# ENGAGING THE FRAIL ELDERLY IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

REBECCA KAMIL

SENIOR RABBINIC THESIS

HUC JIR 2016

ADVISOR/READER: RABBI JULIE SCHWARTZ

ADVISOR SIGNATURE _____

STUDENT SIGNATURE _____

ADMINISTRATION SIGNATURE _____

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which both congregations and individual rabbis can engage with and best serve the frail elderly. Through original research and information from experts in the field of geriatrics, social work, psychology, psychiatry and Jewish life, this thesis discusses how the elderly are currently served by congregations and rabbis and in what ways this service can be improved. It also discusses the Jewish obligation to take care of and provide for the elderly, and includes a survey of biblical and rabbinic texts that delve into this topic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my father, Dr. Edward Ratner, who inspired in me a love of the elderly and a strong desire to see that this population is served and remembered. To my mother, who taught me to always see the good in people, and to stand up for what is right. To my husband, Rabbi Ricky Kamil, who encouraged me and provided me with incredible support. To my advisor, Rabbi Julie Schwartz, who guided me through the writing process and reminded me never to give up on what really matters. Special thanks to Rabbi Richard Address and Rabbi Dayle Friedman, who encouraged me, welcomed me into the "family" of rabbis working with the elderly, and provided me with insight and valuable assistance throughout this entire process.

# INTRODUCTION

Shortly after I began working as the hospice chaplain at Cedar Village Retirement Community in Cincinnati, Ohio, I met Jerry.*[1] Jerry has Parkinson's disease, which confines him to a wheelchair and impacts his speech and movements. He came to the first Shabbat service that I led at the facility, and I noticed before we began that he did not have a prayer book. Thinking I was helping him because perhaps he could not reach the shelf with the books on it, I brought him one. He looked up at me. "I don't need one," he said, smiling. All of it is in here," and he pointed to his heart. Services began, and as we moved through the Shabbat morning liturgy I kept looking over at Jerry. He sat in his chair, eyes closed, singing every word in a deep baritone voice that rang out through the small sanctuary. After services, I told him how beautiful his voice was, how I was so impressed that he knew the entire liturgy by heart. (He would impress me further during the High Holidays when he offered

[1] Name has been changed

to chant the book of Jonah-without looking at the prayer book). I led services again the following week, and noticed that Jerry was not the only one who did not need a prayer book. Most of the congregation knew the prayers by heart, could recite the familiar *Veahafta* and *Amidah* without any visual cues. As time went on, I learned more about the residents of Cedar Village, and how so many of them not only could recite Shabbat morning liturgy without a prayer book, but also were incredibly involved in their Jewish communities…before they came to Cedar Village. One resident told me she was involved in starting the scholarship that helped Sally Priesand get into rabbinical school. Another said she played the organ at her synagogue in Cincinnati every Shabbat for 40 years. And another told me that he helped found his synagogue community, which started in the basement of a church. These stories inspired me to continue asking about the residents' Jewish engagement, both before they entered the facility and after they arrived. I found a stark contrast between the two periods in their lives. Before they arrived at Cedar Village, many were pillars of their communities and prominent members of their synagogues. And once they entered into the nursing home, it all went away. This is not to say that Jewish life is not vibrant and active at Cedar Village—it is. There are two chaplains not including myself who lead weekly Shabbat services and provide Jewish programming to residents. The food is kosher, and holidays are always celebrated. However, the connection to the outside, beyond the double doors of the nursing home, is lost for many of these residents. Not just the homes they once lived in or the family or friends who they do not see as often, but the synagogues and the Jewish life they once led. This phenomenon is not unique, and through extensive

research and interviews with prominent rabbis who work with congregations to cater to the elderly, I have found that many congregations do not place engaging the elderly high on their priority list. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the continually dwindling numbers in membership for congregations. The Pew Study of 2013 reported record decline in young people coming to and staying in congregations. They are the future, and will help sustain these communities. So naturally congregations need to respond, they must find a way of keeping their membership up and finding new people to fill the pews. However, this comes at a cost. Combined with a general societal trend of undervaluing the elderly, synagogues are inclined to see the importance of engaging 20's and 30's and young families instead of the octogenarians. Atul Guwande, author of *Being Mortal: What Matters in the End,* describes the way in which modern American society has shifted in its views on the elderly.

> "In the past, surviving into old age was uncommon, and those who did survive a special purpose as guardians of tradition, knowledge and history. They tended to maintain their status and authority as heads of the household until death. In many societies, elders not only commanded respect and obedience but also led sacred rites and wielded political power….but age no longer has the value of rarity. As for the exclusive hold that elders once had on knowledge and wisdom, that, too, has eroded, thanks to technologies of communication-starting with writing itself and extending to the Internet and beyond."[i]

Now that people are living longer, the elderly are not held in higher regard or given special status. Instead they are seen as antiquated and not useful. Additionally, the relationship between the younger generation and the older has changed over time. Guwande writes,

> "Traditionally, surviving parents provided a source of much-needed stability, advice, and economic protection for young families seeking pathways to security. And because landowners also tended to hold on to their property until death, the child who sacrificed everything to care for the parents could expect to inherit the whole homestead, or at least a larger portion than a child who moved away. But once parents were living markedly longer lives, tension emerged. For young people, the traditional family system became less a source of security than a struggle for control-over property, finances, and even the most basic decisions about how they could live."[ii]

As a result, the elderly are not integrated into community life as much as they could be. This thesis will examine the factors that prevent congregations from full engaging the elderly, and how the relationship between synagogues and this population can be improved. Chapter 1 gives an overview of biblical and rabbinic understandings of aging and the elderly. Chapter 2 presents the largest barriers for synagogues in their engagement of the elderly, and Chapters 3 and 4 are practical guides for both individual rabbis and congregations for welcoming the elderly into the congregation in a meaningful way.

# CHAPTER 1

"And these are the days of Abraham's life in which he lived, a hundred and threescore and fifteen years."[iii]

In the Hebrew Bible, the life span of our ancestors far surpasses what would be considered average today. Abraham lives to be 175, Sarah is 127 when she dies, and Isaac is 180. Old age is largely considered a blessing, and is associated with wisdom and knowledge. However, this is not solely the case. There are plenty of passages both in the Bible and in later rabbinic texts that describe aging as painful, difficult, and full of strife. This balance of blessing and curse could be seen to mirror aging in our own modern world. At times old age is wonderful, it leads to retirement and leisure, as well as the ability to see grandchildren and great grandchildren. Other times, old age leads to loss, to

an inability to continue life the way it once was, to an increase in physical and psychological problems, and an awareness of the fragility of the time that remains. The Center for Disease Control reports that in 1960 the average life span for males and females was 69.7. In 2007, the average life span was 77.9.[iv] Because people are living longer, which means the elderly population is rising, and how we treat and care for them matters even more. This chapter will examine how the Jewish textual tradition views aging and the elderly, what obligations family and community have toward the aged, and what this means for our modern lives and the ways in which we interact with and treat this unique population.

## Physical and Psychological Aspects of Aging

The Hebrew Bible presents myriad opinions about what aging is and how it is defined. In some parts, as described by Daveen Litwin in *Honoring the Hoary Head: Jewish Ritual and Liturgical Responses to Aging*, the "experiencing of aging is a sequence of the seasons or stages of life. Each phase is marked by physical and psychological changes as maturity sets in and old age approaches. Biblical life stages indicate common transitions: childhood, youth, maturity (young married) and elderly."[v] However, later rabbinic literature presents a different picture. Yehudah ben Teima divides life into fourteen phases, from age 5 to 100. Litwin translates, "what begins with some pedagogical instruction-five years is the age of learning for Scripture, ten years for Mishnah,

concludes with sixty as the age for zikna (old age), seventy the age for savya (white hair), eighty as the age of g'vurah (strong old age), ninety as the age of lashuach (bent over) and one hundred is as if the person is dead and has passed away from the world."[vi] In addition to these categorical divisions of a person's life span, there are terms that are used in the Hebrew Bible that specifically denote old age. Two of these are 'vadoni zaken' (old) and 'zaken ba b'yamim' (advanced in years). Both of these are used by Sarah to describe her husband Abraham. Bereshit Rabbah expounds on these terms, delineating between the two.

> "Rabbi Yehudah, son of Rabbi Shimon asks if there is a difference between these two descriptions: being old and being advanced in years. According to Rabbi Yehudah, Abraham prayed for a sign of old age because people could not distinguish between him and Isaac. No one knew whom to honor, for both the father and son looked alike. According to this midrash, it was the physical signs of aging that were needed to help each individual clarify his identity in public and to enable the elder to receive the respect he deserved."[vii]

These physical manifestations of age continue to be discussed in Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer. He lays out seven wonders that were part of the creation of the world, but that have not been seen since. The third of these wonders relates to the elderly. "Until the time of Abraham no one possessed white hair as a sign of old age. White hair is, therefore, the archetypal symbol of age."[viii]

In fact, the term "savya" (white or grey hair) is used in the Hebrew Bible as analogous to the word zaken (old).[ix] The Hebrew Bible denotes white hair, a loss of eyesight, a loss of ability to hear, a loss of sexual potency, a loss of strength, and a loss of taste as all relating to getting older. There are also descriptions of the loss of beauty, an inability to sleep, increased difficulty in controlling bodily fluids, hoarse voices, and stomach

problems. For women, menopause and the inability to continue to conceive denotes old age as well. Litwin writes, "a key transition for the woman comes at menopause, when she loses the ability to give birth to children. When a woman could no longer give birth, or a man was thought too old to produce a child for his wife, that person was considered old." [x] Advancing in age and becoming elderly is often associated with loss in the biblical text. Individuals who enter this stage of life lose primary physical functions, and in some cases this leads to shame or embarrassment. "There is evidence that the pressures of society and loss of self esteem prompted people to try to cover up or change the signs of aging. Grey hair, for example, the symbol of dignity, nonetheless could be unwelcome. According to testimony in the Talmud Bavli, old men would dye their beards so they would look young."[xi]

In addition to physical changes associated with aging, biblical text highlights psychological changes as well. In Genesis, Abraham and Sarah suffer from depression as they move beyond their childbearing years, and feel as though they will never have children. Eli the priest experiences shock after hearing about the capture of the Ark of the Covenant, and subsequently falls back and breaks his neck.[xii] Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging,* expounds, "Even Moses, whose physical strength is undiminished at the age of one hundred and twenty, is described in one midrash as having lost his capacity to teach, or even follow the logic of a presentation given by his disciple, Joshua. This loss of power is so devastating that Moses, who has consistently and passionately pleaded to live, now begs God to let him die."[xiii] It is clear that it is not only the body that suffers with old age, but the soul as well.

Despite this, there are positive attributes associated with aging that are found in the text. There are strongly worded proscriptions to honor mother and father and the elders of the community, with the reward for doing so a place in the world to come. There are Midrashim that describe old age as a reward for living a moral and ethical life, for those who have faithfully gone to the house of study and who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of righteousness and the learning of Torah.[xiv]

Just as it is today, old aging and the process of aging in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic texts is seen as both a gift and a hardship. It is a combination of reward for a life well lived, and grief and longing for what once was.

## Perceptions of the Elderly

Once we have determined who is old and who falls into the category of elderly, we must examine how this population is perceived by the larger society.

In some cases, the elderly are seen as advisors. They serve in rabbinic courts or as aides to the various biblical kings. Their advice is looked upon with respect and authority, as it is assumed they possessed great wisdom and understanding. Walter Jacob, author of *Aging and the Aged in Jewish Law*, describes the ways in which the elderly were perceived in the biblical period. "Sometimes [they] filled honorific positions, and at other times they may have shared in the royal power."[xv] Even elders not holding such status are considered leaders in their respective clans and communities. They bestow blessings and determine the inheritances for future generations. In Genesis, Abraham finds a wife

for his son Isaac, ensuring that there will be a child to carry on the family lineage. Isaac in turn blesses his son Jacob with prosperity and good fortune. Litwin comments, "even after aging parents turn over most of their work to children, their offspring continue to seek and cherish their advice."[xvi] These individuals gain their wisdom from study of Torah, and a continuous pursuit of knowledge. Litwin points out that the Book of Proverbs describes how wisdom and old age are interconnected. "Like longevity, according to Proverbs, wisdom is earned through respect for God: 'Fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For with me (wisdom), your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life."[xvii] It can be assumed that these advisors were in good health, despite their age. They were of sound mind and trusted as being mentally astute. However, the approach of the biblical and rabbinic texts towards elderly who are disabled or feeble is quite different. This population is not included amongst those with special status in the community, namely, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. As Friedman points out, "Old age is not considered a disability, and the aged are not seen as needy."[xviii] Much of this may be due to the fact that the elderly were taken care of in their old age by their families. It was expected that the sons or daughters would care for their frail parents, and in the biblical world there were often multiple generations living together. The stranger, widow and orphan have nobody to care for him or her, no family structure to rely upon, so they are given unique status and must be tended to by the larger community. Even in the Talmud, old age is not defined as debilitating. Friedman says, "The term elder is used to designate community leaders who occupied positions of power. This designation conveys maturity, not necessarily old age. A long life was considered a blessing, the disabilities, pains, and

problems of old age were ignored."[xix] This does not mean that the community is not obligated to care for the elderly, but rather than this population falls into a different category: one that is deserving of respect and reverence and not just assistance and support.

## Obligations Towards Parents

Just as it is important to understand the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic texts' definitions of aging and the communal perception of this population, it is also necessary to examine the communal and familial responsibilities towards the aged. From a familial level, the Torah provides us with the commandment "Honor your father and your mother." The commandment to do so comes with reward. J Gordon Harris, author of *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, examines this commandment. "Two motivational clauses reinforce the honoring of parents. They stress the quality of life attained therein and remind everyone that the command comes directly from God of Israel: 'Honor your mother and your father so that it may go well with you, that your days may be long, as the Lord your God commanded you, upon the land which the Lord your God is giving

you.'"[xx] A longer and happier life is promised to the children if they honor and respect their parents.

The Talmud, as described by Gerald J. Blidstein in his book *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Filial Responsibility in Jewish Law and Ethics*, takes great pains to describe why sons and daughters must fulfill the commandment of honoring their parents, and why parents are deserving of this accolade. "In Talmudic tradition parents share with God the labor of producing life and the grandeur and honor of that achievement. The rabbis called parents partners with God in the creation of man."[xxi]

It is clear that this is an important mitzvah for children to uphold, but it is not clear how this should be done. What actions must a child perform to show they honor and respect their parents? How can children adequately express that they carry these values? The rabbis of the Talmud seek to answer these questions. In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Kiddushin 31b-32a, the rabbis, write "respect is observed by not standing in the parent's usual place, nor sitting where they would normally sit, by not contracting the parent's words, and by not interfering in a parent's dispute with others."[xxii] For the Talmudic rabbis, one way of showing deference and honor to parents is by giving them autonomy, by not taking over their place or usurping their authority. The parents are still in charge, they are still able to have the seat of honor and the final words in a discussion. The Shulchan Aruch says that, "a child should not even support the parent's position in an argument with others."[xxiii] Another Talmudic view is that "honoring one's parents was observed by helping them to eat and drink, clothing and covering them, and helping them go in and out."[xxiv] Rabbi Judah argues the child should pay for the things needed to sustain their parent, such as shelter, clothing and food. Rabbi Nathan ben Oshaiah

believes that the parent should be the one financing their care. Other rabbis struggle with this difference of opinion. They rule that the parent should in fact pay, but what does that say about the commandment to honor one's father and mother? The rabbis decide that while the parents must financially provide for their inevitable care needs, the children could honor their parents "through time given up from gainful pursuits."[xxv] It may seem on the surface that a Talmudic understanding of honor involving a child helping their parent with basic tasks of eating and drinking is a far cry from ensuring their ultimate autonomy, as is outlined earlier in the argument. However, these two opinions are not actually contradictory. By adding that the parent must pay for their own food and shelter and clothing, but that they child should help and provide assistance in performing the tasks associated with these necessities, they are upholding the belief that independence is crucial. Rabbi Richard Address, in his book *That You May Live Long: Caring for Our Aging Parents, Caring for Ourselves,* writes that, "Money makes independence possible. Independence fosters a sense of self worth, and self worth makes life meaningful. For a child to say to a greatly diminished parent 'I'll pay,' when the parent still has personal assets is murderous. It kills the parental self."[xxvi] Instead of money, the rabbis believe that children should provide their time, their energy, and their support. Interestingly, there is no commandment to love one's parents. The Torah tells us to love our neighbors and God, but says nothing about how we must feel about our parents, only how we must act towards them. Address posits, "Perhaps acknowledging the complexity of parent-child relationships, the Torah commands us only to respectfully lend assistance to our parents."[xxvii] It is not acceptable to provide this support grudgingly, despite the challenges in the relationship between a parent and a child. In Tractate Kiddushin 31a-b,

it is written "Abimi the son of Rabbi Abahu taught: a son may feed his father pheasant, and yet be driven from the world to come; he may chain him to the millstone and merit the world to come thereby."[xxviii] Rashi comments on this passage, and says that it is not enough to provide material abundance if one does it with resentment.

> "Though he might appear to be giving his parent treatment fit for a king, the person who feeds his father pheasant is punished because he displays a mean spirit as he feeds him. On the other hand, being unable to wrest a parent from scarcity is not a sin. The son who chains his father to the millstone makes his father work in order to help sustain the family. According to Rashi, he is rewarded because he honors him by speaking good and comforting words, imposing the labor gently by showing him that they could not sustain themselves without his labor."[xxix]

First and foremost, it is important to maintain the dignity of parents, to make sure that they feel they have autonomy and independence. Even if one provides for his or her parents and gives them everything they might need, if he or she is doing it with bad intentions or ill will, then it is not fulfilling the commandment. However, Maimonides suggests that there might be limits for how much a child must care for their parent. Address explains, "[He] teaches that one spouse must not impose his or her parents on the other if being with them is conflictual or unpleasant. One is still obligated to remain in contact with and care for one's parents, but to do so in a way that will not compromise shalom bayit, domestic peace."[xxx] Maimonides also suggests that there might be a time when a child can no longer care for their parent. "If one's father or mother should become mentally disordered, he should try to treat them as their mental state demands, until they are pitied by God. But if he finds he cannot endure the situation because of their extreme madness, let him leave and go away, deputing others to care for them properly."[xxxi] It is possible that Maimonides is referring to parents who were suffering

from what in modern medical parlance we call dementia. When a child feels that the parents needs go beyond their limits, then they are able to say that they can no longer provide care. However, they are not free to simply abandon their parent, they must instead find others who are able to care for their ailing parent. Just as a child is able to set limits about how much they can handle in the care of their parent, Maimonides writes that parents must make sure that they do not place undue burden on their children. "A parent must not look for what a child has failed to do; the parent who acknowledges and appreciates the child's care will be the richer for it."[xxxii] The parent child relationship is sacred, and as parents age, their children have an obligation to care for them. The discourse about what that means begins with the Hebrew Bible and the fifth commandment, and spans centuries as the rabbis of the Talmud and later sages and scholars expound upon the importance of children honoring their mother and father. However, individuals do not have an obligation only to care for their parents, for their immediate family. The Jewish textual tradition discusses at length the responsibility individuals have to care for the general elderly population.

## Obligations Towards General Elderly Population of the Community

The Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and later rabbinic literature make it clear that the community has an obligation to care for the elderly. The Holiness Code, found in Leviticus, has rules for how we treat the aging. "You shall rise before the aged and show deference in the

presence of the old, you shall for your God, I am the Eternal."[xxxiii] The later rabbis try to better define what deference (in Hebrew, hiddur) meant. Friedman writes, "The rabbis mandated an attitude of reverence towards all people over a certain age (generally sixty or seventy).

'What is the deference demanded by the Torah? That you not stand in his (the older person's) place, nor contradict his words, but behave toward him with reverence and fear.'"[xxxiv] Similar to how children must treat their parents, community members have to ensure the independence of the elderly. Coddling, talking down to, or otherwise usurping the authority of an elderly person is not showing honor or reverence. It may seem that taking over daily tasks and general duties for an elderly person is an act of care, but to truly respect a member of this population the rabbis feel maintaining autonomy is of the utmost importance. In the Hebrew Bible, elderly are deserving of support regardless of their status in the community. They do not have to be righteous, or of a particular class in order to be deserving of respect.

> "Included among those meriting this deferential treatment are elderly non Jews and Jews who are neither learned nor particularly righteous, since they are assumed to have acquired understanding of God's ways in the world through life experience. Even if they have forgotten their learning through dementia or other frailty, we still owe them respect. 'Take care to honor the old man who has forgotten his learning for reasons beyond his control, as it is said, both the second unbroken tablets and the broken tablets of the law were kept in the ark of the sanctuary."[xxxv]

However, Maimonides presents a different perspective. In his Mishneh Torah, he writes that the mitzvah of honoring the elderly was related to the mitzvah of studying Torah, making it specifically proscribed to scholars. Harris explains, "Contrary to the clear intent of the Torah, which mandates respect for all elderly persons, Maimonides restricts the display of deference to a learned elite, most of whom would have already qualified

for such attention by reason of their age."[xxxvi] This discrepancy between the Torah and the Mishneh Torah may be due to the desire of the later rabbis to be recognized for their status, thereby making sure that only the learned and elite received respect and reverence.[xxxvii] The Book of Wisdom, also known as the Wisdom of Solomon, says that the honor bestowed upon the elderly has to be earned. "For honorable old age comes not so by a length of time, nor is it measured by number of years, but understanding is gray hairs unto people and an untarnished life is ripe old age."[xxxviii] If one does evil in their life, despite their advanced age, they will not be worthy of honor and respect. Whether it is automatically bestowed, specific to scholars and sages, or has to be earned, old age and wisdom seem to go hand in hand in Jewish tradition. The elderly serve as leaders of communities and advisors to officials. "The people of Israel are enjoined, 'ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they shall instruct you.'"[xxxix] The opinion of the elderly is held in the highest regard, even if it may seem controversial. The rabbis believe that the elderly could guide a community and provide valuable insight, based on their years of experience and wisdom. "Elders' perspectives are exemplified as particularly valuable for the guidance of the community. So inexorable is the link between old age and wisdom that the sage Bar Kappara exclaims, 'If wisdom is not here, can old age be here?'"[xl] How does one show deference and respect to the elderly? In many ways, it is similar to how children are instructed to treat their parents: ensuring autonomy and independence are in tact while still assisting and providing care. Additionally, it has to be clear to the elderly person that they are respected, that they are valued. "We must not merely comport ourselves so as to give honor to the older person, we must do this in such a way that the elder will know that the honor is meant

specifically for him or her. For example, we must rise in the presence of older people but we should wait to do so until the older person is within four cubits so that he or she will recognize that this honor is being accorded to him or her."[xli] Respect for the elderly is crucial, but it also must be presented outwardly.

The Hebrew Bible also discusses the consequences for not respecting one's elders. Physical abuse of the elderly is strongly prohibited in the Torah and later rabbinic texts. The Holiness code dictates that abuse of parents is a capital offense.[xlii] Similarly, in Leviticus 19:14, the well known passage "You shall not curse the deaf or before the blind put something that might cause them to stumble. Rather you must fear your God; I am the Lord," could be interpreted to relate to the elderly. "The elderly often suffer impairment of hearing or sight. This commandment is particularly relevant for their handicaps."[xliii] Disrespect for the elderly is tantamount to disrespect for God, something that the Torah severely punishes. By creating statutes that draw parallels between treating the elderly with respect and honoring God, the Torah creates a stable environment for those entering old age.

## Modern Implications

It is clear that the Hebrew Bible and Jewish textual tradition believe strongly in the need to respect and honor the elderly. This population is often revered as advisors or scholars, and serves distinguished roles in the community. Children are commanded to care for their aging parents, and suffer harsh consequences if they fail to do so. How can we take these biblical and rabbinic lessons and apply them to today? What does it mean to honor

and respect our elderly in the society in which we live now, thousands of years after these texts were written? For liberal Jews, there is not the same fear of God smiting those who choose to abandon their parents or who do not respect the elderly. And the elderly today are more often than not seen as unable to fulfill important roles in the community. They do not serve as advisors; they are not consulted about issues that plague the younger generations. Instead, the attitude seems to be that they cannot relate to the modern world, that their time has come and gone to be useful and productive members of society. In light of this, how do we express our honor and reverence for the elderly? How do we create a community that understands not just how important these individuals were, but how important they still are?

One place to start is to redefine what it means to age. Our society fears getting older, we are constantly trying to look young and maintain a youthful image. Harris writes, "Growing old brings few dividends. Society remains ambivalent about aging. Becoming old is no longer prized and unique. A common impression of the aging process portrays it as fading into oblivion and dying. Little wonder that people want to live to a ripe old age but no one wants to grow old."[xliv] It is difficult for many to accept the realities of aging, but if we can remove the stigma surrounding this process, perhaps we can better appreciate those who are already in it. Rabbi William Cutter, author of *Midrash and Medicine,* discusses what society can do to curb the negative perception of the aging. "We must develop a compelling vision of later life, one that does not assume a trajectory of decline after 50 but recognizes time as a potential change, growth and new learning, a time when our courage gives us hope."[xlv] Perhaps if we care for the aging differently, then the process of getting older will be celebrated rather than feared.

This can be accomplished if we use the biblical and rabbinic tradition wisely, if we take to heart the teachings found in our text. First, we have to acknowledge the physical and psychological aspects of aging, taking cues from our rabbis and sages. Second, we must redefine what we feel as individuals and as a society are our obligations to the elderly—both those in our family and those in our larger community. We have to create a place for the elderly in our modern world: we no longer have the same societal structure as our biblical ancestors, so we must find new ways of bringing them in and letting them know we want to them to stay.

By acknowledging that aging is challenging, that the process of getting older for many represents a real loss, we can better attend to the needs of the elderly. If we view what they are dealing with through an honest lens, then we may be able to better serve them. Returning to the Mishnaic understanding of the stages of aging, we see that one does not lose everything all at once. It is a gradual process, starting with zikna (old age) and ending with lashuach (bent over). People age slowly, and we have to acknowledge the differences between these stages. A person who is still capable of driving a car and attending social functions has very different needs than someone who is in a nursing home and has no orientation to place or time. Despite this, each stage is still a loss. It still may require grieving. Faculties that used to be fully functional for individuals may slip away, whether it's as small as having more pain when standing or as large as being unable to eat or bathe without assistance. If we recognize the challenges that each stage may bring to the elderly in our community, we can find ways of helping overcome them. This leads to the next way we can serve the elderly: creating new roles for them that fit within our modern society. As Harris writes,

> "Role transitions within Western culture need redefining and reflection. When aging is associated with idleness and privation, tensions intensify between the elderly and the young. The young may treat the retired as scapegoats when government spending and taxes soar to finance their retirement plan. Elderly citizens feel threatened when rising health care costs tax their financial resources at the same time their pensions are limited. When older employees work full time, some criticize them for occupying positions by younger employees or the unemployed. Intergenerational struggles result."[xlvi]

One of the most important places where these new roles can be established, and the primary subject of this thesis, is in the synagogue. Rabbis and lay leaders have an obligation to make sure their older members are being cared for and cared about. Harris discusses ways in which this can be done. "Instead of merely developing programs to keep the elderly occupied, synagogues need to utilize the experience and wisdom of these leaders in realistic ways. Organizations can develop programs of enrichment and provide opportunities for travel and education. Religious groups should seek the advice of and employ in reasonable ways their retired leaders. Neither life nor leadership ends at sixty five."[xlvii] For those members of the community who are not able to come to the physical synagogue space, or who do not possess the faculties to actively participate in programming, rabbis can provide pastoral care and visitation. By acknowledging the value of the elderly individual, by making it clear that they matter and are worth the time of the rabbi, those who are aged will feel a renewed sense of value and purpose. "Self esteem for the elderly would increase considerably when all recognize the privilege of getting older…honored elders would not be excluded from life or social support…aging adults would not be identified with the old person of sin, death, and immorality. Preparing messages speaking of old age as a blessing of God would do much to increase the self esteem of the elderly."[xlviii] They may not be serving on courts or as advisors to royalty anymore, but they can serve as incredible testaments to the past and to the

potential of the future. Rabbis can use the Jewish tradition to help guide them in their treatment of the elderly. "Aging is never without its problems. Biblical theology, however, can ease some of its mystery. Biblical teaching can promote realistic yet positive expectations to alleviate some burdens of ageism. Through insights about the blessings of God, it relieves ambivalence about growing old."[xlix] Rabbis have a responsibility to provide spiritual support to the elderly, to those who can no longer sit in the pews of the sanctuary or come to programming. As Rabbi Cutter writes, "One does not "retire" from the covenant, which provides a fundamental framework of obligation between God and the Jewish people. Torah study, prayer, family, celebration of Shabbat and holidays, performance of mitzvoth…these are the elements that frame a Jewish life morally and spiritually at any age."[l] It is possible to help the elderly live a meaningful Jewish life. Spiritual life does not have to decline along with physical or mental capacities. Just as children and larger communities have responsibilities and obligations to take care of the elderly, so too do rabbis in congregations.

Chapter 2 of this thesis will focus on defining some of the challenges that exist for rabbis in terms of engaging the elderly in their congregations and why many synagogues do not have effective programming for the elderly.

# CHAPTER 2

"I played the organ at my synagogue for 40 years before I moved to the nursing home. Now, the rabbi almost never comes to see me." –Mary

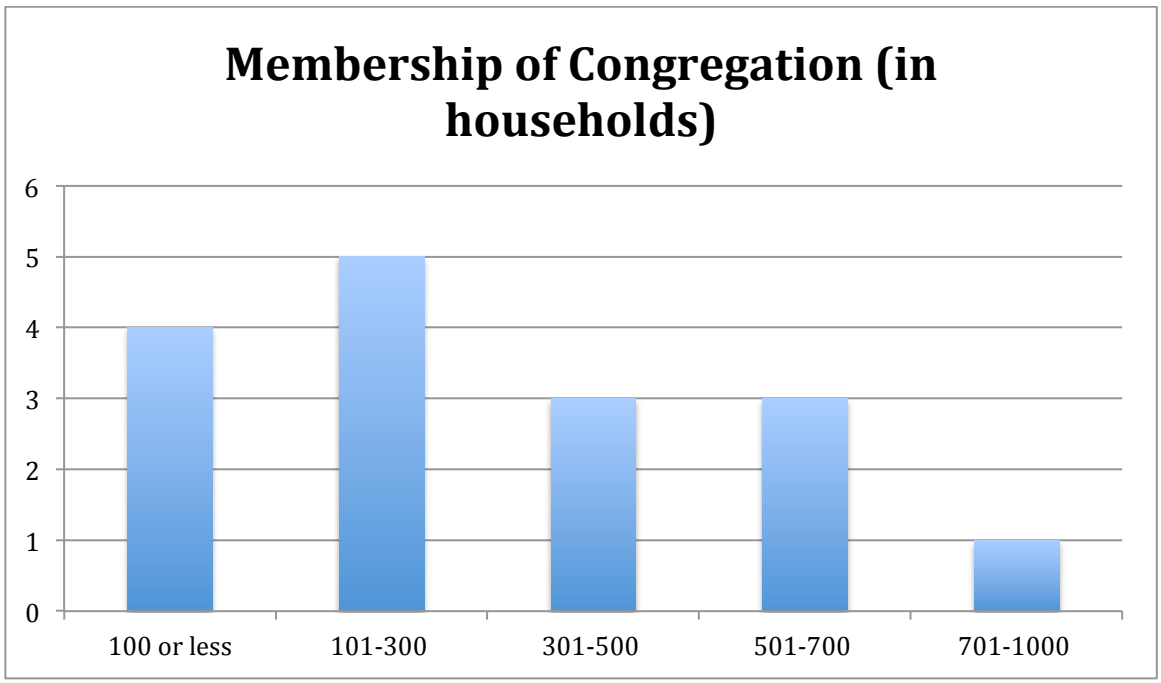
Rabbis have demanding jobs, and often are pulled in several directions at once. They must balance the needs of their congregants while making sure that their community and their synagogue building can be sustained by financial commitment and by membership. Rabbis feel an obligation to their congregants, trying to create programming and worship that is inclusive and engaging. However, rabbis struggle to engage one particular population at their synagogues: the frail elderly. Chapter 1 examined the Jewish textual tradition that proscribes the obligation to provide and care for the elderly, and this chapter will discuss what the elderly need from a rabbi and synagogue, and the barriers that rabbis and congregations face in providing it.

## Description of Data

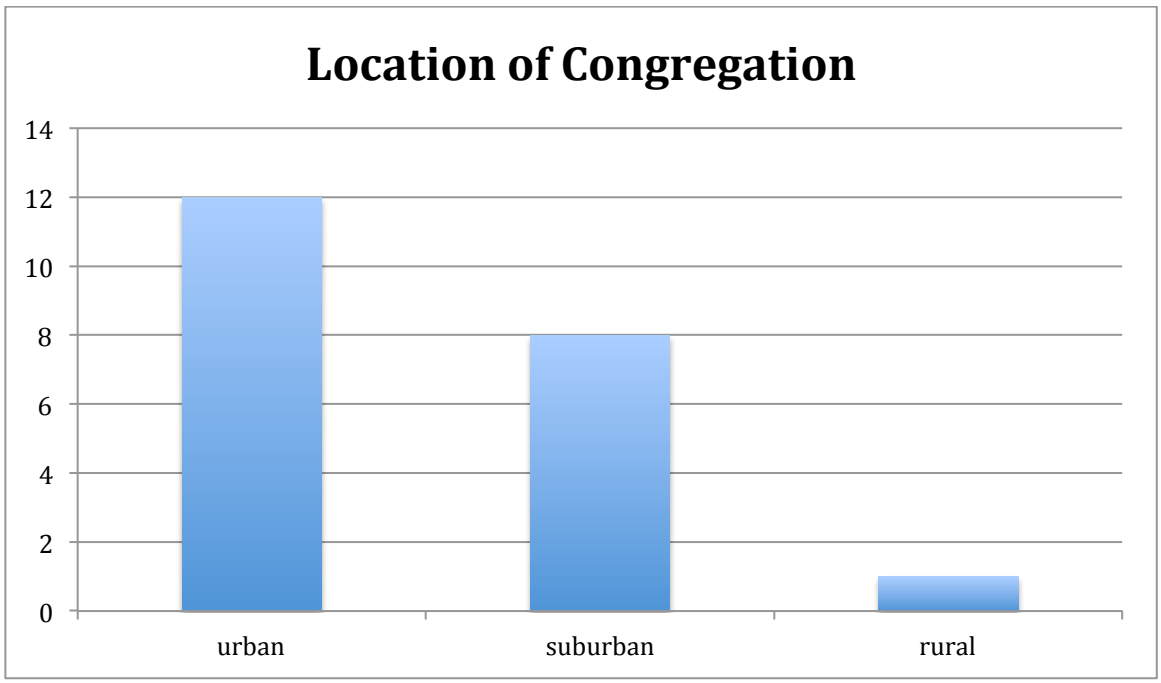
Some of the data presented in this and subsequent chapters come from a survey I conducted of congregations in North America. The survey was posted on two listservs, HUCALUM and RavKav, and 21 rabbis responded. The questions asked include:

1. What programs does your synagogue have that are geared specifically towards the elderly?
2. Do members maintain their relationship and membership with the synagogue when they move to a long term care facility?
3. Who visits members in long-term care facilities or who are homebound?
4. Why do you choose to interact with this population in the ways that you do?
5. Is there anything more that you wish your congregation was doing to engage this population? If so, what?
6. How many households does your congregation have?
7. What is the average age of your congregation?
8. Are you in an urban or suburban setting?
9. How many full time professional staff do you have? (Including clergy)

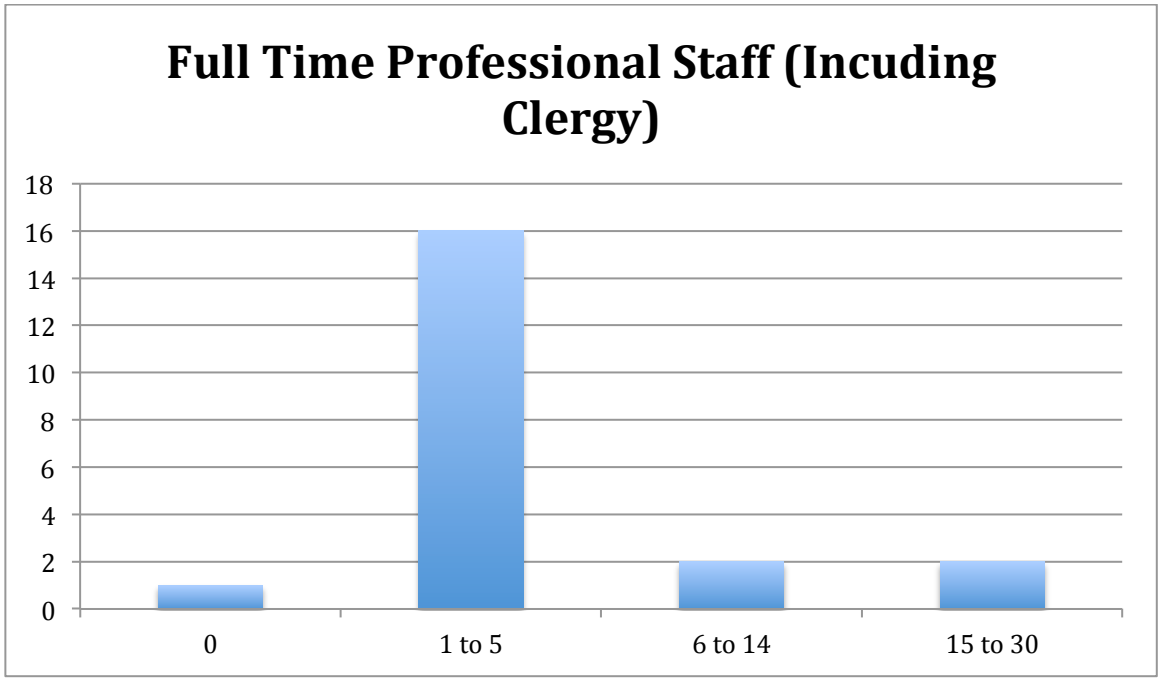
The synagogue clergy who responded came from a variety of settings: urban, suburban and rural communities, large and small memberships, and congregations with wide age ranges. The graphs below indicate the demographics of the respondents.




*Note: the data does not add up to 21 because two respondents did not answer the question.




*Note: the data does not add up to 21 because one respondent did not answer the question.



## Focus on Youth and 20's/30's

There is an increasing demand in today's synagogue culture to provide programming and engagement for youth and young adults. Rabbis and others in synagogue leadership feel that if millenials are not part of the community, then Judaism will eventually die out. The Pew Study of 2013 reported that "compared with older Jews, younger Jews are more likely to have no denominational attachment."[li] Additionally, the survey found that being Jewish was very important to larger numbers of older Jews. It is valid synagogues are concerned about youth engagement, and that they feel that younger Jews are not interested in joining a synagogue or being part of a structured community. However, this generation is the future of the Jewish people, and without their involvement a synagogue cannot sustain itself indefinitely. However, it is not as easy as putting out the call for young people to join synagogues, or offering a discounted rate for those who may not be able to afford typical synagogue dues. This generation is not as interested in organized religion as their parents and grandparents, and the walls of a synagogue offer less to them than an independent minyan or social group that is made up largely of their peers. Synagogues and rabbis have to work even harder to engage this population, and so much of their time and energy is devoted to coming up with programs and worship experiences that cater to the young. On many synagogue websites, there is something written about a young adults program, or a 20's and

30's event. Rabbis right out of rabbinical school who fall into this age demographic are sought out by congregations because they can help to run and implement these types of initiatives. It is not only a concern with sustainability that causes congregations to focus so heavily on the under 40 set. There is a systemic fear of aging in our society, which prevents us from facing this inevitable part of life head on. In his book, *Aging to Saging*, author Zalman Schachter Shalomi writes

> "Our culture worships youth for its unbounded potential and despises old age as a terminal illness. Because we believe that growing older means physical and mental diminishment, many of us shuffle into an inactive, withdrawn, and depressed old age. Now add to these diminishments the grim prospect of being warehoused in a nursing home as part of a useless and redundant population. No wonder we wake up at 2 am, toss on our bed, pass the bedroom and ask ourselves, "What have I got to look forward to?" We have very real nightmares about aging. We fear becoming institutionalized in nursing homes, losing our autonomy and becoming emotional and financial burdens on our loved ones." [lii]

Rabbi Richard Address, author of many books and articles about engaging the elderly in Jewish life, said in an interview that there is "a progression in Jewish communities away from a substantive dealing with the emotional and spiritual issues of aging. "[liii] We focus so heavily on children and young people in our synagogues, and the young and agile in our larger society, that it is no wonder we forget the aging.

## Gaps in Training

Rabbinical schools do train their students in pastoral care and counseling. Courses are offered to help students understands the complexities of engaging in theological conversation with hospital patients, elderly, and families who are facing difficult

decisions. This training is imperative, as it allows students to graduate from seminary with the ability to care both emotionally and religiously for those they serve. Below is a list of courses offered at four rabbinical schools, including the three campuses of the Hebrew Union College. *Course offerings reflect courses currently offered at these institutions for the 2015-2016 school year. Past courses that are no longer taught are not included.

| **Reconstructionist Rabbinical College** | **Jewish Theological Seminary** | **Hebrew Union College-Cincinnati** | **Hebrew Union College-New York** | **Hebrew Union College-Los Angeles** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jewish Biomedical Ethics | Basics of Pastoral Care and Counseling | Human Relations | Life Cycle Counseling | Human Development |
| Jewish Sexual and Family Ethics | Out of the Depths: Jewish Healing and the Spiritual Caregiver | Clinical Pastoral Education | Theology of Grief | Clinical Pastoral Education |
| End of Life: Pastoral, Ethical and Theological Supervision | Pastoral Theology | Jewish Biomedical Ethics | The Psalms in the Key of Healing | Health and Jewish Values |
| Chaplaincy | Behavior Health Issues for Clergy | Advanced Clinical Pastoral Education | Human Lifecycle: Adult Growth and Development into Older Age | Ethics and Empathy (independent study) |
| Pastoral Counseling | Living with Chaos: Pastoral Care for Children, | | Pastoral Care and Counseling | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Adolescents and Their Families in Times of Crisis | | | |
| Advanced Pastoral Counseling | | | Clinical Pastoral Education | |
| | | | Resilience of the Soul | |

It is clear from this sample of course offerings that these seminaries prepare their students for counseling and pastoral care. However, there are not courses or guidance from rabbinical schools on how to engage the elderly within the congregation. Rabbinical students learn how to counsel but not how to include the elderly in programming or communal relationships. It is of course vital that rabbis have tools to provide spiritual and pastoral care to the elderly, but that is not enough. Rabbis also need to have the tools to engage this population within the community.

These tools can be taught in seminary, but there has to be a culture within the school that emphasizes the importance to do so.

Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in her article *Embracing Aging,* writes about the deficits in rabbinical training in this particular area. "Most rabbis in training aspire to work with the young (children or young families)…it is natural, therefore, that student rabbis will equip them for congregational and other posts that serve the young. Thus there is little opportunity, and even less reinforcement, for preparing

rabbinical students to serve those in midlife and beyond."[liv] This desire to focus on the young is a systemic one, and Friedman believes that the stereotypes and prejudices students and faculty in seminary hold create a stigma against working with the elderly. She writes,

> "Seminary students and faculty are unintentionally and unconsciously affect by ageism. It is not surprising that prejudices and stereotypes affecting the society at large are also pervasive among those who seek to lead as rabbis, ministers, and priests. Just as elders are devalued, so too is professional work with elders. Elders are neither seen as chic nor as a source of accomplishment and satisfaction. Students imagine that elders' lives are sad, and that working with them would be sad and frustrating."[lv]

Additionally, once students become rabbis, they must enter into their congregational jobs with the perspective that the elderly are a population worthy of engaging.

The problems that occur at this stage are two fold: congregations engage the mobile and still active elderly, but not the frail elderly, and congregational rabbis do not create an environment where the elderly would feel welcome.

Congregations often have programming and groups for the baby boomer generation, those in their 60's or 70's, but nothing for the frail elderly. In the survey, 11 out of the 21 respondents said that they either do not have any programs for the elderly or only have programs focused on those who are in their 60's or 70's.

These events, if they happen, occur at the synagogue and would only be accessible to those who are mobile. There is a new initiative, through the Jewish Institute for Spirituality, called Wise Aging, which aims to create peer groups for individuals in their 60's-80's focusing on mindfulness, text study, contemplative learning, and journaling. These types of programs are important, as individuals who are entering

into old age often deal with issues of grief and loss, and having a supportive group to help process these changes can be extremely valuable. However, synagogues and rabbis often believe that having these programs means they are engaging the elderly, when in fact they are missing a core part of this population. They are limiting their scope to those who are mobile and cognitively able to participate in intellectual programming, and missing those who are in nursing homes or homebound, and who may not have the mental capacity to engage in learning of this type. Among the responses to the survey question "what programs does your synagogue have that are specifically geared toward the elderly?" answers included a havurah for individuals in their 60's or 70's, lunch and learns, Monday events at the Temple, and daytime classes offered at the synagogue. All of these programs and initiatives are important and valuable for the congregation, but it is not enough. There is an entire section of the elderly population that is not being served by congregational rabbis.

Additionally, rabbis in congregations do not often create an environment that meets the needs of the elderly. Later in this chapter issues of accessibility will be discussed, but rabbis also struggle with connecting to the elderly in a theological sense. Donald Koepke, in his article *Looking Backward: Demonstrated Clergy Training Needs,* writes that sermons are often not directed towards the aging population. "Who is modeling the experience of older adulthood as a hermeneutical principle in writing sermons? When was the last time that the experience of dementia or care giving was used to illustrate the spiritual need to be vulnerable, open, and receptive to what God is doing in the world? Who advocates for the

inclusion of local programming that is intentionally targeted to address older adult spiritual needs?"[lvi] Rabbis are not addressing these issues in a public sense, which creates an environment unsuited to the needs of the elderly. If an elderly person comes to services, assuming they are mobile and able to do so, and never feels as though the rabbi is speaking to *them,* as if their life concerns are not being addressed or validated, it would seem likely they would begin to feel disconnected from the community.

However, even if a congregational rabbi did want to engage the elderly in a meaningful way, even if they did see the importance of the individuals in nursing homes and the value they can bring to a congregational community, a lack of resources can prove to be an incredible hurdle.

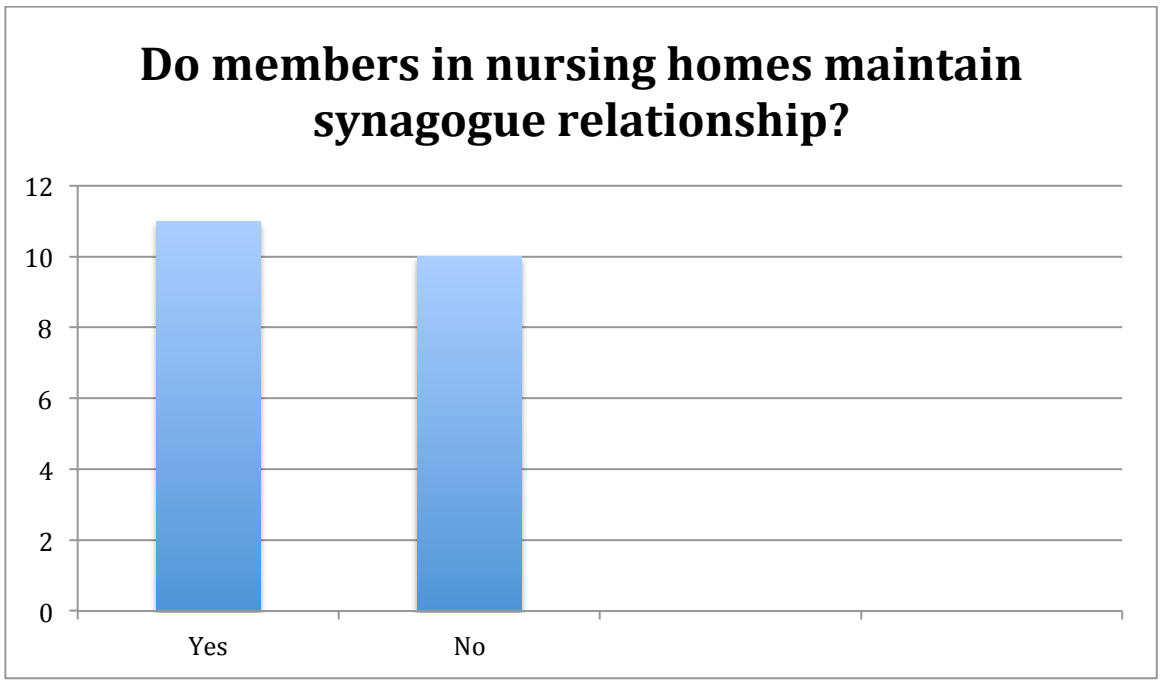
**Lack of Resources**

Synagogues often lack resources, both monetary and personnel, to create programs for their elderly members. One of the largest issues is transportation. If individuals cannot physically be at the synagogue, getting busses or vans to take them from the nursing home to the building can be costly and often logistically challenging. However, as Rabbi Dayle Friedman writes in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging,* transportation is of the utmost importance. "Transportation is critical, both for elders living in the community and for those in long term care facilities who are not independently able to get to the programs and services. If getting the person to the activity is not possible, it might be possible to bring it to him or her using the

telephone, the Internet, a radio or television broadcast."[lvii]Once the elderly individual is at the synagogue, accessibility becomes problematic. Friedman writes "the physical accessibility of the space in which activities are held is vitally important. Not only must people in wheelchairs or walkers be able to get in the door, they also need to be able to sit in a space that is part of any group." [lviii] The lack of accessibility or transportation leads to elderly individuals becoming isolated from the congregation. In the book *Enabling the Elderly: Religious Institutions within the Community Service System,* decrease in attendance at worship services is a common repercussion from a lack of accessibility.

> "Some of the very old are too frail to attend services, while others do not have transportation nor cannot climb the steps of the church or the synagogue. There are some older people who say they can't afford to go to services, and still others feel that younger members have pushed them aside. Although attendance at formal worship decreases among the very old, personal religious practices, such as reading the Bible, prayer, and watching religious programs on television are often maintained or even increased." [lix]

The spiritual and theological needs of the frail elderly will be discussed later in this chapter, but in order for the elderly to maintain a connection to faith, it helps to have a connection to a synagogue community once they have entered into a long - term care facility. The graph below shows the results of the survey question, "do members maintain their relationship and membership with the synagogue when they move to a long term care facility?"




As shown, 10 of the 21 congregations surveyed do have members in nursing homes that maintain a relationship with the synagogue. While this survey represents a small sample, the data is indicative of a larger problem of a lack of resources or initiative in the synagogue to maintain those relationships.

One respondent to the survey wrote that she/he wished his/her synagogue had more "organized efforts to reach out to this segment of our congregation," and another said that she/he wished their community had "intergenerational programs to engage the elderly with younger folk." The lack of programming for one respondent is due to the lack of interest by the synagogue community. "I have raised the idea of pairing seniors with religious school students. Nothing more than a religious school mishloach manot project was initiated where students deliver packages to seniors. I think there is an opportunity to do more of a relationship building thing." Whether it is due to lack of resources or lack of interest, congregations struggle to create and implement programming for the elderly who

are not actively involved in the synagogue. Even if congregations do want to engage the elderly and have the resources to do so, they sometimes are unsure of ways to reach out to or find the elderly to participate in these types of programs. This correlates to the problem of gaps in training within seminary programs. If rabbinical students were taught ways to engage the elderly in meaningful programming or relationships within the synagogue community, as well as were taught what an elderly individual may need or want from a synagogue beyond just a pastoral care encounter, then they would enter into the congregational world prepared to fully engage this population.

### Lack of Ability to Connect

Congregational rabbis may put notices in the monthly bulletins or send out letters saying that individuals who are in the hospital or nursing home should contact the synagogue for visits. They may try to reach out to these facilities, but due to HIPPA regulations, they can't obtain the information. This is an ongoing challenge for congregations, and one respondent from the survey said that he/she wished his/her congregation were better at reaching out to this population. "I wish we were better at collecting information of who is where and their mental condition. Every year we call many elderly individuals because their membership was not renewed, and transfer their membership to "compassionate," (aka free) because they are not mentally able to renew it themselves. I wish we asked congregants more about where their parents were." Another respondent wrote that the community wanted "more organized efforts to reach out to this segment of our congregation." Another

said "I wish we had more people visiting/calling/connecting with this population." It is clear that many rabbis *do* want to connect with the elderly community, those who are in nursing homes or home bound and unable to participate regularly in synagogue events, but they face barriers of not knowing where or how to reach them.

Just as it is important to understand the barriers that rabbis in congregations face in serving the elderly, it is equally as crucial to understand what the elderly need and want from their rabbis and their communities. The frail elderly experience incredible loss and challenges as they age, and many of them who are in nursing homes find these heightened as they move away from their homes and communities and into a facility. Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging,* writes that the aging process can force individuals to redefine their identity. "The aging process challenges a person's sense of who she is, who she has been and who she will yet be. The accumulation of losses, of the little deaths of the aging process, moves us to redefine ourselves. As people grow older they are inevitably stripped of roles and capacities. What are our lives about if the people with whom we share a history are no longer alive?" Individuals in nursing homes or who are home bound become isolated; they no longer have the same connections or community. Perhaps their spouse has died and their family lives far away, or does not visit. Perhaps after they moved in to the nursing home they had to reduce an entire lifetime of memories and possessions into a few suitcases. Rabbis can help ease the pain of this process. Elderly need companionship from their rabbis and

community, they need prayer and spirituality, they need to feel they are part of a community, and they need comfort and support for them and their families.

## Companionship

Old age can be isolating, and often elders are disconnected from the ones they love and the places or things they know. Having companionship during these years is crucial for mental and physical well being. Studies have shown that when elders interact with young people, especially children, the effects on their overall health are significant. A report by Generations United, a national membership organization focused on engaging youth and the elderly in intergenerational programming, said the benefits of this type of programming and interaction go both ways: the elderly report increased satisfaction, decreased isolation and loneliness, and increased physical health. The youth report a greater appreciation for the elderly, a sense of purpose, and a renewed commitment to community service. [lx]According to a study done at the University of California, Irvine, entitled "Loneliness, Lack of Emotional Support, Lack of Companionship and the Likelihood of Having a Heart Condition in an Elderly Sample," being socially isolated can have serious adverse affects on health. "Social isolation has been linked to a variety of adverse health outcomes, including cardiovascular disease." [lxi]Additionally, "lonely people may lack the motivation to engage in adequate self care, may lack regular contact with significant others who could monitor their health behaviors and exert pressure to adopt a healthier lifestyle…. Lonely individuals have been found to exhibit high negative affectivity and depression, and low positive affectivity."[lxii] Visits from clergy or

caring committee members help these individuals feel less alone, and as though they matter. Providing companionship, along with efforts to engage these individuals in prayer and spirituality can have a profound impact on the physical health of the elderly.

## Prayer and Spirituality

Despite being unable to attend synagogue services or events, the elderly do have a need and desire for spirituality and prayer. In the article, *Prayer as Therapy,* published as part of the Journal of Gereontological Social Work, author Leah Abramowitz writes that as individuals get older, the importance of religion in their lives increases. "It is apparent that religious practices become more determinate with age. As people grow older there is a more uniform recognition of the importance of religion in their lives—a realization that most likely accompanies their increased awareness of physical decline and eventual demise." (prayer as therapy, 70) Elderly individuals enjoy prayer, and find that it gives them structure and meaning. Abramowitz reports on a study done at a Jerusalem nursing home, where prayer was part of a daily schedule. "The elderly themselves come to expect

the prayer session as it is a regular part of the program and helps give structure to their disoriented lives. They seem to enjoy the rituality and habit ingrained activity. The togetherness of group prayer is another advantage, as well as the familiarity of the material."[lxiii]

Even if an individual is non-verbal, and cannot say or chant the prayers, the familiar liturgy is comforting. Abramovitz writes

> "For the non verbal there are ritualized gestures that can be made together with everyone; to those who can no longer communicate there are words to recite which obviously have meaning. Old memories are stimulated and the group can easily be lead into a discussion surrounding them or matters of ritual. Finally, the religious contribution is not to be ignored. The activity is seen as meaningful if not reverent and certainly as suitable to an adult of advanced years. As an emotional rather than rational subject, prayer is particularly fitting for the special needs of an aging population with mental deterioration." [lxiv]

In addition, prayer and spirituality can provide positive effects on mental and physical health. Evans writes,

> "Religious involvement, such as attending religious functions and prayer, is negatively associated with suicide."[lxv]Additionally, "religion provides comfort and hope for many persons with chronic mental illness and helps improve functioning, reduce isolation, and facilitate healing. Hope provides the sense of a meaningful future despite obstacles. It is a dynamic attribute of spiritual well being that has an important positive influence on mental health. Hope enables a person to cope with and live through otherwise difficult and traumatic events will still maintaining a positive outlook."[lxvi]

Prayer and spiritual discussions with the elderly are so crucial for maintaining both physical and mental health. The elderly have a wealth of experience to share, and they have much to offer spiritual or religious discussions. Rabbi Dayle Friedman in *Jewish Visions for Aging* says, "Aging can present wonderful opportunities to study

Torah and to grow in knowledge. The wisdom gained from experience makes the encounter with sacred text a rich dialogue. The pastoral caregiver can help bring this wealth to aging persons by teaching in a way that begins with what is familiar and extends toward the unknown." [lxvii]Rabbis have a unique opportunity to provide not only spiritual support, but have a positive affect on a person's overall wellbeing.

## Members of a Community

Due to the isolating nature of being in a nursing home or homebound, elderly need to feel they are still a part of their community. Evans writes, "when people leave their homes there are other familiar parts of the home landscape that are lost: neighbors, stores, places to walk—all small but real parts of the self. Some, perhaps many, people who enter long term care facilities are leaving a church or a synagogue where they have worshipped and prayed for many years." [lxviii]The elderly need to feel connected to the synagogue, both through the community and the physical space. In addition, the elderly need to feel useful, as though they are still valuable. As people age, it is easy to feel as though life does not have the same meaning as it once did, for people to mourn the loss of the activities they once participated in. Koepke writes about William Thomas, MD, who founded the "Eden Alternative," a

movement dedicated to redefining how nursing homes and long term care centers run. Thomas believes that everyone exists in a combination of doing and being. However, these two states cannot exist together, and one of them must be dominant over the other.

> "Every person is either a Being-Doing, or a Doing-Being person. In childhood, humans are Being-Doing oriented. Children play, use their imaginations, and live life differently from adults. Then, at the age of adolescence, their orientation switches from Being-Doing to Doing-Being. The securing of wealth or status becomes high priority, that is until senescence arrives, somewhere between age 45 and 55. At that time a person returns to a Being-Doing orientation, not as a child, but as an adult who has experienced and learned much. Thomas notes that instead of reveling in being present in the moment, elders yearn for days when they were able to do because nobody tells them its okay to just be." [lxix]

There are ways to make elderly feel as though they have purpose and are still participating in the Jewish community. Friedman suggests the "Mitzvah Model," which allows the elderly to continue to fulfill mitzvot, albeit adapted ones. She writes, "The Mitzvah Model suggests that aging individuals have much to contribute to their community and their world. Fostering a life of meaning empowers older people to make that contribution. Giving help to others helps transform difficulty and suffering. "It is crucial that the elderly still feel as though they are important members of their community, even if they are no longer able to as easily attend services or events at the synagogue.

Rabbis and congregations face many challenges in a changing Jewish world. They must keep up with a population that is moving away from organized religion and manage to maintain old values while still being innovative. However, it is clear that the elderly need emotional and spiritual support from the community and from

their rabbis, and it is also clear how little they are receiving. The next two chapters of this thesis will examine how individual rabbis and congregations can work to better engage this important population.

## CHAPTER 3

"Not only are Jews (as others) living longer, they are living in an age of meaning-seeking, with the interest and wherewithal to make a life of meaning an ultimately and reasonably obtainable objective for any point in their lives." –Stephen M. Cohen[lxx]

Rabbis in congregations play an integral role in engaging and serving the elderly population in their communities. They provide spiritual support, guidance, and reassurance when elders face challenges in the aging process. They allow for elders to revitalize or reconnect with their faith, despite not being able to be physically present at the synagogue for worship. Rabbis give caregivers of the elderly much needed respite and care, both emotionally and spiritually. This chapter will examine

the ways in which congregational rabbis can best work with the elderly, including those with dementia. It will also discuss the role of the rabbi in supporting the caregivers and families of the elderly, as well as reporting and preventing elder abuse and neglect.

## Spiritual Challenges Facing the Elderly

As we have seen in previous chapters, the elderly desire a connection to faith and tradition. They are, as Rabbi Richard Address writes in his book *Seekers of Meaning, m'vakshim*: seekers, searchers. They may have lost their faith along their path of aging, or are trying to maintain it in a time when access to their community is increasingly limited. The elderly need spiritual support just as much, if not more, than anyone else in the Jewish community. Aging is often difficult and scary, and while rabbis cannot stop the process, they can make it clear to their congregants that they are not alone.

The elderly face specific challenges that are unique to their population. Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging*, discusses several of these larger obstacles. She writes,

> "Aging is a time of opportunity and also of great spiritual challenge. Despite the heterogeneous nature of the elderly, it is possible to outline three basic

> challenges that the aging person is likely to encounter on his or her journey from midlife to life's end: finding meaning, confronting empty and burdensome time, and counteracting disconnection and disjunction." [lxxi]

Friedman defines the challenge of "finding meaning" as the elderly person struggling to cope with the losses they have accumulated over the years, the deaths of loved ones and friends and of their independence and health. It is sometimes difficult for elders to feel that their life has meaning or purpose when so much of whom they were and what they did is gone. They no longer are able to contribute to their communities in the same ways, or even participate in them at all. Rabbis can help with this challenge by contradicting the notion that the elders are no longer valuable members of the Jewish community. By taking time to visit with and invite the elderly to participate in Jewish life, rabbis can provide the meaning that the elderly seek. Friedman writes,

> "To accompany older adults on their journeys through change, loss, frailty and limits, we have to notice and seize opportunities to reach out to them. They will probably not ask for our care or support because they are not aware of their needs, they are embarrassed to call attention to themselves, or they hesitate to burden us. We need to be present for them, sometimes grasping opportunities for pastoral interventions at unlikely moments, whether it is in conversation at the synagogue Oneg Shabbat or while making rounds at tables in the nursing home dining room." [lxxii]

These small gestures can make an immense difference in the lives of the elderly. "Confronting empty and burdensome time" is defined by Friedman as the difficulty of managing a different schedule and pace of life. Elders are not able to be as active as they age, as their health declines and puts limits on what they can and cannot do. Those in nursing homes or long-term care facilities consistently encounter hours where there is nothing to do, nobody to talk to, and nothing to stimulate the mind or

soul. Nursing homes struggle to create meaningful activities for their residents when there is such a range of ability among those living there. Rabbis can help the elderly with this challenge by visiting them at home or in their facility, or inviting the elders to activities or programs at the synagogue (with transportation provided). Rabbis must work to make their interactions with the elderly meaningful, and Friedman suggests that by recognizing the wisdom and knowledge of the elderly, rabbis can have positive relationships with their aging congregants. Rabbis may not be able to visit their elderly congregants every week or even every month, but this means the time they do spend with this population matters even more. Elders look forward to visits from their rabbis and cherish those moments, so by creating strong relationships, the elders and the rabbi can make the most of the time spent together.

Issues of "dissociation and disjunction" are similar to the challenge of finding meaning. Elders no longer are able to feel connected to their communities because of lack of access, and so they become isolated. Rabbis must take this seriously and recognize the pain that this can cause an elderly person. The elders may become angry or resentful and feel that their community has abandoned them, and rabbis must work to repair this. Friedman says, "our pastoral task is to listen attentively and to reflect on the triumphs, losses and conflicts that are of primary concern for the person at this stage of his or her journey." [lxxiii] By validating the elder's concerns and making them feel valuable, rabbis can connect on a deeper level with this part of their community.

Prayer can be an effective way for rabbis to provide support to the elderly. In the article *Teach Us to Pray: Pastoral Care of the New Nursing Home Resident,* author Henry Simmons writes that elders in long term care facilities often feel disconnected from their faith or from God, and that by providing a connection to prayer, clergy can lift up the elders and give them the spiritual support they may need. Simmons writes that there can sometimes be reticence on the part of the clergy to engage in prayer with elders in a nursing home. He says,

> "It is well to note that [clergy] may approach this task with a sense of unease, even of dread. Why? Because to come close to the inner life of another in such a moment of darkness puts to the test the depth of our own life prayer, puts the test of the adequacy of our meditation on the mysteries of faith, puts the test whether our own psyche and souls are refined by fire, puts the test the quality of our own inner lives." [lxxiv]

Additionally, clergy may not be aware that personal prayer is important to the elderly. In a survey conducted for the article, Simmons found that the nursing home residents "unanimously said that what helped them move through impact and recoil to reorganization and adaptation was personal prayer. The [clergy], on the other hand, thought that the need was communal worship, for collective activities."[lxxv] Simmons describes ways in which the clergy member can use prayer with the resident of a nursing home. He says that the clergy must recognize the value of personal prayer for the resident, in addition to communal worship. Personal and private supplication can be incredibly meaningful for an elderly person, especially if they are not able to physically come to worship services. It is also important for the clergy to understand the needs of the resident when it comes to prayer. He notes,

> "People will say that they have prayed personal prayer, but in some measure this prayer has been supported by familiar people and familiar places. Let us

> note again that the places where the resident prayed are no longer there and the self who prayed is no longer the same self. The resident cannot go home again, physically or spiritually. There is a sense of uprootedness that needs to be articulated forthrightly. Only when it is named is it fair to add that it is possible to begin again to pray in this new old age." [lxxvi]

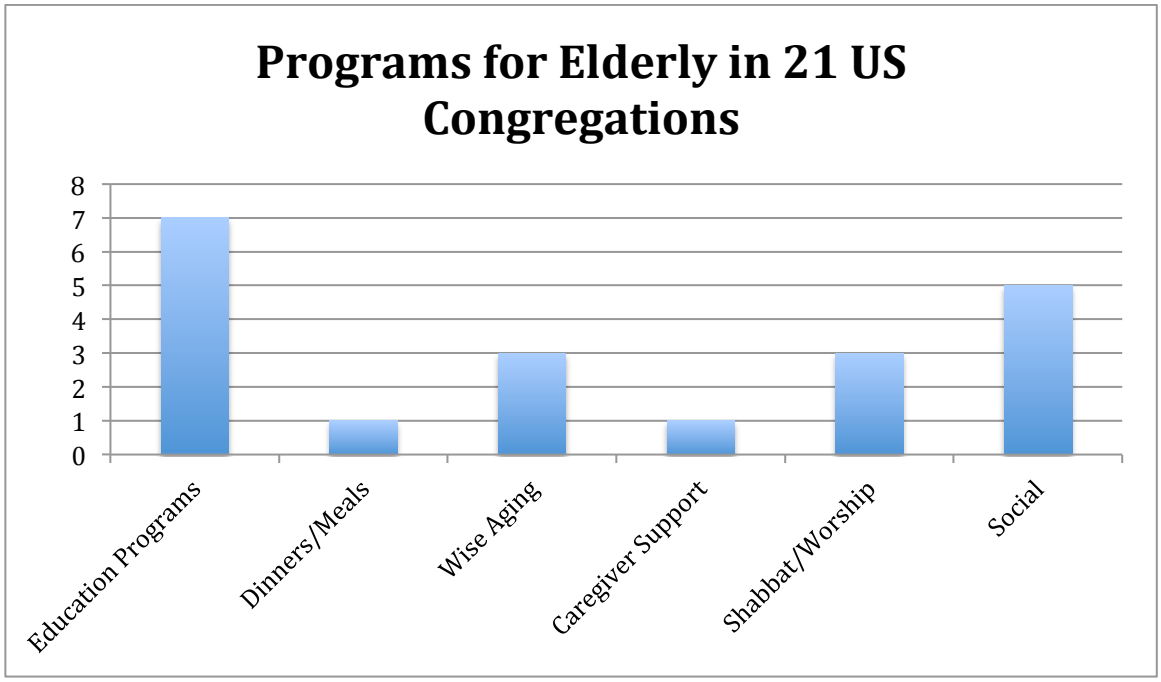
Elders in nursing homes do not necessarily require the same types of prayer guidance as those involved in the congregation. They may need to start again, to begin with the basic understanding of what prayer is and how it can be used in their current state, one that is so different than anything they have previously experienced. They may know how to pray communally in the pews of a synagogue sanctuary, but to pray alone or with a clergy member could be more difficult to grasp. The elder may also feel angry with God, or disappointed in the role God has played in their lives. Simmons writes that it is imperative that clergy know this, and that while anger with God can sometimes seem taboo in religious discussions, it also is quite possibly the place where the elders find themselves in their spiritual relationship with a Higher Power. [lxxvii]

Prayer is one avenue for clergy to interact positively with the elderly, and to create important connections. There are also roles that the elderly can play in the community, and these should be nourished and cultivated by clergy.

## Integrating the Elderly

The number of elderly in the Jewish community is continually rising, and synagogues have started to adapt to this changing demographic. A 2014 Tablet

Magazine article discusses the ways in which synagogues and Jewish communities have shifted their focus to include programming and accommodations for the elderly. "As Jewish America gets older, synagogues have begun to adapt to serve their older members and attract new ones. The creation of age specific social groups, senior themed educational initiatives, and innovations to make both Jewish ritual and synagogues themselves more accessible for an older set constitute some of the widening efforts to retain and attract an older demographic."[lxxviii] In the survey conducted of 21 congregations across the United States, the responses to the question "what programs does your synagogue have that are geared specifically towards the elderly?" affirmed this shift in perspective.




As can be seen from the graph, 20 of the 21 synagogues that responded the survey have some type of programming specifically for the elderly. Educational programs and adult education sessions are the most popular among this surveyed group,

followed by social events and then Shabbat services and worship activities. Three synagogues have started to incorporate the Wise Aging program into their programming.

Dayle Friedman, in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging* talks about the various roles that the elderly can play in synagogue life. She says that elders can be learners and teachers of Torah, can be teachers and mentors, and a resource for teens and young adults. All of these roles must be cultivated and assisted by the clergy or synagogue community, but once they are in place both the elderly and the congregation benefit greatly.

Friedman believes that in order for the elderly to fulfill the role of learner and teacher of Torah, the synagogue and clergy must create an educational atmosphere conducive to having elderly participants. She writes, "We need to employ a respectful and effective educational approach in engaging older adult learners. While research suggests that the older learners are indeed able to extend their knowledge and continue to grow intellectually, they do it best when teaching touches and exploits what they already know." [lxxix] Friedman says that transportation is a major issue that must be identified and solved in order for the elderly to participate in adult education activities. If they cannot physically be at the adult learning session, then it is impossible for them to engage or feel a part of the experience. Accessibility is another factor that must be taken into consideration when planning an event for the elderly. Making sure there is ample space for walkers or wheelchairs, that there is adequate lighting, and that if there is a lecture

or speaker that the person has a microphone are all seemingly small details that can make a huge difference for an elderly individual.

Elders can also be utilized as teachers and mentors. Friedman writes that the elderly population can be involved in teaching in the religious school. Visits to a nursing home or long-term care facility can be incorporated into B'nei Mitzvah or Confirmation class curricula. Along this same vein, elders can serve as a resource for teens and young adults. Friedman says that,

> "There is a natural alignment of the older and younger generations. Both feel at times disenfranchised and disrespected, and both eagerly wish to assert their agency and autonomy. Today's Jewish elders have lived through dilemmas about Jewish identity and have made choices about observance, affiliation, and marriage that have shaped their lives. Who better to join with young people in reflecting on these vital issues of Jewish continuity? Thus, linking adolescents with older partners at key moments, such as bar/bat mitzvah, may be powerful. Connecting old and young at other critical life passages, for example, providing foster grandparents as adjuncts to new parents, may also be valuable." [lxxx]

By integrating multigenerational programming into the synagogue culture, clergy can create incredible benefits not only for those involved directly in the programming or activities but for the synagogue as a whole. Creating a community that values all members, including the elderly, can lead to a more cohesive and supportive environment.

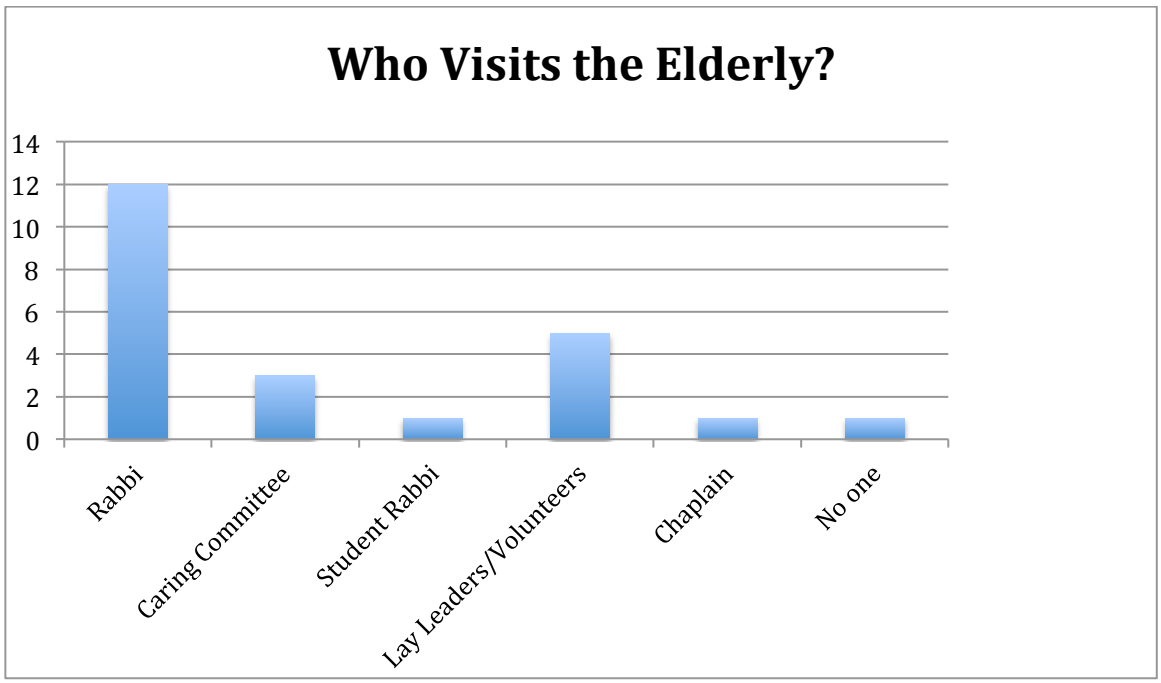
R.J. David Frego, in his article *Uniting the Generations with Music Programs,* explains the benefits of creating partnerships between young children and the elderly. He writes,

> "It is important for children to learn that warm, sensitive relationships can span generations and that aging is part of the total life cycle. Contact with the elderly makes sense out of history, reason out of relationships, and rhyme out of life. Learning about the elderly can give young people a more positive picture of the total life span, since the elderly frequently demonstrate values and ideals that have survived the test of time. Similarly, senior citizens often reap many benefits through contact with the young: the chance to interact with an enthusiastic and vibrant group of the community, an opportunity to share knowledge and life experiences, and a chance to feel worthwhile and productive." [lxxxi]

Clergy can serve as the bridge between the elderly and the younger generations. They are able to initiate programming and take steps to connect with both populations and bring them together. However, it is also important for clergy to connect with the elderly on an individual level, not just on a programmatic one. This can be difficult, as the elderly have needs that are unique to their generation, and do not necessarily transfer to other populations that a clergy member may work with.

## Interacting with the Elderly

The survey of US congregations showed that rabbis in congregations are trying their best to reach out to the elderly members of their community, specifically those in long-term care facilities or who are homebound. The various groups of people who visit this population of congregants is illustrated in the chart below:




Some communities reported that they have multiple groups engaging with the elderly, which accounts for the total responses adding up to over 21. However, overall the rabbi is doing the majority of the visits. As discussed in Chapter 2, clergy do receive training on how to work with and provide care to the elderly, but there are deficits. Additionally, visiting the elderly is not what takes up the majority of a rabbi's job, so the visits may not always be at the top of the priority list.

It is clear from information presented in chapters 1 and 2 *why* it is important for clergy to interact with the elderly, but what has not been discussed is *how* clergy should do so.

Clergy interactions with the elderly can be divided into three categories: the elderly in general, elderly in nursing homes, and elderly with Dementia. Each of these categories requires different skills and knowledge, and clergy must adapt depending on the situation. Rabbi Dayle Friedman presents a model for working with the

elderly in general. She uses the Hebrew acronym PaRDeS to illustrate the various aspects of interacting with this population.

"The first level of listening in the PaRDeS model is peshat, the level of fact. In our helping encounters with elders, we often start at peshat, and sometimes end there too. But often, when we are encountering another on the level of peshat, we are not quite meeting them." [lxxxii] Peshat includes basic conversation, biographical information and pleasantries. These are easy ways of starting a conversation, but it is also tempting to remain there. In interacting with the elderly, who have so much wisdom and do not often get to share it, we have to delve deeper in order to truly provide them with the spiritual support they need. "The second level of PaRDeS is remez. In the human text of our helping encounters, remez is the level of emotion. We are connecting on the level of remez when we are listening and responding to feelings. " [lxxxiii] This level allows the elderly individual to give us either verbal or non verbal cues as to how they are feeling emotionally. Doctors and nurses and other healthcare professionals focus on the physical condition of the elderly person, but we as clergy can go further into the emotional state. The elderly individual may have a challenging time explaining their feelings, as Friedman points out, because from a generational standpoint the discussion and divulgence of feelings and motions was not something that was acceptable when these individuals were growing up or forming their emotional identity. Friedman writes,

> "It can be particularly challenging to connect on the level of remez with elders, since many of them are unaccustomed to speaking about feelings, and they may even be conditioned to believe that it is inappropriate to do so. We need to respect an elder's boundaries, but also give permission and open the door to emotional sharing if that would be welcome."[lxxxiv]

If we are able to be present with the elderly individual and recognize their current emotional state, we can move further into creating a meaningful conversation and encounter. The third level of PaRDeS is derash, and Friedman calls this "the level of meaning." She says that this level requires us to "investigate what meaning elders are making of their experiences." [lxxxv] Derash necessitates the clergy member to see the elder as an individual, recognizing that they have unique characteristics and perspective. The fourth level of PaRDeS is sod, which Friedman writes is most connected to the soul. The sod is the recognition of God's presence in the experience we have with the elderly person. Friedman says, "When we are listening for God's still small voice we are open to sod. That voice may come in the electrical charge of a profound soul connection or in our intuitive sense that we are being guided in the interaction by the Merciful One. While we can't will sod, we can practice spiritual reflection and strengthen our facilities of discernment and openness to the divine." [lxxxvi] Getting to the sod is not easy, and as Friedman says requires that we do some work on ourselves first, but ultimately it is the epitome of a spiritual connection with another person. Friedman writes that we need to have self-awareness, emotional support, and spiritual nurture in order to enter into the PaRDeS process.

Working with the elderly in nursing homes is another aspect clergy interactions. This population has unique needs, which differ from elderly who are active and mobile. In Dr. Henry Simmons' article *Teach Us To Pray: Pastoral Care of the New Nursing Home Resident,* there is discussion of the impact that moving into a long-term care facility has on an elderly person. Simmons writes that elders can feel

useless, like all of their previous independence has been taken away. In nursing homes, Simmons' says, "the feeling of uselessness is often acute; and with it a diminished sense of self deepens and the realization grows that unproductiveness goes hand in hand with being a burden to others." [lxxxvii] Additionally, elders in nursing homes can feel a disconnection or disassociation from God. They may feel angry that God has abandoned them or put them in this situation. Anger may also be directed towards one's family or loved ones. As discussed in Chapter 2, prayer can be an excellent tool for connecting with the elderly in nursing homes. By helping the elder pray and connect back with their faith, some of their despondency or frustration may dissipate. As Simmons writes, "It is an arduous and lonely struggle to come to a new relationship with the self, to decide how to relate to others. The new resident must find people with similar interests, a community of friends, unlike friends they knew before, but friends nonetheless. And the new resident must learn how to relate all over again to God." [lxxxviii] Prayer is not the only avenue that can be used to connect to a nursing home resident. These individuals have left behind so much in moving to the facility, and they may feel disconnected from what they once had or whom they once were. Discussions with the elderly about their past experiences, their lives growing up, or their faith practices or traditions make the elderly person feel valuable and noticed, and gives them a chance to reminisce about a happier time. Life review is one way of connecting with the elderly that can have profound affects. This process, also known as reminiscence, allows the elderly person to recall memories or experiences from his or her past in a safe and therapeutic setting. The person conducting the life review

will ask questions about their childhood, their religious beliefs, their experiences as an adult and relationships with others. In the book *Serving the Elderly: Skills for Practice*, author Paul Kim describes life review as going beyond simply remembering. It is a way for the individual to recollect and at times reconcile past experiences and events. He writes, "Life review is supportive. It involves listening, giving reassurance, showing interest and concern, and providing older patients with an opportunity to vent their feelings."[lxxxix] Robert N. Butler, in his article *The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged*, writes that he believes life review is a "naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these revived experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and reintegrated."[xc] Life review may be a process that the elder has never engaged in before, and it may elicit emotions that they did not previously recognize. Beginning life review can be difficult, and does not always move quickly. As Butler writes,

> "The life review sometimes proceeds silently, without obvious manifestations. Many elderly persons, before inquiry, may be only vaguely aware of the experience as a function of their defensive structure. But alterations in defensive operations do occur. Speaking broadly, the more intense the unresolved life conflicts, the more work remains to be accomplished toward reintegration. Although the process is active, not static, the content of one's life usually unfolds slowly; the process may not be completed prior to death."[xci]

Life review can certainly be used with elders who are not in a long-term care facility, but it is an especially useful tool for those who have transitioned from the life they have known for decades to a new environment in a nursing home. Butler says,

> "As the past marches in review, it is surveyed, observed, and reflected upon by the ego. Reconsideration of previous experiences and their meanings occurs, often with concomitant revised or expanded understanding. Such reorganization of past experiences may provide a more valid picture, giving new and significant meaning to one's life; it may also prepare one for death, mitigating one's fears. "[xcii]

Individuals who may be experiencing grief or anger after moving into a nursing home can find meaning in life review and the process of reconciliation.

Rabbi Dayle Friedman also writes about specific tools that clergy can use when interacting with elderly in nursing homes. She says that when clergy plan religious programs at a nursing home, it is important that they take into consideration the timing of their events. They should not conflict with mealtimes or other established programming at the facility. Additionally, accessibility must be a factor that is evaluated by the clergy. Friedman suggests considering the following when planning a religious program:

> "The space needs to be amenable to wheelchairs, walkers, and Geri chairs. Elders may need assistance in transportation from their rooms to the service. They may need repeated reminders, verbally and or in writing, about the event. Sound amplification should enable hearing-impaired individuals to participate. Also, liturgical materials should be large type and light weight, and even so, residents may require assistance in turning pages." [xciii]

Clergy also must work with individuals with dementia, many of who can be found within the long-term care facility. Dementia patients require more patience and skill than the average elderly individual, and clergy must understand not only what Dementia is, but also how they can interact with someone who has it. According to the Alzheimer's Association, dementia is defined as a "general decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life."[xciv] Dementia is not a single disease, but rather a compilation of symptoms that can have a wide range. Alzheimer's

Disease is a type of dementia, and accounts for 60-80% of cases.[xcv] The Alzheimer's Association says that at least two of several core mental functions must be impaired for the diagnosis to be dementia. These include "memory, communication, ability to focus, reasoning, and visual perception"[xcvi] Once someone is diagnosed with dementia, they may require nursing care at home or transfer to a long-term care facility. It can be difficult to interact with someone who has dementia, as they cannot always communicate effectively or engage in conversation. However, there are many ways that one can interact with a dementia patient, and clergy can and should utilize some of these tools when visiting congregants who may be suffering from this condition. Teepa Snow, an educator on dementia and an Occupational Therapist, suggests a gemstone model for understanding the various stages of dementia. Snow writes that there are six different gems that coincide with the changes the brain of a dementia patient may experience. The first gem is a sapphire, which Snow says is indicative of "optimal cognition and a healthy brain." This level does not create many barriers for the elderly person in terms of cognition. The second gem is diamond, where "routines and rituals rule." A person in this stage will prefer the familiar and need consistent routines to feel safe and functional. They require more rigidity in daily activities and their environment can dictate their emotional state. The third gem is an emerald, which is, according to Snow, "green and on the go with a purpose-naturally flawed." A person in this stage may experience some disconnection or disorientation with place and time, and their understanding of language may become inhibited. The fourth gem is amber, or "caught n a moment of time-caution required." This level comes with an increased

focus on sensation, and a person will actively seek what they want and avoid what they do not. They may have limited visual abilities, which can affect their safety. Their reactions to situations do not necessarily match the intensity of the situation and they may lash out unexpectedly. The fifth level is a ruby, "deep and strong in color-others stop seeing what is possible." This level consists of individuals who may not be able to control their bodily movements. They can mimic what others are doing, but without comprehension. The last level is a pearl, "hidden within a shell, beautiful moments to behold." This individual will respond and possibly recognize familiar voices or faces, but their understanding and comprehension will be limited. They may also find their physical abilities to be affected, leading to difficulty breathing or swallowing.[xcvii] Understanding this gem model can help clergy know what to expect from their congregants with dementia.

The book *Dementia Care: An Evidenced Based Approach* discusses some of the challenges that clergy face when working with dementia patients, as well as how beneficial these visits can be for the elderly person. "Ministering to such patients may seem unrewarding but clergy should be advised that they may be making spiritual connections that are not readily apparent. Clergy should also know that their presence in such activities such as spiritual readings or a spiritual music expression may touch the patient but more importantly affirm the humanity of the patient to the staff."[xcviii] Additionally, clergy can be supportive during what may be a grieving process for the elderly individual with dementia.

> "An individual with dementia may mourn the loss of function and independence, especially in cases where only selective function is impaired such as the ability to communicate in progressive non-fluent aphasia. The sense of loss and fear may continue until the patient loses insight. Patient

> grieving is less common in persons with late stage dementia, however individuals with early stage dementia and other lethal diseases such as cancer need bereavement services that match their cognitive abilities."[xcix]

Dementia patients may not only grieve their loss of functions, but also the loss of loved ones or friends. At times they may even ask for those who have passed away. "Individuals with dementia deserve to know about a recent loss but the subject does not need to be revisited except in response to a direct question from the patient. Repeated reminders of the loss may be forgotten and the patient may re-experience the grief as a new event when reminded. Redirection and distraction may be employed to avoid patient distress."[c] Despite the memory loss that is associated with dementia, prayer and religious rituals can be beneficial, and are simple ways for the clergy to interact with the elderly individual. The research presented in *Caregiving for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders* shows that dementia patients can still strongly identify with their faith. "Persons with dementia continue to respond to their faith and inner needs through long remembered rituals that connect them with the present…sometimes the patient who has not spoken coherently for several years will suddenly years will suddenly blurt out a prayer or a hymn; such deeply learned material is the very last to disappear."[ci] Music is another tool that can create connection for an elderly individual with dementia. The Music and Memory program, which enables nursing home patients to listen to familiar music through an IPod and headphones, is a powerful way for clergy to interact with dementia patients.

There are myriad ways for clergy to interact with the elderly, both those who are mobile and able to live at home and those who are in nursing homes and may have

dementia. Using tools like life review, music, and prayer, clergy can have meaningful experiences with the elderly members of their community. However, the elderly themselves are not the only people whom clergy will need to support. The caregivers and family of the elderly also have spiritual and pastoral needs that should be met by clergy.

## Caring for the Caregiver

Dayle Friedman writes about several ways that clergy can support the caregivers of the elderly. It is important for clergy to normalize what the caregiver is experiencing and feeling.

> "Spiritual caregivers can help caregivers by offering normative support. Rather than perpetuating the myth of abandonment, spiritual caregivers can acknowledge family members' heroic efforts and painful challenges. From the bema and at the bedside, the pastoral caregiver can note the efforts of family caregivers. The pastoral caregiver can also support the caregiver in accepting his or her limits in the face of seemingly infinite tasks."[cii]

Friedman also writes that clergy can also offer normative support in a more public way, by giving a sermon acknowledging the challenges of caregivers, or having a service specifically honoring those who care for their elderly relatives. They can offer guidance and support for caregivers facing difficult choices, from whether to move their loved one into a nursing home to end of life decisions. Clergy can

provide a supportive presence, and Friedman says that, "we will learn a great deal if we ask how the caregiving is going (rather than having an awkward or sad conversation) and how we can be supportive."[ciii] Additionally, clergy can connect families and caregivers to spiritual resources, rooting the answers and solutions to their concerns in Jewish tradition. Clergy can also provide support for caregivers of elders with dementia. *Dementia Care: An Evidenced Based Approach* says that,

> "The caregiver grief reaction produced by supporting a patient with dementia over a period of years can be complex and prolonged. Despite years of caregiving, many report that they are not prepared for death. Many caregivers experience anticipatory grief as well as the bereavement following death. The grieving process for the patient and the caregivers may begin at the time of diagnosis or recognition of symptoms."[civ]

These caregivers have unique struggles, as they not only are challenged by their loved one getting older and frailer but also experiencing increased cognitive difficulties.

Clergy have myriad tools at their disposal to work with and provide spiritual care for the elderly. However, that is not the only role that clergy can play in the lives of this population. Clergy can also serve as an advocate for the elderly in cases of elder abuse and neglect.

## Elder Abuse and Neglect

According to DePaul University Law Review article *When Silence Resounds: Clergy and the Requirement to Report Elder Abuse and Neglect,* author Seymour Moskowitz

writes that there are four main types of elder abuse. "The four main types of elder mistreatment are physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial exploitation, and neglect."[cv] Elder abuse can occur at home or in a nursing facility. The National Center on Elder Abuse says that warning signs of elder abuse include bruises, pressure marks or broken bones, sudden change in mood, and sudden change in financial status.[cvi] Moskowitz points out that there is not one single cause of elder abuse, and that the underlying reasons for why someone would abuse an elder are unknown. However, Moskowitz writes, "the various theories on elder abuse are also applied to other types of domestic violence and their usefulness has been confirmed by correlating predicted risk factors with actual patterns of elder mistreatment.[cvii] The elderly are often quiet victims, unable to articulate or explain what is happening to them. Additionally, if the elderly person is dependent on the abuser, reporting can seem out of the question. Clergy can identify and report elder abuse and neglect, and have a responsibility to do so. Additionally, if the abuse is being carried out by a caregiver, it is possible that the caregiver themselves feels overwhelmed or stressed, resulting in lashing out and negative behavior towards their elderly relative. Clergy can help provide support to these caregivers, and most communities have resources for caregivers of the elderly, including support groups.

Individual rabbis in congregations can do so much to support and provide for the elderly population. The elderly have unique spiritual needs, they are searching for meaning and faith as they navigate a difficult transition in their lives. Clergy can be

integral in helping elderly come to terms with their aging, recognize the gifts they still have to offer, and create impactful relationships with God and with Jewish faith. The next chapter will focus on how congregations and lay leaders can help serve the elderly, and what resources are available to help them do so.

# CHAPTER 4

My house is a house of prayer for all peoples." This verse from the prophet Isaiah adorns many synagogue walls or sanctuaries. It serves as a message to those who come through the doors, that this synagogue is a place where all can find meaning and community. It is a beautiful idea, but one that often does not apply to the frail elderly. Congregations are not always equipped to serve this population, and may struggle to engage them. The previous chapter discussed how individual rabbis can best provide for the frail elderly, and this chapter will focus on how congregations as a whole can do so. There are many congregations around the country who have done incredible innovation to accomplish just that, but there is still more work to be

done. Engaging this population can also be a wonderful gift for the synagogue. Congregations can learn so much from their elderly members, including what the community may have been like in generations past. These individuals are living testaments to the resiliency and perseverance of the Jewish people, and should be honored as such.

In my survey, I asked participants to explain why they choose to interact with the frail elderly population in the ways that they do. Their answers varied, but many spoke of it being a fulfilling, important part of their rabbinate. Responses included:

*"There is something very fulfilling in helping our elderly."*

*"Our elderly members are wise and bring a wealth of knowledge to the table. They deserve our respect and enjoy the interaction with fellow temple members."*

*"It's important that the elderly continue to be remembered and appreciated."*

*"There is value in connecting with them, because they have given to the community for many years and it is our obligation to give back to them in their aging years."*

It is clear just from this small sample of answers that congregational leaders who are engaging the elderly find it meaningful not only for the elderly person but for the congregation. It is not just about making sure that the elderly are honored and remembered, which is important, but it is also about allowing these individuals to continue to impact the congregational community by inviting them in and giving them reasons to stay.

This chapter will give methodologies for assessing the needs of the elderly in the community as well as examples of programming specifically targeted towards the elderly. This chapter will also discuss how best to support caregivers on a congregational level, and what Jewish ceremonies or rituals can be done in the synagogue for the elderly.

## Assessing Needs

Before a congregation can start to implement programming or begin serving the needs of the elderly, there has to be an assessment of what those needs really are. Simply guessing or assuming what the elderly may want or need from their synagogue community is not sufficient. Richard Address, in his book *To Honor and Respect*, gives examples of surveys and questions that congregations can ask the elderly and themselves about what is being done to serve this population. Address writes, "caring for older adults involves preparation. The specific needs and concerns of the aged within the community should be assessed so that the leadership does not waste its time and efforts on programs that will not have any

lasting effect."[cviii] Address suggests using surveys to gauge both interest and need in the community. " By asking people to describe what they desire from their congregation, congregational leaders will be able to more effectively understand how to provide love and compassion to the aged. Moreover, such survey mechanisms with periodic repetition can be instrumental in helping a congregation anticipate human and programmatic needs for older adults." [cix] Address provides a list of questions that can be asked in such a survey, to help the elderly voice their needs and to help the synagogue hear and understand them:

1. How do you envision your own aging? What is your attitude about it?
2. How does growing older affect your participation in services, leadership roles, volunteer work, social action, classes and lectures, and intergenerational activities?
3. What are your expectations of the professional staff, lay leaders and other congregants?[cx]

There are also questions that congregations can focus on internally, allowing an evaluation of how the community and the physical space are doing in accommodating the needs of the elderly. Address suggests using questions such as:

1. Do you provide large type prayer books in the sanctuary and large type reading materials in the library?
2. Do you provide brighter lighting in the sanctuary?
3. Do you provide option hearing assistance?
4. Is there reserved seating for handicapped or physically challenged older adults?
5. Are all doorways to classrooms, meeting rooms, boardrooms, chapel, sanctuary, and lavatories wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers?
6. Do you use a movable Torah reading table that can be placed on a lower level for readers who cannot walk up steps to the bimah?
7. Do you have ushers trained in emergency procedures, such as providing oxygen tanks in an emergency and utilizing wheelchairs and splints?
8. When arranging for social activities, conferences, or retreats, do you select facilities with elevators to all floors?
9. Do you provide video or audio equipment for recording special events?
10. Are your bulletins and newsletters printed in high contrast ink colors, such as black, dark blue, or burgundy? (Light blue and light gray ink are difficult for visually impaired persons to read).

It is important for congregations to be intentional not only in terms of programming and activities for the elderly, but also in the setup of the physical space where events and worship occur. Just as synagogues are conscious about being handicapped accessible, they should also be accessible to the elderly. It is also important that synagogues be able to reach those congregants who are not able to physically come to the building. Streaming of services and other events allow home bound congregants or those in nursing homes to enjoy worship experiences without having to come to the sanctuary. Amy Sales, author of *Help, Opportunities and Programs for Jewish Elders,* says "synagogue accessibility is a fundamental issue in programming for seniors. If older members cannot get to the synagogue or take part in programs and worship services once there, the seniors program has failed."[cxi]

Some synagogues are already doing this, and have found ways of implementing streaming or video so that their elderly congregants can still feel a part of the community. Most of the synagogues in Cincinnati stream their services, providing opportunities for residents of local nursing homes or those who cannot physically be at services to still feel engaged. At Cedar Village Retirement Community, a northern Cincinnati nursing home, residents can watch life cycle events of family members via Skype or video conferencing. Recently, a resident's grandchild was getting married, and she was able to virtually "walk down the aisle" during the ceremony by viewing it on a screen. Technology use in services is rising rapidly, and it is an excellent way for congregations to let their elderly congregants know that they still matter, that they are still valuable and considered a part of the community.

Some of these accommodations are simple to implement, such as changing the font or color used in synagogue publications. Others may require more effort, like creating a movable Torah table or providing hearing assistance devices. Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in an interview, says that the attitude towards the elderly in a congregation has to also reflect a welcoming community. She says that congregations must ask themselves "is it okay for someone in a walker to be there in our sanctuary? What if they are confused? Is that okay? Are we a welcoming inclusive community in that way? Do we need to look past the wrinkles and the tears to see what might be in their *neshamah*, their souls?"[cxii]
Congregations who are able do serious introspection and reflection on the physical accommodations and the attitude of the congregants will truly be able to say that their house is a house of prayer for all peoples, not just those who are young and active and able to participate in all elements of synagogue life.

## Synagogue Programming for the Elderly

Congregations can create a variety of programming specifically geared toward the elderly population. These programs can be educational or social, and can be led by clergy or lay people. However, it is not enough to simply have one or two programs that serve the elderly. Congregations have to make a commitment to engaging this population and making them feel welcome. Rabbi Richard Address, in his article *Synagogue Responses to the Spiritual Revolution in Aging,* writes that

> "it is not uncommon that synagogues respond to issues simply by developing programs: create a program for a particular constituency and one has

> responded to its concerns. What may be different within the current attempt to meet the emerging older adult population is that merely creating a program will not suffice. Older Jewish adults, especially in the aging boomer generation, seek more substance. Thus, more holistic approaches are needed to welcome and challenge this multigenerational cohort."[cxiii]

The elderly are looking for meaning, for substance, and they want to be involved in community. Address writes, "the challenge is for congregations to create moments of meaning that emphasize the power of sacred relationships by linking Jewish values and texts to the specific concerns and moment sin life."[cxiv] Programs for another population cannot simply be recycled or retooled to fit the elderly; they have to be created specifically for them. The material has to relate to their lives and their experiences, has to provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose.

One way to do this is to provide educational programming. Sales writes,

> "Across the American social landscape, educational programs for seniors and retirees are growing at a notable rate. Synagogues that offer educational opportunities for their older members easily fill their classes. Jewish seniors are often well educated and they appreciate the value of life long learning. In retirement, they have time to delve into studies that they could not pursue when they were busy working and raising their families. Younger students may take courses for grades, degrees, or passports to better jobs, but older adults more often come to educational programs for mental stimulation, intellectual challenge, and the sheer pleasure of learning."[cxv]

At a class I taught at a local Cincinnati synagogue on Judaism and aging entitled "What Does Judaism Say About Aging," I asked those attending (all who were over the age of 65) why they chose to take the course. The responses included:

"I want to learn about what Jewish tradition says about the life stage I am in."

"Its important to me to find connection in Jewish text to who I am now."

Elders are curious; they are interested in engaging and want to learn. Synagogues simply have to build it, and they will come.

Just as Address believes that programs should fit with the life stage and experience of the elderly, Sales writes that educational programs need to take into account adult learning styles.

> "[Successful programs] take into account adult learning styles. They provide hands on activities, visual stimulus material, and opportunities for students to ask questions and engage with material. Teachers recognize that students come into the class with a wealth of life experience and they use this to good effect in their lessons. Successful programs offer stimulating and challenging courses. Programmers report that their most popular classes are those that are intellectually or physically challenging. They find that most of the retirees they work with are reading and growing and stretching themselves. Courses perceived as fluff tend to attract few participants."[cxvi]

Most educational programs take place at the synagogue, although some rabbis are extending their reach to nursing homes or long-term care facilities. Dorot USA, a New York based organization focused on engaging the elderly through the work of volunteers, has a program called "University without Walls," which offers interactive online or telephone educational programming. The website says that the programs are offered in English and in Russian, and classes include the arts, history, current events, games, and holidays. Another program offered by Dorot is "To Your Health," which allows seniors to connect with health care professionals to learn more about their physical health as they age. They can also gain support from those in similar condition.[cxvii]

Another way of engaging the elderly in programming is through social events. Elderly still want to feel a part of the community, and by giving them a chance to

connect socially with members of the congregation, they can actively engage. Sales writes that "many synagogues offer social programs for their older members. These include lunch and learn programs, book clubs, film series, and intergenerational programs. Such programs serve several purposes: they keep retirees and mobile elderly connected to the synagogue. They form a sense of community among program participants, and they provide entertainment that can be bright points on the older adult's calendar." [cxviii] It is important that these programs have clergy buy-in, and are supported by the larger congregational community. Without investment from the entire congregation, these programs will not be successful.

Whether a program is education based or purely social, elders need to feel a sense of belonging.

In his book *From Aging to Saging,* Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi, writes, "without an acknowledged role to play in the world, elders are robbed of their dignity and self worth and suffer from a gnawing anxiety that comes from feeling socially useless. When as a culture we recognize the value of elders' invisible productivity, our limited understanding of social security will broaden from the merely financial to include it's cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions."[cxix] The elderly need to feel useful and appreciated, they need to feel valued and respected. By creating programming for the elderly in synagogues, congregations can effectively engage this population.

## Volunteer Programs and Intergenerational Programming

Congregations can also initiate volunteer programs to help cater to the elderly members of their community. Sales writes, "Synagogues have an obligation to care for the Jewish elderly in their communities. They have congregants who can be inspired to become volunteer caregivers. And they have members who are seniors in need of assistance with everyday life. The elderly sometimes feel abandoned by their synagogues. Many are delighted when a representative of the congregation calls, visits, or sends a note. To them it is an affirmation that they remain valued members who still have a place in the congregation." [cxx] However, in order for these types of volunteer programs to succeed, the rabbis and other clergy at the congregation must buy in to the process.

One set of potential volunteers is the youth in the synagogue community. Intergenerational programming can be extremely effective, and as shown in previous chapters, can provide benefits not only to the elderly person but to the younger individual as well. Dayle Friedman, in her book *Jewish Visions for Aging*, writes about what congregations can do to promote and support intergenerational programs. Friedman says,

> "by far the most important component in shaping a successful intergenerational program is preparing both younger and older participants for the encounter. Younger participants need to have a context in which to place the experience. Toward that end, they should first explore their stereotypes and the realities of aging. They will need help to identify with some of the feelings and experiences of older people. Young people will feel most comfortable in meeting frail elders if they have been told what to expect and if they meet impaired elders with the knowledge that the overwhelming majority of people over sixty five are basically healthy and living independently. Finally, orientation of younger participants can include very concrete pointers on how to reach out to older participants, such as compensating for hearing loss, using touch to connect, and making conversation." [cxxi]

It is also important to make sure that the elderly understand and know who is going to be visiting them. This means that preparations need to be made to prepare the elderly for the volunteer visits.

> "Older participants will find it helpful to learn about the group who will be joining them, as well as the purpose and structure of the program. In addition, they may want to express concerns they have about the encounter, such as fear of rejection, embarrassment over physical impairment, or reluctance to enter a relationship that will be time limited. Their sensitivity will be heightened through an exploration of their sense of the young participants' feelings about the encounter. Contact before the program, through letters, email or video may build interest and enthusiasm and ease any awkwardness in the initial meeting." [cxxii]

Spending time with the youth volunteers before and after their visits will be important as well, not only to contextualize what they are doing within Jewish tradition and values, but to help them process their experience. For some, this may be their first time working with the elderly, and they may have questions that they want to ask after they have done so. By creating meaningful relationships between the elders and the younger volunteers, both groups can benefit immensely from the experience.

## Honoring the Elderly And Those Who Care For Them

Synagogues can also create programming that honor the elderly and show that the community values their contributions, both past and present. As the Jewish community changes and synagogues evolve to serve the needs of their congregation, the building and the community inside may become unrecognizable to the elderly. They may feel that the congregation is not theirs anymore, that the foundation they

built and the place that they celebrated their joys or sought comfort in their trials is no longer. Congregations have to recognize that the elderly are not always changing with them, that they may not appreciate the innovations that rabbis and communities are trying to make. Leo Baeck Synagogue in California wanted to create a space where elders could come and be a community both unto themselves and within the larger congregation. An article in the Jewish Journal from 2011 highlights that Leo Baeck created the Havurat Vatikim, the Community of Elders, which "gives seniors a forum in which to share their hopes and concerns, with ongoing learning and leisure opportunities to feed both body and brain."[cxxiii] Some of this stemmed from the large overhaul of the synagogue, with a new rabbi and worship services and a remodeled building. The elders in the congregation no longer felt they belonged. The chair of the Havurat Vatikim, Judith Farber Weissman is quoted in the article as saying "our intent was to bring this age group together and back into the temple. We recognized that a large slice of the original temple population was not there anymore, and thought that if we could be responsive to those people through interesting programs, they would be participants again." Leo Baeck recognized that the congregation was moving towards the future, but they could not forget their past. The founders of the synagogue, those who helped build it to be what it is today, could not be forgotten. Rabbi Dayle Friedman, in *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook* writes that there is a multitude of ways to integrate honoring the elderly into the Jewish calendar. One example that she gives is Rosh Chodesh. "Rosh Chodesh can be a beautiful chance to mark time for older people, either on their own or with younger people. Stopping to note and to hallow

the beginning of each month can add a dimension of holiness to life. Offering prayers for the coming month for oneself, one's family, the community, and the world connects one to hope and to one's power as a source of blessing." [cxxiv]

It is equally important to remember and honor those who take care of the elderly: the children, the family members and loved ones who give time and energy to help support their elders. Address, in his book *To Honor and Respect*, recognizes the changing nature of caregiving.

> "Contemporary society has created a new life stage: the caregiver. Yes, we have always had people who have been involved in this role. However, given the realities of the longevity revolution, the miracles of medical technology and the challenges inherent in many of our health care systems, the caregiving role has taken on new importance. To be a caregiver is perhaps one of the greatest expressions of love. It is also a life stage for which few volunteer. Rather this role is entered into gradually, or for some, suddenly, when a phone call comes informing us that our life has changed." [cxxv]

Address suggests having ritual experiences where caregivers can be recognized for their dedication and hard work to care for their aging loved one.

> "It is important for congregations to recognize all the different caregivers in a person's life, to show them gratitude, and to strengthen their resolve to continue their efforts in a compassionate, loving manner. Caregiving can be full of joy, wonder and fulfillment. The synagogue is the setting to nurture those sentiments. We should celebrate the work of the caregiver! Special services that include prayers and blessings acknowledging their work help give caregivers emotional support. Moreover, programs that deal with the hands on challenges of caregiving, coupled with a unique Jewish perspective to such challenges, help create a culture of support within congregations."[cxxvi]

Congregations can also create resources for caregivers outside of the synagogue. Appendix 1 of this thesis is a Jewish ritual ceremony designed specifically for caregivers. By providing support both in the synagogue and outside of it,

congregations can lift up those who care for the elderly and make sure that their experiences are being valued and their needs are being met.

The elderly population is important and valuable to the congregational community. Their wisdom and experience can teach the congregation how best to move forward while honoring the past, and despite their age or disability, can and do have a serious desire to remain engaged. The elderly care deeply about their communities and want to feel that the community cares about them. Congregations, by doing a serious assessment of how they serve the elderly and what they can do better, by honoring them and their caregivers, and creating programming that fits their needs, can truly make the congregation a place for all people, including and most especially the elderly.

Appendix 1:

Bikkur Cholim Ritual Component
Rebecca Kamil

Introduction:
These rituals are intended for someone who is a caregiver, who spends his or her emotional and physical time and energy supporting and taking care of a loved one who is ill. This is a noble task, and one that requires immense strength and compassion. It is important that in the process of helping a loved one, caregivers remember to provide for themselves as well. Only if they feel spiritually, emotionally, and physically nourished will they be able to be an effective caregiver. I have divided this ritual into three parts. They can be done sequentially, out of order, or at separate times. Each section contains a version of the Mi Sheberach prayer for healing, both for the one who is ill and the one who cares for them. The words here are a guide, a starting point for personal reflection and prayer. They are intended to provide comfort, support, and healing to the caregiver of someone who is struggling with illness.

Part 1
Morning

As you begin the day, you will be faced with the challenges of caring for your loved one. These words are intended to provide you with the mindset you need to begin your day, to begin your process of love and care and compassion.
Start with this ritual as soon as you have awoken, giving yourself time to feel refreshed and renewed. Sit up either in bed or in a chair, taking deep breaths and focusing on your beating heart as you say the words below.

Begin with words from Psalm 51, asking the Divine for guidance and support, and to be held in the hands of God.

לֵב טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן חַדֵּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי׃ אַל־תַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ
וְרוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ אַל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי׃

Lev Ta-hor b'ra-li, Eh-lo-him;
V'ru-ah na-khon ha-desh b'kir-bi
Ahl tash-li-khei-ni mil-fah-neh-kha
V'ru-ah kod-sh'kha ahl ti-kah mi-meh-ni.

Create for me a pure heart, God;
And the right spirit renew within me.
Don't cast me away from your Presence,
Don't take your Holy Spirit away from me.[2]

[2] "The National Center for Jewish Healing: Tools and Resources, http://www.ncjh.org/tools.html accessed 10 Oct. 2014.

Once we have awoken, we can ask God to bless us with the strength we need to embrace the day.

As I awaken, let this be my thought:
May my day be filled with acts of lovingkindness.
Let me drawn to learning and discernment,
And may my actions be shaped by mitzvot.
Keep me from iniquity, disgrace and sin;
May I not be overwhelmed by temptation or despair.
Distance me from evil people and false friends.
Let me cultivate a life of goodness.
May my hands reach out in kindness,
And I will serve God through acts of righteousness.
Today and every day, may I merit your mercy,
By living my life with compassion and love.
Holy One of Blessing, draw me to Your words;
Teach me the art of sacred living.[3]

Continue to breath deeply, giving yourself time and space to be still.
This next passage can be sung (sheet music is attached), or read.

May the waters of healing
Flow through my (her/his) soul
May the waters of healing
Flow through my (her/his) heart
May the waters of healing
Flow through my (her/his) form.

Ah-na El na, please Holy One
R'fa na la Let your Healing be done
Ah-na El na, Please heal my (her/his) soul
R'fa na la let me (her/him) be whole[4]

End this part of the ritual by taking one more deep breath in and out, and reciting the following:

---

[3]Elyse Frishman, ed. Mishkan Tefilah*: A Reform Siddur: Weekdays, Shabbat, Festivals, and Other Occasions of Public Worship*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007, page 39

[4] Rabbi Weiner Shohama, "Jewish Healing Song." http://reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/jewish-healing-song, Accessed. 12 Oct. 2014.

There is a tiredness
That sleep can't reach
An all consuming weariness
That makes it
Difficult to do the simplest things
It comes with resignation
And despair
And of trying times
And all the times we didn't try
Enough
It comes of drifting when
The current seems too rough,
When swimming's not an option
Nor drowning either.
It comes from knowing and
Not knowing
And yet half remembering the
Spark of light and life
That made that state a challenge
Long ago.
There is a tiredness
That sleep can't reach
And yet wakefulness is filled
With faded dreams
Replaying endlessly
In sepia tones
Blurred and formless
And never quite in focus
And then one day there is the first awakening
A gentle stirring
Not unlike the first faint
Signs of spring
A whispered word, a quiet hope
A sharper image
And a small resolve.
Day by day
And almost imperceptibly
It grows and blossoms
An unseen energy,
A new awareness
As the numbness disappears
And with the feeling comes
The pain
But in perspective now
It takes its place
As we take ours

The healing has begun.[5]

[5] Hain, Marcia Gaubman in Freeman, David L., and Judith Z. Abrams. *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 272

Part 2
Afternoon

As the day continues on, it is easy to become tired and emotionally drained. We lose steam as we continue to take care of our loved one. It is difficult work, and we sometimes need time to reconnect with ourselves, to take small moments to center ourselves and feel whole.

Take a few moments for silence, for stillness, and for quiet reflection.

Show me how to offer hope.
Open Your hand with the colors of faith
That I might begin to fill in spaces
To strengthen another's life.
Show me how to offer comfort.
Point out Your nesting place,
Feathered against the adversities
That wound those I love.
Show me the direction
When I am lost,
Searching to help
But finding no paths
Show me tolerance,
When I weary of helping,
And a long dreary day
Stretches toward a restless night.
You place before us life and love;
Show us endurance.
You place before us healing and hope;
Show us persistence.
Reach deep within me, Eternal Strength,
And bring my strength to consciousness
Pull it around us
Let it radiate with your power,
Let it guide our way[6]

[6] Hara E. Person, ed. *The Mitzvah of Healing, (*New York: UAHC Press, 2003), 138

We can pray for the healing of our loved one, both physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

God of wholeness,
God of healing,
Hear [my] words,
Accept [my] prayers
Send a special blessing of healing
To [my loved one],
Among all those of Your children
Who are in need of
Your healing blessing[7]

Sometimes we feel lonely, as if perhaps nobody understands what it is we are going through. It is helpful to remember that we are held in the Divine presence, that God is holding us beneath God's wings.

These words from Psalm 121 can be sung (sheet music attached) or read.

אֶשָּׂא עֵינַי אֶל־הֶהָרִים מֵאַיִן יָבֹא עֶזְרִי׃ עֶזְרִי מֵעִם יְהוָה עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃

Eh-sa ei-nai el heh-harim
Mei-ay-yin ya-vo ezri
Ezri mei-im Adonai
O-she sha-ma-yim va-aretz

I lift up my eyes to the mountains:
Where will my help come from?
My help comes from Adonai
Creator of Heaven and Earth[8]

---

[7] Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council, *About Being A Visitor* http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/visiting4.html Accessed 10/9/14

[8] The National Center for Jewish Healing: Tools and Resources, http://www.ncjh.org/tools.html accessed 10 Oct. 2014.

*Taking space for ourselves and recognizing our own need for self care can be difficult, but it is vital to do so in order to be able to give the most of ourselves to our loved one. This prayer asks God for the courage and strength to seek those moments of respite, and to not be afraid to walk out of our loved one's room momentarily in order to do so.*

*Adonai*, I come seeking courage. The courage to combat despair, the courage to find sparks of light in each moment of suffering, and the courage to ask others for help when I can no longer see the sparks in the darkness.
*Adonai*, I come seeking the sacred balance of *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *gevurah* (strength). Sustain my empathy as I create the distance I need for my own healing. Help me hold onto light as I release the suffering that has taken root in my heart. Teach me about *tiferet* (harmony). Teach me that letting go, like holding on, is an act of love.[9]

[9] Ritual Well, *Mikveh Ritual for Caregivers,* www.ritualwell.org, accessed 10/9/14

Part 3
Evening

As we lay down to sleep, we may still have lingering fears or worries. Taking time before bed to decompress and re-center can allow a more restful night's sleep.

As those who came before us were blessed
In the presence of the communities that sustained them,
So [I] offer [my] blessing for one needing support.
(name of loved one)
May your spirit be calmed
And your pain be eased
May you receive comfort
From those who care for you
And may you drink from the waters
Of the ever giving well.[10]

We ask God as we lay down to sleep to stay with us, to embrace us and keep us close.

O my God
My soul's compassion
My heart's precious friend
I turn to You
I need to close out the noise
The noise that interrupts—
The noise that separates—
The noise that isolates.
I need to hear You again.
In the silence of my innermost being,
In the fragments of my yearned-for wholeness,
I hear whispers of Your presence—
Echoes of the past when You were with me
When I felt Your nearness
When together we walked—
When you held me close, embraced me in Your love,

[10] Falk, Marcia in Freeman, David L., and Judith Z. Abrams. *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 111-112

Laughed with me in my joy.
I yearn to hear You again.
In Your oneness I find healing,
In the promise of Your love, I am soothed.
In your wholeness, I too can become whole again
Please listen to my call—
Help me find the words
Help me find the strength within
Help me shape my mouth, my voice, my heart
So that I can direct my spirit and find You in prayer
In words only the heart can speak
In songs only my soul can sing
Lifting my eyes and heart to You
*Adonai S'fatai Tiftah*- open my lips, Precious God, so that I can speak with You again.[11]

The last part of our ritual before sleep tells God we need God's presence, we need to be held and rocked and guided through this difficult journey of caring for a loved one who is ill. As we fall asleep, we know that we are being held in the hands of God.

The following can be sung (sheet music attached) or read.

Oh guide my steps
And help me find my way
I need your shelter now
Rock me in Your arms and guide my steps
And help me make this day
A song of praise to you
Rock me in your arms and guide my steps

## ופרוס עלינו סכת שלומך

U-fros a-lei-nu suk-kat sh'lo-me-cha[12]

---

[11] Hara E. Person, ed. *The Mitzvah of Healing, (*New York: UAHC Press, 2003), page 127-128
[12] Lyrics by Debra Winston

ENDNOTES

[i] Atul Guwande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End,* New York: Henry Holt and co., 2014, 18
[ii] ibid, 19
[iii] Genesis 25:7
[iv] RD Grove, AM Hetzel, "Life Expectancy at Age 65, In Years, Men and Women, in 2005-10 and 2045-50, *Life Expectancy at birth, at 65 Years of Age, and at 75 Years of Age, by Race and Sex: United States, Selected Years 1900-2007* CDC 2010
[v] Daveen Litwin H. *Honoring the Hoary Head: Jewish Ritual and Liturgical Responses to Aging,* 1997, 24
[vi] Mishnah Avot 5:21, ibid, 25
[vii] ibid 28
[viii] ibid, 28
[ix] ibid, 28
[x] Gordon Harris, J. Biblical *Perspectives on Aging*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 14
[xi] Litwin, 41
[xii] Litwin, 37
[xiii] Dayle Friedman, *Jewish Visions for Aging* Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, 6
[xiv] ibid, 7 and 8
[xv] Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, *Aging and the Aged in Jewish Law: Essays and Responsa,* Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Press, 1988, 6
[xvi] Litwin, 35
[xvii] Proverbs 9:10-11, Litwin, 34
[xviii] Jacob and Zemer, 8
[xix] Jacob and Zemer, 15
[xx] Harris, Location 2019 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xxi] Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother*, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing, 2005, 2
[xxii] Richard Address, Hara Person, *That You May Live Long: Caring For Our Aging Parents, Caring For Ourselves,* New York: UAHC Press, 2003, (94)
[xxiii] ibid, 95
[xxiv] ibid, 95
[xxv] ibid 96
[xxvi] ibid 98
[xxvii] ibid, 82
[xxviii] ibid 83
[xxix] ibid 84
[xxx] ibid 85
[xxxi] ibid 86
[xxxii] ibid, 88

[xxxiii] Friedman, 8
[xxxiv] Fridman, 8
[xxxv] Friedman,, 9
[xxxvi] Jacob and Zemer, 87
[xxxvii] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging,87
[xxxviii] Harris, location 2070 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xxxix] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging 9
[xl] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging 10
[xli] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging 9
[xlii] Harris, Location 1429 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xliii] ibid, Location 1956 of 4249
[xliv] ibid, location 2788 of 4279
[xlv] William Cutter, ed. *Midrash and Medicine,* Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011, Location 1967 of 3676 (kindle edition)
[xlvi] Harris, Location 2885 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xlvii] ibid, Location 2894 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xlviii] ibid, Location 2903 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[xlix] ibid Location 2955 of 4249 (kindle edition)
[l] Cutter, Location 1738 of 3676 (kindle edition)
[li] Pew Research Center, "Portrait of Jewish Americans," http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/
[lii] Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *From Aging to Saging,* New York: Waner Books, 1995, 13
[liii] Richard Address, email message to author, 7/2015
[liv] Dayle Friedman, "Embracing Aging: Infusing Aging into Seminary Training," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging* 23 (2011), 115
[lv] ibid, 116
[lvi] Donald Kopke, "Looking Backward: Demonstrated Clergy Training Needs, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging,* 23 (2011), 23
[lvii] Friedman, 112
[lviii] Friedman, 112
[lix] Sheld S. Tobin, James W. Ellor, *Enabling the Elderly: Religious Institutions within the Community Service System,* New York: State University of New York, 1996, 28
[lx]Generations United, www.gu.org
[lxi] Dara Sorkin, Karen Rook, John L. Lu "Loneliness, Lack of Emotional Support, Lack of Companionship, and the Likelihood of Having a Heart Condition in an Elderly Sample, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine,* 24 (2002), 1
[lxii] ibid, 2
[lxiii] Leah Abramowitz "Prayer as Therapy Among the Frail Elderly," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work,* 19 (2010), 72
[lxiv] ibid, 74
[lxv] Abigail Ruth Evans, "Now is the Time: Seminaries Responding to the Graying of Our Congregations, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging,* 23 (2011), 79
[lxvi] ibid, 79

[lxvii] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging,113
[lxviii] Henry Simmons, "Teach Us To Pray: Pastoral Care of the New Nursing Home Resident, *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling,* 45 (1991), 170
[lxix] Kopeke, 21
[lxx] Richard Address, *Seekers of Meaning: Baby Boomers, Judaism, and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging,* New York, URJ Press, 2012, page xii
[lxxi] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging, 107
[lxxii] ibid, 122
[lxxiii] ibid, 123
[lxxiv] Simmons, 46
[lxxv] Simmons, 170
[lxxvi] ibid, 173
[lxxvii] ibid, 174
[lxxviii] Tablet Magazine, "As the Jewish Community Goes Gray, Synagogues Adapt to Serve Older Congregants." http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/155916/synagogues-older-congregants
[lxxix] Friedman, 61
[lxxx] ibid, 65
[lxxxi] David Frego, "Uniting the Generations with Music Programs," *Music Educators Journal,* 81 (1995), 17
[lxxxii] ibid, 133
[lxxxiii] ibid, 133
[lxxxiv] ibid, 135
[lxxxv] ibid, 136
[lxxxvi] ibid, 139
[lxxxvii] Simmons, 171
[lxxxviii] ibid, 172
[lxxxix] K. Paul, ed. *Serving the Elderly: Skills for Practice,* New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc, 1991, 74
[xc] Robert N. Butler, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged, *Pyschiatry* 26 (1963), 66
[xci] ibid, 67-68
[xcii] ibid,, 68
[xciii] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging,156
[xciv] Alzheimer's Association, www.alz.org
[xcv] ibid
[xcvi] ibid
[xcvii] Teepa Snow, www.teepa snow.com
[xcviii] Marie Boltz, James E. Galvin, *Dementia Care: An Evidenced Based Approach,* New York: Springer 2016, 289
[xcix]ibid, 289
[c] ibid, 289
[ci] Steven H. Zanit, Ronda C. Talley, *Caregiving for Alzheimer's disease and Related Disorders,* New York: Springer, 2013, 97
[cii] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging, 75

[ciii] ibid, 76
[civ] Boltz, Galvin, 291
[cv] Seymour Moskowitz "When Silence Resounds: Clergy and the Requirement to Report Elder Abuse and Neglect." *DePaul Law Review,* 49 (1999), 27
[cvi] National Center on Elder Abuse, www.cea.aoa.gov
[cvii] Moskowitz, 29
[cvii]Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect,* New York: URJ Press, 2005, 12
[cvii] ibid, 12
[cvii] ibid, 12
[cvii] Amy Sales, *Help*, *Opportunities, and Programs for Jewish Elders*, Massachusetts: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, 1998,33
[cvii] Dayle Friedman, interview with author 7/2016
[cvii] Richard Address, "Synagogue Responses to the Spiritual Revolution in Aging," *Generations,* 33 (2008)
[cvii] ibid
[cvii] Sales, 65
[cvii] Sales, 66
[cvii] DOROT USA, www.dorotusa.org
[cvii] Sales, 81
[cvii] Schachter-Shalomi, 218
[cvii] Sales, 43
[cvii] Friedman, Jewish Visions for Aging,181
[cvii] Ibid, 181
[cvii] Jewish Journal, "Leo Baeck's Community of Elders Bridges the Generation Gap," http://www.jewishjournal.com/50_Plus/article/leo_baecks_community_of_elders_bridges_the_generation_gap_20110524
[cvii] Dayle Friedman, ed. *Jewish Pastoral Care*, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010
[cvii] Address, 31
[cvii] Address, 32
[cvii] Friedman, Pastoral Care Handbook
[cvii] Address, To Honor and Respect, 31
[cvii] Address, To Honor and Respect, 32

WORKS CITED

Abramowitz, Leah. "Prayer as Therapy Among the Frail Elderly," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work,* 19 (2010)

Address, Richard F. *Seekers of Meaning: Baby Boomers, Judaism, and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging,* New York, URJ Press, 2012

Address, Richard F, Person, Hara. *That You May Live Long: Caring for Our Aging Parents, Caring for Ourselves*, New York: UAHC Press, 2003

Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect,* New York: URJ Press, 2005, 12

Richard Address, "Synagogue Responses to the Spiritual Revolution in Aging," *Generations,* 33 (2008)

Alzheimer's Assocation www.alz.org Accessed 1/2016

Blidstein, Gerald J. *Honor Thy Father and Mother*, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing, 2005

Boltz, Marie, Galvin James E. *Dementia Care: An Evidenced Based Approach,* New York: Springer, 2016

Butler, Robert N. "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged," *Psychiatry* 26 (1963)

Cutter, William, ed. *Midrash and Medicine,* Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011,

Evans, Abigail Rain "Now is the Time: Seminaries Responding to the Graying of our Congregations, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging,* 23 (2011)

David Frego, "Uniting the Generations with Music Programs," *Music Educators Journal,* 81 (1995)

Friedman, Dayle. "Embracing Aging: Infusing Aging into Seminary Training," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging* 23 (2011)

Dayle Friedman, ed. *Jewish Pastoral Care*, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010

DOROT USA, www.dorotusa.org

Friedman, Dayle. *Jewish Visions for Aging.* Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008

Generations United, www.gu.org, accessed 1/2016

Grove, RD, and AM Hetzel. "Life Expectancy at Age 65, in Years, Men and Women, in 2005-10 and 2045-50." (n.d.): n. pag. *Life Expectancy at Birth, at 65 Years of Age, and at 75 Years of Age, by Race and Sex: United States, Selected Years 1900–2007*. CDC, 2010. Web. 2016.

Guwande, Atul, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End,* New York: Henry Holt and co., 2014, 18

Harris, Gordon J. *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987

Jacob, Walter and Zemer Moshe. *Aging and the Aged in Jewish Law: Essays and Responsa.* Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Press, 1988

Jewish Journal, "Leo Baeck's Community of Elders Bridges the Generation Gap," http://www.jewishjournal.com/50_Plus/article/leo_baecks_community_of_elders_bridges_the_generation_gap_20110524

Kopeke, Donald. "Looking Backward: Demonstrated Clergy Training Needs." *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging* 23 (2011)

Litwin, Daveen H. *Honoring the Hoary Head: Jewish Ritual and Liturgical Responses to Aging*. N.p.: n.p., 1997. Print.

Moskowitz, Seymour "When Silence Resounds: Clergy and the Requirement to Report Elder Abuse and Neglect." *De Paul Law Review,* 49 (1999)

National Center on Elder Abuse, www.cea.aoa.gov, Accessed 1/2016

Paul, K., ed. *Serving the Elderly: Skills for Practice,* New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc. 1991

Amy Sales, *Help, Opportunities, and Programs for Jewish Elders,* Massachusetts: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, 1998

Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, *From Aging to Saging,* New York: Warner Books, 1995

Simmons, Henry "Teach Us to Pray: Pastoral Care of the New Nursing Home Resident," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 45 (1991)

Sorkin, Dara, Rook, Karen, Lu, John L. "Loneliness, Lack of emotional support, Lack of Companionship, and the Likelihood of Having a Heart Condition in an Elderly Sample," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine,* 24 (2002)

Tablet Magazine. "As the Jewish Community Goes Gray, Synagogues Adapt to Serve Older Congregants." Last modified January 6th 2014. http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/155916/synagogues-older-congregants

Teepa Snow, www.teepasnow.com, Accessed 1/2016

Zanit, Steven H. Talley, Ronda C. *Caregiving for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders,* New York: Springer, 2013