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Crisis and Celebration:
Creating and Adapting Jewish Rituals to Mark Our Lives

by

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Digest

Our lives are full of moments of crisis and celebration. Traditionally, Judaism has sought to mark those events which were felt to be most significant within the context of Jewish religious life. Recently, however, segments of the contemporary American Jewish community have become aware of the lack of Jewish rituals acknowledging certain life events which they feel are important. As a result, Jewish rituals are being created and adapted to address these moments of crisis and celebration. This thesis seeks to develop an understanding of why this process is taking place and how it is generating a series of new Jewish rituals.

Chapter One discusses the psychological and anthropological implications of ritual. Analyzing the writings of Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts, as well as Victor Turner, it explores why rituals are necessary in our lives, when we need rituals, and how rituals work. This chapter also begins the discussion of why new Jewish rituals have been deemed to be necessary by certain segments of the community.

Chapter Two is an analysis of two exemplary traditional Jewish rituals, brit milah and the wedding ceremony. Focusing on the symbolic and mythic paradigms within each of these ceremonies, the discussion explores the various ritual actions, objects and words which join together to give these rituals their meaning.

Chapter Three presents a historical background for understanding why new rituals are currently being developed. Through a presentation of the changes which have affected the American Jewish community over the past thirty years, it becomes clear why these new Jewish rituals are deemed necessary by significant segments of the community. The chapter continues by developing a set of criteria which can be used in the analysis of new Jewish rituals.

Chapter Four analyzes approximately one hundred rituals collected for this thesis. Dividing the ceremonies into categories according to the life stage which they address, the chapter examines each group of rituals to understand what symbols and mythic paradigms are used to connect the participants to Jewish community and tradition.

Finally, Chapter Five brings together the previously presented information into a discussion of how new Jewish rituals can be created. This "guide for the rabbi" explores the questions which must be asked and the issues that must be raised when one is creating or adapting Jewish rituals for the future.

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Introduction

Ritual has always been an essential part of Jewish tradition and Jewish cultural life. As we look back over Judaism as it has developed in the last two thousand years, we can observe the creation and renovation of rituals and ceremonies which mark holiday celebrations and major life-cycle events.

Simple actions such as lighting of candles on Shabbat, Yom Tov, and Chanukah as well as the twisted candle lit for havdalah are part of the ritual play which defines what it means for us to act as Jews. Other symbols, including wine, shofar, and matzah, represent for us important links with moments and actions from a Jewish past and enable us to retain the joy and memories of those vital traditions as we journey into a Judaism of the future.

The same patterns hold true for Jewish life-cycle events. The circumcision of a newborn son on the eighth day after his birth connects us to hundreds of generations of Jews who practiced this rite despite the often enormous oppression they faced. The bride and groom who join together under the chuppah (wedding canopy) mark the beginning of their new home and family under a traditional symbol of the shelter they will create together. They share wine and blessings which connect them to Jews through time and space and conclude their ceremony by breaking a glass, an act rich in symbolic meaning. Even at the time of our death, Judaism remains an integral part of our life and the lives of those around us. It is often said that even the least

traditional Jews reach towards tradition during the moments of sorrow and grief following the death of a loved one. The Jewish rituals surrounding a funeral and mourning are some of the most psychologically sound ways to facilitate grief. Despite their age, they have not lost their relevance or power as a result of modernity or assimilation.

When we enact ritual during important times in our lives, or use ritual to mark significant moments which have recently past, we can fulfill many of our psychological and sociological needs which are not met through silence or solitude. Our lives are full of changes, and change provokes feelings of fear and anxiety. Ritual allows us the opportunity to structure that change so that the steps become clearer and the process less unexpected. It allows us to recognize the moment of transformation created by the crisis or celebration, helping us to feel seen and heard. Whenever we are involved in a significant moment, our lives change. We enter the moment as one person, with one consciousness, and we are transformed by the experience so that we exit from that event somehow different. Ritual is the symbolic play through which we mark that change. Through the use of ritual objects, ritual acts and ritual incantations, we are given an opportunity to refocus our search for meaning and connect to something greater than ourselves. For Jews, that something may be Jewish tradition, Jewish community, or God.

And so we must explore the various ways in which Jewish ritual addresses the transitional moments in our lives. Clearly there are many significant events in one's life as a Jew which are marked by traditional Jewish rituals. But, as Rabbi Laura Geller points out in the following story, there are moments which continue to pass by unnoticed within Jewish tradition:

One day, as I sat in a class in my Rabbinical seminary... we studied the tradition of berakhot-- blessings, blessings of enjoyment, blessings related to the performance of mitzvot (commandments) and blessings of praise and thanksgiving. My teacher explained... "There is no important moment in the lifetime of a Jew for which there is no blessing." Suddenly I realized that it was not true. There had been important moments in my life for which there was no blessing. One such moment was... when I first got my period.¹

Rabbi Geller, of course, is not the only one to have noticed this gap. As the recent flood of new rituals will attest, many contemporary American Jews have become increasingly aware of the lack of traditional Jewish rituals to mark some of the significant transitional moments in their lives. Both men and women are seeking to create new ceremonies which will help them articulate meaning during these important times. If these new rituals possess true Jewish resonance, then they will provide not only a sense of order and meaning for their participants during an unfamiliar moment of change, but also enable those

¹ Laura Geller, "Symposium: What Kind of Tikkun Does the World Need?" Tikkun 1, no. 1 (1986), p. 17.

involved to feel reconnected to the Jewish community, to aspects of Jewish tradition, and to God.

This thesis will analyze some of the new and creative rituals which have been developed over the past twenty years to address the needs mentioned above. Through an exploration of why we need ritual and how ritual works, as well as an examination of several traditional Jewish rituals and ritual symbols, I will develop a set of criteria which can be used to evaluate existing rituals and guide the rabbi towards the creation of successful and meaningful new ones. In addition, I hope to provide some directional guidance which will assist the rabbi in determining when it is appropriate to suggest ritual to a congregant as a way to facilitate movement through a transitional moment.

It is important to acknowledge here that I recognize and respect those rabbis and lay people in the field who feel that only time can determine whether a new ritual is "working" or not. I also recognize those who would say that to define what makes a ritual "Jewish" is to limit the autonomy for which our movement has stood and to impose a hierarchical standard on what is clearly a creative endeavor. Still, as this is an academic piece of writing, written with a grounding in Jewish tradition, it is important to define where the boundaries exist for me as a creator and researcher of such rituals. Judaism has provided thousands of years of beautiful and meaningful traditions. These precious gifts cannot be disregarded simply because they were created within a patriarchal

structure. Change must grow from within or we lose what it means to be Jewish. As we continue to reform and reconstruct Judaism, in part by creating new rituals to address needs previously unseen, we must remember that, at least for now, what it means to be Jewish is still that which is recognizable as Jewish by the majority of the Jewish community, and which bears recognizable links to Jewish tradition, its symbols and rituals.

Chapter 1

Why Ritual? And What's Wrong with the Old Ones Anyway?

Ritual affects us in two different ways: as individuals, and as members of communities. As a result, the subject of ritual studies falls under several disciplines. In this chapter, we will explore two different perspectives on how ritual works and why we need it in our lives.

A Psychological Perspective

Our lives are ever changing: from moment to moment, from day to day, from year to year. As humans, such changes are difficult because we like patterns and set ways of living. This understanding is the basis for the Life Experience Inventory developed by Dr. John Schneider to measure the amount of stress a person experiences based on the number of significant changes which have recently taken place in one's life.¹ According to Dr. Schneider, the connection between change and stress is clear. Change disorders our lives and in doing so creates anxiety and fear. Ritual helps relieve some of those stressful feelings by placing order and familiarity back into our lives.

The term, "ritual," can be used to describe even the simplest of structured acts which enable us to create and experience meaning within our lives and our community. Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts, in their

¹ As cited in Christine Ann Leatz, Unwinding: How to Turn Stress into Positive Energy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 19.

psychological exploration of modern rituals, describe the purpose of ritual in the following way:

Rituals surround us and offer opportunities to make meaning from the familiar and the mysterious at the same time. Built around common symbols and symbolic actions... rituals bestow protected time and space to stop and reflect on life's transformations.... They connect us with our past, define our present life, and show us a path to our future as we pass on ceremonies, traditions, objects, symbols, and ways of being with each other, handed down from previous generations.²

Rituals such as saying goodbye before leaving for work, reading a story to a child before putting her to bed, or making a wish before blowing out the candles on a birthday cake all hold power because they take simple actions and invest them with symbolic meaning, helping us feel the order and consistency necessary to move forward in our lives despite the fear of changes ahead. With this in mind, Imber-Black and Roberts describe four types of rituals that affect our lives: daily rituals, family traditions, holiday rituals, and life-cycle celebrations.³ To understand the importance of life-cycle rituals in our lives, we must understand the psychological importance of these other ritual moments as well.

From the simple rituals that affect our daily lives to the more complex family and holiday traditions which our family and community have developed,

² Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts, Rituals For Our Times (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), pp. 3-4.

³ Ibid.

we are constantly learning and reinforcing the importance of ritual and symbolism in our lives. Daily rituals, as such, teach us the basic patterns which place rhythm and structure into our lives and enable us to function without having to renegotiate each situation anew. Even before we are old enough to cognitively understand, we begin to recognize symbols and symbolic actions as representative of powerful meanings. The goodnight kiss from a parent or the teddy bear we cling to at night each holds within it a sense of security and safety that cannot be expressed through words alone. As we grow older, the symbols and actions may change, but the messages which such daily rituals convey often remain the same.

Family traditions and holiday celebrations represent two sides of the yearly calendar and help to teach us how we mark significant events with ritual. Imber-Black and Roberts describe these two categories as "the inside calendar" and "the outside calendar" respectively. In the case of family traditions, we learn ritual and symbolism through the celebration or commemoration of important events in our family life, such as birthdays and anniversaries. Because some of these traditions are culture-bound, that is, they originate in the culture, not the family, there exist common symbols which most American families use as part of their family rituals. We share a cake for a birthday or exchange gifts for an anniversary. Still other symbols may be distinct to a

given family and are passed on from generation to generation, imbuing them with even more meaning.

Holiday celebrations have the same characteristics. Many of these ritual acts and symbols, because they originate within the larger culture and not in the individual family, are consistent throughout a given society, such as a turkey on Thanksgiving or a seder on Passover. Still other symbols or symbolic actions may be unique to a given family or sub-group within the main culture. All of these actions, which are repeated year after year, give us models for how we should live our lives because they symbolize or embody certain values. Indirectly, they teach us that meaning can be created and changes can be tolerated if we maintain a system of symbols and symbolic actions which connect us to our past while enabling us to move forward into the future.

Life-cycle rituals can also provide a sense of security by helping us to recognize the changes which are taking place within the family and community. According to Imber-Black and Roberts, "Acknowledging these times can help us to stop and understand the implications of the changes, as well as alert the larger community to the shifts and bring in their support."⁴ These rituals, however, differ in several ways from the rituals mentioned above. Because most life-cycle rituals only occur once to each person, they carry a greater

⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

sense of mystery and sacredness. These rituals are usually public events, occurring in connection with organized religion, and thus changing the dynamic of time and space by leaving the secular and introducing elements of the sacred. Also, since life-cycle rituals mark major life changes (as compared to the smaller changes which are represented by daily, family and holiday rituals), they must address more complex questions regarding the search for meaning and purpose in our lives. It is for this reason that Imber-Black and Roberts emphasize the need to integrate well understood traditions into the creation of a life-cycle ritual:

Life-cycle rituals use familiar symbols and symbolic actions in order to ease what would otherwise be unfamiliar changes.... Since life-cycle changes generally occur only once in a person's life, rituals that are deeply embedded in history and in a given culture provide a map for personally uncharted territory.⁵

This is an important point and one to which I will return later as I discuss criteria for evaluating new life-cycle rituals.

In addition to describing the various ways through which ritual enters our lives, Imber-Black and Roberts also explain what they consider to be the five ways that rituals work for us. Ritual, according to this theory, can involve:

relating, the shaping, expressing, and maintaining of important relationships...changing, the making and marking of transitions for self and others....healing, the recovery from loss,...believing, the

⁵ Ibid., p. 269.

voicing of beliefs and the making of meaning....[and] finally, celebrating, the expression of deep joy and the honoring of life with festivity.⁶

Each of these categories is an important element in defining and evaluating whether a ritual is successful in achieving its goal. Not every ritual will contain each of these elements, but they give us a guide to begin searching for how the psychological needs of the ritual participants are met through the acting-out of a given ritual. This seems particularly important when speaking about life-cycle rituals, since they are not repeated and therefore must meet the needs of the participants the first time through.

Certainly the ideas presented by Imber-Black and Roberts offer only one psychological perspective on ritual and the meaning it has in our lives. They have, however, had significant impact on the way I view ritual and the development of the systematic analysis for ritual which this thesis will present. Equally influential have been the theories of Victor Turner, who analyzes and contributes to the basic sociological theories on rites of passage first developed by Arnold van Gennep.⁷

⁶ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁷ See A. van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

A Sociological\Anthropological Perspective

Turner's theory of ritual, particularly with respect to rites of passage, is greatly influenced by the model set forth by van Gennep. According to Turner:

Van Gennep himself defined "rites de passage" as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age"....rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a "state"); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and "structural" type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards.⁸

It is this three-stage process which Turner further develops in his writings, focusing mostly on the issues surrounding the second stage, that of liminality.

Turner bases his argument on the idea of society as existing structure, and argues that ritual provides for the opposite of that structure, an "anti-structure" which Turner labels "communitas."⁹ This anti-structure allows for

⁸ Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 94.

⁹ See Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), particularly pp. 94-130.

all things to be equal during that time of liminality which exists as the changes within a rite of passage are symbolized. According to Turner's theory, ritual does not only include the "before" status and the "after" status, but also the "middle" status, the moment during which we have left one set realm of reality and not quite entered a new state, during which the transformation must happen. In this state of liminality, all things become possible. Based on his research of African tribal rituals, particularly those of initiation, Turner concludes that the "liminal persona," the person who is in that in-between state, is caught in a "structural invisibility" where s/he no longer fits into any existing societal status.¹⁰ This "betwixt and between" allows room for growth and change without the threatening pressures that would accompany such changes if they were to take place within a more structured system. As Turner reminds us, "People can 'be themselves,' it is frequently said, when they are not acting in institutionalized roles."¹¹ The process of liminality eliminates those roles and provides the safety necessary to promote transition.

There is one key reason why it is difficult to extrapolate from Turner's theories to Jewish ritual. Most Jewish rituals do not have a lengthy period of liminality. Certainly there is no period of physical separation from the remainder of the community in preparation for any given Jewish life-cycle

¹⁰ Turner, Forest of Symbols, p. 96.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 101.

event. Whether such a separation exists as part of any new Jewish rituals has yet to be seen. Even so, it would be difficult minimally to evaluate whether such a period of separation was based on the ideas of liminality and *communitas* or rather on a general feeling of disenfranchisement by the individuals participating in the ritual. Still, Turner's work has greatly influenced the way in which we see ritual today, including the work of Imber-Black and Roberts quoted above. The importance placed on a reflective phase during a ritual moment cannot be underestimated. As Turner explains, "During the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection."¹² This moment in time during which the structure of our daily lives can be placed aside and our energies can focus on assessing the meaning in our lives is one of the key motivating factors for the creation of new rituals in our modern society. The desire momentarily to abandon time and space and reconnect to all generations past, present, and future through symbolic acts, objects, and words is an essential element in the recent push for ritual innovation. As we establish this sense of *communitas*, even if just for a brief moment, we allow for a

¹² Ibid., p. 105.

sacred time in which hierarchy disappears and all things remain equal with potential.

In his work, The Magic of Ritual, Tom F. Driver further explains the relevance of Turner's theories for understanding ritual in modern western society. Driver elaborates on importance of community as an essential part of ritual:

Rituals are inherently communal, while at the same time being imaginative and playful, even when most serious. They become bearers of *communitas*, which is a spirit of unity and mutual belonging that is frequently experienced in rituals of high energy,... In their liminality, rituals exist outside many of the rules and expectations society normally imposes upon behavior.... The liminality of rituals means that they are informed, on the one hand, by a greater than usual sense of order and, on the other, by a heightened sense of freedom and possibility.¹³

Rituals both depend upon community and build community. Anthropological and sociological discussions of rituals examine their role not only for the individual, but for the community as well. Rituals become necessary out of our need to maintain order not only in our private lives, but in our interactions with other people. They help us to define ourselves and our status within the community by providing opportunities to exit previously held roles and enter into new ones. The power which Turner accredits to *communitas* and periods

¹³ Tom F. Driver, The Magic of Ritual (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p. 164.

of liminality is the power which Driver describes above. It strips the community of the boundaries which confine it, but does so in an orderly, structured manner which provides the safety necessary to allow for such change. In modern western rituals, this power still holds sway, despite the limited period of liminality.

In addition to his work in the area of liminality, Turner also presents us with an important model by which to understand symbols and symbolic actions as metaphors for other elements in life.¹⁴ According to Turner, every community has a system of "root metaphors" or "conceptual archetypes" which represent the base concepts upon which comparisons can be built. The new symbols may not use the root metaphors or conceptual archetypes explicitly, but will use analogous extensions to perpetuate the beliefs implied in the base concepts. Ritual, as a system of symbols and symbolic actions which carry the individual and community through important moments, uses these root metaphors as a common language with the expectation that those participating will understand and internalize their meaning. For example, it is expected that those who participate in a brit milah (covenant of circumcision) ritual have some understanding of the various symbols and symbolic acts which will occur

¹⁴ See Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), particularly chapter 1.

and have internalized the connection between the circumcision of a male child (the "milah") and the covenant with God (the "brit").

Transformation

In both the psychological and the socio-anthropological understandings of life-cycle ritual, transformation plays an important role. Psychologically, transformation is one of the ends of most rituals. Even those rituals which do not by themselves produce a transformation often mark a transformation which has recently taken place. Rituals help us to process the changes which are taking place in our lives and, in doing so, they enable us to move from one state of understanding to another. This transition occurs by making use of symbols and symbolic actions which help us to connect to the sacred, that is, to ultimate reality and value, and find greater meaning in our lives. From a socio-anthropological standpoint, transformation also occurs as status changes and the relationship of the individual to the community is redefined. This change is clearest during rituals such as a wedding or a funeral. It also occurs in new rituals which seek to generate a community response to an individual's tragedy or success.

Why New Rituals?

New rituals can respond to the needs of certain segments of the Jewish population in situations where traditional rituals are deemed insufficient. Clearly, the desire to use ritual as a way to change status and create a voice is one of the reasons that most contemporary ritual innovation has been instigated by segments of the community which are not satisfied with their status in the community as a whole.¹⁵ In their earliest forms, creative rituals began with creative liturgies, growing out of the youth and camping movements of the 1960s and 1970s and developing further in the Jewish counterculture of the late 1960s and 1970s as some of those same young people moved from high school to college. Unhappy with the status quo, these young people began to respond to their own needs through their own creativity. More recently, groups such as the feminist sub-community and the gay/lesbian/bisexual sub-community have been the primary creators of new Jewish rituals. In a culture where their status is defined by thousands of years of stigmatization, these groups have sought to redefine their roles through rituals which give them a voice within Judaism and, in doing so, create a new sense of understanding within the Jewish community. For these sub-communities, traditional rituals did not meet their needs. Only through creativity, innovation, and reinterpretation of traditional Jewish

¹⁵ See Driver, pp. 165-166 for a further explanation of this phenomenon.

concepts and symbols could these individuals, and the many like them who have felt disenfranchised by mainstream Judaism, begin to feel heard within the larger Jewish community. In doing so, they are able to maintain a connection which otherwise may have been lost.

→ The transformation of American Judaism which is presently taking place, and of which this ritual innovation is a significant indicator, cannot be underestimated. What began as a desire to provide equivalent ceremonies for baby girls to the brit milah for baby boys has grown into a discovery of the many important moments which occur in our lives that have previously not been addressed by Jewish ritual. It has led to a redefinition of life-cycle passages and new opportunities to explore those moments which lend themselves to recognition through Jewish symbols, prayers, and communal support. Exactly how this new understanding is playing out in rituals will be further discussed in Chapter Three and Four.

Conclusion

This theoretical basis provides us with the concepts and issues necessary to begin examining the various elements which contribute to meaningful Jewish ritual. In the next chapter, as I explore some traditional Jewish rituals and ritual symbols, it will be important to keep in mind the various implications, both psychological and sociological, which ritual can have for the individual

and community. The discussion provided in this chapter will form the basic framework through which these rituals and the new rituals described in Chapter Four will be explored. Further criteria will be developed as we begin to see what makes a ritual a "Jewish" ritual.

Chapter Two Examining the Old: A Look at Some Traditional Rituals and Ritual Elements

Before we begin to analyze some of the hundreds of new and adapted rituals which have been created over the past twenty-five years, we must look into our own historical tradition. There we can start to see how Jewish ritual has worked in the past and try to understand what gives certain elements and symbols staying power so that, even in this age of creativity, these old Jewish totems continue to be recycled and renewed.

Two Traditional Jewish Life-Cycle Rituals

There are several life-cycle events that have been part of Jewish tradition for close to two thousand years. While the exact elements of the rituals may have changed, Jews, whenever possible, have marked the birth of a male child through brit milah and gotten married through the stages of erusin (betrothal) and nissuin (marriage) and with the signing of a ketubah (wedding contract). These rituals have survived times of war and peace, oppression and exile. The customs have changed, but the essential elements have remained the same. Even today, most Jews circumcise their sons, although not necessarily as part of a complete Jewish ritual, and many Jews, even those who marry non-Jews, include basic Jewish rituals acts and objects in their wedding ceremonies.

What gives these symbols their staying power? In some ways, this question can never be exactly answered. At the same time, when we examine

those elements that make up the ceremonies of brit milah and a Jewish wedding, we can see how each of these symbols and the words spoken serve to connect the participants to the Jewish community and to Jewish tradition. They fulfill many of the psychological and sociological needs which have been presented earlier and facilitate a change in status which is not possible without such ritual. Indeed, these symbols are public, ancient and "objective." They remain powerful because they define Jewish identity at significant moments and associate us with our larger family.

Brit Milah

The brit milah ritual can be traced in origin back to the Torah and the time of Abraham. In Genesis 17:10-14, as God is speaking to Abraham, the Torah reports to us:

Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days....Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pace. And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant.¹

¹ All Biblical quotations are taken from Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

This ritual enables us to symbolize the covenant with God through a physical, permanent marking on the organ of procreation. As the aggadic and halakhic material on the subject of brit milah confirm, this positive mitzvah is considered essential within the Jewish community. Additionally it is a basic social marker, serving in the ancient world as a permanent identification of a Jewish male vis a vis a non-Jewish male.

There are many traditional passages which point to the significance of brit milah. The Babylonian Talmud, in Tractate Shabbat (132a), teaches us that the mitzvah (commandment) of circumcision overrides the prohibitions of work on Shabbat. This, we learn, is because the Torah states in Leviticus 12:3, "And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised," that is during the day, on that specific day, even if it occurs on Shabbat. The same reasoning holds when the eighth day is on a festival, even Yom Kippur. Only if a child was born via a Caesarian section, was born without a foreskin, or is too ill to be circumcised on the eighth day should the father wait instead of celebrating brit milah on Shabbat. The punishment, according to the Talmud, for failing to complete the mitzvah of brit milah at the proper time is karet (cutting one off from the community; Kerithoth 2a).² On the other hand,

² Bernard M. Zlotowitz, "Circumcision in Early Halacha: Mishna and Talmud," in Lewis M. Barth, ed., Berit Milah in the Reform Context, (Brit Milah Board of Reform Judaism, 1990), p. 171.

however, once a Jew is circumcised, he is eligible to enter haolam habah (the world to come; b. Sanhedrin 110b).³ While circumcision is mentioned on many other occasions in the Talmud, it is the Mishnah which tells us how wonderful milah is, in the litany of praises which are found in tractate Nedarim (3:11):

Rabbi Ishmael says: Circumcision is great [i.e., an exceedingly important mitzvah], because with respect to it thirteen covenants were made [i.e. the word berit is mentioned thirteen times in Genesis 17]. Rabbi Jose says: Circumcision is great, because it supersedes even the stringent prohibition [against work] on the Sabbath (see Mishnah Shabbat 19:1). Rabbi Joshua ben Karha says: Circumcision is great, because on its account [the threat of punishment even] for Moses [neglecting to circumcise his sons] was not delayed so much as an hour (see Exodus 4:24 ff.)....Rabbi says: Circumcision is great, because, of all the mitzvot which Abraham performed, he was not called "perfect" until he was circumcised, as it is said, "Walk before Me and be perfect" (Genesis 17:1)...."⁴

The ritual itself contains many connections to Jewish history and tradition while welcoming a new Jewish generation into the covenant with God. First we will examine the traditional ritual and then we will look at the present Reform version as outlined in the Rabbi's Manual of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

³ Ibid.

⁴ As quoted in Lewis Barth, "Berit Milah in Midrash and Agada," Berit Milah in the Reform Context, p. 112.

The traditional brit milah ceremony⁵ can be analyzed based on its content as comprising three elements: words of Torah, prayer, and blessing; ritual objects; and ritual actions. Each of these elements is present in a traditional Jewish ritual and their combination provides the opportunity for connection to a Judaism which is timeless.

The ritual objects which are part of the brit milah ceremony include the kiseh Eliyahu (Elijah's chair), the kiddush cup, the surgical tools which are used by the mohel to perform the circumcision, and possibly candles or a wimpel. There are also a number of people who serve ritual roles during the brit milah, including the kvater (godfather) and the kvaterin (godmother), the sandek, the mohel, the parents, and the child himself. Each of these elements has a tradition or purpose associated with it and holds symbolic significance during this important life-cycle event. It is through the people and objects that the ritual actions are able to take place.

The kiseh Eliyahu is a chair which is set aside in honor of Elijah the prophet (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 265:11).⁶ While there are several possible explanations for the presence of Elijah's chair, the most common one

⁵ The traditional brit milah ceremony explained here comes from Hyman E. Goldin, Hamadrikh: The Rabbi's Guide, revised edition (New York, 1939), pp. 33-37; and Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, Brit Milah: Circumcision -- The Covenant of Abraham (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1985), pp. 118-137.

⁶ Krohn, p. 97, note 40.

is traced back to a story in Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer XXIX. In one version of this story, Elijah becomes zealous for God when the kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) prevent their people from performing circumcision (in another version, when the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom abandon circumcision). In response to Elijah's zeal, God exclaims, "The children of Israel shall perform no circumcision unless thou seest it with thine eyes." The story continues to tell us that "since then the sages have ordained that a seat of honor be set aside for the Angel of the Covenant who is Elijah,"⁷ as an eternal witness to the Jews' conformity to the terms of this covenant. From this midrash, we learn that the chair of Elijah symbolizes Israel's public faithfulness to the covenant as demonstrated through the performance of brit milah.

After the child has been brought into the room and some words have been said, the child is placed into this chair before the actual milah (Sefer HaRokeach).⁸ While the child is in the chair, various biblical verses, which will be explicated below, are recited, and Elijah is formally welcomed to the ceremony, thus invoking the mythic context of the ritual.

The kiddish cup which is used during a child's brit milah can be chosen so that it holds significance for the family involved. Either a cup which has been part of the family can be used, or a new cup, which will then belong to

⁷ Goldin, pp. 28-29, note 15.

⁸ Krohn, p. 97, note 41.

the baby boy can be selected. Following the circumcision itself, as part of the naming ceremony, a blessing is recited over the wine which serves as a symbol of the joy we feel at this occasion. It is drunk by the one who recites the blessing and a few drops are given to the baby by the mohel at a designated time during the recitation of the prayers.

The surgical tools which are used by the mohel become ritual objects because of their purpose. The circumcision of the infant is indeed the most significant ritual act which takes place as part of the brit milah. It is through this act that the covenant between God and the Jewish people is continued for another generation and is inscribed upon the flesh. This physical marking is significant because it cannot be erased. In Chapter Four, as we explore new rituals for marking the birth of a child, we will see that there is often a search to find a physical act for baby girls which can replicate the powerful symbolism embodied in circumcision. In modern times, when many non-Jewish baby boys are circumcised in the hospital and when many mohalim use the same surgical utensils used by doctors who perform circumcisions of non-Jewish infants, it is important to remember that the religious significance of the circumcision act itself is through the ritual which surrounds the surgery and which reminds us of the covenant with God. It is for this reason that controversy has arisen surrounding the various clamps which can be used as part of the circumcision surgery. An important element in the symbolic significance of brit milah is the

drawing forth of a drop of blood. Therefore, those clamps which provide hemostasis immediately without allowing for the drop of blood are not acceptable for traditional milah.⁹ Furthermore, tradition teaches us that the circumcision must be performed with a metal knife (Yoreh Deah 264:2) and that it must be sharpened on both edges so as to avoid further injury to the child by cutting with the blunt edge (Derech Pikudecha).¹⁰

It is traditional to have candles at the brit milah ceremony (Yoreh Deah 265:5).¹¹ The number of candles varies according to community minhag (custom), and the explanations for these ritual objects are many. One interpretation is that the candles commemorate

the times when Jews, because of persecution, could not make public announcements regarding a bris. Instead, they placed candles in the windows of their home as a covert signal that a bris was to take place there (see Sanhedrin 32b, with Rashi and Tosafos). The candles thus symbolize the courage and dedication that Jews have always had for the mitzvah of milah.¹²

Another interpretation teaches us that

Every child is a new spark of life, and the spark within a human being is his God-given soul. Thus the verse, [Neir Hashem

⁹ Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), pp. 422-3.

¹⁰ Krohn, p. 98, notes 49 and 50.

¹¹ Krohn, p. 96, note 34.

¹² Krohn, p. 75.

Nishmat Adam], "The candle of God is the soul of man" (Proverbs 20:27), may be an additional source for lighting candles at a bris, for it commemorates the entrance of a newborn's soul into this world (see Tanchuma, Behaalosecha, 3; Zohar, Shelach).¹³

These interpretations provide symbolic meaning for the candles, the symbolism of which otherwise might seem obscure.

The wimpel is a cloth in which the child is wrapped when he is brought into the room for his brit milah. It is a German tradition, in which the cloth itself will take on symbolic meaning following the ceremony, when it is decorated to include the child's name and other Jewish artifacts which it is hoped will represent the child's life. The wimpel is usually then presented to the synagogue to be used as a binder for the Torah scroll, thus symbolizing the child's vital attachment to Torah, its study and observance.

The people who participate in the brit milah ceremony are no less significant than the ritual objects, for without the people, there could be no ritual. It is the parents and the child himself who give reason for the ritual to occur. Tradition teaches us that the father is commanded to circumcise his son (Kiddushin 29a; Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Milah I,1; Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 260). Indeed, it is his first Jewish responsibility for the child. If the father does not know how to perform the circumcision himself, he

¹³ Krohn, pp. 75-76.

may designate someone else to perform the mitzvah in his place. This designated person is the mohel, who acts as the father's agent. In addition to performing the circumcision, the mohel will usually act as the ritual facilitator, leading the blessings and prayers which are said as part of the ritual and instructing the participants in their duties. The mother has no active role in the brit milah ritual itself. Her primary responsibility is to care for the child before and after the ceremony.

The kvater and kvaterin are the man and woman designated to carry the child into the room at the time of the circumcision and return the child to his mother once the ritual is over. This designation is an honor, usually bestowed upon close friends or family. The sandek, often referred to as the ba'al habrit, is the most honored person in the brit milah ritual. It is this person, also usually a relative, who is designated to hold the baby during the circumcision.

The words which constitute the brit milah ceremony are equally significant. When the child is brought into the room, the community welcomes him with the words, Baruch habah ("Blessed be the one who comes"). These words are given additional meaning because the word habah numerically adds up to the number eight, symbolizing the eighth day on which the circumcision is performed. The same word can also be interpreted to represent an acronym for Hinei bah Eliyahu ("Here comes Elijah"), as we welcome Elijah into the room with the baby.

Throughout the ritual, various biblical verses are recited. At the beginning of the ceremony, a verse from Genesis (17:1) is recited, connecting the event to the circumcision of Abraham. Indeed, this one verse, "Walk before me and be perfect," sets the framework for the relationship which milah creates between God and Abraham. The presence of the foreskin was all that was keeping Abraham from being perfect in God's eyes. Through circumcision, Abraham was perfected. So too at this ritual, the circumcision is construed as perfecting the body, allowing this child to be like Abraham who walked with God. Later, as the child is placed into the kiseh Eliyahu, various verses from Genesis and Psalms are read, speaking of Elijah and praising God for providing help and salvation. These verses place the ritual into an ageless and mythic context. Following the circumcision, the child is given a Hebrew name. This is done through the recitation of other biblical verses including Proverbs 23:25, Ezekiel 16:6, Psalms 105:8-10, Genesis 21:4 and Psalms 118:1. It is following the recitation of Ezekiel 16:6, "Because of your blood you shall live" that the child is given a few drops of the wine which represents the joy of life and the blood of the covenant. Here, the blood, which is often a symbol of death or impairment, becomes a symbol of life and life eternal.

Prayers and blessings also play a major role in the brit milah ceremony. Before the circumcision, the father and/or the mohel acknowledge their readiness to perform the circumcision. The mohel then recites the blessing,

Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al ha-milah, ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision"), publicly recognizing that the action which follows is being performed for the sake of fulfilling and acknowledging a divine commandment. After the circumcision is performed, or according to some authorities, while it is being performed, the father recites the following blessing: Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hachniso bivrito shel Avraham Avinu ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to enter him into his covenant of Abraham, our father."). This once again connects us to the mythic context in which this ritual occurs, giving the action of circumcision its transcendent meaning by linking the participants with Abraham, the first Jew, and renewing the covenant which originated with him. In response, the community continues with the words: K'shem shenichnas labrit, kein yikaneis l'torah ul'chupah ul'ma'asim tovim, ("As he has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into [the study of] Torah, the marriage canopy, and [the performance of] good deeds,") thus acknowledging that the child has started down the path of correct Jewish socialization and hoping that he will continue down that path.

Four other blessings complete the brit milah ceremony. The first of these is the blessing over the wine. It is followed by a blessing of kiddish, sanctification, for the baby and the covenant. In this blessing, asher kidesh y'did mibeten, ("who has sanctified the beloved one from [his mother's] womb) the mythic connection to our ancestors is once again reinforced. While there are various opinions as to whom the word y'did refers (some say it is Abraham, some Isaac, and some Jacob), the most accepted tradition is that it refers to Isaac who was the first Jewish child to be born and the first to be circumcised by his father. Just as Isaac was entered into the covenant by his father, so this child before us will be entered into the covenant by his own father or his representative.

At this moment in the ritual, the child who has been brought into the covenant is still nameless. He could be, and symbolically is, anyone and everyone. "All Jewish history flows through this child, who is simultaneously Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the hoped-for messiah; his father, his grandfather, and every Jewish man who ever was or ever will be." ¹⁴ Identity is solidified and this moment ended as the child is given his name, the name by which he will be known in all of Israel. He is connected to those who came before him

¹⁴ Laura Geller, "Brit Milah and Brit Banot," Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones, Volume I, Debra Orenstein, ed. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994), p. 61.

by virtue of the naming formula (child's name, son of father's name). This is followed by the recitation of biblical verses that recall the covenant and the command for milah, showing those present that, indeed, this mitzvah is timeless. Finally, we are pointed towards the future as the child is wished a good life, full of Torah, chuppah, and ma'asim tovim. These same symbols are referred to in the fourth and final blessing, the misheberakh prayer which invokes God's blessing upon the child with the wish for a complete recovery, and once again reminds us of the dreams which our people hold for this child, that he may learn Torah, be married under a chuppah, and perform good deeds. It is with these words of Torah, prayer and blessing that we are connected to Jewish tradition past, present, and future. The words themselves are frequently centuries old, the blessing formulas are familiar to anyone Jewish, and the connections to the patriarchs, as well as the wishes for a healthy and happy future, point to Judaism as a timeless continuum.

The Reform ritual varies somewhat from the traditional ritual, but it still preserves many of the essential elements which enable the traditional ritual to maintain its meaning and draw Jewish connections for those who are participating. Some of the biblical verses used in the traditional liturgy are left out of the Reform ceremony and various English readings are added instead. Also, while the blessings said before and after the circumcision are the same, the benediction, asher kidesh y'did mibeten, is not included in the Reform

liturgy. Many of these changes are clearly in keeping with the modern views which Reform Judaism tries to integrate. Those elements of the traditional ritual which are view as superstitions have been eliminated and the English readings which have been added are part of the Reform tendency to use the vernacular so that more participants can understand the meaning of what is occurring. This is most likely why references to the kiseh Eliyahu are eliminated with the exception of a stage note to the leader. Finally, the ritual is ended with the birkat kohanim, which is not part of the traditional brit milah ceremony, but represent a traditional blessing formula for all happy occasions.

The Wedding

The elements which comprise a Jewish wedding fall into the same three categories as those in the brit milah. Traditions surrounding a Jewish wedding are many and complex. The most significant ritual objects include the chuppah, the ketubah, the rings, two kiddish cups, and the glass to be broken. These objects are used as the rabbi, bride, groom, and two witnesses proceed to enact various ritual actions which take the participants through the various stages of a Jewish wedding ceremony, including erusin\kiddushin, and nissuin.

The chuppah is the wedding canopy used to represent the future home which the bride and groom will share. It is open on all sides to remind the participants of the tent of Abraham which had doors on all four sides so that

visitors would always feel welcome in his home. The chuppah is also understood to be a sign of God's presence at the wedding. Usually a quilted or decorated canopy, or a large tallit (prayer shawl) is used, although there are no halakhic requirements about the dimensions, shape, or decoration for a chuppah. It is usually supported by four poles, and is either set up as a stationary structure before the wedding or carried in as the first part of the processional.¹⁵ It is the bride and groom who must stand under the chuppah, although often others stand there with them. Traditionally, the chuppah is not required for erusin/kiddushin, but only for nissuin,¹⁶ since this is the part of the ritual which is representative of the bride and groom living together (kenisah l'chuppah, entering the chuppah). Still, it is common for the bride and groom to stand under the chuppah for the entire ceremony.

The ketubah is the Jewish legal document which makes a marriage official. Traditionally, the ketubah is not a contract between the bride and groom, but rather it is a one-sided agreement in which two witnesses testify to the fact that the groom has agreed to support the bride and provide for her in accordance with the minimal guidelines set forth in the ketubah document. While the bride's role in the ketubah is only to accept her future husband's

¹⁵ See Anita Diamant, The New Jewish Wedding (New York: Summit Books, 1985), pp. 91-97.

¹⁶ Maurice Lamm, The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 212.

proposal of marriage and support, the terms set forth therein are the culmination of negotiations between both sides. The ketubah itself is designed to protect the bride's rights and to explicate the responsibilities of the groom. Because it is a binding legal commitment, the ketubah is written in Aramaic, the legal language of Talmud rather than Hebrew, the language of prayer and Torah. In this way, it is not confusingly misunderstood as a ceremonial document.¹⁷ The ketubah makes no mention of God, nor does it address the subjects of love or trust. Additionally, while the ketubah does discuss certain domestic issues between husband and wife, nowhere does it address the establishment of a Jewish home.¹⁸

In modern times, the ketubah has often taken a different form. The Conservative movement has approved an additional paragraph for ketubot in which the bride and groom agree to recognize the beit din of the Rabbinical Assembly as an authority to counsel them and enforce judgements if problems (such as divorce) should arise.¹⁹ This protects the bride from becoming an agunah (a bound woman, one who is legally married even though her husband is not present) if she and her husband should separate and he is unwilling to grant her a divorce. Various other changes have been made by modern Jews to

¹⁷ Lamm, pp. 197-198.

¹⁸ Diamant, p. 71.

¹⁹ Klein, p. 393.

make the ketubah into an egalitarian document and to change the emphasis of the document from a focus on meeting material needs to a focus on emotional and spiritual needs.²⁰

The ring is another part of the legal acquisition which comprises a Jewish wedding. According to Jewish law, a man must essentially purchase his wife from her father or herself through the exchange of something of nominal value.²¹ This action is known as kinyan (acquisition). Similar to entering under the chuppah, which is also kinyan, this action creates a sense of obligation which each partner has vis a vis the other. While the valuable object exchanged does not have to be a ring, it has been traditional since the seventh century to use rings as part of the wedding ritual.²² According to Jewish tradition, the ring should be made of plain metal and have no precious stones in it. This is interpreted in many ways, including the idea that just as a circle is without end, so should be the love of this couple and their marriage.²³ Also, the ring should belong to the groom, although he may borrow one if the bride is aware of this. Finally, the ring should be placed by the groom on the bride's index finger, not her ring finger. One explanation for this is that it was

²⁰ For examples of these documents, see Diamant, pp. 84-91.

²¹ Klein, p. 402.

²² Diamant, p. 69.

²³ Klein, p. 403.

believed that the index finger and the heart were directly joined by a special artery and therefore, by placing the ring upon the bride's index finger, the hearts of the bride and groom were joined.²⁴

Because the traditional wedding ceremony is really two rituals, erusin and nissuin, there are two times that we recite blessings over the wine. It is customary to have two separate kiddish cups for these two acts of drinking so that each of these rituals can maintain its own integrity. It is debated exactly who should drink the wine, since the rabbi is usually the one who says the blessing but the wine is actually intended for the couple. Usually, it is only the bride and groom who drink from the kiddish cup and it is assumed that the rabbi has said the blessing on their behalf. Wine is an important symbol in Judaism associated with joy and festivity. Tradition teaches us that, just as wine is used at the beginning and end of Shabbat to sanctify and separate Shabbat from the rest of the week, wine is used at the beginning of a marriage to separate it from that which is prohibited and to sanctify a proper marriage.²⁵

Probably one of the best known customs in Jewish tradition is that of breaking the glass at the end of the wedding. This tradition can be traced back to the Talmud when Mar, son of Ravina, smashed an expensive goblet at his

²⁴ Diamant, pp. 70, 175.

²⁵ Lamm, pp. 215-217.

son's wedding feast because the guests had gotten too boisterous in their celebrating. This act quieted them down immediately (b. Berachot 30b-31a). A similar story is told of Rav Ashi. It was the Tosafists (b. Berachot 31a) who derived the custom of breaking a glass at every Jewish wedding from this passage.²⁶ There are many traditions explaining the significance of breaking the glass. One interpretation is that, even during times of great joy, we must remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the sadness related to that incident. It is a reminder that we still live in a broken world and must work towards tikkun olam (repairing the world). Another tradition teaches us that a marriage is a covenant, not only between two people, but between them and God. In Judaism, it is traditional to "cut" a covenant (as in brit milah), so the breaking of the glass marks that cutting. Two other common interpretations include the idea that the loud noise from the breaking glass will scare away demons whose envy is often attracted to places of beauty and joy, and the breaking of the glass as symbolic of the breaking of the hymen which is a sign of the couple's future sexual union.²⁷

The Jewish wedding ritual itself consists of a structured set of blessings, prayers, and words of legal exchange which provide the transition necessary to move from a state of singlehood to a wedded union. Just as the brit milah

²⁶ Lamm, pp. 228-229.

²⁷ Diamant, p. 190.

ceremony began with words of welcome, a traditional wedding ceremony²⁸ begins with the welcoming of the groom under the chuppah through the recitation of the same words, Baruch habah. The rabbi then continues by reciting Mi adir, a prayer praising God and asking God to bless this groom and bride. Then, as the bride enters the chuppah, she is greeted by the feminine version of the same greeting, Brucha haba'ah and another prayer is recited by the rabbi, praising God as well as the bride and groom.

Blessings are an essential part of the wedding ceremony. During the erusin portion of the ritual, a blessing is said over the wine (Boreh p'rei hagafen) and followed by a longer blessing which explains the mitzvo involved in avoiding forbidden relations and getting married to an acceptable mate. Later in the ceremony, as part of the nissuin ritual, seven blessings are recited for the bride and groom. These blessings begin with the second blessing over a glass of wine. They include blessings which praise God for creation, for making people in God's image, for the restoration of Zion, and for the gladness of the bride and groom. These seven blessings (the sheva brakhot) are the essence of the nissuin ceremony and are recited again each evening for seven days as part of the birkat hamazon (grace after meals) provided there is a minyan (quorum of ten) present.

²⁸ Goldin, pp. 15-21.

The midrashic interpretations of these seven blessings are important to understanding their symbolic significance in the wedding ceremony.²⁹

Following the wine blessing, the next three blessings all refer to acts of creation, reminding us of the mythic connections between this couple and the first couple, Adam and Eve. Just as God created all things, God created man and woman in God's image so that they could perpetuate life. This couple which is joining together through this ceremony is reminiscent of all couples who have joined together through the blessing of God's creation. The fifth blessing changes directions and subjects by recalling Zion, symbolic mother of all Israel, as she rejoices in the joining together of this couple and their symbolic "returning home." We are reminded through this blessing that the joy of the moment is but a foreshadow of the joy we will have at the time of Zion's restoration. The connection to Adam and Eve is continued in the sixth blessing as we are reminded of the joy created in the Garden of Eden which is symbolically represented by the chuppah. Finally, in the seventh blessing, the connection is drawn, through the vision of Jeremiah (33:10-11), between the joy of this couple and the joy of all who are joined under the chuppah – past, present, and future. We remember that, even as the Temple was being

²⁹ These interpretations are explicated in Jacob Neusner, The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation from Birth Through Death, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), pp. 60-65.

destroyed, there was hope that once again voices of gladness, connected to bride and groom, would be heard. As Jacob Neusner explains,

The closing blessing is not merely a literary artifice or a learned allusion to the ancient prophet. It defines the exultant, jubilant climax of this acted-out myth: Just as here and now there stand before us Adam and Eve, so here and now in this wedding, the olden sorrow having been rehearsed, we listen to the voice of gladness that is coming. The joy of this new creation prefigures the joy of the Messiah's coming, hope for which is very present in this hour.... But enchantment is just that. In the end, we are who we are: real man, real woman, and the bridal canopy, which stands for heaven and for Eden, is a prayer shawl stretched on four poles: groom and bride rejoice not as metaphor but as fact.³⁰

The words of legal exchange come in the middle of the wedding ceremony. They may begin with consent by both the groom and the bride to enter into this marriage under their own free will. Then, the rabbi will call upon two witnesses to observe the actual exchange of a ring which legalizes the betrothal. Before the ring is given to the bride, the groom must recite the legal formula, Harei at m'kudeshet li b'taba'at zo k'dat Moshe v'Yisrael, ("Behold you are consecrated unto me with this ring in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel"). In a traditional double ring ceremony, the bride would then give her ring to the groom and recite, Ani l'dodi v'dodi li ("I am my beloved and my beloved is mine"). In an egalitarian wedding, the bride would recite

³⁰ Neusner, pp. 63-64.

the same formula as the groom, only changed into the masculine. After the rings are exchanged, the ketubah is read, completing the legality of the ceremony.

The Reform wedding liturgy, as found in The Rabbi's Manual is different in that it welcomes the bride and groom under the chuppah together in the plural. This is usually followed by a shehechyanu blessing, the generic blessing for rejoicing at a happy event, which is not part of the traditional wedding ceremony. The blessing which follows the first wine blessing has been edited so that it no longer speaks of the prohibitions which marriage avoids, but praises the marriage in its own right. Finally, the service is concluded with the birkat kohanim before the breaking of the glass.

Minyan

One important issue which has not yet been addressed is the issue of public versus private ceremonies. While the brit milah ceremony does not require a minyan of ten adult Jews present for the ritual to occur, it is required for a wedding which is a legal change of status within the community and therefore must be recognized by the community. We know that a minyan is necessary for the recitation of the sheva brachot from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Ketubot (7a) which explains that laws concerning the recitation of these blessings are derived from the Biblical account of the marriage of Boaz and

Ruth. In the story of Ruth, we are told that Boaz, "took ten men of the elders of the city and said, 'Sit down here.' And they sat down" (Ruth 4:2). By requiring a minyan at the wedding ceremony, we reconnect to the mythic paradigm created in the story of the marriage between Boaz and Ruth. The ten men who account for the minyan are considered representative of the ten elders who came before Boaz.

Indeed, the presence of a minyan at a brit milah ceremony is highly encouraged as that ritual also technically changes the child's status by welcoming him into the community and the covenant with God. As part of this process, the community should be represented. Since the minyan symbolizes the entire Jewish people, the purpose of requiring a minyan as part of a ritual is to provide a representative community as a support and witness for the transformation which is to take place.

Conclusions

It is clear that the rituals of brit milah and marriage are rich with mythic symbolism which gives them their power within Jewish tradition. The words which are spoken draw together elements of past history and future wishes within a context of blessing and prayer. The ritual objects, from the kiseh Eliyahu to the chuppah each represent time-honored traditions and meanings which extend well beyond the participants themselves. In addition, each

ceremony has physical actions which draw together the words and objects into a ritual play where meaning is created and timelessness is somehow understood. It is this combination which enables a singular performance, involving specific individuals, to receive a broader, transhistorical, communal set of meaning as the participants "become" their mythic ancestors, if only for a moment.

These elements form the basis of Jewish ritual. They enable the participants to pass through the stages essential for any rite of passage, and they act as a conduit for transformation as the status within the Jewish community of the key player is changed and recognized through public ceremony. As these symbols provide meaning for the participants in traditional rituals, their reinterpretations must provide similar mythic connections for those who participate in the new rituals which will be examined in the next chapters.

Chapter Three
Understanding Historical Contexts
and Establishing Criteria for New Jewish Rituals

The power of traditional Jewish rituals, as presented in the previous chapter, is clear. Why then, would the existing ceremonies which have this power by virtue of their longevity and mythic symbolism not appear to meet the needs of all members of the contemporary Jewish community? To understand the answer to this question, it is important to understand the modern historical context in which contemporary ritual innovation began and continues to grow.

One must first note, however, that ritual innovation in Judaism is not something uniquely modern or contemporary. It has characterized a number of pietist movements throughout Jewish history, including Hasidei Ashkenaz, Lurianic Kabbalah, and eighteenth century Hasidism. Each of these groups had a strong desire to renew or intensify the piety of those involved. One of the ways they accomplished this was to introduce a variety of new rituals into the tradition. So today, while the nature and format of contemporary ritual innovation has some unique aspects, the motivations for such actions are definitely connected to those which inspired these historical movements.

Modern Historical Context

The changes which have take place in American Judaism since World War II have been greatly influenced by the changes in American society and

culture over these decades. A reexamination of social and moral values and influences became most prominent during the 1960s. Several new challenges which would have significant impact on the future of American Judaism began to face the Jewish community at this time. These included the growth of feminism, the influence of a strong counterculture, and the influence of youth movements. As Jack Wertheimer points out in his book, A People Divided:

By virtue of their unusually high levels of educational attainment, Jews were particularly receptive to the new movements promoted by feminists and the counterculture. To be sure, Jews initially drawn to these movements were generally indifferent to religious life and did not expect to introduce their revolutionary agendas into Judaism. But by the late 1960s, more committed Jews took the first steps towards bridging the worlds of Judaism and the counterculture.¹

The second wave of American feminism which became prominent in the 1960s influenced educated Jewish women to begin speaking out about the discrimination they felt within Jewish life. In the same way that these women fought to change the cultural role of women within Judaism, they struggled to find liturgical and ritual ways to give women and feminist interpretations voices within Jewish ritual life.² The effects became more visible in the 1970s as the first women rabbis were ordained, the Conservative movement agreed to allow

¹ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 21.

² Ibid., pp. 21-22.

for the possibility of women begin counted in a minyan, and, in combination with the youth and countercultures, egalitarian ketubot were designed and brit banot grew in popularity.

While the influence of the American feminist movement was in full swing, another development was taking place among college and graduate students who had grown up in the Jewish youth movements, including the camping movement. These young people, influenced by the counterculture, were actively involved in the political climate of the time, particularly in the fight against the Vietnam War. Following the Six-Day War, their concerns extended to Israel as well. Many of these Jews, and others their age who had not been active in Judaism during their teen years, intensified or rediscovered their Jewish identification after trips to Israel in the wake of the 1967 war.

According to Wertheimer,

what distinguished this group from so many other young American Jews was their involvement with Jewish concerns. For even as they criticized established Jewish institutions, they were engaged in the process of remaking Jewish life, rather than rejecting it wholesale.... Some set out to reform existing Jewish institutions while others formed alternative Jewish communities.³

It was through the influence of these young people that the first modern havurot were formed. Looking to free themselves of the middle-class, "suburban" materialist values which they felt were influencing the Jewish family and

³ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

"fostering Americanization and assimilation," these young Jewish adults sought to develop what they called "real community" and "real intimacy."⁴ The havurah movement was a way to build upon the feminist, non-hierarchical model of community with room for ritual innovation and creativity.

The havurah model appealed because it offered its members the opportunity to form small intimate fellowships for study, prayer, and friendship that seemed impossible in the large, decorous, bureaucratized synagogues of their youth. It allowed individual participation and spontaneity, whereas established synagogues were dominated by professionals who "led" formal services.... The goal, however, was not only to alter the setting of religious interaction by also to construct a different type of Judaism.⁵

This movement became even more popular and influential with the publication of The Jewish Catalog in 1973, which provided creative perspectives on Judaism and Jewish practice while maintaining a strong link to the roots of Jewish tradition.

Other changes influencing the Jewish community were tied to the increased rate of assimilation and intermarriage. As Jews began to assimilate, they felt more comfortable in American society and no longer needed the Jewish community to be their primary source of identity. These third- and fourth-generation Jews saw themselves as part of a larger culture which

⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

included the influences of many sub-cultures. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, synagogue membership and attendance continued to drop,⁶ religious observance decreased,⁷ and intermarriage rates increased at alarming rates.⁸ These trends created a need for outreach, both to those who were unaffiliated and to those who were intermarried, to help maintain the viability of the Jewish community. In order to reach these Jews, it was necessary to find ways to catch their attention and show them that Judaism was relevant and did have things to offer them.

At the same time that these changes were taking place in American society, other shifts in cultural understanding were affecting the Jewish world as well. There was a general movement away from community towards a focus on individualism and personalization. This emphasis had a strong effect on the religious realms of American society. As individuals felt freer to pick and choose, religion for this new generation was influenced by issues of autonomy rather than of community. This played out in a variety of ways. Some individuals left formal, organized religion altogether in search of "privatized spirituality."⁹ Others chose a religion different from the one in which they had

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

been raised. This was seen in the increased interest in eastern religions in American society and the return to pagan/goddess influences in the feminist communities.

Integral to this trend were the influences of psychology and anthropological studies in ritual and religion. As Americans were influenced by more open attitudes towards therapy as an acceptable forum for "working through" one's life issues, they became more "in touch" with their personal needs and their personal searches for meaning in their lives. This, in combination with the renewed appreciation for ritual's ability to facilitate this process, led to a resurgence of ritual creativity and innovation. The connection between one's personal search for meaning and the newly appreciated power of ritual pointed people in the direction of spirituality to find healing for their souls.

It was those individuals who felt most disenfranchised by mainstream Judaism who either left for other spiritual solutions or searched for new ways to make the old Jewish traditions meaningful to them in modern contexts. Several new trends provided the forums for change which appeared to be necessary to make Judaism acceptable to those who chose to stay. Jewish feminists began this struggle on several fronts. They sought to challenge the limits on women's participation in the synagogue, to experiment with the language of prayer, to provide accessibility to Judaism for women through ritual innovation which

would address moments in women's lives previously ignored, to add to the range of Jewish expression through new music and other creative mediums such as art, poetry, and dance, and to reexamine traditional Jewish texts, reinvesting them with women's voices.¹⁰ Through these various avenues, Jewish feminists were able to influence sections of mainstream Judaism as well as develop their own sense of community and spirituality.

In addition to establishing havurot, some of those influenced by the youth and counterculture movements sought to combine their interest in eastern religions with the influences of the self-actualization movement and to do so within a Jewish context. This "new-age" Judaism, led by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, sought to provide, in a Jewish setting, the spirituality which this generation was seeking by integrating "the inner meaning of Torah, Kabbalistic philosophy, Chassidic prayer, meditation, humanistic and transpersonal psychology, and halakha to gain a practical orientation to Jewish spiritual life."¹¹ This movement's focus on prayer and ritual has seeped into mainstream Judaism through creative services and new ceremonies.

¹⁰ This list is influenced by the ideas presented in Rebecca T. Alpert, "Our Lives Are the Text: Exploring Jewish Women's Rituals," Bridges 2, no. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 66-80.

¹¹ Adventures in Jewish Renewal (P'nai Or Outreach Bureau, 1988), p. 2, as quoted in Wertheimer, p. 77.

Also noteworthy for providing a Jewish alternative to previously disenfranchised Jews was the development of gay synagogues in the 1970s and 1980s. These institutions provided a space for Jews who had felt excluded by virtue of their sexual orientation. In addition to addressing the same gender sensitivity issues which the feminist community sought to confront, gay synagogues provided opportunities for life-cycle events not previously developed in Jewish contexts, such as commitment ceremonies and "coming out" rituals. It has also been through the influence of the gay\lesbian community and its struggle with the AIDS epidemic that the Jewish community has been forced to confront issues of healing and develop new and creative rituals to deal with these issues.¹²

The influence of these groups, as well as the effects of assimilation, intermarriage, privatization and individualization, psychology and anthropology, are still shaping the way the Jewish community functions and develops. These changes have raised to the forefront issues which Judaism has previously not confronted and forced the confrontation. While there are certainly negatives resulting from that confrontation, it is the positive aspects which are most significant here. The creation and adaptation of many of the new rituals

¹² Yoel H. Kahn, "Filling the Gaps: Creating New Lifecycle Ceremonies," paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, San Antonio, Texas, 1992.

examined in this thesis are the direct result of these struggles. Without them, there would have been less awareness of the gaps that exist in traditional Jewish life-cycle liturgies.

Establishing Criteria for New Jewish Rituals

With an understanding of the psychological and anthropological need for ritual which was discussed in Chapter One, the picture of traditional Jewish rituals and how they work presented in Chapter Two, and the appreciation of historical and cultural context which is discussed above, we can now begin to develop some criteria for examining the new rituals which will be evaluated in Chapter Four. It is important to integrate that which makes rituals effective generally with those issues which are central to Judaism and which are therefore necessary in Jewish ritual. The first question which must be asked is, what is the purpose of performing a Jewish ritual? According to Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann,

In doing Jewish ritual, what we are attempting to do is to etch Jewish meaning into the lives and souls and bodies of Jews. Ritual can both give people access to Judaism, and can shape their sense of themselves as Jews. In the atomized modern world in which we live, rituals place the individual in community, in continuity. Rituals create a place.¹³

¹³ Patricia Karlin-Neumann, paper presented at the Pacific Area Reform Rabbis Conference, January 1994, p. 3.

This description is important because it helps us to see that the focus of Jewish ritual must be on bringing Judaism and Jewish values into people's lives. The time that people are most susceptible to religious influence is when they are seeking to mark a significant moment in their individual lives and want to do so in a communal context. By keeping in mind this psychological element, ritual innovators can invest significant personal moments with Jewish meaning.

Rabbi Karlin-Neumann continues this point by adding,

I believe strongly that, for ritual to be Jewish it needs to partake of our rhythms, our language, to tie the participants more fully to a stream of tradition, to a community of memory, which belongs to all of us.¹⁴

According to Rabbi Debra Orenstein, this process of grappling with Jewish tradition is an essential aspect of creating new Jewish rituals.

It is important to engage the tradition in a real dialogue.... I would not want to see new rituals without also seeing a thorough and profound consideration of traditional sources, lacunae in those sources, new visions and understandings of the tradition, the process of struggling with the tradition, the use of old texts in new ways, the creation of new texts that is somehow in keeping with ancient themes and methods... It is crucial to develop an understanding of the tradition on its own terms. At the same time, it is vital to explicate and model the methods by which we may choose to interpret it anew and/or to transform it.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵ Debra Orenstein, "Issues to Consider in the Creation of Effective and Convincing Ritual," presented at the Conference on Birth-Related Ceremonies, National Council of Jewish Women, New York, 1991, p. 5.

So how can this be applied to the creation of new rituals? According to Rabbi Laura Geller, one way to focus a new ritual towards Judaism is to base it in a Jewish framework, as she explains, "for creating new rituals, the framework I consistently work in is to ask, 'What is the Jewish analogue?'" Once you figure out what the analogue is, then the ritual creates itself."¹⁶ To find the analogue, Geller suggests that we look into Jewish tradition, particularly existing life-cycle and holiday rituals. Geller also suggests that the ritual innovator look at the Jewish calendar to "see what it's telling you." The setting of a date for a ritual based on the Jewish holiday cycle can influence the analogue for the ritual itself.¹⁷

Others have suggested that Jewish rituals must include basic elements which associate them with Jewish tradition.¹⁸ These elements can include ritual actions, ritual objects, and words of prayer or blessing. Actions such as tashlich or breaking a glass have grounding in Jewish tradition and mythology. The same can hold true for ritual objects such as the symbols of havdalah. Words of prayer or blessing must gain their power through connection to something beyond the present moment in which they are being recited.

¹⁶ Interview with Rabbi Laura Geller, October 27, 1994.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ In the process of researching this thesis, thirteen rabbis and ritual/prayer innovators were interviewed. These ideas are my personal synthesis of the information they presented at that time.

Traditional Jewish blessing formulas or variations thereof, the use of Hebrew, and other mythic imagery which connects us to Jewish history and tradition can all be integrated into rituals to give them Jewish content. Study of Jewish texts as part of a ritual, or Jewish music, can also provide these symbolic connections.

Other basic functions and elements of ritual which are not exclusively Jewish, but which fit into a Jewish framework, are equally significant. The location of a ritual as well as the physical set-up at the location are important issues which must be taken into consideration. A sanctuary which seats five hundred is not going to be an effective setting for a group of thirty people who are trying to create an intimate atmosphere.¹⁹ Who is going to participate in the ritual and who is going to watch must also be considered. What is meaningful to one group of people may not be meaningful to another. Also, what is offensive to some may be perfectly acceptable to others.²⁰ Another consideration must be what senses are involved in the ritual. We integrate experiences through our sensory perceptions. It is important to balance a

¹⁹ See Lawrence A. Hoffman, The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988), pp. 197-224.

²⁰ Orenstein, pp. 4-5.

variety of sensory experiences while not creating a system overload where nothing can be perceived.²¹

Finally, we must address the issue of communal versus private experience. Traditional Jewish ritual is always a public event. Even if the entire community is not invited, there are aspects and elements which connect the individual beyond himself or herself to the larger Jewish community and the tradition that it represents. Debra Orenstein expounds on this point:

Effective ritual should never ignore the communal in pursuing the personal. If our focus on the personal takes the individual out of the communal context, we have gone too far. It is as if we have declared that our individual lives are personal and our communal lives, impersonal, and that the two are somehow unconnected. Convincing ritual asserts the integrity of individual and communal life by reflecting forward and backward. Thus, we name children after relatives who have died, and at the same time pray for their arrival at the chuppah and implicitly, the arrival of still the next generation.²²

Conclusion

While the main focus in evaluating the rituals in Chapter Four will be examining the symbols that connect them to Judaism and Jewish tradition, each of the elements presented above will be taken into consideration. When a ritual

²¹ Ibid., p. 7.

²² Ibid., p. 3.

is created, it is important that each of these aspects be considered, even if it is eventually decided that it is not relevant to the particular ritual. In evaluating the rituals that follow, however, it is important to note that only the scripts of rituals were collected for this thesis. The power of a ritual is in its performance. Many of the elements which have been presented here and in the previous chapters cannot be evaluated from the paper. As a result, it is difficult to see if a ritual actually "worked" for the participants. The assumption, however, must be that, since these rituals have been made public (that is, I was able to obtain them with the understanding that they would be available to others), the participants felt that their ritual was successful in providing them with a sense of Jewish meaning.

Chapter Four
New and Adapted Jewish Rituals:
Themes and Trends with Meaning

Over 100 creative rituals were collected as part of the research for this thesis. In this chapter, I will focus mainly on rituals which either: (a) address life events not addressed by traditional Jewish practice, or (b) change an existing Jewish ritual so significantly that it takes on new meaning or becomes an entirely different ritual. The rituals used here have been gathered from a variety of sources. The American Jewish Congress Feminist Center in Los Angeles, The Jewish Women's Resource Center, a division of the National Council of Jewish Women in New York, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College each keep a ritual bank which organizes new and creative Jewish life rituals. Approximately 75 percent of the rituals analyzed here came from those three sources. Others were collected from rabbis in the field through an advertisement which was printed in the Central Conference of American Rabbis Newsletter and in the Women's Rabbinic Network Newsletter. Finally, some of the rituals evaluated here have been previously published in journals or books.

Most of these rituals can be divided into categories based on when in life they occur: (1) ceremonies for babies; (2) ceremonies for adolescents; (3) ceremonies for entering adulthood; (4) ceremonies for commitment to another person, for issues surrounding childbirth and fertility, and for divorce; (5)

ceremonies to mark events which occur at mid-life or later. Other rituals, including rituals of healing from illness, emotional suffering, or addiction, or conversion ceremonies do not necessarily fit into any chronological category. Some of these rituals will be dealt with at the end of the chapter.

Rituals of Brit

The most common creative ritual found in Jewish ritual banks is brit banot, a covenant ceremony for baby girls. This ritual has taken on many forms and titles over the past twenty years, including Brit Banot¹ (Covenant of Daughters), Brit Ha-Bat² (Covenant of the Daughter), Brit Nerot³ (literally Covenant of Candles, translated as Covenant of Life), Simhat Bat⁴ (Celebration of a Daughter), Brit Rehitza⁵ (Covenant of Washing), Seder Hachnasat Bat La-

¹ See Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, "Brit B'not Yisrael: Welcoming a Daughter," A Ceremonies Sampler: New Rites, Celebrations, and Observances of Jewish Women, Elizabeth Resnick Levine, ed. (San Diego: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1991), pp. 25-33, and other rituals listed in Appendix A.

² See "Brit Ha-Bat of Jordana Rebecca Warmflash," (n.p., 1992), and others listed in Appendix A.

³ "Brit Nerot: The Covenant of Life," (n.p., n.d.).

⁴ See "Simchat Bat -- Celebration of a Daughter for Rachel November Kipnes," (n.p., 1992)., and others listed in Appendix A.

⁵ Rebecca Trachtenberg Alpert, et al., "The Covenant of Washing," Menorah 4, no. 3-4 (April/May, 1993), pp. 5-6+. Other ceremonies, while not named for this particular act do use it as their focal point. These

Brit⁶ (Service for Entering a Daughter into the Covenant), Brit Edut⁷ (Covenant of Bearing Witness), Brucha HaBa'a⁸ (A Ceremony of Welcome), Brit HaChayim⁹ (Covenant of Life), and Seder Brit Kiddush Levanah¹⁰ (Service of Covenant through the Sanctification of the New Moon). While these various names are sometimes representative of the structure or content of the service, other titles simply represent the struggle to find a ceremony to mark the entrance of a baby girl into the covenant with God which is clearly the elemental purpose of brit milah. As we will see, many of these new rituals have taken elements of the brit milah ceremony and integrated them into a new ritual for baby girls.

We must remember that, while this category of rituals includes rituals for babies because babies are the primary focus of the ceremonies themselves, it is actually the adults, particularly the parents, but also the surrounding Jewish

ceremonies and the meaning of this particular ritual will be explored later in this chapter.

⁶ "Seder Hachnasat Bat La-Brit: A Covenant Service in Welcome of Hannah Nadel Roucher," (n.p., 1992).

⁷ "Brit Adut: Sarah Beth Perry-Marx," (n.p., 1983).

⁸ See "Brucha Ha-Ba'a (Welcome) for Chana Aliza Karlin-Neumann," (n.p., 1987)., as well as other ceremonies listed in Appendix A.

⁹ Steven Heneson Moskowitz and Susan Heneson Moskowitz, "Brit HaChayim: Shira Yael," (n.p., 1993).

¹⁰ Laura Geller, "Seder Brit Kiddush Levanah," in Lifecycles, pp. 65-67.

community who are affected by the power and meaning of the ritual. In almost every circumstance, these brit rituals occur during the first two months of the child's life. It is highly unlikely, then, that the ceremony will have any lasting effect on the child outside of any physical markings or gifts which extend beyond the moment of the ritual. It is the parents and the community who must celebrate the birth of this new child and make a commitment to bring this child into the covenant of the Jewish people, including raising the child in a Jewish home, complete with Jewish education and celebration.

It is with this in mind that new Jewish rituals for bringing baby girls into the covenant have been established. Jewish parents who were not willing to accept the unilateral celebration of the birth of boys while no equivalent ceremony existed for girls sought to find ways to share the covenant which boys marked through milah with their daughters through different symbolism. In doing so, these ritual innovators struggled to find the appropriate mythic context in Jewish tradition which could serve as a paradigm for bringing a baby girl into the covenant. As of now, no single ritual for baby girls has been established which can serve as an equivalent to brit milah. Still, several themes have established themselves and are used repeatedly throughout the rituals gathered for this research.

The most common of these is the brit rehitzah, the covenant of washing. This ceremony, originally designed by nine women rabbis and rabbinical

students, was an attempt to provide a ritual action and a mythical context which could parallel that present in brit milah. These women chose to integrate the theme of water as a feminine symbol of the life source and as symbolic of the covenantal relationship with God. In their introduction to the ceremony, the authors discussed their struggle to include something Jewish and positive. After brainstorming many possibilities, the women were drawn to the connection between water and the covenant with Noah. They also connected water with Abraham's washing the feet of the visitors who came after his circumcision and promised him that he and Sarah would have a child. It was a sign of welcome and hospitality. It was also a physical act which could provide a meaningful connection to Jewish tradition.¹¹

In each of the ceremonies which contain the foot-washing ritual, the story is told of how Abraham welcomed the guests into his household by washing their feet. The connection is then made to welcoming this new child into the Jewish people through the washing of her feet. Some of the ceremonies follow the foot-washing ritual with the blessing, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheynu melech haolam, zocher habit b'r'chitzat raglaiyim. ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, Who remembers the covenant through the washing of the feet").¹² For most of the ceremonies which

¹¹ See Alpert, et al.

¹² See for example, Alpert, et al.

contain this ritual, it is the central part of the service, representing the entrance of the baby girl into the covenant. Often this ritual is surrounded by other blessings which speak of the covenant. Those blessings are discussed below.

While this ritual act is becoming more common in brit ceremonies, several difficulties exist. The blessing is grammatically awkward and would be better if it read, al y'dei r'chitzat raglaiyim. Also, the act of welcoming a child into a religious tradition with water is one which most American Jews associate with Christianity because it has been visible in that tradition (i.e. baptism) for long time. This association makes it difficult for many to see the act as being reclaimed from Jewish sources. Rather, it is seen as being adapted from Christian traditions. Furthermore, the example of Abraham and the three visitors is slightly problematic because foot-washing, as a sign of welcome and hospitality, was done for people who had been walking or traveling on a journey and whose feet were tired or dirty. This obviously does not pertain to a newborn or an infant who cannot walk, so the foot symbolism in particular is somewhat weak and inappropriate.

Another common ritual action in brit ceremonies for baby girls is the lighting of candles. Most often, each parent lights a candle and tells of how the light from the candles represents the light of Torah and the light of Shabbat.¹³

¹³ See for example, "Simchat Bat for Rachel November Kipnes."

Since few of the ceremonies make clear how the candles actually serve as the conduit of the covenant (something which is very clear through the act of milah), it is not clear what mythical paradigms are at play here or how their meaning is to be evoked. Often, however, the candlelighting is followed by the blessing, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheynu melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al kiddush hachayim, ("Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who sanctifies us with Your commandments and commands us to sanctify life").¹⁴ The use of this blessing seems to imply that lighting the candles is symbolic of sanctifying life, although how this is so is still unclear. Also problematic is the blessing formula which indicates a commandment is being fulfilled. Here two difficulties arise. First, we are not traditionally commanded al kiddush hachayim. While it is possible to interpret v'tzivanu more figuratively, we are still faced with the second problem, which is that the action of lighting the candles does not fulfill the commandment.

There does not seem to be any biblical or talmudic connection for this ritual beyond the midrashic connections of light with Torah and Shabbat. One ceremony does, however, make clear the symbolism of Torah and Shabbat as signs of God's covenant with the Jewish people and therefore their symbolic

¹⁴ See for example, "Brit Nerot."

representation, through the candles, signifies the entry of this new child into that same covenant.¹⁵

Two other commonly found motifs in brit ceremonies for girls include the use of tallit¹⁶ and the structure of seven blessings taken from the wedding ceremony.¹⁷ Frequently a tallit is used to wrap the baby either before she is brought into the room or as a part of the ritual itself. The tallit holds many meanings, often connecting the baby to family members who have used the same tallit for other rituals. Often, the tallit was used as a chuppah or worn by the father during the parents' wedding. The use of the tallit again at this ritual for their child enables the parents to extend the meaning of one ritual object throughout their lives together.

The structure of the seven blessings is used in various ways in brit ceremonies. In several rituals, seven people are asked in advance to prepare a blessing which they would want to share with the newborn child. Each of these people then presents his/her blessing at a designated time during the ritual.¹⁸ Another ritual takes seven Hebrew blessings, some of which are traditional

¹⁵ "Simchat Bat for Rachel November Kipnes."

¹⁶ See for example, "Seder Hachnasat Bat La-Brit."

¹⁷ See for example, "Brit Banot for Hannah Mark Rosenberg," (n.p., 1993).

¹⁸ Ibid.

blessings, and integrates them into a sheva brachot format.¹⁹ This system of integrating seven blessings provides a connection for the parents between the seven blessings which were spoken as they began to form a household at their wedding and the growth of their household through the addition of this new child.

Many of the brit rituals for baby girls also contain prayers and blessings, though sometimes adapted, from the traditional brit milah ceremony. Many of the rituals contain a blessing for the baby entering the covenant, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheyinu melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hachnisah bivrit Am Yisrael, ("Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us with Your mitzvot and commands us to enter her [our daughter] into the covenant of the People Israel"), as well as the sections of the traditional blessing for naming a child. Some of the rituals either expand upon this second blessing by further explaining what it means to bring a child into a life of torah, chuppah, and ma'asim tovim (good deeds) or substitute such an explanation for the blessing itself. Many of the rituals also contain the traditional blessing for wine and/or the shehechiyanu blessing. Again, the language of v'tzivanu can be considered problematic since we are not traditionally commanded to bring daughters into any covenant.

¹⁹ "Brit Banot Covenant Ceremony for Hallie Riva Chandler," (n.p., 1991).

Furthermore, it is important that when this blessing is used, it is connected, at least midrashically, to an action which symbolizes the entering into a covenant.

Midrashim are also common in the various rituals. One of the most frequently used midrashim is the story of Honi, the circlemaker, and the tree (b. Ta'anit 32a). This story is often used to express the importance of continuity from one generation to another. In addition, several of the rituals make use of a traditional practice of forming an acrostic from the child's Hebrew name by matching the appropriate verses from Psalm 119 to the letters and forming a reading. Many of these elements are joined together by English readings, some by Jewish authors, others not, which fill the ceremonies with structure and meaning.

New rituals for babies do not only include those for baby girls. As discussed in the previous chapter, brit milah is still a common practice among Jews today. While modern liberal Jews have often adapted the brit milah ceremony to include the mother in a more significant way, to eliminate troublesome passages, or to add creative readings and rituals, in general the structure of the ritual and the various elements of the ritual have remained consistent. For that reason, brit milah rituals which fall into this category will not be examined here. Instead, it is important to examine those rituals which have been created for baby boys that do not include circumcision as part of the ritual.

Three such rituals have been examined. Two of these ceremonies clearly explain, in their introductions, that a circumcision has indeed taken place privately.²⁰ They further explain that, because of its exclusively male orientation, brit milah was no longer the brit ceremony which this family wanted to perpetuate as the "central public covenantal symbol of our people."²¹ They were instead looking for a ceremony which could be shared by male and female children alike.

One ceremony was to be celebrated approximately one month after the birth of the child. Taking place on Rosh Hodesh, the ceremony includes the traditional Hallel sung on Rosh Hodesh, as well as the traditional Torah readings. Also included in the service are many prayers and blessings, each adapted from a traditional Jewish source and spoken in both Hebrew and English.²² The second ritual is based upon the concept of hatafat dam brit, the drawing of a drop of blood, which is done when an already circumcised person wishes to enter into the Covenant. In keeping with the theme of brit milah, but allowing for a ritual which could be performed for both boys and girls, a drop of blood is drawn from the child to signify the child's entrance into the

²⁰ Shulamit Magnus, "Simhat Lev: Celebrating a Birth," in Lifecycles, pp. 68-75; and "Hatafat Dam Brit of Asher Bayln Litschwartz," (n.p., n.d.).

²¹ "Hatafat Dam Brit."

²² Magnus, pp. 68-75.

covenant. The blessings in this ceremony are based on the traditional blessings of brit milah, but were adapted to eliminate references to milah and to conform a formula similar to the one developed by Marcia Falk,²³ Nevarech et Mekor HaChayim.²⁴ Both of these ceremonies include the giving or acknowledging of the Hebrew name by which the child would be known. The third ceremony contains various elements to welcome the baby boy into the covenant, none of which actually connects to a traditional covenant symbol. A shofar is used to announce the child entering the room and candles are lit without a blessing being said. The traditional blessing for entering a child into the covenant is said in English, and followed by a shehechiyanu blessing and the blessing over the wine. Finally, the child is blessed with the traditional priestly blessing.²⁵

While some of these brit ceremonies, both those developed for girls and those developed for boys without circumcision, contain elements which seem to connect directly to traditional symbolism linked to the theme of covenant, others seem to be a far stretch. Indeed, each of the rituals examined does

²³ See Susan Schnur, "Reshaping Prayer: An Interview with Marcia Falk," Lilith Issue no. 21 (1987), p. 13, where examples of Marcia Falk's blessing formula, "Nevarech et ein hachayim..." can be found. Cf. also Falk's ambivalent reflections on the acceptance of this formula, in "Beyond Naming: Reflections on Composing The Book of Blessings," Reconstructionist 59, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 68-69.

²⁴ "Hatafat Dam Brit."

²⁵ "Brit Ceremony without Milah," (n.p., n.d.)

contain several elements which connect it to Judaism and Jewish tradition. Whether it be traditional blessings, prayers or biblical citations, or new blessings and prayers written in Hebrew, every ceremony contains some Hebrew. Also, each ceremony has some ritual action or object for which a connection to Jewish tradition is drawn. Through these acts, objects, and words, each ritual provides a link to the Jewish community, both those who are present and the Jewish community which extends beyond that place and time. In this way, they may have served their purpose of providing a Jewish ritual framework in which to recognize the birth of a child as a significant moment in the Jewish community and to welcome those children into that community. Still, it seems unclear whether each of these rituals is indeed a brit ritual simply because a blessing or prayer is said which mentions the covenant between God and the Jewish people and which welcomes the child into that covenant. In those rituals which contain no symbolic action for entering the covenant, it appears that words alone are expected to bring the child into a covenant with God. While words are certainly powerful, it is questionable if they hold the same power as physical ritual actions.

Weaning Rituals

Weaning rituals are not traditional although there seem to be at least biblical precedents. Each of the weaning rituals collected for this thesis draws

a connection to the verse in Genesis (21:8), "The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned." This is the clearest source for the importance of a ritual to mark the weaning of a child. In addition, the Book of Samuel tells us how Hannah weaned her son before bringing him to the Temple, "When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a jar of wine" (I Samuel 1:24).

Weaning ceremonies have taken on various forms and, unlike brit ceremonies which have a traditional source from which to draw blessings and prayers, there are few traditional rituals on which weaning rituals may be based. Two Eastern European traditions included in two of the weaning rituals involve giving an amount of money to tzedakah equal to the weight of the child, and to have the child's first food be given to him or her by someone other than the mother, as an acknowledgement of the community's support in helping to nurture the child.²⁶ Other traditional elements present in the weaning rituals included reading from the story of Isaac's weaning or from the story of Hannah weaning Samuel. In some rituals, the mother recites the traditional blessing, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, sheasani isha, ("Blessed are

²⁶ Elyse M. Goldstein, "A Weaning Ceremony for Noam Ezra Sienna," (n.p., n.d.); and Fern Amper and Eli Schaap, "Yona's Weaning Ceremony & Birthday Party," (n.p., n.d.).

You, Adonai, our God, Who has made me a woman"). However, this blessing does not connect the mother with the child, nor does it directly pertain to a time of celebration or the act of weaning. The shehechyanu blessing, which was included in several rituals as well, seems more appropriate for this celebratory moment.

Three of the ceremonies integrate elements of havdalah into the rituals. Havdalah is traditionally used to mark the end of Shabbat and its separation from the remainder of the week. The word havdalah means separation, and three ritual objects -- a twisted candle, a cup of wine, and a spice box -- are used to symbolize various elements in the separation. As weaning ceremonies mark a separation of the child from its mother, havdalah is an obvious way to signify this break with a traditional ritual that symbolizes separation. Still, some problems exist with this paradigm. It is unclear how this ritual connects to the powerful designation for which the havdalah ceremony is intended, this being the separation between what is holy and what is mundane. While it is possible that nursing is seen as a sacred bond and the ability to nourish oneself, mundane, this is a stretch and one could easily object to this classification. Either way, this link is not drawn in any of these rituals. Furthermore, it is unclear whether each of these ceremonies actually took place on a Saturday night, at the end of Shabbat, or whether the elements of havdalah were removed from their traditional setting and revised for use at this new occasion

of separation. For those ceremonies which do not focus on havdalah as a theme, a blessing over wine is a basic element in the ritual.

Several other, less traditional Hebrew blessings are found in many of the weaning ceremonies. One blessing, praising God for enabling the mother to nourish her child, is found in several variations including, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, sheasani l'hazin ma'aseh v'rishit, ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has made me to nourish the work of creation")²⁷; and Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, shenatan li l'hanik, ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has enabled me to nurse").²⁸ While both of these blessings connect directly to the weaning process, it should be noted that the first blessing is awkward in Hebrew, both idiomatically and imagistically because ma'aseh v'rishit in rabbinic idiom refers to the entirety of creation or the act of creation which the individual mother is not nursing. Another blessing which occurs in several of the weaning ceremonies Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, m'sameiach horim b'yaldeihem, ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has enabled parents to rejoice in their children"),²⁹ also

²⁷ Steven Heneson Moskowitz, "A Weaning Ceremony for Susie and Shira," (n.p., 1994).

²⁸ "Weaning Ceremony for Michele Robin Steiner," (n.p., 1983).

²⁹ Moskowitz, "A Weaning Ceremony."

draws a nice connection between the parents and child during this celebratory moment.

Similar to the brit ceremonies, each of these rituals also contains Hebrew prayers and/or blessings as well as biblical citations. Most of the rituals also include ritual acts which could be connected to traditional Jewish symbols of separation or minhagim surrounding weaning. As mentioned above, the textual basis for a weaning celebration is clear, so it is not surprising that Jewish rituals to mark this life passage are still being developed.

Adolescence

There are various significant life events which occur during adolescence which are not marked by traditional Jewish rituals. Indeed, Judaism does mark the "coming of age" for thirteen-year-old males through the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. The female equivalent of this ceremony, Bat Mitzvah, was created in the 1930's by Mordechai Kaplan, whose daughter was the first Bat Mitzvah. Reform Judaism introduced another important Jewish ritual into adolescence when it began celebrating Confirmation based on the model presented by its Christian neighbors. This ritual was created because the reformers wanted a ritual in which the young person would accept upon himself, and later herself, the beliefs and tenets of Judaism. Since one automatically became a Bar Mitzvah at age thirteen without any formal acknowledgement of one's

acceptance of the teachings of Judaism, Confirmation was deemed a necessary addition to the Jewish life-cycle.³⁰ A later explanation for Confirmation was that a thirteen-year-old was still considered too immature to be able to reflect critically upon religious issues and affirm his/her Jewish identity as a young adult. Because of this, contemporary Confirmation ceremonies, which are prevalent in Reform and some Conservative congregations, usually occur at the end of the tenth grade. Each of these rituals is important to the Jewish life-cycle. Both have, however, remained fairly consistent in their content and structure over the past fifty years. While creative services have been written and compiled for these ceremonies, they rarely contain any new elements of ritual itself. These creative services are more often a gathering of creative readings in both English and Hebrew which surround the significant events of the ritual, the reading of Torah and Haftarah for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah and the accepting of the Torah upon oneself for the confirmand. For this reason, these ceremonies will not be examined here. Instead, the focus of this section will be on less common and less traditional rituals which address moments of adolescence not usually recognized within Jewish tradition. As we examine these rituals which mark life events not particularly associated with being

³⁰ Salomon Herxheimer, "Is Confirmation a Jewish Ceremony?" in W. Gunther Plaut, The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of Its European Origins (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd., 1963), pp. 175-176.

Jewish, it will be significant to observe the ways in which the rituals take traditionally neutral events and invest them with Jewish symbolic meaning.

Onset of Menarche

Certainly a significant event in the life of any teenage girl is the moment when she first begins to menstruate. While it is debatable whether a young girl would want to mark this private event through a Jewish ritual, several rituals have been developed for this purpose. Some rabbis raise the question regarding the significance of such a ceremony for a young woman. They claim that the ritual more often addresses the mother's need rather than that of the daughter.³¹ Indeed, the impulse for such a ritual does seem to be highly influenced by aspects of the feminist movement. Certainly Judaism has no ritual which specifically focuses on the physical onset of puberty in teenage boys. The closest ritual would be Bar Mitzvah which, if anything, sublimates the biological changes by directing the focus of adulthood towards the acceptance of communal and ritual responsibilities. Even as such, the female equivalent would be Bat Mitzvah. Still, a variety of rituals and prayers to mark this important event in a Jewish setting have been written over the past two decades.

³¹ Interview with Rabbi Richard Levy, Oct. 26, 1994.

Of the various prayers which have been written to mark the onset of menstruation or its monthly occurrence, all include either Hebrew or traditional Jewish formulas and connections with traditional Jewish texts. Rabbi Deborah Joslow has written one Hebrew blessing, Modeh ani lifnay Adonai, ma'ayan brachot haolam, she'nivreiti isha, v'notzru bi kohot hachayim, ("I am thankful before Adonai, source of blessings in the world, who created me a woman and implanted within me the power of [giving] life").³² Another blessing, from Siddur Nashim, praises God for the blood which is a gift, symbolizing the life force which women have the potential to pass on to an unborn fetus.³³ These prayers can be included in rituals for marking menarche or recited on their own as a private ritual.

Other rituals which have been developed to acknowledge menarche in a Jewish way include the recitation of traditional blessings, such as the blessing which thanks God for "making me a woman," the blessing which thanks God for "making me in Your image," and the shehechiyanu blessing. One ritual uses the ritual act of tashlich to symbolize the tossing away of parts of childhood in exchange for pieces of adulthood.³⁴ Another ritual uses the same

³² Deborah Joslow, "Menstruation," (n.p., n.d.).

³³ Maggie Wenig and Naomi Janowitz, Siddur Nashim (Brooklyn: privately published, 1980).

³⁴ Phyllis Berman, "Enter: A Woman," Menorah 6, no. 1-2 (November/December 1985), pp. 1-3+.

candles that had been used at the young woman's brit ha-nerot as well as two new candles, to symbolize the connection to the past and the beginning of a new future.³⁵ Both ceremonies involve the drinking of red wine as symbolic of this joyous event and matching the color of the blood which serves as a sign that the young woman now has the ability to bear life. A third ritual seems to have fewer Jewish elements, employing English prayers that mention our ancestors as a way to connect with Jewish tradition, but only involving Hebrew through the shehechiyanu blessing and using no Jewish symbols or ritual acts.³⁶

Other Events of Later Adolescence

In the research for this thesis, rituals were discovered that mark two other events of later adolescence which are seemingly secular because they are tied to passages in American culture and are clearly not marked by traditional Jewish ceremonies. The first of these rituals was a ritual designed for a young person who was about to vote for the first time.³⁷ It is unclear in the ritual why this is an event worthy of marking through Jewish celebration. Indeed, the

³⁵ "Blessing The Blossom: From a Girl to a Maiden," (n.p., 1988).

³⁶ Fishel Pearlmuter, "This Wonderful Time: As Our Daughter Enters Womanhood," (n.p., 1980).

³⁷ Jeremy Schwartz, "A Ritual for Voting for the First Time," (n.p., n.d.).

closest analogue in traditional Judaism would be a misheberakh said (after being called to the Torah) in honor of a significant birthday or anniversary. The ritual is designed to have four leaders of the community participate by sharing readings, most of which are from traditional Jewish sources. These readings address the importance of community involvement and of our role in carrying out acts of Torah. Following the readings, the four leaders bless the new voter with words interpreted from Isaiah 11 and the voter concludes by reciting the following blessing, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu letakein et haolam. ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to repair the world"). The same difficulties mentioned above in connection to v'tzivanu exist here as well although, in this ritual, there is the connection of a physical action which fulfills the "commanded" duty since voting can help to repair the world.

The other event for which several rituals were found was the separation between parents and a child which takes place when a child reaches adulthood. It is unclear for what exact moment these rituals are intended since there are various occasions during which an adult child separates in some way from his/her parents. As is explained in the introduction to one of these rituals,

This is a ritual of "psychological separation" of adult children from their parents. It is not meant to mark the beginning of the process of separation from one's parents, nor is it meant to mark

the end of the separation process. Rather, it is intended to be done in the midst of the separation process (which may be a lifelong process).³⁸

Each of these rituals was built around a havdalah service, observed at the end of Shabbat. As mentioned before, havdalah is a ritual of separation. While its traditional intention is to mark the separation between Shabbat and the rest of the week, it has been selected by many ritual innovators as an appropriate vehicle for symbolizing various types of separations which occur during our lifetime. While there are difficulties with this symbolic application, as has been described above, in each of these rituals, the symbolism of the wine standing for joy, the twisted candle for intertwined lives, and spices to dispel the sadness of the separation about to take place is consistently present. In addition, one ritual draws upon the biblical stories of Adam and Eve, as well as Abraham, as narrative paradigms for the point in one's life when leaving is a necessary part of moving to the next stage of maturity.³⁹ Another ritual uses the story of Jacob and Laban building a monument of stones to mark their relationship and their parting, as a ritual act which the participants in this ritual can imitate.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Separation Ritual For Adult Children And Their Parents," (n.p., n.d.).

³⁹ Sharon Cohen, "On Leaving Home: Towards Creating a New Jewish Ceremony," (n.p., 1985).

⁴⁰ Jane Litwoman, "Hafradah: A Jewish Separation Ritual," (n.p., 1986).

Of all the rituals to be examined in this chapter, those explored in this section are least connected to anything which would seem to require or even suggest Jewish recognition and celebration or commemoration. Since most of the rituals which fit into this category contain those elements which are essential to make a ritual Jewish -- namely, ritual actions or objects which can be made to resonate with something in Jewish tradition and words of prayer or blessing which are recited in Hebrew or follow traditional Jewish formulas -- they do indeed seem to be "Jewish" rituals and not merely rituals performed by Jews. Still, it is sometimes unclear how they connect the individuals participating in the rituals to the Jewish community at large, either socially or mythically, or if they enable the participants to feel that Judaism is present in their lives during an important moment of transition. If they can provide these links, they might become more widely accepted.

Early to Mid-Adulthood

It is after we graduate high school and leave the homes of our parents that our adult lives truly begin. Many of the important events in our lives can occur from these early years of adulthood into our forties and fifties. Engagement, marriage or commitment, issues of childbirth and child-rearing, and, unfortunately, sometimes divorce affect many members of the Jewish

community during this period of their lives. Some of these events have been traditionally marked by Jewish ritual while others have not. According to Jewish tradition, engagement was marked by the writing of a document (tena'im) to declare the groom's intention to remain committed to the bride through the wedding.⁴¹ Following a period of engagement, the wedding ceremony as described in Chapter Two would take place, legally and ritually validating the marriage between the groom and his bride. If a divorce was to take place, it would involve the writing of a get and could be initiated only by the husband. The ceremony itself left little room for participation on the part of the wife, nor for working through the psychological trauma which comes as a result of divorce. Finally, the rituals surrounding childbirth were generally limited to those presented earlier in this chapter. Certainly, there were no formal rituals to deal with issues of infertility, in part because it was not understood as it is today. In addition, there was a different understanding and expectation surrounding the viability of a fetus. Because so many fetuses did not survive birth or the first thirty days of life, such a loss was not marked in the same way as the death of an older child or adult. Traditionally, it was against Jewish law to have a funeral or go through the stages of mourning for a miscarriage, stillbirth or abortion. As a result, there is no traditional ritual

⁴¹ Goldin, pp. 1-4.

either to mark these events or to help provide the psychological healing necessary after such a tragedy. Today, however, when infant mortality rates are significantly lower, the impact of such a loss is experienced more intensely and there is a desire to mark the moment through Jewish ritual.

This section, then, will explore new rituals which vary significantly from those traditional rituals briefly described above, or which fill the gaps left by Jewish tradition to deal with moments of crisis and celebration surrounding commitment, childbirth, and divorce.

Engagement and Commitment

One unique engagement ceremony, modeled on the traditional tena'im (i.e. conditions, promissory stipulations), was collected as part of the research for this thesis. This ritual stood out in significance because tena'im have become a forgotten ritual outside of the Orthodox community. Traditionally, tena'im is a "mutual agreement between two sets of parents for the date and financial conditions of the forthcoming marriage of their children."⁴² The ceremony is a simple one which includes the writing of the tena'im document, an act of kinyan through which the contract is formally accepted, the signing of the document, its public reading, and the smashing of a plate by the two

⁴² Lamm, p. 176.

mothers as "a symbol of the verse, ve'gilu bi-re'adah, ("Rejoice in trembling") balancing the joy of the occasion with its seriousness."⁴³ While the creative engagement ceremony collected here does include a variation on the traditional engagement contract, no date for marriage had been set and the contract itself contains no financial commitments. The ritual is also based on the ceremony of havdalah, interpreting the symbols of havdalah with reference to the joy and interdependence which this ceremony was meant to represent. The concluding blessing for this ceremony is interpolated into the traditional havdalah blessing with the "separations" which distinguish individuals from couples:

Blessed be You, Life-Spirit of the universe, Who makes a distinction between holy and not yet holy, between light and darkness, between the Shabbat and the six days of the week, between committed and uncommitted, between common goals and personal goals, between love and aloneness. Blessed be You, Who distinguishes between what is holy and what is not yet holy.⁴⁴

Here the symbolism of havdalah seems less problematic because the dichotomies created with an engagement connect to the dichotomy between sacred and profane which havdalah traditionally marks. The ritual is then ended with the breaking of a plate, a traditional act similar in meaning to the

⁴³ Lamm, p. 178.

⁴⁴ Barbara Rosman Penzner and Brian Penzner Rosman, "A Reconstructionist Engagement Ceremony," Reconstructionist 52, no. 3 (Dec., 1986), p. 21.

breaking of the glass at a Jewish wedding. At an engagement, the ritual also holds the implication that, just as a broken plate can never be repaired, so too a broken engagement is lost forever and so care should be taken not to break the engagement.⁴⁵

One ritual which has begun to be reclaimed among non-Orthodox Jews is that of using the mikveh before marriage. Two rituals developed for this purpose were gathered as part of this research. Both rituals contain the traditional blessing for entering the mikveh and seek to explain the mikveh experience in terms of the importance of water as symbolic of change and purification. Each ritual uses biblical verses to draw the participants into traditional water imagery and integrate the imagery of the Shechina, the Divine presence of God. One of the rituals includes the traditional Elohai neshamah blessing rewritten into the feminine. The choice of this particular prayer is explained in the following way:

This particular prayer, so familiar to those accustomed to daily prayer, seemed fitting here as a prayer of renewal. So basic a prayer to the liturgy ties us to our ancestors and to our tradition. Its message of gratitude for the replenishing of our souls reminds us that our body and soul work together synergistically. Thus, as

⁴⁵ Goldin, pp. 1-2.

we immerse to purify our physical selves, we also purify our inner selves.⁴⁶

The other ritual uses the seven steps of the mikveh as symbolic of seven stages which have taken place in the bride's life and of seven blessings for the future. Every mikveh is built with seven steps leading down into the water. These steps are symbolic of the seven days of creation. Here, as the bride proceeds down each step, a different past stage of her life is recalled, and as she ascends out of the mikveh after her immersion, a different future blessing is wished for her.⁴⁷ This connection between past, present (the actual immersion in the mikveh), and future provide the ideal structure for a successful ritual.

While several wedding ceremonies were submitted for consideration as part of this thesis, none of them varied significantly from the wedding ceremony described in Chapter Two except for their being egalitarian and including creative vows. The structure of the wedding ceremony itself, while changed to include participation by both the bride and the groom, was essentially based on the structure of the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. The symbolic actions and ritual objects used, as well as many of the words of

⁴⁶ Barbara Rosman Penzner and Amy Zweiback-Levenson, "Spiritual Cleansing: A Mikvah Ritual for Brides," Reconstructionist 52, no 1 (Sept., 1986), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey A. Marx, "The Seven Steps: A Mikvah Ceremony on the Eve of Marriage," (n.p., 1993).

prayer and blessing, were, for the most part, the same as those present in a traditional wedding ceremony. For that reason, these rituals will not be considered here. Instead, new rituals which have been developed to mark the commitment by two members of the same sex to spend their lives together will be the focus.

These rituals contain many of the basic elements included in the traditional wedding ceremony. Each takes place under a chuppah, and had some form of the sheva brachot. In addition, most of the rituals include the traditional blessing over the wine and end with the symbolic breaking of the glass. These rituals are not, however, Jewish wedding ceremonies. As is clear from their titles: "A Commitment Celebration,"⁴⁸ "A Celebration of Love and Commitment,"⁴⁹ "Lesbian Commitment Ceremony,"⁵⁰ and "Brit Ahava: Covenant of Love,"⁵¹ none of these rituals seek to disguise themselves as a mere adaptation of the traditional wedding ceremony. As such, none of the rituals examined here contains kiddushin, the traditional formulas of marriage which are an essential part of any Jewish wedding ceremony. Instead, three of

⁴⁸ Moon Smith and Susan Saxe, "A Commitment Celebration," A Ceremonies Sampler, pp. 89-93.

⁴⁹ Bruce Priebe and Andy Rose, "A Celebration of Love and Commitment," (n.p., 1989).

⁵⁰ Denise L. Eger, "Lesbian Commitment Ceremony," (n.p., 1991).

⁵¹ Ellen Lippmann, "Brit Ahava: Covenant of Love," (n.p., 1991).

these rituals use the words which Ruth spoke to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge...", as vows to be exchanged at the time that rings are exchanged. Several of the rituals also include a ketubah which has been adapted to fit the circumstances of this ritual.

None of the rituals include the traditional sheva brachot in Hebrew or English. One ritual does use the traditional Hebrew blessings with some variations to make them appropriate for a same-sex union, but even in this case, the English reading of the blessings is not a literal translation but a thematic interpretation.⁵² The difficulty with even adapting the traditional sheva brachot is that the biblical paradigms invoked are heterosexual and assume heterosexuality as the order of nature, ordained by God. Two of the ceremonies have no set sheva brachot, but rather ask seven friends and/or family members to offer up their blessings for the couple.

There is still controversy within the Jewish community as to whether same-sex unions should be recognized through Jewish ritual. Since these rituals are clearly not weddings and do not invoke the tradition of kiddushin, they appear to be simply ceremonies in which two individuals want to have their commitment to each other publicly recognized in the Jewish community through a new ritual which integrates elements of the wedding ceremony with other

⁵² Lippmann.

connections to Jewish sources and traditions. Their acceptability, or lack thereof, within the larger Jewish community will only become clarified with the passage of time.

Childbirth, Miscarriage, Infertility and Abortion

Next to brit ceremonies for girls, rituals developed to help women and couples deal with issues surrounding childbirth were the most frequently found rituals. As mentioned before, there is no traditional Jewish ritual for marking the loss of a fetus, an infant before the age of one month, or the inability to have a child. As mentioned above, these pregnancies or infants were simply viewed as not viable. In that pre-modern culture, these losses seem to have been accepted as being "in the nature of things," so one simply went forward and tried to have another child. However, in today's society, where these issues are thought about differently and spoken about much more frequently and openly, the lack of a traditional structure for helping couples to mourn these traumatic events is keenly felt. Even celebratory events such as the decision to try to conceive are not marked in Jewish tradition because they were not at all part of the public sphere until very recently. While many individuals still prefer to keep these moments private, the different cultural perceptions of intimate processes and events have generated new rituals to facilitate working through the strong emotions which they generate.

Two rituals were gathered which address the couple before the birth of their child. One of these rituals is to take place when a couple has decided that they are ready to begin the process of conception⁵³ and the other ritual is to take place several weeks before the baby is born.⁵⁴ Each of these rituals addresses the issues and needs of the parents-to-be at this time of change, or expectant change, in their lives. The ritual for conception includes immersion in the mikveh before the ritual begins. This immersion is to symbolize the beginning of something new, as the waters of mikveh traditionally symbolize purification and the renewal of life. The ritual continues with candle lighting although no traditional blessing is said for this act. An amount of zedakah is designated to be given to a specific charity as an attempt to improve the world in which this new child will be raised, and then the ritual continues with words of prayer, drawing upon the theme of the first mitzvah, preeya ur'veeya - the bringing of children into this world, and including words from the book of Psalms. This ritual is designed to be performed in private, which in some ways eliminates the idea of community from the ritual. Since, however, the ritual itself is based upon the idea of extending the Jewish community, and seeking God's blessing for the decision to attempt conception, it is clear why the couple

⁵³ Gershon Ellison, "To Conceive in Holiness," (n.p., 1990).

⁵⁴ Saul E. Perlmutter and Shoshana Zonderman, "Preparing for Childbirth: A Ceremony for Parents-to-be," Reconstructionist 54, no. 2 (October/November 1988), pp. 18-22.

would seek to recognize this moment in their lives through Jewish ritual. Indeed, this bears some parallels to Lurianic kavanot (expressions of intent, readiness) which may have been recited before an act of sexual intercourse to give the act greater cosmic significance.

The second ritual is based upon the structure of havdalah to mark the upcoming separation of the fetus from the mother at the time of its birth. The authors of this ritual explain in their introduction why they chose the symbols of havdalah:

The Havdalah prayers mention changes in the physical realm (between light and darkness), the temporal realm (between Shabbat and weekday), the social realm (between sacred and ordinary). Havdalah could help us mark the physical, temporal, social, and religious changes happening in our lives as well. Another reason for choosing Havdalah imagery is the theme of salvation that runs through its prayers and the closing moments of Shabbat when Havdalah is recited.... Strong and soothing words -- which help to create a positive tone before the pain and uncertainties of birthing.⁵⁵

This ritual, which takes place as part of the traditional havdalah service at the end of Shabbat, includes images which connect each of the symbols of havdalah to the childbirth which will soon take place and allows for connection through many generations when each person recites his or her Hebrew name, complete with his/her ancestry as far back as it can be traced. Finally, the ceremony

⁵⁵ Perlmutter and Zonderman, p. 19.

concludes with the singing of traditional Hebrew songs which praise God, as well as speaking of hope and of children.

The majority of the rituals developed to mark the loss of a pregnancy or infertility include some form of mourning ritual centered upon the recitation of kaddish. Since kaddish is not traditionally recited for a child who dies before the age of thirty days, it is important to note this departure from Jewish law. For these couples, there is a great need to somehow contextualize their loss within Jewish tradition. Kaddish provides one of those connections. Even if the kaddish is recited in English (as is the case in one ritual), it can still fulfill the need for communal recognition present at such a time of loss.

The struggle between wanting communal recognition of one's grief and wanting to be left alone is a difficult one which is confronted in several of these rituals. As one woman explained, "I questioned the Jewish custom of shiva (mourning surrounded by others) because all I wanted was to be alone -- inside myself and with [my husband]." ⁵⁶ This self-isolation is precisely the behavior which traditional Jewish communal mourning rituals intend to mitigate by forcing the mourner to acknowledge the social dimension of the loss and his/her enduring connection to other living "family." The difficulty for miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn is that this public aspect has not been

⁵⁶ Diane Solomon, "A Midwife's Kaddish," Lilith 15, no. 3 (Summer, 1990), pp. 22-23.

clearly established because the lost fetus or newborn had not yet had the chance to develop a complete social dimension. So, for instance, in the case quoted above, the ritual participants decided that their need to be alone overrode their need for direct communal support. Still, communal support came in the form of cards and letters. Other rituals require that family and friends gather with the mourners to form a support network for them during their time of loss. Traditionally, a minyan is not required for a funeral service. It is, however, a mitzvah to visit those who are in mourning. While the losses described here are explicitly disqualified from traditional mourning practices because the fetus or stillborn is not seen as a living human being and the newborn has not yet established viability, a minyan can provide a connection to the wider Jewish community which is sometimes lost when important life events pass by unmarked by Jewish ritual.

This connection to Judaism can also be enacted through the use of traditional Jewish texts. Several of the miscarriage and infertility rituals include the story of Hannah (I Samuel 1) as a biblical paradigm for someone who has suffered the pain of infertility. In addition, one ritual uses the story of King David and his reaction to the loss of his child (II Samuel 12). Traditional prayers of healing are also integrated into several of these rituals, including misheberakh and birkat hagomel.

In structure, the rituals vary significantly. Some rituals make use of the mikveh as a way to mark the loss of life and the new beginning which must follow. Indeed, it is the loss of potential life which occurs with each menstrual period that is marked by the traditional mikveh ritual of taharat mishpachah. Another ritual uses the elements of havdalah as symbols of separation and loss. Still another ritual integrates elements of tashlich as symbolic of the tossing away of the dream to give birth to a child. Most of these rituals integrate traditional prayers and passages from Psalms into the given structure to provide a full ritual of mourning or separation.

Rituals for women who are about to have, or have undergone, an abortion are different from those for miscarriage because of the intentionality of terminating the pregnancy. It is important to note, however, that as in the cases above, traditional Judaism does not view the fetus as a person or a nefesh (living soul), so the loss of a fetus through abortion is not halakhically considered different from a miscarriage. Of the three rituals collected in this area, two focus on affirming one's choice to have the abortion while recognizing that this was neither an easy choice nor one without pain. One of these rituals uses the symbolism of a havdalah candle as representative of the separation which abortion creates, as well as the traditional biblical verses recited at the beginning of the havdalah service which speak of God as the

source of salvation.⁵⁷ The second ritual provides various options depending on whether the abortion is medically recommended or the woman's personal choice. In the case of medically recommended abortion, the ritual contains the traditional El maleh rachamim as a prayer of mourning for the loss of this potential life. When the abortion is elective, a non-traditional English prayer is provided. In either case, the ritual continues with abbreviated versions of several traditional blessings (elohai neshama, sh'asani isha, and sh'asani bat chorin) as well as a versions of birkat hagomel and misheberakh.⁵⁸ The third ritual focuses on an entirely different theme, using sections of the traditional Al chet confessional prayer and the ritual of tashlich as symbolic of tossing away one's sins. The ritual, which begins, "God, draw me to You with the breath of life. My soul aches to receive Your love. Only by tenderness and forgiveness can I be healed,"⁵⁹ takes a much stronger stand on the view of abortion as an act requiring repentance. Clearly ambivalence towards this decision is a factor here. Of the three rituals, this one seems to be least supportive of the woman's difficult choice and the mourning which she may be experiencing. Still, it could be effective in cases where guilt is a major aftereffect of the abortion.

⁵⁷ Brian Field, "Ceremony for a Woman About to Undergo an Abortion," (n.p., 1989).

⁵⁸ Leila Gal Berner, "Our Silent Seasons," in Lifecycles, pp. 127-132.

⁵⁹ Julie Gordon, "Prayer after an Abortion," (n.p. 1984).

The rituals which address losses related to potential children and childbirth are some of the most powerful being created. They address a clear need within the Jewish community by providing comfort and solace for those who are mourning these losses. Because the loss of a fetus or a child is such a powerful loss, it is particularly difficult to evaluate the strength and weaknesses of these rituals. Each one seems to have worked for those who participated. As women prepare to have children later in life, the number of occasions when rituals such as these are necessary may continue to grow. As time passes, it is possible that one ritual will take the lead and become the template for future rituals in this area. Until then, this is an area where whichever Jewish elements seem to bring the most comfort to the "mourners" should be used to help the couple through this difficult process.

Divorce

Unfortunately, divorce is also quickly becoming a life transition which affects the lives of many Jews. Traditional Judaism does have a formal ritual for divorce. According to Jewish law, only the husband may authorize a get (a Jewish divorce decree) and it must be written in the presence of a beit din. The document must then be delivered into the hands of the wife in order for the

divorce to be valid.⁶⁰ In this legal exchange, the wife has no active role and none of the emotional issues which divorce raises are addressed for either party.

The new rituals which attempt to address these problems do so in a variety of ways. With the exception of one ceremony, a written document of release, a modern equivalent to the traditional get, is integrated into each ritual. Even the ritual which does not include a written document has a verbal formula recited to announce the release from the marriage.⁶¹ Most of these rituals seek to confront the emotional pain which follows a divorce through the use of traditional Jewish symbols of separation and mourning.

Two ceremonies use elements of havdalah as the symbolic focus of their ritual. In one, the twisted candle is used as representative of how marriage causes lives to be intertwined. At the end of the ceremony, the candle is extinguished to symbolize the end of the interwovenness.⁶² In the other ritual, the ritual objects of havdalah are reinterpreted to evoke themes of separation, death and healing. English blessings which address these themes are offered

⁶⁰ Lamm, pp. 238-239.

⁶¹ Ruth Berger Goldston, "Separating: A Havdalah Ritual for When a Marriage Comes Apart," Lilith 18, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 28-29.

⁶² Margot Stein Azen and Jeff Sultar, "Sample Egalitarian Get Ritual," (n.p., 1993).

over each object.⁶³ Havdalah is an interesting paradigm here because the act of divorce could be said to mark the formal end of something holy (marriage/kiddushin), so the metaphor is particularly powerful. Other traditional acts which are reinterpreted for inclusion in these new divorce ceremonies are those surrounding mourning and repentance. One ritual, which includes a traditional get ceremony, begins with a twenty-four hour fast and the lighting of a traditional yahrtzeit candle (which will burn for the full twenty-four hours). The traditional viddui is recited before leaving for the synagogue to face the beit din, and, following the traditional ritual, the newly divorced woman bathes and walks around the block, both actions traditionally performed at the end of the shiva period.⁶⁴ These symbolic actions enable the participant to confront the feelings of loss and regret which divorce brings about, while remaining within a Jewish framework.

Various other rituals for divorce integrate traditional Jewish prayers or verses from Scripture into their ceremonies to help create a connection to Judaism during this time of transition. A commonly used text is the passage from Ecclesiastes, "To everything there is a season..." (Eccl. 3).⁶⁵ This

⁶³ Goldston, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁴ Vicki Hollander, "The New Improved Jewish Divorce: Hers/His," Lilith 15, no. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 20-21.

⁶⁵ See for instance, Burt Jacobson, "A Jewish Divorce Ritual for Our Time," New Menorah (Pesach, 1988).

passage, which contrasts the happy and positive times in life with the less joyous or more difficult occasions, is particularly applicable during a divorce ritual since it helps the participants to see that the cycle of beginnings and endings which are represented by marriage and divorce are not unique to this experience. The misheberakh prayer, usually recited for healing or celebration, has also been adapted as a way to ask for healing from the pain of the divorce.⁶⁶ Additionally, one ritual integrates an adapted version of the tefillat haderech, the traditional prayer recited before going on a journey, to mark the beginning of the new journey the participants will take by living as single people rather than as a couple.⁶⁷

Several of the divorce rituals also contain ritual acts for which there appears to be no Jewish connection. One example of this is the use of a rope, with several tight knots tied in it to represent "tying the knot" when one gets married. The person on whom the ritual is focused must then attempt to untie the knots, in the same way that the marriage is being untied.⁶⁸ Despite the fact that there is no apparent link between this ritual act and Jewish tradition, the ritual itself contains several other elements basic to Jewish tradition, such as

⁶⁶ "Ritual of Release," (n.p., n.d.).

⁶⁷ Susan Rendrick, "Divorce Ceremony," (n.p., 1989).

⁶⁸ Azen and Sultar.

a havdalah candle and a document of release, which locate it within a Jewish framework.

Of all the categories of rituals, this category displays the most variation among rituals with the exception of the document of release. It appears that, while looking to find other forms of symbolism to address the emotional and spiritual needs of the divorcee, those who compiled these rituals also saw the importance of maintaining the one traditional element of Jewish divorce, the get document itself.

Midlife and Aging

One of the largest gaps in Jewish life-cycle rituals occurs between the time of marriage and death. With the exception of divorce, which clearly does not affect everyone, most rituals which adults experience during this time period are focused on their children and grandchildren. While it is true that such rituals can also prove to be very powerful and moving for the parents or grandparents, there is no traditional Jewish ritual to mark any event in midlife or as a result of aging. This has become an increasing problem as members of our community continue to live longer and remain active well into their senior years.

A variety of creative Jewish rituals have been written over the past decade to mark important moments later in life. These ceremonies range from

"A Midlife Ceremony,"⁶⁹ to "A Ceremony for Entering a Nursing Home."⁷⁰ Despite the variety among the rituals, each has a specific goal to recognize some important moment of transition that occurs later in life. "A Midlife Ceremony," written in 1983, is one of the earliest of these rituals. The ceremony, which was called Ma'asch B'reshit, occurred on the eve of Bonnie Feinman's forty-first birthday. The ritual involves three stages, one focusing on covenant, one on naming and one on blessing. The covenant stage is based on Genesis 15, where Abraham cuts a covenant with God through the separation of parts. In this ritual, an apple is cut into two pieces and a candle lit between them to represent the renewal of a personal covenant. This is followed by the recitation of several interpretive Hebrew blessings based on selections from the Birkot hashachar. The naming section of the ritual encourages the participant to take on an additional Hebrew name as representative of the new beginning which the ritual marks. The name should be one which has a special meaning through which a connection to future plans can be drawn. Finally, several people are invited forward to offer words of

⁶⁹ Bonnie Feinman, "A Midlife Ceremony," in Irene Fine, Midlife: A Rite of Passage (San Diego: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1988), pp. 29-39.

⁷⁰ Cary Kozberg, "Let Your Heart Take Courage: A Ceremony for Entering a Nursing Home," (n.p., n.d.).

blessing for the ritual participant. These blessings are wishes for the person as s/he enters into the next stage of his/her life.

Several other ceremonies which have been developed to celebrate later times in life have been known as Simchat Chochma, the joy of wisdom. The first of these rituals was developed by Savina Teubal.⁷¹ It integrates many of the stages presented in "A Midlife Ceremony." Based on a Shabbat service format with a variety of creative readings and interpretations of prayers, the ritual itself includes the taking on of a new name and a promise or covenant spoken by the participant, followed by blessings from members of the congregation. The simchat chochma ritual also includes two other important stages which are not part of the midlife ceremony. One of these is the "Recognition of Changes" which is done by donning a ceremonial garment. In both Ms. Teubal's ritual and a similar ritual by Marcia Cohn Spiegel, the ritual garment is a traditional kittel which the participant said would later be used as the garment in which she was to be buried.⁷² The other stage includes the planting of a tree, because "trees symbolized the connection between the depths

⁷¹ Savina J. Teubal, "Simchat Hochmah," in Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds. (Beacon Press: Boston, 1992), pp. 257-265.

⁷² Interview with Marcia Cohn Spiegel, October 28, 1994.

of the earth below, where life is quickened, to the canopy above where life becomes visible."⁷³

Three other ceremonies to mark midlife and aging were collected as part of this research. One, Av/Em Eitza, would involve the writing of a document, tzava'at eitza, a testament of counsel, which would be similar in content to an ethical will:

Such a testament would include what one considers the important lessons one has learned in life -- insights on human relationships, coping with hardship, and finding fulfillment -- and an expression of what message one has sought to convey through life.... Unlike the classical ethical will which was usually addressed to offspring or to the family, the Tzava'at Eitza will be presented to a larger, more general audience, namely, one's synagogue community.⁷⁴

Those who choose to participate in such a ritual would then join together in a group committed to study and discussion during which time the individuals can continue to explore their feelings about their lives and issues of death. This ritual focuses, then, not only on the individual who is confronting the challenges of growing older, but also on building a sense of community for this segment of the congregation. Another ritual, Simchat HaDorot uses the traditional symbols of havdalah to connect the various generations of a family

⁷³ Savina Teubal, as quoted in Marcia Cohn Spiegel, "Simchat Chochmah," (n.p., 1987), p. 19.

⁷⁴ Paul J. Citrin, "Av/Em Eitza: Proposal for a New Life-Cycle Ceremony," Journal of Reform Judaism (Spring 1990), p. 45.

as they join together to celebrate a ninetieth birthday.⁷⁵ Citing from Jewish sources, the members of the family discuss the tradition of respect for elders and the "fact" that many of our ancestors lived far beyond the age of one hundred. Havdalah, in this ritual, seems only to be an occasion for the gathering and for placing the celebration into a Jewish context. There is no intrinsic symbolic connection between the havdalah symbols and the life passage being ritualized here. Finally, in "A Ceremony for Entering a Nursing Home," various traditional texts, including blessings and psalms, are integrated into a ritual which is designed to make the transition easier for each of the members of the family. A mezzuzah is affixed to the doorpost of the room in which the family member will live as a sign that this, too, is a place we consider home. Finally, the ritual is concluded with the priestly benediction, offered as a blessing for the new resident and his/her family.

Recognition of the aging process, and/or the various life changes which take place as a result, is becoming increasingly more important as our population continues to age and people continue to live longer, healthier lives. These rituals seek to recognize the wisdom which can only come through life experience and to provide ritual for the individual during that midlife period between marriage and death which is often the longest part of the lifespan.

⁷⁵ Lisa Hochberg-Miller, "Simchat Ha-Dorot," (n.p., 1990).

Healing Rituals

This final category does not fit into any of the previously discussed chronologically arranged sections because these rituals can occur at any time during a person's life. Jewish tradition has always offered prayers for healing and survival through the misheberakh blessing and the birkat hagomel. These generic blessings, however, are often not felt to be enough to support the person who is suffering through a physical or emotional crisis or who has recently recovered from such a situation. New rituals in this area are extremely important because they allow the participant to feel heard within a Jewish context during a time when s/he may otherwise feel very isolated or silenced by the Jewish community in general.

While these rituals can be divided into two categories, those confronting physical illness and those confronting emotional crises, the ceremonies themselves are very similar in both cases. Of the nine rituals gathered in this area, four include the use of mikveh as a medium for renewal and rebirth. A fifth ritual also includes water imagery, though not through mikveh. The commonality of this ritual element is significant. The waters of the mikveh can represent many things. When one is in search of healing, the mikveh waters can symbolize the tears which have been shed and those which are still to come. It can serve as a symbol of comfort since we do not sink in water, but rather are supported by it and float. This support can be seen as representing

the support of the community during the difficult time of healing.⁷⁶ While one of the rituals includes the recitation of traditional mikveh blessings, the others use blessings taken from other contexts or written especially for this occasion, including, Baruch attah Adonai, eloheinu melech haolam, ha'rofeh kol basar u'mafleg la'a'sot. ("Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who heals all creation and does wondrous things"),⁷⁷ and Barucha at makor hachayim m'chadeshet b'chol yom, tamid, ma'aseh v'reishit, v'higi'atni lazman hazeh l'hichadeish bit'vilah. ("Blessed are You, source of life, Who renews the works of creations daily and Who has given me this opportunity to find renewal through immersion").⁷⁸ The problem with using the traditional blessings for immersion in the mikveh in this context is that, while there are occasions where one is commanded to use the mikveh, this is not one of them. To say v'tzivanu at this time takes power away from those moments when we are actually fulfilling a commandment by immersing in the mikveh, such as before marriage.

Other patterns in these healing rituals include the idea of changing one's name or taking on a new name. Traditionally, this was done to ward off the

⁷⁶ See Laura Levitt and Sue Ann Wasserman, "Mikvah Ceremony for Laura (1989)," in Four Centuries, p. 323.

⁷⁷ "Living Waters: A Ritual of Healing at the Mikvah," (n.p., 1994).

⁷⁸ Tzeviya Rivka, "A Ritual for Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse," (n.p., 1993).

evil spirits from one who was sick and close to death. In these rituals, it serves the purpose of helping the person establish a new identity which is separate from the illness or emotional trauma which has affected him/her. The use of blessings, either traditional or adapted, and allusions to, or citations of, biblical texts also helps provide a framework within the Jewish community for the person who is in need of healing. Variations on the traditional misheberakh blessings are therefore common in these healing rituals.

Conclusion

These rituals have been evaluated based on their content with only minor consideration for the difficulties which may arise from reinterpreting traditional Jewish actions, objects, and blessings or creating new ones. As discussed above, havdalah is symbolic of the separation which occurs between Shabbat and the rest of the week. In many of these rituals, however, it has been taken far beyond this traditional intention and used as symbolic of any separation. If havdalah is intended to separate the holy from the mundane, it needs to be considered whether or not the elements which these rituals attempt to separate fall into these categories. If not, much of the mythic meaning of the havdalah symbols is lost. A different problem arises from the use of the formula asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu in new blessings which address life moments not traditionally addressed by a commandment. It is possible to interpret the

idea of y'tzivenu as being "commanded" by virtue of the fact that a given act has allowed Judaism to survive for thousands of years, but then the writer must consider what it is that s/he is saying we are commanded to do and whether it actually has been that influential. These are only some of the situations which must be considered more carefully during the process of ritual innovation.

Still, the wide variety of life events which are covered in this chapter give voice to the need for rituals which can help connect Jews to Judaism during significant moments in their lives. Those ceremonies examined here are only a sampling of the many which have been created and continue to be created by Jews across the United States. Indeed, the variety of rituals raises significant questions regarding their longterm viability. While some will possibly survive, others most certainly will not. At the present, however, this type of ritual innovation is still too experimental to determine which ceremonies will become part of Jewish "tradition."

With few exceptions, the rituals gathered for this research appeared to meet the psychological and communal needs of the people for whom they were designed. It is always difficult to evaluate the effect of a ritual from the printed page. Still, the vast majority of these rituals use Jewish symbolic acts, objects and words which link the participants to the larger Jewish communities of past, present and future while addressing the needs of the individuals involved in the

ritual. This is a difficult task. The following chapter will explore some of the questions which one must ask in order to reach a point of equilibrium.

Chapter Five
Where Do We Go from Here?
Listening for Moments and Creating Rituals:
A Guide for the Rabbi

The previous chapters have explored both our need for ritual in our lives, and examples of the shape which such rituals make take within a Jewish context. Indeed, the wide variety of life events which have been marked by new and adapted Jewish rituals points clearly to the ongoing need for rituals in our lives. As the Jewish community continues to assimilate and new generations of Jews seek ways to express their spirituality, rituals which can connect Judaism to important moments of crisis and celebration can serve as the link between tradition and modernity, providing meaning as well as religious and communal fulfillment.

Leila Gal Berner, in her discussion of how the Jewish community presently responds to the "real-life needs" of its members, points out the following:

The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us that "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heaven (3:1). And yet so many of our "seasons" are observed silently--unmarked and unaddressed by our liturgical tradition-- because our tradition does not hear the silence.¹

As these words testify, not to recognize important life events through Jewish ritual is to force countless numbers of Jews to seek solace silently, often in

¹ Berner, p. 122-123.

solitude or perhaps, in other communities which can provide the recognition desired.

To be sure, for the Jews who are active within the Jewish community and who know that Judaism can offer spiritual support during significant life changes, the creation of new rituals may come more easily. These are the members of the synagogues who understand the importance of ritual and strive to include Judaism in most aspects of their lives. It is these Jews, along with rabbis and other professional Jewish leaders, who have created many of the rituals which were collected for this research project. Encouraging the continued involvement and creativity of this section of the Jewish population is essential to the perpetuation of ritual innovation.

Other important cross-sections of the Jewish community which have contributed significantly towards the creation of new rituals are those whose lives have been marginalized because, in some way, they have been classified by traditional Judaism as "other." These groups include the Jewish feminist community which has sought to find ways, particularly through ritual, to address the inequalities inherent in a patriarchal religion such as Judaism. Also included in this cross-section are Jewish gays, lesbians, and bisexuals who, throughout history, have been rendered invisible by Jewish tradition and dismissed by Jewish texts. As these individuals join together to form their own sub-community, they have begun to create rituals to address their needs,

including commitment ceremonies which enable their relationships to be recognized through new interpretations of traditional Jewish texts.

The "average" rabbi need not be as concerned with the ability of members of these groups to find the answers to their search for meaning within Judaism. Either these individuals are so involved with the mainstream Jewish community that they would not think to turn elsewhere to find spirituality, or they belong to a particular subset of the Jewish community which has already begun to confront the issues of isolation that come from being considered "other" and are in the process of creating their own rituals which will enable them to feel heard within the larger Jewish community. With minimal support, these Jews will continue to maintain Jewish identification and connections to their Jewish sub-community. Instead, the "average" rabbi must worry about those members of his/her community who are not very involved, have not found their Jewish "niche," and are beginning to look elsewhere for spiritual and communal recognition. These are the Jews who do not believe that Judaism has anything to offer them during those moments of celebration or crisis which are not recognized by traditional Jewish rituals. Indeed, they may even be doubtful about, or unaffected by, the rituals which do exist. It is they whom the rabbi must try to reach. One way to do this is to provide rituals which enable these individuals to connect with that for which they are searching.

But how does a rabbi know when an important life event is deserving of recognition through Jewish ritual? As was seen in the last chapter, there are moments for which new Jewish rituals have been created that may seem negligible in the course of a person's lifetime. It is difficult to decide which events in one's life are in need of ritual recognition. For a long time, Jewish religious perceptions have assumed that the life-cycle events which needed to be marked through ritual were indeed being so marked. In reality, we cannot create a ritual for every transitory moment in our lives. Still, it is important to acknowledge that the changes in social and psychological understanding which have occurred over the past three decades do provide us with the awareness of situations in which Jewish ritual could ease our transitions. Indeed, the less significant moments, such as voting for the first time, are the ones we are most likely to pass over, and that is probably all right. What is more important is that the life-altering events which Judaism has traditionally not recognized no longer be ignored. It is in these transitional moments that Jews can be "hooked for life" or "lost for good," if only rabbis know to ask the right questions and consider the creation or adaptation of rituals to help these individuals through these significant changes.

Imber-Black and Roberts present six questions which rabbis can adopt as the basis for discovering if a congregant could benefit from the use of ritual and what elements that ritual would ideally contain:

- What is the change you are experiencing or anticipating? (It may be that this change occurred quite a while ago, like a miscarriage, but had no ritual to help you deal with the loss.)
- What aspects of yourself and of your relationships will be touched by the transition?
- How would you most like to mark this transition?
- What are the necessary symbols and symbolic actions?
- Who are the people you would like to gather to witness this life-cycle transition?
- What would you put into a document or a certificate to mark this change?²

In addition to these questions, it is important that the rabbi use his/her knowledge of Judaism and of Jewish tradition to identify existing rituals for specific life events.

In actuality, these questions need not be directly asked of the congregant in need. They can merely serve as guidelines for the rabbi who is constantly in contact with Jews during their moments of crisis and celebration. The times to suggest ritual can arise during a counseling session or a conversation at an oneg shabbat. It may not be initially apparent that the congregant is seeking to find a Jewish way to mark the life event about which s/he speaks. This is where close listening and the continued awareness of the need for such rituals as a catalyst for finding meaning and spirituality within a Jewish context is vital.

² Imber-Black and Roberts, 289.

Once the rabbi is aware of a need for ritual in the life of a congregant, s/he must also know where to begin creating that ritual. The place to start is certainly with the questions above. These questions will provide necessary information about what symbols, both secular and Jewish are important to the person for whom the ritual is being created. They will also prompt the rabbi and the congregant to think about the details of how this ritual can facilitate the transition which is taking place.

It is difficult to create ritual in a vacuum, although it has been done in the past and will most likely continue in the future. It is much simpler, however, when there is a clear and present need for a ritual and the ritual can be shaped to fit the person in need. The process of creating a ritual to mark a significant life event can have almost as much power as the ritual itself. For this reason, involving the ritual participants in its creation rather than having the rabbi create the ritual on his/her own can be an important part of the ritual itself and can help to increase the Jewish knowledge and awareness of the congregants involved.

Of course, the rabbi's role in creating new rituals will vary, depending upon the congregant. Once ritual is suggested, it is possible that the person who needs the ritual will take it upon himself or herself to design the majority of the ritual. In this case, the rabbi can serve as a source of Jewish knowledge and support. Rarely will a congregant have access to the vast array of Jewish

traditions and texts, that the rabbi has available to him/her. The rabbi can help the congregant by preventing a "reinvention of the wheel" while assuring that the ritual does indeed have strong Jewish content which can serve as a catalyst to a feeling of support from the Jewish community, both past and present.

It is important for the person creating the ritual to keep in mind the basic purpose and structure of ritual.³ An effective ritual will provide a feeling of, if not an actual, transformation. Debra Orenstein suggests that, as part of the brainstorming process for creating a new Jewish ritual, one must inquire "What are your Jewish associations to the transformation [which you want to create?]. . . What Jewish heroes, texts, historical movements, symbols, ritual objects, songs, do they call to mind?"⁴ This process can be guided by the rabbi or initiated by the ritual participants themselves. Either way, however, it is important that those for whom the ritual is being created are involved in the creative process. This involvement will help to imbue the ritual with meaning by making it personal while using sources which are communal.

Orenstein suggests that traditional texts, including Talmud, Torah, and liturgy, be searched to find those sources which would be appropriate for creating the mood and meaning of the ritual. Specifically, she suggests that the

³ Much of the information in this section comes from Debra Orenstein's discussion of ritual creation in her book, Lifecycles, pp. 359-376.

⁴ Ibid., p. 363.

ritual innovator look at elements which exist in traditional Jewish rituals, in the book of Psalms, and in the traditional prayerbook for prayers or hatimot (the blessings which conclude prayers). Once the associations to the situation to be marked, as well as to its stages, and the Jewish texts have been gathered, the patterns which are prevalent can be used to guide the creator as s/he weaves the various elements together into a whole ritual. This wholeness is essential, as Orenstein explains,

...Ritual is a whole. Try to avoid gaps and seams between stages...the stages in a particular ritual are not necessarily of equal weight. The best themes, heroes, verses, etc. are those that speak to every aspect and stage of the ritual--wherever they appear--and resonate on many levels, not just one.⁵

To help understand how the stages of ritual can be understood in a Jewish context, Orenstein draws a connection between of these stages (before, during, and after the transformation) and the Jewish themes of creation, revelation, and redemption. These concepts can serve as important starting points for the development of ritual because they represent the stages of Jewish life and Jewish community. The first stage of creation can be connected to beginnings, serving as the introduction to the main event of the ritual while the third stage of redemption is clearly future-oriented and can serve as the conclusion of the ritual, as the participants look forward to living out a new status. It is during

⁵ Ibid., pp. 364-366.

the second stage, as Orenstein explains, that the action of the ritual must take place:

Of all three stages, the during/revelation stage most requires a physical act. The communal response in ritual, as at the Sinaitic revelation, is na'aseh venishma: We will act and thereby we will understand....The behavior must resonate with the ritual occasion, as well as with the tradition.⁶

As the needs of the participants are anticipated and addressed within this context, including themes of Jewish community and tradition, a new Jewish ritual can be created to provide a lasting connection to Judaism and the Jewish people.

Orenstein also explains some of the "pitfalls" which the ritual innovator should try to avoid. Noting that too many themes can make a ritual confusing and ineffective, she recommends that a maximum of two strands be interwoven to create the ritual. Ideally, however, she suggests that one theme which carries throughout the various ritual elements is most effective.⁷ Orenstein also warns against over-explaining the symbolism incorporated into the ritual. Since ritual is a performance, the symbols of a good ritual will be understood as they are presented and acted out.⁸ Maintaining a balance between the personal and

⁶ Ibid., pp. 367-368.

⁷ Ibid., p. 369.

⁸ Ibid., p. 370.

the communal is another important piece of ritual innovation. According to Orenstein:

The most compelling personal lifecycle rituals are those that draw the community in, as witnesses and as participants....A good personal ritual is felt vicariously by everyone present, and carries the feeling and the message that the Jewish people will be just a little bit different and more complete because the ritual took place. Ritual not only requires community, it can re-enforce and even create it.⁹

This sense of balance also must be applied to the tension between personal perspective and tradition. As Orenstein writes:

The best innovative rituals, ceremonies, prayers and blessings come from the heart and are grounded in Jewish sources and ritual theory. If you are missing either the personal or the scholarly component, or if the balance between them is grossly uneven, your innovation will suffer.¹⁰

Finally, it is important to remember to place the stage directions into the script itself. These will enable the ritual to flow smoothly and avoid distracting disruptions.¹¹

This thesis has endeavored to show the trends which are appearing in contemporary Jewish ritual innovation. In the analysis of the rituals collected for this project, several items and ideas seemed to appear over and over again.

⁹ Ibid., p. 371.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 370.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 372.

What these ritual actions and objects have in common are the strong connections to Judaism and Jewish tradition which they have embodied and maintain. Mikveh can be used in rituals where the participant is trying to create a sense of renewal and new beginnings. The idea of sheva brachot can be used to help create a sense of communal support as each person or group of people from within the community offers a blessing for the focal person. Also, wine can be associated with joy and celebration while candles can represent new light and the light of Torah or Shabbat. This list is certainly not exhaustive, but it is a starting point for the ritual innovator to consider the variety of options available.

As the Jewish community continues to struggle with issues of continuity, the creation of new rituals to address the needs of the individual while maintaining a link to Jewish community and tradition can be an important trend in this age where spirituality is associated with eastern traditions and "new-age" responses. If we can reach out to those who are in need or those who are searching and help them to reconnect to Judaism by marking the significant moments in their lives with Jewish ritual, we will have taken an important step towards maintaining a strong and committed Jewish community.

Appendix A
Bibliographical Listing of Rituals Analyzed

The following is a complete listing of the rituals analyzed for this thesis. Approximately 75 percent of these rituals were gathered from ritual banks at the American Jewish Congress Feminist Center in Los Angeles, The Jewish Women's Resource Center, a division of the National Council of Jewish Women in New York, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. The remainder were collected from rabbis in the field, ritual innovators, journals, and books. All unpublished rituals are on file in the Teacher's Resource Center at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Appendix B:
A Sampling of New Jewish Rituals

The following rituals are samples from those collected for this research. Only non-published ceremonies are included, since published rituals are readily available to the public. I tried to include at least one example from each category so that the reader can see how these rituals appeared in their written form.

בְּדִית בְּנוֹת

Covenant of Daughters

חַנָּה חַדָּה

Hannah Eve

4 Adar 5751
February 18, 1991

THE WELCOME

(As the baby is brought into the room by the Kvatter and the Kvatterin, David and Robin Laidlaw, ALL SAY:)

BARUCHA HABA'AH! בְּרוּכָה הַבָּאָה.

MAY SHE WHO COMES BE BLESSED!

SONG: Hi ney mah tov u'manayim shevet achim gam yachad

In every birth, blessed is the wonder.
In every creation, blessed is new beginning.
In every child, blessed is life.
In every hope, blessed is the potential.
In every transition, blessed is the beginning.
In every existence, blessed are the possibilities.
In every love, blessed are the tears.
In every life, blessed is the love.
And blessed is this child and the renewal and fulfillment she gives
to this circle of family and friends.

Gayle: We are grateful that Hannah's aunt and uncle, Robin and David, have agreed to be Hannah's god-mother and god-father. As they bring her into this room, we pray that they will always be there for her when we are not able. Hannah has also been blessed with other loving aunts and uncles who couldn't be here today. We know that their love and support will also help nurture Hannah.

(Adam takes Hannah from Robin and David and stands by great-grandparents)

Adam: On this day, I feel especially blessed, for I am not only celebrating my daughter's life, I am celebrating it with all four of my grandparents, Hannah's great-grandparents. I am thankful for their years of love and grateful that Hannah will also share their love.

Great Grandparents: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהָיִינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִנֵּינוּ
לְיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu,
v'ki'amanu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, O Holy One, our God, who gave us all life, sustained us, and brought us all here to share this happy day.

(Adam stands by grandparents)

Adam and Gayle: We're also thankful that our parents are with us to share this day. Their unconditional love and support has shaped us into the people we are. Hannah is lucky to have such dedicated grandparents.

Linda and Carl: We are thankful for the many joys with which our life has been blessed. Now this great goodness has come to us: a new life, a new child to love, the opening of a new chapter in the chronicle of our family's existence. O may this child grow in health and happiness, to become a blessing to family and friends.

Barbara and Herman: May her dear parents find much joy in the years that lie before them. Grant, O God, that they rear their child with wisdom and understanding, teaching her the ways of righteousness, leading her to the study of Torah and the practice of love and kindness.

Grandparents together: May they grow together as a family in health and strength, in harmony, wisdom and love. And may we be enabled to share in the joy of seeing Hannah Eve grow into adulthood, a blessing to her family, her people and all humanity. Amen.

THE BRIT – THE COVENANT

Adam: And now it is Hannah's turn to become a part of our people - to enter into a sworn covenant with God. Since the time of Abraham and Sarah, Jews have been called upon by God to enter into a covenant: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come (*Genesis 17:7*)."
You now become one of our people, Hannah, as you enter into the brit.

The Torah relates that one day three strangers appeared before Abraham as he sat at the entrance to his tent. Abraham greeted them eagerly and, as a sign of hospitality, offered them water and washed their feet. The midrash tells us that because Abraham so

eagerly welcomed his guests. God provided the Israelites who travelled through the wilderness with special waters of sustenance from the Well of Miriam. The Well of Miriam accompanied the Israelites on their journey from slavery to freedom, quenching their every thirst, both physical and spiritual.

Gayle: Just as Abraham Avinu washed the feet of strangers as a sign of welcome, today your parents welcome you, Hannah Eve, into the holy covenant through rehitza -- through washing your feet. Our prayer for you is that in all your future journeys through life, you will find guidance and sustenance in the waters of Miriam's well -- in God's care, in the words of Torah, and in the tradition of the Jewish people.

After washing your feet, we will place you in this special tallit which was your parents' chuppah five years ago. As we wrap you in its folds, we embrace you into the fabric of our family.

Parents together: Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, asher kideshanu bimitzvotav, vitzivanu l'hachnisa l'brito shel am yisrael.

Blessed are You, O Holy One, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who sanctifies us with Your mitzvot and commands us to initiate our daughter into the covenant of the people Israel.

(All Present hum "Mayim" while parents wash Hannah's feet and wrap her in Tallit)

All Present: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַבֶּצֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, borei p'ree hagafen.

Blessed are You O God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

THE NAME

"One should be named after somebody or something. Else a name is really only an empty breath." -- *Franz Rosenzweig*

Gayle: Today we crown you with your name, may it ever be a source of pride to us and the whole community of Israel and humankind. You are given two very special names. We call you Hannah or

Chanah, which comes from the Hebrew word meaning grace, and you are also called Eve or Chava, from the Hebrew word meaning life. You have brought new life and grace into our lives, Hannah.

Your names are significant not only because of what they mean, but even more importantly, because of who they memorialize. Your named Hannah after your great-grandmother, my Nana, Anna Stern. She had a heart of gold, the kindest nature of anyone I've ever met, and boy -- could she cook! As you bear her name, you will carry her with you in your heart. We pray that you will do her name justice.

Your middle name, Eve, is after your great great-aunt Evelyn. It's meaningful that the name Eve means life, because Evelyn was filled with zest for life. Evelyn had a colorful personality and a lot of spunk. We pray that you will inherit her great love for life. As we recall those who have gone before you, who cannot be with us this day, we pray that you will pay tribute to them in the way you lead your life, Hannah Eve.

Adam: Your names also recall two of our biblical foremothers, Hannah and Eve. Hannah was the mother of Samuel, the first prophet. For many years Hannah tried unsuccessfully to bear a child, but she never lost faith in her Creator. Year after year she prayed to God, and finally she gave birth to Samuel. We pray that like the biblical Hannah, you too will be blessed with strong faith. And that like Eve, the world's first woman, you will recognize that the world is at your fingertips, that you can be anyone you wish to be.

Gayle: אֶלְקִינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲמוּתֵינוּ, קָנָם אֶתְהִי לְיָדָהּ הוּאֵה לְאִבָּהּ
וְלְאִמָּהּ, וְיִקְרָא שְׁמָהּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל ...
כְּשֶׁם שֶׁנִּכְנְסָה לְבְרִית כֵּן תִּכְנֶס לְחוּדָהּ, לְהַפֵּה, וּלְטִיטִישִׁים
טוֹבִים.

Eloheynu v'elohey imoteynu, kayem et hayaldah hazot l'aviha ul'ima, v'yikareh shima d'yisrael Chanah Chavah bat Alter v'HaRav Golda Tikvah. K'shem sh'nikn'sa labrit, ken tikanesh l'Torah, l'chupah, ul'ma'asim tovim.

Adam: Our God, God of all generations, sustain our child, and let her be known in the House of Israel as Hannah Eve, daughter of Adam and Gayle. May she bring us much joy in the months and years to come. As she has entered into the covenant of life, so may she enter into a life of study: may the written word enlighten her eyes

and mind; may she find for herself a worthy companion, one that she can trust and love, support and protect; and may her hands and heart always be busy with doing good things, so that she can live up to the ideal of being God's partner in the work of perfecting the world.

All Together: May the One who blessed our mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, bless this child and keep her from all harm. May her parents rear her to dedicate her life in faithfulness to God, her heart receptive always to Torah and Mitzvot. Then shall she bring blessing to her parents, her people, and all the world.

מִי שֶׁבָּרַךְ אֲמוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה. הוּא יְבָרֶךְ
אֶת־הַיְלָדָה הַזֶּה וְיִשְׁמְרָהּ כְּכֹל־צָרָה וְנִשְׁמָהּ. וְיִזְכּוּ הַהֲרִיָּה
לְגִדּוּלָהּ לְחֻנְכָּהּ וּלְחֻכְמָהּ. וְיִהְיֶה יְדֶיהָ זָקָה לֵאל אֲמוֹנָה.
וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

THE BLESSING

Gayle:

With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might,
I thank you, God, for the gift of this wonderful child.
I thank You for a healthy pregnancy, a safe delivery and a speedy
recovery.

With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might
I pray for the continued health of this child.
I pray for her to be strong in mind and body,
To grow steadily and sturdily in a home filled with joy.
I pray for her to become a person who greets the world
With passion, courage, humility, humor and patience.

With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my might
I pray for God to watch over me and my family.
I pray for the ability to love and nurture this child,
To provide for her and to educate her,
To understand her and to allow her the freedom to grow.
(adapted from a prayer written by Rabbi Judy Shanks)

Adam:

May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scroll
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until Life itself arrays itself before you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.
(adapted from Talmud Berachot 17a)

Parents Together:

Yivarechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha
May God bless you and keep you

יְבָרֵכְךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ.
יֵאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִרְמֶךָ.
יֵשָׁא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֶּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Ya'er Adonai panav e'lecha v'yichunecha
May the light of God's face shine upon you
and be gracious to you

Yisa Adonai panav elecha v'yasem lecha shalom
May God's presence always be with you Hannah,
and grant you a lifetime of blessing and peace.
Amen.

Song: Siman Tov U'mazel Tov

(Our thanks to all those who have created Brit Banot rituals for providing us with some of the material we used in this service.)



Maya Eden Zinkow
Brit Banot

30 August 1992

Rosh Chodesh Elul 5752

Maya Eden Zinkow

Brit Banot

August 30, 1992

Rosh Chodesh Elul 5752

All:

B'RUCHA HABA'AH

May she who comes into our presence be blessed.

Elka and Misha

May all who have gathered here be blessed.

מ

Oh how I adore words of Torah,
Words which I might meditate upon day by day,
Words which are sweet to my palate
Sweeter than honey to my mouth;
The sweet taste of insight I gain from Your eternal truths.

י

*Your hands have fashioned me,
Give me understanding that I may learn your mitzvot
Let, I ask in prayer, Your loving kindness bring me comfort,
Your tender mercies enter and enrich my life.*

ה

O God, teach me the ways of wisdom
Give me understanding
Incline my heart to that which is good and right
Quicken me to do righteousness.

ע

*Happy are they that are upright in their way
Who walk in God's footsteps
Happy are they that hold fast to Torah
That seek God with a heart that is whole.*

ד

Sustain me O God,
Cause my soul to melt away its hardened shell
Let my soul cleave to the dust with which it was formed.
I will run to follow in the way of God
And my heart shall grow with You.

ו

*Your word is a lamp unto my feet
I have studied it and made it my own.
I will observe Your righteous ways
And be mindful of all that is asked of me,
Forever with every step I take.*

--Adapted from Psalm 119



Elka and Misha:

Today we utter aloud the prayers of our hearts which we have uttered softly again and again over the last weeks. We thank the source of creation, the Holy One of Being who, through miracles beyond our understanding, has brought us the precious gift of a new child to love. Joyfully we celebrate with friends and family the arrival of Maya Eden. Elan, Amir and Yael have each in their own unique way welcomed their sister into our midst and as parents, we marvel at the beauty, and yes, the size of the family with which we have been blessed.

Today we reaffirm our commitment to creating a Jewish home for our children. We reserve these moments to embrace the beauty and wonder of childhood as we look into the eyes of an infant and her soul sings a prayerful melody of potential and possibility. Swaddled in her blankets, wrapped around her tiny perfect frame are sparks of the Divine, oohs and coos which sing of life's holiness.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וצונו על קדוש החיים.

Blessed is the Source of Life in the universe who commands us to sanctify life.

Misha:

We joyfully bring our daughter into the Covenant of Israel. May she be a blessing to those who know her. May she grow to be strong in body and mind. May she be one who greets the world with passion, courage, humility, humor and patience. May we have the ability to love and nurture her with wisdom, understanding and tenderness. May we provide for her a loving and secure home. May we provide and encourage endless opportunities for learning and enable Maya to find her own place among the community of Israel and understand her purpose in the world. May we light her path with wisdom and guide her toward becoming the best person she can be.

(Misha lights candle)

Elka:

We joyfully bring our daughter into the Covenant of Israel. May she be comforted beneath the wings of Shechinah. May the light we see in her eyes, and the light she has brought to our hearts shine on those who come to know her. May we ever be appreciative of the privilege of parenthood and provide for our children a home filled with kedusha - holiness, with Torah - wisdom, with simcha - joy and with tsedakah - righteous acts. We present to her these candlesticks for the home she will someday create. May the light of Shabbat and holy days illumine her home and embrace her soul. May the world Maya will come to know be a world bathed in the light of shalom, of wholeness and peace.

(Elka lights candle)



ברוך אתה, ה' אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו
במצותיו וצונו להכניסה בבית עם ישראל.

We praise you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who hallows us
with Mitzvot and commands us to bring our daughter into the
Covenant of the People of Israel.



Maya is a name we have always adored. In truth, we first grew attached to the idea of a Maya in our lives when first we chose to have a family, dreaming and creating a vision of our future together while listening to Chava Alberstein, the well known Israeli folk singer singing about Maya in a song by that name. In a mystical way, Maya came to represent the children we envisioned. We learned a midrash, a commentary on her name which deepened our affection for it. It seems that the letters **מיה** MEM/YUD/HEY, the Hebrew letters which comprise the name Maya are an acronym for the words Milchemet Yom Hakippurim, The Yom Kippur War. Daughters of soldiers, according to this legend, were named Maya in honor of fathers at war in 1973. Thus Maya's name calls for peace among all peoples and peace in the hearts of parents and children journeying together toward the future.

The name Eden we choose as Maya's second name to help us remember a dear cousin, Eli Rayles. Eli's soul was gentle, his mind sharp. Though a practical man by nature, he was also a dreamer and a philosopher. He went to build a homeland for the Jewish people, and when the swamps of Palestine were transformed into farmland, parks and gardens, he quietly worked for tikkun olam, to help eradicate anti-Semitism from our midst. He was a righteous soul, and we pray that Maya Eden will live her life in a way that will honor his memory. May she, like Eli before her, look around her and imagine a better world, a world of fresh air, clear streams and green gardens.

אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, קים אהיה לך, הוואת לאבית
ולאמה, ונקרא שמה בישראל ... ייבך האב ביוצאת
חלציו ותגל אמה בפרי בטנה. וזה הכנה גדולה תהיה.
בשם שנקנסה לבית בן חכם לחורו, לחפה, ולכששים
טובים.

Our God and God of our Mothers and Fathers sustain this child through our loving care and your Divine protection. Let her be known among our people Israel by the name **Maya Eden Bat Elka VMoshe**. May her name be a source of joy and may she be inspired to serve the Jewish people and all humankind. May we lovingly rejoice in her growth of body and soul. We rejoice in the obligation incumbent upon us as parents to bring Maya Eden into the Covenant of Israel. May those of you who are gathered here with us also derive a bit of joy from watching our daughter journey along life's path.

All:

May Maya be brought with steady guidance to the study of Torah, a life of good deeds and marriage beneath the Chupah. May God make it so. Amen.



Elka and Misha:

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.

We praise you Adonai Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, שנתתנו ומיכתנו והגיתנו

לימן הזה.

Blessed is the Source of life in the Universe who has given us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this day.

Elka and Misha:

Today is the first day of the Hebrew month of Elul. This month of Elul awakes each dawn to the voice of the shofar. Maya, as you formalize your connection to God and your people, the new moon of this day opens the month when Jews prepare for the season of the High Holy Days. Beginning today, the shofar is sounded. The shofar wakes us up, it calls us to make clear our vision so that we might adequately and soulfully judge ourselves as Rosh Hashanah approaches. May you Maya always be aroused from complacency. May you consciously and continuously return to the people you love and who love you, striving always to sanctify relationships.

During the month of Elul we begin, as you have just begun Maya, to look about our world, open our eyes, as your eyes are just opening wide little girl, to see the self and the universe as if for the first time. We learn from you Maya the miracle of seeing, of taking note, of reaching, of grasping, of loving and of striving for perfection. These are the very activities with which we must occupy ourselves during the coming days. Elul bids us to learn from the earth as it moves gracefully into autumn, enjoining us to take careful stock of our resources and move one step beyond in order to preserve the world, returning it to the beauty and health of Eden.



Holy One

as the new month begins

Renew us and be with us as we welcome Maya Eden into our family,
and into the family of Israel.

May she enjoy the gift of length of days,
a life of peace, of goodness, a life of blessing,
a life which can sustain her,

a life which she can face with vigor,
a life where she will touch awe,

a life where she will struggle because she is aware when she is off the path.

May Maya enjoy a life without shame,
a life of dignity and honor,
a life wherein she will feel Torah's light

where she will seek Your Presence,

a life where the inner questions of her heart will know response
and peace.

So may it be. Amen.

—adapted from a poem by Rabbi Vicki Hollander

Elan, Amir, Yael and Maya are precious to us. Through each of our children we touch the child within ourselves. They make us laugh and smirk, they challenge us, they move us to tears and test our patience and our resourcefulness. They remind us of our blessings and at times remind us of our limitations.

We pray that they will continue to grow in their love and friendship for each other and that the four of you as brothers and sisters will build a strong and meaningful circle of support for one another. We are fully aware and appreciate that they will come to need each other, confide in each other and advise one another in ways that as parents we cannot.

We pledge to all of our children unconditional and endless love and pray that the path on which we are leading them is a path which will enable each of them to live meaningful, spiritual, and joyful lives.

מִי שִׁבְרָךְ אֲמוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה. הוּא יְבָרֶךְ
אֶת־הַיֶּלְדָּה הַרְבֵּה וְיִשְׁמְרָהּ מִכָּל־צָרָה וְצוּקָה. וְיִזְכּוּ הַיְּתִיבָה
לְיַדְלָהּ לְחֻנָּה וְלַחֲכָמָה. וְהִיוּ בְּיָדֶיהָ וְלִבָּהּ לְאֵל אֲמוֹנָה,
וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

May the one who blessed our mothers, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, bless this child and keep her from all harm. May we rear her to dedicate her life in faithfulness to God, her heart receptive always to the traditions of our people. Then shall she bring blessings to her parents, her people and all the world.

יְבָרֶכְךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ,
יְאֹד יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִדְבֶּקֶךָ.
יֵשֵׁא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִזְכֶּם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם.



We seal this covenant with the Shofar's sound.
Elul stands at the threshold of our lives holding autumn's newborn scent
We hold in our arms this new born, Maya Eden Zinkow.
As this season's blast calls us to renew our hope in ourselves,
We stand in awe of life, of possibilities, and of the miracle of birth.

(The Shofar is sounded)
TEKIAH ..SHEVARIM...TERUAH...TEKIAH G'DOLAH

Motzi - Elan, Amir and Yael



Dam Brit

דם ברית

of

Asher Bayln אשר בעלן
Litschwartz



How is this bris different from most other brises?

Jewish tradition tells us that each child is covenanted with the Eternal and the Jewish people soon after birth. Our legend recalls that the theophany at Sinai was not reserved for any one generation or specific group of people, rather, that in some fashion, each one of us partakes in divine revelation; each of us has an inner Torah (teaching) which enables us to determine what is right and ethical in this world.

In Hebrew, the word for this covenantal relationship is "bris" or "brit." One of the most common signs of covenant in the Jewish tradition is the brit milah, covenant of circumcision, the symbolic tie of each individual Jew to the Jewish people. We, as modern Jews who believe in the full equality of women and men, find it problematic that the central symbol of individual covenant is available to only the male half of the people. Therefore we have chosen to enter our child into the covenant with another traditional brit ceremony, the hatafat dam brit, the covenant which is sealed with a drop of blood.

This does not mean that we reject the practice of milah, circumcision. Although we know that members of the Jewish community hold diverse views about this practice, and although we accept the conscientious choices of all members of our community, we affirm the practice of infant male circumcision. We believe there are significant tribal, psychological, aesthetic, and perhaps medical reasons to continue this rite. However, we believe that circumcision can no longer be the central public covenantal symbol of our people.

Many contemporary Jews are searching for appropriate new symbols to serve as the ritual metaphor for covenant. We have seen ceremonies involving the lighting of candles, the washing of the baby's feet, the offering of fruit. However, we believe the covenant is a bodily covenant. We have chosen a blood covenant, not only because it is gender-neutral, but because it conveys the gravity with which the tradition weighs this act of personal dedication. Blood, in Jewish thought, is the life force. Even one drop of blood joins a life to all the lives: past, present, and future, who make up this people.

We also affirm that the drop of our child's blood which we draw today, is a symbol of our, his parents', power and responsibility. The blood, that is, the very life, of this precious treasure, is in our care. We accept this responsibility with humility and awe, thanking the Eternal for allowing us to be partners in the creation of this person, and asking you, his godparents, relatives, and community, to aid us, his parents, in this sacred

THE CEREMONY

The godparents bring in the child. All sing:

Bruchim haba'im, tachat kanfay hashechinah
Bruchot habaot, tachat kanfay hashechinah
May you be blessed beneath the wings of shechinah
Be blessed with love, be blessed with peace (twice)

All say:

Baruch ha-ba

ברוך הבא

May he who is about to enter the covenant be blessed.

The mother takes the child, presents him to his father, and together they say:

הננו מוכנים ומצוינים לקיים מצוות
הברית

He-nay-nu auch-neem u'meez-mu-neem l'ka-yaym mitzvat
ha-brit

We are prepared and willing to fulfill the mitvah of
covenant.

The parents give the child back to the godparents and say:

נברך את מקור החיים אשר קדשנו
במצוות וציונו של הברית

Ne-va-rech et ma-kor he-cha-yeem a-sher kid-sha-nu
b'mitzvot v'tzee-va-nu al ha-brit

We bless the source of life which has sacralized our
life with mitzvot and given us the mitzvah of
covenant.

(A drop of blood is taken from the child and placed in
a clay vessel)

All present say:

כשם שנכנס לברית, כן יבנה
אתורו ואתורו ואמא ואבא

K'shem she-neech-nas la-brit, kayn she-yee-ka-naya
la-torah, u'l'chuppah u'l'ma-aseem to-veem

As he has been entered into the covenant, may he
have a life of learning, domestic happiness, and
social responsibility. [48]

All present think of a blessing for the child and "place" it into the clay pot. Blessings may be said aloud. After the ceremony the vessel will be buried at the foot of a young cedar tree, and according to Jewish custom, when the child forms his own household, his huppah, he will build it with some of the wood from this tree.

The parents say:

מקור החיים אתה יצרת הנה תאבד
 ולא יאבד ויקרא שמו בישראל אשר בצלן בן-
 שמעון ורעהל. יסמך האב ביוצא חצ'ו ותגש
 אמו בשנה ככתוב יסמך אביו ואמו ותגש יו' תתק.
 Makor he-chayim, ka'yem et ha-yeled ha-zeh l'aviv
 u'l'imo v'yikaray sh'mo b'yisrael ASHER BAYLN,
 BEN SHEMAYAH V'RACHEL, yismach ha-av b'yotzay
 chalatzev, v'tagayl imo bif'ri bit-nah, ka-katuv
 "yismach avicha v'imcha v'tagayl yoletd'cha"

Source of life, preserve this child to his father and mother and let his name be called in the house of Israel:

ASHER BAYLN, BEN SHEMAYAH V'RACHEL

Let the father rejoice in his offspring, and let the mother be glad with her children; as it is written, "Let your father and your mother rejoice; let her that bore you be glad."

EXPLANATION OF NAMES

The godparents bathe Asher's feet in oil, as it is written:

מאשר שמעון ורעהל יסמך אביו ואמו ותגש יו' תתק.

May-asher sh'mayna lach-mo,
 v'hu yee-tayn ma-a-da-nay melech.

For Asher's bread will be well-buttered.
 He shall give royal delights. (Gn. 49:20)

ברוך מבנים אשר וטובל ב'שמן רגלו:

Baruch mi-be-nim asher, v'tovel b'shemem raglo

Blessed among the sons is Asher;
 his foot is dipped in oil. (Dt. 33:24)

The godparents give their blessings, take the clay vessel, and sit down.

All present lift their wineglasses.

The parents say:

We bless the source of life who has sanctified this well-beloved of the womb, has set the mitzvot in his flesh, and has sealed this offspring with the sign of the covenant. Source of life, our inheritance and security, safeguard this dearest product of our bodies and keep the covenant which is set in his flesh.

נברך את מקור החיים כורת ברית

Ne-va-rech et ma-kor he-cha-yeem, ko-rayt ha-brit

We bless the source of life which has enabled us to make this covenant.

It is said, "I saw you in your blood, and I said to you, 'In your blood you will have life.' Indeed, I said to you, 'In your blood you shall live.'" (a little wine is put in the infant's mouth). It is said, "The covenant is remembered forever, for a thousand generations, the covenant of Sarah and Abraham, of Rebecca and Isaac, of Rachel, Bilhah, Leah, Zilpah, and Jacob - this is your covenant.

ברוך את מקור החיים כי טוב

Hodu la-ma-kor he-cha-yeem kee tov

Give thanks to the source of life for life is good.

אשר בך, גדול פי' פ

Asher, hakatan, gedol yiyeh

Asher, our little one, may you become great

All present say:

ברוך אתה "אלהינו" מקור החיים
בורא פרי הענף

Baruch ata adonai, elohaynu melech ha-olam, boray p'ri ha-gafen (drink wine)

"For the mountains may erode, and the hills vanish, but the kindness which surrounds you will not erode, nor the covenant of peace vanish."

Isaiah 44:10, Asher's birth haftara

Lechi Lach (words by Savina Teubel:
 music by Debbie Friedman)

Lechi lach.
To the land that I will show you,
Lech l'cha,
To a place you do not know.

Lechi lach.
On your journey I will bless you,
And you shall be a blessing,
And you shall be a blessing,
And you shall be a blessing.
Lechi lach.

Lechi lach,
And I will make your name great,
Lech l'cha,
And all will praise your name,

Lechi lach,
To the place that I will show you,
L'sinchat chayim,
L'sinchat chayim,
L'sinchat chayim.
Lechi lach.

A Service of Weaning for Lev Rooks-Rapport

"26 August 1990"

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֵּלֶד וַיִּגְמַל וַיַּאֲסֵ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל בְּיוֹם הִגְמֵיֵל עֵת יִצְחָק

Vay-yigdal ha-yeled vay-yigamal vay-ya-as Avraham mishteh gadol
b'yom higameil et Yitzchak.

The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast
on the day that Isaac was weaned. (Genesis 21:8)

There comes a time of separation, of Havdalah, of making a distinction. In reality,
your life, my life, all our lives are made up of separations, of Havdalah.

When you were born, when you came out of my body, you were a new being, unique,
your own person, special, sanctified, holy. That was a major separation and I rejoiced in
your success, your individuality, your "you".

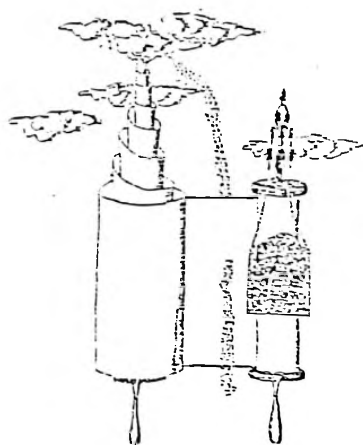
Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Me'ech Ha-olam, ha-mekalkel chayim bechesed.
Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who sustains life with
lovingkindness.

Prayer

Praised are You
Creator of all
mystery wonder and awe
You fill my life
to overflowing,
my heart beats
poems of praise.

Blessed are You
Lord my God
who has given me
blessings without number
of life and love
and laughter that
sings Your holy name.

Thanks be to you
Eternal Source of all,
miracles abound
and gifts beyond counting
my life and breath
whisper an everlasting prayer
of thanksgiving....



Now we come to another Havdalah, another separation, and I am finding it more painful to let go, more difficult to give in, much harder to rejoice in your individuality.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, she-asani israh.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who has made me a woman.



Lev Libi

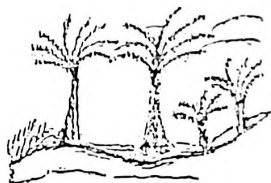
My stubborn child
my venement son
I love you so much
now sleep little one.

Heart of my heart
dream of my dream
nurse at my breast
while silent tears stream.

You're so unique
such a different child
so strong and so forceful
It will take me a while

To learn what you want
to understand your needs
but you're starting out early
you've planted the seeds.

I only hope
I will learn this well
must it always be so painful
only time will tell...



Throughout our years together as mother and child I will try to remember the lesson of this Havdalah. On your first day of school, your Bar Mitzvah, first date, going away to college, standing beneath the chuppah....all these times will be havdalah and they will mix, for me, the bitter and the sweet.

Invisible Thread

We are bound
you and I
My son
by bonds
of invisible thread

Some are fine
some are heavy
My son
some flexible
others ever-so-fragile.

There are strands
that must be broken
My son
as you grow
into manhood

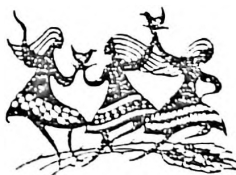
But there are links
that are eternal
My son
that will stretch
into eternity.



Havdalah teaches us to distinguish *bein kodesh l'chol*, between sacred and profane. This moment is sacred. This time is holy. This Havdalah teaches me to let go, to celebrate you and me and our lives together, to cherish our togetherness but also to rejoice as you go forward in becoming your own true self.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, mašameiach nom biyeraasaim.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who has enabled parents to rejoice in their children.



A Three-Fold Benediction

Lord God
of marriages and children
and other major miracles
I have witnessed in my life.

I thank You
for the many blessings
I am showered with
each day and night.

The smallest things
tiny tearsdrops
skinned knees
hugs and kisses

Understanding beyond words
support in times of need
unconditional love
and You--Creator of all.

thankYouthankYouthankYou



We turn now to the traditional symbols of Havdalah, of separation, of taking leave. First is the wine. We say the *brachah* over this first cup of wine which is white and represents the milk which you have suckled until this day of weaning.

As we lift our cups of wine, we join together in singing the blessing:

Baruch atah Atonai, Elohenu Melech Ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Praised are you, Atonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Just as each of us has tasted this white wine let us each share a story of weaning, a time of separation or loss in our own lives, and conclude our telling with a taste of the red wine as we wash away our sorrow in the sweetness of this day.

(Each woman shares her story and drinks from the red wine)





Lev, this kiddush cup is yours. It is filled with sweet red wine. It symbolizes the variety of new food and drink you will now enjoy. As you taste this wine may you remember its sweetness always as a sign of my love and care for you which will endure forever.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, shehecheyanu v'kiyamanu v'higyanu lazman ha-zeh.

Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has created us in life, sustained us in health, and permitted us to reach this special time.

We turn now to the next symbol of Havdalah, the spicebox. These spices represent the exotic world of smells and tastes and adventures which you now enter. It is but one step on the wonderful journey that will continue your entire life.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, borei minei v'samim.

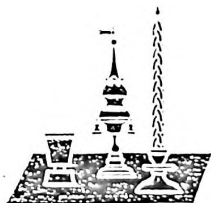
Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of all kinds of spices.

The third symbol of Havdalah is the braided candle. Its paired wicks teach us that all qualities in life are paired--good and evil, light and darkness, sacred and profane, Shabbat and the rest of the week. As we kindle this candle today it takes on a new meaning--the parting of bitter and sweet, sorrow and joy, dependence and autonomy, infancy and childhood.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, borei m'orei ha-eish.

Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of the light of the fire.

While the Havdalah candle is yet burning we have one more symbol for this day. This challah is the first real food Lev will ever eat. It represents not only solid food, but a form of independence. Bread is the staff of life. For generations the Children of Israel have broken bread as a symbol of welcome and of sharing. As you eat of this challah, we welcome you, Lev, as a child in Israel.



Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, Ha-Motzi lechem min ha-aretz.
Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

(A friend feeds Lev his first bite of bread symbolizing independence from his mother.)

As the twisted braids of this Havdalah candle burn with one flame, so too have our lives been intertwined. (Douse the candle)

The flame is now gone, drained in the sweetness of this day and the days to come.
The flame is gone, the bond remains.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, Ha-Mavdil bein kodesh l'chol.
Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who separates between sacred and profane.

The traditional service of Havdalah closes with the singing of Eliyahu Hanavi. We, too, invoke the name of Elian the Prophet who is said to be the herald of the messian. Just as the flame of the havdalah candle continues to burn within our hearts, so too the sustenance of nursing takes on a new dimension in our lives. In the teaching of Torah, the acts of righteousness and the lessons of lovingkindness we will nurture you to full adulthood. *Im ein kemaach, ein Torah*—Without sustenance there can be no Torah. *Im ein Torah ein Kemaach*—Without Torah there can be no sustenance. It is said that the child who would be the Messiah will feed on bread and milk. May you be like that child of tomorrow, may we rejoice in the growth of your body and soul, and may you eat your bread with joy.

Eliyahu ha-navi
Eliyahu ha-tishbi
Eliyahu, Eliyahu,
Eliyahu na-gilaai.

Bimheira viyameinu
Yavo eileinu
Im mashiach ben David
Im mashiach ben David



BLESSING THE BLOSSOM

From a girl to a maiden

ברכת הנדה
מ'עשרה

A celebration of emerging womanhood

in honor of

TAMI SINGER



July 27, 1988
7:30 p.m.
North Hollywood, California

BIRKAT HA-NEETZAN

We begin with our traditional Isha L'Isha blessing:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, Asher
Kideshanu bemitsvot, wetsivanu la-asok b'deevray
Torah.

(Blessed are you, Eternal our God, Creator of the
'universe, Who makes us holy by your mitzvot and
commands us to engage in the study of Torah.)

We read together:

This evening we come together as women of Isha L'Isha
to gently welcome one of our daughters into a new step
in her life. We choose to call this ceremony "Birkat Ha-
Neetzan," Blessing the Blossom. The symbolism of the
blossom expresses the essence of a little girl transforming
into a young woman, just as a tiny bud matures into a
flower.

Several months ago, Tami was welcomed into the Jewish
community as a Bat Mitzvah. Her status as an adult Jew
by virtue of her age was acknowledged by a Shabbot
service in which she read from Torah and accepted the new
legal responsibilities of this status.

This public ritual would not be complete without a
more private ritual, one among women, one that acknowledges
the growth and changes taking place within her. Tami's
Bat Mitzvah addressed itself to her outer life as a Jew; to-
night the Birkat Ha-Neetzan celebrates her inner self in
transition and recognizes her uniqueness as a woman.
Both ceremonies combined speak to the whole person; each of
us having both an inner and an outer life which deserve
to be elevated to holiness through ritual.

WASHING OUR HANDS

We begin the Birkat Ha-Neetzan by ...washing each
other's hands. As we pass the bowl of water and towel from
one woman to another, we symbolically cleanse ourselves,
a holy act. We are washing off any negative images we have
of ourselves as women, feelings of dirtiness, embarrassment
and discomfort that we may have learned from society. By
washing each other's hands, we emerge clean and fresh,
knowing that our sexuality is a beautiful part of us. By

washing each other's hands, we also form a chain of support for one another as women. So we say the blessing:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melech Ha-olam, asher kideshanu bemitsvotav vetsivanu'al.netilat yadayim.

(Blessed are you, Eternal our God, Creator of the Universe, who makes us holy by your mitzvot and commands us to wash our hands.)

(The mother washes her daughter's hands and face. As preparation for her new role as a young woman, the Neetzan repeats the blessing.)

SHARING OUR BLOSSOMS

(Each woman presents a flower to the Neetzan and shares the poems, readings, songs, special thoughts and memories she has brought for this evening. The flowers are woven into a crown for the Neetzan. The crown is completed when the sharing is finished and the crown is placed upon the head of the Neetzan.)

Tami recites the following blessings:

Bruchah at Adonai Eloheinu v'elohei imoteinu v'avo-teinu, asher sidrah et halvana b'darka v'sidrah et makhzoray hakhayim. Bruchah at Adonai, she'astani isha.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God and God of our foremothers and forefathers, who has set the moon in its path and has set the order of the cycles of life. Blessed are You, Source of Life, who has created me a woman.

We all say:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Sheh-hechiyanu, V'kiyamanu, V'higiyanu, Lazman Hazeh.

Blessed are you, Holy one of Being, Parent of us all, who has brought us with great joy to this moment in Tami's life and in the lives of all of us joined in celebration.

Bruchah At Shechinah, Ruach Malkah haolam, she'astani isna. [160]

SONGS OF WOMANHOOD

Leche Lach

Erev Shel Shoshanim

Woman I Am

Dodi Li

Other songs as desired by the group

FOODS OF BLOSSOMING

Now we partake of symbolic foods and participate in feeding the Neetzan:

1. Red wine for joyous celebration...

B'rucha At, Hashechina, Makoret HaChayim, Borayt
p'ri HaGefen.

Blessed are You, Shechina, Source of all life,
Who has made the fruits of the vine sweet to
our taste in the familiar color of our life-
giving blood.

2. Round Challah with raisins for sweetness and
rising--a gradual growing, and the feminine
shape of blossoming fertility:::

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam
Ha-motzi lechem meen ha-Aretz.

We bless the Source of life which creates bread
from the Earth as she creates the power of life
within us.

3. Raspberries, strawberries, watermelon, other
red fruits for ripening, for blossoming, for
beauty and femininity, for future fruitfulness,
and for the variety of experiences that await
you...

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Boray
p'ri Ha-Eytz.

We bless the Source of life that causes us to
experience our feminine beauty.

We bless the Source of life that enables us,
like the fruit, to ripen.

BLESSING THE BLOSSOM FROM MOTHER TO DAUGHTER

We say together:

*Many are the mothers, numerous are the daughters who have shaped our people.

Blessed be the mothers, blessed be the daughters.

May you, Tami, daughter of Israel, be like them:

*patient, as Sarah
gracious, like Rebecca
nurturing, as Leah
loving, like Rachel.* (women of Torah)

May you be

*devoted, as Ruth
dignified, like Naomi
faithful, as Miriam
determined, like Tamar.* (biblical women)

May you be

*heroic, as Judith
wise, like Bruria
generous, as Gracia Mendes
compassionate, like Emma Lazarus.* (post-biblical women)

May you be...

*responsible, as Lillian Wald
assertive, like Golda Meir
courageous, as Hannah Senesh
hopeful, like Anne Frank.* (20th century women)

(Mother) We light two pink candles that were first lit at your Brit Ha-Nerot ceremony when you were a baby. We make a link with your beginning as a Jewish girl while we also anticipate your future as a Jewish woman. (Mother and daughter each light a pink candle.)

(Mother) We light this red candle to symbolize this new stage in your life as a Neetzan, a blossom. Red reminds us of the brilliant color of the life force; fire reminds us of the power you now share with all women everywhere. Through the struggles of this stage in your life, may you learn to use this power in goodness. (Mother and daughter each take a pink candle and together light the red candle.)

Together: Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam,
Asher Kideshanu bemitzvotav vetsivanu l'hadlesk
ner shel Ha-Neetzan. [162]

Such power
 a burning flame, a raging fire...
This new feeling
 is strange to me....
My heart wants to stay a
 little girl sometimes
Yet it knows I am going on.
Perhaps I can keep the best parts of my childhood
 in memory and in experience....
I need to realize that
I am on the brink of
 new possibilities
That, rather than leave all of
 what's been me before behind,
I am adding to it.
The layers of my life are
 increasing
And life becomes increasingly confusing at times.
But I am slowly becoming ready for the emergence of my
 femininity
And I will not rush but take
 each step at a time,
Recognizing the responsibility this power brings.
When I come to a choice, I will be thoughtful and
 choose wisely.
It will be my decision, not influenced by
 my peers but by my own sense of
 readiness and rightness. As such I will express.
Freely my own identity.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share my growing
up with those around me and I am grateful for the blessing
of communication. I know that I can ask any question I have
and get an answer. When I have a problem I do not have to
handle it alone. I am thankful for the trust and guidance
of my family that nurtures my blossoming self, and I accept
with anticipation to the future the changes that are taking
place within me.

CONCLUSION

"My blessing for you is..."

We form our closing circle. Each woman present passes around
the red candle and gives her one word blessing to the Neetzan.
The mother gives her blessing last and passes the candle to
Tami, the Neetzan. The Neetzan says thank you in any manner
she chooses. We all sing our closing song:

Hiney ma tov Uma naim shevet achivot gam yachad.
(Behold how good and how pleasant it is for sisters
to dwell together!)

1. "Enter: A Woman," by Phyllis Berman, Menorah, newsletter of B'nai Or Religious Fellowship, Philadelphia, Vol. VI, Nos. 1-2, p. 1-4, ~~November-December~~ 1955.
2. Penina V. Adelman, Miriam's Well, Biblio Press, 1986, p. 73-83.
3. On Our Spiritual Journey: A Creative Shabbat Service, Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, San Diego, Ca., 1984, p. 6, 8, 14, 66.

Regarding the blessings contained in the Birkat Ha-Neetzan, the transliterations and also the translations were taken largely from the three sources above. Because we believe that God is genderless, or genderful, we have interchanged gender at random and given approximate interpretations rather than direct translations.



This ceremony was lovingly created by Barbara Singer on the occasion of her daughter, Tami, becoming a Neetzan. It had its origins in a meeting of Isha L'Isha in 1986 when the basic structure of such a ceremony was planned, under the leadership of our facilitator, Marcia Plumb, who is now a Rabbi. At that time, none of our daughters was old enough to participate in the ritual, so we have patiently waited. The blessing on page 4, "Many are the mothers..." was written by Barbara Singer with assistance from Jane Litman for Tami's Bat Mitzvah, February 13, 1988 at Temple Beth Hillel in North Hollywood, California. Thank you to Jane who also encouraged me in this endeavor. Thank you also to my soul-sisters in Isha L'Isha. We hope that this ceremony will be adopted and modified for future celebrations among mothers, daughters, and the community of women.

Barbara Singer

ON LEAVING HOME :

TOWARDS CREATING A NEW
JEWISH CEREMONY

Sharon Cohen

Contemporary Worship

Semester I, 1985-1986

Final Project

Daughter :

כִּנּוּךְ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבֹתָנוּ וְלֹא אֲבֹתֶיךָ
פִּי עֲצֵי מִצְרַיִם יִפְרֹץ וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ
וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ

וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ מִצְרַיִם
כִּנּוּךְ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבֹתָנוּ וְלֹא אֲבֹתֶיךָ
פִּי עֲצֵי מִצְרַיִם יִפְרֹץ וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ
וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ

כִּנּוּךְ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבֹתָנוּ וְלֹא אֲבֹתֶיךָ
פִּי עֲצֵי מִצְרַיִם יִפְרֹץ וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ
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כִּנּוּךְ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבֹתָנוּ וְלֹא אֲבֹתֶיךָ
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וְיִשְׁלַח לְיָדֶיךָ

God is my deliverance ; I will be confident and unfrighted.

She is my strength, my song, and my salvation.

In joy we will drink from the wells of salvation.

God will rescue and bless her people.

The God of all creation is with us, the God of Israel is our refuge.

The Jews of old had light, joy, delight and honor ;

So may it be for us.

I lift up my cup of deliverance

And call upon Your holy Name.

Parent :

Tonight the ceremony of Havdalah, or separation,
has added meaning for us.

As we mark the end of this Shabbat

and the beginning of a new week,

So we mark this transition in our daughter's life

as she moves out of our house

and starts to build a new home for herself.

Friend/Relative :

The Bible teaches us that the act of creation
is an act of separation.
God, creating the world, separates
light from dark,
dry land from ocean,
heaven from earth.

So too this moment of separation is a birth
and a beginning.

May you always delight in the miracle of creation
that is all around you
and within you.

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation,
forming the fruit of the vine. 2

Daughter :

On Shabbat, we turn from the results of creation
to the mystery of creation;
from the world of creation,
to the creation of the world.

- A.J. Heschel

Havdalah speaks to us of responsibility;
Gently, it brings us back to the tasks of the
week ahead;
reminding us that we are God's partners in the
ongoing process of creation.

Daughter:

קדוֹן אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
אֵל יִצְרָאֵל, נִסְתָּמֵנוּ בְּצִלְתְּךָ, זְכוֹר וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ קִרְבְּנוֹ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
וְיִצְרָאֵל בְּחַיִּים נִלְוֵנוּ בְּאֵימֶנוּ.
קדוֹן אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מִיָּד מִיָּד מִיָּד קִרְבְּנוֹ.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation.

You created us in one breath, born of the earth and reaching
for holiness.

You shaped the man and the woman in us, and planted within us
the seed of new life, making us partners in the miracle of creation.

Blessed is the One, who constantly renews - with each day -
the work of creation.

Friend/Relative:

The lingering fragrance of these spices arouses us
at this hour of Havdalah,
assuring us that though Shabbat is over, we may
carry some of its sweetness with us
into the coming week.

קדוֹן אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
אֵל יִצְרָאֵל, נִסְתָּמֵנוּ בְּצִלְתְּךָ, זְכוֹר וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ קִרְבְּנוֹ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation,
forming all kinds of spices.

Mother:

There are times when we must leave a place we love
As Adam and Eve left the Garden;
Not freely, not eagerly, not out of choice,
But in exile we must leave.

Father:

There are times when we must leave a place we love
As Abraham left his birthplace;
In search (though not knowing of what),
Cutting all ties to the past,
Alone, we must leave.

Mother :

There are times when we must leave a place we love.
As Jacob left his parents' home;
Running, avoiding a conflict, in need of escape.
Out of fear we must leave.

Father :

But Hazzdalah speaks to us of separation that is part of a cycle.
At the hour of Hazzdalah, we look both backwards and forwards.
As we enter a new week,
We carry with us the memory of this Shabbat now passing,
And the promise of next Shabbat, always returning.

Mother :

May this be the spirit in which you leave our home ;
Carrying the comfort of our love with you
through this week and every week
of your life .

Dzughter :

כְּדֹרֵי אֵיבֹה ר', אֵלֵי צִוְּנוּ לַעֲבֹד בְּצִוְּנוֹם ,
 בְּנִשְׁמִיג יֵד אֲבוֹה צֵל פְּנוֹם , יֵד פְּנוֹר צֵל אֲבוֹהִים .
 כְּדֹרֵי אֵיבֹה ר', לַעֲבֹד בְּצִוְּנוֹם פְּנוֹרִים וְיֵלֵדִים .

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation,
as you turn the hearts of parents to their children,
and the hearts of children to their parents.
Blessed is the One, who causes parents and children to rejoice.

friend / Relative :

The Rabbis tell us:

As night descended at the end of the world's first Sabbath, Adam feared and wept.

Then God showed him how to make fire, and by its light and warmth, to dispel the darkness and its terrors.

Kindling flame is a symbol of our first labor upon the earth. Thank God for the flame by which we turn earth's raw stuff into things of use and beauty. ³

Friend/Relative :

קדוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
קדוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation,
forming the lights of fire.

Daughter: Havdalah speaks to us of what is holy and
what is unholy.
Let us learn to separate ourselves from the unholy,
reaching for holiness.
Let the fire we kindle be holy; let it bring light
and warmth to all humanity. 4

The light of the Havdalah candle is reflected in the
eyes of each person in this circle,
reminding us to turn to each other for help and
inspiration in the work that lies ahead.

Then together may we turn our hearts to Torah;
May the light of its teaching guide us in our search
for what is holy.

קדוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
קדוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

וְיָאֵלֶּה לְפָנֶיךָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
וְיָאֵלֶּה לְפָנֶיךָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

קדוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, touching us with
Your glory and calling us to serve You. You have given us a Torah of
truth, placing eternity into our lives. Open our hearts to Your Torah,
and fill us with love and reverence, that we may learn to do Your
will and serve You with a whole heart. 5

Blessed are You, giving Your wisdom to flesh and blood.

All together :

קדוֹשׁ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיּוֹם יִשְׁמַח
בְּאַמְבָּרָיו בֵּין קִדְשׁ לִינִי וּבֵין יְהוָה לְעַמּוּלָּיו.
בֵּין יוֹם נִשְׁבָּרִי לְעַמּוּלָּיו וּבֵין יְהוָה לְעַמּוּלָּיו.
קדוֹשׁ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַיּוֹם יִשְׁמַח
בְּאַמְבָּרָיו בֵּין קִדְשׁ לְעַמּוּלָּיו.

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation,

Separating holy from unholy, light from dark,

Shabbat from the six days of the week.

Blessed is the One, who separates holy from unholy.

Friend / Relative :

Beyond the daily, weekly, yearly cycles of our lives,

We hold fast to our ancient vision of

"Yom she-kulo Shabbat" - a time that is all Shabbat.

Even as we leave this Shabbat behind,

We sing out our hope

for a Shabbat without Havdalah,

a time of wholeness and of healing,

a time when the promise of peace and love that

we taste on Shabbat

will fill the earth forever.

Daughter :

Throughout our history,

the prophet Elijah has been a powerful symbol of
this dream. Legend has it that before he died,

Elijah declared that he would return to earth
once in every generation.

Dressed in the guise of any poor or oppressed person,
he would come to people's doors, to see how he
would be treated.

By the treatment offered this poor person, who
would be Elijah himself, God would know whether
the population had reached a level of humanity
making them capable of participating in the
dawn of the Messianic age.

Let us have the strength to be among those whose hearts
and homes are always open to the poor and the oppressed.

Sing together :

אֱלֹהֵינוּ כְּנִיָּהּ , אֱלֹהֵינוּ כְּנִיָּהּ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ יְיָנוּ , יְיָנוּ יְיָנוּ

אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ , אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ

Mother :

In this spirit,
we would now like to give you this mezuza -
as you set out to create a new home for yourself.

May you live to see your world fulfilled
May your destiny be for worlds still to come,
and may you trust in generations past and yet to be.

May your heart be filled with intuition
and your words be filled with insight.
May songs of praise ever be upon your tongue.
and your vision be on a straight path before you.
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words
and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.

May your lips ever speak wisdom
and your fulfillment be in righteousness
even as you ever yearn to hear the words
of the Holy Ancient One of Old. ⁷

- Berachot 17a

Daughter :

יְיָ רַבּוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
וְאֵלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ. אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ. אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.
חַסְדֶּיךָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶיךָ.

וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.
וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.

וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.
וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.

וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.
וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ.

May it be Your will, O Lord my God,

God of my fathers and mothers,

to lead me in peace, to direct my steps in peace, to uphold me in peace,
and to guide me to a place where I can safely pursue my desires -
for life, for joy, and for peace.

Deliver me from every enemy, ambush, and tragedy along the way,
and from all the troubles that inevitably visit this world.

Send a blessing upon the work of my hands.

Let me obtain grace, loving kindness, and compassion in Your eyes,
and in the eyes of all who look upon me.

Please hear my voice when I call upon you,

for You are a God who listens to our calling and our prayers.

Blessed is the One, who listens to prayer.

Father :

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ :

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ :

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ .

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord turn His face unto you, and give you peace.

Sing together :

זִכְרֵנוּ זִכְרֵנוּ

(A good week ...)

Notes :

- ¹ translation of this prayer is taken from the siddur printed by Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts, Vetzhar Liberman. (p.121)
- ² translations for this, and the other three havdalah blessings are taken from Vetzhar Liberman. (pp.121-123)
- ³ this passage is excerpted from Gates of Prayer, the siddur published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. (p.640)
- ⁴ this passage is based on excerpts from Gates of Prayer. (p.640)
- ⁵ translation of this prayer is based on the translation given in Gates of Prayer. (p.646)
- ⁶ this passage is excerpted from the Haggadah of Liberation printed in the New Jewish Agenda publication, The Sholem Seder. The passage was adopted by Horvitz Prayer from A Radical Haggadah. (p.95)
- ⁷ this version of the Parents' Blessing from Berachot 17a is taken from Vetzhar Liberman. (p.100)

THE SEVEN STEPS
A MIKVAH CEREMONY ON THE EVE OF MARRIAGE
FOR PATRICIA LAURIE FIELD

OCTOBER 29TH, 1993/ 14 CHESHVAN, 5754

(BEFORE ENTERING THE ROOM TO PREPARE FOR THE MIKVAH)

FRIENDS

"AND GOD SAID: 'LET THE WATERS BELOW THE SKY BE GATHERED INTO ONE AREA. AND GOD SAW THAT THE MIKVAI MAYIM, THE GATHERING OF THE WATERS, WAS GOOD' (GENESIS 1:9-10). MIKVAH: A GATHERING. A GATHERING NOT ONLY OF WATER BUT OF FRIENDS. WE HAVE COME TOGETHER AS A HOLY GROUP, AS PATTI ENTERS THE WATERS OF THE MIKVAH TO MARK HER ENTRY INTO MARRIAGE.

PATTI

MIKVAH, A GATHERING NOT ONLY OF WATERS, BUT OF TIME. IN THE MIKVAH, PAST AND FUTURE SWIRL TOGETHER WITH THE WATERS OF THE PRESENT. AS I DESCEND INTO THE WATERS OF TIME, I WILL CALL TO MIND, WITH EACH STEP I TAKE, THE STEPS WHICH HAVE LED ME TO THIS MOMENT.

FRIENDS

WATER IS A SIGN OF FLUIDITY AND CHANGE. AS YOU ENTER INTO THE WATERS OF THE MIKVAH, YOU ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHANGES WHICH HAVE ENTERED YOUR LIFE. YOUR LIFE IS NOW IMMERSSED WITH THE LIFE OF ANOTHER. THERE ARE TWO CHILDREN WHOSE LIVES ARE BOUND UP WITH YOURS, AND, GOD WILLING, FUTURE LIFE YET TO BE BORN.

PATTI

AS I ENTER THE WATERS OF THE MIKVAH, I KNOW THAT THE SHECHINAH HOVERS OVER ME, AS SHE HOVERED OVER THE FACE OF THE WATERS WHEN THE WORLD WAS FIRST CREATED. I FEEL BLESSED THAT THESE CHANGES HAVE ENTERED MY LIFE.

ALL

BARUCH ATAH ADONAI, ELOHEINU MELECH HAOLAM, SH'HE'CHEYANU, V'KEY'YE'MANU, V'HE'GEE'ANU, LAZMAN, HAZEH. BLESSED IS THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE, ETERNAL SPIRIT OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS KEPT US ALIVE, SUSTAINED US, AND PERMITTED US TO CELEBRATE THIS HOLY MOMENT, TOGETHER.

FRIENDS

THE TALMUD TELLS US THAT ALL THE WATER IN THE WORLD HAS ITS ROOT IN THE RIVERS WHICH ISSUE FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN (BEK. 55A). LIKE THE GARDEN OF EDEN, WE CANNOT RETURN TO OUR PAST, BUT WE CAN RECALL IT. AS YOU DESCEND INTO THE WATERS OF THE MIKVAH, MAY YOU RECALL THE STEPS WHICH HAVE LED YOU TO THIS MOMENT:

1. THE FIRST STEP IS YOUR YEARS OF CHILDHOOD IN BEVERLY HILLS WITH YOUR MOTHER, FATHER, AND BROTHER.
2. THE SECOND STEP IS YOUR ADOLESCENCE AT BEVERLY HIGH
3. THE THIRD STEP IS YOUR YEARS AT BRANDEIS AND IN BOSTON
4. THE FOURTH STEP IS YOUR YEARS IN SAN DIEGO
5. THE FIFTH STEP IS YOUR YEARS IN SAN FRANCISCO
6. THE SIXTH STEP IS YOUR YEARS AT USC, AND IN LOS ANGELES
7. THE SEVENTH STEP IS THE PAST 2 YEARS WITH JEFF

PATTI

BARUCH ATAH ADONAI, ELOHEINU MELECH HAOLAM, ASHER KIDSHANU, B'MITZVOTAV, V'TZEIVANU AL HA'TEVILAH. BLESSED ARE YOU, SOURCE OF ALL LIFE, WHO HAS MADE US HOLY WITH MITZVOT, AND COMMANDED US TO ENTER THE WATERS OF THE MIKVAH.

(PATTI IMMERSSES HERSELF THREE TIMES)

FRIENDS

COME FORTH FROM THE WATERS, NOW. ASCEND INTO THE FUTURE WHICH AWAITS YOU.

1. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE IN WHICH YOUR UNIQUENESS IS ALWAYS CELEBRATED.
2. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE FILLED WITH CONTINUING GROWTH.
3. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE FILLED WITH WISDOM.
4. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE FILLED WITH DEEDS OF KINDNESS.
5. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE IN WHICH YOUR LOVE FOR YOUR HUSBAND AND HIS LOVE FOR YOU IS KEPT FRESH AND ALIVE.
6. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE FILLED WITH PATIENCE AND WISDOM FOR THE CHILDREN YOU WILL NURTURE.
7. MAY YOU STEP INTO A LIFE FILLED WITH THE BLESSINGS OF NEW LIFE.

MAY GOD, WHO HAS BLESSED YOUR COMING INTO THIS DAY, BLESS YOUR GOING OUT INTO LIFE, FULFILLMENT AND PEACE.

Rabbi Jeffrey A. Marx

Sha'arei Am: The Santa Monica Synagogue [177]

LESBIAN COMMITMENT CEREMONY

Processional - music

We rejoice today that _____ and _____ come together to celebrate their love and commitment to each other in the presence of God and loved ones.

God of all generations, glorious, blessed, comforting - Divine Source of the Universe, grant your favor on this couple. Surrounded by loved ones whose joys and prayers are with you here, you stand beneath this chuppah, the symbol of the Jewish home you share together. It is held at the four corners by loving family members who can help to provide support. Yet this fragile chuppah is open at the sides, waiting to be filled with the love of the two of you express to one another. May your home be a shelter of peace, a stronghold of faith and love AMEN.

Now we add to the chuppah the symbol of joy - a drink, a toast, a blessing as you share in this cup together.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam Borei Pri Hagafen.

We praise you Adonai our God, Source of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. (each takes a sip)

(place here for poetry)

And now I ask the two of you to face each other. Behold in the eyes of the one you love the face of God. For in each person is planted the Divine Image. These vows which you now exchange speak of your love and commitment to one another. They are serious and solemn, yet lovingly taken.

EXCHANGE VOWS

You have made sincere and loving promises to one another. Your declarations of love and commitment are embodied in the rings you now exchange with one another.

These rings bind the two of you heart to heart, soul to soul, life to life. As you exchange these rings, place it on the finger of the one you love and repeat the words Ruth said to Naomi:

Al Tif G'i La-azeveich La-shuv me-achrayich Ki-el Asher Tel-chi eilech.

Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge I will lodge. Your love with my love encircling us; through peaks and valleys of our lives until death parts us from each other.

"Our Love"

[178]

Rabbi Denise L. Eger 3/91

KETUBAH READING

IN THE week of Shabbat, _____ on the _____ day of the month of _____ in the year _____, in the house of Adonai, Bet Chayim Chadashim in Los Angeles, California, we have come before the Eternal to sanctify our commitment to one another. We, _____ and _____ do affirm this day to love and honor and cherish one another.

WE AFFIRM our commitment to one another in love and devotion and promise to try to be ever open to one another - sharing our thoughts, feelings and experiences. We will cherish each other's uniqueness, yet, challenge each other to grow and fulfill our dreams and goals. Through mutual support and respect, we will help each other through times of joy and times of sorrow.

We also affirm the sanctity of our Jewish home - one in which the flow of the seasons and the passages of life are celebrated through the symbols of our Jewish heritage. A home which embodies the values, customs and traditions of our people and as such is a dwelling place for the Divine Presence.

Sue Speaks

SEVEN BLESSINGS

We look to our ancestors for guidance and ask God's blessings:

Praised are your Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

2. Just as Sarah brought new life into this world, may God bless us with the ability to create a new life together - a life full of joy and laughter and happiness.

3. Just as Rebekah, at the well satisfied Eliezer's thirst, may God bless us with the flow of generosity and lovingkindness that permeates our home.

4. Rachel and Leah, as sisters, were the same yet different. May God bless us with the gift of respecting each other's capabilities and helping each other grow in strength.

5. Just as Miriam helped lead her people to freedom, may God bless us with the power to inspire others to sing and dance freely.

6. Just as Deborah was a prophet and a judge, may God bless us with eyes that see the good and bad in this world so that we may be partners with God in tikkun olam.

7. And Ruth, who in love and devotion declared, "For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people and your God shall be my God." May we be strengthened in our commitment to one another as we journey from year to year.

TRADITION OF THE GLASS BREAKING

The breaking of glasses at the end of the ceremony remind us of a world which was created by, tzimtzum. God filled the universe. But, in order to make room for the world God had to contract. Then God emitted divine beams of light into the universe. Vessels were assigned to the upper most regions to absorb the light that entered. But these vessels could not contain the light and broke. Some of the light returned to its source; other divine "sparks" fell downward, some rose upward. We thus live in an imperfect world and humanity's task is to repair the world, - the process of tikkun olam. We too, break vessels as a reminder of the tasks that lay before us. We share the hope that our love, work, and commitment to one another will help to bring wholeness to our lives and, we pray, contribute to the process of tikkun olam.

8. FINAL BLESSING

May God bless you and keep you. May the Shekinah be gracious to you and grant blessings to you. May the Divine lift up your faces to always shine radiantly and grant you continued love and joy, health and contentment, wholeness and Shalom - peace. Amen.

9. AFFIRMATION

You have said the words and performed the rites which unite your lives, and before God and these witnesses you are forevermore lovers and friends in committed relationship.

10. Break the glass

[180]

The following is a ritual for a couple who wish to acknowledge together that they are ready to begin the process of conception.

Of course, such a ritual is highly individualistic and will only be meaningful if it is relevant and speaks to the couple. The ritual is most likely to be done in private - though there may be couples who would enjoy sharing such a ritual with a small group of supportive friends.

On the day of the ritual both the man and woman go to a Mikvah or to a body of living water - ocean, lake, or river.

After the immersion the couple will give a significant Tzedakah donation to an organization working towards Tikkun Olam.

When the couple has spent several hours together - meditating, singing and/or talking about their hopes and dreams for the future - they are ready for the ritual.

I. Candle Lighting

The ritual begins with the lighting of two candles, one for each partner, and from these two a third is lit - representing the new life to come.

"Just as we recognize the Divine spark in each other - like a candle burning strong - so we hope now to bring more light into this world - through the joining of our two lights"

the third candle is lit

II. Musical Selection

(This should be a song that the couple finds meaningful and relevant to the ritual)

Teach Your Children

You who are on the road
Must have a code
That you can live by
And so become yourself
because the past is just a good-bye

Teach your children well
Their father's hell will slowly go by
And feed them on your dreams
The one they pick's
The one you'll know by

Don't you ever ask them why
If they told you you would cry
So just look at them and sigh
And know they love you.

And you of the tender years
Can't know the fears
That your elders grew by
And so, please help them with your youth
They seek the truth before they can die

Teach your parents well
Their children's hell
Will slowly go by
And feed them on your dreams
The one they pick's
The one you'll know by

Don't you ever ask them why
If they told you you would cry
So just look at them and sigh
And know they love you.

After singing or listening to the song together the partners join together in the following words and/or spontaneous thoughts and feelings they wish to express prior to this endeavor.

III. *Kavannah* / Intentions

We enter into this stage of our lives consciously, aware of the tremendous responsibilities involved in bringing a new life into the world.

With this responsibility we also acknowledge the hopes and dreams that we share. Dreams for a bright future filled with joy and warmth of family and hope that the world will become and remain a truly hospitable place - a world worth living in.

We pledge ourselves to continue working towards *Tikkun Olam* - making the world a more perfect place. With this in mind as we prepare to join together in conceiving a child - we give *Tzedakah*to _____ This money is a symbol of the actual work we must do to make this world worthy of a new presence.

At this time we wish to acknowledge to one another that should we find conception impossible, we both look favorably on the prospect of adopting and welcoming a child into this family as our own.

Let us now call down the Holy sparks of divinity to join our union in creating a new life - sparked by the Divine

other thoughts:

IV. *T'filah* / Prayer

Oh God , and God of our ancestors; Rock of all Worlds, we call to mind the verse, "Adonai is mindful of us, Adonai will Bless us" (Psalm 115)

May your Divine Presence be with us - giving strength and power to our bodies- enabling us to fulfill this great *Mitzvah* - *Preeya Ur'Veeya* -the Bringing of Children into this world.

May our path be free of obstacles, may nothing prevent us from fulfilling our hopes of beginning a family together. As our love unites us as one, let our hopes and dreams find fulfillment through a child of our own.

May you cultivate in each of the members of our family the ability to discover a life of fulfillment. May our knowledge, understanding and emotions be directed to doing good and holy work in the world. May we draw blessing from this work and may such blessing surround those around us.

Let our union together be pure and grounded in our deep love for one another. May our concentration be pure and strong - allowing us to draw the spark of divinity into our midst - that spark which will bring a new life into the world.

In the name of our ancestors Leah, Rachel, Rebecca and Sarah -may you grant us blessing and child in the name of *Tikkun Olam* and Peace.

Amen, Netzach, Selah!
So Be It Eternally Yeah!

V. *Vichud* / Union

THE DIVINE MYSTICAL PRAYER OF NAAMMUNDI 1 for the Night of Conjugal Relations

May it be Your will, Oh God, and God of our ancestors: rock of all worlds, for the sake of your great and holy name - that which comes out from the verse, "Yah is mindful of us, Yah will bless us, Yah will bless the house of Israel and the house of Aaron" (Psalm 115) - That the spirit of Strength will come forth upon me and give strength and power to my body and my organs in order to fulfill the appointed Mitzvah at any/every time.

Let there be found in by body and organ and passion no weakness, no flaccidity, and no violation; no doubts or confusion of mind, and no weakening of strength to prevent me(hl) from completing my strong desire at any time I wish h with my wife. May my strong desire be invited unto me at any time I so desire with absolutely no remission/omission or flaccidity from henceforth and evermore:

May it be Your will, Oh God, Rock of All Ages, Righteous of all generations, for the sake of your great name - as it says in the verse, "Yah is mindful of us, Yah will bless us (Psalm 115) so may you grant me new seed and holy seed - desirable/favorable/acceptable, worthy/suitable, good and pleasant/prettly, prepared, and recieved and fit to live and to be sustained without sin or guilt. May you also bless me with your name and bless my house (read wife!) (with males) and I will know that there is tranquility in my tent. And you will continue the endurance of my offspring and all my wells from the Source of Israel. So too will you purify my body and sanctify my soul, my thoughts and my intelligence and my knowledge. I will unify my emotions and will strengthen myself and be bold/vigorous and will clothe myself in your good meritorious and generous spirit with the intention of my prayer being to fulfill your will and may You fulfill my seed and build and cause to live and conceive and truly make and gladden and cause to endure - and he will stand in his place of success and through strength and might and boldness - and he will have mercy upon him in his making/creating of him - in the forming of his skin - in his growing tall (extending) - in his clothing - in his introduction upon his cisterns, upon his establishment' at his formation and his creation and his fashioning and the making of his soul his spirit and breath (nefesh, ruach and neshama) in his midst and his imagination. Let there not be in him nor in any of his organs/parts any damage, or lack, nor deformity nor incident nor sickness nor disease nor pain nor a painful labor nor injury or harm - neither weakness or any lack of all that is good all the days of his life.

Cultivate/Educate Me, My wife and my offspring in all complete/fulfilling things - Our knowledge, our intelligence, our feelings to do all deeds for you will. And bless me with blessings from the heavens above to from the depths stretched out below.

And from your blessings - bless the house of your servant.
Amen, Netzach, Selah! So Be It For Always Yeah!

Afterwards both you and your wife should say with a heightened awareness and a pure soul, after you have fixed things up (Tikkun HaMa'Asim) on each night after ritual immersion. It is also fitting to give Tzedakah before. If it is a Mikveh night, there is an additional Aramaic prayer to recite which I have not translated.

notes: The Toughest Klipah is Lilith. She is continually hiding in the sheets of the bed upon which a man and woman are having intercourse. She is there to take the sparks of the drops of seminal fluid which is lost - for without this it would be impossible for Lilith to create with it demons and spirits - Thus it is taught in a Midrash that the man who "draws out his stomach prior to and following intercourse in order to assure that no seed will go to waste - he will be assured male offspring. One should also strive to spurn Lilith from the bed - yell at her in Aramaic

While it is the case that one should not have sexual intercourse by the light of a candle - if the moon is shining through the window it is permitted. Daytime sex is also discouraged

Ritual for Loss of Pregnancy

(To prepare, gather family members and friends together for the ceremony and symbolic meal renewal at the end. As we pray for wholeness once again, we form a circle of support around the woman and man who have recently suffered the loss of pregnancy, by miscarriage, stillbirth or abortion. A rochallah, boiled eggs, pomegranates, citrus fruits with seed, and grapes can be served at the conclusion. The adaptation of havdalah, with a candle and wine is integrated into the service.)

ALL: We stand, shoulder to shoulder, with _____ and with _____ who have felt the promise of life taken away from them; we link our hands to form a human chain of sustenance and support. We feel their sadness, we acknowledge their grief and we pray for their healing to begin tonight.

(The havdalah candle is lit; it is passed to each participant as they read a passage.)

Participant: To begin Shabbat, we light two candles with single wicks; to end Shabbat, we share a single candle entwined with many wicks. Like the candles, our lives become woven together when we create a sacred space and sacred time.

Participant: Tonight, we weave such a cloth to envelop our friends.

Participant: We pray that they are able to find comfort in our presence, and strength as we offer our shoulders to cry on.

Mourners: *Min ha Metzar karati Yah...*

(Psalm 118:5)

מִן הַמֶּצָר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה

In distress I called on Adonai,
Adonai answered me and brought me relief.
God is on my side,
I have no fear;

Woman: Have mercy on me, Adonai
for I am troubled,
My tears reflect the numbing grief
That fills my soul and body, too.

גָּן יְהוָה כִּי צָר לִי
שָׁשָׁה בְּקֶעֶס צִנִּי נַפְשִׁי וּבִטְנִי
כָּל־וָדָא בְּיָגוֹן חֲסֵה
שְׁנוֹתַי בְּאֵנָה
שֶׁל בְּעוֹנֵי כֹחַ
נִצְמִי עֲשֹׂשׁוּ.

Psalm 31:10-13

(The woman and man are given an opportunity to speak. They reflect as long as they wish about the feelings of loss.)

Both Mourners: Adonai, You who are the wellspring of life, the source of all our potential for creating life, help us to understand the pain of broken promises. Remind us of the miracle of birth even as we mourn the loss of our unborn one, and give us the strength to hold on to You, even when we are angry.

Help us nurture the love we share that made us partners with You, and find once again the light of joy the other's eyes.

(The wine cup is raised)

Participant: As we have established sacred space with our circle of comfort and light, so do we make this time as special: from private loss to public healing, from despair to renewal, from emptiness to wholeness once again.

Participant: We raise this cup, to recall the sweetness of time set aside for celebrating our relationships with God.

רוּחַ אֱתָהּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Ba-ruch a-ta, A-do-nai Elo-hei-nu, me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei p'ree ha-gafen.

(wine is shared.)

Participant: The wine brings to mind our sister Hannah, who was thought to be drunk, by Eli the priest, though she was consumed by grief and frustration over her childlessness.

הִיא מָרַת נֶפֶשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל-יְהוָה וּבָכָה תְּבִבָּהּ.

יְיָ סָגַר יְהוָה בְּעַד רַחֲמָהּ

חֲנָה הִיא מַצְבִּירַת עַל-לֵבָהּ

יָק שְׂפָתֶיהָ נְעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע

יַחֲשֹׁבָה עָלַי לְשׁוֹכָהּ

וְאֶרְנִי אִשָּׁה קִשְׁת־רוּחַ אֲנֹכִי

בֵּין וְשָׂכַר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי

אֲשַׁפֵּךְ אֶת-נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

1 Samuel 1

Now Hannah was praying with all her heart, and when she was confronted, she replied: "Oh my lord...d not take me for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress."

Participant: "Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of God."

Participant: So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast.

As we share this challah together, may it nourish your souls as well as your body.

רוּחַ אֱתָהּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Ba-ruch a-ta, A-do-nai Elo-hei-nu, me-lech ha-o-lam, ha-motsi le-chem min ha-a-reis.

(Bread is shared.)

Participant: Our rabbis taught (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot*):

ביום שחרב בית המקדש נולד הנזאל.

"The day the Great Temple was destroyed, the one who would save us was born."
Out of destruction comes new possibilities for creation; this is our prayer for you.

Participant: We have rekindled our flame of hope; now we can extinguish this candle, for it has served its purpose.

Participant: We conclude with the reciting of Kaddish, for its dual purpose: to acknowledge loss and to praise the One who helps us recover from such loss.

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבך. בעלמא דיי-ברא ברעונתה, וימליך מלכותה בתיכונן וביומיכון
ובחיי רבך-בית ישראל, בעגלא ובזמן קריב, ואמרי: אמן.
יהא שמה רבך מבורך לעלם ולעלמי עלמא.
יתברך וישתבח, ויתפאר ויתרם ויתנשא, ויתהדר ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה דקודשא, בריך הוא,
לעלא מן-כל-ברכתא ושירתא, תשובתא ונחמתא דאמירן בעלמא, ואמרי: אמן.
יהא שלמא רבא מן שמיא ותיים עלינו ועל-כל-ישראל, ואמרי: אמן.
עשה שלום במרומי, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל-כל-ישראל, ואמרי: אמן.

Participant: May God give strength to _____ and _____ as they emerge from our circle.

(Meal is shared.)

EXP-1000-1
APC 9/89

DIVORCE CEREMONY

RABBI: We are here to witness, as a caring community of family and friends, the termination of the marriage of Jacob and Rachel Levine. We are here to attest to the loving relationship that was, and to mark its ending.

Jacob and Rachel have tried and are no longer able to sustain their original marital covenant of love and devotion, and are here today to free each other to lead separate lives. They will be free to build new relationships and to form new commitments.

In recognition of the bond they have shared, and the children they have raised together, Bonnie and Max, Jacob and Rachel wish to make the following pledges to each other and to their children, to govern their future relationship and conduct:

RACHEL: I pledge to treat you with respect and consideration in whatever future dealings we may have.

Since we still will need to communicate about financial and other matters, I will do my best to treat you in a way that is kind, open, and respectful.

(others, as written by wife)

JACOB: I pledge to do my best to create an atmosphere of comfort whenever we are together on family occasions.

I will maintain my connection and contact with your father, who has been like a parent to me, and help to support him financially should this become necessary.

(others, as written by husband)

to children
RACHEL: We pledge to never allow our differences to interfere with then our loving and nurturing relationships with you, our children.
JACOB: We will avoid at all costs putting you between us in any disputes or using you to work out any problems we have with each other.

RABBI: Do you each, in the presence of your children, family and friends, affirm of your own free will and without duress that you wish to end your marriage as you have agreed in *your* ~~this~~ Divorce Document?

EACH: I do.

RABBI: Will you do everything you can to support Jacob and Rachel to in their new, separate lives and in maintaining their commitments others for the future? If so, please say "I will."

ALL: I will.

RABBI: Jacob and Rachel, as a symbol of the ending your marriage, you have agreed to return the rings which you once exchanged. I ask you to do that now.

[rings exchanged]

Earlier today, Rachel and Jacob signed a Divorce Agreement, which I will now read to you.

"On the 15th day of the month of Marheshvan, 5750, corresponding to the 13 day of the month of November, 1989, as we reckon here in Wyncote, Pennsylvania,

I do willingly consent, being under no restraint, to release my husband, Jacob Levine, also known as Yaacov ben Pinchas v'Sarah, who resides in Jenkintown, PA. Of my own free will, I grant you this divorce. From today onward, you are not my husband and I am not your wife. You are free to choose any partner. Let this be your Bill of Divorce and Certificate of Liberation according to the tradition of the Jewish people.

I do willingly consent, being under no restraint, to release my wife, Rachel Levine, also known as Rachel bat D'vora u' Shmuel, who resides in Elkins Park, PA. Of my own free will, I grant you this divorce. From today onward, you are not my wife and I am not your husband. You are free to choose any partner. Let this be your Bill of Divorce and Certificate of Liberation according to the tradition of the Jewish people.

Witness _____

Witness _____

Rabbi _____

Rachel and Jacob, may this parting ceremony allow each of you to experience full release from your marriage and enable you to realize your potential as you go your separate ways.

In our tradition, when one sets out on a journey, the T'fillat HaDerech is recited. As you are each beginning a new journey as an individual, I invite you to recite a version of this prayer:

BOTH: May it be your will, O God, to lead and guide us in safety and direct our future paths in healthy growth; may you help guide us on our new paths in life, happiness and peace. Protect us from the pitfalls and difficulties which may befall us as we map out our new lives. May we find favor, kindness and love in your eyes and in the eyes of all those we meet along the way. Hear our prayer and shelter us beneath your wings as we take these new steps, O Holy One of Blessing.

RABBI: And as T'filat Ha Derech^{after} traditionally ends:

RABBI: May God bless you
and protect you.

May God shine on you
with compassion.

May God face your
new direction
with you and
help you find
growth and
peace.

ALL: Amen.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו
אלהינו יהוה אחד
אלהינו יהוה אחד
אלהינו יהוה אחד
אלהינו יהוה אחד

-Susan Pendrick

LET YOUR HEART TAKE COURAGE:
A CEREMONY FOR ENTERING A NURSING HOME

Leader:

We gather today to consecrate a moment of transition. In the journey of life, it is a significant milestone. Much time has been spent in preparing for this moment. Amidst this preparation, there have been feelings of hope and fear, anticipation and anxiety, sorrow and perhaps relief. Embarking on this new phase of the journey, we pause to reflect on the continuance of life and its progression, and to contemplate both the changes and the challenges to be faced.

With hearts full of emotion, we turn to the words of our Tradition, seeking faith in the midst of uncertainty, comfort in the midst of despair:

All:

A Song of Ascents

I turn my eyes to the mountains;
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot give way;
your Guardian will not slumber.
See, the Guardian of Israel
neither slumbers nor sleeps!
The Lord is your Guardian,
the Lord is your Protection
at your right hand.

By day the sun will not strike you,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will guard you from all harm;
He will guard your life.
The Lord will guard your going and coming
now and forever.

(Psalm 121)

From The Files Of:
The AJCongress Feminist Center
6505 Wilshire Blvd., #417
Los Angeles, CA 90048
(213) 651-4601

Resident:

I seek refuge in You, O Lord;
may I never be disappointed.

For You are my hope,
O Lord God,
my trust from my youth.

Do not cast me off in old age;
When my strength fails,
do not forsake me!

Even in frail old age
do not forsake me, God,
until I proclaim Your strength
to the next generation.

You who have made me undergo
many troubles and misfortunes
will revive me again,
and raise me up
from the depths of the earth.

You will grant me much greatness,
You will turn and comfort me.

My lips shall be jubilant,
As I sing a hymn to You,
My whole being,
which You have redeemed.

(From Psalm 71)

All: שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד

Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.

Leader:

ואהבת את ה' אלוהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך.

You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Resident:

May I respond in love and in trust to the will of the Creator of Life, with all my heart, with all of my soul, and with all of my strength.

Leader:

והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצווך היום על לבבך.

These words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart.

Resident:

When my spirit darkens, may I dally take to heart the promise of the Ancient of Days: "I am with you in your distress. I will not forsake you."

Leader:

ושונתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בבתיך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומיך.

Teach them faithfully to your children, speaking of them when in your home or on a journey, when you lie down and when you arise.

Resident:

Even in physical frailty, let me retain strength of spirit. May my existence maintain its sense of purpose; may I still live my life as an exemplar of courage and hope to my family and friends.

Leader:

וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו לטטפות בין עיניך.

Bind them for a sign upon your arm, and let them be a symbol between your eyes.

Resident:

May Divine Caring always be evident to me. May God's mercy always be present to me. May His strength inspire me to keep my body energized and my mind active, and may He always watch over my spirit, even when it departs this world.

Leader:

וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך ובשעריך.

Write them upon the doorposts of your house; and upon your gates.

Resident:

May the Divine Presence, symbolized by the mezuzah, always be felt in this room by all who enter; may that Presence continue to sustain me, as it has sustained those who came before me, as it will sustain those who will come after me. Amen.

If appropriate, affix the mezuzah to the door and say:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו
וצונו לקבוע מזוזה.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us to affix the mezuzah.

Resident:

O God, at this juncture in my life, I look back on the years with both gratitude and sorrow. Basking in the memories of earlier years-- days of health and vigor, of accomplishment and fulfillment--I also recall times of pain and loss, of failure and regret. When I review my life, may I be reconciled to both the happy and the sad, and may such reconciliation help

to bring me healing and wholeness. Thus, may I be worthy of the most precious of Your gifts--shalom.

O Lord, In my frailty, do not forsake me. If I look upon the days to come as days without pleasure or purpose, let my heart take courage. Grant both my family and I the strength to let go of what can no longer be held on to , and to meet the present challenge of acclimating to my new home. When fear and frustration overwhelm us, help us to have patience with those who are dedicated to assisting me. Though my circumstances have changed, let me find continued meaning and goodness in life, so that the remainder of my days will be a true crown of glory for all to behold.

Amidst uncertainty, may I cleave to You in hope and trust, as it is written, "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart...In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Amen.

All sing or recite:

O Lord, my God,

אלי אלי

Eili, Eili,

I pray that these things never end:

שלא ייגמר לעולם

she-lo yi-ga-mair le-o-lam:

The sand and the sea,

החול והים

ha-chol ve-ha-yam,

The rush of the waters,

רשרוש של המים
rish-roosh shel ha-ma-yim,

The crash of the heavens,

ברק השמים
be-rak ha-sha-ma-yim,

The prayer of the heart.

תפילת האדם.
te-fi-lat ha-a-dam.

The sand and the sea,

החול והים
ha-chol ve-ha-yam,

The rush of the waters,

רשרוש של המים
rish-roosh shel ha-ma-yim,

The crash of the heavens,

ברק השמים
be-rak ha-sha-ma-yim,

The prayer of the heart.

תפילת האדם.
tefflat ha-a-dam.

("Toward Caesarea"
by Hannah Senesh)

Staff Member:

On behalf of the entire staff, I want to welcome you (or your loved one), M _____, to _____. We hope that the adjustment for you and your family will be an easy one, and we promise to meet your needs and concerns, to the very best of our ability.

As you join our family, may you be blessed and sustained by these ancient words:

יְבָרֵךְ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ.

Y'va-re-khe-kha Adonal v'yish-me-re-kha

May the Lord bless you and protect you.

יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחַנֶּךָ.

Ya-er Adonal pa-nav ay-leh-kha v'yi-khu-neh-kha

May the Lord make His face to shine upon you

and be gracious to you.

יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֶּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Ye-sa Adonal pa-nav ay-leh-kha v'ya-saym l'kha shalom

May the Lord make His face to shine upon you

and grant you peace.

Compiled by Rabbi Cary Kozberg
Wexner Heritage Village
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A Ritual for Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse

compiled and written by Tzeviya Rivka

April 15, 1993 -- Nissan 24, 5753

SUSAN: "Either you will
go through this door
or you will not go through.

If you go through
there is always the risk
of remembering your name.

Things look at you double
and you must look back
and let them happen.

If you do not go through
it is possible
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes
to hold your position
to die bravely

but much will blind you,
much will evade you,
at what cost who knows?

The door itself
makes no promises.
It is only a door."¹

STEPHANIE: Creating a new ritual is always a risk, but I decided it was a risk I needed to take at this point in my healing process. I chose to begin my ritual with this poem because it represented for me the struggle I experienced in making my decision. If I had not created this ritual, I would have still been able to heal and to live a Jewish life, but the cost may have been that I would have allowed my abuser to render me invisible in the sight of my tradition. Of course, the ritual is only words and the mikvah is only water. They make no promises. But the spirituality and faith which I bring to this place and event can be the guiding forces in my search for the healing which lies ahead.

SANDRA: "According to the Talmud, the ultimate source of all water is the river that emerged from Eden. By immersing ourselves in the mikvah, we participate in the wholeness of Eden. Natural water is required for a mikvah because water is a symbol of the life force of the universe. Fundamentally, mikvah is not about "uncleanliness" but about human encounters with the power of the holy."²

STEPHANIE: For me, the mikvah represents many things. The waters represent life, the womb, a protected environment where we are given the opportunity to grow unscathed by the outside world. Entering the water is to re-experience the tranquillity of the womb, with the understanding that to come back out is to once again face the harsh realities of the world, somewhat refreshed and renewed.

The mikvah also represents my tears. Sue Ann Wasserman mentions the mikvah as representative of tears in a ritual which she helped to develop. She mentions that surrounding oneself with the tear-representing water outside can help prompt the release of those tears which remain inside.³ When I enter the mikvah, I hope to imagine the water as both those tears which I have shed and those tears which I have yet to cry. Part of my hope is that this ritual will provide the catharsis necessary to allow me to begin to shed those tears.

The mikvah also represents my struggle. One year ago today, I came out of the hospital, unsure of what the future held, unsure if I would make it through another year. I never imagined what memories that year would bring. But I made it through. I can stand here today and say out loud, I was a victim, but I am becoming a survivor.

The timing of this ritual is also very important to me for other reasons. Spring is a time of renewal, the flowers bloom, the trees blossom, and many creatures give birth at this time of year. In Judaism, not only is this first month a time of renewal, but one of redemption as well. This month of Nissan marks the Exodus from Egypt. Just as Miriam and the Jews entered the waters of the Red sea, separating from a life of slavery and entering into a new beginning, I will enter the waters of this mikvah, separating from the past which I can not change and entering into a new stage of my healing process.

It is important to note that crossing the Red sea was not an ending for Miriam and the Jews, it was only the beginning of a journey which lasted a lifetime. Nor was the exodus without its struggles. As the Jews wandered in the desert, there were times they regretted leaving. There were memories of the few advantages to their past situation. Furthermore, there were times when the Jews felt lost, physically and spiritually. But the Shechina was with them throughout their journey providing them with the strength and courage to continue.

So it is with me. Entering this mikvah is not an ending, it is merely the beginning of something new, of a year I have chosen to dedicate to healing, of a lifetime as a survivor of incest. Even as I go through the stages of healing, the past will never be completely wiped away from my mind. There will still be the memories of the love and affection which came with the abuse and pain. And I will continue to struggle to understand where I'm going and where I've been and to believe that there is life after

abuse if I only choose to live. But wherever I go, I know that the Shechina will be with me to guide me with strength and courage.

As I immerse myself in the waters of the mikvah, may this mark for me a new beginning, a time of renewal and healing yet to come.

Immerse then recite:

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ מַקּוֹר-חַיִּים, מְחַיֶּה בְּכָל-יוֹם תַּחֲדֵי מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרָאשִׁית, וְהַיְיֵתְנִי לְזֶמֶן
הַזֶּה לְהַתְחַלֵּשׁ בְּטַבִּילָה.

Blessed are You, source of life, who renews the works of creation daily and who has given me this opportunity to find renewal through immersion.

Immerse then recite:

"נְבָרְךָ אֶת מַעַן חַיֵּינוּ שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְאִמָּנוּ וְהַיְיֵתְנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה."

Let us bless the flow of life that revives us, sustains us, and brings us to this time."⁴

Immerse for a third and final time.

SANDRA:

לְמַצֵּא אֶת הַגְּבוּרָה לְהַמְשִׁיךְ
בְּבִרְכָּה אֲמוּתֵינוּ, הִיא תַעֲזֹר לִי
בְּהַתְרַפְּאוּתָהּ. הַשְׂכִּינָה תִּבְרַךְ אוֹתָהּ עִם רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה, הַתְחַלְּשׁוּת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהַתְחַלְּשׁוּת-
הַגּוּף. וְנֹאמֶר אָמֵן.

May the one who blessed our mothers, help _____ to find the courage to continue on her journey of healing. Shechina, bless her with a complete healing, a renewal of spirit and a renewal of body. And let us say: Amen.⁵

STEPHANIE: "Women connect to each other,...

This connection is powerful --
a strong current of feeling
conducted by the medium of our tears.

SUSAN: To some, tears may be a symbol of woman's weakness. Here they are the symbol of a woman's strength: her ability to express feeling, empathy, connectedness.

SANDRA: Shechinah, I pray that Your spirit may pervade those whose tears will not flow; that they may experience the release of feeling that connects us to each other, to the tradition of our ancestors, to our progeny and to all humanity.

STEPHANIE: For the blessing of tears,
I thank God I was born a woman."⁶

Notes:

1. Adrienne Rich, The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New 1950-1984 (New York: Norton, 1984), 51-52.
2. From "Mikvah Ceremony for Laura (1989)" written by Laura Levitt and Sue Ann Wasserman, in Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds. Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 323.
3. *ibid.*, 324.
4. "Sheheheyanu (Blessing for Renewal)" written by Marcia Falk, in Umansky and Ashton, eds. Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook, 242.
5. Adapted from traditional liturgy and Mi Shebeirach, lyrics written by Debbie Friedman and Drorah Setel.
6. Adapted from "Blessing of Tears" written by Adela Karliner, in Marcia Cohen Spiegel and Deborah Lipton Kremsdorf, eds. Women Speak to God: The Prayers and Poems of Jewish Women (San Diego: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1987), 75-76.

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