

Hiddur P'nei Zakein: Rituals for the Elderly

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Chapter 1

Liberal congregations across the U.S try to engage all age demographics in congregational life through various programming and services. Yet many times the elderly congregants of the synagogue, often the longest standing members of the congregation, find themselves on the periphery of these activities. A spotlight is shown on the life cycle moments of the young (baby namings, *b'nai mitzvah*, weddings) while the significant moments of aging are often glossed over in synagogue life. Few rituals exist in synagogue life to honor the accomplishments and mark significant changes associated with growing older. Synagogues are not alone; American society, in general, does not value the process of aging. According to Froma Walsh, "our gerophobic culture holds a fearful, pessimistic view of aging as decay."¹ With people living longer because of advances in medicine and the increasing number of elderly, as the baby boomers age, synagogues will need to be sure to devote their time and energy to taking care of the spiritual needs of their elderly.

The number of elderly in the United States population is generally increasing yearly. According to the 2010 US census, about 40.3 million people over the age of sixty-five live in the United States. This number increased by 15% since the 2000 US Census. The fastest growth rate in the population was for working-age citizens (between the ages of 45-65). This population between 2000-2010 increased by 31.5%.² The growth rate in the United States will continue and the US Census Bureau predict that by 2030 approximately 1 in 5 Americans could be elderly. Annually, the number of elderly

¹ Froma Walsh, "Families in Later Life" in *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Carter and Monica McGoldrick. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 308.

² Lindsay M. Howden and Julie A. Meyer. *Age and Sex Composition: 2010*. Rep. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Commerce, May 2011. Accessed 27 Sept. 2012.
<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>, 2.

will grow at an average rate of 2.8 percent.³ This large increase in population will have significant implications for the United States in the years to come. The census examined these age groups by geography and found that the Northeast contains the largest percentage of age groups 45-64 and 65 + (27.7% and 14.1%, respectively).⁴ Significantly, the Census found that Florida had the highest median age of 50.⁵

In 1900, the average life expectancy for a person in the U.S. was about forty-seven years old. That age dramatically increased and life expectancy is now over seventy-six years old.⁶ The increase in the elderly population could be due to changes in health care. With health care advances, people receive medical care that can add additional years to their lives. Yet additional years to live does not always mean a good quality of life. Although many times these medical advances can help to sustain a person's quality of life, for many it means living with their disabilities for longer.

According to the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey, between 1990 and 2001 the percentage of North American Jews over the age of sixty-five increased from 17% to 19%. At the time of the publishing of the NJPS the total Jewish population in the United States was approximately 5.2 million people. Approximately four million of the total were Jewish adults (ages eighteen to sixty-four). Of those Jewish adults 956,000 people were considered elderly. The NJPS divided the elderly into two age groups; young elderly ages 65-74 and the old elderly ages 75 and older. The study

³ Frank B. Hobbs and Bonnie L. Damon, *65+ in the United States*. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Current Population Reports, Special Studies U.S. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), 2-2.

⁴ Lindsay M. Howden and Julie A. Meyer. *Age and Sex Composition*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ Froma Walsh, "Families in Later Life," 307.

further predicted that by 2010, this demographic would grow significantly as the first wave of baby boomers reach retirement age.⁷

The NJPS investigated the demographics of the elderly. Their findings showed that most elderly Jews live in the Southern region of the United States (many moving to the warmer weather of Florida), although most Jews live in the North East region.⁸ Marital status was also found to be important. Most elderly Jews are married, although this is truer for the young elderly than the old elderly. Widowhood affects one-third of the old elderly and one-fifth of the young elderly.⁹ The survey also noted that 39% of the old elderly and 28% of the young elderly live alone (compared to 18% of non-elderly, single adults) which implies that the risk for social isolation is greater.¹⁰

The NJPS also looked into the Jewish connections the elderly make with communal organizations and programs. The elderly are at least as likely as other Jewish adults to be formally affiliated with the Jewish community through organization membership with approximately 43 % of the old elderly and 44% of the young elderly with synagogue memberships.¹¹ Approximately 20% of the elderly participated in adult education classes versus 25% of the general Jewish population. In terms of religious services participation, a slightly higher percentage of the elderly attended High Holiday services compared to the rest of the Jewish adult population (18% verses 14% respectively). Slightly fewer elderly attended services once per month compared to other

⁷ Miriam Reiger, *The American Jewish Elderly*. Rep. no. 6. (New York: United Jewish Communities, 2004), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

adults (6% verses 10%), while the proportion was approximately the same for attending more than one time per month (approximately 18-20%)¹².

People are considered to be elderly when they reach the age of sixty-five. The category of “elderly” can be further divided into subcategories. The “young old” are considered to be ages sixty-five to eighty-five and the “fourth age” are people over the age of eighty-five.¹³ Just as in other stages of life, the elderly face highs and lows although various factors contribute to the reasons behind an elderly person’s ultimate happiness and contentment with life.

Related to a person’s sense of control over their life, some elderly find they do not have a strong sense of how to manage their time. People who have retired may suddenly find themselves with so much time on their hands that they do not know how to fill it. A woman who has spent her life with her husband and children sometimes finds herself with too much time after her husband dies and her children are raising their own families. For those in nursing homes or being taken care of by an aid at home, the elderly find that the day can be simply punctuated by their meals and medications.¹⁴

Growing older can also create a sense of disconnection and disjunction. As friends and partners die, people can feel disconnected or even cut off socially. They can further feel disconnected if they cannot physically go visit their friends. The disconnection does not only extend socially, but can also be a feeling of being cut off from the future or the past. If the person who used to share memories is gone, it can

¹² Ibid., 18.

¹³ Froma Walsh, “Families in Later Life,” 307.

¹⁴ Dayle A. Friedman, “Letting Their Faces Shine: Accompanying Aging People and Their Families.” In *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Dayle A. Friedman, 2nd ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005), 344-373.

leave the person still alive feeling alone and disconnected from the past. Those people who are scared by death and what is to come can feel from the future or even hopelessness about what lies ahead for them.¹⁵

One significant milestone in aging can be a residential change. As people grow older, the house that they lived in for most of their adult lives can become too large to manage or even physically dangerous to their health. For this reason, many choose to move to smaller apartments or eventually assisted living or nursing homes. This residential change can be associated with loss as they move away from their neighbors, community, and friends.¹⁶

As people age, family systems naturally begin to change. Many times inter-generational relationships can offer a new lease on life as they observe success through their progeny. Grandparents find that they can revisit their own child rearing experiences through their grandchildren. Watching a grandchild grow up can be a valuable part of life review. As they watch them grow, the grandparent has the chance to reflect on their personal parenting satisfaction, achievements and failures.¹⁷ Additionally, many people who are just entering the “young old” years and may be facing their own health battles find that they need to take care of their ailing parents. Many times, this can create a role reversal between parent and child; the aging child cares for the more aged parents.¹⁸

As people grow older, their sense of self can be challenged by their physical limitations. Tasks like going to the bathroom on their own, driving, or even walking used to be easier to accomplish, or were even taken for granted, when they were younger and

¹⁵ Ibid., 348.

¹⁶ Froma Walsh, “Families in Later Life,” 310.

¹⁷ Ibid., 311.

¹⁸ Ibid., 314.

therefore their independence is challenged. As they lose previous meaningful relationships because spouses and friends pass away and by leaving the work force, they are stripped of previous roles from their lives, and capacities, feelings of worthlessness can arise for the elderly. Furthermore, in our gerophic communities many elderly find it difficult to find ways to make a contribution to society.

People can find meaning in their lives by engaging in a life review. A life review allows a person to take stock of their accomplishments as well as their failures. This life review can, many times, lead to a people acknowledging their failings or limits and allow them to come to terms with the life they lead.¹⁹ Engaging in life review allows people to consider the relationships they had in their life, what they found meaning from, and what they learned. Taking all of this information into consideration they can make meaning in the present and, ideally, find ways to continue to imagine a future filled with meaning.

In addition to examining the general trends of the aging, specific research has been done from a psychosocial perspective on the various stages of life. Erik Erikson examined all parts of life stages and divided them into three major sections; infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. Within each of these stages, it can be further sub-divided to total eight separate stages. Each stage of life is built upon the previous one and links to physical development and process psycho-social development. Physical development is also tied to personality development and the ethical power of the social process.²⁰

The final stage for Erikson, "old age," is marked by the theme of integrity verses despair. As people reach the end of their lifetime, Erikson believed that people can either be filled with a sense of integrity or despair. Erikson defines integrity as it relates to a

¹⁹ Dayle A. Friedman, "Letting Their Faces Shine: Accompanying Aging People and Their Families," 347.

²⁰ Erik Erikson, "Major Stages in Psychosocial Development" in *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982,) 59.

sense of wholeness and coherence. Their integrity becomes threatened as they grow older, their body and muscles begin to deteriorate, and they gradually lose strength in their mind. In order to live with a sense of integrity, Erikson believes that the elderly need to maintain a generative function in their lives, for a lack of vital involvement leads to despair. Maintaining some order and meaning in one's life can be vital as the body and mind begin to decay. If order and meaning cannot be maintained, Erikson believed that the elderly would despair as they approach the end of their lives and they become confused. However, if the elderly can find a sense of integrity at the end of their lives they will be able to find sources of enduring hope and achieve wisdom which he defines as "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself."²¹

Highlighting potential negative and stressful aspects of aging begs the question, what makes for successful aging? Various factors contribute to how one responds to each of these significant moments. For many people, turning sixty-five offers the possibility of retirement. A study done by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College investigated the different factors that contribute to a person's general happiness when they retire. They found that several factors contribute to a person's happiness as they transition into retirement: a sense of control over their lives, social relationships, health, and wealth.²² The study found that people who chose when and how they wanted to retire

²¹ Erik Erikson, "Major Stages in Psychosocial Development," 61.

²² This study included 2,389 useable observations. They used data from the Health and Retirement Study, a nationally representative, biennial panel survey of older Americans and their spouses (University of Michigan, 2007). Variables in the study came from the RAND Center for the Study of Aging. Esteban Calvo, Kelly Haverstick, and Steven A. Sass, "What Makes Retirees Happier: A Gradual or 'Cold Turkey' Retirement?" *Research on Aging* vol. 31 no. 1 (2009): 116-117, accessed November 1, 2012.

²⁹ The study defines happiness as "the degree to which a variety of feelings a person experiences are pleasant or enjoyable. Our definition of happiness focused on 1) more or less *stable* feelings as opposed to *temporary* feelings, such as sensory delight of a chocolate; 2) an evaluation of one's feelings in *general* as opposed to the evaluation of a *specific* domain of life, such as satisfaction with a job; and 3) an

(gradually cutting back their hours or abruptly leaving), who were married, and in good health were more likely to have increased happiness²³ and enjoyment of life.²⁴ Age alone did not seem to affect one's happiness and a person's wealth seemed to have mixed results. Receiving a pension did seem to have a positive affect on happiness.²⁵ The study concluded that most significant is a person's sense of control as they transition into retirement.²⁶ In the coming years, the first generation of women in the baby-boomer generation who were employed throughout adulthood will likely experience difficulty with their new found time and sense of loss as they retire.

Another major element that can play a role in successful aging is spirituality. Medical studies suggest that faith, prayer, and spiritual rituals can strengthen a person's health and healing by triggering emotions that influence the immune and cardiovascular system. Research has found a positive association between involvement in religious activities and religious meaning making and a person's well-being and general life satisfaction.²⁷

Spirituality enables people, particularly older adults, to make sense of their lives. Spirituality provides a way to review and interpret the events of their life, to make sense out of it, and to come to terms with and develop a sense of integrity about whom they are as a human being. The person who successfully synthesizes his or her life and shows the highest degree of involvement, be it inner or outer,

affective as opposed to a *cognitive* notion of happiness, such as the degree to which we think we have achieved our goals."

Esteban Calvo, Kelly Haverstick, and Steven A. Sass, "What Makes Retirees Happier: A Gradual or 'Cold Turkey' Retirement?" 118.

²⁴ Ibid., 114-5.

²⁵ Ibid., 115.

²⁶ Ibid., 130.

²⁷ David Baker, "Studies of the Inner Life: The Impact of Spirituality on Quality of Life" in *Quality of Life Research* 12 (2003): 54, Accessed November 16, 2011. www.jstor.org.

will also be the person who has the best potential for perceiving a good quality of life and for being satisfied with life.²⁸

For frail elderly, spirituality and faith provide tools to help them cope with some of the challenges of growing older. For healthier people, spirituality provides a sense of direction and purpose in their lives. Reflecting the work of Erikson, we see that there can be many negative sides to the process of growing older, but spirituality can provide integrity in old age.

Often times, people confuse or use interchangeably the words religion, faith, and spirituality. Wilfred Cantwell Smith makes a distinction between religion and faith. Religion is a “cumulative tradition” which is expressed by people in the form of scripture, laws, myths, prophecies, symbols, music, liturgy, and architecture. Faith is “the person’s or group’s way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative religion. Faith and religion, in this view are reciprocal.”²⁹ Both faith and religion can be used in tandem to strengthen a community and individuals. The elements that make up a tradition hold the capacity to awaken faith within a person. The ritual, the music, and prayer of Judaism have the potential to strengthen the faith of the elderly and therefore act to sustain them.

James Fowler defines faith as “a universal human concern in the quest to find something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being.”³⁰ Faith is a fundamental part of the human experience that few people can live without. It requires self-examination

²⁸ David Baker, “Studies of the Inner Life: The Impact of Spirituality on Quality of Life,” 55.

²⁹ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

and reflection for encounters with others. Faith requires that one be interactive and social, for interacting with others helps to shape one's faith.

Although one can experience faith outside of the synagogue, the interactions with one's community can help strengthen one's faith. Faith is essential for people of every age.

Most of the time, faith functions so as to screen off the abyss of mystery that surrounds us. But we all at certain times call upon faith to provide nerve to stand in the presence of the abyss - naked, stripped of life supports, trusting only in the being, the mercy and the power of the Other in the darkness. Faith helps us form a dependable 'life space,' an ultimate environment. At a deeper level, faith undergirds us when our life space is punctured and collapses, when the felt reality of our ultimate environment proves to be less than ultimate.³¹

As previously discussed, the elderly often find themselves faced with difficulties in their lives: chronic illness, a spouse dying, moving away from a beloved home. In these moments of darkness, having faith can help to support the elderly as they move through a difficult situation. For the elderly within our synagogues, faith can help to support and keep them within our community.

Relationship and faith are intertwined. One's first experiences with faith begin at birth. A child learns to look to the caregiver to learn about their way of seeing the world. They observe how they trust and show loyalty, show their fidelities and infidelities, and their values. All of this early interaction and observation helps to shape one's identity and determines the communities a person joins. In each significant relationship, people are linked by their common trusts and loyalties to centers of value and power.³²

³¹ Ibid., xii.

³² Ibid., 16.

Because of all the challenges that the elderly may face, finding ways to nourish their faith is vital. Rabbi Dayle Friedman actively attends to the spirituality of the elderly through what she calls the “*mitzvah* model.” In Jewish tradition, every person is born into the covenant between God and the Jewish people that binds each Jew to perform *mitzvot* throughout their lifetime. Tradition commands us to engage in *mitzvot* until death. Therefore, older persons have a vital role to play within the universe and their community. They are not exempt from performing *mitzvot* because they are older.³³ However, tradition says that they should be able to do *mitzvot* according to their capacity. For example, if one cannot stand for long periods of time, they can sit and say the *Amidah* rather than stand.

Participation in one’s community and engaging in different forms of spirituality can lead to a life of meaning, celebration, and connection and for this reason the “pastoral caregiver’s role is to link older people with this life of celebration”.³⁴ Studying Torah with others can help the elderly to use the wisdom gained from a lifetime of experience to make the text rich as they study. Because they can draw from any part of their life experience while studying the Torah text, the text does not need to be specifically about aging, it can be on any part of the Torah. Celebration of life can be done through Jewish time. Each moment is a location in time. Being able to engage the elderly in ritual acts like lighting candles can connect them to their past. It also has the potential to connect them to the future as they become aware that holy life cycle moments will continue into the future.³⁵

³³ Dayle Friedman, “Letting their faces Shine,” 349.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 357.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 356.

Older people often look for God more than the young as they feel God's presence in both joys and suffering. Yet their faith can be shaken in face of frailty, loss and mortality. It is necessary to provide a safe and open space to talk about their faith and doubt in God, and to assure them that doubt has been experienced and recorded throughout Jewish history. Giving them the opportunity to pray the words of our liturgy as well as allowing the elderly to articulate their own blessings and prayers to God can help to strengthen their faith and spiritual connection to God.

Rabbi Shelly Marder created a creative song-writing program for the elderly residents of San Francisco's Jewish Home to explore spirituality through the Psalms. Through the program "Psalms, Songs and Stories" elders compose songs after their collective study of a particular psalm. Conducted by Rabbi Marder and singer-songwriter Judith Kates-Friedman, they combine pastoral care, music, and Bible study as a creative and spiritual outlet for the elderly. As a group, the participants study a Psalm together and then write a new Psalm together based upon the original.³⁶ Within the group, Rabbi Marder says about 75% of the participants have dementia. However, Kates-Friedman comments, "Everyone is listened to and engaged with respect and genuine interest..." Participants reported that through the class they were able to enjoy life more and felt as though Rabbi Marder and Judith Kates-Friedman treated them all equally and that each one of them had creativity within them.³⁷

³⁶ One of the compositions written by the residents of the Jewish Home in San Francisco based up Psalm 128. You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors/Collecting memories from year to year/Live to see your children's children/ With much joy and few tears./May you see the beauty of their growing/Like saplings into trees./As we look ahead to the future/May we leave God's world in peace.

³⁷ Steven Friedman, "Singing a New Song: Elders Make Music from Psalms, Beliefs" *JWeekly*, October 22, 2004, accessed November 15, 2012, <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/24099/singing-a-new-song/>

Rabbi Dayle Friedman outlines three spiritual challenges an aging person may encounter as they grow older: finding meaning, confronting time, and counteracting disconnection and disjunction.³⁸

The Jewish community has begun to realize that rituals and ceremonies are needed to help mark significant milestones as one grows older. Ritualwell.org has begun to compile different ceremonies, a few of which address the milestones previously addressed. The following chapter(s) of this thesis will begin to outline different rituals and ceremonies to mark these moments as a Jewish person grows older and music that can be used in each of these ceremonies.

³⁸ Dayle Friedman, "Letting their Faces Shine" 347.

Chapter 2

Our lives are punctuated by significant moments; some publically in front of family and friends while others happen quietly in the private arena of life. Some of these occasions, like retirement or significant birthdays and anniversaries, can be celebrated with families and friends at a party. But unlike parties, formal rituals have the opportunity to place the moment in Jewish time and space and identify the many emotions that come with the significant transition. Each life cycle passage is an opportunity to rearticulate a person's relationship to Judaism; birth comes with entering the covenant, consecration with one's entrance into formal Jewish learning, bar mitzvah is a step into adulthood and demonstrates all the learning one has accomplished. Yet, beyond standing under a *chuppah* with one's partner, few moments are celebrated or recognized within one's Jewish community in any formal way once one enters adulthood. Traditional Judaism does not have rituals to mark the moments that accompany aging.³⁹ Yet adulthood, specifically in the later part of life, is filled with significant transitional moments. People retire, move to warmer climates, friends and partners pass away. These are a few of the transitions that a person faces as he/she grows older. These transitional moments can fall into a few broad categories including changing family and/or friend support systems, a shift in residence, loss of independence, retirement, and engaging in life review. People like Rabbi Richard Address and Rabbi Dayle Friedman, as well as others, have begun to address these needs by creating new rituals to fulfill some of these needs in an aging person's life. This chapter will aim to discuss the

³⁹ There are many sources that speak about growing older in both positive and negative lights, but do not provide any rituals to mark the changes that come with growing older.

significant moments that one can encounter as one grows older as well as some of the rituals that have been created to fulfill these needs.

I. Changing Family and Friendship Systems

The relationships between family and friends naturally begin to change and shift as people grow older. Many times inter-generational relationships can offer a new lease on life as older adults observe success through their progeny. Becoming a grandparent or great-grandparent for the first time marks a significant moment in one's life. Watching your children grow up and then give birth to their own children is a significant, joyful moment for many. Grandparents find that they can revisit their own child rearing experiences through their grandchildren. By watching their grandchildren grow up, they engage in the valuable exercise of life review. As grandparents watch their grandchildren grow up, they have the chance to reflect on their personal parenting satisfactions, achievements and failures.⁴⁰

The relationship with one's spouse can alter in old age. After being married and creating a life with another person, a spouse passing away can be a major life event. Life has the potential to be majorly disrupted for the surviving spouse who spent years with a partner making decisions, building a home, maybe raising children and grandchildren, sharing their hopes and fears. The surviving spouse will need to learn how to move about their life without their partner. Rabbi Richard Address writes about a rabbi and congregant who worked together to develop a ritual of closure. Together they formulated a ritual and wrote a prayerⁱ to remove his wedding band a year following his wife's death.

⁴⁰ Froma Walsh. "Families in Later Life" in *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Carter and Monica McGoldrick. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 311.

The prayer can be recited in front of family and friends, either at home or during a service in a congregation. The ritual could also be added to the ritual of a gravestone unveiling following the year of mourning.⁴¹

After a spouse dies, some people are able to find love again with another person. While they may not decide to marry each other, this new relationship is often deep and meaningful for the couple. My grandparents were married for over fifty years when my grandma passed away. About a year after she had passed away, my grandfather met a woman who he fell in love with and lived with for over ten years. They loved each other very much and found intimacy and comfort together, but did not feel that they needed to marry. They had each been married to their previous spouse for many years and had children and grandchildren together. This story, common to many elderly couples, is one for which Rabbi Richard Address also created a ritual in order to sanctify this new relationship. He says, a couple will come to a clergy person and

ask for a blessing that will sanctify their being together. There is no issue of children. There is an issue of intimacy as one ages, the security of a caring partner and the need to thank God that two people have found each other and to ask for peace and comfort in the years that may be granted.⁴²

Rabbi Address points out that this ritual is not a marriage ceremony, but rather a ritual to give thanks that two people have found each other and a prayer for hope and security in the years to come. Both of the rituals that Rabbi Address presents include echoes of a marriage ceremony speaking of the holy union of two people and referencing the words

⁴¹ Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect: A Program and Resource Guide for Congregations on Sacred Aging*. (New York: URJ Press, 2005), 69.

⁴² Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect*, 62.

ani l'dodi v'dodi li. However, he does not include the essential pieces, such as exchange of vows or signing of the *ketubah*, of a Jewish wedding for this ceremony.

A couple's relationship can be seriously altered due to one of the partner's developing dementia.⁴³ With the gradual loss of one's mental abilities, extra stress can be put on the other spouse to cover daily responsibilities. Because dementia can also affect memory, a person cannot always remember many of the shared experiences they had with their spouse. Rabbi Address also considers this a type of loss for people. He considers the well spouse who finds a new intimate relationship with another person that provides a sense of comfort. The spouse does not intend to leave their partner who is ill, but can still find support from another person. This ritual is built upon the previous cohabitation ritual, but includes a special blessing that acknowledges that the ill spouse is not being abandoned. It concludes with the blessing *Baruch atah Adonai, rofei hacholim*.⁴⁴

A person's social network can also begin to change as friends decide to make residential changes or pass away. As they lose meaningful relationships with friends, people can feel disconnected or even cut off socially. Whether a friend passes away or moves away (perhaps for health reasons or to live in a space that is physically easier to manage) feelings of depression can arise for the elderly. Both are considered to be losses. They can further feel disconnected if they cannot physically go visit their friends. The disconnection does not only extend socially, but can also be a feeling of being cut off from the future or the past. If the person who used to share memories is gone, it can

⁴³ "Dementia is a decline of mental abilities such as thinking, reasoning and memory. Dementia usually occurs in older age; it is rare under the age of 60. It is serious enough to diminish everyday functions in a person's life such as driving, everyday duties and even can effect the ADLs (Activities of Daily Living) like personal hygiene, dressing, and feeding. Many people mistake dementia as being a disease itself but it is actually a group of symptoms that occur with certain diseases or conditions."

"Dementia Overview" accessed November 16, 2012, www.dementia.org

⁴⁴ Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect*, 64.

leave the person still alive feeling alone and disconnected from the past. For the person who is scared by death and what is to come, people can feel disconnected from the future or even hopeless about what lies ahead for them.⁴⁵

II. Shift in Residence

Another significant milestone in aging can be a residential change. Affectionately known as “snowbirds,” some elderly decide to keep the residence that they have lived in for many years and maintain a second residence in the southern region of the United States (many times Florida). Living in the Northeast and Midwest during the wintertime can be difficult to navigate with the snow and ice, so the warm weather in Florida is welcomed. For many, the warm weather is better for one’s health compared to the often times frigid winters in the Northeast and Midwest. According to a study done at the University of Florida, researchers discovered that almost 75% of snowbirds in the study usually held their permanent residence in either the Northeast or the Midwest.

Approximately 80% of those in the sample came to live in Florida during the warm winter months of January, February, and March (verses 10% of snowbirds that lived in Florida during June, July, and August). The results of the study found that approximately 80% of snowbirds came to Florida during this time because of the warmer weather.⁴⁶

Others choose to move to smaller apartments or eventually assisted living facilities as they grow older. The house that one lived in for most of their adult lives can eventually become too large to manage and maintain or can even be physically dangerous

⁴⁵ Dayle A. Friedman, “Letting Their Faces Shine: Accompanying Aging People and Their Families.” In *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Dayle A. Friedman, 2nd ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005), 348.

⁴⁶ Stanley A. Smith and Mark House. *Snowbirds, Sunbirds, and Stayers: Seasonal Migration of the Elderly in Florida*. (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Philadelphia, March 31-April 2, 2005), 7.

to their health (for example, having to ascend and descend a flight of stairs). This residential change can be associated with loss as they move away from their neighbors, community, and friends.⁴⁷ Many times this move is significant for extended family because it's a move away from the family home. Adult children will be affected, as they need to say goodbye to the home that they grew up in.

Some rituals have been written to serve both the elderly as they move their residence as well for their adult children. Rituals have also been written to put up a mezuzah in the new residence, perhaps in a smaller apartment or assisted living or nursing home. Rabbi Cary Kozberg created a ritual for affixing a mezuzah upon moving to a nursing home.⁴⁸ This ceremony makes use of the liturgy of the *Sh'ma and V'ahavta*, "giving concrete meaning to the Jewish mandate of remembering God's commandments 'on the doorposts of your house.'"⁴⁹ With each line of the *v'ahavata*, the new resident of the nursing home makes a wish to God for their new home.⁵⁰

Finally, when living alone becomes too difficult and health deteriorates too much, many elderly move to a nursing home. A person's response to this move varies. This can be a difficult transition for many people. The loss of independence (set times to eat, take medications, planned social events, and constant caretakers) that accompanies moving into a nursing can be difficult. Others find the extra help to be a relief and

⁴⁷ Froma Walsh, *Families in Later Life*, 310.

⁴⁸ Full ceremony can be found by Cary Kozberg in, *A Heart of Wisdom: Making the Jewish Journey from Midlife through the Elder Years*, ed. Susan Berrin (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).

⁴⁹ Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect*, 66.

⁵⁰ For example: The leader will read or chant *uch'tavtam al m'zuzot beitecha uvisharecha*. Resident responds: May the Divine Presence, symbolized by this mezuzah, be felt in this room by all who enter. May that Presence continue to sustain me, as it has sustained those who came before me, and as it will sustain those who will come after me.

Ibid., 68.

necessary. Many make new social connections and continue to be mentally stimulated by the various programming that nursing homes provide.

Whether one responds well or not to this significant move, it's important to find a way for all to acknowledge the feelings that come with this move. For the adult children, participating in a ritual for parents moving to a nursing home can also address feelings of loss or relief that their parent will be taken care of. Many of the current rituals that respond to a residential change (for snowbirds, a smaller apartment, or nursing home) include putting up a mezuzah to establish a new Jewish home.

III. Loss of Independence

Loss of one's independence is generally not marked in any significant way since often times it is a gradual process. However gradual, it can hold major implications for a person's life. People spend the majority of their adult lives taking care of themselves; they pay their bills, drive to work or to run errands or visit friends and family, clean and maintain their home, and make a living. For many elderly, performing many of these tasks independently can become more and more difficult without help. The loss of independence is a major challenge for some people as this loss of control over one's life is accompanied by feelings of helplessness or anger or frustration. Tasks like going to the bathroom on their own, driving, or even walking used to be easier to accomplish, or were even taken for granted, when they were younger. As people's bodies become weaker, dependence on a cane, walker, or wheelchair may become necessary. Some people perceive the use of a cane or wheelchair as a sign of weakness and deterioration

and therefore resist using them. Living in our gephobic communities, these ideas are further perpetuated.

Although few rituals have been written as a need for help becomes more apparent, individual prayers have been written. For example, Rabbi Rami Shapiro wrote a prayer with the intention of it being used at a service to honor both caregivers and loved ones.

Needing Help by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

God, I don't like to be helped. It makes me feel I am a burden and a nuisance. When I vent anger about my affliction, let me do it privately and with frustration only toward my circumstances, and not toward those who help me. When I must ask for assistance, let my words be gentle. Let me remember to say "please" with even my simplest request and "thank you" when even my smallest bidding is granted. Let me do all that I can for myself. But give me the wisdom to know the difference between self-reliance and foolhardiness. Amen⁵¹

More rituals need to be written for these difficult moments. Whether they are done publically in the synagogue or privately in one's home, it's important to place these difficult losses within a Jewish context.

IV. Retirement

Retirement is often times publicly recognized by family and friends. A party may be thrown in their honor, or a family goes out for dinner, or the retiree is often asked, "How is retirement going?" Yet it is rarely recognized in a Jewish context.

People choose to begin their retirement in different ways. Some decide to retire from their job in a gradual way, working part-time as they grow older. This decision could be for reasons including, but not limited to, worsening health, a desire to spend

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

more time with family, a need to continue making money, a love of the job (my grandfather continued going to into his law office through his early 90s). For others, stopping work “cold turkey” is preferable. The free time away from work allows a person to travel, volunteer, and spend more time with family. Others unexpectedly do not know what to do with all of their free time and can become depressed.

Students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (class of 1983) prepared a ritual for retirement called *Bar Yovel* or Son of the Jubilee. The name of this ritual comes from a Leviticus 25:8-18⁵² which speaks of the jubilee year, the fiftieth year, in which one must not plant or reap food from the land. It is a holy year. This ritual therefore celebrates the many years that a person remained in the workforce until he or she decides to rest. Together, those gathered for the retirement ritual say a blessing over wine so that “we may know the sweetness of contentment.” The rabbi acknowledges the worries that can come with retirement asking, “As I enter the years of retirement and aging: Will I be bored or stimulated? Will I feel useless or valuable? Will I be lonely or involved with others? Will I feel despair or hope?” Although there is no immediate answer to these questions to someone entering retirement, together the “blast” away these demons with

⁵² "And thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and there shall be unto thee the days of seven Sabbaths of years, even forty and nine years. Then shalt thou make proclamation with the blast of the horn on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall ye make proclamation with the horn throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you; ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy unto you; ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In this year of jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession. And ye shall not wrong one another; but thou shalt fear thy God; for I am the LORD your God. Wherefore ye shall do My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land."

the sounding of the *shofar*. The retiree also chooses an organization that friends and family can give *tzedakah* to in their honor.⁵³

This ritual puts retirement in Jewish time. It acknowledges the excitement that comes with retirement as well as the fears that may come with it. Because retirement does not just touch the person retiring, but family and friends as well, this ritual very tactfully invites loved ones to participate in the ritual.

V. Engaging in Life Review

People can find meaning by engaging in a life review as they take stock of their lives. Looking back over all they did over their lives by telling the stories can be a cathartic experience as they relive the moment they talk about. They can make meaning out of what happened in the past in order to help them continue to move forward in their lives. Life review can take place in a variety of ways. For some, it's easiest to engage by telling stories. My grandfather would tell stories of his childhood to anyone who would listen as a way of reviewing his life. Many people engage in life review on their deathbed with family and friends by their side. Some people begin to give their things away to others. Each memento, big or small, comes with a memory that the person might decide to share in the process of giving away their possessions.

Rabbi Address recognized the importance of life review at significant anniversaries and birthdays. Both moments allow the person to reflect upon the time that has passed, the events that took place in the preceding years, and the important people that touched their life. As medicine continues to advance, an increasing number of people live to reach the ages of 80, 90, and even 100. The wisdom they possess is vast

⁵³ "Bar Yovel: Ritual of Retirement." Prepared by the "Life Cycle Passages" class of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Institute for Adult Jewish Studies, December 1983. Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Instructor. Accessed May 18, 2012. www.ritualwell.org/ritual/bar-yovel/retirement-ritual

and should be celebrated within community. Rabbi Address suggests a few different readings that focus on honoring the wisdom that a person gains throughout their lifetime and through their life experiences. The reading concludes with the blessing *Baruch atah Adonai, Elohainu melech haolam, ham'afsheir li lachalok chayai im rei-ah ahuv v'oheiv* We praise you, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You enable us to share life with a beloved and loving friend.⁵⁴

Another ritual called *Simchat HaDorot* celebrates a family member's 90th birthday in the context of a *havdalah* ceremony. Together, multiple generations gather to sanctify the special moment together as a family to honor and celebrate the 90 years of their loved one. They share stories and memories together, said a blessing of Thanksgiving, and conclude the ceremony with the children and grandchildren blessing their grandma with the Priestly blessing and of course, the singing of Happy Birthday in Hebrew.⁵⁵ Together the entire family engages in life review through sharing memories and by separating it from the every day by placing it in the context of *havdalah*. Although in the particular ceremony that is given as an example, the woman celebrating her 90th birthday did not share her personal reflections, the family members took the opportunity to reflect on her life to her and show their love for her.

Some people choose to engage in a life review by writing an ethical will to their family. An ethical will provides an opportunity for a person to share their stories, blessings, wisdom, life-lessons, and their hopes and dreams with the people they love.

⁵⁴ This prayer was adapted from "Readings and Rituals for the Joys, Challenges and Traditions of Senior Adulthood," published by the Jewish Council for the Aging, in collaboration with Temple Rodeph Shalom, Falls Church, Virginia.

Richard Address, *To Honor and Respect*, 59.

⁵⁵ Lisa Hochberg-Miller, "Simchat HaDorot." *Ritual Well*. 2011. Accessed November 8, 2012. <<http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/simchat-hadorot>>.

Many times, the ethical will is read aloud to family members. The writing of an ethical will allow a person to review all that they learned in their lifetime and wish to pass on to another generation. This custom is one that can be found from our patriarchs in the Torah and beyond to the Talmud, as well as in medieval and modern Hebrew Literature. The earliest example can be found in Genesis on Jacob's deathbed as he tries to tell his children how to live. Moses also makes a farewell address to the Israelites chastising and prophesying before his death.⁵⁶

Writing an ethical will is not necessarily an easy task. Rabbi Riemer writes,

In doing so, one confronts oneself. One must look inward to see what are the essential truths one has learned in a lifetime, face up to one's failures, and consider what are the things that really count. Thus an individual learns a great deal about himself or herself when writing an ethical will.⁵⁷

This form of life review is not necessarily an easy one to engage in; it can be hard for both the person writing the will and the person who receives it. Some lessons may not be easy to write about because of the pain behind them and can similarly be difficult to read about. However, this can be an opportunity for a person at the end of their life to face their fears and potentially feel a sense of release from the hardships of a lifetime and retain hope that their life lessons can benefit others in the future.

VI. Including Music in Rituals

In researching the rituals mentioned earlier in this chapter, as well as others, I began to notice a trend. The majority of these rituals focus on written text and action.

⁵⁶ Jack Riemer, "Writing and Reading Ethical Wills." Introduction. *Ethical Wills: A Modern Jewish Treasury*. Ed. Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer. (New York: Schocken, 1983), accessed November 15, 2012.

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/Death_and_Mourning/Dying/Ethical_Wills.shtml

⁵⁷ Jack Riemer, "Writing and Reading Ethical Wills."

Planting trees, washing hands, and adding a new Hebrew name were among some of the elements that participants engaged with as a part of their transition. Each action helped facilitate a change of some sort. However, as I read through these rituals, the absence of music was striking. Some rituals included some music, but it appeared to be a space holder rather than as means of enhancing a particular moment within the ritual. Just as carefully planned words and choreography can help to beautify and add meaning to a ritual, when music is examined and chosen with intent the ritual can become a richer experience for the participant and community members.

Music can evoke different emotions. Various elements such as the tempo, how rhythmic or legato the melody is, the dynamics of the piece, and the instrumentation contribute to producing a range of emotions. Starting music softly can produce a feeling of intimacy within a community or could be an unspoken sign that a moment is meant for reflection. Using a very rhythmic piece often inspires participants to clap and express their joy. Even without knowing the text of a piece, opening rhythmic measures can be the sign that the music is meant to inspire happy feelings. The instrumentation used in music can also be used purposefully. Adding a drum can intensify rhythmic pieces. Strumming a guitar often produces a more folk, light-hearted, communal feeling. In contrast, picking the strings of a guitar creates a softer, comforting feeling. A piano also has great warmth, so combined with the picked guitar listeners may feel as though they were being enveloped in a warm blanket. Sometimes there can be a choice to use the voice only music without instruments. While the absence of instruments can feel naked at times, different colors can be heard in the voice. Perhaps it will signify to listeners that this is a moment to sit, listen, and think. Sometimes allowing for silence in the middle of

a ritual can give people time to think and reflect; yet, simple silence can sometimes feel very empty and can create a feeling of being alone and isolated. By adding soft instrumental music in the background or humming, the atmosphere becomes warm again and provides an inviting space for reflection.⁵⁸

The use of each element in combination with the others can produce a whole spectrum of feelings. For example, when the President enters a room for a formal ceremony there is loud, rhythmic music with lots of brass instruments. The tone of the music conveys importance and strength and therefore, underscores the significance of the President and his impending words. If you walk into a spa, soft, soothing, legato music immediately greets you, which creates a calming effect. The warmly painted walls and décor show that the spa is meant to be a relaxing place and the music helps to further convey the tone.

Of the rituals I looked at that included music, the music seemed to be chosen based on the theme of the lyrics in connection with the ritual themes. While this is an excellent first step, the previous elements should be considered as well. For example, in a ritual to celebrate the milestone of a woman turning sixty, Debbie Friedman's composition "*L'chi Lach*" was used.⁵⁹ The ritual focused on acknowledging all that the woman had learned in her sixty years of life and taking it with her into the future. "*L'chi Lach*" acted as the theme song throughout the ritual. The repetition of the music throughout helped to emphasize the message. The music is a beautiful choice for this particular ritual, however there did not seem to be much thought about how it would

⁵⁸ For more information about the emotional impact and messages of different musical forms see: Richard H. Freedman, *Lens, Mirror, Spark, and Lamp*. (Princeton, NJ: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 84-92.

⁵⁹ Savina J. Teubal, "Simchat Chokhmah." *Ritual Well*, 1992. Accessed January 8, 2012. <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/simchat-chokhmah>

affect those participating. How does the music sound? What has happened immediately beforehand and what will be happening immediately after? Should this music be communal or would it be more appropriate for those in attendance to listen? Should it be assumed that the people attending the ritual would know this music? While the theme was an appropriate choice, it appears these other elements were not considered.

Several different elements go into choosing music for a worship service or a ritual. One of the first questions to ask is, “why are you here?” What is the ultimate goal of the ritual? What meaning should the community take away from the ritual? Once the answers to these questions are clear the type of music that will be needed throughout will become more explicit. Knowing that participants might be entering a ritual scared or tentative will mean that beginning with upbeat music would be inappropriate. Instead, music that is calming and familiar may help to begin easing unspoken fears. Should the *kahal* be inspired to take action at the end of the ritual? Choosing music with a quick tempo and a drum can produce an energizing atmosphere, serving as a non-spoken charge to action. Should the ritual give time for reflection, which is not available in our otherwise busy lives? Perhaps quiet instrumentation and no voice would be appropriate. Knowing the ultimate goal of the ritual will help set the tone for the rest of the ritual.

One wonderful musical option is to include a *niggun* within a ritual. A *niggun*, derived from the Yiddish *nign*, is typically translated as a “melody” or “tune” without reference to type or purpose. These wordless melodies use various syllables such as oy, yoy, yoy...; dai, dai, dai...; bim-bam, bam, bam...; and a variety of others that can be used to evoke different emotions. “They are sometimes improvised in the context of desired moods and sometimes fixed by tradition as standard features of particular

niggunim.⁶⁰ Not having specific words can lift a burden for those who have trouble learning new music. It allows focus to only be in the melody. The repetition of a *niggun* can create the same sort of feeling as repeating a mantra. Once the notes are familiar, then the singing becomes effortless and one can concentrate on the feeling it creates within. The type of *niggun* sung will produce different emotions. A *niggun* that is upbeat can create a feeling of joy and unification in the room while a *niggun* that is slower but has a strong beat can begin to calm a room and create a more reflective mood. Knowing what type of mood you want to create can help direct you to the type of *niggun* you should use.

Considering the spoken text of a ritual, before including music, is incredibly important as well. Paying attention to the tone and content of the words will determine what type of music to choose. The music, in fact, can help to emphasize the point of the previously spoken words or set the tone for words that will soon be said. Using proclamatory music following a joyous change in status within the community helps to emphasize not only the change, and further underscores the joy of the moment.

The following chapter includes two rituals for the elderly: one for the retiree; one for a loss of physical ability or independence. The first ritual for retirement is based upon a ritual written by students from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Although it included many beautiful elements, it did not include music. I revised the ritual and chose music to add throughout. The second ritual for loss of physical ability grew out of prayers written by Tamara Arnow. Drawing on the ideas I just presented as part of my

⁶⁰ Neil W. Levin, introduction to Volume 6. "Echoes of Ecstasy: Hassidic Inspiration," (Milken Archives: 2012). Accessed January 9, 2013. <http://www.milkenarchive.org/articles/view/introduction-to-volume-6>.

prefatory explanation prior to each of the rituals, I explain why I chose each piece of music and how I hope the music will function within the ritual.

Chapter 3

A Ritual for Retirement

While it would be incredibly meaningful to honor each individual anticipating retirement in their own ritual, the anticipated large number of baby boomers who will be retiring in the coming years would make this difficult. Therefore, like a confirmation service that honors a group of teenagers as they confirm their lifelong Jewish learning, this retirement ritual will be for all those who intend to retire in the coming year. Together as a group they will begin to rearticulate their place in the community. The community on a particular Shabbat will be able to witness and be cognizant of all the people anticipating retirement in the coming year.

This retirement ritual would be placed within a Shabbat evening service with the core of the ritual happening during the Torah service.⁶¹ In *parshat Vayelech*, Moses prepares to “retire” and hand over leadership of the Israelite people to Joshua. Although Moses is leaving his position, he takes care to write down his teachings and pass them on to the next generation. Because of the significance of this Torah portion, the retirement ritual would be planned to take place specifically on this Shabbat. By recounting Moses’ “retiring,” a link is made to those who are about to retire and reminds us of the continual links in our tradition. Significantly, this Shabbat falls during the month of *Ehul*, a month used for personal reflection as the High Holidays approach. This inward searching and evaluation is also beneficial as one retires. What is it that I’m looking for in my retirement? What did I learn from all the years I spent in the workforce? How do I want to continue to find meaning in my life? The blowing of the *shofar* every day during the

⁶¹ It should be noted that many Reform services no longer hold their *Torah* service on Friday evenings, but on Saturday mornings. This ritual could be altered so that it could take place on a Shabbat morning. The singing of the *Hashkiveinu*, an evening prayer, would need to either be changed or explained.

month of *Elul* can be thought of as an inward call to continue to change and evolve. The blowing of the *shofar* in this ritual can be thought of in a similar way. Other moments throughout the service would be used as focal points as well, such as *Tzaddik Katamar* during *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *V'shamru* during the *Ma'ariv* service.

The name of the ceremony, *bar yovel*, links this ceremony to another biblical occasion when the *shofar* was blown – the Jubilee year, in Hebrew *Yovel*. As the text from Leviticus notes, the fiftieth year is a sacred year that should be set apart from all others. After seven cycles of seven years, the fiftieth year is to be celebrated as the Jubilee year. In this year, people will experience economic freedom by being able to return to both their land and to their families. It is a year in which people pause from their work and from their economic burdens (according to Leviticus, debts would be cancelled in regard to both one's land and one's servitude).⁶² Announced by blowing the *shofar*, the *Yovel*, the Jubilee year is one of liberation and release. Refraining from work after many years of hard work allows the body, the mind, and the soul to engage in rest. Similar to celebrating Shabbat, the Jubilee was a built-in time that gave people permission to rest and reflect on all that has happened.

Honoring the retiree as a *bar* or *bat yovel*, a son or daughter of the Jubilee, highlights that after many years of work a person now reaches a year that is to be sacred. Retirement can have great meaning and significance for the person who approaches it as a holy time. This period of well deserved rest and time for reflection on all that happened in the years past can help a person to grow and gain wisdom as they advance in years. Reb Zalman wrote, "If you don't recover from the past, you won't get the wisdom.

⁶² Dave. A Leiter, "The year of Jubilee and the 21st Century." *Brethren Life and Thought*, 47 no.3-4 Summer-Fall, 2002, 164-186 (article).

Wisdom comes from having learned from experience.”⁶³ This period of rest in the Jubilee year is precisely a time to “recover from the past” or to learn from the past so that one can gain wisdom from all -- positive, negative, and in-between -- that the retiree experienced in his or her workplace.

Furthermore, calling a retiree a *bar/bat yovel* showcases to the community that they have attained a new status within the community. Without a full time job their role within the synagogue community changes. This year of liberation provides the retiree with new opportunities within the synagogue that might not have been available during a full time job. A retiree can attend adult education classes, which they may not have had enough time for before or did not fit into their schedule. From the time a person becomes a *bar/bat mitzvah*, they are required by Jewish tradition to continue studying and learning all of their lives. This jubilee year for the retiree provides the time to reengage in Jewish learning. Rabbi Friedman’s “*mitzvah* model” says that all people, regardless of their age, must engage in performing *mitzvot* according to their ability. While there are plenty of opportunities outside of the synagogue, this is a new way the retiree can engage in their synagogue while also helping the larger Jewish community. By engaging in life-long learning, volunteering within the synagogue (in the library, for example), helping with *b’nai mitzvah* tutoring, teaching classes to religious school students, or helping with general synagogue maintenance, the elderly remain engaged as a vital part of the community.

The emotional high point of the ceremony comes during the *shofar* blowing. This section is meant to highlight the spectrum of feelings associated with retirement. The

⁶³ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, "Can Elders Save the World." *Yes!* Creative Commons, 29 Aug. 2005. Web. 7 Dec. 2012. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/respecting-elders-becoming-elders/can-elders-save-the-world>

ceremony will begin by focusing on the types of fears that can accompany retirement. The sounding of the *shofar* blasts away each of the fears that can accompany retirement. By publically naming fears aloud, the community can acknowledge the feelings the retiree may be experiencing and prepare themselves to respond to them. As the *sh'liach tzibbur* clearly names each potential fear upon entering retirement the *shofar* will be sounded loudly. The blasts of the *shofar* can also be a sound of joy. Hearing the blasts reminds us of all the potential good that may happen in the coming year. Similarly, this was its function when announcing the Jubilee year. It can be exciting to think about the various possibilities and experiences now available with retirement. Hopefully the blasts of the *shofar* can help awaken the excitement within each of us to engage in life in the fullest way possible. The *shofar* harkens to the sounds of Jewish time. The loud blasts punctuate the space and mark it as holy. The sounding of the *shofar* thus proclaims the retiree's new status within the community. It is a holy year and thus deserves to be sanctified with the sounding of the *shofar*. From moments of naming scared feelings to expressing feelings of joy, this point in the service serves as the moment of transition in front of one's community.

Following the final blowing of the *shofar*, when the retiree takes his or her new place within the community, we will sing together *Areshet S'fateinu*. This liturgy is traditionally sung immediately after the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*.

May the request of our lips win your favor, most high and exalted God, who does perceive and hear our sounding of the *shofar*. Accept graciously our recital of *Shofarot*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Philip Birnbaum, trans. *High Holiday Prayer Book*. 25th ed. New York: Hebrew, 1979.

The blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* is meant to do a few things. It marks the beginning of the ten days of repentance between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. The sounding of the shofar is meant to evoke a feeling of awe, reminding us of the creation of the world, and of God's sovereignty throughout the world.⁶⁵ By reciting the words of *Areshet s'fateinu* following the blowing the *shofar*, we ask God to hear all that we have asked and to see all of the internal work that we have done.

The *shofar* blowing during this retirement ceremony acts as a musical *nechemta* that reinforces and highlights the blasting away of the fears that can accompany retirement plus the celebration of the Jubilee year, the year of retirement. This fervent prayer to God seems to be the emotional release of all of the hopes and dreams surrounding retirement. Upbeat, joyful music will facilitate this release. The singing of *Siman Tov* could have been appropriate as well. However, singing *Siman Tov* would only acknowledge the accomplishment of reaching retirement while the words of *Areshet S'fateinu* acknowledge both the accomplishment as well as fears.

The blessing in front of the ark is meant to echo the same blessing that one might see at a baby naming, a bar/bat mitzvah, confirmation, or wedding ceremony. In many cases, the rabbi or cantor will bestow the Priestly Benediction upon a person or a group of people. There are many variations as to how this blessing can be given. It is an intimate moment both for the people giving and receiving the blessing as well as the community members who get to stand as witnesses to the blessing. For this particular ceremony, I chose to place this moment in front of the ark, but modify it a bit. Rather than the clergy blessing the retiree, I chose to have a close colleague or family member

⁶⁵ "Why Is it Necessary to Blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah," copyright 1999, accessed January 15, 2013, http://www.breslov.com/world/parsha/roshhashana_5750.html

bestow the blessing in a public setting so that the community could witness. The blessing will be uttered quietly so only the retiree and the person offering it will hear it. By making the words personal but inaudible to the rest of the congregation, it highlights the sanctity of the moment. Standing in front of the open ark is a fairly dramatic scene to be able to watch and can be a very holy moment for the person being blessed. Each pair, retiree and the person giving the blessing, will come up and stand on the *bimah* in front of the ark. For the congregation, it will be an important moment to see all those in their community being blessed. For the retirees, they will be standing together as a group with all those in the community about to retire. Hopefully, being blessed all together will create a feeling of commonality so they do not feel alone during this important life transition. In this way, everyone gets to take part in this emotional moment.

There are a few reasons behind the choice to have the cantor sing *Hashkiveinu* as the retirees are being blessed. First, the room is not completely silent as the blessings are bestowed. The members of the congregation can listen to the words and the music during the moments of blessing. While meaningful to have the Priestly Blessing sung during this moment, I chose the text of *Hashkiveinu* because it acknowledges things that can terrify us and therefore asks God to bless us with a shelter of peace. In this way, the music acknowledges the fears one may have upon entering retirement but nevertheless has a hope for contentment and fulfillment. There are few texts that are able to acknowledge these feelings and so I felt it important to include.

The music that Michael Isaacson composed for *Hashkiveinu* is beautiful and lyrical. The music itself feels like a blessing. The opening line of music is a beautiful handoff from the piano to the singer's opening words of *Hashkiveinu Adonai Eloheinu*.

It almost seems like a naked plea from the singer as there is only a soft chord underneath these three words. But then suddenly on the word *l'shalom*, both the piano and singer are together as if they give each other support in asking God to spread a shelter of peace. Asking for something so significant is not easy, just as asking God for support as one enters retirement may not be easy. It is not an endeavor that one can do easily alone. But suddenly with a little warm accompaniment it becomes much easier. The middle section that speaks of the demons that we want to keep away is sung in the lower part of the range. One might expect that speaking of each fear would be sharp and staccato, as if they were prickly to the touch. Yet Isaacson chose to still make this part legato and smooth with a forward motion constantly underneath the melody. Although darker in tone than the rest of the piece, the legato feels like a comfort and a reminder to keep moving through these tough moments. Something better could be on the other side. This is further emphasized as the text moves to the comforting words of *u'vtzeil k'nafecha*. The lightness that was felt at the beginning of the piece returns at this point like wrapping a warm blanket back around you. Particularly at the end, as the text speaks of a *sukkat shalom*, the accompaniment is sweeping as if to create a musical shelter of peace. The warmth of the notes is enveloping, yet soft and sweet at the same time.

Retirement Ritual – Bar Yovel – Torah Service

Immediately following silent prayer and the singing of Oseh Shalom, Yihiyu L'ratzon, etc.

Leader:

I invite all of you who are retiring this coming year to come up on the *bimah* and stand before the ark.

[B'nai Yovel will be seated throughout the congregation. As they come up to the bimah, speak to the congregation]

Tonight, we honor these community members who are retiring by celebrating their reaffirmation of the covenant as they each become a *bar or bat yovel*, a son or daughter of the jubilee. Harry, on behalf of all those who are retiring, I ask you to take out our *Torah* scroll.

Sing Ki Mitziyon, Sh'ma, Echad, l'cha Adonai → hakafah

Leader:

[Immediately before the reading of the Torah]

In *parshat Vayelech*, Moses prepares to “retire” and hand over leadership of the Israelite people to Joshua. Although Moses is leaving his position, he takes care to write down his teachings and pass them onto the next generation. Tonight we prepare to honor those in our congregation who anticipate their own retirement in the coming year. Just as we find connection with our tradition at baby namings, b'nei mitzvah, and at weddings, tonight's Torah reading links this moment to our tradition as well.

For the honor of the *Aliyah* tonight, I turn to all of you who anticipate your retirement in the coming year. *Ya'amdu kol ben yovel u'vat yovel l'aliyah laTorah.*

[Aliyah]

Yasher kochachem! I invite you to recite this additional blessing together.

Group of retirees:

In love, You have given us this time for enjoying the fruits of our labors. May this be a time not of stagnation, but of inner growth. May we find new ways to serve You and to consecrate our lives to matters of the spirit.

Keep alive within us the spirit of gratitude for Your many blessings, so that we may know the sweet taste of contentment.

Torah Reading

Rabbi (following Torah reading):

Even in joy there are doubts, apprehensions, and questions concerning what will be after serving for so many years in the workplace. Will I be bored or stimulated? Will I feel useless or valuable? Will I be lonely or involved with others? Will I feel despair or hope? There is a folk tradition that sounding the *shofar* can help to chase away any demons that may plague us. Tonight, the *shofar* will be blown as a way of symbolically chasing away each of the fears that can accompany retirement.

I now invite up family members as well as colleagues of each retiree to stand at their chair and participate in this next part of our service.

The *shofar* harkens to the sounds of Jewish time. The loud blasts punctuate the space and mark it as holy. The sounding of the *shofar* thus proclaims the retiree's new status within the community. It is a holy year and thus deserves to be sanctified with the sounding of the *shofar*. From moments of scared feelings to feelings of joy, this point in the service symbolically marks this transition in front of our community.

Colleague or family member:

The demon of boredom! (*Shofar* is sounded.)

Colleague or family member:

The demon of uselessness! (*Shofar* is sounded.)

Colleague or family member:

The demon of loneliness! (*Shofar* is sounded.)

Colleague or family member:

The demon of despair! (*Shofar* is sounded.)

Leader:

May your retirement be devoid of demons. Should you meet any of them, we pray that you will be blessed with the courage to face them with the sounds of the *shofar* still ringing in your ears and with the memory of the all the faces surrounding you as your support system. **Retirees are invited to sit again in the congregation.**

The name of each retiree, a *bar yovel*, links this ceremony to another Biblical occasion when the *shofar* was blown – the Jubilee year. Announced by blowing the *shofar*, the Jubilee year is one of liberation and release. Refraining from work, after many years of hard work, allows the body, the mind, and the soul to engage in rest and reflection.

Honoring our retirees as a *bar* or *bat yovel* highlights that after many years of work they have now reached, they now have reached a year that is to be sacred. This period of well deserved rest, time for reflection on all that happened in the years past can help them to grow and gain wisdom as they advance in years. Reb Zalman wrote, “if you don’t recover from the past, you won’t get the wisdom. Wisdom comes from having learned from experience.”⁶⁶ This period of rest in the Jubilee year is precisely a time to “recover from the past” or to learn from the past so that each one of you can gain wisdom from all -- positive, negative, and in between -- that was learned during your work years.

Colleague or family member: [one person for each retiree rises and all read from their seat]

"You shall count off seven weeks of years – seven times seven years – so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. Then you should sound the *shofar* loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall have the *shofar* sounded throughout your land and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout your land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each o you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you...It shall be holy to you. (Lev. 25:8-12).

Leader:

⁶⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, "Can Elders Save the World."

So tonight, after recognizing your years of hard work and dedication in our labor force, we declare each of you a *bar* or *bat yovel*. With the sounding the *shofar*, we publically proclaim your new status. **[motion for all to rise]**

(*Shofar* is sounded.)

Mazal tov!

SING *Areshet S'fateinu* (folk tune from Zamru Lo) – After singing, please be seated.

Leader:

Your friends, family, and colleagues have accompanied you through different parts of your entire career. Therefore, we invite one person who has accompanied you on this journey to offer you a private blessing for your retirement in front of the open *aron kodesh*, witnessed by the sacred Torah and this sacred community. I invite those who are giving a blessing and those retirees who are receiving a blessing to please come up to the bimah.

As you receive your blessing, the cantor will chant the *Hashkiveinu*, a prayer that asks God to protect us from the demons that can physically or spiritually plague us by blessing us with a *sukkah* of peace. A *sukkah*, a shelter, which covers our heads brings us closer to God and hopefully to an inner sense of peace, deep within our soul. As you enter retirement, may you be blessed under a shelter of peace under God's wings of peace. If you would like to look at the text to *Hashkiveinu*, you can find it on page 42 of *Mishkan Tefillah*. Please rise as the ark is opened.

Sing Michael Isaacson Hashkiveinu as retirees are blessed.

Leader (with retirees still on the bimah) speaking to the kahal:

Please join me in this collective blessing:

[Found on a daft t'fillah]

May the One who blessed our ancestors – *Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel*, and *Leah*; *Abraham, Isaac*, and *Jacob* – bless you as you enter into this new chapter in your life.

The world was not formed by a single act. Each and every day God renews the work of creation. May God grant you the strength to constantly renew your own creation.

May you open your heart and mind to continuous growth, unexpected change, and the perpetual unsettling, liberating expansion of being alive.

May you have the courage to name and sanctify this moment of change that is shaping your body and soul in the image of the Divine.

Blessed are You, *El Shaddai*, our God, the Renewing One of the world, who has kept us alive and sustained us and allowed us to reach this time of transformation.⁶⁷

Sing *Shehecheyanu*

Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam shehechyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu, la-z'man ha-zeh.

We remain standing as the Torah is returned to the Ark. **Sing Eitz Chayim**

⁶⁷ Elliot Rose Kukla, "Blessing for Adult Milestones." Accessed on December 20, 2012. www.ritualwell.org/ritual/blessing-adult-milestones-0

Ritual for loss of Physical competence or physical independence

As one ages, it can be disconcerting to see one's body weaken. Tasks that once felt easy can suddenly take longer to accomplish or may be unsafe to do or impossible to do without assistance. Losing control over what happens to one's body can be scary. As one ages, bones become increasingly brittle and muscles become weaker. As maintaining balance while walking becomes more difficult, many people find that using a cane or wheelchair are key to their continued mobility. Both forms of assistance come with stigmas related to weakness or a lack of self-sufficiency. Simply being able to acknowledge these changes can be difficult.

Besides the physical limitations that can prevent a person from accomplishing every day tasks, a body's weakening can also be accompanied by social isolation. For years, a person drives to visit friend or family at their homes, to attend synagogue, or to run errands. For many, their body can weaken to the point of no longer being able to drive because it would be unsafe. This important decision may ensure safety, but it does limit one's access to community. If one cannot drive, your social circle suddenly becomes limited to people who either live in your neighborhood or are willing to drive to one's home. This lack of communication face to face, *panim el panim*, can add to a person's emotional distress or frustration.

Jewish tradition teaches about the holiness of one's body. Every person is created *b'tzelem elohim*, in God's image. Every day in the morning liturgy we pray the words of *Asher yatzar*⁶⁸ and *Elohai Neshama*,⁶⁹ which thank God for the intricate creation of our

⁶⁸ Praise to you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who formed the human body with skills, creating the body's many pathways and openings. It is well known before Your throne of glory that if one of them be wrongly opened or closed, it would be impossible to endure and stand before You. Blessed are you, Adonai, who heals all flesh, working wondrously. Translation from Mishkan Tefillah.

bodies and for placing a pure soul within each of us. In particular, *Asher Yatzar* acknowledges the complicated intricacies of vessels and arteries that make up our body. If even one were to stop working, we say, we would not be able to stand before God. As people grow older, these truths can become increasingly apparent. Yet despite the fact that our liturgy proclaims the holiness of our body, nothing in Jewish tradition allows for the acknowledgement of one's body weakening or declining in mobility.

While this ceremony is a healing ritual in some respects, it is not meant for people who are in the midst of a serious illness. This ritual acknowledges the hardship and beauty that comes with growing older. By coming together in an intimate group for this ritual, the person whose body is aging gets to formally acknowledge what is happening to them. While it would be wonderful if the person no longer felt afraid of the changes in their body that is not the goal. Instead, it is the hope that by saying aloud their fears they will feel heard by both the people in attendance as well as by God. Rather than be a public ritual, this would be private for the person who chooses to participate. Unlike rituals that are more celebratory, like a wedding or bar mitzvah, this ritual may come with a bit of sadness as one acknowledges this transition. Therefore, a more intimate space and time are appropriate. A smaller group of the person's choosing could be there to act as witnesses. The ritual could either be done alone with the clergy, with close friends who may be experiencing similar changes in their body, or with family. The place where the ritual takes place can also vary. It can be done in the comfort and privacy of one's

Elyse D. Frishman, editor. *Mishkan Tefillah*. (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 76.

⁶⁹ My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me, and You protect it within me. For as long as my soul is within me, I offer thanks to You, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors, Source of all Creation, Sovereign of all souls. Praised are You, Adonai, in whose hand is every living soul and the breath of humankind. Translation from *Mishkan Tefillah*. *Ibid.*, 78.

home or perhaps in a special place within the synagogue (whether it's in the sanctuary, clergy's office, library, etc).

Clergy from the synagogue should lead this ritual. They will know the people who request it and so the clergy will already be knowledgeable about their congregants and who is participating. The *Sh'ma Koleinu* in this ritual is a recitative written by Israel Alter. Because of the challenging nature of this music, a cantor would preferably be present for the ritual. If they choose, the rabbi could also be present for this ritual. Both rabbi and cantor should have the skills to approach difficult emotions that may be evoked by this ritual. Therefore, the ritual will be labeled to say "clergy" and it should be decided at their discretion as to who will lead it.

Those attending the ritual will begin by singing a *niggun* to the melody of *Haneshama Lach* by Cantor Gerald Cohen. The cantor will teach the melody to those in attendance. The melody will come back throughout the ritual to punctuate different sections. The text comes from the *Yom Kippur* liturgy and translates to "The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation." The use of the text collectively reminds us that although the body may be weakening that God still remains inside one's body all the days of our lives. It is meant to act as a comforting text for all of those participating in the ritual. By repeating it many times throughout, it begins to act as a continuous reminder.

The opening of the ritual will begin with this composition by Cantor Gerald Cohen. Cantor Cohen wrote it in the *Ukrainian Dorian* mode. Related closely to the *Ahavah Rabah* mode, it has a very "Jewish" sound to it. Even if those present do not immediately know the melody the familiar sounds should be comforting. By beginning it as a *niggun*, it will give everyone a chance to learn the melody for when the words are

later added. One of the beauties of a *niggun* is the ability to repeat it many times.

Concentrating only on the melody, and not the words, allows all to relax a bit. The repetition of music produces the same effect as repeating a mantra. The healing quality of a *niggun* should hopefully act as a way of calming those attending. Those attending this ritual may be nervous or anxious having to face things they may be uncomfortable with about their bodies or, what has happened to the body of a loved one. Hopefully this *niggun* will begin to calm those in attendance.

There are three possible readings that can be used during this ritual.⁷⁰ The first is a prayer to God about one's body and is meant to provide a foundation for the rest of the ritual. The second and third readings are more specific: the first for the general weakening of the body; and the second for a decline in mobility. Either or both can be used depending upon the person who is the focus of the ritual. Just because one's body is weakening does not also mean there is a decline in mobility as well. For some, they go hand in hand. As Rabbi Shelley Marder demonstrates through his creative writing psalms class, providing the opportunity to pray the words of our liturgy as well as allowing the elderly to articulate their own blessings and prayers to God can help to strengthen their faith and spiritual connection to God.

Sh'ma Koleinu is placed in the middle of the ritual for a few reasons. The cantor chanting *Sh'ma Koleinu*, without the vocal participation of those attending, gives participants time for reflection and prayer. Giving people time within a ritual to reflect

⁷⁰ Each of these blessings were written by Tamara Arnow and posted as a resource from Hiddur. It can be found at

Tamara Arnow. "When the Body Begins to Fail: Reaching Out in Prayer." From *Hiddur: The Center for Jewish Aging*. Accessed December 15, 2012.

http://www.rrc.edu/sites/default/files/primary_navigation/resources/when%20the%20body%20begins%20to%20fail.PDF

upon their lives and what has happened in the ritual so far is important. The choice to chant Alter's setting without instrumentation allows us to truly hear the voice. The pleading nature of the mode reflects the emotion of the English prayers.

The ritual concludes with the singing of *Esa Einai* by Carlebach. "I lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where does my strength come? My strength comes from Adonai, creator of the heavens and earth." Although the ritual will not bestow physical strength upon a person, it is my hope that the ritual will provide the person with more spiritual strength even if their body doesn't feel as strong as it used to. This familiar melody will hopefully be one that everyone can join in and sing. Singing together in a group creates a stronger feeling of community. As voices join together in song, connections between each person also strengthen. The first person singular of the words *Esa Einai* underscores the need of each member of the person's support network, in addition to the person who is the focus of the ritual, to find strength and support as they enter this new stage. Ending the ritual on this communal high will hopefully remind the person of the community that surrounds them and leave all of them with a positive outlook.

Ritual for Loss of Physicality/Independence

HUM “*Haneshama Lach*” Niggun – Gerald Cohen⁷¹

Cantor first teaches the melody. When all have learned the melody it should be repeated several times.

Clergy:

Baruchim habaim – welcome to all. Today, we join together to recognize the changes happening in Ruth’s life. As each person grows older, their body changes – it slows a bit, parts may not work as smoothly as they used to. Watching these changes and recognizing how little control over them we have can be frustrating. It can even make us angry at times. Rabbi Michael Strassfeld writes,

How did the world begin?

For Jewish mystics the world began with an act of withdrawal. God did *tzimtzum*. God contracted to leave space for the world to exist. After this *tzimtzum*, “withdrawal,” some divine energy entered the emerging world, but this divine light, this divine energy was too strong, overpowering the worlds that tried to contain it, and the universe exploded with a cosmic bang. Shards of divine light, of holiness, were scattered everywhere in the universe. The sparks of holiness are often buried deep in the cosmic muck of the universe, they are difficult to behold and yet they are everywhere, in everyone, in every situation. They are the life and meaning of the universe.

We live in this world of shattering. We feel in our bodies and in our souls the brokenness of the world, and we feel at times the resonance in ourselves of that initial cosmic shattering. Our bodies, like that primordial world, try not to contain, but rather to hold on to the divine light and energy flowing around us and in us. But as in the world’s origin, our bodies are too frail, made only frailer with the passage of time, and so we begin to leak our divine image/energy...In this

⁷¹ Gerald Cohen, “Haneshama Lach.” Manuscript. Accessed January 3, 2013.
http://cantors.org/pubResourceBank/Gerald%20Cohen/Han_shama%20lach.pdf

world of shattered hopes and expectations, we search for wholeness...⁷²

Participant:

Adonai/God/Creator/Source of Life, help me to find the strength to acknowledge that my soul and my body are miraculous gifts. Allow me to accept, with willingness and gratitude, the _____ years you have already given me to inhabit my body. Help me to understand that my body's failings are not my own failings, that my pain is not punishment. Though I may not have control over my body, remind me that control was never ultimately mine. Open my heart and free my voice to share my suffering with You and with those around me, so that I may feel compassion and community surrounding me.⁷³

SING *Haneshama lach, v'haguf paolach.*

The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. (From the kol nidrey liturgy)

Clergy:

One of our desires as human beings is to be heard – to know that someone is listening to all that we say. The prayer *Sh'ma Koleinu* pleads with God to hear our voices and to be merciful to us. It quotes Psalm 71 and says, "*Al tashlicheini l'eit ziknah kichlot kochi al ta'azveini* Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me." We pray that God hears our voices and listens to all of our prayers today and in the future. As the cantor sings *Sh'ma Koleinu*, I invite you to send your own personal prayers to God.

Cantor sings Sh'ma Koleinu - Alter

Participant:

⁷² Strassfeld, Michael, "Kavannah." Rabbi Joy Levitt, Carol Rivel, and Debbie Friedman. *Healing Service*. www.ritualwell.org

⁷³ Tamara Arnow. *When the Body Begins to Fail: Reaching Out in Prayer*.

(For general weakening of body)

Adonai/God/Creator/Source of Life, do not forsake me, though my body seems to be abandoning me, declining without my permission. Keep me from loneliness and isolation even as I grow weaker. My weakness does not define me, just as my strength did not. Help me to find new sources of strength in myself even as my body weakens.⁷⁴

SING *Haneshama lach, v'haguf paolach.*

The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. (From the Kol Nidrey liturgy)

Participants:

(For a decline in mobility)

Horeini Adonai darkecha a'haleich ba'amitecha.

Teach me Your way, God, I will walk in Your truth.

(Psalm 86:11)

Adonai/God/Creator/Source of Life, help me to realize that although I cannot walk, I can still move forward. Open my senses so that I may hear, smell, see, touch and taste the world around me in new ways. Help me to realize the value of being still. Allow me to mourn the loss of my independence, but allow me the courage to know that I do not need to walk with my feet to walk in Your ways.⁷⁵

SING *Haneshama lach, v'haguf paolach.*

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The soul is Yours, the body is Your creation. (From the *Kol Nidre* liturgy)

Participant:

Needing Help by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

God, I don't like to be helped. It makes me feel I am a burden and a nuisance. When I vent anger about my affliction, let me do it privately and with frustration only toward my circumstances, and not toward those who help me. When I must ask for assistance, let my words be gentle. Let me remember to say "please" with even my simplest request and "thank you" when even my smallest bidding is granted. Let me do all that I can for myself. But give me the wisdom to know the difference between self-reliance and foolhardiness.

Clergy:

Gathered with you today are close friends who wish the best for you, close family who are here to support. They [Some of them] have prepared personal blessings for you.

Friends/family share blessings

Clergy:

Rabbi Strassfeld says,

Wholeness comes not from ignoring the broken pieces, or hoping to magically glue them back together. The shattered coexists with the whole; the divine is to be found amid the darkest depths and the heaviest muck of the universe. Every moment has the potential for redemption and wholeness. Our brokenness gives us that vision and the potential to return some of the divine

sparks scattered in the world.⁷⁶

It is my wish, my prayer, for you that even in moments when your body does not feel whole, that you can still feel wholeness, *shleimut*, in your soul. “I lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where does my strength come? My strength comes from Adonai, creator of the heavens and earth.” Physical strength cannot be found in a few prayers.

DISCUSS But one’s inner strength can grow stronger and stronger surrounded by good friends and family, through our connection to God.

SING *Esa Einai* (Carlebach)

⁷⁶ Michael Strassfeld, “Kavannah.” Rabbi Joy Levitt, Carol Rivel, and Debbie Friedman. *Healing Service*. www.ritualwell.org

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ⁱ With this Ring – Adapted from a prayer by Barry E. Pitegoff of Temple Israel, Tallahassee, FL

With this ring I was betrothed to you,
 According to the laws of Moses, Miriam, and Israel.

Ecclesiastes teaches me that there is a time for everything,
 Especially for birth and for death.
 From our heritage I learned the importance of reaffirming our faith
 Even at the most difficult times,
 Even when in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

With the removal of this ring, I acknowledge again
 That I am losing your companionship.
 But the memories and love will always remain
 Dear to my heart.

May they continue as an inspiration to me
 And to those you touched.
 May they remain a blessing,
 And may we always praise God
 For the gifts of life and patience,
 And for the righteous judgments made.

God asks that we walk in the way of Torah.
 May that continue to be my will.

Amen.