

THE RE-ENGAGEMENT OF MEN IN
JEWISH LIFE

By

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Introduction

וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶל־הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה

The Lord God called out to the man and said to him,
"Where are you?" Genesis 3:9

Hiding in the leaves behind the garden
Cowering with guilt and fear and shame,
Adam hides his face in his trembling hands,
Waiting for God to call his name.

And the wind begins to stir
The trees begin to weep
Old becomes a guest among the new
God's voice cries out in silence with a whisper of the wind
"Adam" God says, "Where are you?"

Walking hand in hand upon a mountain
Weighted down by lumber and a knife,
Abraham remembers Sarah's laughter
And for a moment, he fears for Isaac's life.

But the he shudders with the wind
And fills his head with faith,
Struggles with a different point of view
He reaches deep inside to find the handle to the blade
"Abraham" God screams, "Where are you?"

Where are you? Ayeka?
Are you hiding from yourself or from your sin?
Where are you? Ayeka?
The answer to God's question lies within.
"Ayeka" Rabbi Joe Black¹

"Where are you – Jewish men?" Where have you gone? Are you hiding? Are you ashamed for your sin, as Rabbi Black asks, or for something else? "Where are you?" This question is quickly developing into one of the major agenda items for the American Reform Jewish congregational community. A poll regarding gender differences in Protestant churches in 1999 found significant differences between men and women with regard to church attendance and matters of faith. Faith

¹ Rabbi Joe Black. "Ayeka" *Leave a Little Bit Undone*. Lanitunes Music, 1997.

and spiritual goals are more important to women by 15% points on faith, and 12% on setting spiritual goals. Women lead men in this study by 8% in adult learning, and 10% in church attendance.² In a study of the Jewish community of Seattle, synagogue attendance by women is greater than men by as much as 2-3%.³ Historic reports of synagogues in America note the predominance of women in synagogue life, which will be presented in the chapter on immigration and assimilation. Further, current newspaper articles inquire about the absence of Jewish men in synagogue life, suggesting that men have vanished from the Jewish scene.⁴

The earliest response regarding Jewish men came in 1988, when Harry Brod edited a special issue of *Changing Men* magazine on Jewishness and masculinity. His consideration took place in the context of a nascent men's movement – the National Organization for Changing Men, resulting in the issue of Jewish men in the contemporary world of the late 20th century being given a voice.⁵ In his anthology, *A Mensch Among Men*, Brod collected writings that appeared in *Changing Men*, which addressed the challenges men were encountering in a world that was changing dramatically.

Also appearing in the same year, Rabbi Kerry Olitsky authored, *From Your Father's House... Reflections for Modern Jewish Men*. In the introduction, Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevitt stated:

This book arrives at a time of great excitement and challenge for the Jewish people as a whole and for men in particular. As gender roles and expectations have shifted and stretched in contemporary society, it is becoming increasingly more challenging to gain an understanding of who we are – and who we want to be as men and women.⁶

He noted, as did Harry Brod, that the rise of feminism resulted in a need for men to seek out and discover who they were in this new landscape in the words of Genesis 12:1, 2, "Go forth from your

² Religious Practices in the U.S.: Poll Results. Religious Tolerance. Org.

³ Bruce Phillips, Greater Seattle Jewish Population Survey 2000.

⁴ Rachel Zoll, "Looking for a Few Good Jewish Men", Washington Post, May 22, 2004.

⁵ Harry Brod, "Introduction: From the Political to the Personal". *A Mensch Among Men*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1988. p. 2-3.

⁶ Rabbi Kerry Olitsky. *From Your Father's House... Reflections for Modern Jewish Men*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988. p. viii.

native land, from your father's house to the land that I will show you..." The call to "Go forth" was then, and remains today, a call to engage in the enterprise of responding to the question, "who are we as men?" and "where do men fit in to the new world that is no longer the world of their father's house?"

Jewish men in particular were challenged by the growth of feminism, as its leading proponents were Jewish women. The emergence and growth of the women's movement would compel Jewish men to come to terms with the changes in their relationship with women and with their own self-identities. As Jewish women grew in strength and status, an examination of Jewish men in a thorough, thoughtful, and critical manner was needed. Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's, *Search for My Brothers*, written in 1999, explores biblical text as he reflects on those life experiences that inform his identity as a Jewish man. Unlike Brod, Olitsky and Zevitt, Salkin condemns the current state of Jewish men. For Salkin, Jewish men are distinct from the model of men found in the Western world and in the United States in particular. In recalling his youth in Bethpage, New York, he relates his experience of being attacked by the local "hoods", who called him a "Hippie Jew Faggot". "What they were really saying", according to Salkin, was "You are the other. You are a stranger. You are not like us."⁷

In contrast to the other conversations emerging regarding Jewish men, Salkin turns inward and investigates Jewish men historically and in the contemporary world of the last decade of the 20th century. The anxiety for Salkin is how Jewish men can manage, not only in a Jewish world where women are attaining power, status, and control; but also in a world where Jewish men remain "the other" in the eyes and minds of American men in general. In a journey through Biblical texts,

⁷ Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin. *Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999. p. 1.

Salkin contends that the construction of Jewish men is a consequence of a "selection" process where intellect trumps brawn, where connections to "mom" were greater than that with "dad" and where displaying emotions was valued in contrast to the Western notion of "being a man = being macho".

Harry Brod also identifies with Salkin's reading of Jewish men as "other". "As a child and adolescent, I did not fit the mainstream male image. I was an outsider, not an athlete, but an intellectual, fat, shy and with a stutter for many years."⁸ Brod's personal history with the victims of the Holocaust and being an underdog led to his identification with the women's movement. He was the outsider by birth, by upbringing and by background. In supporting feminism, Brod was able to associate himself with others who objected to their marginality and need to establish an identity in an emerging culture where identity was politics.

In using my Jewish marginality as a vantage point from which to attack the mainstream...my ability to use feminist argument had been purchased at the price of continuing alienation from other men, and hence from myself as well.⁹

In his endeavor to overcome being "other", Brod recognized that he would have to consider his use of feminism as a shield against other men. He realized that he "must reevaluate what it really means to be a Jew and a man, a Jewish man, in the contemporary world."¹⁰

Brod and Salkin begin their journey into the world of seeking a Jewish male identity with a strong foundation in Jewish life. Additionally, they both comprehend the importance of the feminist movement and its influences on the emerging Jewish men's movement, albeit small and

⁸ Brod, p. 7.

⁹ Brod, p. 8

¹⁰ *ibid.* Daniel Boyarin, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and David Biale address this from a scholarly perspective – examining text, Jewish history and prominent Jewish thinkers and leaders who played a significant role in the development and construction of Jewish men – in light of and in response to the growth and influence of Jewish feminism.

lacking in form and cohesion.¹¹ As Shawn Zevit notes, the emerging Jewish men's movement followed the model of Jewish feminism in turning to Jewish ritual tradition to find ceremonies and practices that would bring men together and focus on their needs to find themselves and seek answers to the questions about their identity. Salkin will choose to ignore feminism and in so doing imply that the problems facing Jewish men are their own or the result of interactions with other men, in Salkin's case, this will reference non-Jewish men who diminish Jewish men's manhood. Harry Brod on the other hand will argue that men should listen to women and embrace a "male Jewish feminism", which Brod asserts is needed to "determine how feminism applies to Jewish men."¹² Brod adds, "While some think of feminism as divisive to the Jewish community, I find this view backward. The Jewish community is already divided along gender lines and damaged by sexism. Feminism offers the only hope of uniting on a firm foundation."¹³ Brod's insight and argument will be used to support the acceptance and integration of some elements of Jewish feminism into the work of helping Jewish men achieve their fullness and completeness as Jewish men in what is now a post-feminist world. Here Salkin is correct; the anxieties of men are their own. The data from interviews conducted for this study will demonstrate that Jewish men accept the roles Jewish women are now playing in organized Jewish life. The time is present for Jewish men to address their own concerns on their own.

Indeed, Jewish men deal with many questions. How do Jewish men experience and understand God? How do Jewish men become "macho", if that is a goal, or how do Jewish men integrate toughness and gentility? How do Jewish men obtain a sense of spirituality and meaning -

¹¹ Brod will continue to support Jewish feminism. Salkin understands the importance of Jewish feminism as a phenomenon, however, as will be discussed, he rejects Jewish feminism as a significant factor of Jewish men. The task Salkin argues is one for Jewish men alone in seeking to secure male Jewish identity.

¹² Brod, p. 181.

¹³ Brod, p. 182.

which speaks in a male voice and is heard by male ears? Where are Jewish men and why are they not present in our Reform congregations? What are the factors that keep men away and what might be the "ropes" or "magnets" to pull or draw them into the Jewish life of the synagogue?

The answers to these questions and the current dialog within the Reform community regarding Jewish men requires "struggling with a different point of view" as does Abraham in Rabbi Joe Black's song. The answers to "*ayeka* - where are you?" - Jewish men require an exploration of what our Jewish tradition articulates about being a Jewish man. The remedy to finding Jewish men requires an examination of the trends that influence Jewish men in contemporary Jewish life - what role assimilation and acculturation had upon Jewish men. What role does "HIS-tory" have on generations of Jewish men - is today different and if so in what ways and if not what are the lines of continuity for Jewish men?

Rather than seek a programmatic response to the subject of Jewish men, this study seeks to examine the question of Jewish men through an exploration of Jewish texts, history, and culture. Jewish men will speak about their concerns regarding their own Jewish "HIS-tory" and their success in response to these questions. The trends regarding Jewish men while not yet studied systematically by demographers indicate that men are taking time to look at themselves, to gather and discuss their needs as Jewish men. The modalities needed to re-engage Jewish men in Jewish life must be multifaceted and multivalent. The portals to the engagement of Jewish men need to be diverse and attractive as well.

Indeed, the story of Jewish men even five years from now will be significantly different considering current programs, study and literature on this subject. Perhaps in five years the question

will not be "where are you Jewish men?" instead it will be "how did you get here?" and what factors are responsible for this success.

However, for this moment in time, Jewish men are currently absent and the question remains:

Where are you? Ayeka? Are you hiding from yourself...?

Where are you? Ayeka? The answer to (the) question lies within.

Chapter 1 Jewish Men in the Torah

מי הוא זה ואי-פה הוא

Who is he and where is he

Esther 7:5

Before we can answer the question, "*ayeka* – where are you?" We need to ask Jewish men, "Who are you?" A review of Torah texts will provide a framework toward understanding the construction of Jewish men. What information can Torah offer toward an understanding of Jewish men that will serve us in explaining why some Jewish men are apparently uncomfortable with being Jewish and therefore absent themselves from Jewish life.

"What does it mean to be a man in the Torah?" a construction of "who is a Jewish man" in the Torah begins with an examination of siblings in Genesis and then the life of Moses, in particular his relationship with his father-in-law, Jethro. The story of Jewish men begins, however, with Jewish mothers. The differentiation between siblings is reflected in their mothers specifically, the mother who is barren. The pattern found in Genesis is the barren mother, beloved by her husband, who after great difficulty bares a child that is "selected" as the chosen one through whom the line of the Covenant flows. Moreover, it can be argued that the biblical models of what it means to be a man, as will be demonstrated in an examination of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, involve passivity, powerlessness, loneliness and alienation from other men.

Isaac and Ishmael

Sarah, Abraham's wife, was unable to become pregnant and have a child. In frustration and anger, she offers her Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram for childbearing. The child born to Hagar is Ishmael of whom it is said, "He will be a wild ass of a man; his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; he shall dwell alongside of all of his kinsmen" (Genesis 16:12). Years later, advanced in age and announced by "guests" who appear to Abraham and Sarah, she has a child. Sarah laughs when she learns that she is pregnant. Her laughter becomes the name of her son, Isaac – the one who causes laughter.

Sarah's laughter turns on her when her son, Isaac was weaned. She found Ishmael "playing" with him. The Hebrew for "playing" - *metzachek* has linguistic connection to the word "to laugh".¹⁴ Is Ishmael playing and laughing with or at Isaac? The answer to this question has profound consequences in the construction and development of Jewish men. Do they act on their own or are they acted upon?

Ishmael's behavior, his mocking of Isaac, his toying with him indirectly demonstrates his contempt for Sarah and her elevation of Isaac as "the chosen one". Abraham at Sarah's urging casts out Hagar and Ishmael to the desert. Sarah acts upon Abraham. Adding irony to a difficult situation for all involved, Abraham apparently accepts his wife's decree; he "throws" the matter of Hagar back to Sarah dismissing himself from the matter.

¹⁴ Salkin, p. 29.

"Abram said to Sarai, 'Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right'" (Genesis 16:6)
 The paradigm of the weak male who is dominated by others is established with Abraham, the patriarch, and will follow through the lives of his son and descendants.

Ishmael as we noted in the Genesis text (16:12) is a "wild ass of a man" and therefore different and other from his brother Isaac and even his own father, Abraham. He becomes a man of the wilderness. The text concludes with Ishmael being described as one who will dwell, *וְעַל-פָּנָיו כָּל-אֶחָיו* "alongside all of his kinsmen".

But the phrase *al pnei* also can be translated as 'in the face of'. Ishmael will get into people's faces...Ishmael is the one who *metzachek*/laughs on the sidelines. Yet Isaac/*Yitzchak* bears the name 'laughter'. Perhaps Ishmael's laughter reminds Sarah of her earlier infertility.¹⁵

As we learn more about Isaac, we find that he is docile, passive, and meek. In his great moment on the stage of Torah, he says nothing. He departs with his father to be bound on the altar at Moriah. He is powerless. He does not comprehend or if he does, it is not apparent in the story or by his actions. "He (Isaac) accepted what befell him with perfect faith. He became, therefore, the classic Jewish man — *passive*."¹⁶

"Who is the Jewish man?" He is passive are his "chosen" sons. They are acted upon. They lack control, influence and power. This passivity, as will be noted later, emerges from the relationship these Jewish men share with God. The Torah text states that men like Ishmael are "other" and their rejection by their father or mother, biological or familial, represents a rejection by God. Yet, Ishmael and the "others" that follow him ARE brothers of the chosen ones. How the

¹⁵ Salkin, p. 30.

¹⁶ Salkin, p. 31, italics his.

"chosen ones" respond to the "other" sibling has profound impact and influence on the development in the construction of Jewish men. Why is Isaac's passivity preferred over Ishmael's wildness? Why would Isaac want to consider becoming like Ishmael, strong and wild, as Rabbi Salkin will argue? What would Jewish men gain in becoming "like" their "other" sibling?

Jacob and Esau

The dichotomy between Jewish men, i.e. the favored one versus the rejected one is best observed the story of Jacob and Esau. As with, their grandmother, Sarah - Jacob and Esau's mother, Rebecca, encounters difficulty in becoming pregnant and complications with her subsequent pregnancy. Even in utero, Jacob and Esau contend with one another. The answer the Torah provides their mother regarding her arduous pregnancy is, "there are two nations in her womb", the Midrash says: "one kicked to get out studying Torah (Jacob) while the other kicked to get out for idol worship". Salkin observes, "Two different ways of looking at the world...two different kinds of men and two different kinds of maleness."¹⁷

Unlike his father who is passive, Jacob's fault is deceit. His success is his ability to outwit his brother through use of mind over body. Jacob's stealing the birthright celebrates an acquired and admired trait in Jewish men - intellect. However, the power of intellect is insufficient when Jacob encounters Laban who tricks Jacob. He must work not the seven years agreed to for Rachel, his beloved, but fourteen years because Laban switches brides. Jacob weds Leah first, as Laban informs him that this is the custom in his land. Yet Jacob's intellect will in the end, allow him to outwit Laban.

¹⁷ Genesis Rabba 63:6 and Salkin, p. 34

Rabbi Salkin suggests that Isaac really loved Esau. He found in Esau "something that he missed deeply and craved immeasurably. He loved Esau because Esau reminded him of the piece of himself that had been torn from him years ago... Esau was Ishmael, Isaac's half brother, the son cast out into the wilderness. He missed that piece of himself and he mourned for it. It was the missing piece of his soul."¹⁸ However, in the end, Isaac finds himself, like his father, alone, his sons gone. Abraham left his home never to return, no longer a son, but a father to a son who was weak, passive and powerless. Isaac, his son, raises two sons who provide him no pleasure, save the one who brings him game... In the end, the story of Jacob and Esau is one of compromise. The line of the chosen ones flows through Jacob and with it an acceptance of inadequacy, because Isaac really does love Esau, perhaps because he is different. Perhaps being other is not a negative and yet, as is the case with Esau, he is rejected for being other, while Jacob's passivity as **יָשֵׁב אֶהְלִים** "a mild man who stayed in the camp" [NJPS Genesis 25:27 is celebrated.

Even God may not be happy with the result according to Rabbi Samuel Karff, who comments:

Apparently even God must select imperfect instruments to fulfill His purposes. He must choose between Jacob – a man who desires the birthright so deeply he will cheat to secure it – and Esau who so lightly esteems it that he forfeits the birthright for a bowl of lentils. Jacob's calculated cunning must be weighed against Esau's undisciplined craving for immediate self-gratification. Working with 'human material' involved God in a difficult but inescapable choice, and God decides: It is better to care too much than too little.¹⁹

Isaac may have spent his life in search of the piece of his missing soul: his efforts were apparently unsuccessful. He is unable to overcome that which overcomes him. His wife

¹⁸ Salkin, p. 38

¹⁹ Samuel Karff, in Gleanings. W. Gunther Plaut, ed. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981. p. 192.

masterminds the plot for her favorite son to obtain the blessing of the birthright, a flashback to his mother Sarah's actions toward Hagar and Ishmael. Even if one agrees with the assumption that he was fooled nonetheless, he is a non-player on the stage of Torah and as a model of a Jewish man he is tragic and pathetic.

Jacob ultimately fares no better. While seemingly more adept and able to steer events in his favor, in the end Jacob too is acted upon. Even with God's blessing to become the nation promised to his grandfather Abraham, Jacob's blessing comes at cost – fourteen years to obtain his beloved Rachel and then a blow to his manhood when he contends with a divine being. The nameless stranger with whom he battles, "wounds Jacob in his *yerech* – his groin, his masculinity. Jacob becomes the wounded healer of mythology, the paradoxical hero who limps into the sunrise as opposed to the Western hero, who gallops off into the sunset."²⁰

The truth here is that women mastermind the story. Sarah finds Hagar and Ishmael a threat and needs them removed. She forces Abraham to act against his will and cast them out. In the tale of Jacob and Esau, Rebecca masterminds the blessing of the firstborn to her favored son, Jacob... The consequence of these stories is the reinforcement of these chosen men, who are weak and passive. They are unable to maintain their positions before their wives. A pattern, which will be reversed only later in modern times, represented in immigrant novels about Jews coming to America. Jewish men are able to be assertive when Jewish women are absent. Jewish men need to be absent from Jewish women in order to gain power and control. In the following chapter, Jewish study is valorized not only because it is a Jewish value; it is valued because it is a male activity that spares men from women's influence and control.

²⁰ Salkin, p. 34.

Joseph

The story then moves on to Jacob's sons. His youngest son, Joseph takes center stage. As with Isaac and Jacob, Joseph is the son of the beloved wife. Rachel like the matriarchs before her is barren. She, too, has to suffer the humiliation of Leah and their handmaidens who bare children before her. Her bareness and her humiliation end when God heeds her plea and she is remembered, "Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace.'" [NJPS Genesis 30:22 – 23] God taking away her disgrace and giving her a son, led to his name Joseph a play on the Hebrew "asaph" for taking away and "yoseph" adding" a son. Jacob loves her son Joseph, more than he loves his other sons. Joseph abuses his talents and status. It is not enough for Joseph to be the most loved; his dreams foretell a time when even his father and mother will bow down to him.

Joseph lives his life among others and yet is alone. He wanders in search of his brothers, he lies alone in the pit, and he sits alone in jail. He encounters others when acted upon or to promote himself. Ultimately Joseph succeeds, but not at home and not with his family. He becomes "other" living in another's land. Even when he marries and obtains his position in Pharaoh's court, he is alone as were his fathers - a paradigm of Jewish men that is worth noting.

An attempt at resolution of the "conflicts" between brothers is found in the reunion stories in Genesis. Rabbi Salkin states that the purpose of these reunions is "how the story moves forward. It is also how the brothers become whole."²¹ Isaac and Ishmael meet at their father's funeral. Jacob and Esau meet after both becoming successful "businessmen" and family men. Joseph meets his

²¹ Salkin, p. 42.

brothers in Egypt where he has risen in status to become second only to the Pharaoh. In each of the cases, only a physical reunion takes place. The conflicts that separated the brothers in the first instance remain unresolved and the personality traits responsible for this separation are retained each contributing and responsible for the divide between them.

How then do the Jewish men of the Bible deal with their conflicts with their brothers, being alone, being powerless and rendered passive? Rabbi Salkin tells us "Real patriarchs cry. They cry at moments of loss. Abraham cries at the death of Sarah. Jacob cries when he meets Rachel. Jacob cries when he thinks Joseph is lost....Men cry out of pain...Men cry when they encounter the past they thought they had lost...Men weep when they encounter their own mortality."²² In contrast to the prevailing view that "real men don't cry", here the men of the Bible cry perhaps as a reinforcement of their weakness and passivity or as a sign of the pain they are forced to carry an illusion to women and pregnancy, that is their lack of power and control over their lives.

God and Biblical Men

The construction of Jewish men is both driven by and a response to God. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz in his work, *God's Phallus*, explores the dilemmas evoked by the maleness of God in the ancient period:

The first is homoeroticism: the love of a male human for a male God. The issue of homoeroticism arises in ancient Israel because the divine-human relationship is often described in erotic and sexual terms. Marriage and sexuality are frequent biblical metaphors for describing God's relationship with Israel. God is imagined as the husband to Israel the wife...it is (*however*) human males, not females who are imagined to have the primary intimate relations with the deity. The Israel that is collectively imagined as women is actually constituted by men – men like Moses and the patriarchs.²³

²² Salkin, p. 44.

²³ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p. 3.

A male biblical personality showing love for a male God could then be considered homosexual relationship. Eilberg-Schwartz demonstrates that such a reading, while possible, is flawed as a Jewish males' love of God has the result of a feminization of Jewish men. The denial of and the suppression of the homoerotic impulse implicit in the male relationship with God has two significant forms: "a prohibition against depicting God (veiling the body of God) and the feminization of men."²⁴

The consequence of such a relationship with God raises the issue of male heterosexuality and the emphasis in Torah to procreate, raise a family, and maintain one's lineage. If women are men's helpmate, as stated in Genesis, and a man must cleave to his wife, then how does a man establish a loving relationship with God, especially a God who is male; where such a relationship in the human sphere is prohibited. The answer, then, is for Jewish men to become feminized or be rendered unnecessary, except with regard to procreation. In either case, the result is negative and without a compromise. "The feminization of men also disrupted what the tradition posits as a natural complementarity between a divine male and a human woman. When male-female complementarity is the structure of religious imagery, human women are the natural partners of a divine male, but this connection also renders human males superfluous in the divine-human relationship."²⁵

This now creates another complication for the emerging construct of Jewish men. If the interactions of the patriarchs with their mothers, wives, sons and in particular their brothers was problematic and challenging, then how much the more so is the complication of their relationship with God a cause for dysfunction. A further complication is Eilberg-Schwartz's contention that:

²⁴ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 3.

²⁵ Eilberg-Schwartz, p4.

another set of dilemmas is further generated by the monotheistic image of a sexless father God...The sexlessness of the father God was problematic in a culture defined by partilineal descent. A man was expected to reproduce, to carry on his line, yet he was also understood to be made in the image of God who was essential celibate. As we shall see, the decreasing importance of patrilineage in late antique Judaism would have an enormous impact on the religious conception of masculinity.²⁶

No wonder Jewish men retreat into isolation and loneliness. What man could withstand the pressure to raise a family be virile and fertile with wives who are barren, or with non-Jewish handmaidens, whom they impregnate and are the ones who to produce many children? The result is that the Jewish men of the Torah are "odd men out" as Eilberg-Schwartz describes them.²⁷ What is man's role in the male-female, God/Israelite man, /Israelite woman paradox paradigm? Where do men fit it, if with God then women are rejected, with women then God has to be rejected! "There is no 'natural' place for men in this divine paradigm. They are odd men out, for they can occupy neither the male nor the female position."²⁸

The Jewish males of the Bible are odd men out with regard to procreation. Eilberg-Schwartz contends, that a matriarch's capacity to become pregnant was the result of God choosing to open their womb, "in Genesis, barren matriarchs cannot conceive until God intervenes and opens their wombs...It is God who oversees fertility...The role of God in conception is repeatedly recognized by mothers who name their children after the divine and not the human father."²⁹ Again, the role of the Jewish male is limited, proscribed and diminished; his name is not even attached to his own children, even when he raises children as he is commanded to do his success is ascribed to God and

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 138.

²⁸ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 138.

²⁹ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 140. "Eve...gives her son the name Cain (*qayin*) because "I have gained a male child (*qanti*) with the help of the Lord" (Genesis 4:1)...This statement by Eve reflects her claim to be co-creator with God and underscores the lack of Adam's participation in the conception. And Leah refers to God's role in the names of her sons: Reuben ("The Lord has seen my affliction"), and Judah ("This time I will praise the Lord") (Genesis 29:32-33). In the stories of the patriarch's wives, however, the male children are named after their father in heaven.

not to him! No wonder as we are seeing Jewish men feel lost and powerless. Ultimately, God is the final arbiter of chooseness, who is strong and who is passive, who is favored and who not.

Moses and Jethro

Moses stands in contrast to the patriarchs of Genesis. He is born into slavery, but raised by royalty in the palace of the Pharaoh. His upbringing and culture is not that of the passive, weak, unfortunate males we have encountered so far. However, Eilberg-Schwartz counters this view by asserting that Moses too suffered as a Jewish male and one could say even more so than the patriarchs, because he shared the most intimate, significant and extensive relationship with God. Eilberg-Schwartz states, "Because of his intimacy with God, Moses' masculinity is called into question."³⁰

Moses is described on one occasion as having to deny his femininity. This denial occurs when the Israelites complain that man does not satisfy their craving for meat. 'And Moses said to the Lord, 'Why have You dealt ill with your servant, and why have I not enjoyed your favor that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me? Did I *conceive* all this people, did I *bear* them that You should say to me, "Carry them in your *bosom as a nurse carries an infant*," to the land that you have promised on oath to their fathers?"³¹

Perhaps one could argue that Moses' use of female imagery is part of his argument with God. He resorts to feminine language in defiance of being placed in between God and Israel. He resents it and throws the problem of feeding the people back to God. If Israel the people is considered feminine and God as masculine, then Moses charges God to be the "father figure" or in an ironic twist calls upon God to play to role of mother for "His" children. Moses cleverness however does

³⁰ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 142.

³¹ Eilberg-Schwartz, p.142-143. Italics added for emphasis to demonstrate transfer of male to female imagery.

not result in his triumph over God; instead, Moses "denies his femininity because his masculinity is at risk."³² According to Eilberg-Schwartz this sets the stage for the unmaning of Moses when God "attacks" Moses over the circumcision of his son.

Moses is commanded to return to Egypt to perform before Pharaoh "all the marvels that I have put in your power" in order to say to Pharaoh that "Israel, (God's) first born son" may go to worship God. On the way back to Egypt during a night encampment, "the Lord encountered him and sought to kill him (Moses). So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his feet with it saying, "You are truly a bridegroom a blood to me! And when he let him alone, she added, "a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision." (Exodus 4:21-26) Eilberg-Schwartz suggests, "When this story is read in context, it seems that Moses must be the object of the attack. Moses, after all, is being addressed by God in the preceding verses. There is also an implied parallel between God's threat to slay Pharaoh's first born and God's attack on Moses."³³

In lands where virility and progeny were seen as a sign of strength and a source of God's blessing such an attack was a potent threat not only upon sons but also upon the very masculinity of their fathers. Note in this story, Zipporah circumcises her son, usually a ritual act assign to the father. Perhaps this is another instance of Moses masculinity being questioned. Did Moses himself bear the sign of the Covenant on his being? He describes himself as being of uncircumcised lips, perhaps a euphemism. A parallel exists here regarding Jacob who suffers a genital injury when he survives the attack of a divine being also at night. In both cases, the source of their virility and progeny is attacked; they survived, but are reduced by God and again rendered feminine. As a symbolic act circumcision is an assertion of God's control, recognition that the Covenant requires

³² Ibid.

³³ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 158.

Israelite men to submit to God further reinforcing the images of the feminization of men in the Hebrew Bible.³⁴

The potency of Moses' image is resuscitated through his encounter with his father-in-law Jethro. In fact, Jeffery Salkin suggests that Jethro could be a role model for men today.³⁵ Rabbi Salkin asserts that Jethro serves as a mentor to Moses and by extension then to all Jewish men. Jethro is the one who reveals to Moses that God has indeed been with Moses and has guided Moses toward all of the successes that have come to Israel. It is Jethro, in the most famous advice column found in the Bible, who suggests to Moses the need to decentralize the management of the Israelite nation, that Moses need not bear the load of leadership alone. In this encounter, Moses finds in Jethro a guide and, more so, a man of status. A man, who embodies all of the characteristics that are associated with what could be argued are a complete man. He is righteous, kind, a friend, a teacher, a religious man and a man who possesses skills in management and leadership. The rabbis see in Jethro a male model of a proselyte.

Rabbi Daniel Gropper, citing the work of Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, concludes his rabbinic thesis, "Jethro: Rabbinic Paradigm of a Male Proselyte", by arguing that Jethro fills Moore and Gillette's categories of king, warrior, magician and lover, and in so doing is a model for Moses and men who seek to convert to Judaism.³⁶ He is the one who lives out a vision of mature

³⁴ Eilberg-Schwartz, p161. It is worthy to note that Zipporah's role here is significant as a demonstration of Moses' powerlessness in God's presence. Zipporah's circumcision of her son and her charge that he is now a "bridegroom of blood" says that the child belongs to her. Moses is the bride of God and as such abdicates his responsibility to circumcise his son. Zipporah's words and actions are a challenge to Moses' masculinity.

³⁵ Salkin, p. 47.

³⁶ Rabbi Daniel Gropper, *Jethro: Rabbinic Paradigm of a Male Proselyte*. Rabbinic Thesis. HUC-JIR, New York, 1998, p. 163.

masculinity. For Moses, Jethro is this ritual elder and for himself, Jethro is both king, warrior, magician and lover.³⁷

The king provides two major functions: creating order and providing fertility and blessing. Jethro provided order through his suggestion to Moses to create a court system (Exodus 18:19 – 22) and he gives Zipporah to Moses as a wife to maintain a sense of fertility in Moses' life when all seems not. The warrior has an unconquerable spirit, he has great courage, he is fearless, he takes responsibility for his actions and he had self-discipline. Perhaps what is most interesting about the warrior is that he is able to step back from a situation in order to gain perspective. Jethro is a warrior according to Gropper, in this latter regard as he took time to gain perspective before he acted, "to determine for him what was important and what he wanted for himself."³⁸ The archetype of magician best defines Jethro who serves Moses as the ritual elder noted above.

As the "Ritual Elder" who nurtures the transformation, Jethro truly fits the bill, for he becomes the father Moses never had. Frank Pittman says that masculinity is supposed to be passed on from father to son. Women no matter how wonderful, no matter how loving, can't teach it to us. If we don't have fathers; we should have grandfathers, uncles, stepfathers to raise us from boys into men. If we don't have men in our family, then Our need for mentors' beings early. Jethro was such a mentor.³⁹

The fourth archetype "Lover" is the source of spirituality. He rejoices with Moses "over all the kindness that the Lord had shown to Israel when he delivered them from the Egyptians. (Exodus 18:9). Jethro is passionate and zealous for God; he blesses God and even offers sacrifices to God.⁴⁰

³⁷ Gropper, p. 165.

³⁸ Gropper, pp. 167-168.

³⁹ Gropper, p. 170.

⁴⁰ Gropper, p. 173. See Exodus 18:10 – 12.

Jethro serves as a model and a metaphor for relationships of Jewish men with each other and with God. As a king, warrior, magician and lover he is a complete and whole man the polar opposite of the patriarchal men of the Torah. Yet, even if we accept Rabbi Gropper's thesis that Jethro is the model of the male proselyte, Jethro is still outside the camp of Israel and who is an authentic Jewish man remains the question. Is Moses a whole, complete man because Jethro entered his life, we know that Jethro is, what about Moses? In Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's construct it is not possible for Moses to be a complete man, he will always been controlled by God and remained feminized. The response of the rabbis to this quandary will be discussed in the next chapter. In their effort to resolve this dilemma, the rabbis will turn to study and a rejection of women as the modality for addressing the feminization of Jewish men. The project of the rabbis regarding Jewish men will have long-term impact. Jewish men under the impact of this rabbinic project will remain broken and incomplete. The search for wholeness is the quest for Jewish men then and now. Is the task to discover what is missing as Salkin suggests, with and through the "other" sibling or is it some thing else that will provide the completion, the answer to this question remains in the quest.

Chapter 2

The Rabbinic Construction of Jewish Men

בן זוטא אמר, איזו חכם, הלומד סגל אדם

Ben Zoma said, "Who is wise? The one who learns from all men

איזו גבור, המכבש את יצרו

Who is strong? The one who controls his passions

. איזו עשיר השמח בחלקו

Who is rich? The one who is happy with his portion."

Pirke Avot, Ethics of The Fathers 4:1

For the rabbis, learning takes precedent over all, thus one who is wise is the one who is learned. Learning, as we will see, is essential for Jewish men to overcome their "natural urges" and ultimately a man who can achieve this will be satisfied with his lot. A theme that emerges from the reading of this text is that of setting limits and establishing boundaries to determine what is proper behavior and life pursuits for Jewish men.

As discussed, in the previous chapter, in the Biblical setting, men become feminized because of their relationship with God, since God is male and Israel is female. Men face a challenge - how to remain male and still worship this God. How can men establish meaningful relationships with God, with women, with each other? Once again, the matter of "other" will appear in this discussion as well. The rabbinic idea of "building a fence around the Torah" will operate in this rabbinic construct of men. The operational element the rabbis will employ is setting limits – control of urges and the redirection of these urges toward a more acceptable pursuit – learning. Jewish men are culturally and psychologically oriented to regard learning as the answer to avoid becoming like the "other" – the rejected sibling. The rejected sibling represents and symbolizes the males of the non-Jews, the non-Rabbinic world.

What is a Jewish Man?

Previously, we have asked where are Jewish men and who are they? The impact of the rabbinic construction of Jewish men functions from Talmudic times until the Enlightenment when the obligations of *Halacha* were loosened through the advent of Reform, where modernity and its embrace of change the connection and weight of the past. An understanding of Jewish men requires a knowledge and awareness of rabbinic attitudes toward men. While the program for Jewish men in rabbinic times and thereafter is different in operation, the rabbinic view of Jewish men has changed little and remains operative to this day. The rabbis extend the Biblical concept of rejection of "otherness" through their plan, which will favor learning and intellect over physical strength. A plan that one could argue, almost became a part of the genetic make-up of Jewish men.

Daniel Boyarin, in *Unheroic Conduct* seeks to address the matter of Jewish men within the Talmudic context. He accepts the biblical reading of feminized men and argues that the rabbis of the Talmud valorize the "sissy boy" image of Jewish men. That is, study while considered within the world of the rabbis as a manly, "strong", and active endeavor; is regarded by the Gentile world as unmanly – as "sissy".⁴¹ In the ancient world of the Greeks and the Romans, men were associated with virility; being active, courageous, heroic, engaged in domination and control. In the rabbinic world, these attributes, like those of the "rejected" siblings in the biblical world, are rejected as well. The world of the Greeks and Romans is labeled as "other" and is to be rejected – it is not Jewish, not for us, not a model for what a Jewish man should be. The model of the Jewish man for the rabbis then is a reflection of themselves – a scholar sage.

⁴¹ In chapter five, the report of interviews with Jewish men will indicate a rejection of Boyarin's view and a reconnection with the rabbinic concept of learning as a "macho" endeavor, one that leads Jewish men toward knowledge, competency and strength.

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin notes this regarding the rabbinic reading of the Chanukah story. The rabbis preferred not to celebrate the militarism of the Hasmoneans, rather they see in Chanukah the role of the miraculous and perhaps divine intervention when the single cruse of oil lasts for eight days. If the rabbis chose to endorse the militarism of the Maccabees, then they would be compelled to accept behaviors they despised; behaviors considered to be connected to the alien – “the other”. Salkin notes that this rabbinic rejection of the Maccabees’ militarism extends even into the Modern Age:

Consider the Hebrew version of the Hannukah hymn *Mi Yemalel*, “Who Can Retell?” In the Hebrew version, the song says that, “In every age, a *hero* (ha gibor) saves our people. But when the song was translated to English, it was sung, “In every age a hero *or sage* came to our aid.” This is the Jewish moral journey: from warriors who fought with spears to the sages who fought with Torah – from swords to words.⁴²

Not only learning defines the Jewish male, but self control, as well... As the text from *Pirke Avot*, which heads this chapter, states, “one who is mighty is the one who is able to exercise self-control”.

Controlling One’s Urges – The Yetzer Ha’rah

The Jewish male’s moral journey in the pursuit of becoming a *mensch*, which differentiates Jewish men from other men, is obtained through control of sexuality. In *Eros and the Jews*, David Biale, offers the following reading for understanding the *Yetzer*:

To understand the peculiar status of sexuality as at once evil and an instrument for good, one must first understand what the rabbis meant by the *yetzer ha-rah*. Although they considered the *yetzer* to be the force that drives men toward all types of sin, they associate it primarily with sexuality. The *yetzer* may be best understood as natural desire, or to use the Stoic term, the passions. The Bible, by contrast, had used the term to mean a person’s mind or thought.⁴³

⁴² Salkin, p. 62.

⁴³ David Biale. *Eros and the Jews*. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 44.

The predicament is desire, lust and how Jewish men address it. In the rabbinic mind, sexuality is associated with sin. As Biale notes, "Procreation requires man to harness the dialectical energies of sin and evil...The sexual act, then is inherently iniquitous, its iniquity stemming from the physical pleasure that drives it. Only God's intervention can turn the hedonistic act to the holy purpose of reproduction."⁴⁴

The difficulty is the tension to procreate in fulfillment of the first commandment issued to man, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth" [Genesis 1:28] and pleasure.⁴⁵ How a Jewish man learns to exercise control over sexuality will be a measure of his strength. In the Biblical worldview that values procreation, yet rejects the act according to the rabbis, that causes it, is considered "sinful" or a lustful. Jewish men are caught in a trap that necessitates actions to evade this entrapment. The rabbis create a culture that will label women as demonic, as evil, as dangerous and to be avoided. The erotic and deviant sexual practice will be labeled "other" and associated with non-Jews as a justification for this rejection. In the rabbinic mind, even one's body is a source of sin and is to be circumscribed and circumscribed to limit pleasure.

The female body in general seems to have aroused anxiety: 'Anyone who looks at the little finger of a woman is as if he looked at [her genitals]...the handbreadth of a woman is [like] her genitals and even that of his wife.' ...rabbinic literature

universally regarded women's bodies as repugnant or demonized women themselves.⁴⁶

The necessity for Jewish men to be in control of their sexual urges then requires a view of Jewish women that casts them both as a partner in procreation and as demonic with regard to pleasure.

⁴⁴ Biale, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵ Howard Eilberg Schwartz notes, "The blessing of fertility is linked to circumcision and the covenant God makes with Abraham. For the priests, procreation is tied to the issue of descent, thus lists in the bible contain only male names." (pp. 202 - 202). In fact, fulfillment of this commandment is not complete according to Eilberg-Schwartz until a man produced a son as one's legacy passes through one's son. (pp. 215ff).

⁴⁶ Biale, p. 45

This rabbinic view of women provides Jewish men another avenue for control of their natural sexual urge by labeling this urge as evil. Jewish men, when they are able to restrict contact with women, then by extension limit their contact with evil. The ability to control the Yetzer ha'ra is achieved through labeling all activity related to it as "other", even as idolatry.

The ability to avoid falling prey to the Yetzer ha'ra then requires repudiation and a rejection of the erotic. This rejection of the erotic is found once again in the notion of "other" captured in the Yiddish concept of *Goyim Naches*. Boyarin translates *Goyim Naches* as "games goyim play."⁴⁷ Boyarin extends his thoughts on *Goyim Naches*, when he states, "The term *goyim naches* refers to violent physical activity, such as hunting, dueling or wars – all of which Jews traditionally despised, for which they in turn were despised..."⁴⁸ Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin adds to this understanding of *Goyim Naches*, by noting, "These things (that goyim do) are things that may or may not be prohibited to Jews according to Jewish law, but (are) things that *culturally* belong to the gentile world."⁴⁹ For Jewish men, indeed for Jews as a culture, repudiating *Goyim Naches* was a means to control sexuality and any other practice deemed negative.

The following passage from the Talmud illustrates this dialectic:

After the people slew the impulse to the evil of idolatry, they said, 'Since this is a time of grace, let us beseech God's mercy against the impulse to the evil of lewdness.' They asked for God's mercy and the impulse was turned over to them. A prophet warned them: 'Consider carefully. If you should slay it, the world will be destroyed.' They said, 'What should we do? If we kill him, the world will end.'

So instead of slaying the impulse to lewdness, they imprisoned it for three days. But then, when a day-old egg was sought throughout the Land of Israel for a sick

⁴⁷ Boyarin, p. 38

⁴⁸ Boyarin, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Salkin, p. 56

man, it could not be found. So they said: 'What shall we do now? If we slay the evil impulse, the entire world will be destroyed.' (Talmud, Yoma 69b)⁵⁰

This story justifies the need for libido and the urge of sexuality that leads to procreation; however, this story also argues for control of libido for out of control sexual urges have negative consequence. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz makes this point in citing the story of Nabab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, who are "executed" for making an unauthorized offering. Eilberg-Schwartz suggests that one possible explanation for this harsh punishment was their "uncovering" which possibly could refer to an exposure of their nakedness, which in the presence of the altar was a sin.⁵¹

A further result of controlling one's *Yetzer ha'ra* is a distancing from corporeality. Each day, Jewish liturgy praises God for the gift of body and the awe of how it functions. Yet at the same time, there is a rejection of the body when sexuality is involved. Even in the one instance of erotic love in the Bible, *The Song of Songs*, the rabbis interpret an erotic poetic love story between a man and a woman, into a metaphorical tale of God and Israel in love. The rabbis were better able to accept the notion of love between God and Israel over the love between a human man and woman. A result of this view is rabbinic concern regarding how Jewish men come to control their lust and sexual desire. Even in marriage, sexual relations between a husband and wife are controlled through rabbinic legislation and teachings.

Marriage – Control of Desire

One might expect a response to the *Yetzer ha'ra* and its negative consequences to result in an embracing of celibacy. Howard Eilber-Schwartz demonstrates this in a reading of the story of

⁵⁰ Salkin, p. 121

⁵¹ Eilberg-Schwartz, pp. 192 - 193

Nadab and Abihu where marriage could be rejected thereby supporting celibacy. Eilberg-Schwartz cites the rabbis' interpretation of Psalm 78:63 – "Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens remained unwed" [NJPS] as proof that Nadab and Abihu did not take wives "because they thought no women worthy of their pedigree."⁵²

In a stunning interpretation of Psalm 78:63, the sages understand "fire devoured their young men," as referring to the death of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3) "and their maidens remained unwed" as providing an explanation for why they were killed. The refusal of these young men to marry may be related to their lust for God, for immediately following this statement, the text turns to Nadab's and Abihu's inappropriate gaze at God. It is as if they directed their desire in the wrong direction. God is the object of their gaze rather than human women.⁵³

Moses is also depicted as celibate. "Moses, because he is allowed to gaze at God, is justified in abstaining from sexual relations. According to some rabbinic commentaries, Moses never had sexual relations with his wife after this encounter with God. The rabbis treat Moses' sexual abstinence as one of the three decisions that he made on his own but with divine approval."⁵⁴ When Israel met God at Sinai, the men were commanded to refrain from sexual relations for three days. The understanding that emerged from this experience was to avoid interaction with women including one's wife as contact with women even one's wife may led to intercourse which was forbidden during this particular holy time of receiving Torah. Even Moses abstains from sexual relations to be in a constant state of purity, thus always ready to be in God's presence. In Moses, the rabbis seek to address the conflict of being married and loving God.

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz states that in confronting this conflict:

Moses' position involves a contradiction in the very essence of what it means to be a man, for being a husband to a wife is in tension with being a wife of God.

⁵² Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 192.

⁵³ Eilberg-Schwartz, pp. 192 – 193.

⁵⁴ Ibid. The rabbinic sources are Babylonian Talmud Yebamot 6:6 and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 2:29-33.

At times this tension can be reduced, by feminizing the man through circumcision or other symbols, or by hiding God's body. But the dilemma does not go away without repudiating the image of masculinity which creates it.⁵⁵

The very institution that serves to control the power of sexuality is repudiated! Jewish men cannot win! As will be noted shortly, the rabbis impose additional restrictions on marriage, in particular sexual relations, resulting in evasion from marital duties. The rabbis limit sexual relations through two regulatory practices – *nidab*, which is applied to women and *onah*, which is applied to men. *Nidab* restricts the time wives can engage in sexual relations relative to menstruation. In consideration of Yetzer ha'ra, *nidab*, and the rabbinic rejection of women, men "escape" to the Beit Midrash – the house of study.

The sages describe their own community in language drawn from the domain of procreation, sexuality and kinship. They imagined their own activities as sages of a kind if cultural or religious reproduction in which Torah would be disseminated and students would multiply....The aspiration of the sage was to disseminate Torah and raise many disciples. ...Rabbis fathered 'children' through teaching Torah. As the learning of Torah emerged as the paradigmatic religious act in the rabbinic community, it absorbed the symbolic capital which had earlier been invested in procreation. Concerns about reproduction and lineage were symbolically extended from the human body to Torah knowledge itself. For the rabbis, the reproduction of Torah knowledge and clear lines of Torah dissemination were of paramount concern.⁵⁶

In response to the obligation to procreate, men who leave home to study are obligated to return home to their wives' to engage in sexual contact. The discussion in the Talmud regarding *Onah* concerns the amount of time it is permissible for a husband to be absent from his wife while pursuing study. David Biale suggests, "If these stories had their roots in an ancient social problem, then there must have been an enormous sense that marital duties conflicted with the study of Torah."⁵⁷ The teaching from Pirke Avot that introduces this chapter begins with the merit of study, which will serve Jewish men in controlling their urge, and result in teaching them the source of

⁵⁵ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 195.

⁵⁶ Eilberg-Schwartz, pp. 212 – 213.

⁵⁷ Biale, p. 55.

happiness to be content with what is their portion. The lesson is to control what you are able to control. In the rabbinic period, both in Babylonia and Palestine, the Jewish community was controlled by alien powers. The laws in the Talmud, are a record of the realms of Jewish life, the rabbis imagined they controlled.

Real control and imagined control, passivity versus strength and a strong self-identity are central to the predicament encountered by Jewish men at the dawn of modernity. These identity issues from Abraham through the world of the rabbis remain unresolved. Jewish men are still in pursuit of an identity – a response to “who are you?” and “what will you do with your life?” The idealized Jewish man according to the rabbis is the *Yeshiva bucher* - the Talmud scholar, married to learning, to Torah, and to a world that continues to label other, which Jewish men indeed are – they are opposite and thus deserving of rejection. Once Jews are forced to interact with the rest of the world because of the Enlightenment in Europe and immigration to America, Jews and in particular, Jewish men confront their identities as Jews and as men.

CHAPTER 3

The Metamorphosis of Jewish Men: Anti Semitism; Immigration and Assimilation in America

I may have been ten or twelve years old, when my father began to take me with him on his walks and reveal to me in his talk his views upon things in the world we live in. Thus it was, on one such, occasion, that he told me a story to show how much better things were now than they had been in his days. 'When I was a you man,' he said, 'I went for a walk one Saturday in the streets of your birthplace; I was well dressed and had a new fur cap on my head. A Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap and shouted: 'Jew! Get off the pavement!' 'And what did you do?' I asked. 'I went into the roadway and picked up my cap,' was his quiet reply. This struck me as *unheroic conduct* on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand.

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*⁵⁸

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism as a factor of Jewish life has had profound influence and impact upon the construction of Jewish men. Throughout Jewish history, save for brief period of Jewish independence, Anti-Semitism functioned as an external pressure controlling whom Jewish men were and what they could become in the Christian communities where they resided. Even during periods of prosperity, when the non-Jewish community would be inclined to look more favorably upon the Jews in their midst, the Jews knew that their fate was always in question.

A brief examination of Anti-Semitism, both in its European and later in its American settings, frames the external conditions and stress encountered by Jewish men. In particular, the impact of Anti-Semitism upon Jewish men's internal psychological composition had profound consequences regarding Jewish male self-identification. Additionally, Jewish men were attempting, as was the case with Freud, to find their place in the new enlightened modern world which was emerging in Europe and more so, in America. While the ramifications of Anti-Semitism are

⁵⁸ Boyarin, p.33. Emphasis added.

significant and substantive, an acknowledgement of them here serves to guide one toward an appreciation of the tensions Jewish men faced in this new emerging world of modernity.

This is true regarding the tenuous nature of Jewish life, particularly in communities in Eastern Europe, where Jews continued to be characterized as other. The feminization of Jewish men, with its origins in the Bible and then continuing through the ages thereafter, had been and remained an internal matter, although as has been noted Anti-Semitism used this feminization of Jewish men as an external control. Anti-Semitism and in particular, Anti-Semitism that seized upon the Jewish male as feminine brought about increased derision toward Jewish men. The story of Freud's grandfather illustrates this predicament quite well. Jewish men are not heroic and evidently are not able to be so, as they lack the strength both physical and/or intellectual to counter the prevailing notion that Jewish men would be able to counter this mistreatment through their wits. Paula Hyman in writing about the sexual politics of Jewish identity states, "By characterizing Jewish men as feminized, antisemites and their fellow travelers attempted to strip them of the power and honor otherwise due them as men, especially as economically successful men."⁵⁹

The depiction of Jewish men, particularly in cartoons of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are exaggerations of Jewish men "as 'womanish', like women, Jewish men were seen as weak, as soft and rounded."⁶⁰ Further, the behavior of Jewish men was often described as hysterical, with flailing arms and large movement. The purpose of this description was once again to label Jewish men as feminine and deserving of such negative treatment. The result of this confluence of Anti-Semitism and the categorization of Jewish men as feminine often led Jewish men to self-hatred. Jewish men, in their drive to obtain acceptance into the non-Jewish world, sacrificed their own identity and self

⁵⁹ Paula Hyman. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), p. 134.

⁶⁰ Hyman, p. 137 citing George Mosse (who) "describes the antisemitic stereotype of the Jewish male in the following terms: 'a contorted figure resting on short legs, a greedy and sensual corpulence.'"

worth on the "altar" of becoming like the "other". The emerging freedom offered to Jews, through the Enlightenment and the Emancipation that followed, produced conflicts within the Jewish community regarding the identity of Jews and in particular Jewish men. The question placed at the top of the agenda for Jewish communities emerging from the ghettos and villages of Europe was how to remain Jewish and become a member of the general national community. This conflict regarding Jewish identity functions to this very day, and is found in the personal narrative of Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's account. As Salkin related in an interview, the greatest threat imposed upon him by his parents was the linking of his requirement to succeed at school with the fear that failure to do so would result in being in classes with more non-Jews of lower status, the implication being that he would potential suffer physical harm in such a setting.

Scholars to Businessmen – Jewish Men in America

Even with the easing of restrictions on Jews in Europe and later in Eastern Europe, Jewish life in these settings was challenging both on the physical and spiritual level. The question remained, could Jews be German, French, English and later Russian? Could Jews be good citizens of emerging nations who now valued national identity over ethnic linkage, with the understanding that being a good German supercedes even religious identification? While some Jews found acceptance into upper class salons, most Jews remain outside, on the periphery of change still seen by most in these societies as other. Against this backdrop, Jews like other in Europe looked across the sea to America as the hope for resolving this crisis.

Jewish life in America during the great migration of the late 1800's to early 1900 led to a transformation for Jews who found opportunity in the "Golden land" of America. America's

welcome to immigrants challenged the prevailing norms and cultural standards present in the "Old Country". For Jewish men, the centuries of study and learning were not valued in America. Knowledge was not a marketable skill or a means to earn a living. Jewish men who were skilled laborers found gold in America and the hegemony of the scholar fell to the "lowly" tailor. Further, the loss of status long attributed to the Jewish sage and to learning was replaced by Jewish men who were like the others whether in Europe or now in America. Boyarin cites Sander Gilman in *Jewish Self-Hatred* who states, "Become like us – abandon your difference p and you may be one with us (but) the more that you are like me, the more I know the value of my power, which you wish to share, and the more I am aware that you are but a shoddy counterfeit."⁶¹

The American Jewish Community – A Loss of Faith

Jewish life in America was and remains a challenge. The lure to become American often meant abandoning being Jewish or at least a weakened Jewish identity. Arthur Goren discussing Jewish survival in America versus the lure of America pluralism states, "The twin desires for ethnic survival and personal acceptance into American society were rarely posed as an either-or choice. Much of Jewish communal thought was directed toward formulating strategies and programs to mitigate tensions through compromise and accommodation, or by re-defining the group's Jewish identity and character of American nationality."⁶² These twin desires are evident in the novels of the immigrant experience and those that follow describing Jewish life after World War II. The tension is present between in-group identity as Jews and the desire to be fully accepted as American with a

⁶¹ Boyarin, p. 246.

⁶² Arthur Goren. *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 14.

price tag that states, "It's ok to be Jewish but rein it in". The result is Jews in America worrying about being too Jewish or too American.

Goren cites historian Michael Kammen who argues,

The presence of "biformities" is central to understanding the American national character. 'The push-pull of both wanting to belong and seeking to be free has been an ambivalent condition of life in America, the nature of a contrapuntal civilization.' The insight is a useful one in understanding not only America's pluralistic society, but in comprehending the internal pluralism of the American Jewish collectivity. This biform construct of identity aided them in locating And relocating themselves in the 'unstable pluralism', which was, and continues to be, characteristic of the nation as well as of their own ethnic community.⁶³

Kammen's thesis would find popularity in its reformulation and restatement by Charles Liebman who would pose these tensions existing between two sets of values, leading to Liebman's formulation of "the ambivalent American Jew" who is torn between "integration and acceptance into American society" and "Jewish group survival."⁶⁴

Again, the novelists who tell the American Jewish story clearly understand and are able to articulate the discomfort found in ambivalence and living lives that are bifurcated. Jews in America in their desire to become American, sacrifice their Judaism through assimilation and through the secularization of Jewish life. Ethnicity trumps religion, Jewish values are subsumed into universal American values, and Jewish communal institutions arise to compensate for the weakening of Judaism as a religion. Jewish identity in America remains a matter of significance. Charles Silberman notes that,

In the past, Jews remained Jewish for one of three basic reasons: because they believed that was what God demanded of them; because they were born into an organic community with powerful sanctions and rewards; or because

⁶³ Goren, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Goren, p. 186.

anti-Semites would not permit them to be anything else.⁶⁵

As Jewish communities were attempting to negotiate life in America and working toward definitions of Jewish life, Jewish men attempted to balance the tasks of work and home, community and religion, a desire to be American while remaining Jewish in whatever form being Jewish ultimately came to be. The ambivalence of the American Jew was all the more so for Jewish men. The protagonists of Jewish novels speak to this phenomenon, in particular, the writings of Phillip Roth, who bridges the past with the present, still trying to retain authentic Jewish attributes for the characters that occupy his world. To ask, "who am I?" is not a rhetorical question. The issue of identity and in particular, Jewish identity, one could argue occupies, an important place on the program of the American Jewish community and one that informs whom Jewish men are in the community specifically.

Charles Silberman, cites Peter Berger, who concisely and cogently states the demands modernity imposed upon Jews in general and Jews in America in particular:

...Jews are no different from members of other religious groups, every one of which has had to grapple with the consequences of living in a religiously pluralistic society. The essence of modernity, as the sociologist Peter L. Berger has pointed out, is that it brings about 'a near-inconceivable expansion of the area of human life open to choices.' In traditional societies people inherited their occupations, their status, their residences, their religions, and, more often than not, their husbands and wives; in the modern world all of these, and more, are matters of individual choice. In the past, Berger argues, heresy- from the Greek word meaning, "to choose"-was a possibility; in the modern world it is a necessity. 'Modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.'

The movement from fate to choice - the "heretical imperative," as Berger calls it-has plunged every religion into crisis, but Judaism more so than most....⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People*. (New York: Summit Books, 1985), p. 159.

⁶⁶ Silberman, p. 160.

Berger's assertion is significant as it offers a framework toward an understanding and an appreciation of the processes that influenced and influenced the development of Jewish life in America. The role that "choice" and "the heretical imperative" contributed to defining Jewish life resulted in less not more; choosing limited what Jews could be, by what was rejected. This process once again is instructive in the construction of Jewish men who often were forced to make choices that came with an excessive "price tag" and a sacrifice for what was not or could not be. Nathan Galzer summarizes this matter well in observing that

Jews lost their faith so easily because they had no faith to lose; that is, they had no doctrine, no collection of dogmas to which they could cling and with which they could resist argument. All they had, surrounding them like an armour, was a complete set of practices, each presumably as holy as the next." But once the armor was pierced, the immigrants were left unprotected....Whatever else the "world of our fathers" may have been...it was not a golden age of Jewish religious life.⁶⁷

The "World of our Fathers" was not a golden age at least according to the chroniclers of Jewish life in America – Jewish novelists. Three Jewish stories from three distinct periods of American Jewish life – early immigration years, the middle period of Jewish settlement prior to World War II and Jewish life in the American suburban frontier –speak to the harsh realities of Jewish life in America and the sacrifices made by Jewish men in particular. These are stories of men who lost the faith they never had and were unable to secure its replacement save for the pursuit of the American dream, which left them ultimately empty. In the end while they attempt to transform themselves through assimilation into American life, they fail and they seek refuge or solace in their past.

⁶⁷ Silberman, p. 171.

The Price of Becoming American – Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*

Abraham Cahan's, *The Rise of David Levinsky* published in 1917 tells the story of an immigrant's journey from Eastern Europe to America. This novel demonstrated the sacrifice encountered and endured by Jewish immigrants who came to America, in particular the loss of Jewish identity for Jewish men. After the death of his mother, Levinsky who was a Talmud scholar loses interest in Talmud and he searches for something to replace it and fill in the gap, which becomes his desire to seek his fortune in America. When he meets with his teacher, Reb Sender, Reb Sender responds to his plan to travel to America with the following: "To America!" he said, "Lord of the World! But one becomes a gentile there."⁶⁸

Nonetheless, forsaking the bitter memories of his birthplace and homeland, Levinsky, like Cahan, boards a ship bound for America in search of a better life. Upon arriving in New York, Levinsky and Gitelson, a traveling companion he met on the ship, make their way from Castle Garden on Ellis Island to New York City. Both were alone with no relatives to greet them, they look bewildered, then a voice in Yiddish calls out to them. A man bejeweled in diamonds approached them and addresses Gitelson, "You're a tailor, aren't you?" to which Gitelson affirms, resulting in a job at the unknown man's factory. Levinsky awaits his opportunity, "walking up Broadway, the bejeweled man turned to me. "And what was your occupation? You have no trade, have you?" "I read Talmud," I said, confusedly. "I see, but that's no business in America," he declared."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Abraham Cahan. *The Rise of David Levinsky*. (New York: Harper Colophon Edition, 1966), p. 61.

⁶⁹ Cahan, p. 91.

Levinsky, like his creator Cahan, succeeds in America however at a great cost. The hope of America and a better life came with a price "that success was to be the abandonment of Jewish tradition."⁷⁰ Riv-Ellen Prell observes that Levinsky suffered further – "Levinsky's success as an American manufacturer was purchased at the price of his love. His extraordinary rise from penury to financial success by dint of his wits and hard work undermined his ability to find the love of a woman he could marry, and the novel ends with him successful and alone...."⁷¹ The hope that America would be different for Levinsky and immigrant Jews, was not the case and the success some Jews obtained was in becoming something other. The immigrant was re-born at Ellis Island, for Levinsky his journey is ironic and disappointing. According to Bernard Sherman, *The Rise of David Levinsky* ends with him "bemoaning the disappearance of his true self, the innocent Yeshiva boy."⁷²

Henry Roth *Call It Sleep* America as a Scary Place

Cahan chronicles the story regarding the impact of immigration on an individual – David Levinsky and the price he paid to become a successful American – the abandonment of his Judaism. In Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, published in 1934, the effect of immigrant upon a family is described. Often fathers came to America first to earn passage for their families, who remained in Europe. The time to earn the fare for travel to America took years and a toll on families after Jewish fathers "vanished". Cahan's newspaper *The Forward* carried classified ads for "lost" husbands who simply "disappeared" in America forsaking their families and becoming fully integrated Americans.

⁷⁰ Bernard Sherman. *The Invention of the Jew*. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969) p. 23.

⁷¹ Riv-Ellen Prell. *Fighting to Become Americans*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999) p. 79.

⁷² Sherman, p. 45.

In *Call It Sleep*, Roth seizes upon the conflict within families, that of acculturated and in some cases, assimilated fathers and their immigrant, un-American, backward families. In the opening scene, Roth describes the meeting of Albert Schearl with his wife and infant son.

They had been standing in this strange and silent manner for several minutes, when the woman, as if driven by the strain into action, tried to smile, and touching her husband's arm said timidly, "And this is the Golden Land." She spoke in Yiddish. The man grunted, but made no answer. "You must have suffered in this land." She continued, ... "You never wrote me. You're thin... Then here in the new land is the same poverty. You've gone without food. I see it you've changed." "Well that don't matter" he snapped, ignoring her sympathy. "It's no excuse for your not recognizing me." "No," (she replied) placatingly. "But I was frightened...bewildered."⁷³

The setting moves from arrival in New York to the cellar of their apartment in the Jewish ghetto of the city. Roth paints a dark picture of a hopeless life. Husbands and wives disconnect, fathers unable to father their children and children left in limbo with a father who is not present in their lives. The protagonist, David Schearl, the son, who in a rite of passage novel has to overcome the terrors of his life in America. His experiences are exemplary as an education novel one that according to Sherman citing Jacob Sloan is a "journey of exploration in which traditional values are being considered, accepted, rejected or transfigured."⁷⁴

The power of the transfiguration is found in the climax of the novel. "In a memorable scene...David seeking an explanation for the series of mysteries and traumas which threaten him, thrusts a milk ladle into the open streetcar tracks and is shocked unconscious. The passages leading to this scene quicken in tempo, thrusting at the reader a quick succession of images (that) disclose the chief influence of the book: Freudianism."⁷⁵ David's near death experience, and his re-birth, has Christian overtones of resurrection, the rebirth of the immigrant Jew perhaps as someone new or

⁷³ Henry Roth. *Call It Sleep*. (New York: Avon Books, 1962) pp. 11-12.

⁷⁴ Sherman, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Sherman, p. 89

different. The new father is America filled with promise and more importantly an escape from the past, an opportunity for Jewish men to become men in this new setting.

Goodbye Columbus – New and Old Differences Abide

Jews in America began to find acceptance in their new land after World War II. As they made their way into suburbia, Jews became like their American neighbors – they lived in homes that looked like those of their non-Jewish neighbors, their children attended the same schools and Jewish houses of worship in the suburbs looked like churches. On the surface it appeared that Jews had “made it”, and yet the doubts remained, particularly the aching feeling that the “price” paid to become an American was too great. Instead of being satisfied and joyful with the “success” of “making it”, Jews wondered about the old days back in the old neighborhood where they seemed to understand Jewish life better than out here in the land of secular suburbia.

Phillip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* challenges this transformation of Jewish life. This novella attacks the crass commercialism of suburban Jews and their bourgeois life style. In a reversal of the upward mobility from ghetto to better city living and finally to the suburb, Roth embraces a romanticized Bohemian view of Jewish life that condemns this upward track. He employs irony and even humor when he characterizes Ron Patimkin, the suburban son, as a “new Jew, a muscle Jew” who plays football on the local high school team, and in so doing, challenges the conventional view of the Jewish male as weak. Ron earns a football scholarship to Ohio State, a perennial football power. The father, Ben Patimkin, is a successful businessman, however he too like the men

in other immigrant or Jewish coming of age novels pays a price for his success. His business ethic is contained in the view that "one must be a *gonif* (thief)."⁷⁶

Neil Klugman, the protagonist in *Goodbye Columbus*, who at first was dazzled by the "wealth" of suburban life finds it strange; he escapes from the Patimkins and returns to the quiet of the library in the city. There he is safe among his books as were the passive, "sissy" Jewish men who filled the Yeshivas both in Europe and in the ghettos of the cities in America. The characters of these novels are incomplete and broken. The men in particular are weak and unlike their predecessors lack an understanding of their identity as men and as Jews. They are alone and they are lonely.

Shifting Gender Roles – "Jewish Women to the Rescue"

This loss of faith in the Jewish community created gaps and openings, which needed to be filled. As was noted earlier, Jewish women understood how to function in the community – they did the shopping, managed life in the home and interfaced with the non-Jewish world while their husbands and sons studied in Talmud Torah. In America, this formula was broken as men often became established in the community first, taking on leadership roles as builders of Jewish communal institutions, including synagogues, as well as the importance linked to work in America, as breadwinners, took control of their families in name and deed. However, as Jewish men in their desire to become true and full Americans embraced the American dream they at the same time left behind prior connections to their faith – in particular religious observance. Work became their religion and The American dream - their torah.

⁷⁶ Sherman, p. 173.

The assimilation of Jewish women in America differed significantly from that of Jewish men. Here the story of the Scherl family of *Call It Sleep* is informative as the mother turns to her children in order to learn how to function in this new land. Fathers were not present and it became the task of Jewish mothers to foster on-going linkages to religious practice abandoned by Jewish men. Paula Hyman notes when Jewish men had assimilated, the same was not always true for their wives – “wives continued to take cognizance of the Jewish calendar and its rituals...Most Jewish women seem to have been eager to maintain Jewish rituals, within their home, the domain that fell under their jurisdiction...Women seem to have persisted in ritual observance even after their husbands had abandoned these practices.”⁷⁷

Jewish women access spirituality with greater ease than men; better able to express their emotions; women turned their spiritual desires beyond making their homes safe and comfortable for their families, they sought to do this as well for others. While Jewish men were builders of communal intuitions, the operation and maintenance of these entities was often left to women, even the raising of funds to support their work.

This description of Jewish women to modern ears sounds quite gendered; as a seedling, the tree that would grow from these tiny shoots emerges from the opportunities women were granted and obtained largely in the absence of men. In America, men went out from their homes and communities to work, parallel to life in Eastern Europe where they left home to study. The success of Jewish feminism from a feminist perspective would be attained when women gained parity with men in communal leadership and as religious functionaries. The reality however is that true power was and is held by Jewish women as leaders of Jewish homes and in their day-to-day care for Jewish children. The best that Jewish men could hope to be for their families was that of being a provider

⁷⁷ Hyman, p. 22

and role model. Jewish men succeeded well at the first and failed miserably at the latter. How Jewish men address the matter of gender roles and emergent Jewish feminism is a matter of great significance. Indeed the purpose of Jewish feminism was to achieve equality for Jewish women and by extension, Jewish men. Truth is, this task is yet to be completed and challenges remain for Jewish men.

Challenges to Jewish Men

America appeared to offer Jewish men, particularly those who were not of the scholar class, an opportunity to escape the trap of femininity and weakness that was their characterization. Jewish life in America has witnessed in the past twenty-five years a dramatic transformation as Jewish women forcibly and effectively have taken their place at the "Jewish table". Until recently, as some men have become more comfortable with an engendered Judaism that is mutual and equal, Jewish men took to denigrating Jewish women as a means to preserve their places and loci of power.

As Jews' place in America changed, the post World War II stereotypes evolved from a suffocating, parochial mother to a whining, consuming and withholding princesses whose enslaving demands made her thoroughly undesirable. These representations of American Jewish womanhood encoded a profound anxiety about how Jews fit into American society and culture. In keeping Jews apart from the majority, the Mother endangered the Jewish acculturation, while plunging Jews into the middle class and its desires, the Jewish American Princess tainted affluence. In both cases, these monster women emasculated Jewish men.⁷⁸

This view is given voice in a most misogynistic way by Conservative rabbi from Canada who said in 1958 that he:

...specifically blamed the materialism of Jewish women for the increasing rate of intermarriage. The future of the Jews is endangered because of their selfish behavior, and it is no wonder that Jewish men prefer to marry Gentiles. Jewish women push them into it. Having transmuted sex into empty buying, Jewish women are incapable of the main form of production dictated by tradition...

⁷⁸ Riv-Ellen Prell. *Fighting to Become Americans*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p. 243.

procreation.⁷⁹

In response to this statement, David Biale states, "The innocent Jewish daughter of earlier literary stereotypes, praised for preserving Judaism, has now mutated into the JAP (Jewish American Princess), castigated for bringing about the impending demise of the Jewish people."⁸⁰

Truth is that these are desperate cries of desperate men. The success of Jewish men was predicated on the controlling Jewish women by "putting them down". Jewish men had to confront their state of being feminine and feminized, of being weak and passive, of lacking control and power. The sad story of Jewish men in contemporary America is that of a community that is hurt and in pain. They are like Jacob who walks with a limp after being "kicked in the balls". The men of American Jewish literature are incomplete, weak, lacking faith and searching for meaning in their lives, which appears beyond their reach. The answer is to begin a rewriting of the story of Jewish men or to create a new narrative. The task of what Jewish men need to do is theirs – as Rabbi Jeff Salkin suggests Jewish men have to write their "HIS-tory".⁸¹

The writing of Jewish men's HIS-tory returns to Anti-Semitism and its worst manifestation in modern times – the Holocaust. Jewish survival after the Holocaust, while a Jewish question, is at the same time, a question for Jewish men. How can Jewish men survive when it appeared that they did little to stop the slaughter, they did not recognize the signs even in modern Germany – that such a tragedy could take place. Jewish men now need new models and new paradigms to follow – they are in need of not only re-writing their HIS-tory they are in need of transforming it and through it themselves.

⁷⁹ Biale, p. 208.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Personal interview with the author.

Chapter 4
Synagogue Builders – Absentee Landlords: Jewish Men at the Crossroads

אָנוּ בָנוּ אֶרֶץ לְבִנוֹת וּלְהִפְנוֹת בָּהּ
We have come to the land to build and to be rebuilt in it.
Song of the Israeli Chalutzim

Once freed from the fetters of European history and its limitations on full Jewish expression, the freedom present in America provided Jewish men a place where they were able to establish their roots and grow a Judaism and Jewish community unrivaled in the world and perhaps in the history of the Jewish people. In America, Jewish men became builders – creating Jewish institutions and communities that are unique in their vibrancy save for those perhaps of modern day Israel. The re-writing of Jewish “HIS-tory” is a process that is internal to Jewish men and its goal will be to reconnect them to where they began their journey toward a meaningfully significant engagement in Jewish life. However, Jewish men find themselves wandering seeking a place to be and to call their own. America is such a place and offers Jewish men opportunities not seen elsewhere or at any other time in earlier Jewish history. How Jewish men respond to this “gift” is the story that is currently being told.

Jewish Men as Builders – Synagogues in America

In response to Anti-Semitism, the Zionist plan for Jews and Jewish men was the ideal of Muscle Jews. Muscle Jews were not feminine men, humped over their Talmud or rounded or weak. The new Jewish man is strong, tanned and one who does manual labor. This new paradigm for Jewish men was given birth at the time when Jewish men were making their way out of the European ghettos and into cities in America. In Europe and in America, the Enlightenment mentalities of the non-Jewish world were amenable to providing Jews opportunities to find their

place along side their fellow citizens. While doubts about Jews remained among the non-Jewish leadership and their followers, Jews were provided with land and the consent necessary to establish and build their own communities.

When Jews came to America one of the first institutions they created were synagogues, even those who were not religious recognized the importance of having a place of worship as did their fellow Gentile citizens. Charles Liebman observes:

Many Jews did retain an attachment to the synagogue, but this was a broadly cultural, rather than a specifically religious, commitment. As early as 1887 one commentator noted that when the immigrants had built beautiful synagogues they felt they had fulfilled their obligation to Judaism....The[se] new immigrants did found countless small synagogues almost immediately upon arrival...to meet the social and cultural needs of small groups originating in different European communities...⁸²

Worthy of note, the building of synagogues was and continues to be a task of the laity; rabbis came to serve these congregations once they were established. The rabbi in *The Rise of David Levinsky* stated that America is where one goes to abandon their Judaism. As a result, the Jewish press in Europe featured advertisements from communities in America seeking rabbis, cantors and other Jewish professional to serve the emerging Jewish communities all over the United States.

The Jewish men who built synagogues in America sought to create a religious institution that was different from the synagogues they left behind in Europe. In America, the model for synagogues was that of the "synagogue center" –

this is the synagogue that compromises with the culture while serving the need for Jewish identification. Recognizing the impact of acculturation this type of synagogue expands its program far beyond the traditional activities of prayer and study. It seeks encounter with the Jew on his own secular level and it

⁸² Charles Liebman, *The Religion of American Jews* in Marshall Sklare, editor. *The Jew in American Society*. (New York: Behrman House, 1974), p. 236 – 237.

strives to reculturate him.⁸³

In America, religion is an important value and attendance at church even in present days demonstrates this commitment to faith. For Jewish immigrants even those who were not religious as most were, the synagogue became a place where Jews would learn to be Jewish in American terms.

The immigrant Jew quickly perceived that religion and religious institutions were highly esteemed in America, that those associated with these institutions were respected as 'good citizens' and that religious diversity was viewed as a mandate of democracy...to build an maintain a synagogue was a response to the American as well as to the Jewish call to duty. Whenever Jewish and American interests fortified each other, American Jews responded with complete enthusiasm.⁸⁴

Recognition of this duty to serve one's religion and at the same time to be a "good citizen" inspired Jewish fathers to role model for their sons the importance of being a temple leaders and contributors to the building, maintenance and programs of their synagogue. Indeed, synagogues provided Jewish men with the means necessary to overcome the negative labels they had endured in the past. The role of builder – leader valorized and validated Jewish men. In synagogues and later in the variety of communal institutions and agencies they created, Jewish men discovered a connectedness to Jewish life that was successful and significant.

Acceptance with Consequences: Similarities Celebrated – Differences Rejected

Synagogues offered Jews in America the means to become like their fellow Americans. Streets in suburban America often featured a "religion row" of churches and a synagogue that demonstrated by way of faith that Jews had "made it" in America and were part of the "big three" –

⁸³ Marshall Sklare. *America's Jews*. (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 127.

⁸⁴ Abraham Karp, *An Overview of American Synagogues* in Jack Wertheimer ed. *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 6.

Protestant, Catholic and Jew. Reform Judaism in particular sprouted and prospered in America. In America, Reform Judaism once derided as "Judaism-lite" would rise to become the preeminent denomination in the American Jewish community. "The Reform Temple served its congregants as a bond to Judaism and a portal to America. Beyond that, its leaders saw its purpose to be the creation of a new Judaism, suited to the new age and their new homeland."⁸⁵

In fact, the success of the Reform movement in America led to what Jonathan Woocher labels "civil Judaism." "Civil Judaism", according to Woocher, "legitimizes a way of being Jewish and a program of Jewish activity within which the role of the synagogue and the rabbinate – the life of study, prayer and ritual observance – are no longer primary. What the synagogue does and stands for is important, but not central."⁸⁶ The appetite for "newness" in America would lead Jewish men away from the very institution they built that served to redefine them in a positive light for the first time in their HIS-tory. As Woocher will argue, Jewish men in America found, in Jewish Federations that served the larger needs and interests of the Jewish community, a new "home" in these emerging "temples of civil Judaism" which quickly gained hegemony over synagogues in some settings.

What Woocher observes is a trending away from synagogues toward a Judaism that is built upon slogans and status not available in the smaller confines of a local synagogue. As Woocher notes:

The federation campaign lends its own rhythm to the Jewish year. Federation-sponsored events provide occasions for religious exaltation and inspiration which rival or surpass what is available in the synagogue. Service on federation or agency boards, attending to the urgent needs of the Jewish people, takes on the character of a sacred calling. "We are One" becomes more immediate and

⁸⁵ Karp in Wertheimer, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 163.

compelling watchword of the faith than "Hashem echad" ("the Lord is One").⁸⁷

Noteworthy is this new formulation of Judaism as something beyond religion. The very entity where Jewish men attained and obtained a sense of success as Jewish men – the synagogue – is now abandoned for a new horizon, something improved and new. Indeed, as Sylvia Fishman observed, this drive toward civil religion represented a new trend and process that was taking place in American Jewish life, which she labeled as "coalescence". In advance of defining this term, Fishman differentiates "coalescence" from "compartmentalization" which is "a method of dealing with cognitive dissonance by dividing Jewish from non-Jewish spheres of existence and by being inattentive to one world when functioning within the perceived boundaries of the other."⁸⁸ "Coalescence (is) the merging of American and Jewish attitudes and actions and the incorporation of American liberal values such as free choice, universalism, and pluralism into the perceived boundaries of Jewish meaning and identity. This coalesced, merged behavior and belief package is often reinterpreted by American Jews as authentic Jewishness."⁸⁹ Fishman adds the following regarding the meaning of coalescence:

Coalescence is built on ever-increasing levels of accommodation to Western mores in modern Jewish societies, especially in the United States; coalescence, however, comprises newly pervasive and multifaceted aspects of Jewish ethnic identity reconstruction, occurring in environments unprecedented in the extent of boundary permeability available to white ethnics.⁹⁰

Fishman and Woocher describe a trend in American Judaism where the distinctions that marked Jewish identity are disappearing and assimilation of Judaism into American life has erased any boundaries that have existed. In this environment, Jewish men can move beyond the synagogue to

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Negotiating Both Sides of the Hyphen*. Judaic Studies Program, University of Cincinnati, 1996, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

something they perceived as greater and evidence albeit anecdotal seems to indicate that this is the case. Jewish men are disappearing from Jewish life.

The very success of Jewish men has become their own undoing. They built the house and they no longer choose to live in it. The question of where have Jewish men gone is now significant with regard to Jewish survival a subject that has concerned Jewish social scientists studying the American Jewish community from its outset.

Where Have the Jewish Men Gone

In 2000, Robert Putnam examined bowling in America. He discovered that the number of people who bowl had increased, while at the same time the number of bowlers who joined bowling leagues had decreased leading him to label this phenomenon -- bowling alone. Putnam then turned toward an examination of the causes that were responsible for "bowling alone". He suggested that the following causes contribute to our disengagement from each other.

We spend more time in our cars commuting from home to work and back. The urban and suburban make up of the large metropolitan cities in America has resulted in sprawl separating us in both time and space. As we spend more time away from home, working longer hours in pursuit of providing for our families, both men and women have less time for civic and religious involvements than did their parents less than a generation prior. In fact, according to Putnam these dramatic changes took place during the last decade of the 20th century.

This disengagement represents a profound shift from the civic involvements associated with the post immigrant generation. Putnam notes as well that in all categories of organizational

involvement there is a drop off amongst younger age categories. The obvious question then is what younger people are doing with their non-work time. The answer is television and the internet. We have become members of the cult of self where we celebrate autonomy and our disengagement from others. Work has become the religion of the new century and as connections with others are severed – “things” take the place that people and social interaction used to occupy.

Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, an expert on Jewish autonomy and self, is critical of this development with regard to synagogue affiliation, maintaining that the American synagogue “protects the individual from the demands of the Jewish religion as much as it exposes him to them.”⁹¹ Sylvia Fishman addresses the matter of self and autonomy as well by noting, “American individualism has been thoroughly coalesced into the values systems of many American Jews.”⁹² Cohen and Eisen conclude their study *The Jew Within* with the following observations about self:

More and more, the meaning of Judaism in America transpires within the self. American Jews have drawn the activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family, and the few institutions (primarily the synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate sphere. At the same time, relative to their parents’ generation, today’s American Jews in their thirties, forties and early fifties are finding less meaning in mass organizations, political activity, philanthropic endeavor and attachment to the state of Israel. In broad strokes, that which is personally meaningful has gained at the expense of that which is peoplehood-oriented.⁹³

Disengagement also exacts a cost at the end of the century, as did engagement at its beginning for America’s Jews. Since 1970, we spend more time at home watching television than we do spending time with friends, eating out, or going to places offering public entertainment.⁹⁴ The consequences of social disengagement are life threatening. Putnam states, “Of all the domains in which I have

⁹¹ Sklare, *America's Jews*, p. 130.

⁹² Fishman, p. 28.

⁹³ Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 184.

⁹⁴ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000), p. 239.

traced the consequences of social capital, in none is the importance of social connectedness so well established as in the case of health and well-being."⁹⁵ David Kaufman notes Jewish men perhaps because of this disengagement encounter pain and hurt.⁹⁶ Once Jewish men left the "homes they built", they found themselves alone and realize that they are in pain. Putnam comments further:

...social connectedness is one of the most powerful determinants of our well-being. The more integrated we are with our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression, and premature death of all sorts.⁹⁷

As Jewish men face the new millennium, their pain and loneliness has to become a matter of action on the agenda of the American Jewish community. Jewish survival and Jewish continuity rest with Jewish men simply because without Jewish men - who will fulfill the Jewish task assigned to them - Jewish procreation! Healing Jewish men will bring healing to the Jewish community. Connection to community is now a gendered issue as are its consequences. Cohen and Eisen note this in their conclusion and allude to the impact of spirituality upon gender.

The third factor promoting (and inhibiting) involvement, one that proved far more important than we ourselves recognized at the outset of our research, is *gender*. To a remarkable degree, the "action" where Jewish activity among the moderately affiliated is concerned now rests with women, who undertake such activity with or without the assistance of male partners. ...The relatively new interest in spirituality in Judaism...is a concern to which women are generally more open than men. Conversations about and experiences of transcendence come more easily to women than men.⁹⁸

Fishman reports similar findings. "Many Reform Jewish women mentioned personal, spiritual issues or communal activities as the most salient vehicles for their relationship to Jewishness. They spoke about the warm, supportive feeling they have when they associate with other Jews."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Putnam, p. 326.

⁹⁶ Conversation with author.

⁹⁷ Putnam, p. 326.

⁹⁸ Cohen and Eisen, p. 206.

⁹⁹ Fishman, p. 29.

A result of these developments has led to the question regarding "where are Jewish men?" An article in the Washington Post in May of 2004 asks this question of men in Reform congregations. "Reform Jewish leaders in many communities say that females outnumber males in areas ranging from summer camp to synagogue leadership, prompting concern that men feel abandoned by the religious movement and are turning away from it."¹⁰⁰ The author of the article notes that within the Reform Movement women have achieved significant levels of success on behalf of Jewish feminism. Jewish women within the Reform movement worry that there may be a backlash however according to "Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson...Judaism has a long history of relegating women to supporting roles, and it's destructive to now blame them for gender imbalance."¹⁰¹ The issue for Jewish men is where do they fit in this changed landscape and how will Judaism speak to and for them in a way that is meaningful and male.

Rabbi Michael Holzman in a study of Jewish men for the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods and the North American Federation of Temple Youth, both affiliated with the Reform Movement, cites Cohen and Eisen that "men are less likely to be satisfied by an environment focusing on search and struggle rather than goal and outcome."¹⁰² Charles Kadushin's study of Jewish adolescents in 2000 for Brandeis' Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Study reported, "Boys viewed Judaism and Jewish activities in a significantly more negative light than did girls."¹⁰³

Table 1

Percentage of Adolescents to Respond Positively or Neutrally

	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Boys</u>
I want to become more involved in Jewish life.	69	58

¹⁰⁰ Rachel Zoll, "Looking for a Few Good Jewish Men" Washington Post, May 22, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Michael Holzman, NFTB/NFTY Young Men's Project, February 2002, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Holzman, p. 4

B'nai Mitzvah was a graduation from Jewish life.	48	57
My Israel experience enhanced my connection to Jewish life.	81	59

Youth group experiences are observed to be more feminine in orientation – collaborative, cooperative and emotionally open. The emphasis is on social interaction and engagement, which seems to favor the girls, for the boys to be successful in this setting they have to “work at it”. This cultural shift reflects the Mars-Venus controversy or as Joel Grishaver notes citing Joseph Campbell:

...there are men's religions and women's religions. In many ways, it all comes down to the penis and the womb. Women's religions are centered in the moon. They are of the universe of the cycle. They are always dying and rising. Growth and rebirth is at their center. Men's religions have to do with change. They are vectors through history – straight lines.¹⁰⁴

Dru Greenwood, former director of Outreach for the Reform Movement, in a study of gender and its relationship to conversion, cites Robert Wurthnow and James Hillman regarding male spirituality and the absent father.

The missing father is not your or my personal father. He is the absent father of our culture, the viable senex who provides not daily bread but spirit through meaning and order. The missing father is the dead God who offered a focus for spiritual things. Without this focus, we turn to dreams and oracles, rather than to prayer, code, tradition, and ritual. When mother replaces father, magic substitutes for logos. It is this American culture in which American Judaism expresses itself and which forms the context in which men and women choose their religious commitments.¹⁰⁵

Jewish men became feminized according to Jewish scholars of this topic (Boyarin, Biale and Eilberg-Schwartz) because God is an absent father. As was the case for Moses, Jewish men need role models to guide them toward God in their search for themselves. The argument here is not necessarily one between Jewish women and men although this conversation may appear to suggest that this is the case. In fact, the matter rests for the most part with Jewish men alone as will be

¹⁰⁴ Joel Lurie Grishaver, *The Bonding of Isaac: Stories and Essays about Gender and Jewish Spirituality* (Los Angeles: The Aleph Design Group, 1997), p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Dru Greenwood, *Conversion to Judaism: A Gendered Phenomenon*, The Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University, Working Paper Series, September, 2002, p. 2

demonstrated through interviews by the author, which will be presented in next chapter. The hurt Jewish men feel may be an experience of the failure of Jewish feminism, as David Kaufman suggests. He asserts that Jewish feminism did not progress far enough to bring about the changes needed for Jewish women AND Jewish men. Thus, both Jewish men and Jewish women find themselves unfulfilled, alone and lost. Kaufman's thoughts on this matter deserve further inquiry in the future as he may be onto a breakthrough in our understanding of gender relations among Jews in America.

In the film *Field of Dreams*, Kevin Costner's character hears the call to build the baseball field for the players that reside in his cornfield. The assumption of the film is that if he builds these players their ball field not only will these heroes of the past have a place to play those who believe in them and in baseball will come to see them play. Seeing is believing. The opposite seems to be the case for Jewish men regarding synagogues. They built them and then they left. Perhaps they stopped believing. However, as the pioneers of Israel sang they believed that when a Jew came to live and build the land of Israel the land would rebuild them. Abraham Karp observed that one task of the synagogue was to "reculturate" American Jews. Clearly, the challenge for the Jewish community in re-engaging Jewish men in the life of the synagogue, in particular, is to find ways for the synagogue, which they built to re-build them.

Chapter 5

The Transformation of Jewish Men: Reconnections with Jewish Life

וַיִּקְוֶה יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנִי לֹא יָדָעִתִּי
 Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I, I did not know
 it!" Genesis 28:16

Like Jacob, Jewish men in America, are often "asleep" with respect to their connections to religious life and further, if they were to "encounter" God they would most likely mimic Jacob and not recognize the awe or holiness of the moment. In moving toward responses to the questions asked at the opening of this examination of Jewish men, a survey of programs and one-half hour conversations with eleven Jewish men conducted by this author will assist in moving toward an understanding of the changes needed to re-engage men in Jewish life. Further, a review of some of the current conversation by other researchers on this subject will be discussed. In sum, successful re-engagement of Jewish men in Jewish life will require a multifaceted approach offering a variety of portals for entry into multivalent programs, which will appeal to a broad category of interests necessary to engage Jewish men.

Existing programs and the views of Jewish men interviewed for this study indicate that movement toward the re-engagement of Jewish men is occurring. It is therefore, reasonable to feel optimistic about the future however, a balanced view of the problem still speaks to a need for caution and concern. The truth is we are experiencing a time-period where women's involvement in Jewish life out-paces men in real numbers – witness enrollments in rabbinic school in particular at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles where women rabbinic students outnumber men 3 to 1, the greater number of young women involved in youth group activities and a growing preponderance of women in synagogue leadership. The resolution of the problem of engaging Jewish men in Jewish life is a long-term matter. The stories Jewish men have to tell however indicate that some resolution

is in progress and as more programs and activities for men are reported, the trend may tip toward a more balanced reporting regarding gender in Jewish life.

Seeking and Imagining

Our current environment is one where religion is gaining new currency. The presidential election of 2004 featured significant interest in the religious views and involvements of the candidates for president. Even with the election now entering the history books, interest in religion especially how men express and act upon their religious beliefs remains a subject of significant interest and sometimes-heated debate. As this interest in religion among men is discussed and debated its impact on men in the Jewish community is worthy of study. What happens in offices on Monday when men gather in the coffee room or around a board table - how do Jewish men react to conversation about the sermon at church on Sunday? Does this conversation move them toward engagement or does it reinforce their separation as religion is for someone other?

Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof speak about and study spiritual seekers. In their examinations of baby boomers, they note that there "is a need for that which transcends themselves and gives meaning and purpose to their lives..."¹⁰⁶ Men are seeking meaning in their lives and most importantly they are seeking the words and the ways to obtain meaning. [Men's]... stories as Roof notes are "crucial to (understanding) both religion and the human condition: it is a creative act, an exercise in making meaning, the construction of personal identity. By focusing on people's own accounts of their lives, we begin to appreciate the complex, multifaceted face of religion, as symbol, belief, practice, experience, identity, community, institution, and how these various aspects fluctuate

¹⁰⁶ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), p. 16.

in importance in an individual's own religious world over time."¹⁰⁷ Rabbi Rami Shapiro conquers with this view, he asserts, that in his experience men are more interested and motivated in a search for meaning than in learning more text and in intellectual pursuits.¹⁰⁸ However, obtaining meaning from a religious or spiritual perspective is not contradictory to learning about one's heritage and faith. What is paramount for engagement of men in their religious life is access to these elements of faith.

The journey toward Jewish engagement is a personal journey. Cohen and Eisen report this regarding their interviewees' comments on ritual practice:

Seeing oneself as an explorer, valuing the journey more than the arrival – common features of identity among the current generation of Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike – reinforce the refusal to submit to the authority of tradition when it comes to observance. So does the American (and modern) credo, voiced with stunning clarity ...that it is the individual's right to decide what is right for him or her in terms of religion.¹⁰⁹

The role of self and one's sense of autonomy is significant with regard to one's Jewish journey. Roberta Faber and Chaim Waxman address the importance of self and the importance America places on individual freedom.

American life has always been primarily concerned with individual freedom and expression over and above the interests of community. Self-autonomy, in other words, is primary (and) ...it is likewise a central principle in determining appropriate action. It expresses the independence and self-reliance of an individual as well as his or her right to decide...therefore the primary criterion is that of personal feeling. The concept of authenticity is invoked as a way to determine whether or not the feeling is real. Reliance on authenticitymeans that there are neither principles nor laws that can be shared in common.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Roof, p. 33

¹⁰⁸ E-mail correspondence with author.

¹⁰⁹ Cohen and Eisen, p. 93.

¹¹⁰ Roberta Rosenberg Farber and Chaim I. Waxman "Postmodernity and the Jews" in Farber and Waxman, eds. *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1999) pp. 398-399

Rabbi David Ellenson recently echoed Farber and Waxman's observation in speaking about rabbis in contemporary American culture, when he said, "rabbis in liberal settings no longer can rely on authority, the only thing they can rely on is influence."¹¹¹ Rabbi Ellenson's observation is significant and profound in that comments from interviewees' will confirm the importance of rabbinic influence in guiding them toward Jewish engagement. The importance of the self and exercising one's autonomy is central to seekers in their quest toward religious engagement.

Stories – Insights into the Involvement of Jewish Men

Samuel Heilman, in his research regarding the involvement of Jews in two Conservative congregations, spoke about the importance of the link between ethnography and biography. He notes that it is the ethnographer's role "by means of looking at particular individual's passages, to discover what is general and characteristic about these life experiences....ethnography goes beyond telling those particular stories but actually uses these individual narratives to see ...the general character of the community."¹¹² In the process of reporting on my interviews, an additional goal is to discover, as Heilman suggests "themes and patterns"¹¹³ that emerge from these conversation and how the information shared fits into the life and program of a congregational community through serving its members. One further note from Heilman is the need to pay attention to reported changes over time. Congregations like their members are organic, living and evolving.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Class lecture "Portraits of the Rabbis in the Modern World" New York June 2004.

¹¹² Samuel Heilman, "Ethnography and Biography, or What Happened When I Asked People to Tell Me the Story of Their Lives as Jews." *Contemporary Jewry*. The Journal for the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry. Vol. 21, 2000, 23-31, p. 23.

¹¹³ Heilman, p. 24.

¹¹⁴ Heilman, p. 26.

The men interviewed for this study ranged in age from thirty-eight to seventy-one years old. All reside in Southern California and all are currently members of Reform congregations. Some of the interviewees are involved in the National Federations of Temple Brotherhoods on a variety of levels from congregational positions to national board members. Others are involved in men's programming in their congregations, not affiliated with Brotherhood, and others are participants in men's study groups. While this sample is skewed toward pre-existing participation, the decision was made in advance of interviews to speak with men who are engaged, as learning about what led to their engagement may be applicable to seeking the engagement of men who are not currently involved. Among the men interviewed many were not occupied with synagogue life at various times during their own histories. Some joined synagogues only in the last few years, where others have been involved continuously. Most of these men report periods of time when they were disengaged from Jewish life, and more importantly, what brought them back. Clearly, these men were and are seekers who have much to tell us about how Jewish men can become engaged in Jewish life.

The older men in the sample (age 60+ N= 5) reflect the patterns found among third generation Jews. The goal for these men was to be successful Americans, who still maintained some ties to being Jewish. Many reported that Jewish observance of holidays was important for their families, in particular for their grandparents who represented the first generation in America. The subjects themselves talked about limited connections to Jewish life. One reported that his connection to Jewish life was through his father and his role in founding a synagogue. In fact, it was only much later in his life that this man became independent of his father in creating his own Jewish history. A similar story is told regarding the importance of family history as the key to Jewish involvement and yet this particular family with a rich Jewish history was not religious save for

holiday celebrations, which were reported as significant. Another older man shared that he "felt unwelcome at religious school and at the synagogue."

Among the younger men (those under 60 N=6) the connections to Jewish life as youngsters was stronger for some but not for all. These men could identify "markers" such as holiday celebrations, strong family influence, and experiences in religious school, which while not always positive, did lead to becoming a Bar Mitzvah and often continuing to confirmation. Those with stronger identification spoke about going to camp and being in youth group. In one case, one man spoke about his attendance at his synagogue's day camp, which had significant influence on his future Jewish identification and involvement. He described his Jewish day camp experience as a "magnet" that brought him closer to his Judaism. His Bar Mitzvah was one of his most meaningful experiences and this is all the more significant as his father died when he was a young boy. In reflecting on his Jewish life experience, a man who is forty years old stated, "Camp became the source of his Jewish identity". For those men who were not connected as young men, this period of life was insignificant with regard to their Jewish identity. Most of these men reported that their involvements in Jewish life came later.

One important revelation from these interviews was the time-period between commencing college studies, marriage and having children. The time between being twenty to thirty is a time of non-religious involvement for most of the men interviewed. They indicated that this was the time when they were invested in study, establishing themselves in their careers, finding a mate for those who married (all but one subject is married), and raising children. The implications of this revelation are significant regarding the response communities need to enact in serving and connecting Jewish men during this timeframe. In a few cases, some of the men interviewed were able to find time and

did become engaged as college students and thereafter, prior to marriage and family. Again, the men in the younger age category were the ones who reported involvement during college years and before marriage. Three of the men shared that they went to Israel during their college years and the experience of traveling to Israel had profound impact on their Jewish identity. What was most significant for these men regarding Israel was being Jewish without being religious. A significant aspect of their trip to Israel was learning Hebrew. This is an important discovery as well among these subjects; knowledge of Hebrew is directly correlated in their view to their degree of Jewish involvement. They reported that through learning and knowing Hebrew, they were able to attain greater knowledge about Jewish life in Israel and in knowing Hebrew, they were able to be more involved in the religious life of their congregations as they were able to read prayers and Torah.

Another important finding that emerged from these interviews was the importance attached to the role of the rabbi in securing their involvement in the life of the synagogue. While children's attendance at religious school was often cited as the primary factor regarding affiliation, it was the rabbi who secured the personal involvement of these men. This was true both, for the older as well as the younger men in this sample. In one case, the involvement followed a moving eulogy a rabbi delivered for a family member. In other cases, it was the positive response of a rabbi toward interest in learning. For many of the men involvement followed being asked to participate in a program or activity. In some cases, they did indicate that their engagement was the result of their spouses' encouragement. In two cases, the wives had been or became members of the synagogue before their husbands and their positive experience led to the wives' encouragement of their husbands to become involved. In one case, attendance at a Jewish family camp where one wife attended as a teen led to one man telling about the transformative experience he encountered at family camp. He

noted that one particular summer where the focus was on Jewish spirituality, the experience was so moving that he started a men's spirituality group at his synagogue.

In addition to the importance of the rabbi as a facilitator for involvement and engagement, being asked by other men was an important element as well in bringing other men into synagogue life. An important factor for these men regarding their involvement is the matter of fellowship and social time with other men. Many reported that the time spent with other men provided a perspective on their own lives and offered them a place for them to discuss concerns about their families and concerns about their own welfare.

While the fellowship or people factor was significant in attaining connection to synagogue life for these men, they noted that a significant program or project was essential to securing their involvement. For many social action and hands-on activities to benefit others were important in their choice to be involved. Those men with younger children noted that participation in *Tzedakah/Mitzvah* activities was important family time and in some cases was one of the few occasions when the family was engaged together. While not seeking rewards, many men reported the sense of pride and accomplishment that obtained from helping others.

Engagement of men is successful when the activity is concrete, practical and goal oriented. It is helpful as well, if there is an element of reward and recognition that follows from the involvement of men in an activity. Learning, while seen historically as a feminine activity, as was described in chapter two, is now valorized by Jewish men as an activity worthy of pursuit. Learning for these men is a "macho" enterprise, as they emerged from it emboldened and strengthened as Jewish men. Further, many noted that whatever their entry point into the synagogue once involved their engagement broadened into other areas of the synagogue or Jewish communal life.

Applications of Interview Data to Engagement

Dru Greenwood's findings are instructive in providing a framework toward understanding the factors that contribute to men's involvement and confirm the responses of the men interview for this study. Greenwood reports the following:

1. Men want to enter Jewish life, when they choose to, on their own terms and in their own time.
2. Men guard their sense of autonomy in setting their own course.
3. Spirituality, while intriguing, is seen by men as the domain of women. Male role models who value spirituality and give it an intellectual basis can give entrée.
4. Men also demand competency of themselves and value the ability to see and argue the larger picture of purpose from a basis of knowledge.
5. In keeping with men's instrumental/productive orientation, men who participate in Jewish life and/or become Jews¹¹⁵ prize their role as actors capable of making a concrete difference and effecting change in the world.¹¹⁶

Greenwood notes in her comments on these findings that "autonomy is seen as an important male characteristic."¹¹⁷ Farber and Waxman observe, "When applied to religious behavior, a postmodern American perspective supports the conceptual framework for an individualistic interpretation and expression of religious belief and action."¹¹⁸ While some of the men interviewed for this study did report the influence of a spouse in their choice to become involved and engaged in Jewish life, ultimately the decision was their own. In particular, those who became involved after raising their children spoke about the significance of their involvement and its contribution to their personal growth. "I adore it (learning) and I enjoy learning more about Judaism" one man stated serving as an example of the role of self in determining engagement in Jewish life. The significance of "what's in it for me?" is primary in securing men's involvement.

¹¹⁵ Greenwood's work was a study of men and conversion thus this language.

¹¹⁶ Greenwood, findings reported throughout non-numbered paper.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Farber and Waxman, p. 400.

In advance of addressing spirituality, the finding regarding competence is primary to engagement of Jewish men. While time is a significant factor influencing men's involvement, they report that a lack of knowledge and feeling of competence is significant in whether men will engage or not. Men need to feel competent about being Jewish. A feeling of competence leads to feelings of comfort and a desire to seek broader and deeper involvement in Jewish life. The importance of significant Jewish learning offered in an intellectually stimulating environment where differing points of view are respected is primary toward not only initial involvement but also maintaining engagement over time. Once men experience positive feelings, about Jewish learning, they will attach the emotion of fellowship with and toward other men, with whom they learn. Fellowship flows from the learning environment not toward it. Fellowship is a result of involvement.

Men seek connections and while their maleness may be responsible for their inadequacy to express their need for involvement and feeling of fellowship, men do not like the feeling or state of being alone. Often unstated is the desire to be a part of something even if the mode of engagement begins with some one or thing other than himself, men find comfort in talking with other men about their concerns and their pain. The truth is many men are in pain and they say little about it. Of note, the scholars who write about men do so in response to their own pain. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz concluded his introduction with the following, "...I want to acknowledge the relationship of this interpretation to the ongoing concerns in my life. This book was written at a time when I was struggling with my own masculinity, rediscovering intimacy with my father, learning to be a father to my own daughter, working through a painful divorce, and rediscovering love."¹¹⁹ Rabbi Kerry Olitsky also speaks about his personal journey in writing about Jewish men, "as I wrote the book, I found I hesitated to commit some of my thoughts to writing. However, I have come to understand

¹¹⁹ Eilberg-Schwartz, p. 10.

that to be honest with ourselves and to find the holy in our midst, we have to ask these tough questions and listen to the answers we hear.”¹²⁰ While these men found their way to and through Judaism, many Jewish men submit to the pain and reject any further connection to being Jewish. David Kaufman has suggested, as was noted earlier, that this group of men is unknown, as is their number. How to engage them is a true challenge and may be beyond study as their rejection of Judaism is a contributing factor to their absence from Jewish life and being unavailable or uninterested in conversation about Judaism.¹²¹

The Role of Synagogues in Attracting Jewish Men

Rabbi Sidney Schwarz, author of *Finding A Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of American Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue* (Josey-Bass, 2000), argues that, “The Jewish community has ignored the spiritual dimensions of Judaism for far too long and we are paying a heavy price for in terms of the number of younger Jews who have abandoned the Jewish community for a host of spiritual alternatives.”¹²² Rabbi Schwarz asserts that the revitalization of the American synagogue requires the following:

1. Articulation of Mission – we need synagogues to frame answers to the question “Why be Jewish?” for a generation that cannot, itself, answer the question. As synagogues begin to ask such big questions, it will point to new ways to reach a generation that has an entirely new set of assumptions than did their parents about being Jewish in America.
2. Organizational Culture – Synagogues need to embrace a new ethic of egalitarianism. The greatest spiritual power of a synagogue-community lies latent in the soul of every person who walks through the door.

¹²⁰ Rabbi Kerry Olitsky, *From Your Father's House... Reflections for Modern Jewish Men* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), p. xxi.

¹²² Sidney Schwarz, “Synagogues that Work” Jewish Education News, Winter 2002.

3. Spiritual Leadership – a generation starving for spiritual direction will not be drawn to religious functionaries (rabbis). They need to hear someone articulate a vision for how to invest life with meaning and purpose. Rabbi increasingly need to invite Jews to tell their stories, their spiritual journeys, and then to put those experiences into the context of Jewish wisdom and tradition (by helping seekers come to realize that Judaism offers a portal to greater meaning.
4. Framing of Serious Judaism – If we want to create serious Jews, we must offer serious Judaism.¹²³

Jonathan Sarna concludes his new history of American Judaism in his chapter “American Judaism at a Crossroad”, when he states, regarding synagogues that they need to “become moral and spiritual centers responsive to the exciting demographic and religious realities of Jewish Life...synagogues are poised at an historic moment in time to play out the next and finest chapter in the saga of Jewish destiny.”¹²⁴ Rabbi Dana Kaplan, writing on American Reform Judaism, states, “the synagogue attracts many Jews and has the opportunity, first, to connect with ...“Jewish seekers”, then to cement a bond that can develop into an enduring connection and commitment...based on values that the individual holds dear, and those values are twenty-first century American ones.”¹²⁵

The task then of the American synagogue with regard to men specifically is to be that sacred space where men will come to say God is in place and I found God here. The successful synagogue will be a haven for seekers, a home for Jewish “explorers” to find their Jewish treasure in whatever form speaks to them. Most importantly, it is a place where Jewish men will discover someone who will ask them to be a part of the journey their own as well as that of fellow travelers. A place as one interviewee describe as “an anchor and the center of my life.” Another man described his synagogue as a place for “learning, worship and singing – a place for something significant”. “A place of refuge” another man offered as his description of his synagogue. “A source of relevance and

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p365.

¹²⁵ Dana Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), P. 255.

meaning" where one can grow to be a role model for other Jewish men as teachers and leaders. "It's about being part of the tribe and having a love of Torah".

Synagogue and Jewish life work for these men, the challenge is how to achieve this for other Jewish men. In the conclusion that follows, guides for those seeking the way to a meaningful Jewish life will find a variety of approaches toward engagement. "Where are you Jewish men?" - remains a question. In the meantime, an increasing number of Jewish men will have an answer and it will be **הנה** - "I am here!"

Conclusion
Different Points of View

Go Forth **הֵלֵךְ** - Go to yourself, that is, go to your roots to find your potential.
Chassidic Commentary

This study of Jewish men commenced with a survey of current works on this subject. We now return to these works for a re-examination of their particular point of view regarding the re-engagement of men in Jewish life. There are many responses to the question – “where are you, Jewish men?” The successful engagement of Jewish men requires a multifaceted methodology. This view argues that more is better. A singular mode of reaching men is just that singular. If one mode does not speak to or for one man, we risk losing them to something else. A multi-portal approach provides for a variety of entry points to Jewish life and as the conversations with men interviewed indicate, once engaged; involvements expand into other areas of synagogue and Jewish communal life. In suggesting this approach as an answer to the “problem” of Jewish men, the argument speaks in favor of what will work as a response to the variety of issues men present in their own stories. The work of scholars and rabbis on this subject while significant is often singular in their approach to the matter of Jewish men and as a result leaves some men out. Therefore a response to the engagement of men that is multivalent is worthy of serious consideration.

Rabbis in contrast to scholars address the matter of men from the perspective of seeking engagement. Rabbis Jeffrey Salkin, Niles Goldstein and Steven Leder address the subject of Jewish men through physicality. They react to the notion of Jewish men as feminized by creating programs which emphasize a physical response to achieving manhood similar to the ideas of “muscle Jews” advanced by Zionist thinkers and as a response to anti-Semitism discussed in Chapter Two. Rabbinic Judaism valorized learning as the answer to the “problems” of Jewish men both in response to the “yetzer ha-rah” the evil inclination associated with sexuality and women, and in

rejecting the behavior of "others" in particular non-Jews, which was labeled *goyim naches*. These rabbis assert, that when Jewish men engage in physical activity both real and psychic, such activity will propel them to a greater sense of their manhood and in the case of Rabbis Goldstein and Leder, spirituality.

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin's approach to Jewish men is based on "finding our biblical sibling" who was "abandoned" in favor of the "chosen son". On its face, there is an appeal to this idea if only as a psychological step toward completion and wholeness. However, that is not what Rabbi Salkin is proposing. His own narrative regarding his interactions with neighborhood "hoods" speaks to a desire to be able to respond with physical strength to their taunts and beatings. This answer is weak in its effort to be strong. Not every man shares Rabbi Salkin's narrative and for those who do not his argument lacks resonance and connectedness. Some of the men in the interviews spoke favorably about their work in the realm of interfaith relations and to suggest to these men that the way for them to attain Jewish manhood is to become strong enough to engage in "battle" with the non-Jews is counterproductive. Rabbi Salkin chooses as well to ignore women. This is his right however, it is disingenuous to speak about men in the current environment without acknowledging the influence and impact of feminism on Jewish men. The importance of Rabbi Salkin's work is its role in placing the issue of Jewish men on the Jewish agenda. In the introduction, it was noted, that when Rabbi Salkin's book was released, other titles regarding Jewish men were also published at the same time. In keeping with the multifaceted approach toward engaging Jewish men, these other voices need to be heard and given prominence as well.

Rabbi Goldstein in his autobiographical work, *God at the Edge* describes his adventures that have taken him around the world from dog sledding Alaska to helping Jews in Moscow and traveling

the back roads of Asia to working with drug police in the underworld of Manhattan. Rabbi Goldstein relates why he is drawn to the wilderness and the physical challenges he chose to endure.

After my first year as a rabbi...I felt a deep need to return to Alaska. I wanted to reignite the spark that has originally propelled me into rabbinical school with so much zeal and idealism. As a young rabbi, I had longed for a religious community that was bursting with pride, joy, passion, and vitality, that held as its eternal mandate the loving commitment to a sacred covenant between its members and God. What I discovered was something else: a cult of woe, a reactionary community that seemed to be obsessed with its own degeneration, with inter-marriage, assimilation, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. I was losing my faith. I had to get away, to return to a place where I would once again find inspiration for my soul. I made arrangements to fly to Fairbanks....¹²⁶

Rabbi Goldstein's transparency is significant. If this is so for a rabbi, how much more so for other if not most Jewish men. A rabbi should have the capacity to connect to things spiritual and yet here is this young rabbi needing to escape from his work in his congregation to the wilderness to reconnect. His conclusion is a call to action for all Jews, however men in particular, to go to the wilderness in search of God.

One of the problems with religion today is that our faiths, as well as our clergy, are too protective of us. They try to tame the transcendent. They shackle it with too many forces. Denominationalism. Politics. Intellectualization. Our religions often lack the divine fire that gave birth to them in the first place. And because they have failed to provide us with the sustenance that so many of us now desperately crave, we have been forced to look elsewhere. It was this hunger, this quest for the sacred, that drove me to the wilds of Alaska and that now makes me feel at times like a vagabond in search of a home.¹²⁷

Indeed, as with Rabbi Goldstein, Jewish men are like "vagabonds in search of a home". The answer in part to their quest is to show men the way home and how to open the doors to come inside and find their place. The task that Rabbi Goldstein identifies for himself is true for many Jewish men – the call to return: "But I am not alone. The wilderness has always exerted a pull over

¹²⁶ Rabbi Niles Goldstein, *God at the Edge* (New York: Bell Tower Books, 1998) p. 144.

¹²⁷ Goldstein, p. 154.

those who have struggled to find God in a house of worship and who sometimes had to look to the frontier for their spirituality...Alaska was my Sinai."¹²⁸

Rabbi Steve Leder writes about his experience of conquering the rope course at this temple's camp. He describes a weekend with the men's group comprising of "twenty slightly overweight, overdressed guys" who are wondering if they are ready to accept the challenge of climbing and then leaping through the air to ring a bell before being lowered to the ground. In the process of completing the challenge Rabbi Leder learned, "With Chasidic-like clarity...that freedom is the conquering of fear. I am transformed."¹²⁹ Rabbi Leder introduces this essay with the tagline "When you must, you can – Yiddish Proverb."¹³⁰

Rabbi Kerry Olitsky's, *From Your Father's House...Reflections for Modern Jewish Men*, addresses men's spirituality from within rather than through physicality. He provides responses to the following subject areas: petition, joy, thanksgiving, encounter, struggle and survival, holy service, love and understanding.¹³¹ The selections in each of these chapters are texts from a variety of Jewish sources with a comment by the author, guiding the reader to consider how the text can be applied to their life in the context of the particular subject. The style of the book is that of a daily devotional reader and this format will speak to those men in search of a spiritual response to the questions of being Jewish and being male. This approach will speak to one segment of men and not others. As a tool to study or to provoke discussion, this book is useful and men's groups would do well to employ it as a part of their programs.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Steven Leder, *The Extraordinary Nature of Ordinary Things* (Behrman House, 1999) p. 13.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Olitsky, chapter headings.

Rabbi Alan Tuffs, *And You Shall Teach Them to Your Sons*, also employs texts for study and discussion, with the purpose of encouraging conversation between generations of men. In Rabbi Tuffs presentation subjects involving spirituality are included, as well as the concerns of Jewish men with regard to their lives and relationships. "Men as warriors, man of God; love, sex and friendship and work" are addressed together with Bible stories and his suggestions regarding their application to men's life. Most valuable to the Jewish men who use this book are the suggestions for further reading. Here Rabbi Tuffs provides his readers with the seminal works on men – both Jewish and secular. Rabbi Tuffs annotates his reading list and guides men toward consideration of the many voices that are speaking to and about men.

For a number of years, Joel Grishaver, founder of Torah Aura Productions, created and taught classes on Talmud for Jewish men. Most significant in his approach is Grishaver's use of the Talmudic style of argument. He offers not one, but many approaches to each topic he presents. The use of rabbinic discourse and inquiry connects men who many not have studied Talmud to the method of Talmudic thinking and, in so doing, achieves a goal stated by Jewish men and researchers on this topic, the necessity to be intellectually honest and rigorous. Grishaver's narrative while intellectual is one that will resonate with many Jewish men. Grishaver also shares his own seeking with his readers. As with Rabbi Tuffs, Grishaver provides a list of resources for further study, which include the "standards" in men's study. The success of Grishaver's enterprise is its readability, as a storyteller and public speaker, the style is accessible and the message is powerful.

As with other writers on the subject of men, Grishaver, too, is self-disclosing with regard to his work in this realm.

This book started one rainy Thanksgiving weekend when listening to an audio

tape of *Iron John* set off a feeling and a thought. The feeling was profound sadness, a deep mourning for a relationship with my father that could now never be healed. And the thought was that this men's stuff was both powerful and pagan. The two together set me on a three-year journey through rabbinic literature, through lots of classes I then taught, through my soul and through the Jewish tradition. In the process I have learned some and I have healed some.¹³²

Most significant for Jewish male seekers, are Grishaver's commitment to process and his commitment of time. The search for one's self or one's brother is not a momentary, snap event. A truthful, committed search may be or should be a life long enterprise. Here, too, Grishaver supports the value of a multifaceted approach to Jewish men – the need to consider the “dvar acher” the other point of view, which he offers repeatedly throughout his book. In the final pages of the text, Grishaver states, “This book's final answer - wisdom relearned and echoed by my friend and teacher Rabbi Ed Feinstein – is in the words, “what you are really trying to say is just ‘Elu v’Elu D’vrai Elohim ha-Hayim’ – THESE and THESE are all the words of the living God.”¹³³

Rachel Adler, theologian and ethicist, argues for an engendered Judaism, that promotes mutuality between genders. While Adler focuses on a revised wedding contract, which is mutual in language - removing the male dominated text from its original rabbinic formulation, her goal is to employ, as does Daniel Boyarin, the Talmud in a re-reading or re-formulation to include women, rather than excluding them as rabbinic literature had done for centuries. In the introduction, Adler states why engendering is not for women only:

Engendering Judaism requires two tasks. The *critical task* is to demonstrate that historical understandings of gender affect all Jewish texts and contexts and hence require the attention of all Jews. But this is only the first step. There is also an *ethical task*. That gender categories and distinctions have changed in the past tells us nothing about what sorts of changes we ought to make in the future. These changes must be negotiated in conversations where participants invoke and re-

¹³² Joel Grishaver, *The Bonding of Isaac: Stories and Essays about Gender and Jewish Spirituality* (Los Angeles: Aleph Design Group, 1997), pp. 131 – 132.

¹³³ Grishaver, p. 132.

examine the values and priorities enunciated in Jewish tradition in the light of current needs, injuries, or aspirations demanding to be addressed.¹³⁴

In her closing sentence, Adler addresses the concerns shared by both men and women. "Current needs, injuries and aspirations" demand attention and a project that seeks to achieve mutuality between men and women, in the end, will benefit both. Women have much to teach men in this current environment and sensitive men have much to say to women. Here, narrative is essential in speaking to the injuries and aspirations shared by men and women. The matter is not a re-balancing of the political dimension of gender, but a movement toward mutuality where men and women will strengthen each other and enable each other to reach their full potential. In this regard, men in the interview sample did acknowledge the influence of their wives' in guiding them onto the path of engagement in Jewish life and once engaged many of the men reported that their involvement took place with their wives, or children. Truth is, this is not, as Adler argues so persuasively, a gendered matter; it is a human matter.

Robert Bly's, *Iron John*, is an important text for all men who seek to know what it means to be a man. Bly effectively and persuasively unpacks the brothers' Grimm folktale of *Iron John* - an initiation story about and for men. The story of *Iron John* begins with the capture of a wild man who had lived at the bottom of a deep pool not far from the castle of the king. The king's son frees this wild man, renamed later in the tale as, Iron John from his captivity. Fearful of the king's edict that whoever allowed the wild man to escape would face death, the king's son goes off to the forest with Iron John where he is transformed from a young boy to a man through a series of rites of passage. As a young man, the king's son saves a neighboring kingdom, marries the daughter of the king, reunites with his parents and frees Iron John from his true incarceration - an evil spell that had been placed upon him.

¹³⁴ Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998), pp. xiv-xv.

The power of this tale is as a story of initiation and the importance of a mentor-guide. Jethro filled this role for Moses teaching him and leading him to become a true leader of Israel the people. The message and lesson to be learned here is the need men have for mentor-guides. The interviews spoke to this as well, in particular the comments made by the younger men who came to realize and recognize the wisdom of experience present among the older men in the group. The older men spoke of the "reward" obtained in assisting younger men through those challenging periods of life in particular the years of building a career and family.

Every man needs a mentor – guide to aid him in the transition to manhood. Further, rites of initiation, in particular, Bar Mitzvah needs to be re-examined. Every young boy needs to be challenged to undertake a true rite of passage beyond the rituals associated with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. In recent years, Mitzvah projects have been appended to Bar Mitzvah requirements, however in too many cases, these projects have become "low hanging fruit" demanding little and serving no purpose other than meeting a requirement. In cases when a Bar Mitzvah is tasked to complete a meaningful and challenging activity the process becomes an act of passage and a rite of achievement for a young man. Serious consideration of Bar Mitzvah needs to occur with regard to its place, as a rite of passage and meaningful, challenging tasks need to be added to the requirement for becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

The re-engagement of Jewish men and their transformation requires the following: mentor-guides who will lead them through the initiation; access to the stories that will help to guide men toward their personal and spiritual growth and taking on a physical challenge that will teach them "when you must, you can". Programs exist to help men in this process. The amount of activity is under-reported. As programs for men are shared and publicized, the trend toward the re-

engagement of Jewish men will become clearer, significant and real. The National Federation of Temple Brotherhood under the leadership of its national director, Doug Barden, is undertaking a project to catalog the current programs for Jewish men in Reform congregations. This catalog will reveal and demonstrate the variety, wealth and sophistication of programs.

Competence is an important element in securing the engagement of Jewish men. Furthermore, the role of self and autonomy are significant with regard to if, when and how engagement takes place. Here the work of Rabbi Eugene Borowitz and his study of the autonomous Jewish self are essential toward understanding the importance of this process and phenomenon in creating engaged Jews and creating involved Jewish communities.

For Borowitz, the development and growth of a Jewish self takes place in relationship and in community. 'A Jewish self is characterized not only by a grounding personal relationship with God, but relates to God as a part of the people of Israel's historic Covenant with God.'¹³⁵

There are four aspects to Borowitz's concept of Covenant:

1. Self and God – Jewishness is lived out of a relationship with God, which precedes, undergirds and interfuses all other relationships of the Jewish self.
2. Jewish People – The Jewish self lives out the Covenant not only as a self in relation to God, but as part of a living ethnic community.
3. History – The basic relationship and the partners involved in it have remained the same...much of what Jews once did is likely to commend itself to us as what we ought to do.
4. Tradition – Form, habit, institution and structure have a necessary role to play in such fulfillment of self.¹³⁶

This conception of Covenant is then applied to Borowitz's reading of Jewish Law, which he argues, "Is the single best source of guidance for how one ought to live."¹³⁷ Further, he states, "I look

¹³⁵ Eugene Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism: The Autonomous Jewish Self* (1984). (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002) p. 221

¹³⁶ Borowitz, p. 223.

forward to the day when enough Jewish selves autonomously choose to live in ways sufficiently similar that they can create common patterns among us" that is community in Covenant.¹³⁸

The 100 Jewish Men at Wilshire Blvd. Temple in Los Angeles and the variety of men's learning groups led by Rabbi Jeff Marx at Congregation Sha'arei Am in Santa Monica, California are two of the more innovative and on going programs serving men. The Southern California region of the Northern Federation of Temple Youth has hosted a young men's only weekend for the past few years providing a safe space for young men to discuss the challenges of becoming Jewish men. Congregation Leo Baeck in Los Angeles now offers a quarterly men's only Shabbat service and at the recent national youth convention in Los Angeles (2005) a young men's only Shabbat service attracted 200 male participants. These programs defy the conventional wisdom of Jewish learning, as a feminized activity, for these men learning, when rigorous and intellectually challenging, is a "macho-muscle Jew" activity. For these Jewish men, learning informs who they are as an extension and amplification of their careers, families and communal involvements.

These efforts represent responses and successes in programs for Jewish men. While noteworthy, programs are a response to the problem and at the same time they are not the solution. The causes that keep men away are deep and the task of re-engaging men is demanding. Addressing the root causes of the problem is essential to its resolution. The matter of Jewish men has not yet appeared on the national agenda for the Reform movement or secular Jewish organizations. The issue of engaging Jewish men is a silent cry for help. Men will not announce that they are in pain, like Jacob they will learn to live with it. Crippled Jewish men cannot and will not bring Jewish men

¹³⁷ Borowitz, p.224.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

back into Jewish life; their pain overwhelms the tasks necessary to achieve return. Men need healing, they need to seek out the challenge of the wilderness take it on and win.

This study of Jewish men began with an assumption based on current conversation that Jewish men are vanishing from religious life. The findings, in particular, from the interviews conducted and a survey of current materials for Jewish men indicates a counter trend. Men are involved and are engaging in Jewish life. Yes, many men have left as some survey data does show, however, as has been noted, current trends foretell a return and the development of a new and different Jewish man. Today's Jewish man sees learning as a positive attribute and worthy of pursuit. Jewish men seek meaning in their lives and when physically challenged they apply the achievement of meeting such challenges with renewed faith in themselves and an appreciation of awe and holiness. Men want to talk about God and the recent development in male only worship and the reported successes expressed both by those who participate and lead such worship is a positive development. More needs to be done for young boys specifically in the realm of Jewish education and the Bar Mitzvah experience. Early intervention is essential to setting young men forth toward achieving full Jewish manhood. Here the work of mythopoietic writers such as Bly, have much to say and teach Jewish men. Another finding is the importance of male rabbis speaking to men.

While the interview subjects are comfortable with women rabbis, they indicated that their engagement and growth as men came through interacting with a male rabbi. The sense obtained from the interviews leads to a conclusion, for the moment at least, that while the contemporary scene could be described as post-feminist as all but two of the men interviewed even addressed the subject of women, most of the men found their connection through male rabbis. The programmatic

application of this finding speaks to the need for communities led by female rabbis to invite male rabbis to speak to the men in their congregations as well as offering men the opportunity to join other men in settings where successful men's learning and programming is occurring especially where male rabbis are the teachers-leaders. In settings where a male rabbi is not accessible, programming at the regional and national level is one way to provide engagement opportunities for men. In cases where actual physical participation may not be possible, technology should be employed to create on-line learning and places for men to interact, even if it is remote in cyberspace.

As Jewish men gain strength so, too will the Jewish worlds in which they live. The theory behind this project is better Jewish men will make better husbands and partners, create better Jewish families and Jewish homes, which will lead to better Jewish communities. The narratives of men who speak on this subject indicate that this theory is moving toward praxis. While the conclusion regarding the current state of Jewish men is hopeful, there is much to be done. Moses' final charge to his successor Joshua offers such hope for the future:

חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ כִּי אֲנִי תֹבֵיא אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָהֶם וְאֲנִי
אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ:

Be strong, be courageous for you will bring the Children of Israel to the land
about which I swore to them; and I myself will be there with you.
Deuteronomy 31:23

Jewish men will find and are finding the way home. The road signs home say: "be strong and courageous" and believe "when you must, you can."

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