Community Organizing Explored through History, Text, and Creative Liturgy

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Acknowledgments

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Everything depends on the person who stands in front of the classroom. The teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. The teacher is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the Promised Land, the teacher must have been there themselves. When asking themselves: Do I stand for what I teach? Do I believe what I say?, the teacher must be able to answer in the affirmative. What we need more than anything else is not textbooks, but textpeople. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read: the text that they will never forget.”

Thank you teachers and mentors. You are textpeople; you have lived what you have taught. You have attended HUC tefillah, celebrated life cycle events with me, invited me into your homes, listened to me when I had dilemmas, and shown understanding and wisdom when there have been difficult situations. I feel lucky you have been in my life. I hope to have the opportunity to continue learning from each one of you in the future.

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Abstract

This thesis is about community organizing: how it been defined over time, how rabbis describe it textually and how it is represented through creative liturgy.

The first chapter seeks to define community organizing. This is a complicated proposition. Organizing is defined differently by various scholars and is also constantly changing. So, instead of examining a set of definitions, this chapter seeks to explore the complexity of what community organizing is by presenting different approaches to characterizing its development over time.

The chapter continues with the evolution of Saul Alinsky's political community organizing. Alinsky's organizing changes over time: his successors add elements such as relational meetings and outreach to the middle class that they might also contribute their talents to the cause.

The last part of the chapter is a description of Just Congregations, a branch of the Reform movement that aids and increases the number of Jewish congregations who wish to effectively engage with community organizing. Just Congregations uses the political community organizing that emerged from Saul Alinsky and his successors. Just Congregations goals and attempts to make connections between Judaism and community organizing are then discussed. The chapter ends by asking how might we frame these connections in practice, and what can we learn from them?

Chapter Two focuses on how rabbis who participate in community organizing integrate texts into their organizing-themed sermons and textual studies. The chapter begins by making a case that rabbis have taken texts out of context to address modern issues and interests since the time of the Midrash. In moving texts from one context to another, rabbis reveal a snapshot of their time and personal interests. In doing so, they tell us how they conceptualize or frame the connection between Jewish teachings and community organizing.

To illustrate this thinking, Chapter Two ends with an analysis of four community organizing-themed sermons, and one text study. For each example there is a section that describes the purpose, how texts are used, and implications of an understanding the rabbis' conception of the connection between organizing and Jewish teachings.

Chapter Three explores the connection between Jewish themes and organizing through the lens of ritual or prayer. It begins with the natural connections between Jewish liturgy and social justice initiatives. Then it makes the case that there is room for creative liturgy in Jewish practice. There are still those who resist these additions, because they view the liturgy as fixed. The case for creative liturgy is first made by exploring how people have rebranded Hanukkah over time: how it has evolved from a religious military victory, to a miraculous moment, to an unlikely secular victory of a small band rebels who fought for their values, to a counterpoint to the celebration of Christmas in America. If our conceptions of the holiday have changed, then why can't how we frame them in our liturgy also evolve? Secular themes most readily materialize in the Passover *Haggadah*, which is largely a more creative and home-bound ritual. The chapter continues to provide three examples of creative readings that are

then interpreted similarly to the textual snapshots. Each analysis includes the purpose of the prayer, its use of liturgy, and the implications we can draw from it for understanding how connections are made between Jewish prayer and community organizing themes. As there are so few examples of creative liturgy used in community organizing contexts, the chapter provides fifteen new candle lighting readings, which link Jewish and community organizing themes.

The conclusion discusses what I have learned from writing this thesis and the implications for further study in Jewish community organizing.

Introduction

My journey in writing this thesis has been complicated and educational. I started my writing the summer before my senior year of rabbinical school. My original aim was to explore community organizing, to see how rabbis were using texts in relationship to their organizing, and to contribute text studies to aid them in their work. I felt that this would help me explore a technique that was currently being used in congregational settings that I had had little exposure to in the past. I wanted to see how I might integrate this technique into my rabbinate. Adding a text study seemed like a natural conclusion to my research.

After writing the first chapter, which explores what community organizing is, I discovered that there was another student who had written on a similar topic last year. Once I read her thesis, I discovered that my original trajectory was quite similar to hers. So, I worked with my advisor to develop a new strategy. We decided to keep a chapter on the use of texts, but to make it more analytical and less creative. To continue the discussion, it seemed relevant to add a section about creative community organizing liturgy. This was an appropriate section wherein to insert a creative segment of new community organizing-themed creative liturgy

Although my thesis evolved during the time it was being written, I still feel that many of my original goals were maintained. I was able to explore community organizing, I interviewed rabbis that participated in community organizing, I had the opportunity to explore which community organizing

techniques and themes I might want to integrate into my rabbinate, and I had an opportunity to contribute creatively to the field.

Chapter One: Defining Community Organizing

What is community organizing?

A simple definition of community organizing might be, "a group of people coming together to act in their shared interests." However, in truth, how we think about and define community organizing has changed and evolved over the decades. Some have argued that community organizing began as early as the American Revolution.[1] Others claim that in the United States the Civil War, or more broadly, the Industrial Revolution, inspired community organizing.[2] Even within a given time period there will likely be several definitions and understandings of what community organizing is. Keeping this in mind, it is helpful to begin by investigating a few examples of how scholars have classified community organizing over time. Analyzing how community organizing has developed in thought, technique and scope informs one about the priorities and historical experiences of those who have been involved, and allows insight into how they have inspired current Jewish congregations and rabbis to adapt the community organizing model for their social action initiatives.

We will explore three scholars' approaches to understanding how community organizing has changed over time**.** Each scholar differs in how he conceives of the historical development of community organizing and what information he uses to support his claims. Zane Miller[3] claimed that change over

[1] Honey, Cheryl. "Community Organizing: Past, Present and Future." *COMM-ORG Papers 2006*.
[2] Garvin, C.D., & Cox, F.M. "A History of Community Organizing since the Civil War with special reference to Oppressed Communities." In Rothman, J.L. Erlich, J.E. Tropman, & F.M. Cox, Strategies of Community Intervention: Macro Practivce. Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.
[3] Zane Miller is currently professor emeritus at the University of Cincinnati's Department of History. He is most known for his work on the history of urban/metropolitan development in American History.

time in community organizing was based on neighborhood development and paradigmatic community organizing research approaches. Robert Fisher[4] and Peter Romanofsky[5] studied community organizing by identifying trends in research on the subject over four time periods. Finally, Steve Valocchi[6] developed a theory based on the type of work that was used in the community organizing of different time periods.

Zane Miller's Approach

1880 – 1920: Neighborhood Community Organizing

Zane L. Miller was a Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati. In his article, "The Role and Concept of Neighborhood in American Cities," he argued that community organizations emerged as the result of city development over time. Miller wrote,

> Until about 1840, Americans viewed the cities as commercial communities: first, as corporations to regulate economic life in an era of scarcity; then, after 1790, as collections of individuals and institutions gathered together under conditions of relative abundance for the pursuit of commerce and civilization...after 1840, however, the urban gentry redefined the city, conceiving of it as a social system of amorphous groups of individuals and institutions whose interaction either fostered or jeopardized the welfare of the city and the groups that made up the whole.[7]

These perspectives stand in stark contrast to the late nineteenth-century view, which characterized a city as a collection of individual neighborhoods that could

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[4] Robert Fisher is currently a professor of Community Organization at the University of Connecticut. His areas of specialty include: Community Organizing, urban policy, social movements, and social welfare history.

[5] Peter Romanofsky was an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Jersey City State College.

[6] Steve Valocchi is currently a Professor of Sociology at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. His interests include social movements and the sociology of gender and sexuality.

[7] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 4-5.

often be defined by class, religion, or ethnicity. According to Miller, this modern concept of a neighborhood began to emerge over time. It started to come about as a result of the mass rapid transit. Mass transportation obliterated the historic walking city and confined the poor to the center of congested areas around central business districts, as other residents could now move further away from the city. This shift altered how people fought for city resources. Now the focal point was based on the location of the community neighborhood. Members worked together to gain improvements because of their proximity, similar values, and shared suffering. Previously there had been more interaction between various people from various backgrounds and economic situations.

The early part of the period saw the foundation of "improvement" associations that were devoted to obtaining needed resources such as lighting, schools, better sewers, and fire and police protection. Improvement association participants worked to influence political leaders such as the mayor, the superintendent of schools, and department heads to adapt policies that would help those in need obtain these resources.

Another of the earliest examples of community organizing included the settlement houses that originally developed in England. These started to emerge in the United States during the 1880s and 1890s.[8] The Neighborhood Guild and the Hudson Guild in New York City were two examples. Their objective was to house well-to-do people in poor neighborhoods. Settlement workers (the middle class "settlers") would learn from first-hand experiences what it was like to live in

[8] "Settlement House Movement." *Open Collections Program: Immigration to the US,*Web. June 2012. <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/settlement.html>.

the slums and would often help residents create arguments for solutions, advocate on their behalf, or conduct social research projects concerning the neighborhood.

Creating social centers was Miller's last example. Practitioners of this type of organization chose a particular existing neighborhood institution such as a school, park, church or playground and advocated to make it a center for potential improvements. Social centers were the cornerstone of the community, and could be enjoyed by all. The school was a popular choice for this type of improvement and served as a call to invigorate education, recreation, and social life.[9]

All of these instances emphasize the neighborhood as a central point for organizing improvements. They also represent broad and preliminary efforts to acquire resources for the poor.

1920 – 1950: Metropolitan Region

According to Miller, most Americans stopped thinking about the neighborhood as the building block of the city around 1920. Their conception remained primarily based on territory or land, but also expanded to include culture. Miller wrote,

> Throughout these years, many people talked and acted as if territorial community existed in America, and they defined it spatially as something larger than neighborhood, which nonetheless molded the desires, values, aspirations, and personalities of its inhabitants... The metropolis or metropolitan region now seemed a community with a distinctive culture.[10]

[9] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 10.
[10] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 12.

Scholars often characterized the city as a social organism. Harvey Warren Zorbaugh was a sociologist who accepted this view. In *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, he criticized neighborhood organizations, such as Chicago's lower North Community Council, that failed to adapt to this new conception. He contended that the neighborhood based organization model relied on the permanence of residents, common territorial interests and cooperation on the local level. But neighborhoods were now full of mobile residents who were engaged in conflict and constant transition. This made it more likely for older characterizations of the neighborhood to remain accurate.

Zorbaugh found that the Regional Plan of New York, founded in 1929, was a more effective approach. He wrote,

> It tends toward an increasingly realistic conception of city life.. as city plan commissions resort to publicity to arouse public interest, the plan begins to give the city a conception of itself, a self-awareness a sense of its history and role... a personality. And only when the city has achieved self-consciousness... can the city adequately act.[11]

The New York Regional Plan focused on recommendations to improve life for residents in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region. Their first plan was to create a guide for the area's transportation network. As this group identified itself as a region, it gave its residents a more accurate conception of who they had become, Zorbaugh argued. This allowed them to act more effectively, as they realized that their character was no longer defined by neighborhood units.

Saul Alinsky, who started organizing during this period, also saw the value of reaching out to those beyond the neighborhood. Even though he started

[11] Zorbaugh, Harvey Warren. *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1929, 272-273.

organizing in the Back of the Yards, a Chicago slum, he worked to unite disparate groups and institutions to build a large and influential power base, which could force political change.

Miller also mentioned the Regional Planning Association of America, housing organizers, and the New Deal. These organizations addressed larger and more diverse problems and populations. This greater focus on a larger base of participants can be seen through the "successful" efforts and strategies of the period.

1950 – 1968: Suburbs

During this time frame, Miller claimed that physics began to influence the commonly held perception of a city model (in contrast to the social organism, a more biological focus, from 1920 –1950). Units of study and interest became individuals. Their distinct interactions and reactions became central to understanding the city and influencing community organizing efforts.

To highlight this change in focus he wrote,

> The new behavioral research orientation in the social, policy, and managerial sciences centered on the individual and created a theoretical context in which the city, not to mention the neighborhood or community, seemed almost an illusory construct veiling the greater and real process of interaction among classes, institutions, and organizations.[12]

Moreover, Miller argued that greater individual choice existed during this time period. People moved to the neighborhoods they wanted to be a part of, as opposed to being forced to grow up in a particular neighborhood that in turn

[12] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 18.

transformed them into whom they would become. He credited this thought to David Riesman and his collaborators, who wrote, *The Lonely Crowd*.

While Miller wrote that "a slum need not be a mere hotbed of pathology that entrapped and demoralized its victims, it could be either a staging ground for mobility or a location chosen by people because it fit their self defined needs,"[13] I would argue that poor residents were at this time still confined to particular areas of town, and that this was primarily the result of limited funds and resources.

In regard to the responses of professionals seeking to help, a larger divide emerged between theoretical scholars and realistic practitioners. Instead of working together to solve the problems they witnessed, they viewed one another as irrelevant.

Due to the new ability to choose where one lived, and a tendency of government to demolish neighborhoods because they were slums,[14] another shift in community organizing efforts occurred. Residents were resentful — especially those who had chosen to live in the neighborhoods that were to be demolished. Complaints from residents, according to Miller, struck a chord with public opinion. As a result, organizations attempted to involve residents in urban renewal projects.

In 1954, national civic and business leaders formed the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods, or ACTION. While there wasn't a set requirement for participation in ACTION, the organization aimed to engage local residents at least at some level of planning. Organizations such as ACTION

[13] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 19.
[14] Another reason slums were demolished, was to make room for Highways.

helped communities improve rather than resorting to destroying them. James V. Cunningham, who came to lead ACTION in 1956, claimed that the responsible citizen was a key ingredient in planning for neighborhood improvement. He sought to unite members of a community based on common values. Once united, he tried to motivate them to act together.

After 1968: Advocacy

Miller argued that after 1968, people started to lose faith in public solutions for communities, and turned inward. African Americans, who finally achieved civil rights, still found themselves confined to the ghetto. Miller claimed that during this period, policies such as affirmative action best defined the national mood. He wrote, "In the name of advancing disadvantaged groups, it (affirmative action) serves the interest of individuals seeking a position in society to facilitate their pursuit of essentially personal goals."[15] Miller believed that special interest groups such as African Americans, women, workers, and students, as they sought to gain personal rights, became less interested in community improvement. Moreover, leaders became less interested in sharing decision-making with local residents.

Miller asserted that there was a tendency during this period for people to seek neighborhoods that were full of people similar to themselves. He wrote,

> (There was) a longing for the separation, for the division of the metropolis into homogeneous groups and areas in which individuals could pursue self-fulfillment in a static environment where the patent visibility of friends, enemies and goals eliminated from life doubt, uncertainty and fear.[16]

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[15] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 25.
[16] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 26.

If we chose to live near those who were more like us, we wouldn't have to worry about enemies or conflict close to home.

Overall, Miller claimed that was directly related to our understanding of the purpose of a city or neighborhood. As technology became available (mass transit), and our personal priorities changed (we sought to move to places where we would be surrounded by people that were like us), so did how we organize and fight for resources.

Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky's Approach

Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky, edited, *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective.* At the end of the book, they wrote a Bibliographic essay. The essay presented the history and development of community organizing is through an examination of the scholarly work that occurred in each time period.

1890 - 1920

Based on scholarly research from this time period, Fisher and Romanofsky characterized 1890-1920 as the heyday of community organizing before the 1960s. Authors at this time cited industrialization as the primary incentive for seeking change, and classified the time period as one full of experimentation, stating that a common method was to organize urban neighborhoods into, "efficient, democratic, and of course, enlightened units with the metropolis in order to counteract problems of 'bigness' and urban disorganization."[17]

[17] Fisher, Robert, and Peter Romanofsky. *Community Organization for Urban Social Change: A Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981, 241.

1920 - 1940

In the 1920s, Fisher and Romanofsky's research displayed a move toward the professionalization of community organizing as a sub-discipline within the social work field. This sub-field highlighted governmental and movement-inspired efforts. The Great Depression brought about national efforts to organize such as the Unemployed Councils (1930s),[18] which were organized by the Communist movement. This group sought out unemployed workers and set about conducting protests, giving out leaflets and advocating for equal rights for unemployed African Americans. While this faction was more political than many organizing groups, it did not reach the potential of later political community organizing models.

Eventually, in the 1940s, Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal, which helped create jobs and services for the poor.

1940 - 1960

This time period, brought about a reemergence of the neighborhood as an organizing unit. Saul Alinsky, a prominent political community organizer, also arrived on the scene at the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago.[19] Here, he began to organize diverse religious and ethnic groups within a neighborhood slum in order build power and agitate the authorities into making changes in policy that would help residents.

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[18] Black, Gordon. "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early 1930s." *Communism in Washington State: Organizing the Unemployed: The Early 1930s*. The University of Washington, 2002. Web. July 2012. <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/black.shtml>.

[19] Horwitt, Sanford D. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Knopf, 1989.

1960 - 1980

Organizing became more popular and refined during this time period and became the subject of several research projects. Ann Neel linked anti poverty community organizing to the cold war, many anthologies on the subject emerged from scholars and practitioners, and several "how-to" publications came into print.

Overall, Fisher and Romanofsky examined the written research of each period. They characterized community organizing in terms of the practical work that was performed in each era, rather than the influences that might have brought it about.

Stephen Valocchi's Approach

Stephen Valocchi, a professor of sociology at Trinity College, described the different types of community organizing in his article, "A Way of Thinking about the History of Community Organizing*."*[20]

Social Work Model

In the social work model, the community was thought of as a social organism, similar to Miller's characterization of 1920 – 1950. The overarching notion here was that the needs of the community had to be met if it was to survive and prosper. The role of the organizer was to be an advocate on behalf of the community. The goal was to obtain necessarily resources and social services that would help the community to thrive.

Examples of this method, according to Valocchi, were most popular during the first two decades of the 20th century. Largely as a result of the industrial

[20] Valocchi, Steve. "The Historical Development of Community Organizing." *The Historical Development of Community Organizing*. Trinity College, Web. June 2012. <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/tcn/valocchi.htm>.

movement, poverty and community needs escalated. Specific challenges included child labor, tuberculosis, and tenement housing. As a result, settlement houses appeared, which Valocchi characterized as a social work effort. He argued that the settlements brought education. Volunteers taught English, sewing, wood, and sheet metal-working. Other improvements included "legal aid, employment assistance, day and night nurseries for children, public baths and recreational programs."[21]

Valocchi admitted that political activism took place within this model as well. An example is lobbying for tenement housing. This blurred the boundaries between Valocchi's identifications. There were consequences for creating too much overlap. Valocchi claimed community organizers had to be careful not to become too involved in political activism. Those who became too politically active risked the elimination of funders' support. The example he cited took place in Cincinnati in 1920.[22] In this case, advocates spearheaded a mixed social service and political activist approach. As a result, they were branded as Bolshevist, and business opportunities soon disappeared.

Valocchi also included later examples of the social work model such as the War on Poverty started by the Johnson Administration in the 1960s. The government created agencies to provide, "neighborhood self help projects, promote social action, and coordinate existing local services as well as provide

[21] ibid
[22] ibid

new services."[23] These social services were only partly successful and ended up being difficult to sustain due to their top down approach.

Political Activist Approach

To describe the political activist approach, Valocchi first presented Saul Alinsky's techniques. Alinsky honed and fostered a more systematic model for political activism. He empowered local leaders, encouraged democratic decision-making (more of a bottom up approach), and opened membership to the community. The more buy-in and members an organization had, the more power it built. The more power it had, the more it could accomplish.

For Alinsky, the role of the organizer was to gather together the leaders of existing organizations to face their common enemies and realize their shared goals. Once a large enough power base was built, the organization could strategize how to "encourage" change in policy. Encouragement was often confrontational, creative, and specifically targeted. After an organization learned how to operate on its own, the organizer would leave and venture to a new community.

Valocchi discussed other political activist organizations including the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee, the Action Projects of the Students for a Democratic Society, and the Black Panther Party. However, because these groups tended to skip the step of building a stable organization, while they made some changes, they often disbanded on their own, or were attacked. The FBI and others, for example, threatened, jailed and killed the leaders of the Black Panther Party.

[23] ibid

While even the Alinsky organizations had difficulties remaining stable in the 1970s, successor organizations such as ACORN, (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, a conservative organizing institute) and the IAF, (Industrial Areas Foundation, under the leadership of Edward Chambers) tweaked Alinsky's original conceptions in order to adapt to changing times.

Neighborhood Maintenance/Community Development Approach

Finally Valocchi described the neighborhood maintenance approach. He classified this as the loosest category because it drew upon political activism even more than the social work method did. Overall, however, its aim was to protect and enhance property values, and to lobby officials to provide enhanced neighborhood services to residents. In addition, this approach also mirrored the social work method, as it also sought to provide services for residents.

Within this model, the leader of the organization efforts came from within the neighborhood; he was not an outsider. In contrast, the organizer in the social work and political activist methods was usually unknown.

Examples of the Neighborhood Maintenance approach included the civic clubs and neighborhood associations that emerged in the 1950s with the spread of the suburbs. These associations used peer pressure to influence neighbors, and lobbying to gain services such as, "street repairs, park development, schools, and traffic signs."[24]

In the 1980s and 1990s there was a shift to include political activism in organizing efforts, because at this time it had become more accepted form of obtaining services. However, Valocchi noted that now there was less emphasis

[24] Ibid

on confrontation (seen in the Alinsky technique) and more emphasis on creating partnerships with local economic and political leaders.

In his discussion, Valocchi confided to the reader that not everyone considered the neighborhood method as "community organizing." The neighborhood method called the *intent* of the organizing into question. Should protecting middle class self-interests count as organizing? Is organizing about the method of securing interests in general? Scholars disagree on this point.

Overall, Valocchi argued that there were trends in the type of work performed in community organizing. It appears that these trends are loosely chronological. While social work, political activism and neighborhood maintenance organizations last for long periods of time and display crossovers, they generally become popular in specific time periods as a response to particular historical events.

So, how do we define community organizing?

As we can see, there is a rich complexity of opinion concerning not only what community organizing is, but also how we might characterize its development. Whether we think of it as political activism, social work, or pragmatic responses to historical events, it is clear that community organizing has changed over the years in its technique, focus and scope.

Overview of the History of Community Organizing

The variety in these approaches to understanding, defining, and characterizing community organizing trends emphasizes the complexity of the issue. However, even within the diversity of methods presented here, there were commonalities in regard to causes and methods of community organizing.

One of the most often suggested motivations for community organizing was the Industrial Revolution. The impact of efficient Industry, which led to exponential population growth, produced a greater necessity for social and political solutions to problems such as sanitation, education, housing, etc. These newfound challenges created a shared need to procure essential resources (food, shelter, etc.), which led to experimentation with various forms of community organizing.

Later events such as the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and the Civil Rights Movement also dramatically shaped what community organizing looked like, and its perceived importance as a tool for making change. These dramatic historical moments initiated an increased awareness and need for making changes. They reflected an evolution in American consciousness, which would ultimately make organizing efforts more defined and refined, or, in some cases, less sustainable, if they no longer answered the specific needs of the times.

There were also common motivating factors, which influenced the nature of community organizing beyond historical events. These included but were not limited to: population dispersion, government policy, and the personalities of the leaders and scholars of the time. People living close together made it easier to pool resources and communicate talents and progress. This is one reason why where and how people lived influenced trends in organizing.

The government, as seen throughout the historical discussion above, sometimes helped efforts, and at other times hindered progress. The primary

challenge in government involvement was the top down approach that rarely engaged poor residents in expressing their primary needs. Therefore, it was easy for the government to design a program that may have appeared effective, but in reality didn't aid residents in the ways that they needed most.

A strong personality such as Saul Alinsky and well-to-do Settlement house organizers influenced large trends in organizing methods and techniques. In the case of the settlement housing, young and wealthy women were predominantly involved. As a result, the type of services provided often reflected traditionally feminine interests such as sewing, education, day care, arts, and music. It is important to note that these were not the only services or activities that were provided as a result of settlement housing. Alinsky transformed how we think of what is possible to achieve through political activism. He introduced a confrontational and effective style of empowering residents to make change on their own. While there were certainly historical events that influenced well-known organizing leaders, these individuals also brought something unique to their work that resulted from their own experiences, as we shall see in an analysis of Saul Alinsky.

One last trend was that the various models for community organizing wished to better residents' lives whether through social services, or political aid either through confrontation or partnership-building tactics. We have also seen that there were many crossovers between these approaches and the trends still exist today.

Much like the question, "What does this Jewish text mean or say?" the query, "what is community organizing?" depends on whom you ask. As the eventual goal of this thesis is to examine Jewish efforts to integrate community organizing, it behooves us first to examine the people and ideas that served as influences for these efforts.

The Roots of Jewish Community Organizing: Saul Alinsky

The roots of Reform Jewish community organizing lie in Alinsky' political activist method which began in the 1930s.

Who was Saul Alinsky?

Saul Alinsky was born to Russian orthodox Jewish parents in 1909. He grew up in a Chicago slum, as his parents were poor. His father worked as a tailor. When Saul became a *Bar Mitzvah*, his father moved away, leaving him with his mother. Sarah Alinsky (Saul's mother) had a reputation for being "demanding, self-centered, and manipulative,"[25] although, she was reportedly protective of "Sollie" (Saul).

Saul did well in high school and went off to the University of Chicago in the fall of 1926. He struggled academically at first, and was put on academic probation after his freshman year. During his junior year, however, he discovered E.W. Burgess's social pathology course and received his first "A." During the course he had an assignment to visit and observe several Chicago public dance halls. Part of his assignment was to get to know dance hall participants and to conduct personal history interviews. This was something in which Alinsky excelled. Growing up in a poor neighborhood, he understood the

[25] Horwitt, Sanford D. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Knopf, 1989, 7.

culture and language of the people in the dance halls. Alinsky was also outgoing and charismatic. The author of his biography wrote, "He looked and sounded as if he belonged."[26] As a result of this positive experience, Alinsky became interested in Sociology. His interest led to graduate work and a burgeoning career in another of Burgess's interests: criminology in urban environments. During his graduate school days, Alinsky spent time with the Capone gang. He learned their methods, heeded their advice, developed friendships and acquired life histories.[27]

Based on his successful in gaining the trust of local gangsters, Alinsky started to work for Clifford Shaw, a Chicago Sociologist who popularized Social Disorganization theory, at the Institute for Juvenile Research (IJR). Here, he became close with members of the Sholto street gang. This was an Italian gang of boys who referred to themselves as the 42 Mob. Between 1931 and 1933 Alinsky befriended several gang members ("Chickenman," "Rags," and "Step-and–a–Half") and numerous community members (parents, priests, and shopkeepers). Alinsky shared his worldly advice with the boys, and was generous with his resources. Sometimes he gave the gang money to set up a whole spread of food. A combination of his generous nature and his similar background soon won him the trust and admiration of the Sholto community. In one interview, he claims that his entry into the gang was the first organizing tactic

[26] Horwitt, Sanford D. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Knopf, 1989, 14.
[27] Ibid

he used.[28] As the story goes, he heard that one of the gang members' mothers was wailing because her son had been killed and she had no pictures of him. Alinsky went to the morgue and, with the help of a photographer, fixed up a photo of her son. He then gave it to the mother, claiming he had received it two weeks ago. After this event, word spread in the gang that Alinsky was "alright."

With his newfound access, Saul was able to procure more than enough research materials, including detailed accounts of the gang's lives and activities. However, he did not publish his findings or finish graduate school.

Instead, after getting married, he accepted a position working at Joliet. Joliet was a prison. Alinsky's job involved interviewing criminals and assessing their potential for parole. After three years of working in this setting a new opportunity came along through Clifford Shaw at the IJR.

Saul was sent to the Back of the Yards, the neighborhood located behind the Union Stock Yards. It was full of the stench from the smoldering fires of meat packers' burnt waste, too many residents, and an abundance of organic waste. In addition to the physical issues, residents were plagued with a second depression (1938). The Back of the Yards was heading toward a 20% unemployment rate.

Alinsky's job was to observe and interview residents. While speaking to the leaders in the community, he met Herb March, who worked for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO was made up of an alliance of unions

[28] "Interview with Saul Alinsky." Playboy Magazine, 1972. Web. July 2012. <http://www.progress.org/2003/alinsky6.htm>.

that was comprised of both unskilled and skilled workers. Alinsky admired the work that the CIO accomplished and the ideals for which it fought.

In order to meet key leaders and community members, Alinsky relied on help from the CIO and other local organizers. As he became more entrenched in the community, he started to implement his own organizing ideas. At first he tried to work with March. He suggested that they create an anti–delinquency group. Such an organization might prove to be an effective tool for uniting the disparate religious groups in the community. However, another organization, a group of women from the local YWCA and McDowell Settlement House, picked up this tactic first and formed the Packinghouse Youth committee as well as built a rec center for residents.

During Alinsky's early attempts to organize he met a local priest named Joe Meegan. After discovering that they had similar ideas about organizing, they formed a partnership. Alinsky and Meegan started to meet with local institutional leaders. They labored to unite Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, and Bohemians (all local residents). Alinsky and Meegan focused their efforts on established organizations such as churches.

While there were a few organizations that were initially interested in Alinsky and Meegan's group, they were not able to build a strong power base at first. Luckily, a random confluence of events transpired that helped them to succeed. These included the timing, and the involvement of Bishop Bernard Sheil, the respected and beloved leader who founded the Catholic Youth Organization. The timing was helpful because, in December 1938, Herb March

was shot while driving to Union Hall. While he escaped with only a broken nose, his car was full of bullets, and the incident created worker "indignation." This event made the struggle real and inspired a larger number of people to become involved.

Bishop Sheil chose to join Alinsky and Meegan's group. This gave Alinsky's efforts credibility and diversity. Soon, Alinsky founded the Back of the Yards Council (BYNC). He resigned from Shaw's research project, and through the influence and funding of new friends was able to start his own community organizing adventure.[29]

What was community organizing according to Alinsky?

Community organizing changed even during the course of Alinsky's lifetime. His earlier methods and insights are recorded in the book *Reveille for Radicals* in which he described building "people's organizations."

According to Alinsky, radicals, not liberals, should lead community organizing. Radicals acted on principles, while liberals mainly *thought* about them. The radicals' task is to build a strong power-base of moderates, through awakening them from their apathy.[30] To accomplish this, the organizer had to become familiar with local custom, put aside his[31] personal agenda, and empower local residents.

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[29] Horwitt, Sanford D. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Knopf, 1989.
[30] Alinsky, Saul David. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1969, 184.
[31] Alinsky felt that a community organizer was a job for a male. Therefore, in this section, the organizer will be referred to using male pronouns. Most subsequent community organizers such as the leaders of Just Congregations (the Reform Jewish branch of community organizing) do not maintain this belief. They employ both male and female organizers.

Coming from a sociological background, and working as a participant-observer, it is logical that Alinsky saw the benefit of becoming familiar with local customs. This was the key to fitting in, as Alinsky had found in his observations at dance halls and with criminal gangs. In addition, the organizer had to know what behaviors would mark him as an outsider, in order to avoid distancing himself from participants. Taking the time to learn the local customs also displayed a high level of respect to the population. This was helpful when seeking participants for organizing.

Alinsky warned organizers to put aside their personal agendas, because the goal was not to empower an outside leader to come in and make changes. Rather, the objective was to enable local participants to garner enough power to themselves make the changes that they needed most. Personal agendas not only impeded this larger objective, but also created barriers in establishing relationships with locals.

Empowering people was a central facet in Alinsky's approach. He believed that most people felt powerless. One of the first steps to Alinsky's method was to help participants gain power (through numbers), so that they could act on their own behalf. This also allowed an organizer to create a more sustainable, repeatable, and self-sufficient method. An organizer could enter a new community, help local residents establish/gather power, train them, and then leave to influence a new population. The original community was now able to act independently.

In order to gather power, the organizer needed to develop a plan that would allow him to act most effectively and efficiently. Alinsky advised drawing inspiration and skills from the talents of those within the power base, and recruiting organizational members based on their potential to add needed skills to the collective group. This strategy allowed the organizer to maximize the potential power of the group.

Once a power base was maximized, an organizer needed to strategize how best to proceed. This would result in an action that confronted an opponent. If successful, the action would result in polarization. Polarization led to further knowledge about how an opponent reacted. This in turn better informed the community how to continue.

Alinsky pointed out various warnings and challenges that an organizer should be aware of. In regard to working with people, Alinsky encouraged the organizer to have faith in people and to like them. He claimed that people knew when they were mistrusted or disliked, and would not cooperate with someone who didn't respect them. Along similar lines, an organizer shouldn't feel superior to those he worked with. Superiority created barriers for relationship-building and empowering participants.

In regard to leadership, Alinsky warned that it was difficult to organize local organizations. They tended to fear outsiders and each other. He suggested getting to know local leaders, building relationships among them and highlighting the personal/communal advantages of working together (including

personal gain). To those local leaders who feared the organizer's intentions, Alinsky recommended honesty.[32]

How was Alinsky's method of community organizing different from labor unions?

Alinsky's community organizing was different from the Labor movement. In *Reveille for Radicals* he wrote,

> The organized labor movement as it is constituted today (1945) is as much of a concomitant of a capitalist economy as is capital. Organized labor is predicated upon the basic premise of collective bargaining between employers and employees. This premise can obtain only from an employer-employee type of society.[33]

His conception of community organizing was broader than the labor movement's; it was not relegated to an employer-employee relationship. Alinsky's community organizing was based on local organizations that drew members from a greater portion of the local community.

Beyond the expanding the scope of participation, Alinsky also painted an idealistic end for community organizing. He wrote,

> Radicals, on the other hand, want to advance from the jungle of laissez faire capitalism to a world worthy of the name of human civilization. They hope for a future where the means of economic production will be owned by all of the people instead of just a comparative handful. They feel that this minority control of production facilities is injurious to the large masses of people not only because of economic monopolies but because the political power inherent in this form of centralized economy does not augur for an ever expanding democratic way of life.[34]

Community organizing, in Alinsky's mind, sought to achieve a more idealistic end. Alinsky wanted to create power for the masses so they could eventually take control of economic production. Unfortunately, he, like the influential

[32] Alinsky, Saul David. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1969.
[33] Alinsky, Saul David. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1969, 27.
[34] Alinsky, Saul David. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1969, 25-26.

philosopher and revolutionary Karl Marx, did not expand upon what this end might look like or how it might practically function.

How did Alinsky's methods change in later life?

Later in his life (1970), Alinsky wrote another book, *Rules for Radicals.* This book presented advice for the organizer and embraced a more refined approach to organizing. *Rules for Radicals* included similar themes from Alinsky's last book, but clarified, altered and/or expanded upon them. Overall, he spoke about power, outlined the idealistic goals of organizing, and provided advice for organizers.

In regards to power, Alinsky wrote a more succinct and clear statement of purpose. He stated, "The goal is to take power from those who have it and give it to those who need it."[35]

Alinsky also continued to romanticize his work. When he spoke of the organizer in *Rules for Radicals,* he wrote, "the organizer is in a true sense reaching for the highest level for which a man can reach- to create, to be a great creator, to play God."[36] This doesn't sound like the utopian vision that Alinsky painted in *Reveille for Radicals.* Rather, it sounds is as if the organizer has a calling from On High. It is possible that in working with churches and other religious groups, Alinsky gained a greater appreciation for religious frameworks.

Finally, the new book contained long section of advice for the organizer. He divided this topic into several topics: general advice, communication with people, and organizing technique.

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[35] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 3.
[36] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 61.

In general he told the organizer to expect the unexpected. Organizing was an art and an experience. One couldn't prescribe a step-by-step method to hold fast to, because there were too many unpredictable variables. In response, the organizer was to learn from personal experiences and reflect on how to improve in the future. This would best inform the organizer.

Alinsky also reiterated his advice about getting to know the local milieu, expecting conflict, and the importance of building relationships. Interestingly, the section on relationship-building included a new twist. When describing the importance of making connections, in this book, Alinsky focused on values. He wrote, "Communication for persuasion is more than entering the area of another person's experience. It is getting a fix on his main value or goal and holding your course on that target."[37] It wasn't enough to know a person's interests, the organizer had to uncover a participant's deepest values and commitments. This allowed for an authentic relationship to form—a relationship that would aid the organizing process.

In reference to the act of organizing, Alinsky incorporated several tips. He wrote about power, negative assumptions regarding organizing, advice concerning performing an "action," and long-term tips regarding the sustainability of organizing.

Alinsky argued that organizers should begin by providing power to residents. Only then can one imagine that change is possible. This statement explained why empowerment was such as early step. Otherwise, local residents

[37] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, -89.

wouldn't see any benefit in participating in the organizing efforts. In essence he added a rationale for the importance of empowering people.

Alinsky also encouraged organizers to break through a group's negative assumptions. For example, a Native American community sought to enlist Alinsky for help. When he told them to partner with other groups, they claimed that this was, "the white man's way of solving problems."[38] Alinsky argued that he had to help them remove this negative association before he could help them progress.

In regard to participating in an "action" (a creative and directed tactic to elicit change), Alinsky added several words of advice, likely based on specific experiences. Alinsky encouraged the organizer to make the opponent live up to his/her own book of rules, to create an action that was enjoyable for participants, to make the action short, and to keep the pressure on the enemy. Here we see that Alinsky considered the experience through the eyes of the protestors. This most likely helped encourage participants to stay involved. We can also see an emphasis on making sure that the opponent was taken seriously. This helped ensure an effective and targeted action. To add to his point, Alinsky also argued that ridicule was a man's best weapon—one should target someone/something personal (such as the president of a company), and observe the opponent's reaction (similar to a suggestion found in *Reveille for Radicals*). These recommendations display a planned, targeted approach that impacted directly on an opponent. Making the action personal made it more likely that there would be

[38] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 110-112.

a reaction. To summarize his targeted approach, Alinsky wrote that the ultimate strategy was to isolate a target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.[39] Alinsky has become more specific and profuse in his advice, helping the organizer know what he really means by creating a reaction, or polarizing an opponent.

Alinsky also composed long-term guidelines. He encouraged the organizer to expose a group to multiple issues/actions. Alinsky had found that single-cause communities rarely endured over time. He also emphasized the need to eventually "wean" the community from the organizer. Again, the end goal was to leave the community empowered to act on their own.[40] This was a repeated notion from his first book.

In addition to clarifying issues from his previous book, in *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky included new insights. Examples included assumptions about organizing terminology, specific training insights for organizers, and a list of the ideal characteristics of an organizer.

Alinsky redefined "negative" words that were often used in community organizing such as, "power, compromise, and means." He wrote that power can be used as a positive tool, and did not imply corruption.[41] Alinsky argued that compromise was also a positive tool; one could compromise and still leave the negotiating table with more than what he/she walked in with.[42] Finally, Alinsky contended that it was frequently necessary to resort to creative and subversive

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[39] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 130.
[40] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 91-92.
[41] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 49-50.
[42] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 59.

means.[43] To justify his statements, Alinsky included several rationales for his approach. In war, he contended, the ends almost always justified the means. Alinsky also pointed out that the opposition was always critical of the organizer's effective means.[44]

While Alinsky previously mentioned that organizers needed to be trained, he had provided very little information about how this might take place. In *Rules for Radicals,* however, he specified that the organizer should frequently attend conferences, solve organizational problems, find opportunities to analyze power patterns, have experience with communication and conflict tactics, receive education regarding the development of community leaders, and expose him/herself to methods that introduce new issues.[45] One can link each of these educational moments to the stages of organizing: generating power by engaging local leaders of organizations, choosing a target, developing a strategic action, and acting.

Another addition to Alinsky's later methodology was an explicit list of an organizer's ideal characteristics. Curiosity, irreverence, imagination, a sense of humor (for sanity), an organized mind, political savvy, ego (confidence) and an open mind were Alinsky's essential organizer traits.[46] Following the overall trend, these qualities are profuse and specific. Interestingly, this list makes it clear that not everyone possesses the characteristics to be effective organizers.

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[43] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 35.
[44] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 26-45.
[45] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 64.
[46] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 72-79.

Throughout his life, Alinsky grew as an organizer and teacher. In the end, he left a legacy that has formed the basis for political community organizing as we know it today.

How did Edward Chambers alter Alinsky's techniques?

Edward Chambers, Alinsky's successor and leader of the IAF from 1972 until 2010, continued Alinsky's style of community organizing. However, he added new techniques that further refined and improved it.

Chambers wrote a book called, *Roots for Radicals,* which presented his application of Alinsky's community organizing. He began by speaking of how the need for organizing developed. Chambers wrote,

> When these two worlds (what is and what aught to be) collide hard enough and often enough, a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited. The tension between the two worlds is the root of radical action for justice and democracy- not radical as in looting or trashing, but as in going to the root of thing.[47]

This, he argued, was what incited radicals into action. This was Chambers' root for community organizing.

The purpose of organizing, he claimed, had roots in Aristotle, who wrote that politics was "the capacity to gather others as fellow citizens to converse, plan, act and reflect for the well-being of the people as a whole."[48] Chambers also warned readers that there was a danger in not organizing. In this case, "...we can numb ourselves to the gap between social reality we encounter and our best hopes and aspirations. When this sets in, our humanity is diminished,

[47] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 23.
[48] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 18.

when it takes over our humanity is lost."[49] Thus, not only did the natural state of the world motivate people to organize, it also provided distractions, such as TV, that diluted one's humanity, and took away peoples' potential to realize their hopes and aspirations.

Chambers proceeded by going through each step of organizing, outlining how it should take place, and offering recommendations. He claimed that the first step, gathering power, he claimed should be aimed at various units of power. He characterized these units as the glue that holds society together, such as, "congregations, schools, social clubs, citizen organizations, athletic groups, parent-teacher associations, book clubs, unions, and fraternal and social organizations."[50] Chambers expanded the scope of organizing, engaging the middle class and moderates as untapped potential. Chambers sought to generate greater power so as to provoke grander transformations.

In addition to gathering individuals, funds were required to organize. Finances, Chambers argued, should be taken from members, and not from powerful institutions. The point of this was to ensure independence from large institutions dictating the direction of community organizing.

Chambers, like Alinsky, also outlined the ideal characteristics of a "good organizer." However, the personality traits that he cited were different from those that Alinsky touted. Chambers highlighted imagination, intuition, success, determination, the need for anger, and an avoidance of those with higher

[49] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 24.
[50] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 61.

degrees such as PhD's. The one true cross-over between Alinsky and Chambers was social knowledge. This trait was necessary to navigate relationship formations.

Chambers also inserted advice for organizers. He wrote that they should never do for others what they can do for themselves, that have-nots (the poor) should not be romanticized, that the organizer should avoid cynics and ideologues, and, overall, that given the opportunity, people try to do the "right thing." In Chambers we seem to see a greater emphasis on reality than in Alinsky. Chambers advocated for a middle ground, one in which both idealists and cynics are not part of the equation. He also had a down-to-earth approach that promoted independence. This was an attribute that Alinsky introduced, but didn't provide specific advice about.

One of Chambers' most important innovations was the one-to-one or relational meeting. Chambers wrote that a relational meeting was

> An encounter that is face to face- one to one- for the purpose of exploring the development of a public relationship. You're searching for talent, energy, insight, and relationships; where these are present you have found some power to add to your public collective. Without hundreds and thousands of such meetings, people cannot forge lasting public relationships based on solid social knowledge or build lasting citizen organizations.[51]

This meeting was now the foundational tool for scouting potential talent and building a strong relational power base. Chambers continued to speak of it as an art form, an exchange of talent and energy, and a shared connection. He described the best one-to-one meetings as forums for the exchange of

[51] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 44.

meaningful and personal stories. He wrote, "the most important thing that happens in good relational meetings is the telling of stories that open a window into the passions that animate people to act."[52] Chambers also advised that a meeting should last no longer than thirty minutes, and should not include idle chit-chat. This was a meeting to discover what motivated a person.

Chambers defined power as the ability to act. It came from people, organizations and the resources they provided. Once enough power was collected, through the relational meetings, it was time to plan an action. An action, according the IAF, was, "a public meeting of leaders of a broad based organization with political business or other officials for the purpose of being recognized and getting them to act on specific proposals put forward by the organization."[53] Basically, an action was a meeting aimed at procuring specific improvements for a community. Like Alinsky, in this section, Chambers argued that the purpose of an action was to generate a reaction, which would inform the organizer how to proceed.

Chambers contended that planning an action started as early as the relational meetings and should consist primarily of identifying targets. Once this was accomplished, the organizer could help the community to strategize how best to polarize tension and make people feel uncomfortable. Similar to sentiments expressed by Alinsky, Chambers claimed that tension was the best method for instigating change.

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[52] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 45.
[53] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 80.

Chambers advised those participating in actions to apply threats and pressure, to confront power with predetermined decisions, to keep actions short, and to beware of those in power because they are reluctant to give it up. Some of these recommendations originated with Alinsky (short actions and application of pressure), while others are new, such as, coming to a meeting with a predetermined decision, and the warning not to expect "the haves" to share or relinquish their power.

Chambers also added the element of evaluation—a formal time for reflection and growth. He wrote that

> An effective evaluation begins with participants getting their feelings about the action out in one or two words. Then leaders analyze their behavior and the opposition's. Did the two sides recognize each other? Was there an exchange of power? What did we do well? What did we learn from them? How did you feel when our speaker told the mayor to shut up and listen? Did we have the right research? What do we do now?[54]

Chambers' insights further cultivate Alinsky's original vision. As Chambers helped to found the training branch of the IAF, he learned and reflected more about the techniques that he learned from Alinsky. In addition, Chambers was able to start with a method and fine-tune it through personal experiences in organizing throughout his life. The result was a version of community organizing that is most like that used by organizers today.

Who took over after Chambers? What did they contribute?

After Edwards retired in 2010, Michael Gecan[55] and Ernesto Cortes[56] became leaders of IAF.

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[54] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 87.

[55] Michael Gecan is a community organizer in New York who is currently part of the leadership of IAF. Saul Alinsky helped to train him.

Gecan, who was also trained by Alinsky, wrote, *Going Public*. In this book, he recounted his personal organizing experiences. Interspersed among the various stories, he included a few statements concerning his style of community organizing. He charged leaders with the task of disorganizing, and becoming new organizations. In addition, he added advice about relational meetings, actions, practice and evaluation.

One of Gecan's most interesting additions to Alinsky/Chambers' organizing technique was his emphasis on rebranding organizations. In order to reinvent themselves, he argued, local groups needed to disorganize. This task, he found was usually met with resistance. He wrote,

> Good people don't demand that their institutions disorganize more. They don't insist that they be allowed to drop doing something else, when asked to do something new. ... and they don't see it as a first step toward starting or refounding new and better organizations.[57]

One example he gave was a congregation's refusal to remove bingo night in favor of more time and commitment to organize.

Like Alinsky and Chambers, Gecan romanticized the process of organizing. As he described the potential of forming a new organization, one can clearly see this predisposition. He wrote that

> The process of founding a new organization is freeing, demanding, and exhilarating. Leaders can become equal co-owners of the new entity- a critical opportunity... By doing so, they can become refounding brothers and sisters of their country and can write the next and newest chapters in American and social and political life.[58]

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[56] Ernesto Cortes, Jr. is the IAF co-chair. He was instrumental in building over thirty grassroots organizations that train community leaders.
[57] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 133.
[58] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 134-145.

Here he painted the process of becoming a new organization as an opportunity for creativity, for exhilarating freedom, and for a shared partnership in the future authorship of American life.

As Gecan described the relational meetings, he not only characterized them as a tool for organizing, but as an opportunity to be heard and understood. He wrote,

> Done well, individual meetings allow people to break out of the kinds of relational ruts that limit us all. ... We see more of the many facets of people who have come to think of themselves as invisible or voiceless not just because the powers that be fail to see them and hear them, but because those who claim to care about their concerns also fail to relate to them and with them. And they see more facets of you.[59]

In this sense, a relational meeting can be therapeutic; it can allow a deep personal connection to form and also validate a person's core opinions and beliefs in a sincere and personal manner.

In regard to actions, Gecan wrote about the importance of preparation. He argued that preparation was essential for successful organizing. While Alinsky and Chambers both stressed the importance of strategy and choosing a target, Gecan explicitly emphasized this particular aspect of an action. He wrote, "Constructive and creative action doesn't just happen. It requires study of past actions, strategy, collaboration/advisement, and communication with media and moderates."[60] To underscore this point, Gecan also highlighted the importance of practice. He advocated role-play and repetition.[61]

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[59] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 25.
[60] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 53.
[61] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 57.

Interestingly, Gecan's characterization of an action appears to be less confrontational than Alinsky's or Chambers'. He wrote, "Intelligent action, even public confrontation, is at bottom an attempt to engage and relate. ... recognition is fundamental – the most basic sign of respect, the start of reciprocity, and the precondition for a working public relationship."[62] If the purpose of the action is to gain recognition and respect so as to generate reciprocity, then confrontation may not always be required. This isn't to say that Gecan discouraged confrontation. One of his chapters is entitled, "Chutzpah Helps."

Finally, as a result of participating in Chambers' evaluation process, Gecan created a new framework through which to understand organizing in modern times. He identified three types of cultures that an organizer needed to understand in order to be successful. These included: market culture bureaucratic culture and relational culture.

Market culture was composed of economic institutions. Gecan wrote, "Institutions large and small start, grow, collide, compete, collapse, merge and regroup."[63] These institutions changed quickly, running through the various stages that Gecan has outlined. In addition to existing in a quick and mutable cycle, Gecan argued that successful financial organizations invested in themselves, supported a free market, and had a vast reach to the outside world.

Bureaucratic culture was made up of organizations that provided services. Leaders in this culture based their system on logic. They sought to identify each need and then design a program to meet it. To maximize the efficiency of the

[62] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 54-55.
[63] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 153.

approach, the program was designed to be easily replicated and to accommodate a large number of people. According to Gecan, bureaucratic culture appeared to "...thrive in school systems, public health agencies, housing authorities, municipal and federal agencies, some parts of large corporations, and increasingly largely not-for-profit organizations."[64]

While on the surface these organizations may appear to be designed to help, Gecan argued that they failed to see the poor and marginalized as partners, but rather as disabled individuals in need of outside help. Another negative aspect of bureaucratic culture was that its parameters favored the institutions and not the needs of the poor they sought to serve. This was often the case with larger institutions.

Relational culture was made up of voluntary associations. These included, "congregations, social clubs, athletic leagues, citizen organizations, parents and tenants and immigrant and homeowner groups."[65] The benefit of a relational culture, Gecan argued, was that the leaders sought to initiate and deepen public relationships. These relationships would then add power to the leader's ability to act in favor of the community. Gecan characterized leaders as recruiters, talent scouts, and trainers. While he didn't explicitly state so, Gecan had just described community organizing.

Gecan continued to revel in the positive aspects of this culture, highlighting its perceived advantages. He wrote, "Their bottom line is not profit or loss, but expanding pools of reciprocity and trust among people who can act with

[64] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 158.
[65] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 162.

purpose and power."[66] In addition to ideal motivations, Gecan argued that the participants could benefit from relational organizations. He wrote that people change as they act.

Not only could participants grow from participation in relational institution, they were also more likely to achieve results. Gecan wrote that relational organizations could be as flexible, nimble, aggressive and effective as market institutions.

Gecan also noted the negative aspects of relational institutions. He warned that relational organizations are rarely honored, can have faults (depending on leadership), rarely have an organized support system, and require constant disorganization and reorganization so as not to become a part of bureaucratic culture.

When thinking about the usefulness of cultural knowledge, Gecan claimed that each culture must keep the other in check. Community organizing, as a part of relational culture, was thus built into the natural order of societal operations. In this context organizing could be seen as a deterrent that sought to ensure that bureaucratic and financial institutions didn't gain too much power or influence.

This can be seen in how land was used and developed. Market institutions pushed development away from the center of the city, while bureaucracy created pockets of influence that vied for governmental regulations and made it difficult to rebuild old neighborhoods. Relational culture must fight this tendency, Gecan argued. He wrote that community organizers should seek to use the land already owned by the poor in order to rebuild neighborhoods.

[66] Gecan, Michael. *Going Public*. Boston: Beacon, 2002, 163.

This way of framing organizing differs dramatically from Alinsky and Chambers. It appears as if Gecan's priorities rest with understanding how people and organizations interact, what forces drive and motivate organizations, and why policy decisions are made.

Another recent leader, Ernesto Cortes, added different focal points. He shifted emphasis to religious institutions, mentoring and teaching. Like Gecan, Cortes saw the value in one-to-one meetings going beyond acquiring participants. He wrote,

> We must continue to develop leaders in the context of broad-based organizing not only because it provides power and justice for ordinary people, but because having conversations and relationships that encumber us to one another is healthy for adults, healthy for our children, and healthy for our institutions and communities.[67]

In addition, he also sought to move the work of community organizing to include civil relations with opponents. He wrote, "The work of the IAF is best conceptualized as strengthening democratic culture through the development of civil society and citizenship–through conversation and negotiation."[68]

What might the future hold?

It is likely that community organizing will continue to evolve and change, based on the personalities, interests, and experiences of those involved. This is also the case with Jewish organizing.

In the remainder of this chapter I will examine a segment of the Reform Movement's involvement in community organizing. The national organization for the Reform Movement is called Just Congregations.

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[67] Cortes, Ernesto. "Organizing's Past, Present and Future." *Reclaiming Our Birthright*., Sept. 1998. Web. July 2012. <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/101/cortes.html>.
[68] Ibid

What is Just Congregations?[69]

Rabbi Jonah Pesner was actively engaged in community organizing in Boston through his interest in social justice, and his congregational connections. Inspired by the effectiveness of community organizing and its "Jewish character," Pesner worked with leaders from the Union for Reform Judaism, and David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, to raise community organizing to a more prominent place in the Reform Movement's National agenda. After raising the necessary funds, Just Congregations became an official part of the URJ in 2006. Jonah Pesner was the director until 2011 and worked to engage congregations, rabbis and lay leaders in this work across the country. Today Lila Foldes and Rabbi Stephanie Kolin are co-directors. Each one has been working to support, educate and advocate for community organizing in Reform Jewish contexts.

On its website, Just Congregations identifies itself as an organization that,

> ...engages Reform Jewish Synagogues to act powerfully and successfully across lines of faith, class, and race to address the root causes of economic and social injustice. We nurture and train congregations to build deep relationships grounded in Torah and *avodah*/religious meaning within our member congregations, and foster authentic relationships with other communities who share a vision of a world redeemed. Our purpose is redemption: the sacred transformation of the world as it is (parched by

[69] There are other Jewish organizations involved in community organizing. JOIN (Jewish Organizing Institute and Network) – originally called JOI (Jewish Organizing Initiative) started off as a year long fellowship for young Jewish adults. Now it also consults, offers seminary training, and provides a national summit. It serves all denominations of Judaism that express interest. It was founded in 1998. Also Bend the ARC (a Jewish partnership for justice) exists. It is resulted as a merger between the Progressive Jewish Alliance in California and Jewish Funds for Justice in New York. Their mission is to provide interested Jews the tools they need to work with local communities across faith and race lines to organize for economic opportunities and basic rights. In addition there are many other local organizations based out of specific cities such as Boston and San Francisco.

> oppression) into the world as we know it should be- overflowing with justice.[70]

This statement represents an integration of Saul Alinsky's community organizing with Jewish values such as Torah, prayer, and religious meaning. The second half of the statement, beginning with "Our purpose," expresses Chambers' conception of the interplay between the world as it is and as it should be, and brings up Jewish values such as redemption and justice. We see that from the outset there is a distinct style of community organizing presented here. This organizing is "sacred" and Jewish. Later chapters (Chapter Two and Chapter Three) will explore this relationship in more detail, examining in particular the use of Jewish texts and creative liturgy to express this connection.

In a discussion of their goals, on the same website, Just Congregations identified two categories: social justice and congregational development. The congregational development goals reflect Alinsky/Chambers' method in relationship to congregational leaders. The first two goals state, "Identify key congregations and train their leaders (lay and professional) in community organizing skills. Guide congregations through 'relationship-building campaigns,' in which leaders create opportunities for members to learn one another's stories, concerns, and resources." The subtext here is that congregations should use relational meetings to choose talented potential organizers and participants and create relationships. The fourth goal reads, "Aid Reform congregations in increasing the numbers and depth of commitment of their congregations, as

[70] "Just Congregations - URJ." *Just Congregations - URJ*. Union For Reform Judaism. Web. June 2012. < http://urj.org/socialaction/training/justcongregations/faqs/>.

Jews increasingly see their synagogues as relevant in their community." Participation in community organizing will help Jewish communities see the synagogue as relevant. This goal draws on the principle of convincing organizations that there is a personal benefit to participation. This is a technique that Alinsky recommended to involve institutions.

The third goal, "Train rabbinic, cantorial, education, and Jewish communal service students in leadership and organizing skills that will prepare them to lead congregations in the public arena," relates to building up organizing in congregations. If future Jewish leaders are trained in organizing, and experience its benefits, there is a much greater chance that community organizing will endure. Similar to Chambers', Gecan's and Cortes' emphasis on mentorship and training, this practice will help bolster the future of organizing in the movement.

The final goal is, "Set a model for synagogues from the other denominations." While this goal is less clear, it implies that synagogues should learn from other denominations, as other Jewish and non-Jewish movements currently engage in community organizing.

The Social Justice goals also resonate with messages and techniques that originated from Alinsky and his followers. The first states, "Significantly increase meaningful social justice engagement by congregations (increasing both the number of congregations involved and the number of people involved within them)." This statement assumes that organizing will engage participants in "meaningful" social justice. I imagine that whether or not the engagement is meaningful depends on the participant and his or her perspective. More

importantly, however, it displays the importance of generating a sizeable power base. This is the key to successful organizing according to Alinsky and his successors.

The next social justice goal speaks to the core emphasis of synagogue life. It argues that social justice should become a central part of temple life. It states, "Foster a synagogue culture that fully integrates social justice into congregational life, ensuring that the pursuit of justice is at the center of congregational life alongside learning and worship."[71] This elevation of social justice also speaks to Gecan's emphasis on disorganizing and reorganizing. In his mind, institutions like synagogues needed to change—to organize themselves around essential and meaningful values that would allow them to participate in organizing.

The third social justice goal speaks to partnerships with other organizations, which is another important element of building a viable power base. It states, "Enable synagogues to join with neighboring religious congregations of all faiths, recognizing and developing their capacity to be agents of effective social change for the common good."[72]

Similarly, the forth goal highlights the advantages of working together. It reads, "Connect congregations to each other and to congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) networks in their local community; increasingly train leading congregations to mentor others in CBCO."[73]

[71] Ibid
[72] Ibid
[73] Ibid

The fifth goal repeats elements of the third and words them in a way that displays the benefit the congregation gains from participation. It states, "Strengthen the relationships of synagogues to non-Jewish congregations, building an effective context for coalitions to address issues of particular Jewish concern (e.g., Israel and anti-Semitism)."[74] Community organizing will thus also allow congregations to educate other faiths about central Jewish issues such as Israel and anti-Semitism.

The final social justice goal reads, "Strengthen the Reform Jewish Movement's impact on critical social justice issues."[75] This goal touts the effectiveness of community organizing in making real and substantive change. It also implies that there is a need for improvement in the Reform Movement's involvement in social justice. It is certainly true that the Reform Movement, while interested in helping others, has often devoted resources to short-term solutions such as mitzvah days and soup kitchens. There is room to think much more strategically as to how to make systemic changes. Community organizing can be an effective tool for those interested in creating larger, more sustainable changes.

Just Congregations primarily seeks to aid congregational leaders in integrating community organizing into their communities. It offers training courses, it partners leaders with local organizing groups, and it provides resources to those who would like to learn more about organizing.

[74] Ibid
[75] Ibid

Just Congregations claims that their unique contribution is to, “help congregations understand organizing; we deepen leaders’ Jewish learning and guide them to integrate ritual into their work; we make connections between local leaders and organizations.” The most interesting point here is the emphasis on Jewish learning and ritual. What does this look like in practice and in theory? How can we better understand how and why we make a “secular social justice practice” Jewish? How might we better frame the decisions and motivations that are behind this connection? We will begin to explore these questions in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Two: Textual Tools

Do rabbis misuse texts?

When we begin to describe how rabbis "use" texts, one of the first thoughts that comes to mind is how one might "misuse" texts.

Rabbis have used texts to understand contemporary tragedies and challenges, to espouse their principles, and to call people to action throughout time. One only need examine classical *Midrashim*, ancient and contemporary liturgy, Responsa, and modern sermons to find relevant examples.[76] To accomplish these ends rabbis and leaders often bend the texts to fit their purposes, perhaps lifting them out of their original context, failing to present both sides of textual contradictions, and converting texts to reflect modern ideologies. The primary difference in ancient and modern manipulation of texts is that today we have a greater awareness of "historical context." In modern times, historians and academics often seek to discover the "true past" presented in ancient documents. As a result, when we examine biblical texts as academics we seek to understand them as ancient people understood them, and less as we might think of them today through the lens of modern culture.

Rabbis today often act as both academics and interpreters, and thus encounter greater discomfort in relating to texts the way our ancient rabbis did. We find ourselves wondering, if it is valid to take a text such as, "Justice, justice you shall pursue," (Deut. 16:20) and leave out the second part of the verse which

[76] It is important to point out that there was a greater general knowledge of texts for those reading these texts during the time of the rabbis. As a result, the way that they use texts also incorporates the manipulation of the context of texts to lead the reader to a specific conclusion. As there were a greater number of readers of these texts who were familiar with the context of the texts, it was easier to use this knowledge as a tool in writing interpretations.

states, “that you may occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” The second part of the verse raises questions for modern Jews. Is the call for justice only a “thank you” for receiving the land of Israel? Therefore, it is easier to omit this half of the verse. Thus, for some, the question is how far can we bend the texts before they break? The answer is different for each Jewish leader. It is in this difference that I believe there are deeper truths to uncover.

I would like to make the case that this process of bending texts conveys something greater than “misuse.” When we look at either ancient or modern *drashot* (interpretations of texts) we learn something unique about the *writer* of the texts— we are provided with a window into his/her logic, culture, and priorities. This unearths the particular type of Judaism that lived or lives in a particular time and place. The snapshot we can derive from such an analysis reveals the aims of the writer and displays how he/she seeks to frame our actions as Jewish.

In order to further apply this reasoning to the topic at hand—community organizing—I have found a number of sermons online and have received several from rabbis in the field who are involved in community organizing. It is important to note that the sermons I have acquired are not representative of the entire field of community organizing. These are the works that rabbis chose to share either online or with a rabbinical student writing her thesis. As a result, they are primarily sermons that rabbis have spent a lot of time thinking about, as opposed to a text study that a rabbi might have quickly written to engage participants. Nevertheless, I believe that these are sermons that rabbis felt were “high quality.”

Because rabbis chose to share these particular samples, they likely represent their priorities and focal points in using texts as they participate in community organizing. As a result, these texts, I believe, are realistic reflections of how we are trying to frame community organizing today. More specifically, they will inform us which aspects of community organizing we currently feel should be framed in Jewish texts, how these issues should be framed, and will reveal the nature of modern leaders' conception of community organizing as an authentic expression of Jewish values.

Textual Integration in Community Organizing themed Sermons[77]

Sermon #1: "We Have Dreams!" Rabbi Ron Stern, Los Angeles, California

Purpose

The first sermon we will examine was written by Rabbi Ron Stern of the Stephen S. Wise Temple in Los Angeles. I believe that this sermon had three purposes. The first was to create a case for community organizing. The second was to describe how the congregation has been participating in community organizing. The third was to invite people to participate in these efforts.

To make a case for action, Rabbi Stern equated community organizing with realizing dreams. To accomplish this goal, he referenced dreams of aspiring actors and moviemakers that make up the Los Angeles consciousness. "How big are *your* dreams?" he asked. Next, he linked Hollywood dreams to both the creative imagination that is necessary to make community organizing a reality, and to Theodore Herzl's mantra: If you will it, it is no dream. But, after speaking about positive dreams, Stern made a stark transition. "We are living a lie," he

[77] The full text of each sermon is found in the Appendix.

argued. The lie is the reality of life in Los Angeles. It is a nightmare that is full of "gangbangers, homeless and countless drug users."

However, there is hope if we continue to dream, he argued. In fact, Jews have always dreamed. Rabbi Stern made this case boldly. He asked, "Who's better at dreaming and fulfilling their dreams than the Jewish people?" Referencing our connection to the Holy Land he wrote,

> Nearly 2,000 years ago our Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and we were exiled from our land. And yet, we dreamed collectively for a return to the Land of Israel, so at every Pesach Seder we said: *L'shana Habaha l'yirushalayim* – next year in Jerusalem. But it wasn't until 1897 when a dreamer named Theodore Herzl said the following: *Im tirtzu, ayn zo agadah, l'hiyot am chofshi b'artzeinu.*[78]

Rabbi Stern effectively painted a picture of the Jewish people as dreamers who have succeeded in actualizing their aspirations. This, he argued, is how Jews should continue to act. We should continue to dream about better communities and work to make those dreams come true.

Rabbi Stern also sought to share some of the efforts had already been taking place in his congregation. He wrote,

> This year I met a fulfiller of dreams. He's a young guy named Jared Rivera; he's the director of an organization called LA Voice... When some of the leadership of the Temple met with Jared and heard his stories we asked him if we could dream a little bigger... Over the past year we've assembled a social justice team. A leadership group that reflects the diversity of this congregation... We've spoken about our dreams for Los Angeles and talked to Jared about how they could come about. We developed a plan, and it involves you![79]

It appears as if the rabbi simply made a connection with a local organizer and started to see what his congregation could do to become involved.

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[78] Stern, Ron. "We Have Dreams!" Sermon. Los Angeles, CA. Nov. 2012.
[79] Ibid

This section of the sermon made a smooth transition to the final goal—to encourage further involvement among congregants. "I'm daring you to dream with me," he wrote. This dare consisted of a specific plan. He invited congregants to participate in "*minyanei tzedek*," group conversations that were charged with the task of sharing dreams of how to make the community a better place. He wrote,

> We're going to reach out to 1,000 of you by inviting you to meetings at the homes of other congregants. We're calling those meetings ***Minyanei Tzedek*** – meetings in pursuit of justice. Small groups of 20 of you will gather at dozens of *Minyanei Tzedek* so we'll really be able to listen to what you have to say and to each other. We're going to ask you about your nightmares and then were going to dare you to dream. What would YOU like to see change in this city?[80]

His invitation reiterated that this Jewish experience was an opportunity for "dreaming." Rabbi Stern's dream metaphor calls to mind Alinsky's preference for an organizer who was imaginative, curious and open-minded.[81] These traits allowed an organizer to develop creative strategies and actions to instigate real change.

How are texts used in this sermon?

There are two primary texts used in this sermon. The first is a Talmudic text from tractate *Baba Batra* and the second is Herzl's statement about dreams. The Talmudic text is used to demonstrate that Jews have always dealt with unsafe neighborhoods and the concerns of the needy. These people's plight has always been easy to ignore. Moreover, Stern sought to illustrate that there is an historical/textual precedent for Jews making an extra effort to place the requests of the needy first.

[80] Ibid
[81] See Thesis pages 40-41

Rabbi Stern wrote,

> There's nothing new about the big lie. In an incredible text from the Talmud written 1500 years ago the rabbis challenged the big lie as well... some residents of several houses adjoining a large courtyard want to build a locked gate at the entrance to the courtyard...Some of the rabbis said, 'of course! The people have a right to protect themselves and all should pay for the gate.' Other rabbis took a completely different view... They said: 'the gate should not be built because it will insulate the residents from the needs of the community. Beggars won't be able to enter, they won't hear the pleas of the needy from behind their gate. They cannot insulate themselves from needs of the world and deceive themselves into thinking that what goes on outside the courtyard doesn't affect them.' 1500 years ago! Our sages recognized that the truth is: when it comes to city living we're all in this together.[82]

The, "big lie," he referred to is the harsh reality of the world that we tend to ignore; it is the impoverished neighborhood on the other side of the city that we conveniently forget about. Rabbi Stern relates this concept directly to the text, conveying the timelessness of the issue. Some rabbis, as he discussed, felt that the town should erect a wall so as to create a safer neighborhood. However, others stated that if there were a wall, the townspeople would not have heard about the needs of the beggars and the poor. The text continued, explaining the implications of such as action. "They (the townspeople) will insulate themselves from the needs of the world and deceive themselves into thinking that what goes on outside the courtyard doesn't affect them." The Talmud is speaking about apathy and our natural tendency to ignore and escape from the harsh realities of life. This critique is reminiscent of Alinsky's discussion of apathy. He argued that it was the charge of the radical to awaken a strong base of moderates from their

[82] Ibid

apathy.[83] Rabbi Stern concludes his analysis by stating that we are all in this together. The rabbis knew it, and so should the listeners of this sermon.

The second text, from Herzl, was used to describe organizing as "making dreams realities." In addition, Rabbi Stern used Herzl's struggle to fulfill his dream of creating a Jewish state as an example of a seemingly impossible hope that became a reality. He wrote,

> He (Herzl) was determined to fulfill the dream of a Jewish state. 'He's crazy!' people said. 'The Jews will never pull it together, the world will never allow us. Besides the land is a wasteland filled with poor Arab farmers and a few Jewish stragglers. How will we sustain ourselves?' Herzl refused to suppress his vision. He summoned representatives from all the major Jewish organizations in the world to the First World Zionist Conferences and challenged them to fulfill the Jewish dream. He didn't live to see his dream realized, but we have! His vision of a culturally rich, technologically advanced, self-sustaining (and them some) state in the land of Israel is no dream. It is our reality.[84]

This demonstrated that while we may not always live to see the fruits of our labors, there are still great gains to be made in continuing to fight for our dreams. Just like Herzl, an organizer might have to engage in several strategies and actions to achieve his or her goal. And just like Herzl, an organizer should have big dreams. Even if these dreams might not appear achievable, continued and strategic effort can make a real difference.

What are the implications?

I believe that Rabbi Stern's textual choices convey his enthusiasm for organizing, highlight his organizing priorities, and make a case for the assertion that certain aspects of organizing are naturally Jewish.

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[83] See Thesis pages 32 and 42
[84] Ibid

Rabbi Stern's enthusiasm for organizing comes through not only in his use of texts, but also in his description of the "nightmares" that make up the reality of the neighborhoods in Los Angeles. He spends several paragraphs outlining the city's problems: 86,000 gang bangers, 80,000 homeless people, and many drug users are some of his examples. In another section he speaks of ten-mile trips that take thirty minutes, public transportation that residents don't use, litter, and dirty or toxic air. Amidst these paragraphs Rabbi Stern inserts examples of dreams for a better Los Angeles. He states the positive possibility of each negative illustration. For instance, wide open highways and clean air become possible realities when we dream of a better future. His choice of words and his descriptions are infused with passion. He describes travel as, "public transportation that whisks you from your house to the music center of our office with comfort and ease."[85]

His enthusiasm continues throughout the texts he has used. He describes the Talmud text as incredible, and the view of the rabbis as astounding. He uses explanation marks. He writes,

> They said: 'the gate should not be built because it will insulate the residents from the needs of the community. Beggars won't be able to enter, they won't hear the pleas of the needy from behind their gate. They cannot insulate themselves from needs of the world and deceive themselves into thinking that what goes on outside the courtyard doesn't affect them.' 1500 years ago!

When speaking about Herzl he writes, "He didn't live to see his dream realized, but we have! His vision of a culturally rich, technologically advanced, self-

[85] Ibid

sustaining (and then some) state in the land of Israel is no dream. It is our reality."[86]

Through these examples, the tone and tenor of the sermon is clear—Rabbi Stern is passionate about organizing. This is a process he believes in and wishes others to become equally excited about.

Rabbi Stern's sermon also highlights particular *aspects* of community organizing. He speaks about dreaming for a better future, gathering resources through a listening campaign, and hints at the importance of overcoming apathy.

The essential point is that, as Alinsky outlined, these dreams should not just remain dreams. This is how the liberal "thinks."[87] Instead, Rabbi Stern encourages his listeners to become the radicals who impact their reality and actualize their dreams.

Stern's purpose in initiating *minyanei tzedek* is to aid the organizing project with which his synagogue is already engaged. A fair portion of his sermon first describes the history of the connection he has made with a local organizer, and then invites congregants to participate in this connection. The Herzl text highlights the connection between the meetings and the theme of dreaming. Stern wants his congregants to join him in dreaming, and through the *minyanei tzedek* to share their personal hopes and desires. The organizers will then be able to recruit people who share joint dreams and to discover potential human resources. In this sense, he is framing the meetings not only in a way

[86] Ibid
[87] See Thesis page 32

that will encourage congregants to participate, but also in a way that will aid organizers in their pursuit to lead effectively.

Sermon #2: "Synagogue-Based Community Organizing" Rabbi David Adelson, New York,

What is the purpose?

This second sermon also has more than one focus. Rabbi Adelson seeks to distinguish between social action and social justice, to engender support for organizing, and to describe community organizing as Jewish in nature.

Social action includes packaging meals for the hungry, marching for the people of Darfur, and listening to speakers from *Mazon*. These acts, he argues, are mitzvot such as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Community organizing, on the other hand, he classifies as social justice. Social justice makes systemic changes. He writes that community organizing involves "...applying pressure to many citizens united to reduce the need for the short-term help of social action in the first place."[88] His aim in writing this is to characterize community organizing as a method of action that makes long-lasting change, as opposed to only responding to immediate needs for a single night or session.

The social action-social justice distinction transitions flawlessly into a description of how community organizing began at East End Temple. Adelson focuses on one-to-one conversations, and outlines the benefits of this endeavor. He mentions that when we share stories, we not only reveal our interest in making change, we also connect to one another more deeply. He writes, "...we

[88] Adelson, David. "Synagogue-Based Community Organizing." Yom Kippur Sermon 5768. East End Temple, New York, NY. Nov. 2012.

discover that we are no longer alone." This is similar to Rabbi Stern's statement, "we are all in this together." The sentiment reminds me of Alinsky's focus on empowerment.[89] According to Alinsky, after bringing people together and helping them become self-sufficient, the organizer's job was to leave the community and journey to a new one.

Rabbi Adelson expands the definition of, "community" to include non-Jews in the area. In partnering with other groups the community will become broader and more powerful as participants connect with people who have other ethnic and religious values.

Community organizing, in addition to making real change and creating human connections, benefits a congregation in additional ways. More people will want to join the congregation because it will stand for something "more" than it currently does, and congregants will feel "proud" of their synagogue.

Adelson's enthusiasm for synagogue-based community organizing is palpable. He extols Jonah Pesner's success in Boston. Rabbi Pesner's efforts resulted in the creation of a state law requiring every citizen to have health care in Massachusetts. Rabbi Adelson equates human bridge-building and positive societal change to a connection with God. The kind of community he wants to create is one that is sacred in its purpose and process. He writes,

> I want to be a part of community like that. I want to lead a community like that. I know that so many of us here want to feel more connected, and more powerful in the world. We will be in the vanguard of synagogues in Manhattan doing this level of real work of *tikun olam*, the repair of the world. Our wonderful Temple will stand for more, much more, than we do already. We will stand together with men and women in Manhattan of

[89] See Thesis page 38

> every background, defying division, and affirming that we are each created in the image of God, and that we share a common destiny.[90]

To further achieve his goal of generating support for community organizing, Rabbi Adelson frames organizing using Jewish concepts or texts. Community organizing as a whole, he argues, is similar to the highest rung on Maimonides' ladder of *tzedakah*: helping someone to become self-sufficient. He likens organizing to heeding the call of the prophet, and, as mentioned above, he sees organizing as connecting with God.

How are texts used?

In this sermon, Rabbi Adelson uses two texts all from Isaiah Chapter 58 (the *haftarah* read on Yom Kippur). He uses the first to illustrate the prophetic tradition. The second is used to frame organizing as a sacred activity.

Rabbi Adelson begins his sermon with a quote from Isaiah. He writes,

> Is not this the fast I have chosen: to unlock the shackles of injustice, to loosen the ropes of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear every yoke apart? Surely it is to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house?[91]

Rabbi Adelson sees this passage as part of the prophetic tradition, which has been a part of Reform Judaism for many years. The prophet cries out with a clear moral voice, charging people to "fight injustice and repair our broken world."[92] Perhaps he chooses this particular verse because the examples he uses (sharing bread with the hungry and inviting the homeless into one's house) are only temporary solutions. They would fall under his definition of social action as opposed to social justice.

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[90] Adelson, David. "Synagogue-Based Community Organizing." Yom Kippur Sermon 5768. East End Temple, New York, NY. Nov. 2012.
[91] Ibid
[92] Ibid

Later Rabbi Adelson cites another verse from Isaiah Chapter 58. He writes, "Then, when you call, the Eternal One will answer; when you cry, God will say, Here I am."[93] He uses this verse to illustrate how making multiple connections to those around us is the same as connecting to God. He writes, "When we work to be connected on all these human levels, we are connected to the One of all Connection."[94] Later he describes this connection as people speaking in one voice and being ready to affect change together—responding, "Here I am," to the call to involvement. The process of getting ready could be understood then as participating in the listening campaign Rabbi Adelson is initiating. Ernesto Cortes also discussed how the benefit of forming connections goes beyond the acquisition of resources. While Adelson paints one-to-one connections as sacred, Cortes spoke of the *health* of such relationships.[95]

What are the implications?

Rabbi Adelson describes community organizing as Jewish and relevant to congregants' lives, as important and life-changing for those who participate and those who receive help, and as based on the holy concept of connection.

Throughout his sermon, Rabbi Adelson emphasizes the Jewishness of community organizing. There are several possible reasons for him doing so: to make our ancient texts relevant to modern times, to add meaning to our participation in social initiatives, or to link us to our ancestors who tried to solve their social challenges. Whatever the reason, this link is an important part of Rabbi Adelson's conception of community organizing. His masterful portrayal of

[93] Ibid
[94] Ibid
[95] See Thesis page 51

organizing as a modern response to an ancient call creates a particularly strong link to the specific texts he cites from Isaiah. In addition, he is able to connect organizing to the even larger Reform concept of the "prophetic call." It is as if he has given the texts a voice, one that the listener can and will continue to hear. In doing so, he has also given the participant a voice; he gives him or her an opportunity to respond. This understanding of the "prophetic call" has the potential to create a virtual dialogue between the words of the texts and the actions of his congregants. I believe Rabbi Adelson's approach embraces the necessity that we lead an integrated Jewish life, one that naturally generates conversation between Jewish learning and Jewish actions.

Rabbi Adelson also wishes to generate support for and participation in his particular community organizing efforts. This can be seen in his portrayal of community organizing as effective. Rabbi Adelson describes community organizing as an example of social justice that has the potential to make lasting and substantive change. This is in contrast, as has been noted, to social action initiatives that provide short-term support. To me, this indicates that Rabbi Adelson sees community organizing as new and exciting in its ability to create change. He illustrates, throughout his sermon, how transformative successful organizing can be.

Rabbi Adelson highlights another benefit of organizing. Not only will it help those who benefit from the organizing efforts; community organizing will personally impact congregants' lives. Those who choose to participate will experience spiritual fulfillment. When participants answer the prophetic call, God

will answer them by affirming His presence as well. Small group sharing, in and outside of the congregation, will allow this to take place. While Adelson's argument might result from a desire to get participants excited about the listening campaigns, I feel that the importance he attaches to this kind of sharing also highlights the value he places on making personal connections, in particular, connections that result in change. He writes,

> Imagine what it will feel like to connect with each other here at Temple in a deep new way, as we hear each others' stories and work together. Imagine connecting with people in our city we don't usually get to know, but with whom we share much more than we might suspect. And imagine connecting with the power for change promised us by God. After all, we are the people who say we are slaves in Egypt today, but we will not be slaves tomorrow.[96]

Rabbi Adelson seeks to link spirituality to empowerment. According to Adelson, God promised us the power to make change. The implication is that we fulfill our end of the promise when we free ourselves from slavery. This is similar to the discussion of call and response, and to the spirituality that results from such a connection. In this case, we are answering God's call by imitating God's actions. We are freeing ourselves from modern enslavement, just as God freed us from slavery in Egypt.

Overall, the intensity of Adelson's call to make change is reminiscent of Alinsky's focus on the generation of power and strategy.[97] Alinsky, though, focuses more on the practical considerations of organizing, while Adelson speaks of a sacred response to a charge or promise from God. Adelson's organizing is

[96] Ibid
[97] See Thesis pages 33-34

Jewish. He seeks to frame organizing as a Jewish dialogue between the voices from our texts and the intentions behind our actions.

Sermon #3: "Our Idols and Ideals" Rabbi Asher, Dallas, Texas

What is the purpose?

This sermon seeks to dissuade congregants from becoming distracted and obsessed with modern day idols, to update the congregation on a particular community organizing initiative, and to increase participation by equating organizing with actualizing one's ideals.

Rabbi Knight begins his sermon with a story of Tolstoy's about a farmer who had the opportunity to increase his land. All he had to do was to walk to the land he sought in a 24-hour period and return to his starting point by dawn. In the end, the farmer collapses and dies due to his greed; he covers too great an area without stopping for water, food, or rest. This, Rabbi Knight argues, is what happens when our ideals become idols. Rabbi Knight has a specific definition in mind when he speaks of idols. He writes, "What makes idolatry so precarious is that it is rarely about evil things or rotten choices. Idolatry is about ascribing absolute value to good ideals, resulting in highly exaggerated or imbalanced priorities."[98] Anything taken to its extreme can become an idol, even the desire to succeed in our careers or to live a healthy life.

Rabbi Knight tells his listeners that there is a great temptation to make idols in our society. Sometimes we make athletes, movie stars and sex into idols. Rabbi Knight warns us that idols are dangerous. They have the power to destroy family time and replace satisfying relationships.

[98] Knight, Asher. "Our Idols and Ideals." Rosh Hashanah Sermon 5772. Temple Emanu El, Dallas, TX. Nov. 2012.

For me, like Rabbi Stern's sermon, this discussion is reminiscent of Alinsky and Chambers' warnings about apathy. Alinsky speaks of moderates as being apathetic, because they choose to ignore the problems of the world. Radicals were charged with awakening moderates from their apathy, so that they could become partners and build a stronger power base. Chambers spoke more explicitly about modern distractions, such as TV, that remove people from the harsh realities of the world and allow them to ignore social issues. This, he argued, diminishes our humanity.[99] Distractions and apathy are like idols; they can make life devoid of meaning and prevent people from participating in important work such as community organizing.

For Rabbi Knight, at the center of each idol is a valuable ideal. If this ideal is not valued above and beyond everything else, it can be a positive force in one's life. The example he provides of properly honoring an ideal is his congregation's participation in community organizing. Many of Rabbi Knight's congregants have participated in listening campaigns and story-sharing with each other and other congregations. In doing so, they have learned, for example, about the realities of having or not having health care; they become aware of what people have access to, and begin to think about what they might need.

The third purpose of Knight's sermon is to show how organizing is a way to honor one's ideals. He writes,

> This is the story (their Temple's community organizing efforts) of what happens when individuals and a community live their ideals. This is the story of how Temple members have worked powerfully and in coalition

[99] See Thesis page 42

> with synagogues, churches, hospitals, businesses, and government leaders to make an impact on the lives of our members and thousands of people in our city. This is the story of how Temple members have, in the midst of their own healthcare struggles, understood our societal shortcomings and are working hard towards *Tikkun Olam* – towards a fundamental repair, a repair that balances the ideals of justice and mercy, truth, tolerance, and loving-kindness.[100]

In this paragraph, Knight makes the case that organizing is a healthy outlet for channeling one's ideals. In doing so, the emphasis changes from worrying about one's individual health to worrying about health care for others.

How are texts used?

In this sermon, texts are used to illustrate that we and our ancestors have felt similar concerns, to further describe and define "idolatry," and to connect his story to the *parsha* for this particular day (Rosh Hashanah).

Rabbi Knight identifies the golden calf as an example of the prolific idol worship he claims the Israelites must have faced. He writes,

> The polemic against idol worship appears so frequently within the Hebrew Bible that it's clear our ancient ancestors must have struggled with an idol worshipping addiction. Consider the story of the golden calf. Our tradition tells us that Moses ascended Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. God revealed to Moses the Ten Commandments, the teachings, the principals and ideals on our faith. And back at the base of the mountain – the Israelites began to worry. Where was Moses? Where was God? They filled the void of their lives with a golden calf, praying to the man-made object as if *it* were God.[101]

Rabbi Knight links our contemporary concerns to the challenge of literal idol worship described above. He writes, "The tension our ancient ancestors felt is also a tension we have today: we are challenged to distinguish between the gods that humans make and the God that made humanity."[102] This distinction

[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid
[102] Ibid

between the dangers of man-made idols and the one God who created humanity is the same distinction that Rabbi Knight makes between modern idols and ideals. The purpose of this section of his sermon is to create a link between modern day struggles to keep ideals from becoming idols and the similar ancient tension between the one true God and false gods.

The other text used in connection with idolatry comes from the Ten Commandments. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."[103] This text is used to support Rabbi Knight's point that idol worship is dangerous and forbidden in our tradition. Therefore, the same should be true for modern idol worship.

The final text is the story of the *Akeda* (the binding of Isaac). The purposes for using this text are to further prove that idolatry is dangerous and to reference the *parsha* of the day. In this story, as Rabbi Knight reminds the listener, "God distinguished Judaism from child-sacrificing religions." The Eternal does so by stopping Abraham just as he is about to sacrifice his son to God. Rabbi Knight uses a familiar tactic: he links the subject of sacrifice to modern-day sacrifices. He writes, "without quite realizing it, our preoccupation with wealth and entertainment may lead to a different kind of sacrifice: the loss of family time and satisfying relationships, and in extreme cases, neglecting our children."[104] This list is another warning of the consequences of becoming a modern-day idol worshipper.

[103] Ibid
[104] Ibid

What are the implications?

There are a few implications that emerge from this sermon. Looking at the dichotomy of idols and ideals, one might initially guess that there is a clear message: community organizing, which is linked with honoring one's ideals, is good, while idol worship, which is attached to taking one ideal to its extreme, is bad. However, an interesting nuance is created in Rabbi Knight's conception: any ideal can become an idol. One might wonder if even community organizing taken to its extreme could be considered idol worship, but that hypothetical situation is not addressed in this sermon.

What is addressed is what makes community organizing different. Knight claims that organizing helps people focus on the needs of people other than themselves, and allows them to make change on their behalf. This is part of what is unique about community organizing for Rabbi Knight; it is its ability to bring people together and address the primary needs of others. Other values or ideals that Rabbi Knight both finds important and which make up community organizing are truth, tolerance, justice, mercy and loving-kindness. Again, many of these qualities are related to helping others. It appears that this impetus is at the core of Rabbi Knight's interest and love for community organizing.

Another central part of the sermon includes data from the congregation's community organizing efforts up to date. Rabbi Knight shares how many congregants and community members that have participated in sharing their stories more than anyone anticipated. From the listening campaign data, Knight shares statistics about various needs in the community, including the need for specific health-related equipment. He ends this segment by inviting listeners to

join the synagogue's efforts. This communicates to me that he is interested in offering community organizing opportunities to his congregants at later stages, that he is committed to sharing data and information as it comes in, and that he is interested in engaging the congregation in the process for the long haul. Rabbi Knight does not wait for clear results to inform the congregation how things are going. Rather he is committed to bringing the congregation along with him through various phases of the process.

Sermon #4: "Are you Chicken or Not?" Rabbi Kenneth Chasen, Los Angeles, California

What is the purpose?

This sermon's purposes include showing how community-building and social justice should be intertwined, building momentum for a community organizing listening campaign, and introducing how community organizing works.

Rabbi Chasen begins his sermon by relaying a story about gatherings in peoples' home for a visioning process. At one particular home, two congregants argued whether the central aspect of the congregation was community or social justice. The rabbi writes, "And I remember thinking to myself, 'These ladies are saying the same thing— they just don't know it.'"[105] Rabbi Chasen then speaks of the human hunger for community. He quotes Martin Buber, "'All real living is meeting.' We simply cannot achieve sanctity in this life while closed, sequestered from others." Next he outlines the importance of social connection for lasting social action initiatives. The example he gives is the story of a sit-in during the Civil Rights Movement. One researcher found that the reason people stayed

[105] Chasen, Rabbi Kenneth. "Are You Chicken or Not?" Rosh Hashanah Sermon. Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA. Dec. 2012.

involved with this dangerous protest method was because of the relationships they had with others who were involved. Most people who lacked these relationships but believed in the cause either didn't participate, or stopped participating. Other examples of the value human beings place on relationship include Facebook, the concept of social capital, and a quote from Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. This argument and these examples make up half of the overall sermon. Clearly, this is an essential point that Rabbi Chasen wishes to prove.

A second purpose of the sermon is to involve people in an ongoing listening campaign. As we have seen from past analyses, this is a common goal. In the sermon, there is a logical transition from the importance of making social justice work, to a community-building exercise, to encouraging people to come together and share their stories in order to build community and begin the work of organizing. In other words, the rabbi invites congregants to participate in the kinds of connections he has been describing through theory and examples. This invitation includes other peoples' stories who have started the process. This is a creative invitation; it brings people up-to-date and initiates one side of the conversation. Another intelligent strategy he uses is to place sign-up cards at each seat and then collect them at the end of the sermon. Congregants can therefore agree to participate while the idea is fresh in their minds.

The last purpose of this sermon is to inform congregants of the larger process of community organizing. Rabbi Chasen briefly describes each phase of community organizing. He writes,

> We'll start gathering in small groups in each other's homes – to extend and deepen the storytelling, to build our relationships community-wide, to enrich the experience of being a Leo Baeck Temple congregant. We'll also start to look for common themes in our stories – the concerns that unite us, the changes we want to see. Hopefully, we'll find some things that we can really organize around. And then, maybe, we'll turn to each other and ask, 'Are you guys chicken or not?' (this is a reference to the Civil Rights example) And if we're not, we'll work together to figure out the best way to amass our power to effect real change on those issues of shared concern. We may go looking for another faith community or two who want to sit at that lunch counter with us. We may even go looking for a whole bunch of faith communities and civic communities that want to join us in filling the lunch counter and the street outside.[106]

Unlike other sermons, which just detail the specific aspect of community organizing they are currently involved in, this sermon includes a brief outline of what the whole process might look like.

This is not only done through a step-by-step outline, it is also accomplished through Rabbi Chasen's examples. The sit-in protests he describes are similar in content and feel to an action. The visioning meeting at congregants' homes is similar to a listening campaign.

How are texts used?

Texts in this sermon are used to support some of the larger points: Judaism is and has been a social- relational religion, connection can lead to action, and it is important that we act and be heard.

Rabbi Chasen harkens back to ancient times and references a midrashic text that describes the architecture of the first Temple. The *midrash* states that Solomon built two gates into the Temple court, opposite one another. Thus, people were forced to encounter each other, and more likely to share stories. After the Temple was destroyed, we find that the *midrash* says they would repair

[106] Ibid

the synagogues instead. The clear purpose of this insertion is to demonstrate that Judaism has always primarily been a social religion, even in ancient times.

This point is further explored with modern proof texts. Martin Buber wrote, "all real living is meeting." Real living, or, "sanctity," as Rabbi Chasen explains it, requires social connections. Rabbi Chasen also cites Rabbi Larry Kushner who states, "Hermits and monasteries are noticeably absent from Jewish history; we are a hopelessly communal people."[107]

In order to lead the listener to his next point, Rabbi Chasen begins to move from texts that are just about social interaction to texts that hint at what such interaction can lead to. To make this transition he cites Carol Ochs who states, "Interpreting our own experiences and hearing stories of others as if they are Torah opens us to creative possibilities." While this description of what sharing can lead to is not explicit it is enough to prompt this follow-up from Rabbi Chasen. He writes,

> It is the sharing of stories—the amassing of stories—which establishes our kinship. We discover that we suffer from common disillusionments and possess common yearnings. We are not alone. There are many, many others who want the same things that we want for this world. And emboldened by seeing each other… hearing each other… feeling each other—we can acquire power. A loaded word—power. But strip away the connotations, and you're left with the definition: The ability or capacity to act effectively.[108]

This description of what sharing can lead to is at the heart of the first steps of community organizing. Rabbi Chasen speaks of story-sharing, which is referenced by Chambers as an essential aspect of the relational meeting.[109] The

[107] Ibid
[108] Ibid
[109] See Thesis page 44

next step is to acquire power so that an action can be attempted. Chasen, like Alinsky and Chambers, reframes the word "power." Alinsky speaks of redefining power as a positive tool that doesn't need to imply corruption.[110] Chambers defines power as the ability to act.[111] This is quite similar to Chasen's definition, "the ability or capacity to act effectively." Thus, this text is used to move the listeners to think about the results of sharing their stories, which, in this case, would be the next step of community organizing—gaining power.

Texts are also used in this sermon to inspire people to participate in and to care about community organizing. Rabbi Chasen writes,

> The great Rabbi Yossi in the Talmud tells his story: 'On a dark night, I came upon a blind man carrying a torch.' I asked him, 'Why? If you can't see, why do you carry a torch?' The blind man said simply, 'I carry this light so that people may see me.' We walk blind through the dark night of this crazy, break-neck speed, lonely life. And somewhere along the line, we got the impression that because we can't see as well as we'd like in the midst of this blur, we should just put down our torches. No. We need to carry our light, for we need to be seen. We need to be heard. We need to be felt. By each other, in this last, blessed place where we still get to matter – and in this world, where we had better make ourselves matter.[112]

The torches become a call for community and a call for action on the community's behalf.

Rabbi Chasen continues with a quote about the shofar. He writes,

> This is the day for sounding the shofar. *Tekiah* – let us meet each other, face to face. *Teruah* – let us marshal our might, and move forward. And when this day has ended and tomorrow comes, let us follow the call of the prophet Isaiah: *Kashofar harem kolecha* – Raise your voice like a shofar… raise your voice like a shofar![113]

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[110] See Thesis page 39
[111] See Thesis page 44
[112] Chasen, Rabbi Kenneth. "Are You Chicken or Not?" Rosh Hashanah Sermon. Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA. Dec. 2012.
[113] Ibid

This quote not only continues to raise enthusiasm for community organizing, it also links the prophetic call for action to the sounding of the shofar. This link might remind congregants of this sermon and its call to action each time the shofar, like a metaphorical alarm clock, is sounded during the High Holy Days.

What are the implications?

There are a few implications found within this sermon. The first is that Rabbi Chasen, like many of the other rabbis whose sermons we have discussed, is excited about community organizing and wants to spark participation. This can be seen in his passionate pleas for action, in the method of providing sign-up cards for all listeners, and in how he uses texts to paint strong images and evoke memorable sounds to inspire participation.

The second implication is that, unlike most of the other rabbis, he focuses on several aspects of organizing, not just the immediate first steps. Rabbi Chasen writes about gathering power, and alludes to actions. This might indicate a love for the subversive aspect of community organizing that is needed to make a point or create a situation that demands change. Indeed, he even ends his sermon with a quote from his earlier Civil Rights reference, “Are you chicken or not?”

Overall, it is clear that Rabbi Chasen, like the other rabbis, is trying to educate people about organizing, and highlight its many benefits. In doing so, I believe he reveals a passion for both story-sharing and the action to which it leads. These two stages of organizing—story-sharing and the action—will enable his congregants and their partners to make real change in their community.

Text Study: "Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action" Rabbi Suzanne Stone, Los Angeles, California

What is the purpose?

This last item is part of a thesis on community organizing. It was written to "illuminate how the work of congregation based community organizing can be enlivened through a more explicitly Jewish foundation."[114] To this end, Rabbi Stone has crafted a thorough study guide that addresses each aspect of community organizing so that congregations can more effectively link their organizing work to Jewish texts. In addition to this stated purpose, I also believe that she seeks to prove that each phase of organizing is naturally Jewish.

How are texts used?

Rabbi Stone identifies storytelling, relationships, self-interest, power, action, and interpretation as the primary aspects of organizing. Under each heading, she writes a section about why the topic is Jewish and then includes an accompanying text study.

In her text study, Rabbi Stone presents a biblical text, a rabbinic text, a medieval text, and a modern text. Each text is accompanied by questions and a section called "A Closer Look," that analyzes the texts. We will look at the text study that accompanies the theme of storytelling because it is most similar to the other documents we are examining.

In the storytelling section, Rabbi Stone seeks to draw a natural connection between ancient storytelling and Judaism, and to argue that the same connection exists between Judaism and modern storytelling. In doing so, she also begins to hint at other community organizing concepts such as "changing reality."

[114] Stone, Suzanne. *Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action*. Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012

Rabbi Stone begins with *Bereshit* 1:1. She writes, "...words are more than the tools to narrate a story or to express a sentiment. Rather they have the power to create a new reality."[115] This paves the way for the power of storytelling to be understood as the beginning of the community organizing that has the power to create a concrete new reality.

Rabbi Stone also makes the point that redemption does not occur without a story. She notes that there is an interruption of the Exodus story that states,

> And it will come to pass, when your children say to you: 'What does this service mean to you?' You will say to them: 'The Passover sacrifice is for God who passed over the homes of the Children of Israel in Egypt when he smote the Egyptians, but God saved our homes.[116]

This insertion of a future command to tell the story of the Exodus creates a natural link between story sharing and Judaism. It is so important to relay the command to retell the story that the narrative is interrupted mid-way through.

She makes a modern link by arguing, "it is clear that the Torah emphasizes the need to tell our story before we can participate in our own liberation."[117]

The biblical text showcases Torah verses concerning the four children referenced in the Passover *haggadah*. The questions Rabbi Stone asks examine how we tell our stories, and how storytelling might be connected to redemption. "*Is there anything that these verses can teach us about the connection between*

[115] Stone, Suzanne. *Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action*. Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012, 35.
[116] Stone, Suzanne. *Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action*. Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012, 38. (Exodus 26:12)
[117] Ibid

story-telling and redemption?" she asks.[118] The connection to redemption seems to imply that sharing stories can enable and inspire participants to redeem themselves and their community and echoes Rabbi Stone's earlier description of community organizers as people who seek to create a new reality together. The final question is, "*Other than the rabbinic interpretation, why do you think there are four different ways to tell the story of our Exodus?"*[119] This question may refer to the varied individuals who will share their experiences during listening campaigns.

The questions Rabbi Stone asks concerning the rabbinic text (*avadim hayinu*) focus on the universality of telling our story no matter if we are smart, wise, experienced or learned. In particular she focuses on the segment that reads, "Even if all of us were smart, all of us wise, all of us experienced, all of us learned in Torah, we would still be commanded to discuss the Exodus from Egypt. And everyone who really discusses the Exodus from Egypt is praised."[120] One questions she asks about this text is

> While Hoffman translates the word מרבה (marbeh) as "really," many other scholars translate this as "to increase, to expand upon, or to multiply." Therefore, in your opinion, what does it mean that anyone who really discusses or expands upon the story of the Exodus deserves praise?[121]

The "expansion" may refer to increasing support through participation in storytelling. As seen through the sermons presented here, gaining support is crucial to increasing power and creating a successful public action. In Rabbi Stone's analysis she adds that the *haggadah*, which is told each year, might

[118] Ibid
[119] Ibid
[120] Ibid
[121] Ibid

inspire people to continue to engage also in new conversations each year, as there is always something new to learn, even from an old story.

The medieval text Rabbi Stone uses is by Rabbi Leon de Modena. It states, "Words are the guides to acts; the mouths makes the first move."[122] The questions she asks pertaining to this text are based directly around Leon de Modena's statement of, "why is this the case?" She asks, what words have inspired YOU to act in the past? When have YOUR words influenced your acts? The underlying questions are, "how are acts and words related?" and, "how have my words and acts been connected?"[123] The questions are similar to those that Rabbi Chasen explored, although he framed the issue around relationships and actions.

Rabbi Stone's modern text is a quote from Rachel Adler. The text speaks about the importance of sharing where you have been so as to be able to figure out where you should go in the future. It also states that commitments result from stories. Adler writes, "I can only answer the question, 'what am I to do?' if I can answer prior questions, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' Commitments emerge out of stories and are refashioned in stories.'"[124] Rabbi Stone again approaches the text by directly asking participants if they agree—if they can think of examples that relate to their own experience. The underlying question here is similar to that in the medieval text: how does storytelling impact our future actions and commitments? In contrast, though, this text is stronger in

[122] Stone, Suzanne. *Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action*. Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012, 45.
[123] ibid
[124] ibid

its argument than the medieval text. In Adler's text, it's as if one CAN'T go forward if they do not participate in storytelling/sharing. This would certainly be similar to the need to organize and to listen to one another in order to be able to enact effective and long lasting change.

What are the implications?

This text study is one section of a thorough Rabbinical Thesis in which Rabbi Stone's stated goal is to help others become better at using Jewish texts. As such, it is clear that she is committed not only to contributing creative text studies, but also to demonstrating that community organizing is Jewish. The texts are the centerpiece of her study, but they are surrounded by commentaries and interpretations. Each question and analysis directly connects the reader to an aspect of community organizing. The case we have been discussion is about the importance of storytelling in ancient times as well as our need to add a personal story, to aid redemption, to inspire action through stories, and the necessity of knowing where we come from in order to know where we should go next.

The thesis, as we have seen, in its attempt to be thorough, introduces a biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern text for each concept. This, I believe, is to not only offer a variety of different texts to choose from, but also to demonstrate that each part of community organizing has a place in Judaism throughout history.

Finally, there are sections of the text study that seek to convince participants that storytelling is an important part of community organizing. It appears as if the author has met participants who are skeptical of the necessity

of a listening campaign when the goal is to increase the standard of living in a particular neighborhood. She writes,

> While many congregants wonder why they must tell their own personal story in order to build a platform for social justice, it is clear that the Torah emphasizes the need to tell our story before we can participate in our own liberation. Although the story-telling process utilized by the CBCO model can be very time consuming, it is based on the radical Jewish notion that stories are the foundation of redemption.[125]

Not only are stories necessary, but they are also based on a Jewish notion that "stories are the foundation of redemption."

Chapter Two Conclusion

These sermons and text study present snapshots of how rabbis communicate the link between community organizing and Judaism. Each text, sermon, or study reveals which aspects of community organizing the rabbis are excited about, how they use texts to highlight their excitement and interest, and how they seek to garner support from congregants.

Throughout this analysis there are trends. Many of the rabbis are seeking to get congregants excited about a particular community organizing project that is about to start or is presently taking place in their community. Most of the rabbis we have discussed wrote about the beginning of their community organizing experiences. The beginning is when rabbis need to engage people the most, and the time period in which the most excitement abounds. Interestingly, each rabbi has a different strategy for inviting congregants to participate. One rabbi equates organizing with actualizing dreams, while another sets up organizing as a response to an ancient prophetic call. However, all of these rabbis use texts to

[125] Stone, Suzanne. *Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action*. Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012, 38-39.

make the case that organizing is important and worth their time. They do this, I believe, partially because this is the role of the rabbi: to make links between our congregational actions and Jewish texts. But, they also do it because they largely feel that organizing is Jewish in terms of its values, process, and end results. It is true that one rabbi might find greater connection to a text in the results of an organizing campaign, while another might find connections between texts and actions throughout the process, but, nonetheless, each appears committed to understanding his or her congregation's communal actions as driven by or enhanced by Jewish texts.

Where does the desire to link social action and text originate?

The link between text and action can be traced back to our antiquity. In the Talmud we read the following story:

> Rabbi Tarfon and some elders were reclining in an upper chamber in the house of Nitza in Lod when this question came up: Which is greater, study or action? Rabbi Tarfon spoke up and said: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva spoke up and said: Study is greater. The others then spoke up and said: Study is greater because it leads to action.[126]

This text comes from a specific context, one which assumes that people desire and indeed are obligated to study mitzvot and Torah. Today we live in a world where we are more likely to learn from a rabbi's sermon or an occasional Torah study than from daily and diligent study on our own. As a result, instead of assuming that congregants will come to the conclusion that Torah leads to action, we often share a few texts or discussions and then, in the same breath, challenge congregants to act. In doing so, we frame the action as Jewish.

[126] "Kiddushin 40b." *The Babylonian Talmud ...* Trans. Isidore Epstein. London: Soncino, 1961.

The challenge for Jewish life today is that sometimes we act without grounding our actions in Jewish texts at all, whether they are sermons or text studies. This is a missed opportunity that fails to realize the potential of an integrated Jewish life. When we think about how our actions inform our learning and how our learning informs our actions, there is a greater potential to enhance meaning, understanding, and our Jewish identities.

And should we not also consider how our worship and rituals relate to our actions or studies? Are we not told in *Pirkei Avot* 1:2 that the world depends on three things: on Torah (study), on worship (holy work), and on acts of loving kindness (social justice initiatives)? If we integrate our study and our actions, why not integrate our rituals and prayers with our actions as well? What might this look like? These are the questions we will address in the next chapter, Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Liturgy and its Connection to Community Organizing

This chapter will focus on the connections between prayer and social action, make the case that community organizing readings and liturgies are appropriate and have historical precedent, and explore potential applications in the realm of community organizing.

Connections between Prayer and Social Action

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel made claims that social action is related to prayer. Heschel's most memorable occasion was his march with Martin Luther King at Selma, where he claimed he was praying with his feet. Another occasion where Heschel made a connection between prayer and social action appears in an essay titled, "On Prayer." Here we find the following statement,

> Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, and falsehood. The liturgical movement must become a revolutionary movement, seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, and the vision.[127]

To expand our understanding of Heschel's statement, it is helpful to examine words from a former community organizer who is currently a leader in social action circles, Rabbi Jill Jacobs. Jacobs speaks about how Jewish liturgy causes one to imagine the world to be different, to be a fulfillment of a promise from God.[128] Prayer becomes subversive when it prompts congregants to participate in social justice initiatives. It does this by underscoring the difference between the world as it is and as it should be. When Rabbi Jacobs recites the *birchot*

[127] "On Prayer," pp. 257-267, Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996)
[128] http://www.jewishlights.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=OP&Category_Code=3-23-11

hashachar, the morning blessings, she is reminded of a God who provides for her needs (clothing, sight, etc.). The *amidah* calls her to stand, "for the welfare of the righteous."[129] These words startle her into action.

Because Rabbi Jill Jacobs has a background in community organizing, it is quite appropriate that she highlights the friction between the world as it is and as it should be. This is reminiscent of Chambers impetus for organizing mentioned in Chapter One. He wrote,

> When these two worlds (what is and what aught to be) collide hard enough and often enough, a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited. The tension between the two worlds is the root of radical action for justice and democracy- not radical as in looting or trashing, but as in going to the root of thing.[130]

Rabbi Jacobs finds this same tension in Jewish liturgy—it is what ignites her to participate in social justice initiatives.

At the same time, Jacobs mentions that prayer reminds her that she cannot act alone; she must also rely on God to bring about justice. One can also understand prayer as a petition for God's aid in the realm of social justice. During *shacharit*, the Morning Prayer service, Psalms 146-150 are traditionally included. Psalm 146 directly speaks to our social responsibilities. It reads,

> who secures justice for those who are wronged, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free; The LORD restores sight to the blind; the LORD makes those who are bent stand straight; the LORD loves the righteous; The LORD watches over the stranger; He gives courage to the orphan and widow, but makes the path of the wicked tortuous.[131]

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[129] Ibid
[130] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003. 23.
[131] *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985. (Psalm 146:7-9)

Here, we chant or recite words that speak directly to a need. While the psalm claims that God performs actions such as feeding the hungry and giving courage to the orphan and widow, the lines remind us not only of the power that God holds, and the need for God's actions, but also of the value of social justice related to these acts.

Consider also the phrase *tikkun olam*, which has its origins in the 3rd century (maybe as early as the 2nd century) *aleinu* prayer that we recite at the end of each prayer service.[132] In the second paragraph, often omitted in Reform prayer services, we find the phrase, "*l'taken olam b'malchut shaddai*" (to establish or fix the world as the kingdom of God.) In context, the phrase refers to a time when everyone will recognize God's majesty and divine sovereignty. Fixing the world, in this context, on a *peshat* (literal) level refers to working towards a time when all people will worship God. While this particular context does not necessarily relate directly social justice, it does concern *tikkun olam*, repairing the world (through making it more like a perfect world without need, hunger or war)—a term that has become inextricably intertwined with social justice in today's progressive Jewish circles.[133]

There are also connections between social justice and ritual such as giving *tzedakah* on Shabbat, or *mishloach manot* to friends and family on Purim.

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[132]http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Caring_For_Others/Tikkun_Olam_Repairing_the_World_.shtml

[133] This took place through time. Rabbinic traditions .. and the kabbalists added a mystical meaning to repairing the world related to In the Lurianic creation story, God then emanated Godself into the world through ten *sefirot* – aspects of the divine presence. God contained these *sefirot* within vessels, but some of the vessels proved too weak to hold the more powerful of the *sefirot*. The vessels shattered, resulting in the mixture of divine light with the *kelipot*, or shells of the vessels themselves. This process resulted in the introduction of evil into the world. http://www.zeek.net/706tohu/index.php?page=2

Matanot La'evyonim, gifts for the poor, are an even more important Purim obligation, according to Isaiah 57:15. *Tu bishevat* began as a tithing holiday; it signaled a time to calculate the age of one's trees. The tithe law mandated that ten percent of one's produce should to be given to the priests and the poor. Today, *Tu bishevat* has developed an environmental tone. Many use it to raise ecological awareness.

Making the case for community organizing creative liturgy

In addition to these connections, many have sought to contemporize holidays, rituals, and the liturgy so that they can remind and inspire participants to engage in social justice. Examples of this can be found on sites such as that of the RAC (Religious Action Center)[134], Hillel[135] and Bend the Arc.[136] The RAC has several Jewish services that include readings and creative social action themed interpretations. The authors of these prayers and services seek to take the meanings of prayers and to link them to social action. For example, the Bend the Arc site includes a food justice themed Passover *seder*. It reads,

> We will begin our *seder* by connecting the hunger that ancient Israelites experienced in Egypt to the modern-day experience of hunger and food insecurity. We uncover the *matza* and lift it up as we sing aloud.[137]

Throughout the rest of the seder, the format of key prayers and rituals is followed, but in addition, *iyunim* (intentional readings) are interspersed throughout that frame the *seder* as a message about hunger. When the

[134] The RAC, or the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism is an institution that has acted as a, "hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in Washington D.C.
[135] http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/F5454253-400F-4F75-A290-F751B5BEF57A/0/HOLIDAYGUIDE_PartI.pdf
[136] http://bendthearc.us/resources/holidays-celebrations
[137] Kimelman-Block, Jason. "Food and Justice Passover Seder." *Bend the Arc*. Bend the Arc, 4 Apr. 2012. Web. Mar. 2013

opportunity arises to stress a relevant theme such as “the bread of affliction,” it is highlighted. Modern examples and statistics on hunger also make an appearance and allow our ancient story to function as a commentary on modern day challenges.

An example of contemporizing a Jewish Holiday in History

Creative liturgy is connected to our understanding of the meaning of each particular holiday, which changes over time. Our observance is influenced by how we understand the meaning of the holiday. Let’s look at Hanukkah, for example.

The Hanukkah story has changed throughout the ages. Various generations have connected to distinct parts of the story. In the first book of Maccabees, we learn of a small band of fighters (the Maccabees) who won a victory over the Syrian Greeks. The Syrian Greeks suppressed Jewish religious observance. Rabbis from the Talmudic period, who might have had concerns about a holiday celebrating a revolt while living in Babylon or perhaps concerned about the lack of “God’s presence” in the story, might have placed new meaning in the holiday by adding the story of the miracle of the oil. Consider the first book of Maccabees.[138] It states,

> Then Judah appointed certain men to fight against those that were in the fortress, until he had cleansed the sanctuary. So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law: Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place. And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, which was profaned; They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they

[138] The first and second book of Maccabees are from the Apocrypha a collection of books that are not part of the official Jewish Biblical canon. It is generally thought that the first book of Maccabees was written in Hebrew, as the Greek version reads like a literal translation of a Hebrew document. The Second book was written in Greek.

> pulled it down, And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them. Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former; And made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts. They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table. And upon the altar they burned incense, and the lamps that were upon the candlestick they lighted, that they might give light in the temple. Furthermore they set the loaves upon the table, and spread out the veils, and finished all the works which they had begun to make now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called the month Kislev, in the hundred forty and eighth year, they rose up betimes in the morning, and offered sacrifice according to the law upon the new altar of burnt offerings, which they had made. Look, at what time and what day the heathen had profaned it, even in that was it dedicated with songs, and harps, and cymbals. Then all the people fell upon their faces, worshipping and praising the God of heaven, who had given them good success. And so they kept the dedication of the altar eight days and offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise.[139]

In this text, it is clear that the focus is on rededicating the Temple properly. Each detail is relived. Judah consults the priests to make sure that the altar is purified properly. At the end of this arduous process, we find that the Temple is rededicated, and that participants celebrated for eight days by sacrificing burnt offerings and rejoicing with song and harp. There is no mention of oil. Indeed, the earliest observance of Hanukkah took place as

One would imagine that the second book of Maccabees would tell a similar tale. However, while there are some similarities there are certainly differences as well.

> Judah the Maccabee and his men, under the Lord's leadership, recaptured the Temple and the city of Jerusalem... After purifying the

[139]1 Maccabees 4:41-57. *Holy Bible King James Version, the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Apocrypha, a Norton Critical Edition.*: W W Norton & Co, 2013.

> Temple, they made another altar. Then by striking flint they made a new fire and... offered sacrifices and incense, lit the lamps...On the anniversary of the very same day on which the Temple had been defiled, the 25th of Kislev, they now purified the Temple. They celebrated joyfully for eight days, just as on Sukkot, knowing that [a few months before] on Sukkot they had spent the festival [hiding] like wild animals in the mountains and caves.... That is why they came carrying stalks wreathed with branches—palm fronds—and ripe fruit [the *lulav* and *etrog*], and sang hymns of praise [Hallel] to Him Who had given them the victory that had brought about the purification of His Temple. By a vote of the community they decreed that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate these festival days every year.[140]

While the purification of the Temple is still a theme, we learn that the festival celebrated for eight days was actually Sukkot. They couldn't have celebrated Sukkot earlier because they had not been in possession of the Temple when the festival was supposed to have been celebrated. More support for this interpretation can be found in Mishnah Sukkot 5:3.

In addition, we find that Judah was under the Lord's leadership. This version of the story credits the victory to God, rather than a human army.

The first mention of the oil appears in a commentary (in this case, the Scholia, or commentary) of *Megillat Taanit* (a scroll that details the festivals on which one should not fast.) "On the twenty fifth day thereof (Kislev) is the day of Hanukkah. (For) eight days mourning is forbidden."[141][142]

> *Scholia*: When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils that were there. When the House of the Hasmoneans prevailed and won victory over them, they searched and found only one cruse (of oil) with the seal of the high priest that was not defiled. It had only enough oil to burn

[140] Maccabees 2: 10:1-8. *Holy Bible King James Version, the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Apocrypha, a Norton Critical Edition.*: W W Norton & Co, 2013.
[141] Zeitlin, Solomon. *Megillat Taanit as a Source for Jewish Chronology and History in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Philadelphia: Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1919. (Megillat Taanit 9)
[142] The Shulchan Aruch and Mishneh Berurah expand on this notion, stating that you must not bewail or fast on this day. (*Shulchan Aruch* 670:1)

> for one day. A miracle happened, and there was light from it for eight days. In the following year they established eight festival days.

Here we see that the story of the oil finally emerges within the story of a military victory and the purification of the Temple. The same tale emerges in the Talmud in a discussion of Shabbat candles and appropriate wicks and types of oils that one may use.

> What is [the reason of] Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [begin] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils there, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was formed there and they lit [the lamp] there for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.[143]

As we can see, many differing meanings appear throughout these time periods.[144] Hanukkah went from a military victory, to the purification of the Temple, to the celebration of Sukkot, to the miracle of the oil.

In modern times, Hanukkah has developed additional meanings. In the 1800s Hanukkah gained a new focus with the rise of Zionism. Modern author, Noam Zion[145] wrote paper about this topic stated,

> The Secular Zionists rejected the miracle and emphasized the earthly realism of Hasmonean heroism. Zionism made Hanukkah a nationalist holiday… the secularization and nationalization of religious celebrations focused on minor religious holidays and reprioritized their significance.[146]

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[143] "Shabbat 21b" *The Babylonian Talmud ...* Trans. Isidore Epstein. London: Soncino,1961. (Quoting Megillat Taanit)

[144] For further elaboration on more moderate interpretations of Hanukkah see Sampson Hirsch, Alex Bein, Yaacov Herzog.

[145] Currently, Noam Zion is a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. He has a Master of Arts in Philosophy from Columbia University.

[146] Zion, Noam. "The Jewish Cultural Civil War and the Reinvention of Hanukkah in the Twentieth Century: Who Are the Children of Light and Who, the Prince of Darkness? Four Contemporary

As the early pioneers in Israel fought to defend themselves, they began to connect with ancient Jewish fighters who stood their ground in the same place. The holiday of Hanukkah, with its positive portrayal of the Jewish fighter, spoke to the early Zionists who connected to the message of freedom and liberty.

In addition, they removed the emphasis on the miracle of Hanukkah. Zion quoted Aharon Ze'ev, a Zionist poet who wrote in 1951,

> We are carrying torches. In the dark night the paths shine beneath our feet, and whoever has a heart that thirsts for light--let him lift his eyes and his heart to us and come along. No miracle happened for us. No cruse of oil did we find. We walked through the valley, ascended the mountain. We discovered wellsprings of hidden light. We quarried in the stone until we bled: Let there be light![147]

Clearly, the miracle has become less important to Zionists. Instead, Zionists emphasize the unlikely military victory.

In modern day America, Hanukkah has become an important holiday, symbolizing one's Jewish identity as it is celebrated close to the time of Christmas.[148] Americans have strived to add more importance to the holiday creating Hanukkah Harry to rival Santa clause, integrating gift giving for eight nights, and adding the notion of "Hanukkah bushes" to combat the desire to have a Christmas tree in the house.[149]

As we can see through this example, the meaning of holidays is shaped by a people's changing experience and priorities throughout history.

Interpretations of Hanukkah Candles and Ethical Traits: Zionist, Classical Reform, Hassidic, and Jewish Renewal."*Http://www.hartman.org.il/*. Hartman, Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

[147] Ibid

[148] Wolfson, Ron, and Joel Lurie. Grishaver. *Hanukkah: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebration*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2001.

[149] Ibid

For examples of how these changes infiltrate our rituals and prayers, simply examine the wide range of current and historical Passover *Haggadot*. For information on this subject, visit My Jewish Learning online: *http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/The_Seder/Haggadah/New_Haggadot.shtml.* Here we find descriptions of various *haggadot* that have integrated modern and historical themes.

The reasons that contemporary themes are so readily integrated into the *haggadah* are many: the Passover *seder* takes place at home and is led by each family (no central authority), the *haggadah* is itself a patchwork of texts from various times in Jewish history (Bible, Mishnah, Midrash, psalms, songs, medieval writings, etc.), and when printing began, there were several different versions created (25 in the 16th century, and today there are more than 1000).[150]

While there is less resistance to changing and adapting the *haggadah* than there is to altering or adding to other prayers and rituals, that doesn't mean there is not place for change, especially within the Reform movement, which has constantly sought to find ways to bring Judaism to life and make it relevant for modern worshipers.

Do rabbis misuse creative liturgy?

As in the texts discussed in Chapter Two, the authors of creative prayers and readings speak through their work. They share their priorities, interests and conceptualizations through what they choose to emphasize and how they frame it.

[150] Cohen, Sharonne. "How Is This Haggadah Different? - My Jewish Learning." *How Is This Haggadah Different? - My Jewish Learning*. My Jewish Learning, Web. 23 Apr. 2013.

Unlike text use, however, a prayer is often perceived as a fixed entity. Some congregants and prayer practitioners find any change to ritual or prayer to be disrespectful or inauthentic to "traditional Jewish practice." However, in truth, prayer- one type of ritual- has always changed and evolved over time. The liturgist and scholar Jacob Petuchowski often said that one generation's *kavanah* (inspirational or creative additions) becomes the next generation's *kevah* (fixed practice).[151] In my lifetime, for example, Debbie Friedman's *mi shebeirach* prayer has become a regular part of most Reform religious services—but when it was first written, it was threatening to many congregations. So, while people do add to, take away from, and alter liturgy, there is less experimentation with liturgy than there has been in how texts are used. This makes it difficult to locate examples of creative community organizing inspired liturgy. In total, I found three examples.

Examples of Contemporary Community Organizing Themed Prayers

We will now focus on three examples of Jewish prayers used for community organizing, and explore what the authors prioritize and which interests are highlighted. Examples of each in their entirety can be found in the Appendix.

Prayer #1

The first example was written by Rabbi Richard Levy, and delivered January 7th, 2012. It was a charge that concluded an event in California that was held for rabbis in the Pacific region who were discussing organizing. It was

[151] Summit, Jeffrey A. *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ., 2000, 50.

written to frame the experience in Jewish tradition—to encourage rabbis to take risks by standing up for their beliefs, and to inspire participants to continue their, "holy," work.

Purpose

Rabbi Levy likened the process of organizing as a movement from slavery to freedom akin to the exodus from Egypt. In particular he referenced the five cups of wine drunk on Passover, including *Kos Eliyahu*, Elijah's cup. He described Elijah's cup, as a symbol of the promise to bring the Israelites to the holy land. However, as he noted, it remained un-tasted. He related this longing for the taste of the Promised Land to the recent past of the early American reformers. They worked to make change, but also failed to reach the "true Promised Land." He wrote,

> Our colleagues in the last century, hearing the call of our prophetic movement, thundered from their pulpits in support of.... all the while yearning to drink the wine of Elijah's cup in a toast to a world in which the promises had been fulfilled.[152]

These words describe our aspiration to make positive social change as a yearning, and a desire to reach, "the Promised Land"—Elijah's as yet untasted cup. This is a Jewish contextualization of a sentiment that was mentioned earlier in this chapter by Rabbi Jill Jacobs as well as by Edward Chambers (p.28): we always see the world both as it is and as it should be. In doing this, we become impassioned to make change. While Rabbi Jacobs uses liturgy to access this sentiment, Rabbi Levy, in this instance, uses text and the Exodus narrative to demonstrate how work toward social justice is a Jewish experience.

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[152] Levy, Richard. "Recapturing Our Prophetic Voice." Reform CA Program at PARR. Los Angeles, CA.

Another purpose of Rabbi Levy's charge was to motivate rabbis to take a stand on important issues related to social justice. He wrote,

> In a time when many rabbis and rabbinic students are urged to be careful, we are preaching another message: a prophetic movement must take stands for justice, a prophetic movement must take risks for justice—else we risk forfeiting this title our movement has borne so proudly since our founding. We must study Torah—we need always to study *more* Torah—but we must also take Torah into the streets with us, hold it proudly aloft as we proclaim: *v'zot ha-Torah asher sam Moshe*—this is the Torah which Moses and all who followed him have placed in our arms: a Torah of justice, of truth, of compassion. We need to work on these issues— to explore how we can carry the Torah we love so deeply into a world whose people yearn so deeply for its application to their lives.[153]

Here, we can see that Rabbi Levy is well aware that many rabbis and student rabbis are cautioned to be careful in what they preach. However, it is a view he believes to be untenable. If we do not take the risk of speaking out for those in need, he argues that we risk denigrating the central facet of our Reform Movement. Our Torah, Rabbi Levy maintains, is not limited to texts, but is also found in our actions. Levy hopes to inspire, and to motivate rabbis to bridge the Torah in their synagogues to applicable, modern activism. It is written to inspire, motivate rabbis to mobilize their congregants to take action and to live the Torah they study.

Finally, Levy makes a call to follow through. He wrote,

> Four cups sit waiting in this week's *parsha*—fill them full of your passion and your wisdom and your strength, so that when we return to PARR (Pacific Association of Reform Rabbis) next year we shall be that much closer to filling Elijah's Cup, to seeing the promise of this great western land fulfilled.[154]

[153] Ibid
[154] Ibid

Drawing again from his initial language, he exhorts the participants at the conference to fill their cups with passion and strength so that next year, when the they reconvene, they will be closer to Elijah's cup, closer to reaching the Promised Land.

How is prayer used?

This charge, while in many ways a mini *drash*, also is meant to be a "prayer." This is partially true because of its intent. In addition, Levy's concluding statement helps to frame the charge as a prayer: "My fellow *klei kodesh*—may God fill us all to overflowing in the year to come." God is invoked and petitioned.

What are the implications?

Rabbi Levy's prayer is a call for rabbis to become the Moseses of their synagogues, to lead their congregants and their communities closer to the Promised Land. This certainly paints a picture of Organizing as a central facet of our religion. The exodus story portrays the foundational narrative of our people and its central tenants: becoming a Jewish nation (creation), receiving Jewish law (revelation), and establishing an independent and free state using God's precepts and laws (redemption). By invoking the theme of the Promised Land, I believe Rabbi Levy implies that organizing—that social justice— is a responsibility that is central to our narrative.

To further support this view, Rabbi Levy links the act of creating change to Torah. We must carry our "Torah of justice" into the world, to the streets, where people in need are awaiting the application of its teachings. Torah is the central text of our religion. The fact that this particular metaphor is used stresses the connection between organizing and fundamental Jewish teachings.

Prayer #2

The second example we will explore is a benediction written by Rabbi Jonah Pesner for Governor Deval Patrick's Inauguration on January 4th, 2007. Governor Patrick made history as the first African American to be inaugurated as the governor of Massachusetts, and the second of any state in American history.

Purpose

The purpose of this benediction is to honor the governor's diverse roots, to make a case that while we are diverse, we all come from one human family, and to characterize the pain behind our faces as a call to share stories and to pave the way for rebuilding, repair and redemption.

Rabbi Pesner begins with a Talmudic blessing that states, "Blessed is the Wise One / Who understands secrets / For the mind of each / Is different from the other / Just as the face of each /Is different from the other."[155] Here we see God's recognition of not only our different minds, but also our diverse faces. He identifies this difference as, "Many colors and complexions / Rich in languages and beliefs."[156]

Quickly moving beyond that which separates us, Rabbi Pesner finds a way to link our diversity to a common creator. He writes, "Look around! / See the beauty of the faces / Each one unique... / reflecting the very image / Of the Divine / Each one from a common source / A single, sacred family."[157] This characterization allows us to be diverse and unique, while sharing a common link: we are all reflections of the Divine.

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[155] Pesner, Jonah. "Deval Patrick's Inauguration Benediction." Deval Patrick's Inauguration. Boston, MA. Benediction.
[156] Ibid
[157] Pesner, Jonah. "Deval Patrick's Inauguration Benediction." Deval Patrick's Inauguration. Boston, MA. Benediction.

After this link is established, Rabbi Pesner begins to speak of our common struggles. He writes,

> Yet behind every face / Hide so many secrets... / The pain suffering / Of parents who watch helpless / As their children are plagued / By guns, drugs, and gangs / The private pain / Of children struggling to care for their parents / As they age and grow frail... / Of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters / Who daily confront blatant discrimination.[158]

He invokes many social issues that organizers and indeed all those who care about social justice confront. While these difficulties again point to our differences, it is clear that he implies we all suffer from something. This is why his examples are so diverse, and include wide populations such as those who care for aging parents. In a sense, this suffering is another aspect of our common experience.

Leading back to the original reference to our faces, Rabbi Pesner artfully links his proposed "solution" to sharing our stories, face-to-face. He writes,

> We know your ancient wisdom / Is found in no cathedral / Temple / Nor shrine / It is here, face to face / It is everywhere our humanity gathers... / Let our secrets of suffering / Give way to stories of / Rebuilding / Repair / And Redemption / ... / As we join together / In one spirit, and write on shared story / ... / The story of a commonwealth / ... / Where secrets of private suffering / Where tales of lonely languish / Are joined / Through the power of the people/ Rising up / Together /... / And writing a new story / One story /... /[159]

Here we see that Pesner has given us a strategic plan for confronting the secret pains that lie beneath our faces. This plan includes many organizing themes, such as, sharing stories face to face, garnering power, and joining together to act towards a common story or goal.

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[158] Ibid
[159] Ibid

How is prayer used?

This particular example is a prayer throughout. Interestingly, though, it invokes traditional sources. It begins with a Talmudic prayer, referenced above, "blessed is the Wise One, Who understands secrets...Just as the face of each, Is different from the other."[160] This sets the tone for the rest of the prayer, and is an outline of Pesner's initial points.

The prayer ends with reference to Isaiah. The verses state,

> If you banish the yoke from your midst / The menacing hand / And evil speech / And you offer your compassion to the hungry / And satisfy the needs of the afflicted / Then shall your light shine in the darkness / And your gloom shall be like noonday /…/ You shall be like a watered garden / Like a spring whose waters never fail. / And you shall rebuild ancient ruin/ You shall restore the foundations of many generations / You shall be called the repairer of the breach /…/ [161]

Rabbi Pesner parallels the liturgy of our tradition, which weaves in a tapestry of texts and prayers from various sources, including the Talmud and Isaiah. The language here not only echoes his call for action, but his word choices such as, "rebuild, and repair." Like a proof text in a sermon, or essay, this language adds authenticity to Pesner's words, to make them weightier or more anchored within the tradition.

I also find it significant that traditional sources sandwich the prayer. Traditional sources appear at both the end and the beginning of the benediction. In this way, the words in the middle are framed in text, which the listener will most likely remember because text were the first and last words they heard.

[160] Ibid
[161] Ibid

What are the implications?

There are numerous community organizing themes within this prayer. As mentioned before, the face-to-face connection is reminiscent of one-to-one meetings. Chambers wrote that a relational meeting was, "An encounter that is face-to-face—one to one—for the purpose of exploring the development of a public relationship."[162] Throughout the prayer, Pesner makes reference to the secret pains we experience alone, to meeting one another face to face, and to sharing stories. He writes, "Democracy happens out there / Face to face / Among the people / As we join together / In one spirit / And write one shared story."[163] In the following stanza he continues, "Encountering one another / Face to face / And writing a new shared story / One story."[164] This is clearly organizing language. Finding our shared story is a central facet to mobilizing people to act when participating in community organizing.

Rabbi Pesner also focuses on power. He writes, "Through the power of the people / Rising up / Together..."[165] This is certainly a major theme in community organizing. Rooted in Alinsky's core principles, power must be transferred from those who abuse it to the masses who desperately need it. He wrote, "The goal is to take power from those who have it and give it to those who need it."[166] In this vein, most organizing techniques relate to gathering power so that this transfer can take place.

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[162] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 44.
[163] Pesner, Jonah. "Deval Patrick's Inauguration Benediction." Deval Patrick's Inauguration. Boston, MA. Benediction.
[164] Ibid
[165] Ibid
[166] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 3.

Finally, Pesner's prayer addresses the *use* of power. He writes about the importance of rising up together. If we do this, we will be able to write a new story, our story. Rising up through shared power is also found at the core of Alinsky's vision of Organizing. Alinsky spends much of his written work discussing how to organize an action, to make it effective, and to create a desired reaction.[167]

The fact that Pesner integrates three of the central facets of organizing into his prayer for the Governor speaks to his political goals. I imagine that he wants to remind the Governor that it was grassroots efforts such as community organizing that allowed African Americans to take positions of power (taking power from those who have it and giving it to those who need it), as well as to advocate for involvement in future community organizing initiatives.

In addition for advocating for community organizing, the fact that this is a benediction—a prayer—takes the import of community organizing to a new level. We are not only praying that we remember the power and effectiveness of community organizing, we are asking God to aid us in our pursuits because God is already bound to the idea of social justice as evidenced by the reference from Isaiah. Organizing has a natural connection not only to Jewish texts, but to our liturgy as well.

Prayer #3

Purpose

The third resource was posted on a Jewish Reconstructionist Federation site. The page is entitled, "Texts on Congregation-Based-Community-Organizing

[167] Chapter One of this thesis describes this sentiment in greater detail.

(CBCO)." Jules Mermelstein, a Jewish educator, wrote this example, which is a passage adapted from the High Holy Day liturgy. The original prayer, *Al Cheit*, "for our sins," is often adapted to include modern sins. In this case we find a creative variation that concerns finding balance between pursuing social justice initiatives and spending time with one's family. Mermelstein writes, "For spending time helping the community, when our children and spouse need us at home; For spending time with our family at home, when we are needed in the community."[168] Each stanza reflects the tension between family and social justice, by asking for forgiveness for favoring one or the other.

How is prayer used?

This example is meant to be an actual prayer read during the High Holy Days as either an addition to or replacement of the traditional *Al Cheit* segment of the service. Asking forgiveness for these particular sins helps those praying to become more aware of how much time he or she might be spending toward social action initiatives, and how much he or she is giving to his or her family. Reciting this prayer might even cause that person to reevaluate their plan for the coming year. Adding this interpretation to one of most important prayers said during the High Holy Days emphasizes the importance of social justice in a person's life, or at least the balance between family and social justice.

What are the implications?

In truth, I believe that this prayer, while speaking directly about involvement in social justice, is less concerned with community organizing. In

[168] Mermelstein, Jules. "High Holy Day Creative Prayer." *Texts on Congregation-Based-Community Organizing (CBCO)* | *Jewish Reconstructionist Movement Archive*. Jewish Reconstructionist Movement, 2003. Web. Mar. 2013. <http://archive.jewishrecon.org/cbco-texts>

Jonah Pesner's benediction and Rabbi Levy's charge there are references to secular community organizing themes and experiences.

The primary theme expressed in this creative prayer example is balance. None of the organizers we explored in Chapter One spoke formally about balancing one's time. If anything, there was a sense that one should be involved as possible in organizing. Readers were warned to be wary of distractions such as TV. Chambers claimed that such distractions could diminish our humanity.[169] Therefore, I contend that this particular prayer was written from the perspective of someone engaged in social justice initiatives, and drew from his particular experiences rather than from organizing language. I imagine that whoever decided to compile the organizing texts for this website saw a connection between the personal experience of those involved in organizing and felt that it might speak to the need to find balance between family and organizing.

Overall

Throughout these examples it is clear that there is tremendous potential for creative liturgy related to community organizing, and that there is much room for more experimentation and exploration. The field is open for creative approaches.

In addition, it seems clear that our creative liturgy allows us to bring new meaning and relevance to our traditions by framing them in current initiatives, like community organizing.

[169] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 24.

New creative readings for Jewish community organizing

In order to begin to address the relative lack of community organizing themed creative rituals and liturgy, I will create a small sampling of candle lighting readings. As I cannot create an entire literature of readings in the short time I am writing this thesis, I can only hope that my contributions will inspire others to begin to contribute to the field as well. It is my hope that together we can create a larger pool of rituals, prayers, and readings from which to draw.

Candle lighting rituals have great potential to express community organizing themes. As they often mark the beginning of a holiday's observance, they have the potential to provide an introduction that might frame a larger occasion or service. They symbolize an occasion of change from profane to sacred or the opposite, as is the case with *Havdalah*. Because they fill involve an open flame, they symbolically offer metaphors of increased light, warmth, or an added spark for making change. Finally, they are used on many holidays: Shabbat, *Havdalah*, and the beginning of festivals (Hanukkah, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur etc.). Candle lighting readings will provide opportunities to integrate a greater number of holiday and community organizing themes together.

I have chosen to write candle lighting readings for five different holidays: Shabbat, Passover, Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. For each holiday I will include three readings that integrate themes from community organizing, such as relational meetings, power, and actions, with various themes from each holidays. For Shabbat: creation, extra soul, sacred time (sanctity). For Passover: redemption, revelation, and freedom. For Hanukkah: liberation, miracles, and the

power of a small band of rebels. For Yom Kippur: repentance and judgment. For Sukkot: Fragility, simplicity, and an interpretation of the lulav and etrog.

What is my philosophy of creative liturgy?

Similar to those who have also written either sermons or creative liturgy, I have sought to find links and connections between Jewish themes and community organizing. I imagine a Venn diagram that displays the segment that exists between two overlapping concepts. While there are differences between Passover and community organizing, there are also several points of intersection. Both speak to the themes of freedom and redemption. One could analyze the connection a step further and think about what each has to say about freedom and redemption. For example, Passover tells the story of freedom from a Pharaoh who abused his power, which allowed the people to become united as a single people under God's law. Community organizing, too, seeks freedom from the tyranny of a few in power. There are also more detailed commonalities. Both holidays speak of a few who abuse power, and of the importance of becoming a united people. The differences involve God. God plays less of a role in community organizing. I contend that the more connections to be made between the holiday and as aspect of community organizing, the stronger the creative liturgy or ritual.

Another factor in forging a connection between Jewish holidays and community organizing is the centrality of the theme to either the holiday or community organizing. Freedom is a central theme in the Passover story as well as in organizing.

Throughout the creative liturgy that I have created there is a wide range of connections. Some refer to activities that will take place during the holiday, such as shaking and holding the lulav and etrog during Sukkot, while others refer to larger themes such as freedom. I have taken these liberties in order to display a wide range of potential connections. I hope that this will be the beginning of a wide body of creative liturgical readings to connect the experience of organizing with our prayer and ritual.

Why have I integrated images throughout my readings?

In the Jewish world of prayer/creative prayer there are two distinct goals: to preserve *kevah* (the fixedness of the texts) and facilitate *kavanah* (personal meaning and intention). The interplay between these is dynamic and changing. As Jacob J. Petuchowski notes in *Understanding Jewish Prayer*, one generation's *kavanah* becomes the next generation's *kevah*.[170] At the root of this interaction is a desire to create both an affective (personally meaningful and emotional) and a substantive Jewish experience rooted in tradition and ritual (practices that have developed meaning as a result of being practiced over time). The arts offer the perfect bridge to connecting these two seemingly disparate goals into a single experience. The arts can open up worshippers to the affective while at the same time allowing them to remain rooted in traditional prayers and practices. In addition, the arts are often provocative, eliciting unique intellectual connections between complex ideas and emotional responses. As community organizing is rooted in emotional, affective personal stories, this seems particularly applicable. Each organizer I interviewed or read about had a deep

[170] Petuchowski, Jacob. *Understanding Jewish Prayer,.* New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1972.

personal experience that propelled him or her to become involved in organizing. One participant used to ride through a decrepit neighborhood on his way to Sunday School, another organizer had a troubling conversation with a poor man who couldn't accept a coat in the winter to stay warm, and another participant worked with those who were poor and became frustrated with the lack of resources and opportunities that existed to make lasting and impactful change. Others had one to one conversations with organizers who linked them to others who had similar interests and concerns. Because the impetus for involvement is often emotionally based, it seems particularly appropriate to root my creative liturgical readings in images that might provoke emotional responses.

Another reason for using creative images is that the community organizing sermons and prayers we have examined contain a great many approaches to framing the process: actualizing our dreams, answering the prophetic call of our ancestors, and overcoming idol worship, etc. As such, creative abstract images are helpful as they allow us to find our own understanding within each reading.

Finally, I would argue that creative images allow the prayer experience to be both individual—we can understand the interpretations of the prayers in a way that is personally meaningful—and at the same time communal: we are using the same service and doing so in the same location. This seems relevant to organizing, which seeks to unite the individual talents and skills of each person for the betterment of the whole.

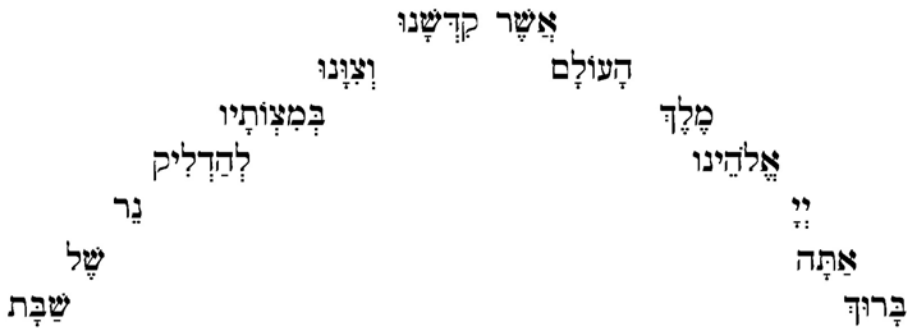
Creative Candle Lighting Readings

As it is my hope that those using the readings I have created will form personal interpretations of each reading, I will present them prior to explaining

my intentions. As you examine the readings consider what you see, what you read, how it makes you feel, and how it might be connected to organizing.

Shabbat Candle Reading #1

God breathed life into the
world, creating it in six days. As we seek to
imitate God in our pursuits, let us be reminded of
the world that we seek to create-one of peace and justice,
of equal opportunities and rights. As Saul Alinsky said,
"The organizer is in a true sense reaching for the highest
level for which a man can reach- to create, to be a
great creator, to play God." As we prepare
to enter shabbat, a sacred time-
the world as it should be, let us
commit to a world of
justice through our
future actions
and pursuits.



Shabbat Candle Reading #2

As we stand here in the dark,
face-to-face, let us remember
the stories we have yet to tell,
the narratives that lie hidden within.
They are the injustices we have witnessed,
...the personal injuries we have suffered,
and the social challenges we have only begun to fight.
Edward Chambers wrote,
"Telling stories opens a window into
the passions that animate people to act."
As we light our shabbas candles and are
able to see one another, face-to-face,
let us be inspired to share our
stories,
to open the windows into the passions that animate us to act.
In this way we can share the sanctity of Shabbat with the world.

בָּרוּךְ
אַתָּה יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק
נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת...

Shabbat Candle Reading #3

Edward Chambers wrote,
"Our politicalness is our God given ability
to respond to our world as it is by joining with others to
stand for the whole." On Shabbat we receive an extra soul which
helps us to feel whole throughout the day, making us more
attuned to our Creator. As we prepare to enter into
this holy relationship, let us remember our prophetic
call to stand in relationship with one another
during the week as well.

Passover Candle Reading #1

Saul Alinsky wrote,
"In the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions,
we find God holding relational meetings at critical moments.
In the Torah, we find Moses at the burning bush (exodus 3).
This early relational meeting, called by our Creator,
set a timid spirit on a path that changed the world."
Imagine the potential change we might create
by joining together, as a single voice.
As we recall our historical Passover narrative and its impact tonight,
let us remember our contemporary stories and how they might lead to
freedom from the modern injustices we face such as poverty,
health care, inequality, sex trafficking, and immigration.

בָּרוּךְ
אַתָּה
יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק
נֵר
שֶׁל
(שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל)
יוֹם
טוֹב

Passover Candle Reading #2

"Rabbi Janet Marder,
whose California synagogue
has been organizing for six years,
explains that this model is, 'not based
on philantrophy, in which affluent folks reach
out to give to those less fortunate. Rather, it teaches
people to build bridges across culture and race, connecting
with others as equals, uniting with them in significant action
to improve the quality of life within the community we share.'"
Passover is the story of a people seeking equality- the
opportunity to form our nation along side others. As
we begin our celebration, let us remember to bring
our hopes for equality not only in the results
of our community organizing work,
but to model it throughout
the process as well.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ...

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם טוֹב

Passover Candle Reading #3

Saul Alinsky used to say,
"The goal is to take power from those
who have it, and give it to those who need it."
This is exactly what God helped the Hebrew people
accomplish during the Passover story. In doing so,
we were allowed to become a Jewish nation with
sacred laws and a homeland-we had all the
tools we needed to succeed. Given
our historical experience, let us
remember to organize so that
we might help other people
to do the same- to gain
the tools and resources
to feed themselves,
house their children,
afford first rate
education, gain
equal rights,
or access
health care.

בָּרוּךְ
אַתָּה יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל
(שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם טוֹב

Saul Alinsky writes,
"The histroy of America is the story of radicals.
It is a saga of revolution, battle, words on paper setting hearts
on fire, ferment and turmoil; it is the story of every rallying cry of
the American people.
It is the story of the American Revolution,
of the public schools,
of the battle for free land,
of emancipation,
the unceasing struggle
of the ever increasing
liberation of mankind."
As we prepare to begin
our celebration of the
festival of Hanukkah,
let us recall the Maccabees' triumph~
a religious revolution that allowed the Jewish people
to continue to worship.

בָּרוּךְ

אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן

הַזֶּה.

Hanukkah Candle Reading #2

At Hanukkah we often talk about miracles-the miracle of a jar of oil lasting for eight nights instead of one and the miracle of the a small band of rebels overthrowing a Syrian Greek regime. In today's age, however, we cannot always rely on miracles to make change. We must act. As we begin our celebration of Hanukkah, let us remember that in order to make the change we want to see in the world, we must share our resources and stories, develop plausible strategies, and act together.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

לְהַדְלִיק נֵר

שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים

לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם

בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ

וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Hanukkah Candle Reading #3

Edward Chambers
writes,"It only takes
a well-organized
2 to 3 percent
of the body politic
to initiate social change."
As we mark the beginning
of the festival of Hanukkah and
the victory of a small rebel band,
the Maccabees, let us remember
that it only takes a small
number of people to
make a difference.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר
שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים
לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
בַּזְּמַן
הַזֶּה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה

Yom Kippur Candle Reading #1

In

community organizing,

we are taught that the morality of means

is dependent on whether it is employed at a time of

imminent defeat or success. Our end goal is often seen

as more important than the process by which we achieve it.

Therefore, as the Day of Atonement begins, let us ask

forgiveness from those we might have harmed either through

intent or accident. Let us remember that we are all created

in God's image, and while our work is sacred, it is also

important to ask forgiveness from those

in power we might have wronged

along the way.

בָּרוּךְ

אַתָּה יְיָ

אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ

הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר

קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,

וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר

שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם

הַכִּיפּוּרִים

Yom Kippur Candle Reading #2

Edward Chambers writes,

"We can numb ourselves to the gap between the social reality we encounter and our best hopes and aspirations.

When this sets in, our humanity is diminished,

when it takes over, our humanity is lost."

On this Erev Yom Kippur,

let us ask for forgiveness for becoming lulled into complacency

by the modern luxuries that dim our consciousnesses

to the harsh realities that require our attention.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ

לְהַדְלִיק נֵר

שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים

Rabbi
Abraham
Joshua
Heschel
said,
"Few
are
guilty,
but all
are responsible."
As we prepare to enter a time
of self reflection and repentance, let us
not only remember what we are guilty of,
but how we might become more responsible. ...

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים

Sukkot Candle Reading #1

As we begin to celebrate the festive holiday of Sukkot, let us remember how fragile we are when we are in need of shelter and sustenance Let our experiences of dwelling and eating in the Sukkah not only remind us of our connection to God but also to our responsibility to organize for the basic needs of those in our communities.

בָּרוּךְ
אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב

Sukkot Candle Reading #2

As we prepare to begin Sukkot,
let us remember that the lulav and
etrog symbolize our differences.
If we equate taste to learning,
and smell to good deeds,
we see that each species contains
a unique combination.
Myrtel has smell and no taste.
The etrog has taste and smell.
The lulav has taste, but no smell.
Willow has neither taste nor smell.
Symbolically, when we hold the species together
we are united as a greater community.
The same is true for organizing-
we succeed by pooling
our collective and unique talents.
When we do so, we can accomplish
much for the greater community.
As we waive our lulav and etrog together this sukkot,
let us remember the power of acting
as a united voice
full of individual talents and skills.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב

As we prepare to dwell in our Sukkot
and leave our material possessions behind,
let us become more attuned to the world as it is:
a world of poverty, injustice and inequality.....
Let us work together to make it into the world as it should be-
one full of possibility and power for those who are in need

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים

Individual Meanings

There are multiple possible interpretations for all of my creative candle lighting readings. Now that you have had an opportunity to create your own understandings, I will present a few interpretations based on my initial thoughts.

Interpretation of Shabbat Candle Reading #1

One of the essential themes of Shabbat is creation. The first verses in the Torah describe the work God performed in creating the earth. God breathed life into Adam (man), on the sixth day (Genesis 2:7). On the seventh day, God rested. "God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation."[171] In this sense, Shabbat is both the celebration of the creation of all life, as well as rest from the work that was involved in creating it. In the liturgical tradition, we find a description of Shabbat as "*zecher le maaseh bereshit*," a reminder of God's creation of the world. To express these themes, I evoked both the image of God creating the earth, and the six days, that it took to create the earth. This set apart the seventh day, the Sabbath, as the day of Divine rest. The secular organizing connection to creation can be found in Alinsky's reference to creating a world that we want by imitating God as a creator through organizing.[172]

The image that the English words form is abstract. I find myself thinking of it as a hot air balloon. This calls to mind the air or breath needed to create the world, and the perspective from above, a macro view, that we need in order to see possible change. Another image that it evokes is an incomplete earth, one

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[171] Genesis 2:3. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985.
[172] Alinsky, Saul David. *Rules for Radicals; a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Random House, 1971, 61.

that is not fully formed or rounded. This interpretation symbolizes our continued need to continue to shape our surroundings through action.

The Hebrew blessing underneath the "balloon" also suggests several interpretations. First, the Hebrew words conjure the image of a mountain, such as Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The commandments include the directive to remember and guard the Sabbath.

It is also significant that there are seven steps up and down, like the days of the week. The seventh word is the highest, symbolizing both the Sabbath and the world we might create through organizing.

In viewing both the English reading and the Hebrew blessing as one complete image, we see that each points to the middle. This reflects the notion that there tensions in the world. It is in the special moments, like Shabbat, or when we work together through organizing, that we can find peace and/or shared hope.

Interpretation of Shabbat Candle Reading #2

This reading was largely inspired by Rabbi Jonah Pesner's benediction referenced earlier in this chapter and found in its entirety in the Appendix. Rabbi Pesner wrote about standing face-to-face, and not seeing what is inside our hearts and souls. When we turn on a modern lamp or light a candle, we can see one another. The image created by the English reading resembles a lamp, while the words in the Hebrew blessing form a candle. These images symbolize the light that Shabbat brings forth through the physical act of lighting a candle, and the spiritual light that comes forth from Shabbat being a holy day.

The reading is about sharing the spiritual light of Shabbat by remembering to aid those in need during the week. By seeing one another, face-to-face, and sharing our stories we can begin the process of sharing Sabbath holiness (the world as it should be) with the greater community.

Traditionally we kindle two Sabbath lights. In the image represented here, there are two lights: a modern lamp representing community organizing and an ancient candle, symbolizing Shabbat. The two juxtaposed pictures create tensions— spiritual and physical, modern and ancient, sacred light in contrast to profane light.

Interpretation of Shabbat Candle Reading #3

Both Shabbat and community organizing involve joining together to become whole. On Shabbat we receive an extra soul according to rabbinic interpretation.[173] In community organizing we join together to enhance our power for the betterment of the whole community.

There is an old English proverb that the eye is the window to the soul. The English words for this reading form an eye. The "eye," is closed because we cannot always see the sacred soul. The image of a closed eye reminds the reader that we need to open our eyes to the souls around us on Shabbat when we are encouraged to give tzedakah and welcome the stranger. In addition, we need to open our eyes to those in need of our organizing skills.

The circle underneath represents a more traditional interpretation of "whole." It is a complete circle. Together, the picture could be thought of as two

[173] Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence A. *My People's Prayer Book; Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries: Vol. 10: Shabbat Morning Shacharit and Musaf (Morning and Additional Services)*. Vol. 10. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2007, 113. (Also found in *Beitsah* 16a)

representations of an eye: one open, and one closed. This represents the tension between the sacred and the profane—what we see and what we remain blind to.

Interpretation of Passover Candle Reading #1

This reading makes a connection between the storytelling that takes place on Passover and the storytelling required to participate in community organizing. In addition, the reading links community organizing and Passover through the theme of freedom. In community organizing, freedom is achieved when participants build their power-base by sharing stories. On Passover, participants gain freedom by worshiping and trusting God. The Passover story recalls and records this moment of redemption for all time. During the Passover Seder we are told to tell the Exodus story as if we were there, as if we experienced the slavery in Egypt and the freedom that followed.[174] The experiential nature of the narrative is similar to the personal connections organizers seek to create in their work. As noted in this chapter (pp.114-115), most organizers have a personal story that explains their interest and passion for organizing.

The themes of power are explored in the crown shape of the English reading and the greater-than sign formed by the Hebrew Blessing. The crown symbolizes the power of a ruling class. The greater-than sign represents the

[174] Jacobs, Rabbi Jill. "I Was Redeemed From Egypt Reenacting the Exodus in Every Generation." *I Was Redeemed From Egypt - My Jewish Learning*. My Jewish Learning, Web. 30 Mar. 2013. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/The_Seder/Haggadah/Reenacting_the_Exodus.shtml>. See also Rabbi Suzanne Stone's Rabbinical Thesis in the Appendix.

potential power of the people, which can be greater than the ruling class if they participate in community organizing.

Another interpretation is that the Hebrew blessing forms a winding path. When the Israelites were in the desert, they wandered for forty years. They did not travel in a straight path. The road to freedom (for organizers and the Israelites) is a difficult path.

Finally, one could characterize the image formed by the Hebrew blessing as an arrow pointing forward. The arrow symbolizes the forward momentum that people can create under ideal circumstances. In the community organizing world, this is accomplished through listening campaigns and actions. In the Exodus story, there is forward movement during the beginning of the story as the Israelites set out into the desert to become a united people.

Interpretation of Passover Candle Reading #2

The second Passover reading partially symbolizes the bridges that organizers create between people across race, economic and cultural divisions. Everyone is equal. During the Passover story, the Israelites wish to be counted as equals among other nations—to have the ability to rule themselves in their own land, under God. During the Exodus narrative, the Israelites walk across the Red Sea on a land bridge created by God. This represents the moment of their redemption, and their safety from the Egyptian army that has been pursuing them through the desert.

The English reading creates a picture of a vessel that has two openings: one at the top and one at the bottom. The vessel is strongest where the two meet, where they are connected. The Hebrew blessing creates an equal sign, or

a simpler bridge. These images are meant to reinforce the importance of bridge building and working for equality.

Together, the English reading and Hebrew blessing, look like the top of a candle flame. When people join together through community organizing, they kindle a strong blaze.

Interpretation of Passover Candle Reading #3

The third Passover candle reading is about transferring power from those who have it to those who need it. This transference of power is a fundamental aspect of community organizing. Conversely, in the Passover story, God uses his Divine power to free the Israelites.

The English and Hebrew images symbolize power through the image of one or two fists. The smaller fist is formed by the Hebrew blessing represents the power of the people. The English reading and Hebrew blessing together form a larger fist. Together the two images symbolize the fist of man accompanied by the metaphorical hand of God. Both wield power, especially when they work together. This is why the smaller hand leads to a projection of a larger more amorphous and Divine fist.

Another possible interpretation of the two images created by the English reading and the Hebrew blessing is of a fist that is wielding an enormous light bulb. The light bulb symbolizes the lofty idea of freedom (bringing light into the world through power).

Interpretation of Hanukkah Candle Reading #1

This reading connects Hanukkah and organizing through the theme of revolution. Alinsky writes that organizing began with the American Revolution.[175] As Jews, our history precedes the establishment of America. We can trace revolutionary roots to an even earlier time. For example, the Maccabees fought to practice Judaism in the 2nd century BCE. Their revolt against the Syrian-Greeks is a central theme in the Hanukkah story.

The English reading forms the image of a tree. The tree represents the deep roots of the revolutionary theme in American and Jewish history. The Hebrew blessing forms a sword, symbolizing power and revolution.

Interpretation of Hanukkah Candle Reading #2

The second Hanukkah reading is about miracles. The reading suggests that we can't rely on miracles in the modern age. While the Hanukkah story highlights miracles such as a small band of rebels defeating a trained army, and a jar of oil lasting for eight nights, community organizers do not rely on miracles. Rather, they use strength, ingenuity, and strategy. This example explores what a candle lighting reading based upon conflicting ideals might look like.

The English reading and Hebrew blessing form the image of lightening emerging from a cloud. Lightening is traditionally a symbol for God, or God's power. However, it can also be understood as a scientific phenomenon- a massive electrostatic discharge between electrically charged regions within clouds.

[175] Alinsky, Saul David. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1969, 191.

Interpretation of Hanukkah Candle Reading #3

The last Hanukkah reading is about a small number of people who can make a significant change. This is true in both community organizing and the Hanukkah story. As the quote from Edward Chambers states, it only takes 2 to 3 percent of the body politic to make change.[176] In the Hanukkah story, we learn of a similar occurrence. The Maccabees, a small band of rebels, defeats the formidable Greek-Syrian army.

The English reading forms a small jar of oil, which is symbolic of the cruse of oil, which miraculously lasts for eight nights. Again, there is only a small amount of oil, but it too makes an unexpected impact.

The "V" image formed by the Hebrew blessings represents victory. The other line is a shadow or an echo of the original "V." This shadow symbolizes the fact that revolutionary victories often make waves in life that exceed the initial military or political success.

Interpretation of Yom Kippur Candle Reading #1

Community organizing encourages participants to use any means necessary to accomplish one's end goals. It is likely that people will be harmed emotionally, politically or socially through the process of organizing. Because it is the task of Jews on Yom Kippur to apologize to those we have wronged, the holiday and this reading present a natural opportunity to apologize to those we have wronged. Even those who participate in social justice for the better good have sins for which to apologize.

[176] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 15.

The English reading forms an apple with a bite taken out, referencing the Adam and Eve narrative from Genesis. Eve's sin of tasting an apple from the tree of knowledge is an act that has become controversial in the modern age. Many, such as feminists, do not subscribe to the notion that Eve is more responsible than Adam or the serpent for eating the forbidden fruit. Community organizing is also controversial, both in its perception from others and in its directive to use subversive tactics.

The tear, formed by the Hebrew blessing, symbolizes sorrow or apology. We should all feel remorse for harming others, even in the name of progress and higher morals.

Interpretation of Yom Kippur Candle Reading #2

In this reading, we focus on a quote from Edward Chambers. In his estimation, we are often lulled into complacency by modern conveniences. He argues that when we allow this to happen, we lose our humanity.[177] On Yom Kippur, it is again time to ask for forgiveness. This time we apologize for what we haven't done— what we have stood by and allowed happen.

At the end of *Unetaneh Tokef*, one of the central High Holy Day prayers, we read that *teshuva, tefillah*, and *tzedakah* temper judgment's severe decree. This reading combines all three themes: the blessing over the candles is a prayer, the words of the reading call us to participate in *tzedakah*, and the reading asks us to seek forgiveness (this is the first step of teshuva).

The English image forms a boat that simply floats away like our humanity, or like someone who wants to escape the cares of the world. The words of

[177] Chambers, Edward T., and Michael A. Cowan. *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice*. New York: Continuum, 2003, 24.

forgiveness are printed in blue, and represent the water. The water symbolizes the *mikvah,* which is where some Jews go to become ritually pure after committing a sin. For those on the boat, the water is just out of reach.

The Hebrew words represent a digital screen such as a TV, iPad, or iPhone. These are the devices in our society that distract us from our prophetic call to participate in social justice.

Interpretation of Yom Kippur Candle Reading #3

It is not enough to avoid contributing to the social, political and racial inequality we see, we must also work to make it better. In the Haftarah portion for Yom Kippur we read,

> Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the Lord is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin.[178]

As we see from the haftarah reading, there were those who recognized that Yom Kippur was and is an inspiration to act.

The picture formed by the English reading and the Hebrew blessing is a tipping scale. The word, "guilty" is the heavier part of the scale, and the reminder to be responsible is found within the scale itself. Our inaction as well as our actions are considered during this sacred day of judgment.

[178]Isaiah 58: 5-7.*Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

Interpretation of Sukkot Candle Reading #1

This reading makes a connection between the vulnerable state of humans when dwelling outside in a Sukkah with the vulnerable experience of those who do not have a house or food.

Leviticus 23:42-3 tells us,

> You shall dwell in the Sukkah for seven days, every citizen in Israel shall dwell in Sukkot so that your descendants shall know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord am your God.[179]

During Sukkot, we are reminded of the overall power of God when we dwell in Sukkot because of the Exodus narrative. The reading, however, makes the case that we can't always rely on God to provide for our needs. There are others who live outside and can't afford to rent or mortgages in our very cities, states and countries. The candle reading is an appropriate moment to remember the needs of the homeless because we experience what it is like to dwell in a space without a permanent roof.

The English words form the image of a *sukkah*. Each side is a puzzle piece that fits together. This puzzle image symbolizes the notion that we live in an interconnected world, and that our actions can and should impact those in our communities.

The Hebrew blessing forms a lulav and etrog. This is symbolic of Sukkot as a harvest festival. Food is another essential need that many do without.

[179] *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

Interpretation of Sukkot Candle Reading #2

This reading includes a midrashic interpretation, Leviticus Rabbah 30:12, of each part of the lulav and etrog. Whether each part of the lulav and etrog (the willow, palm and myrtle branches) has smell or taste symbolizes good deeds, or learning respectively. The lesson from this Midrash is that we are all diverse. When we join together, we have a full community. The same is true of community organizing, which seeks to join together diverse participants so that broader and more powerful resources are available.

The English reading and Hebrew blessing form the image of a candlestick. It symbolizes the potential flame and power that a united community organizing effort might constitute, while at the same time making reference to the fact that this is a candle lighting reading.

Interpretation of Sukkot Candle Reading #3

This final reading discusses how our material possessions can distract us from how the world is, and therefore, keep us from working to make the world as it should be. This is not a completely contemporary argument. In the Babylonian Talmud (*Sukkah* 37b) we find the following discussion:

> That I placed the people of Israel in booths, These were the "clouds of glory," (See Exodus 13:20-24 where it is explains that as the Hebrews traversed through the desert, a "cloud" followed them during the day. At night, a pillar of fire protected them. Rabbi Eliezer refers to this cloud as the "clouds of glory"), so says Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says, "This is referring to the actual *sukkot* they made for themselves."[180]

[180] English translation/interpretation from: Weinstein, Avi. "CONNECTING TO SUCCOT: A PRIMER From Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning." *Hillel*. Web. 24 Apr. 2013. *<http://www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/2A96EADD-754D-4AC7-8E92-1B1C91940F49/0/connecting.pdf>*

This *sugiya*, or discussion in the Talmud attempts to find meaning in what is meant by a "*sukkah*." Are we supposed to recall the physical huts that God created for us, or are they metaphorical? How much should we owe to God's glory, and how much is a reminder of our human responsibilities? If the *sukkah* is as Rabbi Akiva implies, a reminder of the role of human creativity, perhaps we should indeed use the experience as a reminder that we are partners with the Divine in aiding the vulnerable members of our society, who might not have access any housing.

The image formed from the English words is a house. The Hebrew blessing forms the image of a path. It is meant to raise the following questions: What does it mean to have a house? Can we dwell in righteousness? Is the path to housing equal or straight?

Conclusion for Chapter Three

There are several connections between social justice and liturgy. One can understand prayer as a hope for the world as it should be—a place where our essential needs are met and we are able to thank God for them. Another way to understand prayer is as a petition for God's help to watch over the stranger, give food to the hungry and provide courage for the orphan and widow. (Psalm 146) Prayer understood in either manner has the potential to remind and inspire participants to act.

Authors and scholars have altered liturgy and ritual throughout time in response to historical events and the changing meanings of holidays. The Passover Seder is particularly prone to alterations and additions.

Some Jewish professionals have begun to write creative community organizing prayers. The examples I have found include a charge, an inaugural benediction, and a modern adaptation of the *Al Cheit* prayer. There are fewer examples of creative readings or prayers than sermons or text studies. There are fewer examples of creative liturgy because there is a commonly held misconception that Jewish liturgy and prayers are fixed.

I have therefore created fifteen candle lighting readings. There are three for each selected holiday including Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hanukkah, and Passover. Each reading seeks to create a connection between the theme of the holiday and community organizing. It is my hope that these readings might serve as an inspiration for organizers to writer new community organizing themed prayers and readings.

As I wrote each creative reading, I found that some holidays were more difficult to connect with organizing than others. The Yom Kippur candle lighting readings I wrote, for example, often relied on forgiveness or repentance. Recognizing God as the ultimate judge, an essential theme during the High Holy Days, did not directly resonate with community organizing. Our reliance upon God is also an important Sukkot theme, making it difficult to write a Sukkot-community organizing themed candle lighting reading.

Other holidays such as Passover, which speak of freedom and the bread of affliction, offer more obvious connections with organizers. Organizers seek to *free* the common people from political, social or cultural oppression. Hanukkah

too, which includes the story of an unlikely victory of Jews who wanted religious freedom (or control), was an easier holiday to write creative readings for.

I would caution authors of creative liturgy to consider the strength of the connections they seek to make. While there is room for creativity, when one makes a connection that is forced or odd, it diminishes the validity of the reading, prayer, or ritual. I contend that there are rituals and prayers that lend themselves more readily to community organizing themes. As the theme of either the holiday or community organizing might change over time, I would also argue that it is important to constantly revisit creative prayers, rituals, and readings so that they remain relevant and contemporary.

Overall Conclusion

I originally became interested in community organizing because of one-to-one, or relational meetings. Building social justice initiatives upon common and shared interests seemed logical and effective. In addition, community organizing represented a method that would reach people who weren't involved in other aspects of congregational life.

As I learned about the other aspects of organizing in greater detail, I discovered a rich history of political techniques and strategies designed to increase power to make lasting change.

Through my research, I also learned that Alinsky encouraged participants to be subversive. He argued that the ends justified the means. These subversive tactics did not initially resonate with me as a leader. However, as I studied the material, interviewed organizers, and read various accounts of organizing in action, I began to question my initial reactions. Perhaps subversive tactics were warranted in certain cases. Building a strong power base, at the very least, might be an advisable strategy for a rabbi beginning congregational work.

If I were to add research to Chapter One, I would want to discover more about the organizers who didn't originally feel comfortable with their task. Do people like this exist? Does one have to have a certain disposition to be effective when organizing? How have people partnered with others who possess different skills in order to organize?

As I continued to write about the use of Jewish texts by congregational rabbis, in Chapter Two, I uncovered unexpected enthusiasm and creativity. The

rabbis were clearly inspired by their mission to aid the world and strongly supported community organizing. I believe that their love of Jewish learning combined with their passion of organizing generated powerful words. The lesson for me, throughout Chapter Two, was that bridging strong interests could generate increased motivation and inspiration.

I also found it significant that the majority of the rabbis who wrote about community organizing were in the early stages of the process, overwhelming listening campaigns. While this might be a coincidence, as I only included four sermons, it seemed unusual. I found myself wondering if the rabbis would be as excited and passionate if they had become stifled or unsuccessful in their organizing efforts. If their experience in community organizing was successful, it is also possible that they were tired, or that they had passed the bulk of their organizing tasks to another professional. Whatever the reason, if I were to include additional information to Chapter Two, I would speak to rabbis who have been involved in organizing for a longer period of time and ask them how they use texts.

In Chapter Three, the focus on creative liturgy reminded me of how important it is to revisit our rituals, prayers and readings. While one should consider *kevah*, *kavanah* should also influence our prayers. We occasionally need inspiration to remind us of what it means to lead a "whole" Jewish life. I believe that creative prayer and ritual has the potential to enhance our study and our social justice habits if used at relevant times (while beginning a listening campaign, for example). This is an underused technique. Whether people

haven't considered it, or they feel uncomfortable with the idea of changing prayers, it was difficult for me to locate any community organizing-themed creative liturgy.

If I were to add further information to Chapter Three, I would want to find out the reasons behind these choices. Why do rabbis avoid using or writing creative liturgy? What might make them consider exploring it? How might I encourage further experimentation in this area?

Overall, I have discovered that there is great potential in thinking about the connections between each aspect of Jewish life through a community organizing lens. As a result of this thesis, I think more about these connections. I wonder how my prayer and study might prompt me to action, how my prayer and social justice initiatives might inspire me to learn, and how my studies and social justice initiatives might enhance my prayer. They are all interrelated.

As I prepare to become a congregational rabbi, I find that I wish to emphasize a more holistic approach to Jewish life. We should not only seek to integrate prayer, social justice and learning into our lives separately, but also work to make connections between each one. In doing so, we weave a stronger web that supports one's entire Jewish experience.

Community organizing, in particular, has potential to bridge these areas as it is currently becoming more popular in Reform Jewish synagogues, hearkens to a prophetic call to action, and embodies the spiritual hope for a better world that we find in prayer.

Appendix

Textual Selections from Chapter Two

Please note that all references contained within these documents are cited in the style of the author.

Text Example One: How big are your Dreams?

Written by Rabbi Ron Stern, High Holy Days, 5769

How big are your dreams? Unlike any other city, Los Angeles is a city that's built on the pursuit of dreams. We've got eternal sunshine, blue skies, glamorous lifestyles, Hollywood, white beaches, open and creative minds and an unbelievable blend of cultures and ethnicities like no other city. Usually, "dreams" in this town refers to those of an aspiring actor who longs to find her break on the digitally enhanced, technologically modified, artificially air-brushed, commercially restricted, union employed, federally taxed, morally censored, pre-released in selected markets, limited release, made for television, straight to DVD, independent, major studio sponsored. . . . .silver screen.

But those are not the only dreams that are both sustained and shattered in this town. Some might resemble the one I just described but in fact, I'd bet that most of our dreams are far more mundane. While the aspiring actor dares dream of finding fame and fortune in Los Angeles, most of us just dream of finding the best shortcut from the office to home or of the day when we can't use "traffic" as the excuse for. . . well . .. just about everything!

When you dream about a better LA – what are your dreams made of?

Can you dream of neighborhoods where your children can walk to school, take clean, safe public transportation to a friend's house or the movies? Can you imagine neighborhoods where kids or grandkids can play in the front yard, without a gate or fence. Where people walking the streets of your neighborhood late at night are just your neighbors out for a stroll?

Instead we awaken each morning to a nightmare city with 86,000 gang bangers, 80,000 homeless, countless drug users and other assorted criminals that cause us to fear the nights and even fear some neighborhoods during the day! We close our eyes in dread each evening with our house alarms turned on while private neighborhood patrols cruise up and down streets. We're certain that anyone on the streets after dark is a danger to us. We live a nightmare where millions of dollars of our tax money is being spent to aid the working poor, fight crime throughout the city, assist the homeless families who are one paycheck short of rent and provide emergency medical care to the 2.5 million people who don't have heath care in L.A. county. So much of our taxes are spent fighting the blight in our city that little money is available to pave our streets, clean our parks, fix our schools or maintain our city's infrastructure.

Maybe you dream of a city with wide-open streets and freeways or maybe state-of-the-art public transportation that whisks you from your house to the Music Center or your office with comfort and ease. Perhaps you dream of clean air in a city where vistas from the oceans to the mountains are clear and sparkling.

Instead, we wake up to the very real nightmare of 10 mile trips that take 30 minutes, public transportation that you'd never consider riding, streets filled with litter and homeless encampments. We live the nightmare of air that is so dirty we fear for our children's health when they do what children have done for 1,000s of years. . . something called: playing outside! I'd call it a nightmare when simply opening your window is to let in a toxic brew of particulates, ozone, and other chemicals that literally takes hours off your life simply by breathing!

Perhaps you dream of an eager workforce, trained and ready to the do the jobs that your businesses have for them? Could you dream of employees who stay at their jobs because the benefits they receive including health care, easy transportation to and from work as well as affordable housing combine to create a work environment that sustains everyone?

Instead you wake to the nightmare of my friend Farid whose support staff for his dental practices have a 200% turnover rate! A nightmare city where clogged streets and cramped, sub-standard apartments combine to add thousands of dollars to your bottom line as your employees struggle to just survive! A nightmare city where 40% of the students who attend Roosevelt High School in Boyle Heights drop out before they graduate. The very same Roosevelt High where some of you might have even graduated before going on to college.

Los Angeles is a city of dreams and unfortunately, also a city of nightmares. You could surely add your own dreams to this list of how different this city could be, but maybe you've stopped dreaming because you figure that nothing can be done and what passes for "normal" in this town will just be the way it is. As if this is the price that we must pay for 360 days of sunshine and 68 degree winters.

Here's the truth: we're not living a dream, we're living a LIE! The big lie. You know – the big lie that deceives us into thinking that all those things that are wrong with this city don't really affect us. The real bad stuff happens far from our neighborhoods so we're o.k. We live the illusion that deludes us into thinking that by keeping our windows rolled up, our gates closed and avoiding the dangerous neighborhoods all will be fine. The big lie that fails to add up how much it actually costs us in lost revenues, taxes, extra security, alarm systems, health impairment, time and quite simply the quality of our lives in this town. Whether your zip code is 90210, 91356, 91302 or 90077 every neighborhood is porous and every belching tailpipe, gangland murder, failing school or uninsured emergency room visit affects every single one of us. This is a virus that crosses all borders.

There's nothing new about the big lie. In an incredible text from the Talmud written 1500 years ago the rabbis challenged the big lie as well. It seems that some residents of several houses adjoining a large courtyard want to build a locked gate at the entrance to the courtyard, something that we'd call a "gated community" today. Some of the rabbis said, "of course! The people have a right to protect themselves and all should pay for the gate." Other rabbis took a completely different and, frankly, astounding view.

They said: "the gate should not be built because it will insulate the

residents from the needs of the community. Beggars won't be able to enter, they won't hear the pleas of the needy from behind their gate. They cannot insulate themselves from needs of the world and deceive themselves into thinking that what goes on outside the courtyard doesn't affect them." 1500 years ago! Our sages recognized that the truth is: when it comes to city living we're all in this together.

Don't get me wrong. This is not a swansong announcing my departure. I love this town – that's the reason that I care so much about its well-being. That's the reason that I have dreams for how life can be different and that is the reason that I'm daring you to dream with me. But we're not just here to dream – this is about making dreams reality.

No doubt some of you will despair and are thinking to yourselves things like: this is hopeless, he's **really** dreaming, why bother? To which I say: "Who's better at dreaming and fulfilling their dreams than the Jewish people?" Nearly 2,000 years ago our Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and we were exiled from our land. And yet, we dreamed collectively for a return to the Land of Israel, so at every Pesach Seder we said: *L'shana Habaha l'yirushalayim* – next year in Jerusalem. But it wasn't until 1897 when a dreamer named Theodore Herzl said the following: *Im tirtzu, ayn zo agadah, l'hiyot am chofshi b'artzeinu.* "If you will it, it is not a dream, to be a free people in our own land." He was determined to fulfill the dream of a Jewish state. "He's crazy!" people said. "The Jews will never pull it together, the world will never allow us. Besides the land is a wasteland filled with poor Arab farmers and a few Jewish stragglers. How will we sustain ourselves?" Herzl refused to suppress his vision. He summoned representatives from all the major Jewish organizations in the world to the First World Zionist Conferences and challenged them to fulfill the Jewish dream. He didn't live to see his dream realized, but we have! His vision of a culturally rich, technologically advanced, self-sustaining (and them some) state in the land of Israel is no dream. It is our reality.

Herzl is only one in centuries and centuries of Jewish dreamers. Prophets, rabbis, ordinary folks have all believed in any number of Jewish dreams. And, because of those dreams we are here–their dreams are our realities! We know how to dream and we know how to make dreams reality. Whether they be the fulfillment of the dreams of an entire people like Theodore Herzl or the dreams of just a community. If we didn't dream and believe in the fulfillment of dreams there would be no Stephen S. Wise Temple, no Milken Community High School, no Skirball Museum.

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This year I met a fulfiller of dreams. He's a young guy named Jared Rivera; he's the director of an organization called LA Voice. When I met him, I was immediately taken by his charisma, conviction and the clarity with which he expressed his ideas. He's a dream maker because Jared will sit with the folks of a neighborhood or community in Los Angeles and he'll ask them to dream. Jared will get to know the parishioners of a church in Boyle Heights and like me they find out that he's someone they can talk to because he listens to them. He'll lead them in a discussion about what they want to change in their world and then

he helps them organize for action and helps them find the right groups of people to get things done.

Recently, Jared along with other folks from LA Voice helped fulfill the dreams of parents at Murchison Elementary school in Ramona Gardens. Those parents dreamed of keeping their kids sheltered with one more year of elementary school by adding a 6th grade to a school that as of last year ended in 5th grade. Jared helped the families advocate for themselves with LAUSD and the city and they got that extra year! A small victory for us, perhaps. But for the parents of Murchison Elementary that extra year is one more year to keep their kids out of gangs and build their academic strengths. That year could literally be the difference between life and death for an adolescent.

When some of the leadership of the Temple met with Jared and heard his stories we asked him if we could dream a little bigger. Imagine, we said a community that knows how to get things done? We asked Jared to imagine a community that has relatively easy access to the city council and the mayor's office. Could he imagine a congregation whose members can easily make the connections to get curbs fixed, streets paved and extra police patrols when necessary? What could we do, we asked him, with a community that is involved with neighborhood councils, business associations, and all kinds of professional organizations? Imagine a community of some of the most accomplished people in the entire country. What could this community do if it put its mind (collectively) towards making change for the better in Los Angeles? What could this community do if it partnered w/churches, other synagogues and community agencies?! What could this community do for L.A.?

Jared asked: "That would be my dream!" We said: "Have we got a community for you. Jared, meet the membership of Stephen S. Wise Temple!" And the best part of this community is that it's full of dreamers! Dreamers who work to build businesses, strengthen schools, create museums, support community organizations and bring their energy and support to all kinds of agencies that make a difference in this community.

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Over the past year we've assembled a social justice team. A leadership group that reflects the diversity of this congregation: there are liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, working parents and stay at home moms. We've spoken about our dreams for Los Angeles and talked to Jared about how they could come about. We developed a plan, and it involves you!

We're going to reach out to 1,000 of you by inviting you to meetings at the homes of other congregants. We're calling those meetings **Minyanei Tzedek** – meetings in pursuit of justice. Small groups of 20 of you will gather at dozens of Minyanei Tzedek so we'll really be able to listen to what you have to say and to each other. We're going to ask you about your nightmares and then were going to dare you to dream. What would YOU like to see change in this city? As we talk we're going to discover that many of you share similar dreams and have certain influence, connections and skills. Using that information we're going to create networks of people who are committed to making change happen in our city. And, most importantly, we're going to work together with other communities

of faith, ethnicities and language groups who share our dreams and hopes for L.A.

We're going to ask you for creative solutions – like the small business partnership I've set up between Carlton and Ira. Carlton Rhoden is the first pastor of the First American Baptist Church of Los Angeles in the mid-Wilshire district. The church owns a big building and doesn't fill it with that many congregants. They also own a large, usually empty parking lot. Carlton has dreams of affordable housing over that lot. It just so happens that Ira Handelman (a Temple member) builds affordable housing over parking lots. . . hmm. So I made a shidduch to see if maybe both could benefit from the marriage. Things are still in the courtship stage but these two dreamers might just make things happen!

A last example from our own Jewish history of dreams realized: On our recent Temple trip to Israel we saw incredible physical evidence of a few who dreamed with Herzl. Near the renown Weizman Institute of Science, we visited a Kibbutz museum and entered what appeared to be a laundry facility from the 1940s. To our great surprise, our guide revealed a secret entrance hidden beneath a massive clothes washer. After climbing down the ladder we discovered a complete underground bullet factory built by the early Zionists and hidden right under the nose of the British army. There in a space the size of some living rooms the determined Jewish workers manufactured three million bullets for use by Israeli resistance fighters between 1945 and 1948. Above ground an entire kibbutz was built as a ruse to hide the factory. The dream of achieving independence brought together the most creative minds to hide a noisy, dirty manufacturing plant. They were so committed to their clandestine mission that the site remained secret until the 1970s - 25 years after it was abandoned! Were it not for those crazy dreamers who took Herzl's vision seriously history would have gone quite differently.

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My wife and I have raised two children here and made our lives in LA for 20 years and we believe in this town. I refuse to settle for things as they are. We can do better and with your help, your creativity, your energy and your dreams the beautiful blue sky is the limit.

- we can work for cleaner air
- we can make our streets safer
- we can create jobs and opportunities to lift people out of poverty
- we can improve our schools
- we can reduce congestion on freeways and streets

We can do it by partnering citizens, business people and government in ways that will make all of our lives better.

But it takes all of us, our efforts coordinated, our dreams directed, and our actions realized. It can be done - *Im tirzu, ayn zo agada* - if you will it, it is no dream!

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How big are your dreams? How much do you want to change this city for

the better? Will you step forward and bring your commitment, your knowledge, your network and your energy to the task? Sign up sheets are outside on the tables. On your way out put your name on a list and attend a house meeting; be a part of changing this city so that our children and grandchildren will look back on us and say that we were the generation that turned L.A. around! Put your name on a list and most importantly be a dreamer!

Text Example Two: Synagogue-Based Community Organizing

Written by Rabbi David Adelson, Yom Kippur 5768

In the *haftarah* we just read, the voice of the prophet Isaiah rings out:

"Is not this the fast I have chosen: to unlock the shackles of injustice, to loosen the ropes of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear every yoke apart? Surely it is to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house?"

These verses are a prime example of Judaism's "prophetic tradition," which has been a hallmark of Reform Judaism for years. The prophets spoke with the loud, clear voice of moral authority exhorting the people to fight injustice and repair our broken world.

And we at East End Temple have heard and responded to that call. We are proud of our social action work, the work of *tikun olam,* of repairing our world. We package meals for the hungry every month in our Food For Families program. We march for the people of Darfur and other causes. We bring in speakers on important issues and encourage donations to organizations such as American Jewish World Service and Mazon. All through this coming year, as a part of our 60th anniversary celebration, we will be encouraging acts of service such as volunteering to tutor at a local school. And many of us do other volunteering on our own, at shelters, libraries, and elsewhere.

These acts fulfill the *mitzvot* of feeding the hungry, of clothing the naked, of sheltering those in need. It feels good to know we are alleviating some suffering, and that we are doing some of what we can to do the right thing. But sometimes it feels that no matter how many meals we may make, there are just as many hungry people in New York City. We are indeed required to help the needy who stand before us, but it can be overwhelming, and demoralizing, to feel that we can barely meet their needs, never mind alleviate those needs once and for all. Sometimes it is tempting to cover our ears, to block out the cries of the needy and the call of the prophets.

I have felt that frustration deeply, as a New Yorker, and especially as a rabbi, grasping for a way that my congregants and I could do something more. I am here today to say there is such a way, a way not only to make real change in the world, but also to transform our own community, and ourselves.

This new way is synagogue-based community organizing, and this year, we will be laying its groundwork at East End Temple. We are working with an initiative at the Union for Reform Judaism called "Just Congregations," founded this past year by a contemporary prophet, Rabbi Jonah Pesner. Just Congregations is bringing the community organizing model of doing social justice work to Reform synagogues in select cities. Turns out, when Rabbi Pesner was asking around

about which Temples in Manhattan he should approach, East End Temple kept coming up. So, I was flattered. But more important, when I heard the story of his experiences with community organizing, I knew I was hearing something that could change us forever.

While serving a large, Boston congregation, Rabbi Pesner was introduced to a group called the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, which works on the community-based organizing model. Over several years, his synagogue, Temple Israel, organized to collaborate with other faith communities and accomplish amazing things in Boston. To cite just one example: when synagogue members shared their own stories with each other, they realized how many of them hated the poor quality of the elder care facilities where their aging parents lived. At the same time, nearby churches had Haitian immigrant populations who worked in some of those same facilities, and were angry over poor work conditions and pay. Together, the Jews and Christians fought for, and won, reforms that brought justice for the institutions' employees and better care to their residents.

And in their crowning achievement, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization made history as *the* driving force behind the state of Massachusetts' new law requiring every resident have health insurance. That law, the first of its kind in the nation, would not have become reality without the grassroots pressure applied by ordinary people, Jews and Christians and Muslims, acting together in pursuit of their common value. And now, the Massachusetts plan is a model for Hillary Clinton's, Barack Obama's and John Edwards's own health care platforms. Personal change begets synagogue change begets local change begets state change begets national change.

So. What is community-based organizing? It is about the difference between social action and social justice. When we work to feed the hungry in soup kitchens or at Food For Families, we are fulfilling a necessary, but short-term, *mitzvah* -- that is, the human service of social action. What community organizing hopes to do is social *justice* -- applying the pressure of many citizens united to reduce the need for the short-term help of social action in the first place.

This is the "teach a man to fish" theory of social change. It is also the highest rung on Maimonides' ladder of *tzedakah*; that is, better than any kind of charitable gift is helping an individual to become self-sufficient. The goal is to help the needy by addressing the source of their needs, and empowering them to change themselves.

But community organizing is not just about changing the world. It is about spiritually transforming ourselves, and our Temple community.

Here's what the steps of community-based organizing involve, and what this process of transformation might look like for East End Temple:

The first step of the process is to get connected to one another. In a series of one-on-one conversations and living room meetings, we share with each other what we struggle with in our own lives, and what we are passionate about changing. Maybe we're scared of being priced out of the neighborhood we live in, or we miss our friends who have already been priced out. Maybe we wish our public schools were better, for our kids who attend them or because then we wouldn't have to stretch to afford private school.

Whatever our stories, when we share them, we become a community truly connected to each other. When we hear one another, we discover that we are no longer alone.

In the next step, we connect to others beyond our own Temple. There is a new community-based organizing body here in Manhattan, called Manhattan Together. Working with Manhattan Together, we will meet people from other faith communities, from diverse ethnic, class and religious backgrounds, who care about the same issues we do. Based on our common concerns, our common values, and our common hopes, we will strategize together for change.

Imagine what it will feel like to connect with each other here at Temple in a deep new way, as we hear each others' stories and work together. Imagine connecting with people in our city we don't usually get to know, but with whom we share much more than we might suspect. And imagine connecting with the power for change promised us by God. After all, we are the people who say we are slaves in Egypt today, but we will not be slaves tomorrow. This is real-life, on the ground, spiritual transformation.

As we read in today's haftara: "Then, when you call, the Eternal One will answer; when you cry, God will say, Here I am." When we work to be connected on all these human levels, we are connected to the One of all Connection.

Of course, this kind of real change takes time. In Massachusetts, achieving full health coverage took over a decade. Organizing our own community will take a while, developing relationships with other congregations will take longer, and achieving real change here in the city will take even longer. We have to go in committed for the long haul.

And there is a financial commitment too. Every congregation that is a member of Manhattan Together pays to support the whole process, based on the size of the congregation. We would have to be ready to put our money where our mouth is.

But I am confident that both the investments of time and money will pay dividends.
When our own members feel so much more connected to one another and to the power for real change, they will come forward with the support to make it happen.

And when new people see us truly doing God's work, they will want to join a community like that.

I want to be a part of community like that. I want to lead a community like that. I know that so many of us here want to feel more connected, and more powerful in the world. We will be in the vanguard of synagogues in Manhattan doing this level of real work of *tikun olam*, the repair of the world. Our wonderful Temple will stand for more, much more, than we do already. We will stand together with men and women in Manhattan of every background, defying division, and affirming that we are each created in the image of God, and that we share a common destiny. Think of how proud we could all feel.

We can all share in transforming ourselves, our Temple, and our city. Some of us will do more, and many of us will only have to show up occasionally. And we have help. Members of East End Temple have already stepped up to get this project started, but there is room for as many leaders as are ready to work. And we are getting lots of help from the Reform Movement's Just Congregations initiative.

I'll leave you with the first step. Start thinking about what you are most passionate about in our city. Is it housing, education, is it the rights of workers, or immigrants, is it environmental sustainability or access to healthcare? Something else entirely? Think of what you are struggling with in your own life, and where in the city you see others struggling. In the coming year, we will start talking together about what affects us most deeply, and what we care about. And if you want to help, please let me know.

Let this be the year that on Yom Kippur we say as a community with one voice: I am not powerless to effect change; I am connected to life beyond my own daily struggle. I want to feel more connected to my Temple family and to others in my city. I hear the call of the prophet, and I am ready to respond. I am ready to say, Here I am.

"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall quickly blossom; your Righteous One will walk before you, the glory of the Eternal One will be your rearguard. Then, when you call, the Eternal One will answer; when *you* cry, God will say: Here *I* am."

Ken y'hi ratzon, may it be God's will.

Text Example Three: Our Idols and Ideals

Written by Rabbi Asher Knight, Rosh Hashanah Sermon 5772 - 2011

In the late 19th century, Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story about a farmer titled, "*How Much Land Does a Man Need?*"[181] The main character felt that he never had enough land to satisfy his yearnings. The farmer was given an opportunity to acquire all the land that he could cover by foot, over a twenty-four hour period, provided that he started and ended at the same location. Obsessed with the possibility of wealth, the farmer devised a plan to run and mark-off as much territory as possible. He began at dawn and did not stop. He traveled through the heat of the day without a pause. He ran out of water. His body ached. He went on and on and on, covering staggering distances. Realizing that morning was near, the farmer made his way back to the starting point. With all the strength he could muster – he raced back – faster and faster he ran – anticipating the rewards of land and wealth. Just as he reached his starting point, the farmer tumbled forward and collapsed flat on his face. Someone said: "Rise up, strong man, you have won much land." But the dead farmer did not rise. He was buried in a cemetery plot that was six feet long by two feet wide. How much land did the man need? Not more than the size of his own grave.

Tolstoy's farmer wasn't wrong to want land and success. But these ideals became his idols. In the end, he sacrificed everything, his very life, to the god of material success. Yet, we know that success cannot be defined by how much land we have, how much money we make, or what kind of items we own. Success is defined by the essence of our souls and how we live our ideals. Success is our ability to recognize our personal and societal failures and work towards their fundamental repair and resolution.

In the wake of the economic collapse a few years ago, a tragic string of suicides made more current the tragedy of Tolstoy's farmer. The stories were similar to infamous suicides following Black Tuesday and the Stock-Market crash at the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Timothy Keller, author of Counterfeit Gods, suggests that the suicides of educated and successful real-estate moguls and financial managers was symptomatic of a larger problem in the United States: idolatry.[182]

Keller argues that our nation's recent financial meltdown revealed a disturbing truth: financial success had become *the* absolute principle for some individuals. Wealth was *the ultimate source* of meaning, *the definitive* and *defining* element of their careers, their livelihood, and their personal lives. And when fortune vanished, when the false idol – the counterfeit promise of money, power, and success – crumbled, despair and desperation resulted.

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[181] http://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/2738/

[182] Keller, Timothy Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power and the Only Hope that Matters. Please note: numerous examples exist of suicides following the financial meltdown: http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2008/12/23/head-of-fund-invested-in-madoff-said-to-commit-suicide/; http://dailycontributor.com/real-estate-mogul-steven-good-found-dead-in-apparent-suicide/2783/; http://www.alternet.org/economy/123563/?page=entire

We witness the Ten Commandments in this sanctuary: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."[183] And yet, we know that the temptation of idolatry exists in our lives: In addition to material wealth, we sometimes make gods out of athletes, movie stars, and sex. Anything in life can serve as an idol, a counterfeit god. Voltaire quipped, "God made us in his image, [and] we have returned the favor."[184]

The phenomenon of misplaced faith is certainly not new. The polemic against idol worship appears so frequently within the Hebrew Bible that it's clear our ancient ancestors must have struggled with an idol worshipping addiction. Consider the story of the golden-calf.[185] Our tradition tells us that Moses ascended Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. God revealed to Moses the Ten Commandments, the teachings, the principals and ideals on our faith. And back at the base of the mountain – the Israelites began to worry. Where was Moses? Where was God? They filled the void of their lives with a golden calf, praying to the man-made object as if *it* were God.

The tension our ancient ancestors felt is also a tension we have today: we are challenged to distinguish between the gods that humans make and the God that made humanity. Society is dominated by icons, rites, and shrines. The shrines may look more like office buildings, spas, gyms, and stadiums than ancient temples. We may not have a golden calf, but we have kneeled before idols of body image,

This morning we read the story of the *Akedah*, in which God distinguished Judaism from child-sacrificing religions. Without quite realizing it, our preoccupation with material wealth and entertainment may lead to a different kind of sacrifice: the loss of family time and satisfying relationships, and, in extreme cases, neglecting our children. It is understandable why our prophets, sages, and teachers railed against idolatry. Idolatry is bad. God, understood as embodying virtuous qualities, is the Exemplar of goodness.

The problem, however, is that our notions of idolatry need to be nuanced because idolatry is quite complicated. At the core of every idol is an ideal. It is not wrong to want financial security or to make money. We work hard. We want to make sure that we will have enough money to and live in relative comfort. There is nothing wrong with building a meaningful career. It's not wrong to have a vibrant social life. It is not wrong for athletes to strive for ultimate performance in their sports. If I had more athletic prowess – I would do that, too! It is not wrong to have romantic relationships. It is not wrong to care about health, beauty and grooming, or intellectual pursuits. These are all good ideals.

Rabbi Harold Schulweis teaches, though, that idolatry is the categorical error of mistaking a part for the whole, of treating an ideal – which has relative

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[183] Exodus 20: 4-5. Based on JPS – I made slight translation choices to emphasize the broader notion of idolatry versus the better translation of "sculpted image."

[184] "*Si Dieu nous a faits à son image, nous le lui avons bien rendu.*" Voltaire *Notebooks* (c.1735-c.1750)

[185] See Exodus 32

value to other ideals – as though it has ABSOLUTE value.[186] What makes idolatry so precarious is that it is rarely about evil things or rotten choices. Idolatry is about ascribing absolute value to good ideals, resulting in highly exaggerated or imbalanced priorities.

When our ideals *become* our idols, they become the absolute source of meaning in our life. If we value our career, for example, to the exclusion and negation of other ideals – like relationships, community, family, and love – then we run the risk of making an idol out of our career. An idol is whatever we look at and say, "if I have that, *then* my life will have value." Idolatry turns our ideals into a possession: something that we try desperately to have and keep hold of. We have to work hard to prevent an over exaggerated ideal from becoming the center of our emotional, psychological or financial identity.

Take the ideals of health and wellness. It is good to live healthy lives. It's good to proactively and preventatively care for our bodies. Yet, in the past few years the zeal for health has started to shape our lives, conversations and decisions to a disproportionate measure, and the marketplace has certainly responded.

Billboards advertising weight-loss procedures, cancer research and treatments, and private insurance adorn our highways and our radio and television airwaves. We appropriately obsess over the food we eat, the vitamins we ingest. It is great that health food stores are filled to the brim. Yet, the ideal has also turned into an obsession of sorts – we've become so focused on "me" and "my health" that we've somehow lost sight of the "we."

We scrutinize our bodies and our minds in an endless bid to be healthy. But the idolatry of health ultimately limits our vision of the world. We become so focused on our own needs that we barely acknowledge the needs of others - they become nearly invisible. We fail to recognize deep societal failures and how they affect our neighbors, our friends, and our community members. Being healthy is a fine ideal – but it becomes an idol when it prevents us from bringing health, holiness, loving-kindness, justice and mercy to others.

For example, while we try to figure out how to afford staying healthy, we may not be aware of the degree to which we share that burden with others: 28% of middle-income families report having serious problems paying for healthcare and 50% of all bankruptcies during the great recession are due to medical expenses.[187] Indeed, according to the *Health Affairs* journal 11% of all middle and upper-income families in the United States are underinsured and cannot afford their medical expenses.

Two years ago, recognizing the healthcare statistics and the terrible reality that many of our friends, neighbors, family members and many of us were silently suffering, Temple Emanu-El's Just Congregation's team embarked on a healthcare listening campaign. We believed that unknown solutions existed. We believed that sensible ideas would emerge from our stories. We had a goal of talking with 400 members of Temple Emanu-El face-to-face. We exceeded our

[186] "Idolatry is not in the worship of many gods nor of evil forces, but it is the adoration of a part as if it were the whole." Schulweis, Harold. "The Pendulum of Pluralism," In God's Mirror, pg. 18.
[187] See: http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls & a study by Health Affairs: www.healthaffairs.org

goal by listening to nearly 750 Temple members. We set out an ambitious plan: to understand what issues were widely and deeply felt within the congregation and to build relationship between members of the congregation. Most importantly, though, we believed that solutions to identified healthcare concerns would emerge from our stories, our experiences, our struggles, and our victories. We were right.

Over and over again we heard stories of Temple members that matched the healthcare statistics we had been reading about. And the stories were alarming. Members of Temple told us how they did not have insurance or were underinsured and needed items like wheelchairs, hospital beds, toilet seats, and patient lifts – but that they were living without them because they couldn't afford them. An uninsured member told us that he couldn't afford a hospital bed for his wife. Another member told us that her insurance had denied her father a wheel-chair. A mother told us that their insurance company wouldn't provide a specialized seating apparatus for their child with physical disabilities. These were members of Temple Emanu-El – who openly shared stories of pain, suffering, and need.

We also heard stories of plenty: we heard about members of Temple whose insurance had been amazing and had provided them with wheelchairs, walkers, canes, hospital beds, and nebulizers. We heard that the medical equipment was collecting dust because they had gotten better now and or no longer needed it.

Working with our Dallas Area Interfaith partners – our broad based coalition of 50 faith institutions - we conducted conversations with an additional 2,200 people throughout the city of Dallas. We researched the issue. And we found that 33% of Dallas residents under the age of 65 have no medical coverage. Over 40% of the Dallas County population has an income below twice the federal poverty limit. Of those people nearly half are uninsured. What does this all mean? Our research shows that minimally, on an annual basis, 25,000 people in the city of Dallas need what is called Durable Medical Equipment, and cannot afford it.

In the halls of Temple and with our faith partners in the Dallas Area Interfaith – a logical solution emerged. We are in the process of creating a non-profit organization that will collect donations of Durable Medical Equipment, refurbish and sterilize the equipment up to State health-code standards, and provide the equipment to patients in need. We are building a network that will annually serve thousands of clients who need the equipment in order to live a healthier, safer and more satisfying life.

This is the story of what happens when individuals and a community live their ideals. This is the story of how Temple members have worked powerfully and in coalition with synagogues, churches, hospitals, businesses, and government leaders to make an impact on the lives of our members and thousands of people in our city. This is the story of how Temple members have, in the midst of their own healthcare struggles, understood our societal shortcomings and are working hard towards *Tikkun Olam* – towards a fundamental repair, a repair that balances the ideals of justice and mercy, truth,

tolerance, and loving-kindness. Don't be a bystander. Get involved. Your efforts – our efforts - can help us make Dallas a more holy city. Go to www.tedallas.org to sign up. Work with us to advocate for those whose voices, for too long, have been muted, looked over, and forgotten. We must advocate for ourselves – for the members of our own Temple community and for all individuals in the city of Dallas who need Durable Medical Equipment and are silently suffering.

During these Days of Awe, let us reflect. Let us take stock of where we are, what we have done, and what we have become. Let us acknowledge the idols we sometimes worship and identify the ideals obscured within them. Most importantly, let us take steps to ensure that our Jewish ideals will continue to imbue our lives with meaning.

The *shofar* blasts calls us to consider our own mortality. We wonder: will we live or will we die? The gates are open: and now is our time to ask questions about how we are going to live our lives, how we will do something that matters, how we will step up to make a difference in the lives of those we love, of those in our community, and for the benefit of our city. Unlike Tolstoy's farmer whose ambition cost him his life, let's slow down enough to be certain of our priorities.

At this season of new beginnings, may we free ourselves from the idols that limit our vision, knowing that the One God has gifted us with ideals - the potential – should we so choose - to sweeten, nourish, and sustain our lives.

Amen.

Text Example Four: Are You Chicken Or Not?

Written by Rabbi Kenneth Chasen, September 28, 2011, Rosh Hashanah 5772

It's a story I love to tell. In fact, you may have heard me tell it before, for it describes the DNA of Leo Baeck Temple more dynamically than any other story I know. It was about seven years ago. We were in the midst of a congregational visioning program, which began with "Link and Learn" gatherings in our congregants' homes. Interestingly, our Link and Learn program from way back then is featured in the current edition of Reform Judaism magazine as an exemplary tool for temple visioning.

And for us, it was. We learned a great deal about our congregants and our congregation in those house meetings. But one has always stood out in my memory. A group of twenty or so Leo Baeckers were gathered in the living room of one of our longtime members. We were going around the circle, asking people to tell us their names, when they joined our congregation, and their reason for joining Leo Baeck Temple. In the circle was this young woman – a mother of a grade-school son – who had just joined LBT that year. And when she was asked why she joined, she said, "I come to Leo Baeck for community – to connect on a personal level with other people. That's how Leo Baeck is different from all the other temples I visited."

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed our hostess – a long, longtime Leo Baecker – developing a contorted look upon her face. "That's not what makes Leo Baeck Temple different!" she declared. "Social action is what makes Leo Baeck Temple different! That's why we come here!"

Said our new member, "Well, I joined because this was the place where people were interested in getting to know me and my story."
Said our hostess, "But this is where we talk about the world and what it should be – and how to change it."

And I remember thinking to myself, "These ladies are saying the same thing – they just don't know it."

The new member that day is greeting the new Jewish year for the very first time as our temple's President. But she's been around now. She gets this place. And she's still here to create community and to connect with others. And she's determined to do her part in giving new purpose to our temple's social justice heritage. And she – just like an ever-growing number of our congregants – has come to understand that the two go hand-in-hand. You don't get one without the other.

When it comes to the first half of that equation, it may seem self-evident that synagogues exist to create human connection. But it was never treated as self-evident in our tradition. In fact, go back to the very first temple… the Temple, built by King Solomon… and you'll see that it was constructed with a purpose. The ancient midrash teaches that Solomon chose to build two gates into the Temple court – on opposite sides of the compound. So people were literally forced into encounter with one another… as soon as they entered, they saw the faces of other people, with whom they would mingle and share stories. And after

that great Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the midrash says it plainly: “They would repair to the synagogues instead.”

So from the time there ever was a synagogue, its first purpose was to create genuine human bonds – and that was before we humans turned this world into a fast-paced, utilitarian frenzy of loneliness… before we built cities in which people would be cocooned in their own automobiles… in which other people would become merely traffic, the impediments I seek to circumvent in order to complete my “to do list.” King Solomon had no idea how desperately we would need that primary function of the synagogue that he first imagined. But the desperation is clear to us, for I’ve simply lost count of the number of Leo Baeck congregants who have purportedly joined this temple for one reason – a preschool, a Bar Mitzvah, a rabbi in time of need – but then discovered they were really here for that and a whole lot more. They came, they thought, to check another consumer need off their run-around-town list, but in the process, they found what is perhaps the last communal institution devoted to encouraging them to be human, to be real. And upon making that discovery, they fell in love with the interpersonal life raft that is Leo Baeck Temple.

This is why the legendary 20th century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber famously wrote, “All real living is meeting.” We simply cannot achieve sanctity in this life while closed, sequestered from others. I remember learning this from the most renowned of my college professors, social theorist Henry Giroux, who has now published more than fifty books about how we learn, grow and are shaped by our encounters with one another. He recently wrote, “Individuals are told that the misery they feel is a personal flaw that they must bear in isolation…. Misfortune is viewed as a private disgrace.” So what does a sacred community like this do – if it’s doing its job? It “translates individual problems into public concerns.” It enables us to discover how not alone we are in our pain – and how not alone we can be in combating that pain, for all of our sakes.

And this is where seeking relationship in Jewish community and seeking to change our world for the better become one and the same. For as contemporary Jewish philosopher Carol Ochs writes: “Interpreting our own experiences and hearing stories of others as if they are Torah opens us to creative possibilities.” It is the sharing of stories – the amassing of stories – which establishes our kinship. We discover that we suffer from common disillusionments and possess common yearnings. We are not alone. There are many, many others who want the same things that we want for this world. And emboldened by seeing each other… hearing each other… feeling each other – we can acquire power. A loaded word –power. But strip away the connotations, and you’re left with the definition: “The ability or capacity to act effectively.”

This is how every movement for social change that has ever succeeded took root. Nothing ever changed in this world simply because a rabbi gave a great sermon about it. Change has happened when women and men, sharing a purpose that binds them, have banded together to make their presence and their truth felt.

In the late afternoon on February 1, 1960, four college freshmen from North Carolina A & T sat down at the long, L-shaped Woolworth’s lunch counter

in Greensboro, just off campus. One of them, Ezell Blair, asked the waitress for a cup of coffee. “We don’t serve negroes here,” was the response. A black woman employee, noticing the confrontation, approached the young men to tell them that they were acting stupidly. They didn’t move. An hour later, the front doors to the store were locked – and still they did not move. When they left a short time later through a side door, they discovered a small crowd outside… and a photographer from the Greensboro Record. Said one of the four, “I’ll be back tomorrow with A & T College.”

By morning, there were twenty-seven men and four women seated at the counter. Most were from the same dormitory that housed the four freshman who had been there the day before. They were dressed in suits and ties, and they sat at the counter, doing their homework. The next day, students from the local “Negro” high school brought the number of demonstrators to eighty. The next day, there were 300. By Day 6, there were 600, some in the store and others crowding the street. A few of them were white – but there were also white teenagers waving Confederate flags and setting off firecrackers.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his article “Small Change,” describes what happened next: “By the following Monday, sit-ins had spread to Winston-Salem, twenty-five miles away, and Durham, fifty miles away. The day after that, students at (two black colleges) in Charlotte joined in, followed on Wednesday by students at (two colleges) in Raleigh. On Thursday and Friday, the protest crossed state lines, surfacing in Hampton and Portsmouth, Virginia, in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and in Chattanooga, Tennessee. By the end of the month, there were sit-ins throughout the South, as far west as Texas… Some seventy thousand students eventually took part… These events in the early sixties became a civil rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade.”

As we know, the civil rights movement was not for the faint of heart. Those who participated, black or not, were risking their safety and their freedom. They were threatened, beaten, jailed, and sometimes even killed. So we would naturally assume that the activists willing to go through with such a thing were those most ideologically driven by the cause. But Stanford sociologist Doug McAdam researched the matter and discovered, interestingly, that the difference between those who stuck with their activism in the civil rights movement, despite the dangers, and those who bailed out was the depth of their personal bonds with others in the movement. McAdams therefore calls activism a “strong-tie phenomenon.” If you were relationship-deep in the civil rights movement, you were involved… and if you weren’t, chances are that you had much less of a stomach for it, even if the cause was very, very dear to you.

This was certainly true of the four freshmen who got everything rolling in Greensboro. Gladwell describes perfectly the power of shared story when chronicling their relationship. They were college roommates. Three of the four went back to high school together. And they did what all college roommates do – they smuggled beer into the dorm and sat talking until late in the night. And they shared the stories that bound them – the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the desegregation fight in Little Rock. One night, one of the students suggested the Woolworth’s sit-in. But

they doubted it would work. And they were afraid – deathly afraid. So they talked about it for a month, before finally, one turned to the others and asked: “Are you guys chicken or not?” And the next day, Ezell Blair somehow worked up the courage to ask for a cup of coffee that changed history – “because he was flanked by his roommate and two good friends from high school.”

That’s how it’s done. The pattern shows up again and again in practically every successful movement for social change. There’s no shortcut. People who fix the ills of society – whether in their neighborhood school or in a faraway land – are going up against the relentless momentum of the status quo. And they have to possess the courage, the will, the persistence, the refusal to coalesce that creates a new status quo. Otherwise, everything stays the same.

So if you’ve been wondering why all of those email petitions you sign seem to produce little of substance… or why Congress can’t seem to do anything right, regardless of who’s in charge – it’s because we’ve deluded ourselves into believing that real change can happen without real relationship. If Greensboro in 1960 was a demonstration of what sociologists would call “strong-tie activism,” then email petitions and Facebook campaigns are what we might call “weak-tie activism.” And while weak ties are very effective at increasing numbers – after all, I have 1,307 very, very close friends on Facebook – it’s pretty hard to get much of anything done by a giant network of people who really aren’t connected to each other or committed to each other in any meaningful way.

Now, I suspect that at least a few of you are thinking, “Rabbi, did the paperboy stop delivering the news to you this year? Did you miss the Arab Spring, in which entire governments were overthrown by movements organized on Facebook? Indeed, Facebook and other social media engines have been instrumental in the Arab Spring. But why? First, because the story that is shared by the victims of Arab dictators is deeply embedded in millions. And second, because Facebook was perhaps the only means for Arab citizens to communicate with one another that the dictators hadn’t already suppressed. It’s a little different for us here in America. When we’re outraged about something, we, too, take to Facebook – but with somewhat different results. Take Darfur, for example. I think we’d all agree that the situation in Darfur is an outrage. And Facebook has been used to organize us. Malcolm Gladwell presents the results: “The Facebook page of the Save Darfur Coalition has 1,282,339 members, who have donated an average of nine cents apiece. The next biggest Darfur charity on Facebook has 22,073 members, who have donated an average of thirty-five cents. Help Save Darfur has 2,797 members, who have given, on average, fifteen cents.” If the dark-skinned Darfurians are counting upon us to unite by Facebook to save their lives, they’re in for a disappointment.

No, if we want to create the kind of world we always say we want, we’re going to have to do it the old fashioned way. It so happens that the very thing that will make our temple life stronger – the building of real relationships, the sharing of our stories, the discovery of everything we have in common… the pains, the hopes, the visions – this happens also to be exactly what is needed to make our neighborhoods, our city, our country and our world stronger.

The well-known guru of social capital, Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam, has laid out the facts. Our emotional isolation from one another is itself one of the main causes of the societal weaknesses we most decry. Failing schools. Struggling children. Rising crime. Political incivility. Philanthropic decline. Even premature death – believe it or not, Putnam has found that social isolation causes us to die sooner. All of this happens in a world where we choose not to relate with one another – where we try simply to drive around one another through the traffic jam of life, while our road rage increases as rapidly as our sense of hopelessness.

There is a solution – for our souls, for our temple, and for this world that needs us. And it's the same solution that's being utilized in medicine… and in prisons… and in history museums… and in philanthropy. They are all awakening to the power of personal narratives – the power of story. And if they all get it, we, as a Jewish community, have no excuse not to. After all, Rabbi Larry Kushner rightly states: "Hermits and monasteries are noticeably absent from Jewish history; we are a hopelessly communal people."

It is time for us to take our place in that story – that history. Over the past few months, a dedicated group of more than thirty Leo Baeckers has been working to begin the task of organizing our congregation for relationship and for action. They are just like you. They are men and women. They are young and old. They are long-timers and newcomers. They are left, center and right. They are spiritualists and atheists. And most of all, they are gung ho on telling their stories and on hearing yours. They want to know: What is it that keeps you up at night? What happened in your life – recently or a long time ago – that created a passion in you for changing our city or state or country or world in some specific way? What is that vision that burns inside of you – but that you cannot make happen all by yourself? We want to know.

Perhaps you raised a child who struggled with substance abuse, and you now are devoted to protecting others from that heartache.

Maybe you grew up in a home of Holocaust survivors and have been highly sensitive to the importance of religious freedom ever since.

Perhaps you're trying simply to provide a decent education for your children, and you truly wonder whether you'll be bankrupt by the time they're through with college.

Maybe you watched what happened to our nation in Vietnam, and it changed your sensibilities about war and peace forever.

Perhaps you're trying your best to find quality elder care for yourself or your parents, and discovering that it costs way too much and is too hard to come by.

Maybe you see your children heading out into a world where it will be hard for them to find a decent job or ever afford a decent home of their own.

Perhaps you're alarmed by the silence out there as our planet warms – and you wonder whether this Earth will be able to sustain your grandchildren or great-grandchildren someday.

Maybe this economy has left you frightened – truly frightened – for your own well-being, and it's made it hard to sleep at night.

I don't know what your story is. But I know that the stories I just described are held by people sitting in this room– because we have begun to tell them, myself included. Those stories, and so many more. We need to hear them, for they're who we are. So during the next several weeks, our congregation will be engaging in what we are calling a listening campaign. Members of our organizing team would like to arrange a one-to-one meeting with you. It will cost you nothing but forty-five well-spent minutes of your time. You'll get to share your story with someone who really wants to listen and knows how. And you'll get to hear their story, and in the exchange, your life at this temple will become richer and realer.

Our team has had nearly a hundred of these meetings already, and now we're looking forward to many hundreds more. So you found a pencil and a card on your seat when you arrived. I won't hazard a guess as to the various things you may already have done with those cards. But if by chance yours is still intact, we would love for you to fill it out, and immediately after I finish – during what Rabbi Timoner, Cantor Kates and I lovingly refer to as the "sermon review"… you know, that quiet minute of organ music when you turn to your neighbor and exchange your grades for the sermon that just ended – some of your fellow congregants will come down the aisles to collect your cards during the sermon review. And if by chance your card is already gone or damaged or doodled on, let me assure you – we've got a lot more. A lot more And I'm going to make a promise to you. If you fill out that card tonight, you're going to hear from a fellow Leo Baecker before Yom Kippur – just to open the conversation and begin coming up with a plan to meet. And then once we've finished with all the one-to-one meetings a couple of months from now, we'll start gathering in small groups in each other's homes – to extend and deepen the storytelling, to build our relationships community-wide, to enrich the experience of being a Leo Baeck Temple congregant. We'll also start to look for common themes in our stories – the concerns that unite us, the changes we want to see. Hopefully, we'll find some things that we can really organize around. And then, maybe, we'll turn to each other and ask, "Are you guys chicken or not?" And if we're not, we'll work together to figure out the best way to amass our power to effect real change on those issues of shared concern. We may go looking for another faith community or two who want to sit at that lunch counter with us. We may even go looking for a whole bunch of faith communities and civic communities that want to join us in filling the lunch counter and the street outside. It's hard to say right now what the product will look like, but I can tell you what the process will look like, because the process is already underway. It looks like one Leo Baecker eye to eye with another, speaking the kinds of deep truths that we used to speak late in the night with a beer in our hand in a college dorm room – opening heart and soul… and past and future… holding our hopes in each other's hands. And it will be holy, for as the Chasidic master Menachem Mendel of Rymanov taught, "Human beings are God's language."

The great Rabbi Yossi in the Talmud tells his story: "On a dark night, I came upon a blind man carrying a torch. I asked him, "Why? If you can't see, why do you carry a torch?" The blind man said simply, "I carry this light so that people may see me."

We walk blind through the dark night of this crazy, break-neck speed, lonely life. And somewhere along the line, we got the impression that because we can't see as well as we'd like in the midst of this blur, we should just put down our torches. No. We need to carry our light, for we need to be seen. We need to be heard. We need to be felt. By each other, in this last, blessed place where we still get to matter – and in this world, where we had better make ourselves matter.

This is the day for sounding the shofar. In the Torah, we are taught that the horn was to be sounded for two purposes. The long, single blast – *tekiah* – was sounded to assemble the community… to bring us face to face with each other. And the short, staccato blast – *teruah* – was sounded to say it was time to move.

This is the day for sounding the shofar. *Tekiah* – let us meet each other, face to face. *Teruah* – let us marshal our might, and move forward. And when this day has ended and tomorrow comes, let us follow the call of the prophet Isaiah: *Kashofar harem kolecha* – "Raise your voice like a shofar… raise your voice like a shofar!"

We have heard over the years many sermons on social action in this temple. It's time now for us to be a sermon on social action in this temple. Are you chicken or not?

Text Example Five: Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action

A selection from a Rabbinical Sermon written by Rabbi Suzanne Stone

Biblical Text

As mentioned above, the dramatic story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt is abruptly interrupted by an explanation of how the Israelites should commemorate their liberation. Based on the verse above (Ex. 12:24-27), the Rabbis suggest that there are four archetypes found among the Israelite children: the wicked child, the wise child, the simple child, and the child who does not know how to ask.

These four archetypes are based on four different verses in the Torah that refer to the Israelites journey from Egypt. For example, Exodus 12:26-7 symbolizes the wicked child, Exodus 13:8 refers to the child who does not even know how to ask a question about the people's struggle for freedom, Exodus 13:4 represents the simple child, and Deuteronomy 6:20-26 signifies the wise child.

- *Please compare and contrast the verses below.*
- *What similarities or differences are there between these verses?*
- *Is there anything that these verses can teach us about the connection between story-telling and redemption?*
- *Other than the rabbinic interpretation, why do you think there are four different ways to tell the story of our Exodus?*

Exodus 12:26-27
The Wicked Child

(Hebrew text is not included due to formatting complications)

26 And it shall come to pass, when your children say to you:' What does this service [ritual] mean to you?

27 You will say to them: The Passover sacrifice is for YHVH, who passed over the homes of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but he saved our homes. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

Exodus 13:8
The Child Who Does Not Know How to Ask

8 And you shall explain to your son on that day, saying: 'It is because of that which YHVH did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.'

Exodus 13:14
The Simple Child

14 And when, in a time to come, your son asks you, saying: 'What is this?' You shall say to him: 'It was with a mighty hand that YHVH brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage.'

Deuteronomy 6:20-24
The Wise Child

20 When, in a time to come, your children ask you, 'What do the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances mean, which YHVH, our God, has commanded you?'

21 Then you shall say to your children: 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and YHVH freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand.

22 And YHVH wrought before our eyes marvelous and destructive signs and portents in Egypt, against Pharaoh and his entire household.

23 And us He freed us from there, so that He could bring us to the land that He swore to our fathers.

24 Then YHVH commanded us to do all these laws, to revere Adonai our God, for our lasting good and for our survival, as is now the case.

A Closer Look:

Three out of the four passages above use the verb *amar*, which means to "say" or to "speak," in order to convey to the Israelites that they must repeat the story of Passover to their children year after year. In contrast, in Exodus 13:8 the Torah uses the verb *l'hagid,* which comes from the root *n.g.d*. to convey a similar message.

This distinction is important because the Rabbis decide to call the Passover Seder a *Haggadah*, which comes from the same Hebrew word as in Exodus 13:8. In Modern Hebrew, the word *l'hagid* is usually translated as "to tell" or "to say." So, what can we learn from the Rabbis' decision to call the Passover Seder a *Haggadah*? Furthermore, what significance does it have that the central element of the Passover celebration is the "*magid*"—the telling of the *story* of the Exodus from Egypt?

In Exodus 13:8, the word *higad'tah* is in the *hif'eel* form of the verb *n.g.d.* This verb appears 334 times in the *hifeel* form alone, but only 48 times in the

Chumash.[188] Since *hif'eel* forms are often causative, it is logical to presume that *higad'tah* can be defined as "to cause to know." Yet, for the sake of simplicity, it is often translated colloquially as to tell or to say. However, the goal of this etymological investigation is increase our understanding of this verb's complex nature. For example, linguists argue that the verb form of *higad'tah* is most likely related to the prepositional form of the word (i.e.- *neged*), which means "to face, to confront, or to stand across from."[189]

Interestingly, the connection between *l'hagid* (to tell) and *neged* (to stand across from someone) is in keeping with the ideals of the CBCO model. In order "to tell" someone your story or to really "cause them to know" what you are experiencing, one must have a face-to face encounter in which the participants are literally standing across from one another (e.g.- *eish neged l'eish)*. While Jewish organizers often use the idea of *panim al panim* to speak about a one-on-one encounter, I would like to suggest that we might also use the root *n.g.d* to arrive at a similar idea. Perhaps, only by r standing across from someone in a one-on-one encounter that we will know how "to tell" a story, which causes us to get to understand ourselves and our community members in a way that enables us to act together with more power.

In support of this idea, linguists argue that the Arabic meaning of the root *n.g.d.* means to "overcome" or to "help."[190] In other words, by standing face-to-face, or by confronting someone one-on-one in order to tell them a story, we may actually be able to help one another overcome an obstacle that we cannot handle on our own as individuals. Interestingly, this understanding of the root *n.g.d.* may be indicated by the first use of the word in the Torah. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is not good for man to be alone, therefore He creates Eve as an *ezer-knegdo* for Adam. Most often, this word is translated as a help meet. However, what does it mean to be a helpmeet? Applying the information above, I would argue that a helpmeet is someone who helps another person by standing face-to-face with him or her, perhaps even confronting or agitating them, so that they will understand the true nature of their stories, their interests and their desires.

Last but not least, the verb form of *n.g.d*. first appears in Genesis 3:11 when God asks Adam "Who told (*higid*) you that you were naked?" One scholar suggests that in addition to a lot of other uses, the verb *n.g.d*. also carries the connotation of being used to investigate the truth. Once again, I believe that this insight can help Jewish organizers deepen the connection between the concept of story-telling and its ability to turn relationships into a force for social change.

Rabbinic Text

At the beginning of the story-telling portion of our Passover *seder*, a

[188] TDOT 175.
[189] TDOT 174.
[190] TDOT 174.

section known as the *magid* (telling), the Rabbis retell the story of how we were slaves in Egypt. This section is known as *avadim hayinu* in Hebrew. While many *seder* participants are familiar with the first half of this section, which talks about how God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with an outstretched arm, fewer people are familiar the second half of the paragraph, which reads:

"Even if all of us were smart, all of us wise, all of us experienced, all of us learned in Torah, we would still be commanded to discuss the Exodus from Egypt. And everyone who really discusses the Exodus from Egypt is praised."[191]

- *Why do you think that the Passover Haggadah instructs us to tell the story of Passover even if we are smart, wise, experienced or learned? Is there a difference between all of the different descriptors used above?*

- *While Hoffman translates the word מרבה (marbeh) as "really," many other scholars translate this as "to increase, to expand upon, or to multiply." Therefore, in your opinion, what does it mean that anyone who really discusses or expands upon the story of the Exodus deserves praise?*

A Closer Look:

According to Rabbinic scholar, Professor Alyssa Gray, this section of *avadim hayinu* reminds us that no matter how well we know the story of Passover, we are still commanded to tell the story and even to expound upon it more than needed. Based on the comments of a medieval Jewish philosopher known as the *Rashbetz,* Gray argues that: "We should not think that the recitation of the Haggadah is only for the children—notwithstanding all the attention paid to them at the Seder. The recounting of the Exodus from Egypt is an adult responsibility as well, even for those adults who are Jewishly learned."[192]

Similarly, in the beginning of some CBCO campaigns, people may feel a sense of resistance talking to people and telling stories. At times this is because they feel like they already know this person or because they have engaged in similar conversations in the past. My hope is that this section of the *Haggadah* will help us place the notion story-telling in a larger framework. If we can learn something new each year from the *Haggadah*, then I certainly believe that we can learn something new from each conversation with another person no matter how familiar we may be with this particular person. The *Haggadah* teaches us to remain humble and to avoid scorning repetition because it is, in fact, a key ingredient to the story of our redemption.

Furthermore, many medieval commentators, such as Abudarham (14th

[191] Translation based on Hoffman 169.
[192] Hoffman 172.

Century Spanish commentator) and Don Isaac Abarbanel (Spain and Italy 1437-1508) argue that the only way someone is praised for telling the story of Passover is if they expand and expound on it (*hamarbeh l'saper*) more than normal.[193] Just telling the story of the Exodus is not praiseworthy. Rather, expanding upon it is the only way to be praised for this mitzvah.

- *How might this relate to the concept of story-telling in cycle of organizing?*

Last but not least, while the idea of increasing upon the story of the Exodus is clearly a post-biblical injunction, Professor Larry Hoffman suggests that we expand upon the story of Exodus as a way to imitate God's great expansion of signs and portents in the land of Egypt.[194]

- *The Rabbis teach that expanding upon the story of the Exodus is a form of imitatio dei[195] because it is supposed to parallel God's expansive mercy as He bestowed an ever-increasing amount of miracles upon the Israelites in order to free them from Egypt.*
- *In what ways is expanding a story like expanding miracles?*

Medieval Text

Rabbi Leon de Modena (1571-1684)

"Words are the guides to acts; the mouth makes the first move."

- *Why do you think Leon de Modena believes that words are the guides to acts?*
- *What are some words that have inspired you to act in the past?*
- *Can you think of an instance when your works influenced your acts?*

Modern Texts

Rachel Adler

"To determine where we ought to go, we must reflect on where we have been. We do this best by storytelling. As individuals, we continually rework and relate our life stories to ourselves and to others and project ourselves into possible futures through dreams and fantasies…The ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre says, "I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior questions, "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'

[193] Hoffman 187.
[194] Hoffman 184.
[195] The idea of *imitatio dei*, imitating God, is seen as a holy endeavor in Judaism, as it says in Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy, for I, Adonai, am holy."

Commitments emerge out of stories and are refashioned in stories."[196]

- *Do you agree with Adler's idea that in order to know where we are going we need to know where we have been?*
- *In addition to story-telling, what is another way in which we may "remember" where we have been?*
- *Adler argues that commitments emerge out of stories. Can you think of an example of this in Jewish teachings or texts? Can you think of a time when this was true in your own life?*
- *What is a story about your past that could inform what you are going to do, or be, in the future?*

A Closer Look:

Later in this chapter, Adler introduces her readers to the concept of *nomos*, the Greek word for "law." While many Jewish scholars have used this word to refer to *halakhah*, Jewish law, Adler suggests that there is another way to think about this notion based on broader sociological and cultural factors. As Peter Berger, a famous American sociologist argues, *nomos* does not simply refer to particular law or legal concept. Rather, *nomos* represents the process by which human beings fashion the world around them through their own ideology and actions. In other words, the way we understand things to be true are created by our discourse. Thus, our own language creates that which we believe is "true," common sense knowledge. Adler argues, therefore, that our world is ordered and made full of meaning through our individual and corporate understanding of the world. Therefore, *nomos* is a universe of meanings, values, and rules embedded through storytelling.[197]

- *What stories would help us to inhabit the world of possibilities? Having told a story of possibility, how could we inspire people to be "willing to live some of them out in praxis"?*

Rabbi Tzvi Blanchard

"There are stories that tell about holding people while they cry with the pains of this world, and then there are other stories that show the possibility of really coming full circle, of being transformed. These stories show us what it means to actually be able to touch all parts of ourselves and bring them together, and to access what is available not just in our own memory, but all across the spectrum of our family's memory, of our community's memory, of the human race's memory, and perhaps in spiritual domains we can only begin to understand"

- *In Jewish texts or traditions, what story or stories tell us about the possibility of coming "full circle" and about being transformed? Are there*

[196] Adler 320.
[197] Adler 329.

stories like these in your own life as well?

- *Blanchard argues that stories can bind our imagination across space and time. Is there a story that plays that role for you in your life or in the life of your family?*

Liturgical Selections from Chapter Three

Liturgical Example #1 - Closing charge at a PARR Conference in 2012

Written by Rabbi Richard Levy

This week's Torah portion recalls for us God's promises that fill the four cups from which we drink each year at the Pesach Seder—*v'hotzeiti,* "And I will take you out from oppression," *v'hitzalti,* and I will deliver you; *v'ga-alti,*"And I will redeem you," *v'lakachti,* "And I will take you as My people,"—and one additional promise that fills the cup we leave untasted, the Cup of Elijah: *v'heiveiti,* "And I will bring you into the Promised Land" (Ex. 6:6-8),

For our ancestor Reformers, this country *was* the Promised Land, and for the Reformers who founded PARR (Pacific Association of Reform Rabbis), the West was the Promised Land—deserts and palm trees and oceans, and in the north, rain in abundance. But we know that California and the other Western states have not lived up to that promise—we know that there is much deliverance and redemption yet to be accomplished.

Our colleagues in the last century, hearing the call of our prophetic movement, thundered from their pulpits in support of labor, marched in Delano with farm workers, went South—or lived in the South—to help free African Americans, marched on draft boards to end the war in Vietnam, smuggled themselves into Moscow and Leningrad and Kiev to give succor to refuseniks—all the while yearning to drink the wine of Elijah's cup in a toast to a world in which the promises had been fulfilled.

Now it is our turn to lend our voices to the needs of people in these states, to walk the prophets through the halls of the Legislature, to work to protect the stranger from being uprooted from what has become her home, to enable these states to better teach the Torat Chayim to all their students. Like the rabbis who have gone before us, the rabbis taking the lead in this effort tonight, and all of you who have been working on these issues much of your lives, we know that teaching Torah takes a different form in the streets and the halls of power than in our study groups, Hillels and synagogues—Torah may look like a bill in the legislature, or a lobbying effort with state senators, but Torah it is, and as Reform rabbis we have a duty to teach it wherever God calls us to speak—and to act.

Our forebears knew that to work for redemption they had to be bold. In a time when many rabbis and rabbinic students are urged to be careful, we are preaching another message: a prophetic movement must take stands for justice, a prophetic movement must take risks for justice—else we risk forfeiting this title our movement has borne so proudly since our founding. We must study Torah—we need always to study *more* Torah—but we must also take Torah into the streets with us, hold it proudly aloft as we proclaim: *v'zot ha-Torah asher sam*

Moshe—this is the Torah which Moses and all who followed him have placed in our arms: a Torah of justice, of truth, of compassion. We need to work on these issues— to explore how we can carry the Torah we love so deeply into a world whose people yearn so deeply for its application to their lives.

Four cups sit waiting in this week's parsha—fill them full of your passion and your wisdom and your strength, so that we can come that much closer to filling Elijah's Cup, to seeing the promise of this great western land fulfilled.

My fellow *klei kodesh*—may God fill us all to overflowing in the year to come.

Liturgical Example #2 - Deval Patrick's Inauguration Benediction

Introduction and benediction written by Rabbi Jonah Pesner

On Thursday of last week, Deval L. Patrick made history *as the first African-American to be inaugurated the governor of Massachusetts, and only the second of any state in American history. I had the honor of giving the benediction (which was quoted by the New York Times). Here are the words I spoke.*

Governor Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Murray, elected and civic leaders, people of the commonwealth, I am most deeply honored to offer these words of invocation to open this sacred assembly.

In the Talmud, the ancient rabbis teach that whenever we encounter a large gathering of people, it is appropriate to offer the following blessing:

"Blessed is the Wise One
Who understands secrets
For the mind of each
Is different from the other
Just as the face of each
Is different from the other."

Source of all life,
Out of many,
You have made us ONE.
You have created us splendidly
In our distinctiveness:
You have made us a spectacular,
Living tapestry
Many colors and complexions
Rich in languages and beliefs,
Varied in our blessings,
And challenged by our curses.

Indeed the face of each one
Is different than the other –
And here we gather
Meeting,
Face to face.

Look around! See the beauty of the faces,
Each one unique

Can leave in the last 12 months of the contract...

3 year 2 year
Reflecting the very image
Of the divine
Each one from a common source
A single, sacred family.

Yet behind every face
Hide so many secrets.
Private, painful secrets of suffering.
If only we would find your Wisdom O God
Revealing all the secrets,
The pained suffering
Of parents who watch helpless
As their children are plagued
By guns, drugs, and gangs
The private pain
Of children struggling to care for their parents
As they age and grow frail,
The secret suffering of immigrants
Who like us came to this place
To seek a better life
And labor hidden and underpaid in jobs
Upon which the rest of us depend,
But won't do ourselves
Of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters
Who daily confront blatant discrimination,
Inequality and humiliation
Of those who sleep in the streets,
Those who are overworked and underpaid,
Those who are abused in their own homes
Those who are left behind
By their disabilities.

So many secrets,
Private sufferings.

Yet we have hope.
Yes we have faith.
Because we have each other.

Assembled here in the light of day
Bathing in the unseasonable warmth of your presence,
We affirm that democracy
Is not built with bricks and mortar;
We know your ancient wisdom
Is found in no cathedral,

Temple,
Nor shrine –
It is here,
Face to face
It is everywhere humanity gathers
And out of many,
Makes one.

Let our secrets of suffering
Give way to stories of
Rebuilding
Repair
And Redemption

Stories of redemption
Like a kid from the South Side of Chicago
Becoming the governor of Massachusetts
Representing the people

We the people;

Let us never forget the faces
The secrets
And the stories

God, grant us your wisdom
That we may never forget that
Democracy happens out here –
Face to face –
Among the people
As we join together
In one spirit
And write one shared story:

The story of a commonwealth
That acts like a commonwealth
Where secrets of private suffering
Where tales of lonely languish
Are joined
Through the power of the people
Rising up
Together
Encountering one another
Face to face
And writing a new story
One story

Echoing Isaiah's ancient call:

"If you banish the yoke from your midst
The menacing hand
And evil speech
And you offer your compassion to the hungry
And satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
Then shall your light shine in the darkness
And your gloom shall be like noonday…

You shall be like a watered garden
Like a spring whose waters never fail.
And you shall rebuild ancient ruins
You shall restore the foundations of many generations
You shall be called the repairer of the breach…"

This is the story of redemption;
The story of a true commonwealth
Rebuilt
Repaired
And Redeemed.

Amen. May this be God's will.

Liturgical Example #3 – An adaptation of Al Cheit

Written by Jules Mermelstein

O God, please forgive us:
For spending time helping the community, when our children and spouse need us at home;
For spending time with our family at home, when we are needed in the community;
For spending money to repair the world, when our family must do without;
For spending money on our family, when they already have so much more than so many;
For over-committing our time, money, and energy when we are already overburdened;
For saying "no" when our time, money, and energy could help a worthy cause;
For providing our love and compassion only to members of our family, when there are so many oppressed people in the world who could use that love and compassion;
For sharing our love and compassion with oppressed people in dangerous parts of the world, causing our family and friends worry and torment at home.
O God, please forgive us for spending another year in vain, attempting to find balance.
For all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.
V'al kulom eloha s'lichot s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu.

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