HEBREW UNION COLLEGE —
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

From Strength To Strength:
The Impact of Interim Rabbis on Rabbinic Transitions

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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This rabbinic thesis is about interim rabbis and their impact on congregations navigating a rabbinic transition. The program to train and place intentional interim rabbis in Reform congregations is now nearly a decade old. With increasing numbers of trained practitioners in the field and of congregations exploring the possibility of hiring intentional interim rabbis between two settled rabbis, this is an important moment to reflect on the current state of the field. The goal of this project is to describe the current state of the field of Reform interim rabbis and to situate it within the context of the expertise and best practices in the more expansive fields of nonprofit management and Christian congregational studies. The intention is to articulate the theoretical frameworks that undergird the work of interim rabbis, as well as to explore the tasks, impacts, and outcomes of interim rabbis in congregations.

The contribution of this thesis is twofold: First, as no comprehensive study of interim rabbis or rabbinic transitions exists to paint a picture of the field, this thesis seeks to sketch the outlines of such a picture. Second, the author offers recommendations to the URJ and CCAR about the future of the interim program, including topics that need further exploration or clarification and possible areas in which the program might be improved structurally. Essentially, this thesis seeks to reveal untested hypotheses and unnamed assumptions about the work of interim rabbis so that practitioners and leaders can devise ways to continue to improve the field.

The thesis is divided into an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of the topics to be addressed and describes the importance of the rabbinic transition as a lifecycle event in a community. Chapter 1 provides a general overview of interim work and background information, including a brief history of the interim program in the Reform Movement. Chapter 2 introduces the work of William Bridges, a foundational thinker in the field of transition management, and presents biblical and rabbinic sources that elucidate the Bridges model. Chapter 3 presents findings from a review of nonprofit management literature about executive transitions, and Chapter 4 presents best practices and frameworks from the work of experts in churches and pastoral transitions. Chapter 5 then returns to synagogues, specifically to explore the work and impact of interim rabbis based on interviews and first-hand observations. The concluding chapter makes an argument for the importance of interim rabbis and offers a number of recommendations about areas for further study and changes to the interim program, including clarifying the difference between one and two year interim periods.

There were three major categories of sources for this thesis: First, a review of literature representing the current thinking in the fields of nonprofit management and congregational studies, as well as the limited books available about strategic synagogue leadership. Second, the thesis relies on interviews with practitioners in the field, organizational representatives who work with interim rabbis, and lay leaders, as well as publically available documents given to synagogue leaders about to undertake a rabbinic transition. Finally, the analysis is drawn from the observation of one synagogue experiencing a rabbinic transition, as well as the sessions taught at the annual conference of the Interim Ministry Network.

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brought to your work as you navigated the terrain of your own personal rabbinic transition. Studying *Midrash Petirat Moshe* with you in our last few months working together was one of the most enriching and rewarding learning experiences of my life. Thank you for making those ancient words come alive by sharing your story with me.

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have you as my traveling companion and co-adventurer on life's journey. Thank you for the incredible gift of your love.

To the reader: The pages that follow are, more than anything else, a reflection of my aspirations for synagogues. I pray for a day when all synagogues are excellent, all synagogues are dynamic, and all synagogues are visionary. I believe that such a thing is possible and that interim rabbis are one of many tools that will help us build such a reality. I thank you for reading these pages and for dreaming with me about that future.

Joshua R. S. Fixler

DEDICATION

To my mother, Jill Friedman Fixler,
who taught me to dream and to build.

What I offer in these pages is another expression of our late night talks about the future of synagogues. I hope it takes us one small step closer to the future you and I dreamed of, where synagogues fulfill their capacity to transform lives and change the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the first rabbinic transition in recorded history did not go well. From start to finish, it was a muddled affair. The old rabbi was fired in a hurry. The search committee had no clear directives, and the shadow of the ousted predecessor hung over the process, influencing the results. The new rabbi, whose entrance was accompanied by stories claiming he was a miracle worker, was quick to make changes. So quick in fact, that the community's leadership grew concerned. Ultimately, they decided to curtail the new rabbi's responsibilities, and they even returned the ousted rabbi to his former position and ordered the two to share power. In the illustrious history of rabbinic transitions, this is not a shining example of success.

The rabbinic transition is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 27b-28a, the story of the deposition of Rabban Gamliel. The story is complex and discursive, but the basic facts are these: In a dispute, Rabban Gamliel, the head of the Sanhedrin, publically shames Rabbi Yehoshua. Recalling other times that Rabban Gamliel had similarly abused his power, the rabbis of the Sanhedrin declare, "Let us depose him." Then, they set out to find someone to appoint in his place. First, they suggest Rabbi Yehoshua, but they fear it would appear that he ousted Rabban Gamliel with the intention of taking his position. Then, they suggest Rabbi Akiva, but they reject this idea because he does not have a sufficiently illustrious lineage. Ultimately, they decide on Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah because he is wise enough to withstand any challenge, wealthy enough to bring tribute to the Roman government, and a descendent of Ezra.

When the rabbis go to Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, he says he must check with his wife, who is concerned that the rabbis will ultimately depose him, too. He responds with a

parable saying that one should not avoid using a fine cup today just because it might break tomorrow. She worries that he is too young, for he is only 18. Miraculously, gray hairs appear on his head. So off to the academy he goes.

He immediately starts making changes. He loosens the restrictions on entry into the academy. Hundreds more benches must be brought in to accommodate the influx. Historic amounts of Torah are taught that day. Even Gamliel cannot stay away and comes to hear and participate in the discussion. His heart is broken by the idea that he might have been withholding Torah from the people with his restrictive rules.

After this, Rabban Gamliel goes to Yehoshua's house to make peace. When Yehoshua finally forgives him, the two men return to the academy. Hearing that the two men have reconciled, the rabbis decide to reinstate Rabban Gamliel, but they cannot demote Rabbi Elazar, so they decide that Rabban Gamliel will teach three weeks each month and Rabbi Elazar will teach one.

This congregation went on quite a journey. They had an ongoing problem they failed to address – a leader who committed repeated infractions and ethical missteps – until it finally came to a head in a public way, and they had to fire him. But then they were in crisis-mode. They had no plan for how to proceed, and the shadow of Rabban Gamliel loomed over the search process. Every candidate was compared to him or suggested as an antidote to him. When they finally selected Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, they chose him for seemingly superficial reasons (wealth and lineage) and because he could stand up to Gamliel, instead of choosing the best possible leader for the community's needs. And they considered him perfect – he miraculously became more mature to take the position. But when he arrived, he stared making changes – changes the other rabbis may not have been

expecting. They had no clear vision for what they hoped to build, so they had no mechanism to determine if Rabbi Elazar's changes were taking them in the direction they wanted to go. And Rabban Gamliel hung around during the whole process. He hovered, like a ghost haunting his successor who could not seem to fully exorcise him. In the end, all of this weakened Rabbi Elazar so much that the rabbis regretted their decision and eventually reinstated Rabban Gamliel. The modern reader is left to wonder how well this new arrangement could possibly work. Rabban Gamliel, with his penchant for displays of power, now had to share the stage with the man the rabbis had chosen to replace him? What a mess!

This transition was a pivotal moment for the Sanhedrin community. The rabbis had the opportunity to leave behind an old identity and pivot towards a new one. But they could not seize this opportunity. Everywhere they looked, they saw Rabban Gamliel. All the candidates were either the mirror image of or the antidote to him. They needed a way to get out from under his shadow so they could make a truly strategic decision. Perhaps what they needed was an interim rabbi, for an interim rabbi creates just such a space. He or she allows the congregation to say goodbye, to process who they have been, and then to move on to dreaming about whom they will become. An interim rabbi gives the congregation the time they need to make a strategic and intentional decision and paves a smooth path for the new rabbi to be successful. The role of interim rabbi did not exist in the time of the Sanhedrin. But it exists now, and it can help congregations turn a rabbinic transition into an opportunity to thrive.

Synagogue leaders seeking to create the opportunity for successful rabbinic transitions are looking more and more to interim rabbis to guide them through this work.

For about a decade, the institutions of the Reform Movement have been investing in training and supporting interim rabbis so that their work can be more effective and impactful. The hope is to help congregations avoid situations like the one the Sanhedrin faced, where issues that affected the outgoing rabbi, or leftover emotions about his or her departure, are loaded upon the successor and hinder the new rabbi's ability to succeed. As more and more congregations explore engaging interim rabbis, they compel the movement to ask both how the interim rabbinate works and how it could be made to function even better and be even more impactful.

Introduction to This Project

This thesis will attempt to assess the current state of the field of interim rabbis, primarily within the Reform Movement, and to draw out lessons and best practices from specialists in the fields of transitions in churches and in nonprofits. Through interviews, first-hand observation in synagogues, and a review of works by experts in these fields, this thesis seeks to describe the basic state of the field and to identify areas for potential growth and further research. All of this is presented with the belief that synagogues have the potential to do God's work by touching people's hearts and changing their lives. The field of congregational studies exists to help congregations do this work better – to reach more people and have a greater impact on them and on the world. The goal is to build the capacity of congregations to be transformative. The clergy transition is one pivotal moment for congregations to build their capacity and strive for vision and excellence. As this thesis will demonstrate, interim clergy enable congregations to take advantage of the transition moment, and the more we understand about interims and their work, the better able we will be to position them to have a substantive impact.

Structure of this Thesis

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history and importance of the interim rabbinate in the Reform Movement. The next three chapters delve into the theory behind the practice of interim work. Chapter 2 looks at the work of William Bridges, one of the most influential thinkers on the topic of individual and organizational transitions. This chapter also presents narratives from biblical and rabbinic sources that illustrate the Bridges model and that could help rabbis and congregations to conceptualize transitions with uniquely Jewish frames. Chapter 3 presents a review of best practices and concepts from the field of nonprofit management on the topic of executive transitions, and Chapter 4 narrows its focus to look at the theory underlying the work of Christian interim ministers, which the Christian community has been refining since the late 1970s. Chapter 5 then returns to synagogues specifically and presents the findings from interviews and field research. The concluding chapter makes recommendations to the institutions that support congregations in transition and interim rabbis about topics for future study and new ways to improve the field. Together, the topics offered in this thesis give an overview of the field of interim rabbis. The hope is to provide a useful guide for the current state of the field with an eye towards how interim work can be made even more impactful and prevalent.

CHAPTER 1: General Overview and Background

The Rabbinic Succession: An Important Crossroads in the Synagogue Lifecycle

Psalm 84:8 declares, "יֵלְכוּ מֵחַיִל אֶל־חָיִל" – a phrase which has become a blessing in modern Jewish culture – "may you go from strength to strength." This thesis is about the ways in which interim rabbis help congregations move from strength to strength.

The rabbinic transition represents a particularly important moment in a congregation's life. It is a time fraught with emotion and uncertainty, but it is also a time of great opportunity and potential. Loren Mead, one of the founders of the Alban Institute, who was instrumental in the creation of the field of interim ministry, makes this point clearly in his book, *A Change of Pastors ... and How it Affects Change in the Congregation.* Although this book is written for a Christian audience, like many of the resources in Chapter 4, its message is just as true for rabbis and synagogues.

> Yes, the loss of a pastor can be difficult for any congregation. Yes, they will have a time of uncertainty and change. But the bottom line is measured in the potential of this moment. Indeed, there is no more critical moment in the life of a congregation than this moment in which it faces going from one pastoral leader to another.[1]

Mead also notes that this is a time for congregations to create a new self-image, writing, "The time when a pastor leaves is a rich time for a congregation to update its perception of itself. It is a time to learn what new kinds of people have become part of their life."[2] What congregational leaders choose to do in a transition determines their trajectory for years to

[1] Mead, *A Change of Pastors*, 20.
[2] Ibid., 52.

come. Mead's work aims to "help the trajectory take off in an upward direction," and the models he, with many others, helped develop are still serving congregations to this day.[3]

The model that Mead helped create is based on the idea of behavioral scientist Kurt Lewin who explained that the problem with institutions is that most of the time they exist in a state of homeostasis.[4] According to Mead, Lewin believed, "Organizations are always stable because they are a balance of opposing forces held together, frozen in equilibrium, and they cannot change until that equilibrium is somehow broken."[5] Lewin suggested that there are three steps to breaking this homeostasis:

1. The frozen equilibrium had to be unfrozen.
2. The desired change had to be installed.
3. The organism/organization then had to be refrozen with the change in place.[6]

Finding moments and strategies to unfreeze institutions is difficult. So Mead and his colleagues went looking for places where congregations unfreeze naturally. They realized that what is exciting (and often anxiety inducing) about a pastoral transition, is that "every congregation gets unfrozen when its pastor leaves."[7] Mead elaborates on this idea, stating:

> When the pastor leaves a congregation, everybody knows instinctively that the old cannot be replicated in the same old way anymore – that some things will have to be faced and some done differently in the future. It does not determine what should be changed or how it should be changed; it merely asserts that the status quo is "in play." This is a time in which some things can change, if we choose to make it happen, as opposed to other times when things might happen, but generally do not. In Lewin's theory, this is the first

[3] Ibid., 14.
[4] Ibid., 81.
[5] Ibid., 81.
[6] Ibid., 81.
[7] Ibid., 82.

> step. When the pastor moves, the system is unfrozen. Change becomes possible.[8]

Knowing this, the leaders of the Alban institute in the early 1970s set out to find a way to capitalize on this moment of unfreezing – to take change out of the realm of possibility and make it a reality. The model they created was called "interim ministry."

Interim Clergy Lead to Good Successions

Interim ministry was designed as a way to seize the moment of unfreezing and turn it into an opportunity to transform congregations. Mead and his colleagues came to realize that a productive and thoughtful succession was one of the greatest gifts that a congregation could give itself, and that interim ministers were the means to help ensure that each transition would be such a gift. An intentional interim clergy-person is a trained transition specialist who enters the system as the outgoing leader leaves and guides the congregation through its transition process. "The appointment of a professional independent interim may be the best investment the board can make at this critically important crossroads."[9] Margret Keip sums up the impact of interim ministry this way:

> Whatever the reason for a settled minister's departure – retirement, debilitating illness, death, a call to opportunity or obligation elsewhere, conflicts that fail to resolve, misconduct that destroys the relationship – life has happened. Interim ministry engages with the downsides and upsides of life change. It builds a bridge from what was to what will be.[10]

What is Interim Ministry?

An interim minister or rabbi serves a congregation from the time its outgoing clergy-person leaves until just about the time the next clergy-person starts. In that time, the

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[8] Ibid., 83.
[9] Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 74.
[10] Keip, "The History, Philosophy, and Impact of Interim Ministry," 3-4.

interim serves a dual role. He or she is the clergy-person who works to meet the ritual, programmatic, and pastoral needs of the congregation while at the same time bringing a set of skills and experiences that allow him or her to also serve as the congregation's coach through the transition process. As experienced interim Rabbi Darryl Crystal explains, the congregation gets two clergy-people for the price of one. The "interim is both the congregation's new senior rabbi and the transition consultant."[11]

The interim period provides space so that the congregation can make a decision that is informed by its story up to this point, but which has its eye fixed on the future and not on the past. The common advice when one loses a loved one is to not to make any big, life-altering decisions in the first year, based on the belief that it is hard to think about one's future when one is still deeply enmeshed in thinking about the past. Interim ministry presumes that this is true for congregations as well. Certainly, this was true for the Sanhedrin mentioned in the introduction, where the rabbis could only picture the successor through the lens of the memory of Rabban Gamliel. Maybe they were not ready to conduct a search for his replacement. They needed a break – a period of pause and creativity to explore the story of who they had been so that they could to think about who they wanted to become. "Transition offers a special opportunity for the congregation to nourish its collective spirit."[12]

Interim ministry is also just as meaningful for the interim ministers and rabbis. "Interim ministers, in turn, are afforded soul exercise. The opportunities transitions offer

[11] Crystal, "Rabbinic Transitions: The Power of an Interim Rabbi," (presentation, URJ Biennial, Orlando, FL, November 6, 2015).
[12] Thompson and Thompson, "Transitional Ministry as an Opportunity to Lead," Kindle Location 1547.

are real for us, too. Encountering new situations, remarkable people, fresh challenges, and opportunities to learn something in each setting, we may continue to deepen and grow our selves and become a little more truly who we yearn to be."[13] Interim ministers get to experience the joys of a whole career in just a few months. "Interim ministers experience life in microcosm. They arrive as newborns to a setting, learn fast, offering their skills and gifts even as learning continues. They leave without finishing everything, having done what they could in the time given. They relay a heartfelt farewell and let go."[14]

Interim ministry is a unique calling. It draws clergy with particular passions and skills who seek to help a number of congregations navigate this critical moment. They work, seemingly selflessly to ensure the success of their successor. They are unafraid to speak difficult truths and push people to grow. They seek to live in a constant balance, addressing the "two essential fears [that] face our congregations: the fear of too much change, and the fear of too little change."[15] They do not always get to see the fruits of their labors, but they find meaning in helping congregations find and build upon their strengths. And then they move on to do it all over again.

Definition of Terms

Pastoral/Rabbinic Succession

William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird offer a beautiful definition of pastoral succession, by way of Dave Travis, CEO of the Leadership Network. "He says it's the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional

[13] Keip, "The History, Philosophy, and Impact of Interim Ministry," 11.
[14] Ibid., 10.
[15] Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation*, 9.

leader to another. Succession is when one senior leader intentionally transitions and hands over leadership to another."[16]

Intentional Interim Rabbi

Also sometimes called a "turn around rabbi" or a "transitional rabbi," an interim rabbi is a one who serves a congregation for a contractually limited amount of time as the congregation prepares for and searches for its new rabbi. Though some interims serve without special training, most intentional interim rabbis have received specific training in interim work, often from either the Interim Ministry Network (IMN) or the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). The majority of congregations that choose to use an interim do so for a senior or solo rabbinic transition, though there are some rare cases where a congregation may also choose to engage an interim for an associate position, but these interims tend not to be people with special training in change management. At present, this author has not encountered any professional interim cantors. Much more about the profile of interim rabbis and their work will be explored in the chapters that follow.

Settled Rabbi

Many congregants may be tempted to refer to the rabbi who follows the interim rabbi as the "permanent rabbi" to delineate between the two, as in, "We chose to hire an interim rabbi for the year while we searched for our new permanent rabbi." But the implication of this word-choice is problematic. The new rabbi is not any more permanent than his or her predecessors. Every rabbi will retire, leave, become unable to continue, or be asked to leave. No rabbi is permanent. The transition period teaches many lessons, and

[16] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 179.

this is one of them. The term of art for such a rabbi is “settled rabbi,” though some people also use the term “successor rabbi.” This paper will rely mainly on the term “settled rabbi” to refer to the person who holds the position at the end of the transition period.

Unintentional Interim Rabbi

The term “unintentional interim” is used to describe a scenario wherein a congregation moves directly from one settled rabbi to the next without hiring an intentional interim in between, and after one or two contract periods, congregational leaders decide not to renew the new settled rabbi’s contract. The implication is that there is some unfinished business or underlying issues that affected the success of the new settled rabbi, and that if the congregation had chosen an intentional interim period, these issues might have been avoided. For instance, a congregation full of people, who idealize a predecessor rabbi who could do no wrong, may find that they think the new rabbi can do nothing right. Or people with strong emotional baggage about the last rabbi may load that baggage onto the new rabbi until the situation becomes untenable. Or the congregation may have chosen their new settled rabbi too quickly, without careful consideration for what it most needed. In this scenario, either people loved their rabbi and went looking for a carbon copy, or they had issues with their rabbi and went looking for his or her exact opposite. Either way, they may soon find that the new rabbi is no closer to an idealized image in their mind than the predecessor. Pretty soon, the leadership or the rabbi begins to suspect that they may have made a mistake, and, though they hoped to build a long-term partnership, instead it

dissolves. Although the congregation did not intend to hire an interim, they ended up with a rabbi who only stayed a short time, and the search process must begin all over again.[17]

It is also important to note that issues from the previous rabbinate can affect the new rabbi, even when they do not result in the new rabbi leaving. The rabbi may stay for many years, but he or she may spend significant time and social capital overcoming obstacles that an interim rabbi might have cleared. This exhausting period can affect the congregation's trajectory towards health and excellence. Though the rabbi may stay, neither party feels like the relationship is totally functional or fulfilling. While the image of the unintentional interim is a cautionary tale that may compel synagogues to seek an intentional interim, the case of a settled rabbi with unresolved issues to overcome is a lesser acknowledged but even more significant threat to congregational success.

Why This Thesis at This Time?

At the beginning of their book, *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works*, Vanderbloemen and Bird write, "Wisdom around pastoral succession is one of the great needs of the church today."[18] This is as true for synagogues as it is for churches. There is a great need to better understand rabbinic succession and the interventions that are successful in helping congregations to navigate rabbinic transitions. The church world is asking these questions, too. Articles like "Rethinking Transitional Ministry"[19] and books like *Transitional Ministry Today*[20] and *Next: Pastoral Succession that Work*,[21] reflect a

[17] While this scenario has been observed anecdotally, and experts speak of it often, more data are needed to know precisely how prevalent this scenario is among synagogues.
[18] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 138.
[19] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry."
[20] Bendroth, ed. *Transitional Ministry Today*.
[21] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*.

movement within the broader field of congregational studies to ask these vital questions at this important moment. Synagogue leaders, and the organizations that support them, can learn from the conversations happening in the churches down the street and add to this growing field with our own insights and contributions. Only then can we all capitalize on this moment of broader transition in the religious world. As this thesis will show, like all transitions big and small, this moment contains both risks to be acknowledged and opportunities waiting to be seized.

There are four primary reasons that this is a particularly important moment to investigate these issues:

Baby Boomers are Retiring

Baby Boomers are retiring. In large numbers. In all sectors. One study of 1,900 nonprofit executives found that "75 percent planned on leaving their position in the next five years."[22] And Baby Boomer rabbis, like their peers, are nearing retirement, too. Synagogues, which have been shaped by their passion, commitment, vision, and skill, will need to adapt. A new generation of rabbis has already begun moving into those senior positions. It is a generation with its own passions and views about the workplace and vision for the rabbinate. The numbers of transitions will only increase. Rabbi Janet Offel, Director, Consulting & Transition Management at the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), the umbrella organization of Reform synagogues, estimates that in any given year, her department is aware of, and trying to provide support to, approximately 175 congregations at some stage in a rabbinic transition (including any stage of the process from the time the

[22] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 4, citing Bell, J., et al., *Daring to Lead 2006*, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2006.

rabbi is thinking about leaving until the new settled rabbi has arrived).[23] That is an incredible number.[24] And in this moment of increased turnover in congregations, organizations like the URJ that work with congregations will need to be ready to support them as they navigate these turbulent waters.

Encore Careers

At the same time that the movement seeks to support congregations, it will also need to support this new boom of retiring rabbis. Marc Freedman writes about a developing trend called "Encore Careers"[25] where Baby Boomers are seeking to use their retirements to start "new careers with a positive social impact," in an effort to give back.[26] Baby Boomers are living longer and more active lifestyles than their parents. With active retirement years, they are thinking about ways to fill their time that are meaningful to them and their communities. The interim rabbinate presents one opportunity for highly skilled rabbis to find a new, challenging, and meaningful outlet to offer their skills. As the number of congregations in transition grows, so does the pool of potential interims. A better understanding of this field – of what the work entails, how it differs from the settled

[23] Janet Offel, in discussion with the author, October 25, 2016, with additional clarifications by e-mail, January 17, 2017.
[24] Offel also notes that this is too great a number of congregations for her department to truly engage and therefore "the extent to which the congregations are interested in engaging with us in thinking deeply and focusing on the work of transition varies immensely." As a result, her department has embarked on creating a self-guided toolkit for congregations call the "Roadmap for Rabbinic Transitions." She recognizes that even with these materials, each congregation's level of intentional work and engagement with the URJ will continue to vary. (E-mail message to author, January 17, 2017.)
[25] For more on this, see Freedman, *Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life.*
[26] Kristof, "Geezers Doing Good."

rabbinate, and what its challenges are – is essential to recruiting, training, and retraining rabbis looking for a meaningful encore rabbinate.

Synagogues Cannot Afford to Neglect Strategic Thinking

The pace of change in congregations is increasing. And the answers that have gotten synagogues this far may not get them through the next phase. People's expectations of congregations are in flux. Their standards are high, and their other options are many. The market in which synagogues exist is increasingly complex and crowded.[27] In such an environment, synagogues must be nimble and strategic. They must be thoughtful and forward-thinking or the world will pass them by. With the frenzied rhythm of 21st century American life, synagogues cannot afford to miss a beat. As Michael Piazza notes about the church world, "At the current pace of life in the real world today… [an approach that strives for] maintenance alone cannot be sustained. Church history is replete with stories of

[27] Over the last two decades, a great number of articles and book chapters have been written about the changing Jewish population in America and its relationship to synagogues, far too much to summarize here beyond some of the biggest trends. The Pew Research Center's 2013 study, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" notes that "Roughly one-third of Jews (31%) say they belong to a synagogue, and nearly one-in-five (18%) say they belong to other kinds of Jewish organizations." (Lugo, et al) An article from a decade earlier, "The American Synagogue: Recent Issues and Trends" by Jack Wertheimer notes that synagogue affiliation reached its peak in the post-WWII era at about 60 percent of American Jewish households. ("The American Synagogue: Recent Issues and Trends," 10.) But by 2000, this number had dropped to 46 percent. (ibid, 19.) Wertheimer's article provides a thorough assessment of the internal and external trends affecting synagogues, and many of the issues that he identifies have only become more pronounced in recent years. Hayim Herring, in his 2012 book *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*, also looks at the state of the American synagogue. He provides a thoughtful analysis of the ways that the rate of technological changes has impacted synagogues. He notes that the internet and personal computing have had a democratizing effect on synagogue life and increased the number of alternatives to synagogue participation in people's lives. As more and more Jewish resources become available online, people's desire to connect to a synagogue community is changing. According to Herring, synagogues have to work and think differently to assert their relevance in this changing environment.

churches that were thriving until an effective pastor retired or moved away."[28] Synagogues cannot afford to stumble through transitions. They cannot afford to make missteps or to have a few years of being lost in the wilderness before they find themselves again. The rate of change in the culture will only increase, and congregants will be less and less patient with such missteps.

To some, interim rabbis might appear to be a pause, which, in this fast-paced environment, would be the opposite of what congregations need. For example, one congregational leader noted that there were members of her community who were resistant to the idea of an interim because they felt like it would mean having two rabbinic transitions, instead of just one.[29] They reasoned that the interim period would be like pulling over during a car race, letting the other cars pass while they slowly changed the tires. But, as this paper seeks to prove, the opposite is true. The interim period is like a well-planned pit-stop, making the rest of the race possible. It provides an opportunity to continue to thrive, to develop and demonstrate vision. An interim rabbi keeps the trains running smoothly while the congregation takes the time it needs to think strategically and intentionally about how it will continue to serve its mission and the needs of its congregants. Interim rabbis offer congregations the opportunity to demonstrate the kind of dynamism and vision that people demand from all other organizations of which they are a part.

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[28] Piazza, "Revitalization, Renewal, or Redevelopment During the Interim," Kindle Location 2106.

[29] Every interviewee was given the opportunity to speak anonymously. Therefore, while most interview subjects in this thesis will be identified by name, others will remain anonymous, though they represent actual responses to interview questions.

Mead and his colleagues created the practice of interim ministry out of the idea that the transition was a time when the congregation would "unfreeze." It might be said that in today's fast-paced, global environment, congregations cannot afford to re-freeze. They must be ready to constantly change and adapt, while holding on to what is essential and true. At its most effective, the interim period teaches congregations how to change, how to build vision, and how to communicate effectively. These are skills that serve the congregation long after the rabbinic transition is over. These are skills that congregations need to survive in today's environment. Teaching congregations to transition with excellence is a means of teaching them the skills they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The Field of Interim Rabbis is Growing Up

The idea of training Reform interim rabbis is now more than a decade old. (For more history, see the following section.) This seems like a perfect moment to assess the program's success and evaluate next steps. The field is mature enough to have developed enough data for people to analyze its impact on synagogues. A decade is also enough time for orthodoxies to develop and for untested assumptions to get baked into the foundation of the field. Now is the time to test those assumptions and challenge those orthodoxies, with the goal of moving the field forward. And, as the field continues to grow, now is the time for more diversification of modalities and approaches. As Neil Chafin writes, "Interim ministry will not succeed if we take a cookbook approach to this work. Each congregation is different, with its own gifts, styles and traditions. Interim ministry must fit the

congregation and its traditions and norms."[30] As the field continues to expand, it demands a better understanding of its basic tenants.

Brief History of Interim Rabbis in the Reform Movement

The story of the Intentional Interim Program in the Reform Movement might be seen in three phases: tilling soil, planting seeds, and growth.

1990s: Tilling the Soil

The soil from which the interim rabbi program would grow into the Intentional Interim Program became fertile in the 1990s. As Rabbi Charles Kroloff, a leader in the CCAR and president from 1999 to 2000, explains, this period saw an explosion "of alternate career paths for rabbis."[31] Before the 1990s, rabbis and congregants tended to think that, on the whole, there was a normative path for rabbis: A rabbi would start as an assistant in one or two congregations and then seek a senior position at the best congregation he or she could find. Of course, there were exceptions, and this may not have ever been as common a reality as it was presented, but it was the collective perception. But by the 1990s, this perception had started to erode. More rabbis were starting to explore alternate careers like chaplaincy and community rabbinates. More and more women were becoming rabbis, with different expectations of what they wanted for their career paths. The myth of the straight and singular path for rabbis was starting to fall apart. As Rabbi Kroloff describes, "The ground was moving under us."[32] All of this created a fertile ground

[30] Chafin, "Engaging the Developmental Tasks," 165.
[31] Charles Kroloff, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2016.
[32] Charles Kroloff, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2016.

for another alternate rabbinic calling – the career interim – for rabbis who choose at a certain point in their career to intentionally serve multiple consecutive interim positions.

At the same time, there was a growing focus on rabbinic ethics and enforcement of the ethics code. This meant that there were a growing number of synagogues experiencing the traumatic transition of losing a rabbi because of an ethics violation and also that the organizations that supported synagogues started to look for preventative measures to address unhealthy situations. This environment led practitioners to look more closely at rabbinic transitions, and some started asking questions about the field of interim ministry, which they observed in the Christian community. All of this turned the soil and made it fertile for the interim program to thrive.

The Early and Mid-2000s: The Seeds are Planted

By the middle of the next decade, the URJ and the CCAR, partially through their work together as members of the Joint Placement Commission and the National Commission on Rabbinic Congregation Relationships, were starting to look seriously at the issue of rabbinic transitions and to think about ways they could better support congregations through this change. At this time, the CCAR began to focus on the training of rabbis in transition management. For instance, this was the period when the CCAR launched its "First 100 days" seminar for rabbis preparing for new positions. The Placement Office was starting to look particularly at congregations that had multiple, successive searches over a short number of years (see the section on the Unintentional Interims) and were, in the estimation of Rabbi Steven Fox, who had then recently taken over as the Chief Executive of the CCAR, "burning up our rabbis one after another to the

detriment of both rabbis and the community."[33] All the parties involved began to look to interim rabbis as one of a number of possible solutions to address such problems. At the time, a few Reform rabbis had received training in interim work, mostly through the Interim Ministry Network, and were serving congregations. Rabbi Arnold Sher, the Placement Director in this period, was helping pair them with congregations that were struggling to find rabbis. When Rabbi Deborah Prinz came to the CCAR in 2007 as the Interim Director of Program and Member Services and Director of the Commission on Rabbinic Mentoring ("interim" was soon dropped from her title), she had already taken the IMN training for interim ministers. Even before she took the position, she had been having conversations with CCAR leaders about the potential benefits of the interim model in synagogues, and once she came on board, Rabbi Fox committed CCAR resources to the interim program including asking Rabbi Prinz to move forward with the creation of the interim program as part of her portfolio.[34]

All of these were the seeds of the Interim Program. There was a growing interest in helping congregations manage transitions more successfully, and Rabbi Sher and his successors came to believe in the value of interims to do this. The CCAR, under the leadership of Rabbi Fox, set out to create a program to specifically train rabbis to be intentional interims, and they partnered with the IMN to offer these trainings. The CCAR offered its first orientation phone call for rabbis interested in interim work in the summer

[33] Steven Fox, in discussion with the author, December 21, 2016, with clarifications by e-mail, January 19, 2017.
[34] Deborah Prinz, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2017.

of 2008 and the first three-day training, in partnership with the IMN, in 2009.[35] Rabbi Prinz, understanding both worlds, became the coordinator of the CCAR's new interim program.

Mid-2000s to the Present: Growth of the Program

With this training in place, the CCAR and the other parts of the Reform Movement engaged in helping congregations in transition began to encourage them to pursue an interim rabbi. As a result, thinking began to shift about interim rabbinates, from something a congregation would do if its search failed to something congregations were choosing intentionally. As Rabbi Crystal notes, in 2015-2016 there were "sixteen interim rabbis serving congregations," up from the two a little more than a decade before.[36] In the intervening years, the CCAR has worked to adapt the IMN training so that it has became uniquely and recognizably Jewish. It has also begun creating other support systems for interim rabbis, including monthly video conference calls to offer group coaching and ongoing development. The CCAR now offers a separate application for congregations seeking interim rabbis and a separate section on its placement page for these job listings. Now, nearly a decade old, the program continues to grow and develop. As Rabbi Fox notes, the movement has reached the point where it can confidently say, "Congregations in transition need a specialist – and we have trained the specialists."[37]

Moving Forward

The next chapter in the story of the interim rabbinate is just being written. It is a story about the ways that interim rabbis help congregations to flourish and thrive in this

[35] Deborah Prinz, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2017.
[36] Crystal, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition," 96.
[37] Steven Fox, in discussion with the author, December 21, 2016.

moment of transition and change. To write it, organizations that train and support interim rabbis will need to look to practices both within the Jewish world and beyond it to better understand the work of interim rabbis and the ways it could be more effective. The challenge is to transform a fledgling field with a few qualified and experienced practitioners into a robust field, underpinned by both sound theoretical approaches and tested best practices. The sections that follow attempt to write the first few lines of that next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: Bridges and the Bible – Biblical Stories of Change and Transition

One cannot write about navigating change without discussing the work of William Bridges. His research, which was first published in the book *Transitions* in 1979, provides the foundation for many subsequent thinkers in the field.[38] The crucial work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the area of nonprofit executive transitions is based on Bridges' approach and cannot be understood without him. In interviews, many interim rabbis cite Bridges' model of transitions as a philosophical underpinning of their work, and some have even attended his firm's trainings in transition management.[39] *Transitions* and a number of his other works could be required reading for interim rabbis and congregations in transition.[40] In particular, Bridges' essay, "Getting Them Through the Wilderness: A Leader's Guide to Transition," which compares the stages of transition to the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, should be required reading for any interim rabbi or leader of a Jewish organization experiencing a time of change.

This chapter attempts to provide a brief introduction to the basics of Bridges' model. The chapter also offers an assessment of some specific areas where this model may

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[38] Almost every book on interim ministry at least mentions the Bridges model.

[39] Rabbi Darryl Crystal spoke about attending such a training, though he also has the distinction of having attended the most extra trainings and certification programs of any interim rabbi with whom I spoke. (Crystal, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2016.)

[40] In addition to *Transitions,* Bridges wrote another book (with Susan Bridges), *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change.* The latter is targeted specifically at organizations in transition and the leaders who direct them. This chapter uses material from *Transitions,* which focuses primarily on transitions in individuals' lives. I believe, however, that it offers a useful model because rabbinic transitions are an opportunity for individuals to learn more about how they experience and cope with change in their own lives. The process of transition happens simultaneously on both an organizational and an individual level.

be particularly useful to rabbis and congregations in transition. This is followed by a selection of biblical and midrashic stories that illustrate Bridges' three stages of transitions. While by no means exhaustive, these stories are presented to provide some sermon, class, or discussion starters that might inspire interim rabbis to help communities compare their journey through the stages of transition with the journeys described in Jewish texts.

Basic Introduction to William Bridges' Model

Change and Transitions

William Bridges' first big contribution was to make a distinction between change and transition. The change is the event that happens while the transition is the psychological processes that allow an individual (or, by extension, an organization) to adapt to the change. As Bridges writes:

> Our society confuses them constantly, leading us to imagine that transition is just another word for change. But it isn't. Change is your move to a new city or your shift to a new job. It is the birth of your new baby or the death of your father. It is the switch from the old health plan at work to the new one, or the replacement of your manager by a new one, or it is the acquisition that your company just made. In other words, change is situational. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological. It is not those events, but rather the inner reorientation and self-redefinition that you have to go through in order to incorporate any of those changes into your life.[41]

This is a vitally important distinction for congregations experiencing a rabbinic *transition*. The departure of the rabbi is the change. This is the event. The outgoing rabbi will leave, the committee will convene and interview candidates, the congregation will hire a new rabbi, and the new rabbi will arrive. These are the inevitable facts of the story. Every rabbi's tenure ends eventually, whether through departure, retirement, scandal, tragedy, or death. But none of the above actions say anything about the transition. The transition for a

[41] Bridges, *Transitions,* Kindle Location 70.

congregation is the processes of self-reflection and self-analysis, of ritualizing the departures and arrivals, of mourning and welcoming, that enables the members of a congregation to embrace their new settled rabbi. These are the elements that determine the success of the transition. These are the elements that allow a congregation to come to embrace its new rabbi and to build new relationships and set new direction.

Congregational leaders sometimes address the change and ignore the transition, and thus they struggle to make sense of the emotional realities they face. As Bridges explains, "Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, the change won't work, because it doesn't 'take.'"[42] The most successful interim rabbinic placements are the ones where the interim rabbi is able to help the congregation to navigate the transition as they move through the change. Much of the work that outside parties can do to help congregations in times of rabbinic transition is focused on helping them acknowledge that an important transition will take place and developing their spiritual and practical skills to embrace each stage of that process

Three Stages of Transitions

Bridges' other important contribution to the field was to describe a three-stage model of transitions. As he explains in his book, "All transitions are composed of (1) an ending, (2) a neutral zone, and (3) a new beginning."[43] These stages need not occur exactly in this order, and many times there is not a clear delineation when an individual or organization moves from one stage to the other, but all three stages will be present in every transition.

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[42] Bridges, *Transitions,* Kindle Location 70.
[43] Ibid., page 4.

Endings

> Every transition begins with an ending. We have to let go of the old thing before we can pick up the new one – not just outwardly, but inwardly, where we keep our connections to people and places that act as definitions of who we are.[44]

Bridges' first assertion, which could not be more pertinent for synagogues experiencing transition, is that every beginning is preceded by an ending. An individual experiencing an ending, according to Bridges, must undergo a process of separation from the identity that existed prior to the change in order to someday embrace a new identity. Organizations, similarly, have to let go of who they were in order to discover who they will become. Bridges goes on to say that there are five processes that happen in the ending stage, and they can occur in any order.[45] They are:

1. Disengagement
    a. One removes oneself from the situation and strikes out on his or her own, either spiritually or sometimes even physically.
2. Dismantling
    a. One begins the cognitive process of separating oneself. In a separation, one stops thinking of oneself as a "we" and starts thinking as an "I."
3. Disidentification
    a. One begins to separate from one's old ways of defining oneself. As a result, one is no longer quite sure who one is.
4. Disenchantment
    a. One begins to understand with more clarity and distance that some of the "old me" existed in one's head, leading to a less idealized view of who one used to be.
5. Disorientation
    a. The connections to the old way are (mostly) severed, and one enters the Neutral Zone, unsure who one is and whom one will become.[46]

These phases need not be seen as negative, but rather as part of the necessary process of letting go. As with much of Bridges' concepts, a negative valence is only applied

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[44] Ibid., 11.
[45] Ibid., 131.
[46] Ibid., 109-123.

when one struggles against the natural processes or attempts to ignore them completely. He instead encourages that one give oneself the space to experience each step without rushing through it or ignoring it.

These phases may also map well onto the synagogue experience. As the congregation goes through each step, it moves further and further away from its identity as "rabbi so-and-so's congregation." Much of this may occur in the various goodbye rituals and celebrations of a departing rabbi (when the congregation is able to perform such rituals). The challenge for congregations in transition is that many do not have the luxury to move through these phases at a patient pace; instead, they spend the time working on the communal analysis necessary for the rabbinic search while they separate from the outgoing rabbi. One benefit of the interim rabbi model is that it gives synagogues the space to focus on their goodbyes before they turn to recruiting and welcoming their next settled rabbi.

In a transition from one senior rabbi to the next, the congregation often must create a new identity, which necessarily involves letting go of its old identity. This letting go can be found in any life transition. Bridges writes:

> One of the most important differences between a change and a transition is that changes are driven to reach a goal, but transitions start with letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage you are in. You need to figure out for yourself what exactly that no-longer-appropriate thing is.[47]

Congregations may try to avoid the difficult process of letting go. They may seek to fit a new rabbi into the space left by the outgoing rabbi without a process for reassessing the future needs and vision of the congregation. These congregations choose to forego the

[47] Ibid., 128.

necessary pain of a transition but may also fail to glean all they can from this potentially fertile process.

Neutral Zone

> One of the difficulties of being in transition in the modern world is that we have lost our appreciation for this gap in the continuity of existence. For us, "emptiness" represents only the absence of something. So when what's missing is something as important as relatedness and purpose and reality, we try to find ways of replacing these missing elements as quickly as possible…. In this view, transition is seen as a kind of street-crossing procedure. One would be a fool to stay out there in the middle of the street any longer than was necessary; so once you step off the curb, you move on to the other side as fast as you can. And whatever you do, don't sit down on the centerline to think things over! No wonder we have so much difficulty with our transitions.[48]

Between the ending and the beginning is a time of self-discovery. This time may feel like a period of fallowness or emptiness, but in fact it is full of creative chaos. Bridges calls this time the "neutral zone" and believes it is vastly underappreciated in modern society. He writes that we seek to avoid this time because if feels unproductive or lacking in purpose, when in fact this is a vital period for growth and change. He notes that people tend to find themselves in the neutral zone even as they try to avoid it: "Without quite knowing why, people in the middle of transition tend to find ways of being alone and away from all the familiar distractions."[49] He advises people to embrace this period and even to seek it out:

> You should not feel defensive about this apparently unproductive time-out during your transition points, for the neutral zone is meant to be a moratorium from the conventional activity of your everyday existence… The basic industry of the neutral zone, which is attentive inactivity and ritualized routine.[50]

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[48] Ibid., 133-134.
[49] Ibid., 134.
[50] Ibid., 135.

In the Jewish tradition, the practice of sitting *shiva* is a poignant example of a ritualized neutral zone – a time during which one feels the power of refraining from the activities of everyday life.

Bridges advises that the "first of the neutral zone activities or functions is surrender – one must give in to the emptiness and stop struggling to escape it."[51] He suggests that for an individual, this is a time to be alone, to practice self-noticing and self-awareness, and inquire as to what one really wants. And he states that as scary as this time might be, it is not only necessary, but vital for individuals and organizations who want to come to know themselves and to ready themselves to emerge having successfully transitioned. He writes, "The neutral zone is the only source of the self-renewal that we all seek. We need it, just the way that an apple tree needs the cold of winter."[52]

Many interim rabbis contend that "the neutral zone is the work of the interim year."[53] The interim period provides a synagogue with this much needed time of quiet and creativity. The book of Genesis refers to this as וּבֹהוּ תֹהוּ (Genesis 1:2), the time that is unformed and chaotic where creativity can occur. In a transition without an interim, the congregation is hiring and welcoming the new rabbi at the same time that it is saying goodbye to the outgoing rabbi. The neutral zone is often delayed or ignored completely. It can seep into the goodbye process or into the new rabbi's initial months, but it has no space of its own. An interim rabbi might provide the congregation a designated space to be in the neutral zone.[54] It is a time, bounded by the interim rabbi's contract, which enables the

[51] Ibid., 140.
[52] Ibid., 142.
[53] Crystal, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition," 102.
[54] For more on when an interim period can and cannot truly be a neutral zone, see the Conclusion.

congregation to feel free and confident to embrace the creative potential of the neutral zone. Just as an individual can use this period for self-reflection, a congregation can use the time to develop a new, shared vision of what it wishes to be in the world.

There is some debate as to when this period ends for a congregation. Each congregation and circumstance is different, of course, and so each transition will also be unique. Crystal, in his article about interim rabbis, seems to imply that while the boundaries are fluid, by the time the new settled rabbi arrives, the congregation should have moved into the beginnings stage. In the course of this research, a compelling argument began to emerge that the time of creative chaos might well extend into the new rabbi's first few months and that there is a more significant overlap between these two periods than Crystal's article implies. This seems important because a congregation that prematurely declares an end to neutral zone activities risks stunting its growth or creating false expectations of smooth sailing.

Beginnings

> Life… goes forward regardless, and even as we look in vain for ways to get the machinery going again, we are doing unwittingly much of what we need to do to be renewed and changed. We forget how indirect and unimpressive most new beginnings really are, and we imagine instead some clear conscious steps that we ought to be taking. The English novelist John Galsworthy was surely right when he wrote that "the beginnings… of all human undertakings are untidy."[55]

The final stage of the transition process is a new beginning. Bridges notes that the moment when the movement to the beginning happens is often less dramatic and definitive than a person might hope or expect. Rather, when the neutral zone has done its work, one has become ready to be open to new possibility, and then one finds oneself aware of, or

[55] Bridges, *Transitions,* 158.

drawn to, opportunities he or she could not see before. Bridges notes that this can only really happen when the neutral zone is "finished with you," no matter when you think you are finished with it.[56] He notes that while in the neutral zone, one might pass by many possible solutions before the right one appears. "The lesson in all such experiences is that when we are ready to make a new beginning, we will shortly find an opportunity. The same event could be a real new beginning in one situation and an interesting but unproductive by-way in another."[57] The trick is giving oneself the time and space to explore and reject these alternative by-ways.

In the course of this research, rabbis and leaders from multiple synagogues shared stories where the synagogue intended the interim period to be only one year but decided to re-engage the interim rabbi for a second year. In these instances, Bridges might argue that the neutral zone was not done with the congregation. In one such case, the congregation entered placement but did not find anyone who felt like the right match. In the second year, having done even more congregational evaluation and research about the vision of the synagogue and the possibilities in the field, the synagogue was able to actively solicit applications from rabbis who it thought might make an excellent match. The congregants are now incredibly happy with their settled rabbi, who had not even considered the job when it was posted the first year. Cases such as this are a compelling argument for patience with the process that Bridges speaks about in his sections on neutral zones and beginnings. Only when they have the luxury of giving this process the space to unfold can synagogues truly make the most strategic decisions. As Bridges puts it, "Genuine beginnings depend

[56] Ibid., 159.
[57] Ibid.,

upon this kind of inner realignment rather than on external shifts, for it is when we are aligned with deep longings… that we become powerfully motivated."[58]

There is, however, also a risk of spending too much time in the neutral zone. Bridges warns that individuals need "to stop getting ready and to act. 'Getting ready' can turn out to be an endless task, and one of the forms that inner resistance can often take is the attempt to make just a few more (and then more, and again more) preparations."[59] Just as a synagogue might not be willing to give the neutral zone its due time, it is also true that a congregation can get lost in the neutral zone and may need assistance from its interim rabbi to know when it is time to stop getting ready.

Next, Bridges suggests one must identify the results of a new beginning. "What is it going to feel like when you have actually done whatever it is that you are setting out to do?"[60] One must make an active effort to begin to imagine her or himself in a way that is reflective of the new identity he or she wishes to assume. Synagogues might well take this advice to heart. It is not enough for a synagogue search committee and/or board to identify the values and vision that will guide the rabbinic search, they must share this information clearly and regularly with the congregation so that this new identity will be shared amongst a growing number of congregants. For instance, in one synagogue, the search committee did an admirable amount of work to engage congregants in conversations about the future of the synagogue but failed to follow through on the next step of articulating what the committee had learned and how this learning was informing the search. Although its search is not yet complete, it seems clear to this observer that there is not a shared view of the

[58] Ibid., 162.
[59] Ibid., 169.
[60] Ibid.,

synagogue's future, and one could imagine this lack of shared understanding having an ongoing impact as the transition process continues.

Bridges also notes that beginnings can be as painful as any other part of the process. "As much as we long for them, new beginnings can be things to be resisted just as much as the loss-filled ending and the ambiguous and frustrating neutral zone were."[61] Beginnings, too, can be a time of resistance and struggle:

> Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so.… Everyone has a slightly different version of these anxieties and confusions, but in one way or another they all arise from the fear that real change destroys the old ways that we have learned to equate to "who we are" and "what we need."[62]

Bridges' point serves as a reminder for congregations that even happy and strategic beginnings may be met with some resistance.

Rituals and Rites of Passage

Much of William Bridges' work is based on the sociological studies of ancient tribal communities and their rituals around rites of passage, conducted by Mircea Eliade[63] and others. Bridges argues that these societies "paid much more attention to transition than we have, and in doing so they prepared people much more effectively for the experience of being in transition than our society has prepared us."[64] Though one has to ignore a certain fetishistic and orientalist approach to this model, there is a truth here for synagogues. Bridges spends much of his book demonstrating how modern society teaches individuals

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[61] Ibid., 173.
[62] Ibid., 164-165.
[63] Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was a historian of religion. His works *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (1958), *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1961), and *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (1967) provide the foundation for much of Bridges' understanding of rites of passage in the context of transitions.
[64] Bridges, *Transitions,* Kindle Location 63.

to rush transitions and minimize the impact of change. But listening to this message is ill-advised because change is an inevitability for everyone, and the best one can hope for is the tools to navigate it successfully. Jewish tradition is well-equipped to help counter the societal message that change is bad and should be avoided. Although less extreme than some of the tribal rituals described in *Transitions* (based on Eliade's work),[65] Jewish rituals also contain elements of Bridges' three stages. At a Jewish wedding, the members of the couple arrive separately (ending their lives as separate units), enter a temporary structure (a representation of the neutral zone), and leave together (beginning their life hand-in-hand). The *b'nai mitzvah* ceremony is a kind of public trial, wherein a youth must learn and demonstrate a difficult, new skill to show the community a change in status. Mourners are required to sit in the neutral zone as they move from the graveside to the shiva and back out into the world.

Bridges' focus on rites of passage is a reminder to Jewish leaders that they have an incredible tool at their disposal to help congregations move through each of the stages of transition – Ritual. Whether re-purposing ancient rituals or creating entirely new ones and rooting them in tradition, synagogue leaders can help people mark their progress through the stages of transition by providing moments of ritual. These include the rituals of saying goodbye to the outgoing rabbi, rituals for processing grief or loss, rituals of embracing the interim year, and rituals for welcoming the new rabbi. Synagogues often think of these as important communal moments and yet may not fully utilize the tools of ritual to help the congregation make the transition.

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[65] For example the description of a young tribal youth entering adulthood by being circumcised, cut across each cheek, and sent on a two month ordeal alone in the wilderness. Bridges, *Transitions,* 194.

A liturgy for such rituals might use the Book of Psalms. Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, introduces the idea that psalms, too, fall into three distinct categories. He explains, "I suggest, in a simple schematic fashion, that our life of faith consists in moving with God in terms of: (a) being securely oriented; (b) being painfully disoriented; and (c) being surprisingly reoriented."[66] Though not perfect corollaries, these three stages of orientation, disorientation, and re-orientation can be mapped onto Bridges' three stages of transition. Before the transition, individuals feel oriented and comfortable in their way of life. During the neutral zone, individuals finds themselves disoriented as they wander through the chaos. As the beginning comes to a close, the individual is reoriented to a new self. The psalmist, too, understood that transition was a process of letting go, searching, and reorienting. Rabbis looking to create liturgies of transitions for congregations might turn to Brueggemann's division of the Book of Psalms to seek some examples that might be meaningful in each stage.

Biblical and Midrashic Stories

Jewish text overflows with stories that speak powerfully to moments of transition. The Torah is a book of stories about of people's journeys – and journeys are a form of transition. Offered below are a few examples that may help rabbis and lay leaders think about Bridges' stages of transition in new and uniquely Jewish ways. The following stories and interpretations may serve as sermon starters or discussion guides. They are offered as reminders for rabbis and lay leaders that the Jewish people are a people who know all about

[66] Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2.

change. They are presented here as a contribution to the field of rabbinic transitions as another way, along with ritual, to ground conversations in Jewish text and Jewish tradition.

Abraham: *Parashat Lech L'cha* is a Transition unto Itself

The first command to Abram is לֶךְ־לְךָ – just "go!"[67] (Genesis 12:1). God's call to change comes without warning – without pretext or subtext. Abram does not know where he will go, or what he will become. All he knows at that moment is that he has to leave.[68] Only later would he hear words like "Canaan"[69] and "covenant." Today, we tend to think of the call in Genesis 12 as a beginning – a fresh start. But Abram's story, like every story of transition, begins with an ending, a separation from what came before. The focus is on leaving. Before Abram can set out, he must leave מֵאַרְצְךָ֙ וּמִמֹּולַדְתְּךָ֙ וּמִבֵּ֣ית אָבִ֔יךָ – from his homeland, his birthplace, his father's house.[70] Abram's journey begins by severing ties with what came before. And to this, Abram can say nothing. He does not converse with

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[67] Unless otherwise noted, all Hebrew translations in this thesis are rendered by the author.
[68] Jonathan Sarna notes that the "preposition L gives the verb H-L-C, 'to walk, go,' the sense of 'separating, taking leave of.'" (Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 88) This, in particular, hints that an ending is taking place.
[69] Robert Alter notes that in God's first call in Genesis 12:1, "the name Canaan is never mentioned, and the divine imperative to head out for an unspecified place resembles, as Rashi observes, God's terrible call to Abraham in chapter 22 to sacrifice his son on a mountain God will show him." (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 62)
[70] Nehama Leibowitz discusses the strange order of these three phrases. "The verse should have read, in the ordinary way, 'from thy father's house, thy birthplace and from thy country.' This is the logical sequence, since a person first leaves home, then his birthplace and then his fatherland. The commentary, *Haketav Vehakabbala* penetratingly suggests that there we are referring to a spiritual rather than physical withdrawal, beginning with the periphery and ending with the inner core. The withdrawal from one's birth place is not such a cruel wrench as the cutting of one's connection with one's family. First, therefore, Abraham was bidden to sever his connections with his country, then his city and finally the most intimate bond, that of home." (Leibowitz, *Studies In Bereshit*, 113) Bridges' five phases of endings seem to follow a similar pattern of increasingly intense disengagement with one's old self.

God. He is not yet the great litigator of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this moment, all he can do is follow God's command and pursue God's blessing. All he can do is leave.

Parashat Lech L'cha continues with Abram's aimless wandering. He wanders to Canaan (Genesis 12:5) and then he journeys in stages towards the Negev (Genesis 12:9). One verse later, he diverts all the way to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). He seems lost. It is a time in his life that appears barren and fruitless. It is a famine, after all, that sends him to Egypt. His relationships are in flux. He passes his wife off as his sister (Genesis 12:13), and he separates from his nephew, Lot (Genesis 13:9). It is also a time of renegotiating his relationship to power. He accepts gifts from Pharaoh (Genesis 12:16) but he refuses gifts from the King of Sodom (Genesis 14:21). This is a time of great change and uncertainty in Abram's life. This period is his neutral zone.

Abram's neutral zone is full of uncertainty, but it is not entirely fallow. It is a time of great creativity and fruitfulness, too. It is in this period that Abram conceives his first son through Hagar (Genesis 16). Abram learns to talk to God in this period, speaking his first words back to the One who sent him on his journey. In Genesis 15:2, Abram makes a passionate plea for God to keep God's promise. With this petition, Abram's skill of using words to advocate with God begins to emerge. And in this period, God instructs Abram to picture his descendants as innumerable the stars in the sky, a much more creative wording than those in God's initial promise. And this is followed by the even more evocative covenant of the pieces (Genesis 15), a powerful, if somewhat puzzling, episode. Its imagery cries out with the wild creativity and primal searching that happens in the neutral zone. This time in the patriarch's life is one of searching and experimenting, of separations and

reunions. This is the wilderness of Abram's life. A neutral zone that turned out to be more fertile than it might have initially appeared.

Abram ultimately emerges from the neutral zone to a new beginning. *Parashat Lech L'cha* concludes with Abram returning to converse with God, having been transformed by his time in his own personal wilderness. The last conversation between God and Abram in the parasha is different from the first. Genesis 17 echoes Genesis 12, but their dissimilarities are stark. In the later revelation, God introduces God's-self by name, El Shaddai (Genesis 17:1), signifying that Abram has come to know God on a deeply personal level. The command form of לֶךְ becomes הִתְהַלֵּךְ, now in the reflexive, *hitpael* form, indicating that God and Abram will walk together. God changes Abram's name to Abraham, to signify to him and to the world his change of status. And God calls on Abram to mark their new relationship on his body with the sign of circumcision, a permanent reminder to himself of who he has become. Unlike their first encounter, when Abram says nothing, the new man, Abraham, now takes an active role in this new dynamic. Twice he humbles himself before God (Genesis 17:3 and 17:7), and the second time he laughs in God's face and demands another heir. The new, bolder prophet, who is willing to challenge God and advocate for himself, has finally emerged. Abraham's transition is complete.

Abraham began his journey with what Norman Hirsch described as "a radical leaving."[71] He set out without knowing who he would become. He wandered through a wild but fruitful wilderness and emerged on the other side transformed. His story was far from over, and there would be many more changes before his time was done. But *Parashat*

[71] Frishman, *Mishkan T'filah*, 231.

Lech L'cha tells one complete story of a man in transition, moving from stage to stage, towards something new.

Crossing the Sea: An Image of the Neutral Zone

The stories surrounding the exodus from Egypt relate in big and small ways to the process of transition in individuals' lives and in the life of a community. The Israelites' wilderness experience is a transition on the grandest scale. They undergo a massive transition that lasts 40 years as they shed their identities as slaves and discover what it means to be a people in covenanted relationship with God. They set out from one land (an ending), travel through a wilderness (a neutral zone,) and finally arrive at a land they call home (a beginning). One who wishes to understand Jews in transition is likely to compare them to their Israelite ancestors on the journey from slavery to freedom. Perhaps no single image captures a narrative of transition more compellingly than the crossing of the sea. The Israelites enter the sea as slaves on the run and exit on the other side as a people who dances in freedom. A close examination of this story and a notable companion midrashic text provides a powerful image of the challenge and possibility inherent in transition.

The Children of Israel stand at the shore of the sea. The fiery angel that had guided them moves behind them and forms a flaming barrier between them and their Egyptian pursuers (Exodus 14:19-20). It is clear that the Israelites have reached a point of no return. Their ending has begun, and there is nowhere to go but forward. The Torah suggests that it was a long, dark night (Exodus 14:20) – as if to imply that the Israelites cannot yet see what they are to become. Exodus Rabbah explains that the sea does not part right away when Moses holds out his staff.[72] Rather, the water remains unchanged

[72] Exodus Rabbah 21:10

עד שֶׁב·וֹ לְוֹוֹ עד חטָמן – until the Israelites wade into the sea all the way up to their noses – ואחר כך נעשה לָהֶם יבשה – and only afterwards is dry land made for them on which they can walk.[73] They have to wade into the sea of uncertainty, almost the point of drowning, before a way forward opens in front to them. To set out on a transition is to set out into the swirling, dark unknown with the faith that a path will emerge.

When the path finally presents itself, the Israelites walk forward into the sea. The walls of water rise high above them on either side (Exodus 14:22). This place of transition is narrow and imposing. One can imagine the situation felt precarious and terrifying. But if the Israelites can look beyond this perceived scarcity, they can see potential, too. The midrash elaborates:

Exodus Rabbah 21:10	
דרש ר' נְהוֹראי: הָיְתה בת יִשְׂראֵל וֹבֶרֶת בים,·ובְנהּ בְידהּ, וְהי בוֹכֶה וְהֶ ·פּוֹשֶׁטֶת ידהּ, וְוֹטֶלֶת ת·וח אוֹרֶן מִוֹדּהים וְוֹתֶנֶת וֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמר)תהלים קו, ט(: "וּיִנְחֵם בְּיַם־סוּף וַיֶּחֱרַב ו וֹלֹיכֵם בַּתְּהֹמוֹת כַּמִּדְבָּר", מה במִדְבר לא חסְרוּ כְלוּם, אף בתְהוֹמוֹת לא חסְ·ו כְלוּם.	R. Nehorai said in a discourse: The daughters of Israel passed through the sea holding their children with their hand; and when these [children] cried, they would stretch out their hand and pluck an apple or a pomegranate from the sea and give it to them, for it says, “And [God] led them through the depths, and through a wilderness” [Psalms 106:9] just as they lacked nothing in the wilderness, so also in the depths they lacked nothing.[74]

A modern reader might wonder, “Who was the first person to reach her hand into the wall of water and discover fruit?” What an unexpected decision. What a surprising result! The walls were not walls. They were curtains concealing fruit trees. One might wonder too where the rabbis got such a bold idea for this midrash. How did they arrive at

[73] Midrash Rabbah Hebrew Text: Halevi, *Midrash Rabba, Vol. 3*

[74] This english translation of Midrash Rabbah: Freedman and Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*. (Translation by S. M. Lehrman)

the image of hidden fruit trees? Rabbi David Fohrman suggests it is a playful illusion to the creation in the first chapter of Genesis.[75] As in the creation story, the verses where the sea splits mention a wind (וּח) of God (Genesis 1:2 and Exodus 14:21), darkness and separation (Genesis 1:3-4 and Exodus 14:20), and the dividing of water from water (Genesis 1:6 and Exodus 14:22). Perhaps, the rabbis imagined that because fruit trees followed the creation of dry land in Genesis (14:11-12), so too in the exodus story, trees would appear along with dry land. Thus they harkened back to creation with their midrash on the sea.

The time in the narrow place of the sea was also a time of fruitfulness. It was a time swirling with creative potential; a time that echoed the creation of the universe. Before the Israelites could emerge on the other side of the sea and dance in the joy of their newfound freedom, they had to walk through the depths – a place of chaos and creativity. And through it, many a daughter of Israel chose not to be afraid of the apparent confining walls of the neutral zone, but rather to let them nurture her as they led her towards her new self.

The Wilderness: Another Model of the Wandering Period

The story of the Israelites in the wilderness is a grand tale of a community in transition. One can find many similarities between the stories of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert and the stories of individuals and organizations in transition. In fact, William Bridges makes this comparison explicit in "Getting Them Through the Wilderness: A Leader's Guide to Transition," and his thorough analysis leaves very little to further exegete here. Bridges compares Moses to a transition leader, looking to free his organization (in other words, the Israelites) from the system that was no longer working

[75] Fohrman, *The Exodus You Almost Passed Over*, 157-165.

for them, and help the people he led make a transition to a new way of thinking – freedom. Essentially, Bridges sees leaving Egypt as the ending, wandering in the wilderness as the neutral zone, and the move the Promised Land as the beginning. Bridges uses stories from the bible to illustrate each phase and connects them to real-world challenges facing changes leaders. What follows are some connections that Bridges misses.

It is worthwhile to focus on the word for the physical space the Israelites inhabit during their time of transition: מדבר. While the popular notion is that the word מדבר should be translated as "desert,"[76] a more accurate translation in this case might be "wilderness," as Bridges uses in the title of his article. Indeed, the word מדבר can mean desert. In Isaiah 41:18-19, the prophet relays God's promise to bring water and vegetation to an otherwise parched desert. In Deuteronomy 32:10, the word מדבר is paired with the phrase וּבְתֹ֣ו יְלֵ֔ל יְשִׁמֹ֖ן ("a barren and hallowing waste"). And yet, Jeremiah 29:10 speaks of the pastures (נְאָוֹת) of the מדבר drying up, thus emphasizing that the wilderness is a place with pastures. In Exodus 3:1, Moses is grazing his flocks in הַמִּדְבָּר. While the wilderness is sometimes uninhabited, as in Jeremiah 17:6, it can also be a place where new peoples dwell in encampments or even cities, as in Joshua 15:61 or Isaiah 42:11. The term מדבר must therefore have at least two meanings. It is both a dry and desolate place as well as a wild, chaotic, and fertile place.

In addition to "wilderness" and "desert," Koehler, Baumgartner and Stamm offer also "pasture" and "steppe" as possible translations of מדבר.[77] The images that these different translations evoke offer divergent conceptions of the Israelites' surroundings. A

[76] See, for instance, the New International Version (NIV) translation of Numbers 1:1
[77] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* Bibleworks.

wilderness is not unfertile, it is only untamed. Perhaps this environment was not a fallow desert where nothing could grow, but rather a vast wilderness, where flora, fauna and humans could grow in unexpected and uncontrollable ways.

Periods of transition are similarly dual-natured. The wilderness of Sinai, after all, was not an empty time developmentally for the Israelites. It was not as though they did nothing in their 40 years of wandering. Rather, it was the time and place where they encountered God at Mount Sinai, received revelation, and forged a new identity as a people in a covenanted relationship with Adonai. They experimented with new modes of worship and models of leadership. They built their first sanctuary and had a brief flirtation with idol worship. It was a time and place where they struggled to assert themselves and their needs. The מדבר for the Israelites was not a place where nothing could grow, but rather a place where they grew wildly and chaotically until finally they emerged as a people, ready to investigate their new homeland.

The Death of Moses: A Masterclass on the Endings that Come with Beginnings

The last great transition of the Five Books of Moses comes with the end of Moses's life with the transition of power to Joshua. This was a time of change for everyone – for Moses who had to accept that it was his time to go, for Joshua who had to assume his new role, for the Israelites who had to learn to follow a new leader, and for God who had to forge a new relationship with a new leader. Perhaps no story in the *Tanakh* more movingly conveys the complex relationship between endings and beginnings than this. And perhaps no story better captures many of the nuanced emotions inherent in a rabbinic transition. Any Jewish leader seeking to understand transitions should look to this section, to both the Torah's account and the midrashic expansion of it found in *Midrash Petirat Moshe*.

Details on this transition in the biblical text itself are scant. The precipitating incident is the narrative of Moses striking the rock, found in Numbers 20:1-13. After Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock instead of asking it for water, the text says:

Numbers 20:12		
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן יַעַן לֹא־ הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן לֹא תְבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־ נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:	12	But יהוה said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."[78]

Here, there is no mention of the leadership transition. In fact, Moses says nothing in response to hearing his fate, and the narrative moves off in a different direction. The story picks up a few chapters later in Numbers 27:12. Here, God instructs Moses exactly how his story will end:

Numbers 27:12-13		
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֶל־הַר הָעֲבָרִים הַזֶּה וּרְאֵה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	12	The יהוה said to Moses, "Ascend these heights of Abarim and view the land that I have given to the Israelite people.
וְרָאִיתָה אֹתָהּ וְנֶאֱסַפְתָּ אֶל־עַמֶּיךָ גַּם־אָתָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר נֶאֱסַף אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ:	13	When you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your kin, just as your brother Aaron was."

Moses has a strong reaction to this command. He wonders who will lead the people in his stead and speaks forcefully to God:

Numbers 27:15-17		
וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:	15	Moses spoke to יהוה, saying,
יִפְקֹד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָרוּחֹת לְכָל־בָּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל־הָעֵדָה:	16	"Let יהוה, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community
אֲשֶׁר־יֵצֵא לִפְנֵיהֶם וַאֲשֶׁר יָבֹא לִפְנֵיהֶם וַאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וַאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עֲדַת יְהוָה כְּצֹאן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם רֹעֶה:	17	who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that יהוה's

[78] The biblical translations in these boxes come from the 1989 NJPS, adapted to reflect a non-gendered understanding of God.

		community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd.”

Without argument, God commands Moses to single out Joshua son of Nun for this job. God describes an ordination process that will take place in front of the high priest Eleazar and the whole community (Numbers 27:19). Moses places his hands on Joshua, as God instructs:

Numbers 27:20		
וְנָתַתָּה מֵהוֹדְךָ עָלָיו לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ כָל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃	20	Invest him with some of your authority, so that the whole Israelite community may obey.

Thus, there was a communal ritual that publically enacted the transition from one leader to the next in the eyes of the congregation, acknowledging that this was as much a transition for them as it was for the two leaders.

The Torah speaks again about Moses’s death in Deuteronomy 3:23-29, when Moses tells the people about the day God told him he would die. But he amends the story from the Numbers 27 account, adding in that he argued with God and requested to cross over the Jordan River and see the Promised Land for himself (Deuteronomy 3:23-25). But God responded decisively:

Deuteronomy 3:26-28		
וַיִּתְעַבֵּר יְהוָה בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלָי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי רַב־לָךְ אַל־תּוֹסֶף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה׃	26	But יהוה was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me. יהוה said to me, "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again!
עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וְשָׂא עֵינֶיךָ יָמָּה וְצָפוֹנָה וְתֵימָנָה וּמִזְרָחָה וּרְאֵה בְעֵינֶיךָ כִּי־לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה׃	27	Go up to the summit of Pisgah and gaze about, to the west, the north, the south, and the east. Look at it well, for you shall not go across yonder Jordan.
וְצַו אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְחַזְּקֵהוּ וְאַמְּצֵהוּ כִּי־הוּא יַעֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהוּא יַנְחִיל אוֹתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה׃	28	Give Joshua his instructions, and imbue him with strength and courage, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall allot to them the land that you may only see."

Moses's bargaining stage came to a quick close, and he continues with his speech, relaying to the Israelites the major moments of their story in the desert. The transition concludes with the final words on the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34 and then in the first chapters of Joshua as the new leader assumes his role. Through all of these elements, the reader gets hints of a story of a community experiencing a loss and transition, without many clear indications as to their responses to the change. One reads of Moses's insistence on securing a replacement and of Moses's bargaining for a reduced sentence only to hear God's quick and categorical refusal. And one is left to wonder about the emotional impact of these decisions. One reads about the ordination ceremony, and about the community's 30 days of mourning after Moses departed the community (Deuteronomy 34:8), but one can only infer how the people adapted to Joshua as their new leader. Everyone in this story is in transition, but the reader is left with numerous questions about how the transition impacted all the parties involved.

It seems clear that a similar line of questioning led to the composition of *Midrash Petirat Moshe*. This midrash is actually a "compilation of many earlier traditions

surrounding Moses's death."[79] Together, these compiled sources create an extended narrative about the last days and hours of Moses's life, in which the rabbinic authors explore the emotional toll of this transition on the people and their leaders. The text is overflowing with parallels to a modern rabbinic transition. Nearly every page contains an image or an idea that will ring true to rabbis and congregations in transition.[80] There is certainly more to find in this text than can be explored here, but there are a few passages that are notable for their poignant insight into the raw emotions that accompany times of transition.

This extended midrash expands and explores Moses's neutral zone activity. He spends much of the text bargaining and negotiating about his new identity. Like any individual in transition, he must first let go of all of the elements of who he has been. He will no longer be a leader, and the people will listen to Joshua instead of him. He will no longer be a prophet either. He will not fulfill his lifelong goal to see the Promised Land. *Midrash Petirat Moshe* follows Moses as he struggles with, and finally accepts, these facts. This ending is summed up powerfully in section 3.1. Moses begs God to let him see the Promised Land until finally God declares:

[79] Lutz, "The Death of Moses," iv.

[80] I had the honor to study this text in *chevrutah* with Rabbi Joel Mosbacher in the year he was preparing to leave one congregation and begin work at another. Every time we opened the text, we found something new that paralleled part of his experience as a rabbi in transition. Some pages moved us to tears with their emotional resonance. Many of the insights I share here were inspired by those sessions, and I am grateful to Rabbi Mosbacher for studying with me and using his own story to illuminate this text.

Midrash Petirat Moshe: 3.1	
א"ל הקב"ה רב לך עד פה תבוא ולא תוסיף, קרא את יהושע ואצונו	The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, "*Let it suffice* (Deuteronomy 3:26). You have done enough until now. You will come this far and no further. *Call upon Joshua and I will give him instructions* (Deueronomy 31:14)."[81]

What a powerful statement of an ending. עד פה תבוא ולא תוסיף – this far and no further. Sometimes an ending sneaks up, and other times it smacks you in the face. Moses is not ready to accept that his ending has begun until he hears these words. How many congregations have struggled to hear the same words, to know how far to go in a rabbinic partnership and when to say, "This far and no further"? How many rabbis have overstayed their effectiveness, and how many congregations have indulged beloved rabbis who have stayed too long because there was no external voice to announce the ending process by saying, "This far and no further"? The words are heartbreaking, but God knew they needed to be said.

This starts Moses on his topsy-turvy neutral zone period. This is a period of experimentation and struggle. His first idea for a new identity, in a story that gets retold in several ways throughout the midrash, is to stay on and assist Joshua. Moses imagines he can be some kind of second-in-command to Joshua. He is in a state of unrest, literally staying up in the middle of the night cleaning Joshua's tent and his clothes. Needless to say, this plan does not work. The people cannot accept Joshua's leadership while Moses is around, and Joshua is terrified of this major role reversal. God intervenes and whisks Joshua off to speak to him privately in the Tent of Meeting. Viewing this interaction from

[81] All translations of *Midrash Petirat Moshe,* as well as section divisions from Lutz, "The Death of Moses." These section divisions may not be found in all versions.

the outside, Moses begins to appreciate how hard it would be for him to see Joshua in his old role, and he declares, "מאה מיתות ולא קנאה אחת" – "[Better] one hundred deaths than a single envy."

This kind of attempt to come up with any plan, no matter how destructive, to avoid a transition is not uncommon. Bridges speaks of people who "use change to avoid transitions."[82] Moses attempts to convince himself and God that what is required is a change in personnel structure, not a transition in leadership. When this plan fails, Moses continues to struggle to negotiate his new situation in this time of transition. Over and over again, he tries to bargain with God to see the Promised Land. In one of the most beautiful and heartbreaking passages of the midrash (section 7.4) Moses pleads that if God cannot let him walk into the Promised Land, perhaps God can make him like a bird to fly over it, or a fish to swim in the Jordan. When God will not do so, Moses suggests that God let Moses hang in the clouds to view the land from above. When God declines, Moses, in an act of sheer desperation, suggests:

Midrash Petirat Moshe: 7.4	
רבש"ע חתוך אותי אבר אבר והשליכני אחר הירדן והחייני ואראה את הארץ	"Master of the Universe, cut me up, limb by limb, and throw me over the Jordan and then revive me so that I will see the land."

Along with desperation, there is so much creativity in these proposals. Moses is deep in the wilderness as he says these words, trying on new identities and new possibilities. Finally, God consents to giving Moses a miraculous view, from high up on the mountain where he will die, so that for an instant, he will have the ability to see the whole land. After all his struggle and negotiation, Moses finds a new vision, more powerful

[82] Bridges, *Transitions,* 129.

than any he had ever experienced before. This is the kind of clarity and creativity that can only come when one has let the neutral zone do its work. Moses's journey through the neutral zone finally affords him a new kind of clarity.

It is important to note that while the midrash focuses on Moses, there are also transitions going on for Joshua, as well as for the whole community. While Moses is struggling to say goodbye, Joshua and the community are learning to trust each other. This, in itself, is an important reminder that the different stakeholders in a transition may be at different places in the process. A senior rabbi may be wishing to be celebrated while a congregation is hard at work on an application for an interim or settled rabbi. The midrash shines a light on some of these competing needs by hinting at the interplay between Moses, Joshua, and the community. While Moses continues to struggle, for instance, Joshua offers a beautiful prayer for the community in section 7.2.2.[83] He and the community are already experiencing a beginning while Moses is still in his neutral zone.

Needless to say, there is much more that can be gleaned from this midrash. It is a midrash about Founder's Syndrome. It is a midrash about emeritus rabbis. It is a midrash about the death of a beloved communal leader. But mostly, it is a midrash about a community in a time of transition and about a leader struggling to accept what this means. Like all the texts in this chapter, this midrash is rich with potential to speak to any congregation in a time of transition. Together, the texts represent the beginnings of a kind of curriculum of change – a set of sources and images that can draw congregants out of the

[83] This blessing could make a powerful sermon for a new rabbi entering a congregation. Lutz, *The Death of Moses,* 56-58.

potential isolation they may feel at this difficult time. They are a reminder that the story of the Jewish people is one of constant change and transition.

CHAPTER 3: Lessons from Nonprofit Management Literature

Synagogues are not like other nonprofit organizations. They are part service organization, part community. They are often led by a constellation of professionals with different (and sometimes overlapping) roles, including rabbis and other clergy, along with perhaps an executive director or other senior staff. And yet, synagogues share many characteristics with all nonprofits. They have a board, who partners with the staff to lead the congregation and steward its finances. They recruit and engage volunteers. They are subject to similar tax categories (with some specific and important differences). They are subject to national trends in giving and participation. One might think of synagogues as a unique sub-category of nonprofits.

Similarly, rabbis are not like most nonprofit executive directors. Unlike other nonprofit executives, the senior rabbi is the spiritual and pastoral caregiver to members of the community. They are teachers and transmitters of tradition. And yet, a rabbi is similar to other nonprofit executives in many ways. In synagogues, especially those that do not also have an executive director, the rabbi fulfills many of the director's functions, providing leadership and overseeing the staff, articulating and implementing vision, and setting congregational policy, all in collaboration with the board. In congregations with both a rabbi and an executive director, the triumvirate relationship between the senior clergy-person, the executive director, and the board is even more complex. And yet, in so far as rabbis are the sole or primary leader of a synagogue, one might think of them as a unique sub-category of nonprofit executive.

Furthermore, rabbinic transitions are not like most nonprofit executive transitions. Other nonprofits can advertise and recruit for an unoccupied executive director position in

ways that a synagogue cannot. For most nonprofits, there is no regulated placement system such as the one for Reform rabbis facilitated by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Nonprofits look at candidates for their leadership skills, vision, and experience while members of a congregational search committees must look at these characteristics in addition to asking if they might feel comfortable sharing with this rabbi their deepest joys and sorrows; if this person will push them to grow and think on deep and spiritual levels. The character and direction of a nonprofit may or may not change substantially with the arrival of a new executive director, but congregations seeking a new senior rabbi do so knowing that this person will likely bring new qualities and new vision to add to the congregation's existing culture and priorities.

And yet, the difficulties in navigating leadership change in nonprofits and synagogues are similar. Both involve a change in identity. Both can involve unique issues like Founder's Syndrome or board dynamics. In both situations, the board must examine the current status of the organization to determine appropriate next steps and set a vision for recruiting the next professional leader.

All this is to say that while there are some ways in which synagogue leadership transitions present unique sets of challenges and opportunities not experienced by other nonprofits, there are also many areas of significant overlap. Synagogue leaders and the Jewish communal institutions that serve them can capitalize on this overlap, and on the relative advantages of a much larger and more robust field of nonprofit management.

American synagogue leaders have been slow to acknowledge this reality and to avail themselves fully of the knowledge and resources that might serve to make synagogues stronger and more impactful. The history of the American synagogue as an institution is

one of increasing complexity and structure. Congregations went from being small, lay-led communities in early America to huge, suburban institutions of the 1960s with gigantic facilities and large staffs to match.[84] But even as synagogues achieved greater levels of organizational complexity in the 20th century, and as the field of management was developing (with the field of nonprofit management developing as an off-shoot of it), there was a resistance to thinking of synagogues as institutions that were "managed." There was a sense that synagogues do "God's work" and that "one does not manage God's work." There was something that felt unholy about applying knowledge gained in the corporate world to such a sacred institution.[85]

It has only been in the last few decades that the Jewish community has begun to realize that thoughtful leadership and strategic management are ways to do God's work well and has started to devote resources to the task of translating secular best practices to a Jewish context. The burgeoning library of books on synagogue management in the last twenty years, from authors and experts such as Lawrence Hoffman, Isa Aron, Hayim Herring, Terry Bookman, and William Kahn, among others, speaks to this new communal interest in thinking of synagogues as institutions that are managed and could be managed

[84] Abraham Karp provides a comprehensive overview of the seven chronological states in the development of the American synagogue in his article, "Overview: The Synagogue in America – A Historical Typology."

[85] This is a topic about which I have been thinking and researching for over a decade. I articulated a similar understanding of synagogues' challenging relationship with the ideas of management and strategy in my unpublished 2007 undergraduate thesis, "Strategic Management in the American Synagogue." I do not know of an author who articulates clearly this strained relationship between synagogues and management. This is perhaps because, while many authors in recent decades have contributed to a growing literature teaching synagogues to manage their work better, there is no author who has written about the history of synagogue management that might articulate trends in people's thinking of synagogues as institutions that must be managed.

better. While this new awareness is now more widely accepted, more work needs to be done to bring the best practices from the nonprofit sector to bear on the challenges synagogues face.

While there has been very little written on rabbinic transitions, a much greater volume of literature exists on nonprofit executive transitions. And this literature is a part of an even greater body of work about organizational change for both for-profit and nonprofit enterprises. This chapter sets out to explore some notable works in this field and to identify tools and best practices that might serve synagogues in transition. While some points require more of what one might call "translation" to a Jewish context than others, there is a wealth of information that can be applied to synagogues.

Before going further, it must be said: Rabbis are not executive directors. Even in synagogues where there is no separate executive director, it is clear that many parts of the rabbi's job are different from a traditional executive director's. That said, in so far as many senior or solo rabbis (or sometimes cantors) serve as a primary professional leader of their synagogues, much of what has been written about nonprofit executives and their transitions might be applied to rabbinic transitions as well. This chapter will use nonprofit management literature to discuss rabbis in their role as organizational leaders.

The Importance of Transitions

An important lesson from the nonprofit literature is that leadership transitions present great challenges but also great opportunities for organizations. Synagogues sometimes lose sight of the potential benefits of a leadership transition, seeing instead only potential pitfalls. Yet even when a beloved and successful leader leaves, there is immense opportunity for an organization to move to the next exciting place with intention and vision.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has become a thought leader and funder in the field of nonprofit executive transitions, and the writing and research it supports provide the basis for much of the creative work in this arena. About the exciting moment of executive transition, it writes:

> We have found that transitions are powerful – and under-realized – opportunities to strengthen nonprofits. Proactively managed, leadership transitions provide a "pivotal moment." Faced with a (sometimes disconcerting) pause in business as usual, organizations can re-examine current practices, positioning, even mission, direction, and vision. Boards, with expert support from ETM [executive transition management[86]] providers, can assess the situation, work through the hiring process, and implement strategies that enable an organization not only to survive a transition, but to thrive through it.[87]

Synagogue leaders must learn to embrace these opportunities if they are to avail themselves of more potential benefits of the transition period and learn to thrive through the change.

There is an organizational opportunity in every rabbinic transition. Embracing it requires an understanding of the distinction made by Bridges between change and transition (explored in Chapter 2). The change is the expected or unexpected departure of the rabbi, but the transition is the process of evaluating and dreaming that can come along with it. If synagogues only seek to address the change, they will try to replace the previous rabbi, but they will miss the chance to ask bigger and potentially transformative questions. Or, to put it another way, Thomas Gilmore writes that organizations must:

> Rethink the concept of "replacing" your leader. A more proactive approach conceptualizes the process as a search for the new – not a replacement of the old – allowing an organization to capitalize on a leadership change by redirecting or explicitly reaffirming the course of the organization's

[86] For more on ETM, see the "Executive Transition Management (ETM): Prepare, Pivot, Thrive" section later in this chapter.
[87] Adams, *Capturing the Power of Leadership Change*, 5.

> future.… For a board, there is no greater opportunity to shape the organization than through a successful leadership transition.[88]

Many authors suggest that succession planning is a form of strategic planning. Tim Wolfred writes, "Strategic leader development can be closely aligned with the strategic planning process. As this planning begins, an organization's first step is to develop a strategic vision and arrive at a clear sense of its long-term goals and direction and to determine the leadership competencies necessary to get there."[89] The hope is that, after answering many strategic questions, the search process should become much easier. Gilmore takes this a step further by explaining that an executive search and organizational change are almost inextricably linked. "The selection of a new leader is strategic planning in much deeper ways than the formal process and documents that go under that name. Rarely are there stories of successful major developments or significant redirection without a change at the helm."[90] Weisman and Goldbaum summarize this relationship, stating:

> Change should be used to take what is and turn it into what should be. Executive transition offers a wonderful opportunity to review the organization at all levels and develop a plan making improvements. The result of the evaluation will help the Board clarify the direction of the organization, which in turn simplifies the process of identifying the expertise and skill sets needed by the next ED [executive director].[91]

The challenge for synagogues is figuring out how to capitalize on this moment of possibility and use it to propel the community forward. Reshmi Paul explains that a purposeful transition may be hard and painful. But he warns that organizations that only prioritize a "smooth transition" often miss the opportunity to truly serve their long-term

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[88] Gilmore, *Finding and Retaining Your Next Chief Executive*, 2.
[89] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 6.
[90] Gilmore, *Finding and Retaining Your Next Chief Executive*, 2.
[91] Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 35.

interest. Instead, he argues, "It's time for boards to accept and prepare for the bumps and bruises that come with successions geared to serve the company's long-term interests."[92]

Gilmore suggests a number of pitfalls that boards in an executive search should seek to avoid, including "jumping too quickly to think of candidates and the search machinery without first capitalizing on the opportunity to revisit the strategic direction of the agency."[93] A synagogue board's eagerness to fill the rabbinic position quickly – an eagerness that is practical and rooted in a desire to support the important functions of the synagogue – may be at odds with this opportunity to think more strategically. An organization that has been successful, or has had an effective executive who is now leaving, might be even more susceptible to this kind of thinking. Gilmore contends that the successes of the outgoing leader should not be an indication that this strategic re-evaluation is any less necessary. He explains:

> Paradoxically, a board looking for a successor to a successful executive can often overlook the reality that the very achievements of the departing leader make the challenges for a new person different. The new leader must build on the predecessor's achievements and take the organization further on its journey, not retrace a well-worn path.[94]

In every executive or rabbinic search, there is an opportunity for strategic thinking that will propel the organization further than if the organization seeks only to re-fill the vacancy.

Succession Planning

All of the entreaties above point to the importance of succession planning. Succession planning is a process wherein a board, in consultation with the staff, creates plans for when and how conversations about executive succession will happen. This

[92] Paul, "Beware the 'Smooth' CEO Succession."
[93] Gilmore, *Finding and Retaining Your Next Chief Executive*, 6.
[94] Ibid., 6.

planning can – and should – happen well before the executive announces that he or she is leaving or retiring and take place as part of the organization's regular analysis of its strategic direction. This is a significant departure from the practice of many synagogues, which wait until either their rabbi decides to leave or until there is a problem to ask themselves the questions, "How will we know when it is time for our rabbi to leave and what will we do next?" Succession planning encourages organizations to create an open space to have such conversations regularly and in ways that respectfully engage the current executive in the conversation.

In some ways, succession planning is a method of planning for the unexpected event that might cause a leader to become unable to lead, either temporarily or permanently, through crises, sickness, or death. "At the most basic level, succession planning is a sound risk management practice. It is critical to ensuring the viability of an agency in the event of a key manager's unplanned absence."[95] However, succession planning is also useful even when a departure is planned. The increasing number of Baby Boomers who will retire in the coming years is but one compelling argument for a more substantive organizational focus on succession planning.[96] This trend, combined with the ascension of Generation X and Y leaders, who often have a desire to "restructure the executive role, creating collaborative or shared leadership models and job expectations that allow for a healthier balance between work and life,"[97] requires more robust strategic thinking. Succession

[95] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 3.
[96] Ibid., 4.
[97] Ibid.

planning in organizations that have been led by boomer-aged executives may help "lay the groundwork for making these kinds of organizational changes."[98]

Thomas McLaughlin and Addie Backlund, in their book on the impact of Founder's Syndrome[99] on nonprofit executive transitions, call this kind of advanced planning "succession thinking." They explain:

> We made this term up to signify the kind of work that needs to happen before the more formal practice known as succession planning. Succession thinking means the board of directors is always contemplating the state of the organization's leadership even if the founder's departure isn't imminent.… Begin planning for a vacancy now, and a sudden opening will never take the board by surprise.[100]

The question for those engaged in thinking about the field of synagogue management is how can congregations normalize "succession thinking." Presently, many congregants seem to believe that such thinking poses too great a risk – as it might upset the delicate relationship between rabbi and congregation. But not talking about these important organizational issues can lead people to misread situations and act on assumptions, and to congregations that are entirely unprepared for a crisis. Leaders in synagogues need to find respectful and sacred ways to create new types of conversations about rabbinic succession.

Three Kinds of Succession Planning

Tim Wolfred identifies three different kinds of succession planning:

> **Strategic leader development** is an ongoing practice based on defining an agency's strategic vision, identifying the leadership and managerial skills necessary to carry out that vision, and recruiting and maintaining talented individuals who have or who can develop those skills.

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[98] Ibid.,
[99] For more on Founder's Syndrome, see the section later in this chapter.
[100] McLaughlin and Backlund, *Moving Beyond Founder's Syndrome to Nonprofit Success*, 40.

> **Emergency succession** (or leadership) planning ensures that key leadership and administrative functions, as well as agency services, can continue without disruption in the event of an unplanned, temporary absence of an administrator.
>
> **Departure-defined succession** planning is recommended when a long-term leader has announced his or her departure date two or more years in advance. It includes identifying the agency's goals going forward; determining which tools a successor will need to have in his or her skill set to achieve those goals; and devoting significant attention to building the capacity of the board, managers, and systems to sustain funding and programs beyond the current executive's tenure.[101]

In interviews, many synagogue leaders spoke about some form of departure-defined succession planning. There may also be a few synagogues that have emergency succession plans. But there seems to be notably few that engage in any kind of holistic, strategic leadership planning. Wolfred notes that in small nonprofits, a quality that applies to many synagogues, there may be too few resources or staff to engage in extensive strategic leader development. "In these cases, however, the other two succession strategies – emergency planning and departure-defined planning – are still relevant."[102] A more proactive approach to succession planning could serve many synagogues seeking to more thoughtfully and strategically navigate the rabbinic transition.

Reshmi Paul also points out that the earlier an organization's leadership starts the conversation of succession planning, the better. In fact, if an organization can make succession planning a regular part of the conversation from the very beginning of the new leader's tenure, it may avoid sending the wrong message. "This expectation-setting is key, so the CEO doesn't see the uptick in board involvement as a sign of disapproval."[103] Part of the strategy through which synagogues might normalize this process is to make

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[101] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 4.
[102] Ibid., 6.
[103] Paul, "Beware the 'Smooth' CEO Succession."

conversations about the rabbi's and the synagogue's ideas and goals for succession part of a rabbi's regular, yearly evaluation so that it is normalized and not taken as a sign of lack of faith in the rabbi's leadership.

Steps of the Transition

In their book, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, Weisman and Goldbaum offer a useful outline of all the steps of transition. It may be helpful for synagogue leaders to similarly identify all of the discrete steps so that they can endeavor to give some attention to each one. All of these steps exist (or should) for synagogues as well as secular nonprofits, though some may appear in a different order or take a different form:

1. **Preparation:** The first step happens long before the ED even considers stepping down. Every organization should prepare itself for the time when its ED leaves. Preparing for the inevitable is a responsibility that rests with both the Board and the ED.
2. **Response:** The ED's departure can create a void in staff leadership that the Board must address immediately. Its actions must take into account the response of the staff, clients, funders, community, and other stakeholders. The Board must also step back and look at its own response as it begins the process of finding a new ED.
3. **Hiring an Interim ED:** If there will be a gap between the out-going leader and the new ED, the Board may want to fill the position with an interim Executive Director. It may also want to consider doing so if the organization has serious problems and would benefit from having an objective, experienced professional institute some changes and clear the way for the new permanent leader.
4. **Recruitment and Screening:** The decision of how to conduct and structure the executive search process determines the amount of time, money, and skills needed by the Board.
5. **Negotiations and Hiring:** Offering the ED's position to the best candidate may be the most critical action a Board can take, and choices made during the negotiations of employment may determine the long-term relationship between the ED and Board.
6. **Orientation:** It is important that the new ED start off in the right direction with the Board, staff, participants in the organization's services, and other stakeholders. The ED's introduction to the

organization and the community at large takes planning and coordination.

7. **Retention:** Holding on to the newly hired ED requires commitment, communication, and all the other skills of relationship building. The departing ED may be stepping down due to problems that could have been avoided. Identifying those problems before the new Executive Director comes on board can help the organization avoid repeating that experience.[104]

Why Executive Directors Leave

Weisman and Goldbaum also present a taxonomy of reasons why executive directors might leave. Each presents its own challenges and opportunities for the organization. Many of these reasons also hold true for rabbis leaving congregations.[105]

- The Career Ladder Factor – The executive moves to another job with a greater leadership responsibility or better benefits.
- The Godfather Factor – The executive is recruited by another organization which made an offer he or she could not refuse.
- The Gone Fishing Factor – The executive retires, sometimes with ample notice given to the organization's leadership and sometimes with less.
- The Sudden Loss Factor – The executive is no longer able to serve because of injury, illness, or death.
- The Burnout Factor – The executive is burned out from the stress, pressure, or responsibility of the job.
- The Cutting the Mustard Factor – The board asks the executive to leave or does not renew his or her contract because of a failure to maintain the expected productivity or level of performance.
- The Ten-Year Factor – The executive leaves within a few years of his or her tenth anniversary at the organization. The authors have observed a new trend to this effect. Sometimes it is because a subtle new relationship with the board began to emerge, perhaps there are fewer board members who hired the executive still on the board. The executive may also be seeking new challenges and new opportunities.

More work is required to translate these stages to the synagogue context. For instance, a question might be asked about the extent to which the Ten-Year Factor holds

[104] Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 2-3.
[105] Based on Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 7-12.

true in synagogues, both in terms of the overall concept and the exact timing of it. Similarly, the Cutting the Mustard Factor may play out a little differently in synagogues, where performance may be one factor, but differing vision or lack of cultural fit may be others. The unfortunate cases of ethics violations that result in dismissal or resignation of a rabbi are also not addressed in the above model. As with many issues in the rabbinate, a comprehensive study of rabbinic career trajectories would provide more insight into trends in rabbinic transitions. Still, this list may help congregations seeking to conduct succession planning to think about the possible reasons for a succession.

Keys to Successful Transitions

Communication

A theme that was repeated over and over in interviews with interim rabbis and representatives from the Reform Movement was that communication with the congregation throughout the search process is a vital element of success. This is, unsurprisingly, a theme echoed in much of the nonprofit literature. Perhaps Weisman and Goldbaum say it most succinctly when they implore, "Throughout the transition process, communication is key.... If the response to change is driven by anxiety about the unknown, then knowledge is an important weapon against resistance to change. Information comes from communication."[106] They explain that communication with all stakeholders is important, and point to the staff and funders as two groups who may need particularly thoughtful and regular communication. They also identify that one of the primary functions of this

[106] Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 34.

communication is to offer reassurance that the board has a plan and is aware of their needs.[107]

Sir Nick Scheele, former president and chief operating officer at Ford Motor Company, suggests three lessons he learned about communicating in a time of change.[108] First, he says, "Be honest; don't ever try to prevaricate, because if you do you'll answer somebody in one way and you won't quite give them the truth" which will eventually come to undermine your change effort. Second, "Be consistent. Don't come up with new sets of data; be very consistent in how you show things."[109] And third, "When you communicate, don't look as though you hate it; enjoy it, because you are working with people – and if they don't trust you, if they believe that you think this is a waste of your time, they won't follow you."[110] All of this is critical advice for any communicator, including synagogue leaders.

A Transition Budget

Another important element (one that is sometimes not anticipated by synagogue leaders) is setting aside a designated budget for the myriad of expenses that come with a transition. Weisman and Goldbaum argue that this is a vital step to complete as early in the transition process as possible:

> One of the first things the Board should develop, in conjunction with the Transition and Finance Committees, is an executive transition budget. This should take into account how much the organization can spend for the

[107] Ibid., 42.
[108] Scheele, "Change Comes Through Consistent Communication," 34.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

> appointment of an interim ED and how much can it spend on the executive search.[111]

This is particularly true if the organization's board intends to engage an interim director, as there will be expenses when it recruits and welcomes the interim and another round of expenses when the board searches for and settles the new leader. Weisman and Goldbaum suggest that this may require the board to think critically and creatively about how to set aside money earmarked for this process. For example, a board might "consider delaying a major program expansion or capital expenditure and using those funds to cover the additional costs of the [transition]. Or they might seek a special one-time grant from a longtime donor. Many funders will be responsive to such a request, when they are assured that the Board has a well-thought-out plan on how to proceed through this critical period."[112] An important way that the leaders of a synagogue can signify to the community that they are committed to a thoughtful and strategic transition process is by setting aside designated funding.

The Role of Interims in the Nonprofit Search

While this chapter focuses on the general topic of executive search, there is also an increasing amount of literature specifically on the role of an interim. Just like synagogues, a growing number of nonprofits are employing trained interim executives as part of their transition processes, and the literature reflects a few important best practices. Weisman and Goldbaum explain the various purposes and effects of interim executives, all of which are true for interim rabbis as well:

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[111] Weisman and Goldbaum, *Losing Your Executive Director without Losing Your Way*, 59.
[112] Ibid., 65.

> An interim ED can provide a bridge between the previous executive and the next, helping the Board, staff, and other stakeholders adjust to the fact that the previous ED is no longer there. The interim leader can prepare the organization for changes that will occur with the new leadership and play an important role in demonstrating that change can provide new opportunities for the organization.[113]

In addition, the authors highlight a number of specific organizational tasks, including providing "oversight and management of the organization's operations," ensuring "the stability and morale of the staff," and preparing "the organization for the next ED."[114] While this list serves as a useful reminder of the structural tasks related to a rabbi's role as nonprofit leader, it is also important to acknowledge the interim rabbi's role as chaplain and spiritual leader. An interim rabbi must simultaneously accomplish organizational management responsibilities while also fulfilling a number of pastoral tasks both for individuals and for the community as a whole.

In addition to managerial roles, the interim executive director comes in as an outsider who can offer a unique perspective on the organization. "The independent interim can provide an objective evaluation of the organization's operations and policies and be in an excellent position to provide recommendations for change within the context of what needs to be done before and after the new ED's arrival."[115]

One possible area of difference between interim rabbis and interim executives in other nonprofits is the interim executive director's role in the search for the successor. Some authors argue that an interim executive should be very involved in the search process:

> Having the independent interim ED involved in the executive search process will provide an invaluable perspective for both the Board and the candidates. The interim ED should be part of the search team, participating in the interviews and screening process. The independent's understanding

[113] Ibid., 47.
[114] Ibid., 49-50.
[115] Ibid., 63-64.

> of the job and the expertise needed to perform its duties is a component that will enhance the search and decision making process.[116]

Interim rabbis tend to take a more circumspect approach to the search for the settled rabbi. They may answer questions from candidates or coach the committee, but they do not sit in on the interviews or screening process – in some ways as a matter of necessity. One interim rabbi explained that he was told in training that synagogues that have a failed search are more likely to try to disobey the CCAR's model and convince the interim rabbi to stay and become the settled rabbi. Interim rabbis, therefore, want to be careful not to involve themselves too greatly in the search process, lest they appear to be undermining their colleagues in an attempt to secure the job for themselves. Interim rabbis must be careful and often need to pull back from the search process more than a nonprofit interim executive might.

In an interview with Lynne Molnar, a professional interim executive, a few other differences between her work and the work of an interim rabbi emerged.[117] Molnar pointed out that most of her positions were on the order of six to eight months, not the one or two years of an interim rabbi. She noted that this meant her work was more narrowly focused, usually on either helping the organization to get ready to do the search or to make a clean break with the previous executive, or both. While a year or two is still not enough time to engage in a significant change effort, rabbis are able to do more with the added time. She also pointed out that most of the organizations with which she works are in some kind of crisis. This primarily has to do with the types of nonprofits that choose to bring on an interim. As she explained, "Those [organizations] looking for an interim know something's

[116] Ibid., 65.
[117] Lynne Molnar, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2016.

not right." Interim rabbis, on the other hand, may come into a congregation in crisis, but they may also serve perfectly healthy congregations on their way from one strength to the next.

Thinking about the interim rabbi's role in the search and the ways in which this differs from a nonprofit interim executive will be an important task if more of the learning from the nonprofit world is to be translated into the synagogue context.

Two Most Important Concepts: Founder's Syndrome and ETM

Of all the nonprofit tools and best practices, there are two in particular that seem to have the potential to have the greatest relevance for synagogue leaders. They are the impact of "Founder's Syndrome" (defined below) and an emerging movement in transition consulting called Executive Transition Management (ETM). The former is a matter that affects many rabbis and yet is not a frame often used to discuss these issues. The latter offers a model for thinking about the interim year and transition more holistically and strategically that may inform future changes to the role of the interim rabbi.

Founder's Syndrome

The Annie E. Casey Foundation points out:

> While all executive transitions are challenging, research in this area has identified several distinctive types of transitions with different levels of risk and opportunity. Transitions involving the departure of the founder (or long-term executive with many similarities to a founder) are the most perilous, as key internal and external constituencies (employees, funders, etc.) tend to identify the organization with its first leader.[118]

These characteristics of a founder's departure are made all the more complex by a phenomenon referred to in the literature as "Founder's Syndrome."

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[118] Adams, *Capturing the Power of Leadership Change*, 7.

Founder's Syndrome is set of dysfunctions that apply to a founding or long-time leader and that make transitions difficult. McLaughlin and Backlund define the syndrome as "the imbalance of power in nonprofit organizations in favor of the founding executive that occurs because of the unique advantages of assembling board and staff of the organization."[119] They elaborate that if the founder has recruited all or most of the board members, has created the organization largely out of his or her own vision, and/or has served the organization with distinction for a long time, the board may be less willing to dictate to the founder the future needs of the organization. The founding executive holds a unique role within the organization that often carries with it unique loyalties and power dynamics which may have an adverse effect on the leader or the organization as he or she attempts to disentangle from the organization (or to resist such a process).

McLaughlin and Backlund also note, "The term is pejorative.… No one ever talks about Founder's Syndrome in a complementary way."[120] There are certainly instances where a founder is able to leave gracefully and strategically, in which case no such syndrome exists. But at the point at which the unique characteristics of the founder's role begin to adversely affect the founder's or the organization's ability to identify the right time to move on, or to act strategically and in the best interests of the organization, these characteristics could be described as a syndrome. Understanding the unique power dynamics at play may help organizational leaders to spot in advance when and why a founder transition might be difficult and to proactively address these unique needs and

[119] McLaughlin and Backlund, *Moving Beyond Founder's Syndrome to Nonprofit Success*, x.
[120] Ibid.

issues.[121] In so doing, they may avoid letting the syndrome reach an advanced and detrimental stage.

It is Not Just Founders

Much in the literature suggests that the characteristics of Founder's Syndrome may apply even when the executive did not technically found the organization. McLaughlin and Backlund point out that many of the same dynamics may apply to someone who has served a long tenure as executive director. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, in their book on Christian pastoral succession, take this even further in their chapter on the impact of Founder's Syndrome on pastoral succession. They surmise that there are number of different kinds of pastors who may function as "founders" in the sense of their unique power relationship with the board – not only pastors who have served a significantly long time but also pastors who have seen the congregation through a period of great growth or decline.[122] One might extrapolate that a rabbi who has been in his or her job for more than a decade or seen a synagogue through some kind of substantial change might be susceptible to at least some of the symptoms of Founder's Syndrome. Thus, a large proportion of senior rabbi transitions are at risk of manifesting these symptoms. A congregational leader looking to diagnose such symptoms might turn to the ample literature on Founder's Syndrome to make sense of these unique dynamics.

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[121] The monograph *Founder Transitions: Creating Good Endings and New Beginnings* by Tom Adams and published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation deals with many of the dynamics of these transition and is a worthwhile read for anyone preparing for one.
[122] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 1443.

None of this is to say that founders[123] are not one of the organization's greatest blessings and assets. It was his or her vision that brought the organization to where it is today. Founders pour their time, energy, and passion into helping their organizations succeed. Without them, these organizations could not exist. Honoring their contribution and hearing their vision for the organization's future – even a future that extends beyond their tenure – are vitally important tasks. The importance of better understanding the elements of Founder's Syndrome and their impact on transitions is a tactic for helping the nonprofit leader to give the organization one last and lasting gift, the gift of a good transition.

The Impact of Founder's Syndrome

The symptoms of Founder's Syndrome can impact an organization in a number of ways. One challenge that exists is that the skillset that helped the founder to build or sustain the organization may not be the skillsets that will help it thrive in the next phase of its life. McLaughlin and Backlund point out, "The flaws of the founder-led organization are usually clearest when there is a gap between the founder's past strengths and the current and future needs of the organization."[124] For instance, founding the organization might require a Type-A leader who can get things done and is unequivocal about his or her vision, but the next phase of the organization's life might require leadership that is more collaborative and relies on engaging volunteers and lay-leaders around their own visions and skills. The founder and the board may have trouble recognizing that the skills that

[123] As explored in the section above, the word founder will be used for the remainder of this section even though the syndrome may apply to non-founding executives as well.
[124] McLaughlin and Backlund, *Moving Beyond Founder's Syndrome to Nonprofit Success*, ix.

helped them get this far are fundamentally different from the skills that they will need to navigate their future. Identifying what the founder's skills are, and are not, is an important way to mitigate the impact of Founder's Syndrome.

Trouble Letting Go

For a number of reasons, founders (and leaders who share their characteristics) may have great trouble in letting go. Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird identify a number of reasons why this separation is hard for pastors and other religious leaders, including, the pastors' possible:

- "unwillingness to face the emotional sense of loss,"
- "hope that they can do it again,"
- "fear that all they've done will be lost under the next person,"
- "fear of the unknown,"
- desire to wait "on the right potential successor," and
- "enjoyment of the comfort level they've achieved."[125]

The difficulty in letting go goes both ways. "Staff often experience equal difficulty in letting their long-term leaders go. Many staff were drawn to the agency by the executive's vision and determination in addressing a social need they care about."[126] This affection can lead to problematic expectations. Staff may "even explicitly state that they expect the next executive to lead in the same manner and with the same immediate ease as the founder – an aspiration that is likely to set the successor up for failure."[127] These dynamics can contribute to a situation where the founder stays past the time when she or he is no longer as effective as she or he once was, or even past the time when her or his

[125] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 1498-1511.
[126] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 16.
[127] Ibid.

work is most meaningful and fulfilling. Organizations should always be keeping an eye on the possibility that a founder might be floundering.

Founders also tend to stick around and have an outsized impact on their successors. "This kind of a leader's leave-taking often does not include, consciously or unconsciously, a complete handover of the reins of influence and power to the next executive."[128] The founder may attempt to influence decisions, making it hard for the new executive to develop his or her own authority or take the organization in a new direction. For this reason, some nonprofit specialists suggest, "The future should not include the founder.... The lingering presence the founder almost inevitably weakens his successor and confuses board and staff alike. Again, boundaries are useful, and the founder's permanent absence is one more helpful boundary."[129] Such a boundary may not be possible in synagogues, where this situation is made all the more complex by the fact that many synagogues give the outgoing leader the title of "emeritus" and invite him or her to stay on in this role while the successor attempts to fill the role the founder used to occupy. The impact of Founder's Syndrome on the emeritus role is certainly a subject for further study.[130]

Tools to Mitigate Founder's Syndrome

A number of authors suggest that an interim executive might be particularly useful when the organization is transitioning from a founder. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in

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[128] Ibid.
[129] McLaughlin and Backlund, *Moving Beyond Founder's Syndrome to Nonprofit Success*, 39.
[130] The monograph *Table for Two: Can Founders & Successors Co-Exist So Everyone Wins?* by Mark Leach looks at alternative models to the complete departure of the founding executive. For those attempting to think strategically about the role of the emeritus in light of the founder's and the organization's needs, this might well provide inspiration for further conversation.

writing about ways to mitigate Founder's Syndrome, even points to the use of interim ministers in Christian denominations as an example of how secular nonprofits might think about navigating this time. The foundation notes that a congregation which uses an interim pastor "experiences a different leadership style with the interim and can see success beyond the shadow of its previous pastor."[131] For organizations facing a founder transition, the interim period provides a useful time to process and move on.

Another important task in founder transitions is honoring the legacy and impact of the outgoing leader. "Given the founders' role in building and sustaining critically needed organizations, it is important to celebrate their work and invest in successful transitions that protect their legacies."[132] Ritualizing this transition process and creating an appropriate space for the outgoing leader to express his or her ongoing hopes and dreams for the organization may mitigate some risk of the founder exerting power over the successor. Tom Adams suggests:

> Some founders find it helpful to draft an "ethical will" [for their organization]. This is a statement of what they think is important and valuable about the organization and its work. It also may describe what the founder wants to hand off to the next executive and what he or she hopes for the future.[133]

Synagogues have all sorts of unique tools of ritual to help the founding rabbi to say goodbye and tell his or her story. As explored in Chapter 2, Moses's goodbye to the Israelites before he departs to be alone with God might serve as a model for this kind of transition.[134]

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[131] Wolfred, *Building Leaderful Organizations*, 16.
[132] Adams, *Founder Transitions: Creating Good Endings and New Beginnings*, 4.
[133] Ibid., 18.
[134] I believe that *Midrash Pitirat Moshe*, explored in Chapter 2 is a midrash all about Moses's brush with Founder's Syndrome, and the many great challenges that founders face as they attempt to step back.

Finally, creating space for executives to build relationships with peers and begin to think about when and how they will leave can have a tremendous impact on their ability to end their tenure in ways that they are proud of. "Peer networking in a confidential and safe environment has also proven valuable to founders during their personal assessment period."[135] The Annie E. Casey Foundation has created a program called Next Steps Workshops, where founders and long-term executives can:

> Get a needed opportunity to address the isolation so often associated with transition decision making, develop a usable framework and language for thinking and talking about transitions with others, and become clearer about the issues related to their own transition, particularly the timing of their departure and their role in the transition period.[136]

The organizations that support rabbis, including the CCAR and local chapters of the Jewish Federations of North America, should explore creating similar programs for rabbis nearing retirement. Such groups could help rabbis to make graceful and meaningful exits when the time comes. Supporting rabbis as they enter into these discussions is a way to ensure that congregations are set up for strategic and transformative transitions right from the start, and it is an area requiring much more attention from our broader Jewish institutions.

Conclusions on Founder's Syndrome

Rabbis who have founded and/or sustained congregations for a long time or through a significant change may have a unique set of needs and challenges that will impact the transition process. Their transition to their next role is particularly fraught, especially (though not exclusively) if they will become an emeritus rabbi and stick around while their successor settles in. As synagogue leaders look to the nonprofit world for insight into

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[135] Adams, *Founder Transitions: Creating Good Endings and New Beginnings*, 12.
[136] Ibid.

transitions, this is an area of particular need and also an area where a great amount has been written, only the surface of which has been skimmed here.

Executive Transition Management (ETM): Prepare, Pivot, Thrive

Three organizations have done cutting-edge work helping nonprofits to move intentionally and strategically through the transition of an executive director: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in partnership with two nonprofit consulting firms, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and TransitionGuides. They have been working together since the 1990s to develop a new model of transition called Executive Transition Management (ETM) based on the belief that "transitions are powerful – and under-realized – opportunities to strengthen nonprofits."[137] Much of their model is based on the work of Tim Wolfred, one of the pioneers in the field of the intentional nonprofit interim executive work.

The ETM model expands on the work of William Bridges (see Chapter 2) and his model's applications to organizations. There are three stages of ETM, which correlate to Bridges' three stages of ending, neutral zone, and beginning. In ETM, the stages are called "Prepare, Pivot, and Thrive."[138] Just as Bridges makes a distinction between a change and a transition, ETM makes a distinction between activities that are *transactional* (focused only on filling an open position) and behaviors that are *transformational* (allowing an organization to seek a new path towards fulfilling its mission).[139] In many ways, this model is a distillation of many of the principles that have been explored in this chapter: Strategic thinking is used to build a picture of what the organization will become and informs the

[137] Adams, *Capturing the Power of Leadership Change*, 5.
[138] Wolfred, *Managing Executive Transitions*, 10.
[139] Ibid., 9.

structures the board uses to recruit the right leader to lead the organization towards fulfilling that picture.

Phase One: Prepare

> Unlike traditional search processes, ETM helps organizations prepare for leadership succession, months, even years before the actual transition takes place. Central to this preparation is to identify the executive director's key leadership functions (e.g., fundraising, government relations, etc.) and to make sure they are backed up by staff or board members.… Administrative systems, particularly financial planning and oversight, are often reinforced so that they will survive the departure of the executive director. In addition to addressing the prospective timing of the executive's departure, ETM asks whether significant organizational changes – including mergers, partnerships, or even closure – are warranted.[140]

In essence, the "Prepare" stage is the time to deploy many of the succession planning tactics explored above. It looks to the future even before a succession is on the horizon and invites all stakeholders (especially the current executive) to plan for the possibilities and pitfalls that lie ahead. In the Prepare phase, organizational leaders seek to "clarify direction and leadership requirements"[141] so that they can be ready to take full advantage of a leadership transition (even one where the impetus is unexpected).

This phase might be the hardest for rabbis and synagogue leaders to embrace because the culture at many synagogues may not currently allow for this kind of frank discussion (as mentioned above in the section on succession planning). Traditions around the respect for rabbinic leadership and rabbinic authority and realities about people's close, personal relationships with their rabbis all complicate these conversations. Organizations seeking to help synagogue leaders embrace ETM will have to spend a lot of time translating

[140] Adams, *Capturing the Power of Leadership Change*, 11.
[141] Wolfred, *Managing Executive Transitions*, 24.

the Prepare phase into Jewish language and cultivating new cultures around these kinds of difficult conversations.

Phase Two: Pivot

"Executive Transition Management activities in this middle phase focus on three areas – executive search and selection, organizational improvement, and staff morale."[142] Organizational leaders, having used the Prepare phase to identify the direction in which they wish to head, now use the search during the "Pivot" phase as an opportunity to turn and head in that direction. "Unlike traditional search processes, this stage employs an organizational development orientation designed not only to find and hire the new executive, but also to maximize a nonprofit's ability to provide services and fulfill its mission."[143] This phase also generally includes "a proactive outreach process to establish a diverse and qualified finalist pool."[144] If the organization has taken the time to build a clear vision for where it is going and the type of leadership skills it needs to get there, it will be able to strategically recruit candidates who can bring these skills.[145]

Engaging an interim leader in the Pivot phase is an important way to get the most out of the phase, but it is insufficient by itself. Hiring an interim leader does not cause this kind of pivot-thinking to happen; it only creates the space for it to happen. Synagogues that wish to get the most out of their interim time will have to commit to this kind of strategic work. Organizations that wish to help synagogues to do this will have to support

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[142] Ibid., 25.
[143] Adams, *Capturing the Power of Leadership Change*, 12.
[144] Ibid.
[145] One would hope this would also have the added effect of limiting the impact of unconscious bias in the search process. If the leaders have done a good enough job of creating a specific profile for the leadership skills they seek, they can limit the risk of committee members deciding on inappropriate or discriminatory factors, such as gender.

synagogues in the Prepare phase (even before they hire an interim) to lay the groundwork for strategic thinking and then help them to follow through on that thinking through the Pivot phase.

Phase Three: Thrive

In the final, "Thrive" phase, "the new executive is oriented to the agency, its strategic directions, and the board's initial performance expectations for the executive. Board and executive become a team by making explicit how each wants to be supported by the other."[146] In this phase, the board and executive work together to ensure that they capitalize on all the hard work of the previous two phases and turn the pivot into a lasting change. This involves intentional goal setting with continued support to fulfill these goals. Wolfred notes also that because a high percentage of "entering executives are doing this job for the first time," it might behoove the board to seek to provide "some form of professional learning and support to develop [the new manager's] executive skills."[147] This phase does not end with the hiring of the new executive, but rather begins with it, and continues for the months and years ahead as the board and executive continue to check in and support each other in structured and thoughtful ways.

ETM Conclusions

The three transformational questions that ETM might call synagogue leaders to ask are:

1. What do we need to do to prepare to lead a strategic search?
2. What is the pivot in our organization's direction that we hope to make in the search process?

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[146] Wolfred, *Managing Executive Transitions*, 26.
[147] Ibid.

3. How will this pivot help us to thrive under our new leadership?

This seems to be a very different set of questions than the one most synagogues ask in times of transition. Even leaders who are prepared or eager for a communal change may not necessarily be thinking about how to lead a transition that is itself a form of transformation. What if each rabbinic search was seen as an opportunity for a congregation, even the most successful congregations, to pivot towards a new level of thriving? This means thriving not just in the long term, but also setting the new rabbi up for immediate and short-term success along with pointing the community towards long-term vision. What would it mean for congregations to see ongoing leadership development of rabbis, who are new to the senior position, as a built-in part of the search process? A focus on the ETM model asks Jewish communal institutions to think about how to best encourage synagogues to think this way.

The ETM model is also interesting because it presents an alternative to the more pastoral approach focused on family systems and grief and recovery that is currently employed by many interim rabbis. As the field of the interim rabbinate continues to grow and become more refined, and as organizations like the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism seek to better support rabbis and congregations in transition, the ETM model may provide another useful way to think about transitions.[148]

[148] Many of the publications of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Executive Transitions Monograph Series deal with different elements of the ETM model, including the ways that ETM interfaces specifically with interim work. The book *Managing Executive Transitions: A Guide for Nonprofits* by Tim Wolfred of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services is also a useful introduction to the model. The latter serves as a workbook of organizational resources. Those wishing to learn more about the application of ETM to rabbinic transitions should look to all of these works for a comprehensive examination of the model.

On the surface, ETM sounds a lot like a restatement of many of the principles of transition management outlined earlier. But it is a fuller and more holistic approach to the entire transition processes, from well before the executive or rabbi leaves until long after the new leader is hired. It also prioritizes the organization's ability to capitalize on the unique opportunities that a transition offers and turn these opportunities into lasting change that will help ensure the organization's future success. While many interim rabbis and interim rabbi trainers speak about William Bridges and about other models for transition (such as the grief and recovery model), very few speak about ETM. There is a significant opportunity to look at the ways that the Jewish community might adopt and adapt some of the best practices of this model to help synagogues take a more strategic approach to their rabbinic transitions.

Looking Ahead

There are veritable libraries full of resources for synagogue leaders interested in capitalizing on the wealth of knowledge in the field of nonprofit management. This chapter barely skims the surface. As the field of interim rabbis grows, one of the primary challenges continues to be the translation of the concepts of interim work into Jewish language and the synagogue context. As described in Chapter 4, the primary avenue for this translation work is through adapting literature and resources for Christian interim clergy into a format that best applies to synagogues. To ignore the wealth of secular literature on transitions and transition management, however, is to deny the extent to which synagogues are organizations. Synagogues are a particular type of organization, with a unique set of needs and influences, but synagogues are also similar in many significant ways to other nonprofits, and there is much to be learned from this broader field. The challenge for those

wishing to improve the field of interim rabbis is to translate usable knowledge from all fields – including but not limited to the field of nonprofit management – where there is something worthwhile to be learned.

CHAPTER 4: Pastoral Transitions in Churches – Opportunities for Translation

The best way to understand contemporary rabbinic succession is to look at pastoral succession in churches. Over the past few decades, organized church communities in North America have invested significant energy into better understanding the theory and practice of pastoral succession in a way that the synagogue world has not and cannot. This is largely a result of the fundamental issue of scale. There are so many more churches and so many more institutions that support them. There are more authors and theorists, more graduate programs and researchers. While there are currently no books that systematically study rabbinic transitions, there are dozens of Christian books examining pastoral transitions, each from a different vantage point. And because there are exponentially more churches in transition than synagogues, there are far more interim pastors than interim rabbis. While the CCAR should be proud that more than 100 rabbis have received the interim training and that there are a growing number of experienced interim rabbis who have served multiple consecutive congregations, the Interim Ministry Network, the leading voice on interim pastors in the Christian world, boasts more than 1,300 members from 25 to 30 denominations.[149] Those interested in helping pave a path for thoughtful and strategic rabbinic transitions should continue to turn to the ever-growing library of literature and resources on pastoral succession and glean what they can.

The biggest challenge (and opportunity) in trying to apply theories from Christian congregational studies to synagogues is the issue of translation. Not everything in church management literature will apply to synagogues. Just like in any two languages, some

[149] Bendroth, *Transitional Ministry Today,* Kindle Location 82.

concepts will translate well, some will require more interpretive work, and some will have no corollary at all. This translation will need to happen on three levels: language, structures, and theology. The first and easiest translation is that of language. For example, much of the Christian literature uses texts from the Christian Bible to help modern pastors model their ministry after the life of Jesus. Rabbis will need to seek other authentic examples from Hebrew and rabbinic texts. Some of these texts can be slotted into the point being made, while other points may need to be reworked to better reflect their source text. The language level of translation is not only about biblical texts. References to a pastor's ministry will need to be translated to a rabbi's rabbinate. Some concepts will not translate at all. For example, there is no official corollary in synagogues for the concept of "church elders." Still, for most people, it is not hard to imagine how a book's passage about a pastor might be easily read about a rabbi.

The next level of translation, which is a little more difficult than the first, is translation of structures, as Christian denominations are structured differently from Jewish ones. Many churches have different relationships with their denominational authorities than synagogues (especially those synagogues which are members of a movement.) Church literature often divides congregations into size cohorts, much like synagogue classifications by size, but the actual dividing lines may differ significantly.[150] Similarly, interim pastors are able to use preaching as a major communication tool during the interim year because, in many churches, a large proportion of the congregation gathers regularly

[150] The Alban Institute, which worked with both churches and synagogues, did spadework translating from one world to the other, including offering some resources to help congregational leaders understand the different size divisions in churches and synagogues. There is still much more translation work to be done, especially now that the Alban Institute has disbanded.

for worship. In most liberal synagogues, a much smaller proportion of the community comes regularly to Shabbat worship, so an interim rabbi must understand that his or her sermons will have a narrower reach.[151] Another structural difference is that in a synagogue in transition, many people are concerned about whether the interim rabbi will provide consistent services to their children at their bar and bat mitzvahs, but there is no single issue that is as consistently important in the Christian world, Christian interim minister Lynn Carman Bodden explained.[152] Interim rabbis will need to acknowledge that this is a unique need, not represented in the Christian literature. Those seeking to apply Christian literature to synagogues will have to understand these structural differences, which may, in many cases, influence how each community applies different theories.

The final category of translation is theological. The literature about church management and congregational studies is, of course, deeply rooted in Christian theology. Messages about "call" and "ministry" and "grace" pervade these texts. In order to translate these Christian theologies into Jewish ones, leaders in the field of synagogue management will need to disassemble the components of the Christian works and use the raw materials to build something entirely new on the strong foundation of Jewish theological concepts. Even the idea of "mission," though it has come to be common parlance in the secular for-profit and nonprofit worlds, carries with it different theological underpinnings when it is discussed among church and synagogue leaders. In order to effectively translate the vast quantities of literature from the field of Christian congregational studies to a Jewish

[151] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.
[152] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.

context, many of these deep and fundamental differences will need to be explored in greater depth.

This chapter uses some of the notable literature, as well as interviews and training resources, to describe the field of pastoral succession with two simultaneous goals. The goals are first, to identify a series of concepts that may be useful to those wishing to build a more robust understanding of the field of rabbinic succession, and second, to make an attempt at some of the translations suggested above, with a focus on the first two levels. This chapter is meant to provide an overview of the opportunities and limitations of translating church literature into a Jewish context, but much more work needs to follow to build a truly functional translation.

Brief History of Interim Theory

> The intellectual roots of interim ministry were planted in the late 1960s and early 1970s with research conducted by Loren Mead, Celia Hahn, and Bill Yon, all affiliates of the Alban Institute. Their study, "Project Test Pattern," which took place from 1969 to 1974, resulted in a paper presented by Loren Mead at the Association of Religion and Applied Behavioral Sciences titled "The Interim Pastor: A Neglected Role in Parish Development."[153]

Project Test Pattern and Mead's paper identified the interim period as a potentially fertile opportunity to improve congregations, and together they sparked a growing conversation about the work of interim ministers and the ways that Christian organizations could better support interims in their work with congregations. "The next two years brought a flurry of publications following up Mead's insights, and Alban began to assemble a team to study the question further."[154] The result of these conversations was the formation of the

[153] Bendroth, *Transitional Ministry Today,* Kindle Location 71.
[154] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.

Interim Ministry Network (IMN) in 1981, an organization which has become the most influential name in congregational transitions and interim work.[155]

The research in the late 1970s resulted in an approach to interim work based around five "developmental tasks" of interim ministry: 1) "coming to terms with history," 2) "discovering a new identity," 3) "negotiating shifts of power and leadership changes," 4) "rethinking denominational linkages," and 5) "commitment to new leadership and a new future."[156] These developmental tasks served as the basis for much of IMN's training and conversation for the next three decades.

Changes to the Model

The developmental tasks model was never static. Terry Foland, a trained interim minister who has worked in the field since its founding, notes, "The Interim Ministry Network has reviewed the tasks three times in the past three decades."[157] In the 1980s, the developmental tasks were supplemented with a "strong 'family systems' component after the work of Edwin Friedman and Peter Steinke and in recent years [leaders at the IMN] have been paying attention to the 'adaptive' vs. 'technical' approach to problems as taught by Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow."[158]

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[155] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.
[156] Robinson, "Rethinking Interim Ministry."
[157] Terry Foland, quoted in Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.
[158] Ibid. Rabbi Edwin Freidman was a rabbi and family therapist who applied Family Systems Theory to congregations in his book *Generation to Generation*. Peter Steinke is a congregational systems consultant who applied Family Systems Theory to churches in works like *How Your Church Family Works.* Heifetz, Linksky, and Grashow are secular leadership consultants write about the practice of "Adaptive Leadership," a theory that separates problems into "technical" (problems that can be fixed with answers available from what one currently knows) and "adaptive" (problems that require one to learn new things and build new creative solutions. They have published books together and separately on the topic, such as *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*

The IMN's most recent re-evaluation of the model resulted in a "move from the original language of 'five developmental tasks' to the perspective of focus points, adopted by the IMN board of directors in the spring of 2012."[159] The five focus points are: Heritage, Mission, Connections, Leadership, and Future. There were a number of reasons for this reworking of the model. One was a concern that the developmental tasks "at least implied the necessity of expert supervision and… [therefore were the] ultimate responsibility of the professional – the interim minister – rather than being the work of the members of a congregation."[160] The move towards a language of focal points was an attempt to help the interim to guide the congregation to take ownership over the process. According the IMN's updated curriculum:

> [The] real work of the intentional interim minister is to facilitate and coach, guide and support the members and leaders of the congregation as they engage the focus points. It is the ongoing work of the congregation and its leaders that ensures the long-term effectiveness of the transition work.[161]

A second reason for this shift was a desire to move away from the perception that the developmental tasks had to be accomplished in sequence. The focus point model clarifies that, while some areas may require more energy early in an interim's tenure and others more energy later, they are all the work of the entire interim period and will thus continue to resurface over the entire tenure. For instance, a congregation that has already hired its next settled clergy-person should not consider itself done focusing on its heritage.

Finally, this new language was an attempt to create a model that was applicable in a wider variety of situations. Margaret Bain, a former president of IMN, notes a growing

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[159] Keydel, "Focus Points and the Work of the Congregation," Kindle Location 1181.
[160] Ibid., 1183.
[161] Ibid., Kindle Location 1118.

diversity in the types of congregations seeking an interim and their goals for the interim period:

> Many congregations are looking more toward reinventing themselves. Others are exploring closing their doors *and* need a skilled interim to help them through that process, while others are going through a process of amalgamation, pooling resources, and sharing a common vision with another local church. Other interim specialists can help lead a congregation through healing after clergy sexual or financial misconduct.[162]

It is clear to practitioners in the field that "one size does not fit all" congregations,[163] and the new focus points are meant to speak to the challenges in any congregation, no matter its particular needs or where it is in its congregational lifecycle.

At the same time that IMN was developing this new model, the number of alternate frameworks was also growing. The Unitarian Universalist Association's Janus Workbook for congregations in transition frames the work around the threefold tasks of looking back, standing in the present, and looking forward.[164] The Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, "which offers a specialization in interim ministry," suggests interim ministers pay attention to "three areas of concentration: structures, symptoms and narrative."[165] This proliferation of frameworks challenges the Jewish community to consider its own frameworks. Having partnered with the Interim Ministry Network, much of the CCAR's training is likely built around the focus points. The Christian community has used its experience to challenge the assumptions built into its model in order to refine and improve its frameworks. The Jewish community must be ready to do the same.

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[162] Margaret Bain, quoted in Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.
[163] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.
[164] "Janus Workbook."
[165] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 25.

Now, nearly a decade into the focused effort to improve the state of the interim rabbinate, there are enough congregations engaging in this work to do a more complete survey of the field with questions that focus on what frameworks inform the work of interim rabbis and the ways that these frameworks play out in congregations. To improve the implementation of the work of interim rabbis, Jewish communal institutions not only need to improve the structures that support interim rabbis but also create a more robust set of frameworks to undergird them. As proven by the experiences of the Christian world as it developed its own frameworks, the Jewish frameworks will need to be flexible enough to apply to a multitude of situations and specific enough to guide interim rabbis in their work.

If interim rabbis are going to attempt to translate the five focus points, there will be challenges on all three levels of translation outlined above. Some focus points, like heritage, will translate easily. This focus point is informed by the realization that "history is a dynamic and creative process, and the development of a vital sense of meaning and self-awareness is the result of an ongoing process of telling and retelling a congregation's defining stories."[166] This should not come as a surprise to any rabbi. The ongoing telling and retelling of stories to define a community's purpose is a theme found in abundance in Jewish text and tradition. This is, after all, the purpose of the Passover seder. In *Midrash Petirat Moshe,* the rabbis say that on the day that Moses died, he wrote thirteen Torah scrolls, one for each of the tribes and one for the ark. One of Moses's transitional tasks was retelling the story of the exodus and preserving his version of the community's heritage for posterity. Clearly, the Heritage focal point will not present many translation problems.

[166] Keydel, "Focus Points and the Work of the Congregation" Kindle Location 1203.

Other focal points may be more difficult. In particular, the one about "connections." While this may be as important for synagogues as it is for churches, the translation may require more effort and creativity. In churches, the work in this focal point is to reconnect the church to denominational entities and to neighboring congregations. Because of the differing structures of churches and synagogues, the specific tasks within this focal point may look different. The synagogue may already be connected to the URJ and CCAR, although it may develop connections with different staff at those institutions who can help the congregation to navigate the transition. Synagogue leaders may need to be in contact not only with other local synagogues but also with synagogue leaders in other locations who have faced similar challenges or navigated a similar change. The implication from the church literature seems to be that churches are sometimes isolated but come out of their isolation during a transition. Synagogues, on the other hand, may be less isolated to start but are at risk during transition of falling into isolation by losing one of their conduits of connection to other clergy or to national institutions. While both churches and synagogues may engage with this focal point, more work needs to be done to understand how it plays out uniquely in each setting.

New Models

Some churches and institutions that support them are looking at entirely different models of transitions, and moving away from the interim model. Some churches are "seeking a successor before the current pastor's tenure is complete so that the current pastor might mentor the incoming pastor for at least a short period."[167] Others are hiring associate

[167] Piazza, "Revitalization, Renewal, or Redevelopment during the Interim," Kindle Location 2131.

pastors with the specific intent of developing them into senior pastors.[168] Still others are considering a co-pastorship model where "the longtime pastor's role gradually decreases so his or her absence will have minimal impact when he or she steps out of the picture."[169] Alternatively, the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota "places a transitional priest and a transitional consultant to work together in a single church" with the priest focusing on the spiritual needs of the congregation while the consultant deals with its organizational needs, with the goal of facilitating a faster and smoother transition.[170] All or none of these models may be applicable to synagogues, but because of the significantly larger scale, churches are able to experiment with more models. These new models can serve as a reminder of the old adage, "It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail."[171] The CCAR is in the process of making the interim rabbi hammer into the most effective tool possible, and as it does, more and more synagogues may consider using it. But if this trend continues, it will be worth asking critical questions about when and if other tools, other models, may be worth developing alongside the interim model.

When Should Synagogues Consider an Interim?

An open question for synagogue leaders is, "When is an interim recommended?" The field of church management struggles with this question, too. Each transition is unique and has its own goals. An interim is better at accomplishing some goals than others. An ongoing challenge is supporting congregations as they look ahead to those goals and plan the best route towards them. The tools of succession planning may help congregations to

[168] Robinson, "Another Option," Kindle Location 2322.
[169] Piazza, "Revitalization, Renewal, or Redevelopment during the Interim," Kindle Location 2137.
[170] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 25.
[171] Maslow, *The Psychology of Science*, 15.

know what their needs will be, and denominational institutions may be able to support congregations in asking these questions before they begin their searches.

Christian authors suggest that there are some situations in which an interim is particularly effective. Loren Mead, in his book *A Change of Pastors... and How it Affects Change in the Congregation*, presents some such situations:

> - if the previous pastorate was a very long one. I think of "long" as 12 years or more, but that is not a highly defined term!
> - if the previous pastorate ended in unhappy conflict and polarization,
> - when the congregation is a large, multistaffed entity.[172]

Vanderbloemen and Bird also create a taxonomy of pastoral transitions that distinguishes between transitions that are unexpected and transitions that are expected. Because of the completeness of their taxonomy, it is useful to quote from it at length:

> - **Emergency.** Unforeseen, sudden, often crisis-laden successions that can include death or other tragic events are one of the following:
>   - *Short-term*: A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last for three months or less.
>   - *Long-term*: A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last more than three months.
>   - *Permanent*: A permanent absence is when the pastor will not be returning to the position.
>
> - **Disqualified.** Sometimes a pastor is no longer qualified to be pastor of a church. Reasons can include:
>   - *Moral failure:* Most disqualifications stem from moral failure. The majority involve abuse of sex, money, and/or power. Some involve serious breaking of the law or other major improprieties.
>   - *Doctrinal heresy or deviation from accepted biblical standards*: This includes pastors whose approach to ministry shifts drastically enough that they are no longer a fit for their church.
>   - *Loss of physical core competencies:* Sometimes disqualification relates to loss of energy, vision, preaching ability, or other physical core competencies required for the role of pastor.

[172] Mead, *A Change of Pastors*, 70-71.

- **Forced.** Whether or not the term is used, the pastor has been fired…

- **Expected…** They include:
  - *Ministry transition:* Sometimes church and pastor partner together on a new ministry venture. It can involve any number of roles the pastor might shift to, e.g., church planter,[173] missionary, seminary professor, chaplain, interim pastor (at other churches), mentor to other pastors, or author.
  - *Church rotation:* The bishop reappoints the pastor to another church or the pastor accepts a call to a "next step" church.
  - *Retirement:* In many cases, retirement is long planned, but sometimes circumstances prompt a short countdown to retirement, whether partial or full. Partial retirement may involve shifting to a new role in the existing church, such as visitation pastor, mission pastor, or senior adult pastor.[174]

Not all of these categories translate well to the synagogue context (in particular, doctrinal heresy is not a category with a significant corollary in the rabbinate, nor is church rotation). Still, creating a means by which to differentiate among different types of transition might allow synagogue leaders and the national organizations that support them to begin identifying situations where particular transition strategies might be called for. The classifications above provide a jumping off point for the CCAR and URJ to determine in what circumstances an interim rabbi might be most necessary, but a complete and uniquely Jewish guide does not yet exist. Anecdotally, while some situations – as identified above – may be more urgent than others, there are benefits to hiring an interim rabbi in nearly every category of senior rabbi transition.

[173] A Christian term for a minister who establishes a church.
[174] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 863-881.

What Makes a Good Interim?

Another open question in the synagogue world is, "Who makes a good interim rabbi?" Or better yet, "What skills are required to be a successful interim rabbi?" While the answers in the church world may be incomplete, a few authors point to certain skillsets. As more and more rabbis complete the interim training and as the CCAR seeks to continue to raise the bar for interim rabbi performance in congregations, a more thorough understanding of these skillsets will help to refine the approach.

First, it is important to acknowledge that interim work is not easy, and it draws a unique cohort committed to a different kind of service:

> Ministers dedicated to transitional ministry are a rare breed. It is as unique and challenging a ministry as any out there, but in spite of its challenges and headaches, this ministry niche is deeply satisfying when congregations "get it" and begin the work of transformation.[175]

This is, perhaps, even more true in the Jewish world because of one significant structural difference: scale. There are far more churches in a given area than synagogues. Christian interim ministry, therefore, does not always require the kind of transient lifestyle that interim rabbis often experience. Some successful Christian interims are able to stay in one city and serve multiple congregations over the course of their careers. In an interview, Lynn Carman Bodden stated that she has worked for 17 years as an interim and has usually had a job within an hour's commute of the home she shares with her husband and children. "This kind of interim is referred to by some as a 'tethered interim,'"[176] she explained. Other

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[175] Bendroth, *Transitional Ministry Today,* Kindle Location 4006.

[176] She also clarified, "There were two occasions when [I] had jobs away from home, one of which was part-time and allowed [me] to be home a part of each week. And… some jobs have been part-time to accommodate [my] family needs." Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016, with additional clarifications by e-mail, January 17, 2017.

interim ministers relayed similar career patterns. Certainly, there are Christian interim ministers who move around, but the system is able to sustain a percentage of "tethered interims" who do not. Interim rabbis, on the other hand, must move, oftentimes from one side of the country to the other. The people willing to do this more than once or twice are a particularly uncommon bunch. In the work of translating the Christian model of interim work to a Jewish context, this difference could not be more substantial.

Besides the willingness to commit to the work, there are other skills that serve interim ministers:

> The best of transitional ministers have gifts for analyzing congregations and their communities. They like having one foot in the congregation as pastor and teacher and one outside as observer and consultant. They like to think systemically and pose the right questions.[177]

Interim ministers have to be system analysts and truth tellers, often unafraid and unabashed in their willingness to help people name hard realities. Put another way, interim ministers are most effective when they have "a keen eye for systems, for it is in the patterns in the chaos of the moment and its underlying context that recurrent issues have their roots. Some systemic dynamics cease causing damage once people understand them and, thus, can manage them."[178] These skills may be different than those required of settled ministry, where truth telling has a different tone because clergy-person and congregation are pursuing long-term relationships. The Janus Workbook reminds interim ministers that they are "pre-fired" and that this should allow them to tell the truth, even when it might be hard to hear.[179] People moving to interim work after years of settled work will have to learn a new set of tools and practices around system analysis and truth telling.

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[177] Bendroth, *Transitional Ministry Today,* Kindle Location 111.
[178] "Janus Workbook."
[179] Ibid.

Interim clergy must also engage in a unique kind of relationship management, one that is fundamentally different from that of settled clergy. The interim has to be "friendly to all, but friend to none."[180] The interim will leave after a predetermined, proscribed period of time and sever ties. Though some interims do this more completely and others stay in some kind of contact with friends they make along the way, interim clergy must work hard to build fast and meaningful connections but which can be easily severed or reoriented when the interim period ends. "This is not to say that interims are necessarily unfriendly or cold. But there is a difference between being friendly and becoming someone's friend. Some congregants may not understand why the interim, who was so friendly last month is leaving this month with an explicit expectation of no further communication."[181] It takes a unique kind of person and a unique set of interpersonal skills to build relationships in this context.

These relationships can be a source of stress and challenge for interim ministers. Experts note that some interim ministers return to the settled ministry after only a few years "because they miss the relationship component of ministry. Certainly, interim ministry can be a lonelier job than [settled] ministry."[182] Interim training needs to continue to both prepare trainees for this reality and also provide them with the skills and structures to sustain themselves in this lonelier rabbinic work. Organizations like the CCAR that seek to support interim clergy need to do as much as much as possible to help them find new avenues for the type of meaningful connections that they are missing in their interim congregation.

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[180] Walker-Riggs, "A Different Country," 20.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 19.

All of these skills and characteristics, and the many others mentioned in the church literature, raise questions about the training of interim clergy. Are we doing enough to recruit clergy with these skills and passions? Are we doing enough to develop the unique toolbox of the interim rabbinate and to identify the many ways that it is different from the settled rabbinate? Are we supporting interim rabbis in their work over the long term so that they can continue to develop these skills, as well as supplement their shortcomings and overcome institutional obstacles to their success? These are questions that may be helpful to consider as the CCAR continues to refine its interim trainings.

Transition Tasks

As the field of interim rabbis continues to grow and evolve, it will be valuable to create a more robust sense of the various tasks that interims can perform and the different types of congregational needs that each task could address. Many interims speak of what they offer to congregations. Developing a more comprehensive understanding of measures of success in the interim period will require a better understanding of the relationships between these offerings and congregational needs. This understanding will also help to identify potential disconnects, i.e. places where there are congregational needs that are not being addressed sufficiently. It will also help to identify assumptions and structural limitations built into the system. For instance, a more robust understanding of what interim rabbis offer, combined with the knowledge that, at present, most interim placements last one year, raises the question: "What is reasonable for an interim rabbi and his or her congregation to accomplish in one year, and what needs cannot be adequately addressed in this time?" Only with a better understanding of interim's tasks and congregational needs can such questions be thoughtfully answered.

Looking to church literature, a wide range of interim tasks emerges. Whole books have been written on the subject. While a complete list of interim tasks falls outside the scope of this thesis, what follows are a few examples that analyze the field with an eye towards what can, and cannot, be accomplished in the interim's time. Some important interim tasks include:

- Creating rituals of transition.[183]
- Creating healing rituals when there have been public or private damages.[184]
- Re-building trust, especially "following a long pastorate, a conflict, or a negotiated resignation."[185]
- Identifying the "sacred cows" that are the pieces of congregational life people feel cannot be touched.[186] An interim may or may not try to change them, but as an outsider, he or she can identify them, name them, and alert the successor to their presence.
- Making a few, thoughtful changes, to build people's capacity to cope with change.[187]
- Helping the congregation to "explore its own culture for the presence of 'peculiar' forms of deep energy that will both support and impede the congregation in following its vision."[188]
- Coaching and providing pastoral care for the search committee, the members of which may have seen very few searches while the interim may have seen many.[189]

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[183] There are some good resources for this work in the Unitarian Universalist Association's "Janus Workbook." Some interims describe using visual symbols like entering the first worship service with a walking stick or a suitcase and leaving it on the alter for the whole year. I once heard Rabbi Michael Remson, an interim trainer for the IMN, describe a Jewish version of this ritual where on the first Shabbat he puts on a *tallit* that belongs to the community, and on his last Shabbat he symbolically takes it off and leaves it on the *bimah* for his successor.

[184] Keyes, "Coming to Terms with History," 57.

[185] "Janus Workbook."

[186] Ibid.

[187] Judith Walker-Riggs tells a story about an interim minister who added a third hymn to a service in a congregation where the custom was to sing two. Later "the president of the board overheard a comment from one long-term member to another: 'last week two hymns, this week three hymns. What's going to become of us?" Sometimes, an interim can help stretch muscles that have atrophied over time, like the muscles that allow us to embrace change. Walker-Riggs, "A Different Country," 16.

[188] Thompson and Thompson, "Transitional Ministry as an Opportunity to Lead," Kindle Location 1442.

[189] Keely and Presley, "The Interim Minister's Role in Ministerial Search," 123-136.

- Working with the staff to set goals and conducting evaluations, especially in organizational cultures where this has not been the norm.[190] Addressing staffing issues.[191]
- Checking the congregation's financial situation with an eye towards any neglected areas.[192]
- Helping the congregation to conduct an analysis of the surrounding community to better understand trends and opportunities amongst the parishioners that the congregation hopes to reach.[193] This is what is called "environmental scanning" in the nonprofit field.

This list is by no means exhaustive but gives a sense of how some interim pastors are thinking about their work. Perhaps the most concise list of interim tasks comes from Beverly A. Thompson and George B. Thompson, Jr.'s article, "Transitional Ministry as an Opportunity to Lead" from the book *Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors* edited by Norman B. Bendroth. Here is their list of interim tasks:

[190] Hanson, "Working with Staff," 84.
[191] Ibid., 88.
[192] Mead, *A Change of Pastors*, 72.
[193] Ibid., 53. This is one of the new ways that congregations are understanding the "connections" focal point, and it is not a task I have heard any interim rabbis speak of. Helping a congregation to understand its place in the larger community and the demographic trends to which it is subject may be an important interim role which is not currently being filled.

- to help to create conditions for the congregation to name the truth about itself…
- to help manage members' apprehensions as the congregation begins to realize… that it has entered 'in-between times.'…
- to help the congregation discern a shared vision…
- to help the congregation take initial steps for following its fresh vision…
- to anticipate and help the congregation to handle its own natural resistance to changes that result from following fresh vision. In this approach, resistance to change is seen as natural and typical.[194]

Transition Timeline

In the research for this thesis, one of the most important distinctions to emerge between Christian clergy transitions and rabbinic transitions came from the aforementioned interview with Lynn Carman Bodden. She pointed out that the biggest difference between her work as a Christian interim and the work of the rabbis she trains is the result of the rabbinic placement season. She explained that in some Christian denominations, including hers, "You can start any time of the year, and you just pick up where the person left off, and it can last an indefinite period of time."[195] In her denomination, there is no placement season, so her work starts when the outgoing minister leaves, and ends when the new settled minister begins, no matter how long that is. An interim placement can be nine months, or thirteen months, or nineteen months. Her rule of thumb, shared with congregations, is "not less than six months, not more than two years, and usually a month for every year the former pastor was there."[196]

Interim rabbis, by contrast, except in the rarest of cases, either serve for one year or two. The looser structure of the Christian context means that a pastor like Lynn Carman

[194] Thompson and Thompson, "Transitional Ministry as an Opportunity to Lead," Kindle Location 1477-1501.
[195] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.
[196] Lynn Carman Bodden, e-mail message to author, January 17, 2017.

Bodden is able to encourage the congregation she is serving "not to form a search committee until you have done the work" of creating a shared vision.[197] The result of doing visioning work and creating a shared sense of understandings among the congregants is that they are able to let this newly created vision shape the search process. Even the makeup of the search committee is informed by these newly developed goals, but this is an understanding that cannot take root without time and effort. Echoing some of the secular wisdom from the previous chapter, Bodden cautions not to begin the search process too early. She says, "If you establish a search committee when the former person is there [or without doing the work of visioning first], you are going to get people who think in the old leader's way."[198]

By contrast, an interim rabbi who is hired for one year often arrives at a congregation that is already well on its way to submitting its application for the new settled rabbi. If any visioning work is to be done, it must be done in the last few months of the outgoing rabbi's tenure and the first few months of the interim's, while the interim is also settling in, learning the community, and creating his or her own assessment of the congregation's needs. In a one year interim, a rabbi cannot ask the congregation to wait to form the committee "until we have done our work," unless he or she really thinks the work will only take a month or two. Visioning and robust transformation may therefore simply not be possible during a standard, one-year interim. This is a fundamental difference between the Christian context and the Jewish one. It changes the goals of interim work. In order to more fully understand this limitation, it is important to name and explore it in

[197] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.
[198] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.

depth. Additionally, Jewish leaders should look to Christian denominations that do have placement seasons, such as the Unitarian Universalist community which has a similar structure to the Reform Movement.[199] Perhaps practices from such movements will translate better. The impact of this fundamental difference between the context in which the Christian model was created and the context in which that model has been applied in the Jewish world has yet to be fully explored and understood.

Looking back at the list of interim tasks by Thompson and Thompson, it is now clearer where these roles might break down in a Jewish context. An interim rabbi can certainly spend a year creating conditions for the congregation to name truth about itself and manage members' apprehensions. But tasks that extend to discerning and moving towards a shared vision may fall outside the scope of a one-year interim, especially if they are meant to inform the search for the successor. A serious conversation is needed to discuss what can be accomplished within the limitations of one year, whether a two-year model might be more successful, and whether alternate models exist for how synagogues might get the most out of interim rabbis.

Appreciative Inquiry

One model that is growing in popularity among Christian interims and may help to address some of the above concerns about achievable goals within the confines of a one-year interim is Appreciate Inquiry,[200] a theory "developed by David Cooperrider at Case

[199] The new book, *In the Interim: Strategies for Interim Ministers and Congregations,* edited by Barbara Child and Keith Kron is a very thorough look at the interim period. Written from a Unitarian Universalist perspective, it may provide some initial opportunities for translation to a Jewish context.

[200] There are some interim rabbis who are already exploring the application of Appreciative Inquiry to synagogues. Rabbi Darryl Crystal has been a major advocate for the use of this model. Not only did he mention it in our interview on October 18, 2016,

Western Reserve University in the mid-1980s."[201] As it is practiced in congregations, it strives to elevate what is working in a congregation, with the goal of helping the community to improve in areas where it already has core competencies. Unlike some other forms of organizational analysis, the Appreciate Inquiry practitioner shifts the focus "from 'what's wrong' to 'what's working.'"[202] Barbara Child explains:

> The thesis of Appreciative Inquiry is that an organization (such as a congregation or some group within a congregation) can be constantly kept thriving and recreated by its conversations. AI builds upon a congregation's best stories. It is not chiefly a planning method. It is a new way of seeing and creating.[203]

Rob Voyle explains, "Appreciative Inquiry is characterized by people sharing stories about their best experience of the organization or the activity being developed, and then on the basis of these stories dreaming and envisioning a future that builds on those experiences."[204] David Keyes notes that some people may find this process frustrating and feel like they are only being prompted to say positive things when they want to vent or problem solve. He argues, however, that this feature of Appreciate Inquiry is an asset not a flaw. Appreciative Inquiry "will frustrate those who want to vent, which accounts for much of its charm and success. By keeping the focus on what's right with the church and putting problems in the 'parking-lot' for later consideration, congregants seem to have direct experience of the spirit and power that will propel them towards greater service."[205]

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but many other interviewees mentioned him in relation to the Appreciative Inquiry model.

[201] Voyle, "An Appreciative Inquiry Paradigm for Transitional Ministry," Kindle Location 2533.

[202] Ibid., ," Kindle Location 2540.

[203] "Janus Workbook."

[204] Voyle, "An Appreciative Inquiry Paradigm for Transitional Ministry," Kindle Location 2544.

[205] Keyes, "Coming to Terms with History," 59.

Appreciate Inquiry helps a community focus on its strengths and not just its weaknesses. This helps community members create a new kind of faith in themselves and a new sense of the possibility for the future. This is also a process that need not take place only before a congregation seeks its next pastor or rabbi, but rather can continue over the whole interim period. For this reason, it may well be a task for which success is possible in a one-year rabbinic interim. This is a model which requires further examination, as it may help to address some of the concerns about larger interim tasks outlined above.

Succession Planning

In the previous chapter, a number of sources outlined how succession planning is becoming a more pervasive topic of conversation in the nonprofit sector. Some of these conversations have penetrated into the church world. The most powerful articulation of these conversations comes from the book, *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works* by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird. This book pushes the questions about pastoral succession to their most strategic and holistic extreme, asking the reader to imagine a world where congregations are great at planning for and executing clergy transitions. It is useful here as an example of a kind of "promised land" to which those engaged in improving the state of rabbinic transitions might aspire. But, while there is much in this book that is exciting, it is probably also the work where the task of translation presents the greatest burden. Presented here are some key lessons that seem to translate well to a Jewish context.

The book begins with this powerful and agitational sentence: "Every pastor is an interim pastor."[206] Every clergy-person leaves his or her community eventually, whether

[206] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 162.

by choice or by fate, whether because he or she leaves for new opportunities, is asked to leave, or is no longer able to do that work. "Few ministers consider that truth. Few are eager to admit that their time with their present church will one day end. But ultimately, all pastors are 'interim' because the day when a successor takes over will come for everyone in ministry."[207] Vanderbloemen and Bird conclude that speaking honestly about this fact will transform congregations. "Planning for that day of succession may be the biggest leadership task a leader and church will ever face. It may also be the most important."[208] They see a transformation where more and more clergy can own this hard reality, speak about it freely with their congregations, and plan for its impact:

> We are already seeing a new day dawn. Today, more than in any other era on record, pastors are anticipating their own succession. And they are not merely beginning to talk openly about it; their awareness of a future transition is also shaping how they do ministry today.… And if those open discussions become the new standard, the church will be healthier and more effective.[209]

But this new dawn is not yet fully realized. "For all the talk in churches about vision, there is an unmistakable blind spot in churches large and small: succession isn't being discussed enough, and when it is, church leaders often lack wisdom in identifying the questions to ask or in what order to tackle them."[210] Churches and pastors that do accept the fact that every pastor is an interim pastor will plan for it, as early as possible. "Succession planning can (and should) start with pastors early in their tenure."[211] The authors note that, in the bible, the plan for Joshua to succeed Moses is put in place well before Moses's death at the end of Deuteronomy. God and Moses have been planning for

[207] Ibid., Kindle Location 163.
[208] Ibid., Kindle Location 164.
[209] Ibid., Kindle Location 177.
[210] Ibid., Kindle Location 340.
[211] Ibid., Kindle Location 182.

this departure for years and grooming Joshua to take the reins.[212] From this and other biblical texts, Vanderbloemen and Bird conclude, "Throughout the Bible the message about succession is consistent: effective leaders plan ahead for the time when they can no longer lead, and they prayerfully prepare for that day."[213]

The authors also note that there is no set process for succession and that each situation will be unique. That said, they do point to a few common denominators:

> - The process will be messy.
> - Your process will be unpredictable in ways that predecessors, successors, leadership boards, and congregations do not fully anticipate.
> - It won't take the amount of time you think. Some successions take longer than planned (more common), while some move more quickly (less common).
> - The process will almost always be healthier and more effective if an objective third party speaks into the process. This could include a denomination, judicatory, or district; a search firm; or an objective trained consultant.
> - Pastoral transition is not over when a new pastor's tenure officially begins. There is still transition work to be done during the first leg of any new pastor's appointment. The complete process typically takes two to three years from that point.[214]

Much of their work focuses on taking the stigma out of discussions between congregations and pastors. Parties must be able to discuss this reality without one thinking that the other has lost faith in them. One tool for this is to make evaluating the state of the succession plan a yearly task. The authors encourage congregations to "place 'succession planning' both as the first item of your own annual performance review and also schedule a full board meeting once a year to discuss the state of your succession plan."[215] Making

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[212] See Numbers 27:16-17.
[213] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 410.
[214] Ibid., Kindle Location 485.
[215] Ibid., Kindle Location 571.

succession planning a part of the congregation's annual business lowers the risk that one party will take offense at it.

All of this will probably sound fanciful to many rabbis and congregational leaders. It is an optimistic view of a system that relies on a level of profound honesty and trust. It is also a view that is deeply rooted in a Christian theology of call and service and that will therefore require substantive theological translation if it is to be applied to Jewish communities. Still, the underlying reality is as true for Jews as it is for Christians: All rabbis are interim rabbis. Much of the work of improving the state of rabbinic transitions stems from this fact, and the field could be further improved if more people talked more openly about it. The writing of Vanderbloemen and Bird could serve as a challenge and an inspiration to those in the field seeking a new and better path forward.

Conclusions

The field of congregational studies in the church world is much more robust than its counterpart in synagogues. This is due largely to the different sizes of the two communities. There are exponentially more organizations serving and studying churches and ministers than there are supporting synagogues and rabbis. As a result, the fledgling field of synagogue studies will always be a smaller cousin, trying on hand-me-downs from its bigger relative. The opportunity lies in trying on all those hand-me-downs to figure out what fits. Just like clothes inherited from an older cousin, some will fit like a glove, while others will hang loosely, and others still will need to be tailored to fit our different bodies. Some t-shirts may have messages written across them that we do not agree with, or that we will need to explain differently. But there is no shame in receiving hand-me-down clothes. If they fit, or can be made to fit, we should wear them proudly.

The Jewish community has much to learn from our Christian neighbors about clergy transitions. There are many more organizations and authors and thinkers looking at this issue from a range of perspectives. Some are building on the form of interim work, while others are exploring new models entirely. Some are adding to the conventional wisdom, while others are challenging it. The Jewish community must continue to try and insert itself into this conversation, to glean what it can and translate where it must. We must strive to bring in as much as we can to help us better understand our own clergy transitions, as well as our synagogue structures. The Reform community, through its partnership with the Interim Ministry Network, has done much of this work already. Now, with a decade-old partnership, there is enough data and experience built up in the field to begin to create a fuller understanding of how our work is similar and how it is different. The sections above have posited some places that may be fruitful for further investigation. The next step is to create a much more substantive project to compare these two communities in order to determine a set of shared expectations around outcomes and tools with which to achieve them.

CHAPTER 5: Interim Rabbis – The State of the Field

Introduction and Methods

This chapter attempts to provide an overview of the current state of the field of Reform interim rabbis. Research included a review of publically available documents and resources, created by the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism, which are targeted at communities undergoing a rabbinic transition, as well as sessions on rabbinic transitions from the most recent URJ biennial. A review of the limited published material on interim rabbis was also conducted. Also included are five interviews with respected interim rabbis as well as a number of interviews with experts involved in the URJ and CCAR's transition work or with the history of the interim program. Interviews were also conducted with one leader from each of three congregations which had recently undertaken a rabbinic transition to discuss their experience of the interim year. First-hand experience from working in one congregation currently undergoing an interim year was also instrumental in creating a deep understanding of the organizational dynamics of one transition process.

The results of this analysis reveal a general agreement that interim rabbis can be of significant use to synagogues during a vitally important moment in a congregation's story. People from all perspectives within the field speak about the benefits to congregations of utilizing an interim rabbi for one or two years. One former synagogue president in the midst of an interim year put it succinctly: "I think it was one of the smartest decisions we have ever made."[216]

[216] Julie Kniznik, in discussion with the author, January 2, 2017.

It is also clear, however, that there is some confusion in the field about just what interim rabbis can offer, how congregations can get the most out of the interim year(s), and how congregational leaders can best assess their own needs and find an interim rabbi with the particular skillset to help them meet those needs. Improving the field of interim rabbis will require a more systematic approach to answering these questions. Additionally, as the use of interim rabbis has become more common, structural challenges to the field have begun to emerge, and future work to improve this field will require addressing or accounting for these challenges. What follows is a selection of observations from this preliminary research into the field of interim rabbis, written with the hope that it will raise questions that a more complete and thorough analysis of the field might answer.

How the Movement Talks About Interims

In a number of ways, the two major institutions of rabbinic transitions, the CCAR and the URJ, encourage congregational leaders to consider interim rabbis. One leader of a congregation said that as she and her fellow board members began to plan their search, two URJ regional leaders came and told them "horror stories" about rabbinic transitions that had failed because the congregation decided not to use an interim rabbi. Others synagogue leaders mentioned learning about the consequences of "unintentional interims" from URJ or CCAR representatives. The message that these congregational leaders understood from URJ and CCAR staff consulting with them on the search is that congregations that do not choose to go the interim route will regret it later.[217] Many synagogue leaders also report

[217] It is important to note that there is a sampling bias in these reports. I only spoke to congregations that hired an interim rabbi. Whether congregational leaders who choose to do a transition without an interim do so because they hear different messages, because they chose to ignore the warnings they hear, or because they are not in contact with the URJ and CCAR to hear these messages at all is an open question. It seems likely that as

having heard about interim rabbis through Reform Movement programs, such as sessions on rabbinical transitions at the URJ biennial and the Scheidt Seminar, a URJ training program for synagogue presidents and presidents-elect. Director of Placement for the CCAR, Rabbi Alan Henkin, who oversees the interim program, noted that the CCAR makes a point of showcasing interims at both of these venues.[218] Through programs like these, it would seem that the movement either has reached, or soon will reach, a tipping point where, in the majority of congregations, when a rabbinic transition is at hand, someone in the leadership of the congregation will have enough positive associations with the idea of an "interim rabbi" to at least propose the idea for board consideration. This is a sea change from even 10 years ago, when many rabbis and leaders in congregations either had not heard of interim rabbis or had negative associations with them (see below for more on these misconceptions), and presents a great opportunity for growth in the field.

Specific Messages that Congregational Leaders Encounter in Their Research

There are a number of documents from institutions of the Reform Movement that talk about the benefits of interim rabbis. Some of these are publically available and others are provided to congregations when they reach out to the URJ or CCAR at the beginning of a rabbinic transition. Many are posted to "The Tent," the URJ's online community for members of synagogues, in a sub-group on rabbinic transitions. An overview of these materials is provided here to give a sense of what messages congregational leaders might encounter as they begin to research how best to conduct a rabbinic transition.

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use of interim rabbis increases, the question of why some congregations choose not to use them will be as important as the question of why other congregations do.

[218] Alan Henkin, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2016.

There is a URJ PowerPoint presentation called, "The Interim Rabbi: Four Questions."[219] This document was created in 2012 and is sent, along with some other materials, to congregations which are exploring the interim program.[220] It is interesting for a few reasons. It is says explicitly at the beginning that interim placements are only one year, with "a defined and short-term contract (one year – July 1 to June 30)"[221] As will be explored below, congregations receive mixed messages about how long an optimal interim placement should be. The document also provides a useful outline of what the movement thinks are the most pivotal tasks for the interim year:

> What does an interim rabbi do?
>
> - Handle [sic] day-to-day, traditional rabbinic functions
> - Allows a congregation time for thoughtful, intentional work, enabling success for the permanent rabbi
> - Provides the congregation with a sense of continuity
> - Works at a deep emotional level on issues of separation (grief, anxiety about the future)
> - Facilitates the discovery of a new congregational identity and the creation of a new vision
> - Understands the systems of congregational life, identifies the strengths of the congregation and the staff, heals the emotions related to the earlier rabbi.[222]

[219] The four questions the document asks are:
- "What is an Interim Rabbi?"
- "When should we consider an interim rabbi?"
- "What does an interim rabbi do?"
- "Will the interim rabbi become our permanent rabbi?"

"The Interim Rabbi: Four Questions," unpublished PowerPoint presentation, Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism, 2012.

[220] Alan Henkin, e-mail message to author, January 13, 2017.

[221] "The Interim Rabbi: Four Questions," unpublished PowerPoint presentation, Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism, 2012.

[222] Ibid.

The presentation also asks, "Will the interim rabbi become our permanent rabbi?" and answers with a resounding "NO!"[223] The document cites four reasons for its emphatic response:

> - The interim rabbi is engaged precisely to avoid rebound relationships
> - The interim cannot speak the hard truths if he or she is trying to become the permanent rabbi
> - It is unfair to other candidates if the interim is allowed to have the inside track
> - If word gets out that the interim is a candidate, it will discourage others from applying.[224]

The emphasis on this question indicates that this is a pressing concern for some congregations.

Rabbi Deborah Prinz, former coordinator of the interim rabbi program at the CCAR, also wrote about the benefits of an interim rabbi in her 2010 article in *Reform Judaism Magazine*, entitled "When Your Rabbi Leaves." This article emphasizes the transformative power of interim rabbis. Rabbi Prinz writes:

> With a rabbi's departure, much more needs to transition than the person who occupies the rabbi's study. This is an excellent time for the temple leadership to focus on envisioning the next era for the congregation: How does our congregation define itself? What makes it unique? What special contributions do we wish to make to our families, our congregation, the Jewish community, and the world at large? How will our future look?[225]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is questionable whether the structure of one-year interim placements really allows for such a deep dive into a congregation's self-image. It is interesting to note that the example Rabbi Prinz uses in this article is of a two-year placement. As will be explored below, this mixed message about how long interim

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[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Prinz, "When Your Rabbi Leaves," 33.

placements should be and how much can be gained from them reoccurs often. That said, Rabbi Prinz says elsewhere in the article that employing an interim rabbi "helps congregations avoid the mistake of hiring a new rabbi reactively" and "can shift the congregation's attention away from what was to what can be." These statements are true no matter how long the interim period lasts.[226]

In another article, published on the CCAR website, Rabbi Prinz offers an even more powerful argument for interim rabbis, which is worth quoting here at length because of the candid and straightforward way she makes the case:

> This shift between two rabbis, whether the result of retirement, illness, death, malfeasance or relocation of a longtime rabbi, may be destabilizing, fraught with varied emotions including anxiety, anticipation, loss, fear, grief, relief, concern, excitement or upset. To 'get on with things' a leadership may be tempted to rush quickly through this change. However, a synagogue's work with a trained interim rabbi allows time for thoughtful, intentional work, strengthening congregations for a healthy search process. Without rushing into a new commitment to a new rabbi, the complicated dynamics of the departure of a rabbi – beloved, hated, deceased, retired – are given time and space. Ultimately, the interim process enables the success of the relationship with the next settled rabbi.…
>
> An intentional interim rabbi, what some call "the temporary help" or the "turn around rabbi," has a huge responsibility proactively to understand the systems of congregational life, identify the strengths of the congregation and the current staff, build the lay leadership, learn the culture, develop trust with the leadership and staff, help define the mission, heal the emotions related to the earlier rabbi, help the congregation prepare for a successful search and a stable tenure with the successor rabbi. This work shifts the attention from the previous rabbi's strengths or weaknesses and avoids a frequent reactive decision about the new rabbi.… The intentional interim rabbi also smoothes [sic] the potentially challenging successor/emeritus dynamic where relationships and ego sometimes create complications. The immense gift of taking time to grow the congregation's identity through self study – by examining its role in the community, in demographics, in the neighborhood, in the movement and in national religious trends – makes the well used interim period all extremely worthwhile.[227]

[226] Ibid.
[227] Prinz, "When Do You Need an Interim Rabbi?" 1-2.

This article is valuable because of its honest assessment of the many different impacts of interim rabbis on congregations. For example, it is one of the few places where the issue of how an interim can help clarify the emeritus role has come up.

None of the articles and resources contain a clear message on when it is appropriate to hire an interim rabbi. In the *Reform Judaism Magazine* article, Rabbi Prinz suggests that it is appropriate "after a rabbi's death, a sudden departure brought on by a congregational conflict, or other difficult circumstances."[228] A document from the URJ's Knowledge Network series and posted on "The Tent" about interim rabbis suggests that they are useful in "the following situations: retirement or departure of a long-tenured, beloved rabbi, trauma or crisis (i.e., sudden death, divisive experience, misconduct), large congregation with multiple staff, [or] lack of time to do a full search"[229] One URJ staff person suggested that a good metric would be that an interim is worthwhile any time the outgoing rabbi has been a centerpiece of the congregation's life or a "north star," and may be less necessary when the rabbi's centrality to the congregation has faded in recent years. But the question of when an interim rabbi is most needed or effective remains unresolved. This lack of clarity may create a sense of confusion when a congregation is considering whether or not to hire an interim.

New Argument for Interims

A new argument for interim rabbis has begun to emerge, namely that applicants for settled rabbi positions are beginning to look to see if a congregation has engaged an interim as a sign of the relative health of that congregation. One congregational leader, who served

[228] Prinz, "When Your Rabbi Leaves," 33.
[229] "Interim Rabbis," 1.

as the committee chair for a settled rabbi search, said that candidates communicated to the committee that they "thought it was a sign that the congregation was doing things right, and they thought it was a sign of thoughtful leadership."[230] She also mentioned that some candidates who were leaving congregations where they had become unintentional interims were particularly pleased by the fact that her congregation had gone through that process. She said that when she speaks to leaders of other congregations who are thinking about hiring an interim rabbi, she suggests, "If everybody thinks that this makes you look like you are a thoughtful congregation, then that means that you are a thoughtful congregation" and that this attractiveness to potential applicants is, itself, a compelling reason to consider going the interim route.[231] One can imagine that, as interim rabbis become more and more common, this will continue to be true. As the movement looks for ways to pitch the interim rabbinate, this may be one compelling argument to raise.

Growing Ecosystem of Programs

It is important to note the growing number of programs that support congregations in transitions, run either jointly or separately by the CCAR and the URJ, all of which contribute to a congregation's ability to navigate a rabbinic transition, as well as other changes across a congregation's lifecycle. These programs include:

- *The URJ Scheidt Seminar for Presidents and Presidents-Elect*, a four-day training for new synagogue leaders to improve their leadership skills. Since 1998, this program has trained more than "1,500 congregational presidents."[232]
- *The URJ Shallat Rabbinic Transition Program & Retreat*, a "two-day retreat for congregational presidents or presidents-elect and their new senior/solo rabbis in the winter of their first year together. The retreat allows rabbis and presidents to strengthen their developing partnership."[233]

[230] Gale Adland, in discussion with the author, December 20, 2016.
[231] Gale Adland, in discussion with the author, December 20, 2016.
[232] "2017 URJ Scheidt Seminar."
[233] "Shallat Rabbinic Transition Program & Retreat."

- *The CCAR First 100 Days: For Every Rabbi in Organizational and Congregational Job Transition*, a two-day training, offered in May of each year to help rabbis prepare for the transition to new roles.[234]
- *The CCAR Interim Rabbi Training*, a three- or five-day training (alternating, one each year) to help rabbis gain expertise in managing transitions and the logistics of interim work. Some rabbis participate in the training with no intention of becoming an interim rabbi but because they know it will help them gain skills to help their congregations navigate change.

In addition to these programs, there are also sessions on transitions and interim rabbis at biennials and CCAR conferences. The URJ now employs two consultants in its Strengthening Congregations department with a specific focus on Consulting & Transition Management, whose work aims to help congregations in transition and complements the work of the CCAR Placement Director and Manager of Programming.

What is emerging is an ecosystem of programming designed to train rabbis and lay leaders to become more adept at managing change. In many of these, trainers push the idea of interim rabbis as one tool that congregations can use to help manage rabbinic transitions strategically. Questions remain, however, about whether these services are sufficient to aid all of the congregations in rabbinic transitions and what other services might fill in gaps. There are also questions about how the URJ and CCAR might continue to improve coordination of their efforts to best meet the (sometimes contradictory) needs of rabbis and congregations experiencing transitions. As the field of interim rabbis grows, it does so in the context of this evolving ecosystem of programs. And, as leaders from the URJ and CCAR continue to work to improve the interim rabbi program, and the state of rabbinic transitions more generally, all of these programs are places where they can seek to exert influence.

[234] Fox and Henkin, "Making the First 100 Days Count: Rabbinic Transition."

Mixed Messages

There are a few places where someone researching interim rabbis might get mixed messages. Much of the documentation, for example, suggests that one year is the common timeframe for an interim. Rabbi Darryl Crystal's recent article, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition" uses as its case study a one-year transition.[235] As mentioned above, the CCAR/URJ PowerPoint states that interim rabbis are given "a short-term contract [of] one year."[236] Neither piece mentions the possibility of a second year. Even the URJ's Knowledge Network document on interim rabbis which says that the length of an interim contract "may vary depending upon the congregation's needs," says that interim periods are "usually one year."[237]

Most notably, the CCAR's "Handbook for Placement Procedures" states explicitly, "The term of an interim rabbi shall be for one year," and can only be extended if the congregation submits a request to the Placement Commission.[238] This statement, in particular, makes a two-year interim seem rare and perhaps even foreboding. But at the same time, the former coordinator of the interim rabbi program at the CCAR uses a two-year transition as a case study in her articles.[239] And a URJ Blog post, alluringly titled, "We Hired an Interim Rabbi and It Was a Great Success" by a congregational leader named Skylar Cohen, similarly features a two-year transition.[240] A congregational leader trying to understand whether to aim for a one-year or two-year transition would have a hard time

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[235] Crystal, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition," 95.
[236] "The Interim Rabbi: Four Questions," unpublished PowerPoint presentation, Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism, 2010.
[237] "Interim Rabbis," 1.
[238] "A Handbook of Placement Procedures," 9.
[239] Prinz, "When Do You Need an Interim Rabbi?" and Prinz, "When Your Rabbi Leaves."
[240] Cohen, "We Hired an Interim Rabbi and It Was a Great Success."

understanding the differences and relative advantages of each – let alone understanding what is the norm and what is permissible. Most of the explicit statements they would see would say one year, while most of the examples they would read would be of two years. This is a point that requires further clarification in URJ and CCAR messaging and materials.

Another mixed message synagogues may encounter involves questions of process and timing. The Knowledge Network document mentioned above provides the following steps for congregations navigating a transition with an interim rabbi:

- Rabbi Leaves
- Direction finding (the congregation chooses its path)
- Self-study (finding out who and where the congregation is)
- Search (looking for the "right" rabbi)
- Decision/negotiation (making a decision and reaching agreements)
- Installation (getting a new rabbi on the job)
- Start up (beginning to build a new ministry in the congregation and the community).[241]

What is strange about this list is that it is unclear and unstated where the interim rabbi fits into this picture. It does not specify with which, if any, of these tasks the interim rabbi can and should help and which might happen before the interim even arrives (in cases of a one-year transition). There are a number of places, like this one, where the specific aspects of how a congregation manages a transition are not addressed in the documents provided by the URJ and CCAR. Clarifying and coordinating these documents might enable both organizations to help congregational leaders set thoughtful and achievable goals for their interim period, whether that period is one year or two.

[241] "Interim Rabbis," 1-2.

Battling Misconceptions

The fieldwork revealed a number of misconceptions about intentional interims. These mainly fall into two categories: misconceptions about interim rabbis and misconceptions about the role of the interim.

The primary misconception about interim rabbis is that they are not high-quality rabbis. A phrase that was repeated from time to time, particularly by congregational rabbis who had been in the field for many years, was that all or most interim rabbis "could not make it as settled rabbis" or that they "became interim rabbis because a year or two with them was all a congregation can handle." It seems clear that this perception, if it ever had any truth to it at all, comes from a time before the CCAR trained interims. Some rabbis in the field explained that they used to believe such things but have come to see this perception as flawed or outdated. As more and more rabbis observe interims operating successfully in the field, and as younger rabbis come to expect interims as a natural part of the transition process, the influence of this misconception will wane, but it is a hurdle that may hurt some congregations' processes. This misconception may be especially prevalent among some retiring rabbis, who may have perceptions of interim rabbis that pre-date the last decade of development in the field, but who pass along a distrust of interims to the lay leadership of their congregational. As the URJ and CCAR seek to improve the field, retiring rabbis represent an important constituency with the ability to shape the search process for their replacements. Convincing them that interim rabbis are effective and can help to solidify their legacy may be one way to help congregations give the idea fair consideration.

It is also worth challenging this misconception on two additional levels. First, as in the rabbinate in general, there are a range of skills and aptitudes among interim rabbis. Some interim rabbis are better at some tasks than others. As the program grows, as more

and more rabbis receive interim training, and as the quality and unique Jewish character of the training continue to improve, however, the overall quality of the field will undoubtedly improve as well. That said, in the process of this research, some stories of less effective interims were heard. Anecdotally, these were most often about rabbis in their first or only interim placement (though it should be said that there are other first-time interims who do an excellent job). This is, of course, a compelling argument for encouraging more rabbis to consider a career, or part of a career, as an interim rabbi because in this field, like any other, there is an opportunity to develop expertise with time and practice.

It is also worth noting that the fact that someone may not have been a successful settled rabbi does not necessarily indicate that he or she will not be an effective interim rabbi. The skillsets to be successful in each kind of position are very different (more on this below). A number of interims indicated in interviews that they thought that they were successful in their calling as an interim precisely because of some skillsets that may not have served them as settled rabbis, particularly around their willingness to speak hard truths and the kinds of relationships they were most interested in developing. The career interim rabbinate is a unique and important rabbinic calling, which draws a certain subset of individuals. If the CCAR wishes to draw new generations of rabbis to intentionally choose this path, it will need to help the field break free of the misconceptions.

The other misconception is about the nature of the interim's role. As Rabbi Henkin noted in an interview, prior to the "creation of this program, interims were seen as 'babysitters,'" sent to look after the congregation but leave it largely untouched until the successor arrived.[242] To some extent, this perception still exists among some rabbis and lay

[242] Alan Henkin, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2016.

leaders. As this thesis demonstrates, interims can be so much more than mere space-holders, in between two settled rabbis. As one synagogue consultant put it, "It's more than just hiring someone to keep the trains running – synagogues that do this are missing the point."[243] While many questions remain about what tasks interim rabbis can accomplish and how long it can take them to accomplish these tasks effectively, it is clear that interim rabbis offer a wide breadth of services to congregations. As they have done with articles like "We Hired an Interim Rabbi and It Was a Great Success"[244] and "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition,"[245] the URJ and CCAR must continue to push the message that the interim period is more than just a break.

The Search for the Interim Rabbi: An Unexplored and Under-supported Transition

Currently, it seems that congregations search for an interim rabbi under one of three circumstances: 1) they choose from the start to hire an interim, 2) they are unable to find a suitable settled rabbi and decide on an interim as a backup plan, or 3) they do not have enough time for a settled rabbi search, perhaps because they learned of their rabbi's departure in the spring, when the standard placement season is wrapping up. In all three of these cases, but especially in the last two, congregations have to act quickly to define the scope of the job, set goals for the year (to the extent that congregations intentionally set goals when hiring an interim), and recruit and hire a talented interim who can fulfill the requirements of the job and help them to accomplish their goals. The interim placement process, run though the CCAR, is structured similarly to the settled rabbi placement

[243] David Tretch, in discussion with the author, November 11, 2016.
[244] Cohen, "We Hired an Interim Rabbi and It Was a Great Success."
[245] Crystal, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition," 95-110.

process, but it is different in a few important ways. The search for the interim must be motivated by different key questions than the search for a settled rabbi. Research turned up no formal resources to help congregations identify and answer these questions, though some of this may happen informally through conversations with the CCAR Placement Director or URJ Consulting & Transition Management staff. The URJ's forthcoming self-guided toolkit for congregations may also help some congregations to raise these issues on their own.

At present, congregations list a job through the CCAR's job posting page, under the category of interim positions. From there, the job is open to all CCAR members who have taken at least one of the two interim training courses.[246] A congregation can seek guidance from the Placement Director or the URJ staff to help it narrow the candidate pool, but this must be initiated by the congregation. There is a sense among professionals in the field that there are different needs in different congregations and that there are certain interim rabbis with specific skillsets to address those needs. For instance, there was a special session at this year's interim training on helping congregations which have suffered a sudden loss of a rabbi after an ethics violation. Other focused skillsets might emerge in board restructuring or congregational mergers and closings. The movement is on its way to developing interim rabbis who specialize in these kinds of cases. But at present, there is no system for helping congregations to assess their needs, figure out which needs can be addressed by an interim rabbi, and identify interim candidates with the particular skills to

[246] Later, if no match is found in a first round of searching, the congregation can also accept applications from rabbis who have not completed either interim training. Rabbinic Placement Commission, "A Handbook of Placement Procedures: For Congregational Search Committees and Searching Rabbis," 9.

address those needs. Rabbi Henkin notes that he is aware of much of this information informally, in his role as the Director of Placement, and that he is sometimes able to help guide the process towards a strategic outcome, but no formal system exits.[247] Creating a more robust system for supporting congregations in this search would be challenging because it would require three simultaneous changes to the system:

a) It would require an early intervention with congregations who are about to go through a search to help them conduct a congregational analysis that would assess their unique needs. While the URJ transition consultants currently seek to provide some of these services and are seeking to provide even more with their forthcoming "Roadmap for Rabbinic Transition," – a self-guided tool for congregations in transitions – they may not be able to provide analysis at the scale and with the depth that congregations would need to hire an interim in the strategic way outlined above.

b) It would require a skills bank or some kind of certification process for different specialties among interim rabbis. The movement would need a way to track which interim rabbis had particular specialties in areas like board development, strategic planning, or crisis management.

c) It would require some kind of system that would more actively match congregational needs with the skillsets of individual interim rabbis. This is the hardest step. Some Christian denominations are able to do this work effectively because they assign interim clergy to congregations without an open application process. This may not ever be the goal of the institutions of the Reform Movement. However, if they seek to better pair interim rabbis with congregational needs, they will need to look carefully at the placement system to see if there are more effective models. It is worth noting that were the above two steps to come to pass, it would mean that congregations might be better able to communicate on their applications what they were looking to accomplish, and interim rabbis might be better able in interviews to articulate what they could offer, which would be an improvement over the current system. But without this third step, the movement would be relying on good matches to work themselves out, without a system in place to ensure that they do.

The important questions that the institutions of the Reform Movement need to ask are these: If we know that rabbinic transitions are a pivotal moment in a congregation's life and that a strategic transition can determine the congregation's health for many years to

[247] Alan Henkin, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2016.

come, is there more that we could be doing to help congregations navigate this period in the most strategic and impactful way possible? And similarly, if we believe that interim periods can be positively impacted by placing interim rabbis in congregations where their particular skillset will help the congregation accomplish its unique goals, what more can we do to make this happen? At present, there seems to be what Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton call a "knowing-doing gap"[248] – a breakdown between what the URJ and CCAR know might help congregations and what they are able to put into action. Answering these questions would be a step towards closing this gap.

Elaborating the Interim Profile: Who They Are and Who They Could Be

An important theme that flowed through all of the research was the search for the answers to two questions: First, who chooses to be an interim rabbi? And second, what skillsets are needed to be an effective interim rabbi? These questions are pivotal to the field, but they have been, up to now, largely unanswered. If the movement wishes to raise the quality of synagogues by providing effective interim rabbis, then we will need a better understanding of who serves as an interim and what skills and dispositions make her or him successful. Only then can we recruit more effectively, train more effectively, and possibly screen more effectively for those skills. What is offered here is the beginning of a more complete profile of interim rabbis. Since, at present, there is no comprehensive data on interim rabbis or rabbinic transitions, this is not an exhaustive qualitative analysis but reflects the current understandings that exist in the field.

[248] Pfeffer and Sutton, "The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action."

Profile

Successful interim rabbis tend to be in the second half of their careers, often in their 50s or 60s. Rabbi Henkin remarked that it is one of the areas "in your rabbinate where age works to your advantage."[249] Some interim rabbis had whole careers in one pulpit or multiple pulpits and are looking for an "encore career."[250] Others served a congregation or other nonprofit for a time, left (through their own choice or the board's), and then sought something new and differently challenging. All the successful interims interviewed for this thesis expressed a new sense of calling and purpose in their work. None thought of it as a backup plan or a necessity to find work, though there are certainly rabbis who turn to interim work for this reason. Some aspired to do many more interim placements, others just a few before retirement. One successful interim with several placements under his/her belt was considering both settled and interim placements for next year. Both men and women do this work, though I encountered many more men than women.[251] Some are married or partnered, and others are single – a characteristic which will be explored more below.

This profile is too general to be truly helpful. An open question remains as to whether interims tend to be older because the work or lifestyle does not appeal to young people or because the skillset requires ample experience (or perhaps both). The above comment from Rabbi Henkin about age and experience, along with others like it, would seem to indicate an assumption that the latter is primarily true. Experience from the church world, however, would indicate that younger people with training can make successful

[249] Alan Henkin, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2016.
[250] A term popularized by Marc Freedman, in his book *Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life*.
[251] The reason for this disparity is unclear and requires further exploration.

interims. If the CCAR and URJ want the number of successful interims to continue to grow, and intend to sustain the program moving forward, they will need to consider the pipelines into this work. The retirement of Baby Boomer rabbis seeking encore careers is one route, but this stream will eventually dry up, and there is a limit to the number of consecutive placements such a retiree can effectively serve. If it is true that repeated placements contribute to an interim's efficacy, then to be truly impactful, as well as sustainable, the CCAR and URJ must attract and retain effective career interims.

Comparison of Settled Rabbis and Interim Rabbis

Rabbi Deborah Prinz, one of the people most influential in the creation of the Reform Movement's interim rabbi program, shared in an interview five skillsets and characteristics of interim rabbis:

- Ability to be selfless – someone who is able to serve the needs of the successor rabbi and the congregation, who can keep his or her ego in check.[252]
- Ability to analyze – someone who can quickly and accurately assess the needs of a congregation. Someone who is a good listener to both the spoken and unspoken story of a congregation. Someone who can be strategic with how he or she devotes limited time.
- Ability to be flexible – someone who is able to pick up and move. Someone whose personal attachments (partner, children, etc) allow him or her to move and whose professional aspirations or commitments allow this as well.
- Ability to move on – someone who does not feel the need for long-term investment to make his or her work meaningful.

[252] This is particularly important because there is a common moment in almost every placement when members of the congregation will turn to the interim rabbi out of anxiety or appreciation and say, "Why won't you just stay forever?" An interim rabbi must hear that expression with the same, selfless curiosity with which he or she hears all messages from the congregation, and hear it for what it is – often an expression of either fear of the unknown or gratitude for what the interim rabbi brings. A rabbi who does not have his or her ego in check may be deceived by this dangerous, though well-meaning, sentiment. Lynn Carman Bodden (in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016) describes this invitation from congregants as "very seductive."

- Ability to let go – someone who, in Rabbi Prinz's words, is "ok with not owning everything and not controlling everything."[253]

Lynn Carman Bodden, one of the CCAR's partners at the Interim Ministry Network and a trainer of interim rabbis added:

- Ability to tell the truth – "Everybody likes to have people like them, but it is not my job to make people like me. Like most people, I like people to like me – but that isn't the point. It is not my job to tell them everything is great – if it isn't. You have to be able to hold a mirror up and help the people see who they are."[254]
- Ability to say goodbye – The biggest challenge people transitioning to interim work often have is giving up the idea of building long-term relationships. Interims connect, but they also leave. And many of them have a rule about eliminating or limiting future contact (at least for some period of time) so as not to distract attention from the settled rabbi.[255]

What is intriguing about this list is that all of these skillsets are fundamentally different from the skillsets that tend to make someone a successful settled rabbi. Even the ones that are shared between interim and settled rabbis, like the ability to analyze or tell the truth, play out in vastly different ways, because the goal of the interim is to move quickly towards truth and discovery, while the settled rabbi has to focus on balancing truth telling and maintaining and preserving relationships. These lists should inform how interim rabbis are trained and supported, especially when the pool of participants in the interim rabbi training is often many former settled rabbis. Settled rabbis will have to unlearn some of the skills that helped them be successful in their long-term posts. They will have to stretch new muscles which may have gone long unused, atrophied, or never developed in the first place. If former settled rabbis want to be interims, then understanding these differences is key to helping them succeed.

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[253] Deborah Prinz, in discussion with the author, September 27, 2016.
[254] Lynn Carman Bodden, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016, with additional clarifications by e-mail, January 17, 2017.
[255] Ibid.

At the same time, this change from settled to interim rabbi can be liberating. Rabbi Don Rossoff was a settled rabbi at the same congregation for 25 years. Now he is on his second interim posting. He described a "lifting of a burden" around the decisions that laypeople make and the way they affected his life and his future.[256] He said he felt a newfound freedom to tell the truth. Retiring congregational rabbis might welcome the opportunity to stretch and build up muscles, which they have not had the chance to use in a long time. And they might well bring their extensive experience to bear on new congregations with new challenges. The use of retiring rabbis presents both a challenge and an opportunity in interim recruitment and training.

Interim Tasks: What Do Interims Do?

In interviews with interim rabbis, with the professionals who support them, and with the congregants that they serve, a number of discrete tasks of interim rabbis emerged. Some of the most important answers, and some that came up most frequently, are listed here in an effort to paint a picture of the kinds of tasks on which interims spend their time, with the hope that it will serve a basis for an ever growing understanding of the interim's role. Some are similar to how Christian interim clergy describe their roles (see Chapter 4) and others are unique to the Jewish world or play out in unique ways.

Pastoral Care and Lifecycle

Experienced interim, Rabbi Darryl Crystal described pastoral care and lifecycles (especially *b'nai mitzvah*) as "priority number one" when he enters a congregation,[257] a sentiment echoed in many interviews. He expounded that it is important for interim rabbis

[256] Don Rossoff, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.
[257] Darryl Crystal, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2016.

to build in systems to get pastoral information. As he explained, when he sees a congregant with a cane, he does not know "if it's a new cane or and old cane," so he relies on staff and lay leaders to help collect pastoral information in ways which may have been unnecessary with the previous rabbi (but which will also serve the successor rabbi as well).

Communicating with families who are about to experience lifecycle events is another important task. These families often have their own feelings of fear and loss around the previous rabbi's departure, and this is an important constituency with which to do outreach. Because of the frequency of *b'nai mitzvah* in many congregations, this may be a significant time commitment for interim rabbis (for which there is no parallel for their Christian counterparts). It also presents an opportunity. As one *bat mitzvah* parent noted, experiencing this change provided his congregation with "a teachable moment for parents to teach children about how to deal with change."[258] He also noted that this is an opportunity to return or keep the focus of the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony on "children, not the rabbi."[259]

Assessment and Communication

A number of interim rabbis spoke about their success being determined by their ability to get into the system and analyze it quickly. Many spoke about having a number of one-to-one meetings with a diversity of congregants. One rabbi said he had 20 such meetings, another said upwards of 60. These meetings serve the dual-purpose of helping the congregants connect or re-connect to the congregation and the interim rabbi while at the same time helping the interim analyze the system. Some interim rabbis have more

[258] David Schanzer, quoted in Crystal, "The Interim Rabbi: Anatomy of Transition," 105.
[259] Ibid.

formal processes for conducting analysis from one-to-one meetings, while others do so less formally. For example, Rabbi Rick Shapiro uses one-to-ones and congregational transition workshops to develop a formal assessment which he presents to the board.[260] Other rabbis spoke of using the information they gleaned from these meetings to help them know what to focus on for the year.

During the assessment period, the interim rabbi should be reflecting back what he or she is hearing to the congregation. Rabbi Barry Diamond describes this process as "externalizing what you are seeing so that people can see it, too."[261] The assessment then serves as the basis for a process of setting goals for the interim year(s). Sometimes the interim rabbi sets the goals in conversation with the board and leadership while other interim rabbis intuit what they think is most important based on the priorities they have been given from the board. It would seem, however, that if one of the goals of the interim year is to build the leadership capacity of the congregation, the former approach would be preferable.

Rabbi Diamond described regularly asking, "Why is that important to you?" to help people begin to identify their own dynamics and sacred cows in a non-threatening way.[262] He wants to help congregations expose potential problems before they become significant impediments to growth or success. He described his experience this way: "Sometimes I feel like a building inspector or an electrician. I say 'I see you are hanging these shirts near

[260] Rick Shapiro, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2016.
[261] Barry Diamond, in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.
[262] Ibid.

the fuse box. This thing sparks sometimes and it could be bad. It could be fine forever. But it could be bad.'"[263]

Using High Holy Days as an Opportunity

A number of interim rabbis spoke about using the High Holy Days as a particularly potent opportunity to help guide the congregation in their transition since so many congregants gather at that time. Don Rossoff says that this is a particularly useful time to "name the elephant in the room" of whatever loss, anger, hurt, etc., the congregation is experiencing.[264] He says that often when the rabbi leaves, people are afraid that the congregation might close, and he sees the High Holy Days as an opportunity to assure them that the synagogue is still there and that it is moving forward. For some congregations, the High Holy Days are a time to provide both "calm and continuity."[265] For others, the Days of Awe may be a time to start to showcase some of the small changes that will help the congregation to increase its capacity to accept change. As noted in the previous chapter, in some ways, the High Holy Days serve a function for synagogues that regular, highly attended worship does for churches. But the situation is a little more complex because the holidays only come once in the year, and they reach people who may also come infrequently. There is likely to be greater anxiety in the room than at regular Shabbat worship service, hindering the leadership's ability to create an atmosphere conducive to significant transformation. Perhaps, in this case, even the sight of a different face on the bimah can be change enough while at the same time assuring the congregation that life will go on.

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[263] Ibid.
[264] Don Rossoff, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.
[265] Ibid.

Exposing the Congregation to What Else is Happening in the Jewish World

Another important and perhaps underappreciated interim task is providing the congregation with a broader perspective. Congregants tend to have infrequent access to other synagogues and may not know about new trends or other dynamics developing in the broader Jewish world, particularly in the realms of worship and rabbinic styles. The interim rabbi brings an outsider perspective because he or she may have been in many congregations and seen many traditions and styles. The interim rabbi brings this outsider knowledge and can share it with the congregants to broaden their perspective. This will help them to dream bigger about what they want from their next rabbi. An interim rabbi might consider bringing "visual *t'fillah*" to a congregation where this has never been done before, or bringing new melodies to a worship service that may have become staid. An interim rabbi might direct congregants to watch the live-streamed services of other dynamic congregations, and she or he might direct congregants to books, articles, or studies that might help them to get a new perspective on demographic trends affecting their synagogue. Interim rabbis should consider what more they can do to offer this unique perspective to congregations. For instance, Rabbi Darryl Crystal has recently prepared a "seminar of Judaism in the 21st century for congregations to see what's out there and creative."[266] One way that the URJ and CCAR might look at supporting interim rabbis would be by providing them with resources to more thoughtfully fulfill this role. Rabbi Crystal's seminar might serve as a useful model for the types of resources that could be created.

[266] Darryl Crystal, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2016.

Visioning Work

As has been discussed in Chapter 4, it is difficult to do comprehensive visioning work in a one-year interim. Yet such work can be a transformative part of the interim's gift to the congregation, and it can shape their search. As synagogue consultants Hayim Herring and Linda Rich say, "Unless we know who we are, how can we know what we want?"[267] The extent to which interim rabbis can and should help congregations conduct visioning work and self-analysis is a topic that requires further exploration (See Conclusion)

Clarifying Vision for the Search

Even when the congregation does not have time to conduct a full visioning or strategic planning process, the interim rabbi can still be instrumental in helping the board and search committee to clarify their existing vision and communicate it to potential settled rabbi candidates. As one congregational leader put it, "The leadership had a vision. [The interim rabbi] helped us define and refine how to speak about that to the congregation and the candidates for the search."[268] As a rabbi who has seen many searches, the interim can help a congregation phrase its vision in ways that will attract and excite candidates.

Coaching from the interim rabbi to help identify vision and goals for the search may in turn also help congregations to surface and ultimately eliminate the unconscious biases that sometimes still exist in congregational rabbinic searches. As search experts, interim rabbis could be on the look-out for warning signs of bias. This is not a topic that came up in interviews, but it does come up in some of the Christian literature, and it appears to be an opportunity. All those invested in eliminating bias against rabbis along issues such

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[267] Herring and Rich. "Rabbinic Search and Transition," (webinar, sponsored by the UJA Federation of New York, March 30, 2016).
[268] Gale Adland, in discussion with the author, December 20, 2016.

as gender, race, age, or sexual orientation should be looking at interim rabbis as one important weapon in this fight.

Acculturating the Community to Change

The interim rabbi can help each congregation increase its capacity for change. Rabbi Rick Shapiro says, the basic work for interim rabbis "is to respect the culture of the *shul* they are entering. They are not change agents. They can work with people on change if they initiate it. But they are also trying to help acculturate the community to change. The settled rabbi will change things. Hopefully, by then we will have clarified what is central and important."[269] He emphasized this point by relating a story from Rabbi Michael Remson, an experienced interim rabbi and IMN trainer. After one of his first Shabbats at an interim pulpit, a congregant came up to Rabbi Remson and declared, "We have a strong tradition that the rabbi always wears a white shirt on Shabbat." Remson thanked this person for the feedback and never wore a white shirt on Shabbat for the rest of the year.[270] This is an amusing example of the work that interim rabbis do to teach congregants that a little change will not kill them and to help them differentiate between big and small changes. No matter how long the interim placement, this is a worthwhile and achievable task.

The Last Few Months

A unique time for interim rabbis, and one that does not exist for Christian interims, is the final few months of their posting. In this time, when the new settled rabbi has been hired, the interim rabbi may serve two congregations. They are preparing the congregation

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[269] Shapiro, "Rabbinic Transitions: The Power of an Interim Rabbi," (presentation, URJ Biennial, Orlando, FL, November 6, 2015).
[270] Ibid.

for the new settled rabbi while at the same time searching for – and, in some ways, serving – their next interim pulpit. In the former category, many interim rabbis describe making a thorough transition document for the new settled rabbi. They have, hopefully, been keeping documentation all year of what they did and what the synagogue systems are. This can be very helpful especially if the predecessor had been there a long time and had been doing many things that had become second nature, and thus difficult to describe. The interim rabbi has the opportunity to make explicit that which had been implicit in the system and to communicate it to the incoming rabbi. The interim rabbi may also be regularly on the phone with his or her successor, helping plan for the new rabbi's arrival. Rabbi Rick Shapiro insists on being the primary point of contact (as opposed to the board or search committee) for the incoming rabbi once he or she has signed a contract so as to ensure consistency.[271]

At the same time, the interim rabbi is in communication with his or her next pulpit. Many congregations choose to bring out the interim for a weekend (or even multiple visits) to meet congregants and key constituencies, like *b'nai mitzvah* families, as well as to start looking for housing and getting to know the area. Interim rabbis may also be able to consult with the congregation or outgoing rabbi on the goodbye rituals. Finally, if the new synagogue hopes to do any kind of listening campaign or strategic analysis, especially if the congregation only plans to do a one-year interim, this is a key time to begin the process, and the interim rabbi can be helpful in the planning.[272]

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[271] Ibid.

[272] It is important to remember that any congregational analysis that is conducted while the outgoing rabbi is still around may be influenced by his or her presence. Many interim rabbis note that it is difficult to do this kind of analysis before the interim period has

Essentially, in these last few months, an interim rabbi is trying to serve two congregations. He or she is saying goodbye to one while saying hello to another. This can be difficult to manage. Some interims think of themselves as part time in both congregations, even as they are only getting paid by one. They may even describe themselves this way to congregational leaders, knowing that each year, the new congregation gets the benefit of some of their time before they are on the payroll, and will pay it forward to the next congregation at the end of the next year. This, of course, works best with interims who serve multiple consecutive placements. To improve the field, the movement leadership needs to better understand this unique block of time and perhaps consider alternate structures that may support interim rabbis as they serve both congregations.

A Note on Membership Decline

Of all the rabbis and congregational leaders interviewed, only one congregation (Congregation A) reported a significant membership decline during their interim year. Some interim rabbis reported that some congregations lost a few members in (non-crisis) transitions, particularly among members whose participation in the congregation had faded and whose only connection to the congregation had been the outgoing rabbi. The categories of members who resigned from Congregation A may provide clues about some particularly vulnerable populations worthy of special attention. Some of these resignations might have been avoided if the congregation had known that these were vulnerable constituencies and had actively reached out to them in advance. These constituencies fit into three categories.

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begun. William Bridges might say that the congregation cannot start its neutral zone activity until it is done with its ending.

The first, and most common, category was made up of congregants with weak ties to the congregation. In some cases, the only thing keeping them at the synagogue was the senior rabbi, either because they appreciated his work (in the case of Congregation A, the senior rabbi was male) or because they had been longtime members and did not wish to tell him they were ready to resign. When he left, there was nothing keeping them connected. This seems like the hardest constituency to whom a congregation might do targeted outreach, and some small amount of membership attrition might be a natural part of the transition. That said, communications from the congregational leadership asking for people's faith and patience may provide some small help. If people are confident that the leadership will lead with vision and hire a new, dynamic and engaging rabbi, they may be convinced to stick with the congregation though the process.

The second category of membership loss at Congregation A was a group of families who had recently joined the congregation so that their children could enroll in religious school together. This group of families knew each other before joining the synagogue, joined at the same time, and then nearly all resigned before the start of the next school year – the interim rabbi's year – to join another congregation nearby.

The third category was *b'nai mitzvah* families with dates in two or three years. Some left Congregation A to join other congregations, and some found private tutors and create do-it-yourself *b'nai mitzvah*. These families tended to think that the departure of the senior rabbi was the time to make a change instead of waiting to see what happened in the transition.

While there are certainly a host of factors that led families in categories two and three to make the decision to leave Congregation A, some of which may be non-

transferable, there are some factors that may exist in other places. The congregation is in a suburban area with a number of other synagogues within driving distance. It is also near a major metropolitan area with a vibrant Jewish community, which meant that families had access to resources like private *b'nai mitzvah* tutors.

It is possible that had the leadership engaged in targeted, proactive outreach to these constituencies, some of the membership loss could have been avoided. A congregation could consider specific communication from the president and directly from the interim rabbi to these groups. Synagogues often fly the interim rabbi out to meet with families who have *b'nai mitzvah* in the coming year. Perhaps a synagogue could also schedule meetings during these visits with families with *b'nai mitzvah* two or three years out. This type of direct engagement may give these families an extra sense of connection strong enough to keep them involved though the period of uncertainty.

As congregations prepare for transitions, understanding which constituencies are vulnerable may help them to do targeted outreach and engagement work. Particularly in an age where synagogue participation is fluctuating, and there are rising trends like do-it-yourself *b'nai mitzvah*, these are systemic questions for synagogue leaders and the organizations that support them to ask. Membership loss may be one important metric to use to evaluate the success of interim rabbis, but more thorough research is needed to determine what factors contribute to normal membership loss during the interim year.

Systemic Challenges

In the course of this research, a few systemic challenges facing the field of interim rabbis emerged. Any attempt to make changes to the field must account for and address

these challenges. Some of these topics have been mentioned in earlier sections, but they are also briefly summarized here:

- The regular moving and transient lifestyle is the biggest challenge facing the field of interim rabbis. One interim rabbi said bluntly, "The move is a pain in the ass." It is not just the physical move, but smaller tasks like finding a new doctor and dentist every year, too.

  Synagogues can be better prepared to support interim rabbis not only by helping them with moving expenses and with settling in, but by providing a list of services like doctors, dentists, auto mechanics, etc. The URJ and CCAR can support congregations by creating checklists of what will be helpful for their interim. Creating such lists will be good practice for the congregation because it will need to do it all over again when the settled rabbi arrives.

- Similarly, the impact of this move on a rabbi's spouse or partner and on his or her larger family is an important issue. Some rabbis are single, some move with their partners and family, and others make arrangements to live apart for the year (or two). Each of these options presents a significant challenge to rabbinic families and can contribute to the interim rabbi's sense of loneliness in a new place. As the movement aims to expand the field, it must continue to acknowledge this challenge and think creatively about ways it can be mitigated.

- Sometimes congregational leaders, even after they hire an interim, do not fully appreciate all the services that he or she can offer, and thus do not fully avail themselves of the interim's range of talents and gifts. This challenge offers an important place for intervention. The period after a congregation has engaged an interim rabbi but before that rabbi arrives, may be a time in which the CCAR and the URJ can partner with the interim rabbi to offer support to the congregation to think broadly and strategically about all the ways it will use the interim rabbi in the year or two together. This will also be a time for planning and preparation for the interim year(s) and will contribute to the success of the process. While it would be preferable to have these conversations before the congregation hires an interim, many congregations miss that opportunity. This period after the hire may provide a second chance for effective intervention to make the interim year(s) more strategic and impactful. Furthermore, the CCAR and URJ may not know right away when a senior rabbi announces her or his departure, but they do know when an interim position gets filled. This hiring could trigger such an intervention.

- Rabbi Samuel Joseph, Ph.D, the Eleanor Sinsheimer Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion raised a final issue: There is no systemic supervision or mentoring for interim rabbis.[273] While this is also a broader

[273] Samuel Joseph, in discussion with the author, December 20, 2016.

challenge in the field of rabbis more generally, it has a particular impact here because interim rabbis do not have a longstanding relationship with a synagogue board or other support networks in each new location.

The CCAR's decision to offer monthly conference calls for coaching and ongoing development is one step to address this issue, but these calls are not required, and they may be insufficient to address the challenges when sending interim rabbis to congregations without robust supervision and support. This situation, however, also presents an opportunity. A means for the CCAR to improve the field might be to offer all interim rabbis serving congregations ongoing professional supervision in a group or individual setting. This may help mitigate the risk of problems while at the same time building the capacity of these rabbis.

Measures of Success

If we aim to demonstrate the success of the interim program and to increase its effectiveness, we must establish shared understandings of what success looks like. It was remarkable to note that no metrics or markers of success currently exist. All the interim rabbis interviewed had different measures for their own success, as did synagogue and organization leaders. While it is certainly true that each individual rabbi and each congregation will set their own goals and that these goals will vary, it is problematic that there is not a basic understanding of what success looks like for the field.

One major school of thought on the measure of interim rabbis' success was summed up succinctly by Rabbi Alan Henkin: An interim rabbi is hired "to make sure the successor succeeds."[274] Rick Shapiro elaborates, "I know that I am successful when the rabbi who comes after me gets a second contract."[275] This is an admirable goal and a foundational understanding of interim ministry. Interim clergy exist to help a congregation embrace its

[274] Henkin, "Rabbinic Transitions: The Power of an Interim Rabbi," (presentation, URJ Biennial, Orlando, FL, November 6, 2015).
[275] Shapiro, "Rabbinic Transitions: The Power of an Interim Rabbi," (presentation, URJ Biennial, Orlando, FL, November 6, 2015).

new settled clergy. Yet this is a challenging goal to use as our only measure of success because it is incredibly difficult to measure and demonstrate for three reasons:

1) We also do not have shared understandings of what success means for the settled rabbi, and this success may also mean different things to different congregations. With the changing face of the rabbinate and the need for congregations to be dynamic in this ever-changing environment, it would seem that longevity cannot be the only measure of success.

2) This measurement is delayed until long after the interim has left. If there is an interim rabbi whose actions consistently fail to lead to a successful settled rabbi, how would this information be tracked and by whom? And how would it be addressed? The data would not be available until years later, and by that point, the interim would have already moved on to other congregations.

3) The success of the settled rabbi, in whatever form we choose to measure it, is impacted by many factors beyond the interim year. Is it reasonable to judge an interim's success solely on a metric over which he or she has such limited control? As Rabbi Rick Shapiro, who is himself an advocate for this measure, notes, "I'm just there to guide [the congregation]. They have to want to do the work."[276]

Rabbi Steven Fox, Chief Executive of the CCAR, frames success slightly differently. He says, "It is not just setting up the next settled rabbi for success, it is also setting up the entire community for success."[277] This is an improvement, or a good complement, to the measure proposed above because the people it affects are at least still around to measure their own success. Still, all three of the above concerns apply to this measure as well.

Rabbi Janet Offel at the URJ challenges the assumption that longevity should be the primary measure of the successor's success. One measure of success that she proposes is that the next transition, when the successor moves on, will be healthier because of what was learned in this transition.[278] She points out that rabbinic transitions, and change more

[276] Rick Shapiro, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2016.
[277] Steven Fox, in discussion with the author, December 21, 2016, with additional clarifications by e-mail, January 19, 2017.
[278] Janet Offel, in discussion with the author, October 25, 2016.

generally, are becoming a more frequent occurrence for congregations. For this reason, the interim period's success should be measured by its ability to help congregations build their capacity to "handle other changes that they may undertake as a community, including future rabbinic transitions."[279] Again, while this is an admirable goal, it requires a delay between the action and the measure of its impact.

The second school of thought is more focused on internal indicators specific to each congregation's needs. This school looks at desired changes within the system to determine success. There are a number of expressions of this methodology, presented here along with the person who articulated them:

- The interim rabbi has "helped the congregation develop confidence in themselves." (Rabbi Darryl Crystal)[280]
- The interim rabbi has "helped the congregation keep the program, helped them do pastoral care, done some short-term projects, and helped them learn about change dynamics." (Rabbi Darryl Crystal)[281]
- "There will be mistakes… but [the interim rabbi has helped] them to increase their tolerance for change and for mistakes." (Rabbi Darryl Crystal)[282]
- If there was some kind of issue that continues to exist and affects the new person, the interim has not been successful. Interim rabbis should "leave it clean for the next person." (Rabbi Don Rossoff)[283]

[279] Janet Offel, e-mail message to author, January 17, 2017.
[280] Darryl Crystal, in discussion with the author, October 18, 2016.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Don Rossoff, in discussion with the author, December 14, 2016.

- "The way I would want to measure my success is saying to the congregation, 'what would we want to accomplish' and then accomplishing that." (Rabbi Barry Diamond)[284]
- "If there are specific weaknesses within the systems, and those weaknesses are on the road to being addressed, or at least there is a language [to describe these issues] that they are starting to use, then I would say that that is a success." (Rabbi Barry Diamond)[285]
- "If their daily Jewish life continues, and they feel cared for and served and appreciated… and that the trains are still running, that is a success." (Rabbi Barry Diamond)[286]
- Success is the board having an understanding of what it needs to know to "set a new settled rabbi up for success." (Julie Kniznik, synagogue president and search committee member)[287]

These measures relate to the short term, and some of them seem like they could be measured and observed by people both inside and outside of the congregation. Samuel Joseph suggests that we need both short- and long-term measures of success and that these need to be part of the negotiation and contracting between the congregation and the interim rabbi so that both parties are clear on the goals from the outset and so that progress towards them can be measured periodically throughout the year.[288] Perhaps this is another sign that the step of recruiting, hiring, and welcoming an interim rabbi is a pivotal and under-serviced moment in the rabbinic transition. If the URJ and CCAR could do more to help congregations identify and articulate goals at the beginning of the process and then assess their success in achieving them at the end of the interim period, the two organizations could simultaneously help the congregations think more strategically and also begin to gather data on the effectiveness of the interim period as measured by the congregations themselves.

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[284] Barry Diamond, in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Julie Kniznik in discussion with the author, January 2, 2017.
[288] Samuel Joseph, in discussion with the author, December 20, 2016.

Much more work needs to be done to create shared understandings of what congregational success and rabbinic success look like, both for the general field and for interim rabbis specifically. These measures of success need to be broad enough to encompass the diversity of congregations but also measurable if we are to have any hope of assessing the success of interim rabbis and of increasing their capacity to positively impact congregations. This goal is outside the scope of this project, but it is an urgent question in the field, which this author hopes will be the focus of much discussion by thoughtful leaders in the years to come.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To think about pastoral succession, Leith Anderson offers a useful metaphor that helps to illustrate the many complexities and opportunities for interim clergy. Anderson calls this metaphor "parish poker," and he equates a clergy-person's credibility to the availability of poker chips. Clergy-people earn chips (good will, credibility, political capital, etc.) throughout their tenures. They spend these chips whenever they exercise leadership in the congregation. To make changes or institute new practices, the clergy-person needs enough chips, just like a poker player needs chips to keep playing. Making changes to the service, re-organizing the staff, implementing new policies – each requires a certain number of chips. If the clergy-person does not have enough chips for the hand, then she or he cannot keep playing. And if she or he runs out of chips completely, then the game ends, and she or he no longer has the credibility to continue with that congregation. This last case describes what happens when the relationship between the pastor/rabbi and congregation devolve until there is no choice but to part ways. The goal in pastoral succession is to bank enough chips for the new pastors or rabbis, so that they walk into the congregation with a few chips already in their pockets and have the credibility to lead the congregation forward. Here is how Anderson, along with Vanderbloemen and Bird, explains the game (though they use exclusively Christian language, it is easy to see how this metaphor would apply just as well to rabbis and synagogues):

The new clergy-person arrives ready to lead the congregation. "When a new pastor is called to a church, a pile of chips is normally stacked up for use as the pastor chooses. They represent the good favor and support of the church people. They may be saved for a

rainy day or risked in the first hand of play."[289] The clergy-person needs to build up even more chips to lead the congregation in bold new directions. "Every good sermon is worth at least one good chip. Individual ministry is a slow but sure chip builder. But chips can also be lost for yawner sermons, botched personal ministry (like forgetting a funeral you promised to preach), or leading the church on a big risk that doesn't pay off."[290] Over time, the new clergy-person builds up enough chips to lead the congregation in exciting new directions or flounders with barely enough chips to survive or finally runs out of chips.

Pastoral succession has a profound impact on the number of chips. As Anderson explains:

> Long-term pastors are hard to follow; they often seem to take most of the chips with them. Long-term pastors who died in the church are particularly unfollowable…. In contrast are those marvelous predecessors who prepare the way. They teach the congregation to love and support the next pastor "no matter who." They even make a special point to endorse their successors and thereby confer hundreds (maybe thousands) of their own chips.[291]

This is hard to achieve. Even under the best of circumstances, most clergy take a lot of their chips with them. Chips are just very hard to leave for your successor. They tend to get lost in the back of the desk drawer, even when the outgoing pastor had the best of intentions.

An interim period can be a time when the congregation stockpiles chips so that the leaders and the rabbi can spend them together making the congregation thrive. It is hard to ignore the reality that outgoing rabbis take their chips with them, although many congregations try. "We loved our last rabbi," they say, "and we will love the next one. We

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[289] Anderson, "How to Win at Parish Poker."
[290] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*, Kindle Location 1017.
[291] Anderson, "How to Win at Parish Poker."

don't need an interim." They forget that it took time and perseverance, and a lot of missteps to get to that place with the outgoing rabbi, and it surprises them that it is similarly difficult with the successor rabbi. There will be mistakes and hard realizations of how different the new rabbi is from her or his predecessor. The congregation can only hope that there were enough chips in the desk and that the new settled rabbi is adept enough to earn what she or he needs – and that its congregants will be generous with their chips.

The interim period embraces this truth instead of avoiding it. Congregations that choose to hire an intentional interim rabbi say, "We know that our rabbi has loved us, and we have loved her, and we hope that will be true of the next person. What can we do to help ensure this is true?" The rabbi and congregation have generously shared their chips with each other. The rabbi may very much want to set up her successor for success; she may hope to leave chips stashed away. She will tell the congregation how eager she is to do so. But the congregational leadership knows, in reality, that a lot of those chips belong to the outgoing rabbi. They know they need a year to stockpile new chips. They will spend that year with a rabbi who does not need chips because the interim rabbi is playing a totally different game. That game is called "Speaking Hard Truths and Paving the Way for Change," and it is the topic of this thesis. It is played without chips. So, during the year, whenever the interim earns a chip, he or she just puts it in a safe place in the rabbi's study for the new settled rabbi to use when he or she arrives.

Meanwhile, the leadership spends the year looking for places where chips tend to get spent unnecessarily in the congregation and starts resolving those issues so the settled rabbi does not waste his or her chips. The board might also spend time setting a vision that says, "This is where the next rabbi should spend his or her chips early on" so that the rabbi

knows in which direction to lead. By spending time learning about and preparing for the challenging experience of change, the congregation lowers the "chip cost" of various activities, so that people are more patient with the various missed steps and missed opportunities and missed connections that inevitably come as the new rabbi settles into the work. By the end of the interim year, the congregation has not only stockpiled chips to spend with its new rabbi, but it has also refined the rules of the game to help the next rabbi succeed. The interim rabbi helps the congregation to celebrate the great work they have done to pave the way for this new game where everyone wins. When the new settled rabbi steps into the office, she or he finds a big pile of chips and a note on the desk from the interim that says, "Good luck! You are going to be great for each other. I hope these help you get started."

Perhaps Anderson's analogy is too transactional and a little bit flippant. Congregational life is not a game. The relationship between a rabbi and the congregation can be a little more collaborative and a little less like buying people's affection. But Anderson is right that leadership requires social capital. Leading people somewhere (even if you are leading collaboratively with those same people) requires trust and relationships and respect. These are resources that are built up over time. They do not appear in the ark on the rabbi's first Shabbat. And no one can build them for the new rabbi – not the outgoing rabbi, not even the interim. It just takes time. But an interim period starts the clock even before the new settled rabbi arrives. It allows for threats to his or her success to be eliminated or at least named and mitigated. It allows time for people to make room in their hearts and their lives for their next rabbi. At its best, it allows space for vital communication and visioning about the direction of the congregation so that the settled rabbi arrives to a

community that is clear about its next steps and excited for a new clergy-partner with whom to take them. The community may not know the whole vision – the settled rabbi and congregation will develop some of that together – but the members can at least name the important first steps and walk forward, boldly, together. Rabbi Geoffrey Mitleman once said to me that a congregation "can dream only as big as they have lived."[292] Hiring interim rabbis allows congregations to live a little bigger so that they can dream a little bigger. What more can we ask for from a rabbinic transition?

Interims of Transition and Interims of Transformation

In the course of this research, I have come to believe that there are two categories of interim periods for synagogues in transition, which I have come to call the "Interim of Transition" and the "Interim of Transformation." Each one has its own advantages and may be called for in different situations. One is not more preferable than the other.

An Interim of Transition is one year. It provides the necessary breathing space between the outgoing rabbi and the next settled rabbi. By the end of the year of an Interim of Transition, the interim rabbi has helped members of the congregation address any emotional needs they experienced with the loss of the previous rabbi and has paved the way for the next rabbi to make a smooth transition into the system. The interim rabbi has instituted small changes with the goal of helping increase the congregation's capacity to handle change. He or she has engaged in the process of "externalizing" what he or she observed about the culture so that the congregation enters into a relationship with the next settled rabbi more self-aware and self-reflective. If there were major issues, like staffing problems, board conflicts, or other structural issues that might have affected the incoming

[292] Geoffrey Mitleman in discussion with the author, July 14, 2016.

rabbi, they have been named and are on their way to being addressed. The interim rabbi has helped the congregation to plan ways to welcome the new settled rabbi and to help her or him to get to know the congregation. The interim rabbi has prepared a transition document and spoken to the incoming rabbi to help him or her understand the tasks of the new job. All of this is achievable in one year. If all has gone well, the congregants end the year feeling good about the choice they made and excited to move to the next step.

This is fundamentally different from an Interim of Transformation, which can only be accomplished in two years. In the first year of an Interim of Transformation, the congregation works to say goodbye to its previous identity and begins to imagine what is next. The interim rabbi spends this year helping the congregation to process the emotions that go along with that transition. The congregation, in partnership with its interim rabbi, conducts a series of congregational meetings and one-on-one conversations to share stories, hopes, and aspirations about the community's future. The congregation also conducts a thorough environmental scan – an analysis to identify its potential members and their needs. Together, this listening campaign and environmental scan are developed into a vision of what the congregation will become next. Leaders begin to translate this vision into short- and long-term goals for the congregation and to develop an understanding of the skillsets and passions the community will need in a rabbi so that this person can help them to achieve these goals. They build a profile of this rabbi before beginning the actual search. Through this whole process, the interim rabbi serves as consultant and coach, along with her or his responsibilities for programming and pastoral care. The interim rabbi also brings the congregation a broader perspective of trends and opportunities in the Jewish world that helps leaders to dream and create a bold vision.

In the second year of the Interim of Transformation, the congregation turns its newfound vision into a strategic search. The congregation's job posting for the new settled rabbi position communicates in clear and enticing terms the type of skills and vision that the congregation is seeking. The congregation may even actively recruit rabbis in the field who demonstrate these skills. All the while, the interim rabbi is helping the community to address issues and make changes, just as she or he would in an Interim of Transition, but the congregation has more time to experience the impact of these changes, and what it learns from them will have a more lasting impact. In the final months of the transition, in addition to all the work to welcome the new settled rabbi, the interim rabbi is also helping the congregation to articulate what it has accomplished and how it has changed. The congregation celebrates a period full of accomplishment and growth as the members look to the future with optimism and vision.

Two years is too much time for Transition, just as one year is not enough time for Transformation. To return to the William Bridges model (explored in Chapter 2) for a moment, I have come to understand that a one-year interim period is not really enough time to go through his three stages. The neutral zone must be neutral. It cannot be full of the tasks of ending and beginning. A congregation in a one-year interim is barely done with its goodbye when the search starts. Even in one year, the interim period serves the important role of separating the ending and the beginning so that they do not happen simultaneously, but without a second year there is not time for an effective neutral zone. Only in a two-year interim is there a calm, expansive period for the congregation to question, listen, experiment, and ultimately grow. Even in cases where the rabbi has given ample notice before a retirement, the community work that happens before the outgoing rabbi's

departure is shaped by his or her presence. The real work of change begins only after he or she is gone. It is hard to do the neutral zone work effectively when you are not done with your ending. Except perhaps in the rarest of cases, any ideas of parlaying the rabbinic transition into a substantive change in only one year are just fantasies. We do a disservice to congregations when we try to convince them otherwise. If the Reform Movement had a more fluid placement season, or there were some way to rethink when and how interim rabbis move to congregations, this might be less true; however, as long as the choices are strictly one year or two, this reality remains: a second year is needed for true transformation to occur.

Either of these two interim periods may be valuable. Clarity on the differences between them, however, is of the utmost importance. We must stop pitching congregations on the promise of transformation, if the one-year interim period is structured for transition. If synagogue leaders are confused between these two distinct types of interims, it may increase their risk of setting goals that are unrealistic or of failing to take full advantage of their interim period.

It is this author's opinion that there is immense opportunity for visionary leadership in the Interim of Transformation, but there is also great value in the choice to engage in an Interim of Transition, especially for congregations that are fairly strong and for which the transition is not a shock. But it must be just that: a choice. Congregational leaders and rabbis need a better understanding of what is possible in one year and what is only possible in two. And they need encouragement to slow down, even when the temptation is to hurry up. Congregants will want the issue "settled" as quickly as possible. People's natural

avoidance of ambiguity and uncertainty will push them to seek answers. But, as John Nichols notes about Christian pastoral transitions:

> Search Committees that decide in haste tend to choose someone who is either the mirror image or the exact opposite of the person who just left. They are reacting rather than reflecting and they may be working with an image of ministry that no longer serves the congregation well. In some cases, they may be trying too hard to fix a situation that takes time to mend.[293]

Only a congregation's leaders can determine which of these two types of interim periods they require and how long they need, but the institutions of the movement can do more to help them understand their own goals and the ways in which an interim rabbi can help them to accomplish these goals.

There may be some times when an Interim of Transformation is particularly necessary. Nichols notes, "It takes two years to do a proper job of setting a minister who follows a long-term predecessor"[294] Robert Latham identifies various categories of congregations that "need special care" such as "the bereft" (those who are heartbroken at their clergy-person's departure), "the benumbed" (those who have fallen into a rut with a longtime leader), or "the betrayed" (those who have suffered a break or trauma with their previous leader).[295] Congregations where the rabbi leaves after an ethics violation or congregations which have major internal conflicts might also be good candidates for an Interim of Transformation. Congregations considering merging or closing might go this route as well as they consider all the possible next steps.

As the field of interim rabbis continues to grow and our understanding of the dynamics in a variety of situations grows, it may become clearer which congregations are

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[293] Nichols, "Predictable Roadblocks," 152.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Latham, "The Temptation to Rush the Search," 170-176.

strong candidates for an Interim of Transition. In the meantime, the dividing of the interim model into two distinct sub-categories should help to delineate the goals, advantages, and drawbacks of each. The more we can encourage congregational leaders to take as much time as they need, whether that is one year or two, the more strategic and empowering their transitions will be.

Recommendations

What follow are a series of recommendations based on observations from the field. They are targeted primarily at the CCAR and the URJ in their work to continuously improve the field of interim rabbis and the state of synagogues more generally. It is clear that some of these goals are easier to achieve than others, but the objective here is look toward the future with vision, as well as an understanding of what is realistic in the short term. All are offered humbly, with the belief that rabbinic transitions are an important moment in the life of a congregation and that strategic and thoughtful interventions with congregations at these moments influence the congregation's ability to build capacity to fulfill its mission.

What Do We Need to Know/Understand? Suggestions for Further Study

Systematic Study of Synagogue Transitions and Rabbinic Trajectories

It has become clear in the course of this research that the Reform Movement needs more data on rabbinic transitions in synagogues and on the movement of rabbis more generally. At present, very little such data exist, and none of it has been collected in one place. The movement needs a comprehensive and systematic study of the state of the rabbinic field. The system is full of assumptions about when rabbis move, why they move, how often they move, how they tell their congregations, etc. So many of the decisions of

the movement are based on these assumptions. For instance, the discussion about using settled rabbi longevity to measure interim rabbi success in Chapter 5 is based on an assumption that both rabbis and congregations aspire towards longevity. This may well be true, but it is impossible to know until there is data. A study of the field might also reveal the extent to which rabbis looking towards retirement really are considering encore rabbinic careers. To truly improve the field of synagogue studies, we must understand it in a much more data-driven way so that we can make targeted interventions and measure our impact.

Part of this data analysis should coincide with a broader conversation about rabbinic success. As outlined in Chapter 5, no shared understandings exist about standards for measuring the success of rabbis in the field. If our goal is improving excellence across the field, we will need shared metrics for what constitutes excellence. Only then can we measure and create interventions to improve rabbinic success.

In response to a similar lack of data in the church world, Russell Crabtree published the book *Transition Apparitions: Why Much of What We Know about Pastoral Transitions is Wrong* in 2015. In it, he attempts to use data from a survey of churches to measure the impact of interim pastors on congregations. As he notes, very "little research has been conducted on interim ministry."[296] He found no serious study that compares congregations that choose an interim against those that do not. While Crabtree's attempt to rectify this dearth of research is a valuable first attempt, it is worth briefly noting here that there are serious methodological problems with his approach. Crabtree's study is not longitudinal but uses a single survey of congregations, some of which had interims at the time of the

[296] Crabtree, *Transition Apparitions*, 13.

survey while the rest had settled pastors (some new, and some long-term, but with no delineation between these two groups). Because he organizes his data this way, he has no way of comparing congregations that have recently finished an interim period to those that chose not to hire an interim. Nor can he draw distinctions between congregations that hired interims recently as compared to those who hired interims and are now more than five years into a new settled clergy-person. As a result, his analysis of the data seems to this author to be deeply flawed. Moreover, without a longitudinal study, no comprehensive conclusions can be drawn about the long-term the impact of interim ministry. That said, Crabtree does a good job of drawing attention to some of the many assumptions on which the field is based, and for this reason alone the book is worthy of examination. Those who wish to truly understand the field, like Crabtree, have to identify the unspoken assumptions on which they base their work.

Topics to be Explored in Future Research

In the course of this research, there were a number of questions that surfaced which were outside the scope of the project but which present fertile opportunities for future research projects. They include:

- Exploring the use of interim rabbis when the congregation has a viable internal candidate for the senior rabbi position. Are there unique opportunities or interim tasks to ensure a successful and fair transition in these situations?

- Are there particular categories of rabbinic transitions where an interim rabbi should be required? Two categories that have been suggested, both of which require further thought and investigation, are congregations facing a crisis or congregations with frequent and unplanned rabbinic turnover.

- Another topic for further exploration is the unique time in an interim rabbinate between when the new settled rabbi is hired and when he or she arrives. It is clear that this is a time when the congregation's need for the interim rabbi is waning and when the synagogue that interim rabbi will serve next may have a growing need for his or her attention. As explored in Chapter 4, this is not a time period that exists in

a similar form in most Christian denominations, and so it is one which does not show up in much the church literature. The movement needs a better understanding of what interim rabbis can and should do during this period. From here, movement institutions will be able to creatively explore new ways to maximize the use of interim rabbis' talents and expertise.

- On a related note, Chapter 2 indicates that there is some debate about when the "beginning" stage of William Bridges' model of transitions begins and ends. A more robust understanding of this phenomenon may be helpful to interim rabbis using Bridges with their congregations. As explored in Chapter 4, a better understanding of the ways in which the "beginning" stage stretches into the first few years of the new settled rabbi's tenure may help the organizations of the movement support rabbis and congregations as they work to build up chips.

- The movement needs to know more about Founder's Syndrome and its impact on rabbinic transitions. This research revealed no Jewish writers who discuss this phenomenon in relations to synagogues even though its impact seems substantial.

- Additionally, the movement needs to know about an emeritus's role and its impact on transitions, especially when a founding rabbi or a founder-like rabbi is involved. The question of how an interim rabbi might help to smooth a retiring rabbi's move to the emeritus role is important and not yet understood.

- Another unexplored area where the interim rabbi might be helpful is coaching the search committee to help eliminate unconscious bias. A systematic study of rabbinic movement might also help to reveal disparities between demographics in the placement process, such as whether it is more difficult for a female rabbi to get a senior rabbi position, perhaps because of unconscious bias or latent sexism within the system. Anecdotally, some such discrimination was observed. Armed with a better understanding of such bias, interim rabbis could be trained to help congregational search committees surface and address such bias, which would lead to a placement process that is more fair, equitable, and just.

  As an example of a denomination doing this work, the Unitarian Universalist Association offers a program called "Beyond Categorical Thinking," which is "designed to help a congregation understand and get beyond prejudices or presuppositions about categories of ministers based on race and color, ability challenges, or sexual orientation and gender identity."[297] Unitarian interim ministers are instrumental in helping to encourage search committees to participate in these trainings.

- Another area for exploration is the rabbinic transition as an opportunity for individual spiritual growth. What can this period of uncertainty and change teach people about how they navigate transition in their own lives? How can interim

[297] Keely and Presley, "The Interim Minister's Role in Ministerial Search," 130.

rabbis use their position to offer people pathways towards personal growth by using the interim period as the curriculum for an ongoing learning conversation among congregants about their responses to change in their lives?

- A final issue, which came up and deserves more attention, is if and when an interim rabbi can become the settled rabbi of the congregation. Currently, such a transition is not allowed in the Reform community except under special circumstances when the congregation "has completed a full search and has not found a candidate that it can recommend for the position of rabbi," or "the congregation has completed a full search and no candidate has accepted the congregation's offer to become the rabbi of that congregation."[298] In such circumstances, the "congregation must petition the Placement Commission in writing to seek a waiver from the rule that an interim is not to be considered for the permanent position."[299] The whole system of interim work is based on the good faith assumption that interims will not be candidates for the settled position. If they are, or if there is the appearance that they are, there is a high risk of creating a system that is unfair. The interim rabbis could be seen as trying to influence the search in a way that would benefit themselves, or the interim period could come to be seen as something entirely different – a trial contract. Neither of these situations is desirable. That said, Rabbi Alan Henkin shared a story about a congregation that hired its interim to become the settled rabbi after a period where both the congregation and the rabbi had trouble finding other matches and when they had discovered a deep affinity for each other in their year together.[300] It is understandable why it is hard to say "no" in such a situation. The Placement Commission needs to be careful to grant the requests in only the rarest and most exceptional circumstances, especially as interim placements become more common. This dynamic needs to be better understood, and the materials the Placement Commission provides could be more transparent about how this system works and why it is so rare.

Exploring the Emotional Dynamics in Rabbinic Transitions

A theme that reoccurred over and over again in the research was a need to better understand the emotional dynamics at play in rabbinic transitions. Again, this is an area where interim work is structured on top of some foundational assumptions about how congregations experience grief and loss that have not been systematically tested.[301] If

[298] "A Handbook of Placement Procedures" 9.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Alan Henkin, in discussion with the author, September 21, 2016.
[301] In his book, *Interim Apparitions*, Russell Crabtree attempts to surface some of these assumptions, such as the assumption that "pastoral transitions traumatize congregations much like the death of a spouse" (19). As explored above, the issues he raises are valuable, even if his methodology for testing these assumptions may prove to be flawed.

interim rabbis function partially as congregational grief counselors, helping both individuals and system as a whole to move on after the loss of a rabbi, then understanding exactly how these dynamics work will be very important.

Much of the work of interim ministry in the past 30 years has been based on the Family Systems approach to understanding congregations, present in the work of Edwin Friedman and Peter Steinke.[302] The church world, however, is now beginning to challenge this foundational understanding of the emotional dynamics in congregations. For instance, Rob Voyle, a proponent of the Appreciative Inquiry approach to interim ministry as a replacement for the Family Systems approach, writes, "I find the language of 'family systems,' which has formed the basis of most transitional ministry, counterproductive, especially when it comes to growing our communities of faith."[303] Voyle elaborates:

> The largest extended family anyone can imagine is 50…. The family systems model breaks down because most of our congregations are larger than that. The benefit of Bowen is enabling pastors to understand their own family history and how those dynamics impact their ministry. It's best to see congregations as communities of faith rather than as families.[304]

While much of the church world still accepts the work of family systems model, these challenges to assumptions push the thinking forward and create new avenues for experimentation and growth within the field. Jewish interim work is still most often rooted in the family systems model and might well benefit from a critical examination of this model and its effectiveness in congregations.

The metaphors that we use to describe a change in rabbis are telling, both because they indicate the impact of family systems thinking on the field and because they speak to

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[302] Terry Foland, quoted in Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 24.
[303] Voyle, "An Appreciative Inquiry Paradigm for Transitional Ministry," Kindle Location 2939.
[304] Rob Voyle, quoted in Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 25.

the deeply rooted sense of connection and pain that can come with a rabbinic transition. Both laypeople and professionals often describe the departure of a rabbi like a death in the family or like a divorce. In describing the transition process, they use the language of grief and mourning. In a session at an Interim Ministry Network conference, presenter and interim minister Doug Stensby said, "Congregational grief is just like individual grief, only bigger."[305] Many interim ministers and rabbis speak of using the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief to help frame the congregational experience. All these metaphors are limited, however. Often the rabbi has not died but rather moved on to another congregation or retired, and while gone from the system, she or he still very much alive and accessible by phone, e-mail, or Facebook. Nor is a rabbinic departure like a divorce. The relationship between rabbi and congregation may be covenantal like a marriage, but the metaphor starts to break down the more it is used. Furthermore, these metaphors might be confusing or even hurtful to those who have experienced recent personal grief or have gone through the dissolution of a marriage. Interim rabbis need a better set of metaphors and tools to help congregations process the unique experience of saying goodbye to a rabbi.

Some interim ministers are encouraging the use of the metaphor of interim as midwife: "Transitional ministers must retool their approach from being hospice chaplains for a church suffering a loss to becoming midwives of hope for a bright new future born out of this season of change."[306] If our goal is to normalize transitions and help congregations turn them into moments when they can seize opportunity and dream about a

[305] Stensby, "Congregations in Grief," (presentation at the IMN Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD, June 18, 2015)
[306] Piazza, "Revitalization, Renewal, or Redevelopment during the Interim," Kindle Location 2144.

bold future, new metaphors that focus less on grief and loss and more on hope and renewal may help to do this.

We might also begin to think more about the rabbinic transition as a natural lifecycle event in the life story of the congregation. In her book, *Nonprofit Lifecycles: Stage-Based Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity*, Susan Kenny Stevens explores the stages of the growth and possible decline of a nonprofit organization through the lens of a human lifecycle. The same lens might be applied to synagogues. An added benefit to this approach is that Jews know a lot about how to move through and ritualize lifecycle events. Jews know how to mark these times. Jews know that lifecycle events take a preparation period and a recovery period afterwards. Jews know that in a lifecycle event, "who you are is in flux," that you are partially who you were and partially who you will be.[307] Perhaps a better understanding of the rabbinic transition as a congregational lifecycle event might help to normalize the experience and to give interim rabbis tools to bring the wisdom of Jewish tradition to bear on the experience.

Proposed Book on Rabbinic Transitions

It is noteworthy that no book exists for a general audience on rabbinic transitions. While the number of Christian books on this topic has grown significantly over the past few decades, not one Jewish equivalent exists. The 2016 book, *Clergy Retirement: Every Ending a New Beginning for Clergy, Their Family, and the Congregation* was co-written by Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts and Michael P. Freidman, a Jewish lay leader and psychologist. But this book is written for both synagogues and churches. Moreover, it has only one chapter targeted at lay leaders, and the bulk of the book is targeted at clergy considering

[307] Nancy Wiener, in discussion with the author, September 13, 2016.

retirement. I propose a book written for both rabbis and congregations (possibly to be read together) with chapters on topics including:

- When and how a rabbi might decide to leave or retire, and how to inform the congregation
- The interim period
- Founder Syndrome
- The importance and challenges of the emeritus role
- Rabbinic searches
- Beginning with a new rabbi
- Hiring from within and other alternative models of rabbinic succession.

Such a book might help to bring together many of the disparate topics upon which this thesis touches into one, coherent look at the rabbinic transition and its impact on congregations. It would empower rabbis and lay leaders to think about this period strategically and to navigate this difficult and important time with intentionality and vision.

What Do We Need to Do to Further Develop the Field?

Low Hanging Fruit: Continue to Develop Resources for Congregational Leaders

It was striking to note that some of the resources to which the movement directs congregational leaders are not written for congregational leaders nor are they about interim rabbis. For instance, the URJ's Knowledge Network document on interim rabbis has a section on Resources and Recommended Reading that directs people to the IMN and Alban Institute websites and to the book *The Interim Pastor's Manual* by Alan G. Gripe.[308] While the two websites have some resources, none are specifically directed at synagogues and most are directed at interim ministers or the organizations that serve them, not at congregational leaders seeking guidance. Meanwhile, *The Interim Pastor's Manual* is from 1997 and still relies on the five process tasks, which, as explored in Chapter 4, is an

[308] "Interim Rabbis," 2.

outdated frame. It is also targeted at ministers not lay leaders. Congregants would be better served if, rather than directing them to external resources, the URJ and CCAR continued to create short, clear resources that walk congregational leaders through the steps of deciding to hire an interim and executing that plan. The URJ's new Roadmap toolkit may contain some of this information, but short and publically available articles published in places like the URJ blog or *e-Jewish Philanthropy* will also help to raise the profile of interim rabbis and to encourage congregations to think more broadly about their transitions.

Continuing to Develop the Reform Rabbi Interim Training

Many interviewees mentioned that one of the challenges of the CCAR/IMN interim training is that participants have to do a lot of their own translating from Christian modalities to Jewish ones. This was especially true of people who had taken the training prior to the last few years. More recently, the CCAR and IMN have endeavored to build a training that is more deeply rooted in Jewish values and reflects the structure of the rabbinic transition. This thesis project has sought to identify areas that can be, or need to be, translated from the Christian context into the Jewish one. In particular, the issues of the how interim rabbis spend their time in ways that are different from interim ministers – such as doing less strategic planning or having more time between when the next rabbi is hired and when she or he arrives – seem like vital issues. The more work that can be done to build a training that offers a distinctly and authentically Jewish view of the interim rabbi's role, the more inviting and natural this will feel to rabbis taking the course.

At the same time, the CCAR should be exploring alternate models of interim training that might help the organization reach a larger audience or offer a more impactful

course. The Christian world is experimenting with different models of training. For instance:

> The Presbyterian Church (USA) has ten centers around the nation that offer two weeks of basic training and the opportunity for advanced continuing education. The National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors requires a 12-hour discernment event plus three additional phases of training, including two weeks of residential instruction and a 6 six-month field education project.[309]

These models may not translate well to the Jewish world, but they are worth exploring as alternatives to expand the movement's creative thinking in considering how best to provide training and ongoing support and professional education.

As the number of trained and experienced interim rabbis continues to grow, the CCAR may also want to consider ways to continue to raise the quality of the field. It may consider some sort of certification process, either for interim rabbis in general or for those with particular specialties like crisis management. This would help congregations to identify qualified candidates and to understand what needs interim rabbis might help to fill. The organization might also create a professional association for interim rabbis. According to Alban, at least six mainline Christian denominations have professional associations for interim ministers.[310] The move by the CCAR to offer monthly coaching calls is a step in this direction. As the group grows, the CCAR may want to adopt the IMN's model of grouping interims into "learning communities of six to eight people coached by an IMN faculty member."[311] As explored in Chapter 5, this might move the field in the direction of offering ongoing supervision for interim rabbis.

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[309] Bendroth, "Rethinking Transitional Ministry," 26.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

Supporting Interims in this Lonely Work

Simultaneous with professionalizing the field, the CCAR should continue its work to try to support interim rabbis emotionally in their work, which can be lonely and isolating. The abovementioned learning communities are one way to do this, by creating a community of colleagues, even if it is a community that is digital, not geographical. Rabbi Steven Fox also mentioned that in the last 18 months, the CCAR has added a social worker to support CCAR members including interim rabbis with their own spiritual and emotional needs.[312] The fact that interim rabbis must move every 12-to-24 months and the fact that there are likely no cities that could supply enough work for one interim rabbi to have steady placements without moving (as many larger cities can do for Christian interims) have a significant impact on the longer-term sustainability for career interims. If the CCAR hopes to attract more career interims, it will need to think creatively about how to mitigate this challenge.

Helping Rabbis Prepare for Retirement

In the case of a rabbi's retirement, it may be true that the outgoing rabbi has at least as much influence on the entire transition process as the interim rabbi does, maybe more. Vanderbloemen and Bird remind us, "In the end, most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor."[313] A good departure is the last, and perhaps most lasting, gift that a rabbi can give a congregation. As Vanderbloemen and Bird advise clergy, "People will remember how you leave long after they forget what you did

[312] Steven Fox, in discussion with the author, December 21, 2016.
[313] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 1038.

while you were there."[314] This is, perhaps, especially true when the retiring rabbi is the founding rabbi of the synagogue (or has founder characteristics as explored in Chapter 3). If the URJ and the CCAR want to improve the state of congregational transitions, the best and most powerful point of intervention may not be the interim year, but rather a period that begins before the outgoing rabbi announces her or his retirement. If we could build a rabbi's capacity to give her or his congregation a good goodbye, we could have an outsized impact on rabbinic transitions. While not all rabbinic transitions are the result of retirement, there are enough that this is an important moment for intervention. Vanderbloemen and Bird relay the story of one successor minister who was asked what it was like to fill his predecessor's shoes. He replied, "He is a wise leader, and took his shoes with him."[315]

This is also a time of immense life-change for retiring rabbis. They are going to have to negotiate their own goodbyes. They are going to have to change their own modes of seeking purpose and fulfillment. They are also experiencing a loss and grief. Supporting rabbis to navigate this transition well is not only an opportunity to serve synagogues but also an opportunity to meet the needs of rabbis at this particularly fraught and powerful moment.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offers Next Steps workshops that provide the opportunity for executives considering leaving their organizations (for other jobs or retirement) to receive coaching and "peer networking in confidential and safe environments."[316] Perhaps a similar model of confidential support groups might give

[314] Ibid., Kindle Location 2618.
[315] Ibid., Kindle Location 1453.
[316] Adams, *Founder Transitions: Creating Good Endings and New Beginnings*, 12.

CCAR members the opportunity to discuss these big life changes and a place to receive support through all the decisions and steps of the departure process.

Long Term, Aspirational Goals

There are also a few areas of long-term goals for synagogues. These are not programs or improvements to existing procedures, but aspirational visions for a movement that takes transitions seriously as an opportunity to transform congregations.

Succession Planning

What would it look like to de-stigmatize succession planning in congregations? What would it look like to make loving and trust-filled conversations about the rabbi and the congregation's growth goals a regularly scheduled happening? Synagogue leaders would ask their rabbi how she or he hopes to grow and how the congregation can be supportive, and rabbis would engage with the congregation in continued conversations about the best staffing structure to achieve the congregation's mission. The synagogue would have plans in place in case of an emergency that left the rabbi temporarily or permanently unable to serve. Rabbis would arrive in new jobs already talking frankly about how long their tenure might be, not because they are not 100 percent committed to their current placement, but because they recognize the truth in the statement, "all rabbis are interim rabbis." Rabbis would plan events with a thought toward who would continue them after their tenure. They would train younger rabbis either to move up into positions of greater leadership in the congregation or to move on and serve other congregations.

This is a highly aspirational vision. Congregations are scared to ask their rabbi when she or he will be ready to think about retirement because they do not want to show dishonor or lack of trust. Rabbis are anxious to speak about their own goals because they

do not want to appear to be looking for the exit hatch. As a result, when these conversations come up, they happen too late, which has an impact on the community as a whole. There is not enough time to plan. The congregation must change drivers while driving at 60 miles per hour, risking an accident, instead of planning a pit-stop where it can refuel, refresh, and move forward thoughtfully. Vanderbloemen and Bird tell the story of Brady Boyd, who said, even in his first few years as the new pastor of his church, "If you don't plan your succession, you are planning to fail."[317]

By contrast, this is how the Reform Movement talks about succession planning:

> Try to plan as early as possible: This is, of course, easier to do when the outgoing clergy member gives ample notice (more than one year is ideal), allowing congregational leaders to start planning for the transition far in advance. When talking to your rabbi about retirement, be gentle but try to set a date well in advance. Taking this emotional conversation off of the table will assist in a smooth transition in the final years.[318]

While this statement is a good description of where the movement is now, it is clear from the comparison between it and the model of succession planning outlined by thinkers like Vanderbloemen and Bird that there is yet a long way to go as we seek to build congregations ready to navigate this difficult moment of change with honor and foresight. God and Moses did not wait until the eve of Moses's death to prepare for the transition to Joshua. Rather, they made a plan that took years to execute but resulted in a smooth and transformative transition.

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[317] Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works,* Kindle Location 668.
[318] Offel, "8 Tips for Managing Your Congregation's Rabbinic Transition."

Executive Transition Management

One step in this direction might be to use the tools of Executive Transition Management (ETM) as discussed in Chapter 3. ETM is a three-stage process: prepare, pivot, and thrive. What would it mean for these three steps to frame the conversations around transitions in congregations? What would it mean for congregations to begin their transition process by asking, "What work will we need to do to thrive as we come out of this process? What will we need to prepare, and how will we need to pivot?" Most congregations, in my experience, do not choose to see the transition as a pivot but rather as continuation or maybe as a new beginning. Yet every change in a congregation's senior clergy-person is a pivot. It brings a new identity that the new rabbi and the congregation will co-create together. It brings a new vision that the congregation and the rabbi will set and execute together. What would it mean for congregations to recognize this pivot and embrace it so that they might move through it and thrive? Tools such as ETM might offer new models for organizational change that could help teach congregations to embrace and utilize change to bring them closer to fulfilling their mission in the world.

Closing Thoughts

There is still much to be learned about rabbinic transitions and about the interim rabbi's effect on them. The interim rabbi program of the Reform Movement is now about a decade old. Its impacts are only now starting to be felt, and they will only grow as more rabbis are trained in this work and more congregations begin to seek them out. But what we know unequivocally is this: Change is hard and the cost of failure is high. While no systematic study of congregational transitions exists – meaning that there is no firm data on the exact impact of interim rabbis – it seems clear that a change specialist is well poised

to help a congregation in need. Not all interim rabbis are as effective as the idealized descriptions found in these pages. But if they take their work seriously, and if they have been trained in the skills of change management and congregational support, their positive impact will be felt.

The instinct in a transition is to rush to fill a gap as quickly as possible. Congregants will want to feed their need to avoid insecurity and uncertainty by hiring quickly and reactively. But, they will not be setting themselves up for success. If we can convince them to slow down and take their time, they will likely find there are benefits to resisting their very natural urges. An interim period, whether one year or two, is a breath of fresh air. It is a space for calm and contemplation. It is a space to be thoughtful and strategic. It is a space to dream bold and visionary dreams. Rav Abraham Kook famously said, "חדש ישן יתחדש והחדש יתקדש" – make the old new, and make the new sacred. This is the work of rabbinic transitions – to refresh and to sanctify. Together, we must encourage synagogue leaders to seek bold new ways to re-invigorate that which has come before and to do sacred work. Interim rabbis are one method to do just that.

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