

The Reconstructionist

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FROM THE EDITOR

Those who have monitored the changing nature of the general and Jewish communities over the past few decades are aware of the rapid changes affecting the roles of parent and partner. "Family life" operates out of multiple models. Customary patterns of earlier generations have shifted, often radically, and what we find in communal and congregation settings now are single parent families, blended families, gay and lesbian families, families where one partner is from a non-Jewish family of origin, and any number of other profiles.

Inclusivity has become a paradigm of the Reconstructionist movement, one that is shared in much of the secular Jewish agency world and, increasingly, in the wider synagogue world. Rather than debate definitions we seem to be moving into an era where we assume pluralism and seek to respond appropriately.

But bringing our ritual, liturgy, *minhagim* (customs) and practices into line with our changing community is an ongoing process which often moves more slowly than the organizational adjustments that characterize our new Jewish community. How do we create life cycle liturgy for same-sex couples? Do we use the traditional paradigms with simple grammatical adjustments or create entirely new ceremonies? What information under what rubrics do we seek on our synagogue membership application forms — "husband/wife name" or "partner name" (either of which might suggest an attitude about singles . . .). How do we count our congregations? "Singles"? "Families"? "Households"? "Members"? Do we ask "religious identification" with regard to adults and/or children?

This issue focuses on a series of observations, analyses, arguments and perspectives on contemporary parenting and partnering. As this is very much a conversation in progress, we hope readers will respond with additional observations and insights.

We also feature several articles of more general interest by way of signaling our intention of retaining a focus for each issue of *The Reconstructionist* while leaving space for other topics that do not necessarily derive from that focus.

Upcoming Issues

The Fall 2000 issue will feature articles on "The Public Square and Public Policy," with a focus on how the Jewish community and the Jewish religious tradition are responding to changes in American political and social

culture. Spring 2001 brings “Ethics and Decision-Making” with attention to the application of Jewish values to contemporary ethical issues. Our Fall 2001 issue will explore academic and communal implications of “Jewish Identity.”

We wish our readers a relaxing and renewing summer.

— Richard Hirsh

“Bless Us, Our Father”: Parenting and Our Images of God

BY JACOB J. STAUB

This story begins in March 1999, on Shabbat morning, *Parashat Ki Tissa* (Exodus 32). I was six months into a regular, not-quite-daily mindfulness meditation practice that was opening me up in ever new ways to the old words of the *siddur*. Every *davvening* had become an adventure, an opportunity to explore deeply felt connections — gratitude, yearning, terror, wonder. Words like *mashpil ge'im u-magbi'a shefalim* (the One who levels the proud and elevates the humble) — words I had recited since childhood — had become mnemonic maps charting my inner journeys.

On this particular Shabbat, my *Shaharit* prayer had led me into a wordless contemplation, an emotional reverie in which I sat at ease, in *menuhah* (rest), spiritually restored, enveloped by song, by the very air in the room. Aligned with a greater Whole. Momentarily certain, in a non-cognitive, inexpressible way,

that my breath was connected to *nishmat kol hai*, to the breath of all living things that testifies to the Presence of God. *Borkhenu Avinu kulanu ke-ehad be'or panekha*, I prayed: May we all be blessed, as if we are children of God the Parent, in the light of the divine countenance.

Divine Wrath

And then came the Torah reading. The Golden Calf. The wrath of God, deflected only by Moses' argument that God's reputation among the nations would suffer if the Israelites were destroyed. The wrath of Moses, breaking the tablets, ordering the slaughter of 3000 people.

A story I had heard a thousand times. A story from which I had long distanced myself — an outmoded, supernaturalistic myth of God the Father that, like so much of our inherited scripture, tradition, and liturgy, no longer speaks to us. A story

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that perhaps I had thus never allowed to touch me before.

On this particular morning, however, in my state of open-heartedness, I found it devastating. It was not just infuriating for the objectionable values embedded in it, but excruciatingly painful even to listen to, because of what it reveals about the world view and experiences of its authors.

The people can't wait for Moses to descend from the mountain. In their anxiety, they build a molten calf to worship God. They've apparently misunderstood Moses' intended teachings about the proper way to worship. Constructing an animal seat on which the invisible God rests, a common practice in the Ancient Near East, was not to Moses' liking. So they had to be punished, even slaughtered. A story written from the viewpoint of a despotic, abusive tribal chief who must have ruled by fiat, violently enforced his will on his subjects, and assumed that God must govern like him.

The Power of Inherited Narratives

Why allow myself to be so affected by a story that I don't believe is a factual account? Why not distance myself from it? Why not place it in its historical context and understand it as a reflection of the values of a generation past with which I do not identify?

Because I saw, as never before, how

much power our central, inherited myths still have over us. I realized that I am still being wounded by it, on many levels.

I don't believe in a supernaturalistic God who literally rewards and punishes me. But the Divine Process in which I do believe, I realized, is in many ways a naturalistic version of the Sinaitic God: an impersonal Process that doesn't know me or care about my specific circumstances (as God at Sinai doesn't care about the intentions of the Israelites); a natural Force by which the world is governed, so that I am responsible for the consequences of my actions (so that I pay, in naturalistic justice, for my mistakes as the Israelites are made to pay for the sin of the Golden Calf). I realized that however much I condescend to the Biblical narrative of God, I am still profoundly affected by it as I seek to reinterpret it in naturalistic terms.

The *d'var Torah* at Minyan Dorshei Derekh that morning was delivered by Rachel Falcove, who echoed many of these same concerns. She spoke about her experiences in the workplace, where supervisors interpret the behavior of their supervisees on the basis of their preconceived impressions of each individual. The behavior of someone who is perceived as lazy is interpreted as confirmation of the preconception, while identical behavior by someone who is perceived as industrious is taken in an entirely different way. She wondered aloud whether God and Moses overreacted at Sinai because of the as-

sumption that the people were backsliding idolaters. What, she asked, if the Israelites were trying to worship God in the best way they knew how, with no idolatrous intentions?

In the discussion that followed, I listened for a while to people who tried to justify the God-Moses position in the story, and then I voiced my own pain and frustration. I don't believe, I said, in a God who stands only in wrathful judgment, who might contemplate destroying an entire people, who sends a prophet to command some of them to slaughter others. I reject, I heard myself saying, God the Tyrant, created in the image of an ancient monarch or tribal chieftain. I want a God, I admitted, who helps me — not one who threatens me.

Maternal Love

I was thinking about my own mother. It was not until I had sat *shiva* for her three years before that I noticed what a powerful force she had been in my life. While she was alive, I would have said that ours was a distant relationship. She wasn't adept at expressing her feelings, especially her affection. I had left the Orthodox world in which she had raised me when I was a teenager, and she could never fully embrace the life I had chosen. We would speak briefly by phone each week, and nothing substantial was ever said beyond reports about her grandchildren.

But when she died, I felt orphaned in a profound and surprising way. I

hadn't realized how much I had relied on her unspoken love and support. Though I never turned to her for emotional support when I was in distress, I knew on a deep level that she was there, that she cared, that she would help if she could. She had brought me into the world, and despite all the unspoken ways that she couldn't help judging me when I acted in ways of which she disapproved, she loved me with an unconditional maternal love that I yearned for immediately when she died. During *shiva*, I dug out photographs (in violation of halakhic rules) of her hugging me as an infant, and I spoke to visitors about what those images meant to me.

Divine Predicates

Why, I wondered, couldn't a naturalistic conception of God include images of a Process that also nurtures and forgives and supports? Why is it more naturalistic to say that God is revealed when we act in justice than it is to say that God is manifest when we feel nurtured?

After the service that Shabbat morning, many people approached me to follow up on my comments — all of them concerned that I seemed upset. One exchange was particularly significant for me. A friend who is utterly devoted to fighting injustice in the world asked: It's all very nice to want God to be loving and forgiving, but what if that's not the way it is? What if the world is so constructed that we really do have to pay

for our mistakes?

I replied quickly, as if I had always known the answer: We don't know anything about God. God, if God exists, is, by definition, beyond our ability to know with certainty. Everything we say about God is a reflection of our noblest values, which we assume God embodies. That's why our images of God evolve as we evolve. Jews have always re-read our stories in light of what we believe to be true and right.

And that being the case, there is no reason not to attribute our noblest values about parenting to God. Parenting and being parented is as universal and natural an experience as there is. Our view of Reality affects the way we experience our place in the world and how we treat our own children and others whom we parent.

Good Parenting

In the year that has followed, I have traveled around the country, leading a study session for supporters of the RRC with the title of this article. I have begun each session by asking participants to say one thing about what makes a good parent — based either on their experience of being parented or of parenting. In each group, a consensus has quickly emerged, and all of the groups have been in striking agreement.

A good parent, we believe, is someone who loves unselfishly, who treats children with empathy and respect, who is warm and understanding, who guides children through their mis-

takes and rebelliousness without abandoning them, who models the values he or she espouses, who is always available, who is patient, who nurtures and lets go, encourages them to be independent and accepts them as they are without insisting that they follow in their parents' footsteps. A good parent does not approve of everything her or his children do. Good parents set limits and teach about consequences, but they do so understanding that children should be allowed to make mistakes knowing that they can count on their parents to help them through. (I make this list based on the notes I took during those discussions.)

By no means are all Reconstructionist parents identical. Some emphasize structure and discipline, others stress focus on empathy and respect. But all of them agree that if they met a parent who behaved like God at Sinai, they would send him or her for counseling about anger management and relationship building.

Unredeemed Texts

My study sessions have focused on a number of selected texts, in addition to the story of the Golden Calf. We examine the Garden of Eden story. God instructs Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Adam and Eve disobey and eat the fruit, as a consequence of which they are banished from the Garden and are punished forever. With what? With pain in childbirth. With toil-

ing by the sweat of our brow.

In other words, as the result of the first act of human (adolescent?) self-assertion, the text teaches that we are stricken with the human condition itself — as if we are meant to see our entire lives as reminders of God's wrath. Unlike Christians, we like to assert, we Jews do not believe in Original Sin. Perhaps, but what we nevertheless do learn from the Book of Genesis is that at our core, we do not measure up to the expectations of God the Father.

Rabbinic literature claims that the sin of the Garden was erased at Sinai, with the revelation of the Torah. That is, if we observe the commandments, we can overcome our primal, rebellious nature. That's not so easy, we should conclude, based on the Golden Calf episode.

And if we weren't so sure about that, the book of Deuteronomy and the prophets spell it out. Bad things happen because we deserve them. We study *Parashat Ha'azinu* (Deuteronomy 32) — Moses' farewell address, his summary of Israelite history. God is a father who acquires Israel when it is destitute. God favors Israel, makes Israel into something great. But Israel is ungrateful and rebels, provoking God to extreme wrath, threatening punishments that are truly unspeakable. If one weren't wary about treating God irreverently, one might easily conclude that the relationship described is an abusive one.

We look at passages from the liturgy. "We have sinned before You.

Forgive us though we are undeserving. We stand before You in fear. Because of our sins we were exiled. We are utterly dependent on You. We are nothing and You are everything." And so on. A powerful and often overwhelming thrust of our heritage identifies God as that aspect of Reality that holds us to standards that we can never live up to — and that accounts for our suffering by blaming ourselves.

Our Texts?

It is clear that our notions of good parenting differ significantly from those of our ancestors. It is pointless to condemn them for not having our values, but it is anything but pointless to acknowledge the pain we may feel when reading the texts they wrote. We have the option of reading the Garden of Eden or Golden Calf stories each year as historical documents that reflect the values of a different era, and thus to inoculate ourselves by not taking them as significant in our lives.

They are our texts, however. We do read them in our liturgy. And thus, for those of us who choose to engage them, they are unavoidable. We are vulnerable — more than we realize, perhaps. Even as we reinterpret them, we are affected by them. As I noted above, we can affirm that God isn't the supernatural Person who rewards and punishes. But if, in our naturalization, we assume that it is natural law that causes us to suffer, as a direct and natural conse-

quence of our own behavior, then we unwittingly remain captivated by those texts as they continue to shape our view of reality.

Undeserved Blessings

Do I get everything I deserve? This is a question on which I have been reflecting through this process. We are all clear, I think, that we can't blame the victim when bad things happen. Evil should not be interpreted as punishment. That is the way in which naturalistic theology does liberate us from our theological heritage.

But what about the blessings in my life? My health. My family. My job. My IQ. My standard of living. Do I deserve them? Did I deserve to be born in the USA in the middle of the twentieth century? Do I deserve novocaine? Antibiotics? Angioplasty? Every day I make serious mistakes — in the ways I mistreat others, in what I eat, in petty and not-so-petty lies — for which I experience no negative consequences. If there is justice embedded in reality, then there is certainly compassion as well.

Why then have I assumed for so long that naturalistic faith is faith in a God who does not intervene but who is manifest in natural laws of cause and effect? Parental love — love which nurtures and forgives — is natural. Why is it more intellectually respectable to assume that God is impersonal rather than personal? God, we should all agree, is neither. We don't really believe that God is a

Process. Not if we remain true to our conviction that all representations of God are culturally conditioned and reflect the viewpoint of the human beings making the representations.

Reevaluating God's Compassion

Yet it has been more difficult for Reconstructionists to reevaluate God's compassion than God's justice. There are certainly a sufficient quantity of inherited texts with which we could work. Look only at the first blessing of *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals):

Praise is Yours, God, who feeds the world every day in goodness, grace, love, and compassion. God gives bread to all living things, for God's love is endless. And in God's great goodness, You never cause us to lack sustenance and will never do so in the future.

We sing it, but perhaps we don't mean it. God doesn't take care of us. We have food if we work together to produce it. There are famines. People starve.

All true. But it's also true that we have food and are sustained when we don't deserve it. We find loving partners even when we have destroyed prior relationships. Our businesses survive our mistakes. Our parents and children forgive our cruelties. Good things happen to undeserving people.

I don't believe in a God who is a Parent with our values — a parent who takes care of us rather than being perpetually angry. I do believe, however, that where I discern God in the world is affected by how I was parented and affects how I parent my children and others whom I seek to nurture. To the extent that I believe that I get what I deserve and that I am entitled only to what I earn, I'm likely to be more unforgiving to others, including my children. I'll want to teach them the "truth" of causes and consequences. To the extent that I experience my bounty as an unearned blessing, that I cultivate a sense that I am held in the arms of the world, I'm more likely to treat others with compassion, including my children. But to do so, I find that I must face the power that our inherited narratives have over me.

Self-Compassion

I'm the parent of teenagers — the best motivation I have encountered for cultivating compassion. When my daughter turned thirteen, she was pretty ruthless. Day after day, I braced for the inevitable: the point at which she would erupt in frustration at the imperfect nature of her father and let me know how much she hated me.

At first, my response was limit-setting. You may not speak to me in that way, I would assert. If you do, I will not help you, you will lose this or that privilege, you will be punished. I'm not such a quick study.

Day after day, week after week, she would erupt, I would threaten, she would be punished, she would feel lousy about misbehaving, try harder, and fail yet again. Not unlike Genesis 3 or Deuteronomy 32.

At some point, I realized that I was not modeling what I was preaching. She would get angry, and I would get angry. So I adopted a compassion meditation practice. I would sit each day and focus on understanding her, recalling what it is like to be thirteen. I would then come home. She would erupt, and I would say: I'm sorry you are upset. How can I help? Which only infuriated her more.

I reported this proudly to my meditation teacher, Sylvia Boorstein. She laughed and told me to practice compassion on myself. Say, she instructed: Poor Jacob. I work so hard. I'm so tired. I'm raising these kids almost alone (with my wife a medical resident). I'm trying so hard, and I come home every day to the wrath of my daughter.

Sylvia's instruction was transformative. I'm embarrassed to admit that it had never occurred to me be compassionate to myself. I tried it, and things changed almost immediately. I stopped punishing myself for my inadequacies as a parent, and I stopped responding to my daughter out of my own wounds. She was no longer hurting me, so that I could be truly compassionate to her. My daughter sensed that immediately, and the whole dynamic of the relationship improved.

So I try to imagine a God with

God-like knowledge, who knew Adam and Eve in the Garden or the Israelites at Sinai as well as a parent knows his or her children — a God who would love humans in their imperfection and not be so vulnerable, so quick to anger, so impatient.

Imagining such a God allows me to locate my ideals of parenting as manifestations of God's predicates. And it helps me, more and more, to believe that despite my failings, I am not alone. There is an aspect to Reality that nurtures me.

Striking a Balance at Home and Work

BY JANE EISNER

For months, I had rehearsed in my mind the words I would say to my three daughters — words I hoped they would remember as one of those life-lessons parents yearn to give.

We were seated at the dinner table, and I made the announcement. In a few weeks, at the end of the year, I would step down from my prestigious job as editorial page editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to become a full-time columnist. And, I told them, to prepare for this change, I had received a fellowship to study at the University of Pennsylvania for a semester, beginning the very next month.

I was doing this, I explained, because the pressure of my work — the hours, the unpredictability of news and management, the publicness of it all — had worn out my soul. And I wanted to spend more time with them, my daughters so quickly on their way to being women — to observe a music lesson every now and then, to be more available to help with homework, and equally impor-

tantly, to actually be home from work when Shabbat begins.

The Freedom to Make Choices

This, I said earnestly, is what feminism should give us: the strength and freedom to make choices, to step off the high-powered career ladder if it's making us crazy, and carve out our own path to the sky.

I paused for a moment, waiting for reactions.

"That's nice," one daughter said. "Could you pass the corn?"

The conversation went on in that vein for a while. When I tried to explain why I had made this change now — because our oldest daughter was in 10th grade and would be leaving for college in only a couple of years — there ensued a spirited debate on who would get her room when she moved out.

And they were very upset that I'd be losing my secretary.

My husband and I looked with amazement at each other across the

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table. We had to laugh. My moment of high emotion had become another evening of high comedy. The spiritual struggles of parents are lost on most children. That is as it should be. But we should continue the struggle, nonetheless.

Career and Identity

Like many woman of my generation (I turned 44 on my last day as editorial page editor), I came of age at the exquisite moment when the world of work suddenly flung open its doors. I wasn't going to be bound by the limited choices of my mother and grandmothers; I was going to do everything and anything, at once and well.

My career was my identity, and I loved it. I began working full-time before I even had a college diploma in hand. I took brief maternity leaves. When asked to be a foreign correspondent, I moved to England with a year-old child, alone with a baby in a strange country for six months before my husband could join us.

I was named the first female editorial page editor at the *Inquirer* before my youngest daughter was out of nursery school. In that job, I had prided myself on the finely timed juggling act that was my life: Climb the ladder at work, maintain a happy marriage, raise three children (and several pets), nurture my friendships, participate in my community, read Torah, water the plants . . .

Recognize the syndrome? Truth is,

while I struck a heroic pose on the outside, inside I often felt like the pink octopus Beanie Baby that used to sit on my desk at work: pulled in eight different directions. Pulled so hard, the stuffing was coming out.

Impact on Jewish Women

At the risk of calling upon a stereotype, I think this syndrome is particularly acute for women involved in modern Jewish life. We bring upon ourselves a host of new expectations — not only are we going to prepare warm, tasty Shabbat meals for our families as our mothers did, we're also going to read Torah like our fathers. And we are going to try, depending on our level of observance, to help our families embrace what Abraham Joshua Heschel called "the holiness of time" in a world that persists in operating "24/7."

Part of what prompted my own career change was facing up to the disappointing but honest fact that the corporate world at its highest level pays little more than lip-service to the notion that work and home life should be balanced. Doors have opened for so many women in my lifetime, but once inside, we have often found the culture of work stubbornly resistant to change.

Whether by design or necessity, leadership positions in newspapers and in many other professions require a devotion to on-call-round-the-clock work that is difficult, if not impossible, to square with a similar devotion to family and religious life.

(As we know, religious leaders are not exempt.)

I was always going to be the one to change that, to stay inside and fight, and perhaps I have helped break the mold a bit. But with my oldest child just a few years from college, I was no longer willing to sacrifice so much time with my family for such an unavailing cause.

Reclaiming Choices

Interestingly, since I made my decision, I have talked to numerous other fortysomething women, friends and strangers but feminists all, who chose a similar path. Or wish they could. Perhaps, after decades of work, we no longer need to identify ourselves solely with professional achievements. Or perhaps, as the Israelites discovered in the Exodus story, it takes forty years to mature enough to accept a new kind of freedom.

The fact that so many of us have choices is a lucky gift of the 20th century that too many women still do not share. And this is where I feel compelled to put on my editorial hat for a moment and step up to the speaker's box and call for reform.

Yes, reform needs to happen all over America, so that families — rich, poor and middle class — can devote the time they need to raise their children, using whatever formula works best for them. Modern-day feminism wasn't only intended to push for more female law partners. It was and is a social movement to help fos-

ter a healthier, more egalitarian society.

Specific Jewish Issues

As Jews in this most welcoming and prosperous society, we have an obligation to work for change for all Americans. But we've also got to address the specific stresses of modern Jewish life that contribute to this family/work dilemma.

My three children are in Jewish day school, and I am a fervent believer that this kind of Jewish education is key to the future of our people. But there's no way we could afford the ever-increasing tuition if we didn't have two high-powered incomes. What about those families in need? What are we doing as a community when we set the financial expectations for Jewish education so high?

These same expectations affect other parts of our communal life. Have you priced Jewish summer camp lately? Family memberships to the JCC? No wonder many parents feel the need to overwork — not to keep up with the Cohens, but simply to help their children become engaged, knowledgeable Jewish adults.

Those stresses can only be fully addressed by widespread reallocation of Jewish communal spending. I'm an optimist, true, but I can't stop believing that we could feed the Jewish hungry, educate our Jewish children, and reduce the stress on Jewish family life if we decided to make those our real priorities.

Personal Changes and Choices

But that requires a change in personal behavior, too. I know from experience how hard that is. Believe me, I fully appreciate the seductions of work, especially when enhanced by power and prestige. It's a lot sexier than helping with history homework.

In the weeks and months since I

made my career change, I'll admit to moments of anxiety, when a small voice inside says: Sure you wanted to do this? Think the kids understand? Think they want me around more?

And there are plenty of evenings when the dinner-time conversation is more Jerry Seinfeld than Jane Austen.

But I'm home for Shabbat dinner now. For me, that's an accomplishment to savor.

Adoption and the Jewish Community: Like a Branch Transplanted

BY SHELLEY KAPNEK ROSENBERG

*"O God of Hosts, turn again,
we beseech You;
Look from heaven and see,
and take note of this vine,
The stem planted by
Your right hand;
The branch You have made
strong for Yourself. . ."
(Psalm 80:15-16)*

"Like a branch transplanted," every adoptee has been re-rooted from one existence into another, from one life into another, with a new and different family, community, and even a new identity. *"Ametz,"* the word for adoption in modern Hebrew, means, "strengthen." Borrowed from these verses, it eloquently bespeaks the hope that children adopted into a Jewish family will invigorate that family and the Jewish people, as the

family and community empower their new member.

Yet just as the transplanted vine must accustom itself to new soil, an adopted child must become acclimated to a new environment. Just as the vine requires special attention in order to flourish, so too the adopted child, simply by virtue of being adopted, faces challenges that others do not face. At each stage in the child's development there are questions that, while normal, are unique to adoption. And, for a Jewish adoptee and adoptive family, every question and event is filtered through the additional lens of thousands of years of history and generations of traditions, as well as the experiences of contemporary American Jewish life.

Adoptees have long harbored questions and feelings about the missing

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pieces of their lives and their heritages. Longing to know about their birth families and communities is part of their quest to better understand themselves. They need to know who they would have been, and integrate that with who they are, in order to become who they want to be. Adoption, by its very nature, raises questions — even among healthy children adopted at birth into a “traditional” family of the same ethnicity.

Adoption’s new realities create novel and even more complex questions for Jewish families, issues for which some people are not prepared. The numbers of transculturally and transethnically adopted children in the Jewish community, as well as adoptions of children with disabilities, have grown. Adoption has been recognized as a risk factor for a variety of invisible disabilities. Open adoptions have increased in popularity, and the number of adoptees from closed adoptions who are seeking their birth parents has grown. Singles, gays, and lesbians are adopting in greater numbers. All of these situations create challenges for Jewish adoptive families and the Jewish community.

Conflicting Responses

Within Jewish law and the Jewish community, adoption has always engendered conflicting responses. Family has long been honored as a key to Jewish existence and adoption has long been respected as a way to build

a Jewish family. The Talmud teaches “whoever teaches Torah to the son of his companion, Scripture considers it as if he begat him” (B. *Sanhedrin* 19b) and “one who brings up a child is to be called its parent, not the one who gave birth” (Exodus *Rabbah* 46:5).

Yet the biblical instances of “adoptive-like” relationships were not legal adoptions. Such an institution did not exist in biblical times. Moreover, Judaism has always maintained its emphasis on the bloodline, according primacy to biology in the rights of religious and tribal status. Under traditional Jewish law, adopted children must be officially converted to Judaism, yet are not accorded precisely the same status and privileges as non-adopted children.

Through its ancient practices, Judaism recognized what has become understood as a universal truth about adoption: Adoptees cannot erase their past; it is there and it is theirs and they must acknowledge it and incorporate it into who they are. Birth identity cannot be wished, ignored, or even loved away. It is forever a part of the adoptee and must be melded into the new, adopted Jewish identity if the adoptee is to grow into a healthy adult.

Jewish adoptees are a minority within a minority. Should a Jewish adoptee also have a disability, be of a different race or culture, or have gay, lesbian or single parents, he or she becomes a member of an even smaller minority. Each additional identity raises questions that overlap the oth-

ers, layer upon layer, creating heretofore unrecognized but not unfelt stress upon these adoptees and their families. In addition, the Jewish community has displayed sometimes subtle, sometimes not-so-subtle, prejudice against adoptees' birth culture, religion or situation. Comments that "he has a *goyishe kop*," or "she's so pretty — she doesn't look Jewish," are painful slurs that can become self-fulfilling prophecies for adoptees who are struggling to adopt the people that has adopted them.

Yet while adoptive Jewish families confront complexities that other adoptive and other Jewish families do not, adoption remains a blessed way to build a Jewish family. Most adoptees ultimately do well; they and their families face the challenges, treat them as opportunities, and prevail. And, the rewards may be sweeter for having been more difficultly won.

Adoption *Halakhah* on One Foot

Halakhah teaches that adoption alone does not create a Jew. When a child is not born Jewish, Jewish law recognizes the tension inherent between nature and nurture and asserts that an adoptee must become a Jew by means of the prescribed ritual of conversion (not simply by living with and being raised by his or her Jewish family) and that, even then, he or she never loses his or her personal history.

Many adoptive Jewish families, unaware of or in disagreement with the traditional Jewish legal doctrine, act as though the action of civil law, coupled with their emotional and familial connection to their child, confers Jewish identity on that child. It does not. There are also variations in the laws concerning conversion among the four streams of Judaism. This is critical to understand, because the decisions adoptive parents make on this issue can have lifelong repercussions for their child. They can affect enrollment in a Jewish school, bar or bat mitzvah, synagogue membership, and even the ability to marry in the manner of their choosing. Some rabbis may request the certificate from the *brit* and/or *mikvah* to determine where and by whom these rituals were performed. Parents need to consider that, regardless of their own level of observance, they have no way of predicting their child's future interest in and observance of Jewish ritual. It can be devastating for an adopted person who has been raised as a Jew to be told that he or she "isn't really Jewish."

Some adoptive parents, therefore, choose the most traditional path. Others do not accept classical *halakhah* as binding and select a more liberal procedure, while anticipating how they and their child will handle whatever future complications might arise. It is important to realize that a traditional procedure is likely not available to liberal Jews who are honest with a traditional rabbi about their level of observance and their

future intentions. Some try to find an Orthodox rabbi who will conduct the *bet din* (religious court) in the hope of saving their child future difficulty. However, fewer Orthodox rabbis are willing to do this because they believe that it is better not to convert a child who will not live a traditionally observant Jewish life. Even if a willing Orthodox rabbi is found, his signature on conversion documents is often unacceptable to other rabbis.

Adoptive parents should become knowledgeable about the *halakhah* of adoption, and should then consider carefully what fits comfortably with their personal convictions and beliefs. They should also seek guidance from rabbis within their community who are familiar with adoption issues. They will then be able to make decisions from a position of knowledge that can help their children feel strongly connected to and supported by the Jewish community.

Judaism's Transformative Rituals

Life cycle rituals, such as conversion, are meaningful markers in an individual's life and for the Jewish community. They help many adoptive parents lay spiritual claim to their adopted children, welcoming them into the family and the Jewish community. Rituals demonstrate the importance of the event itself and, by celebrating it Jewishly, the importance of Judaism to the celebrants.

The powerful and transformative rituals of *milah* (circumcision) and *tevilah* (immersion) for a boy and *tevilah* for a girl are central to a classical conversion ritual. Reconstructionist Judaism endorses the value of observing traditional laws and rituals, while maintaining that they are not binding, by holding that *halakhah* "has a vote, not a veto." Thus, Reconstructionism requires conversion, unless the birth mother or father was Jewish. The traditional rituals are seen as a gateway to membership in the Jewish people, imperative parts of the conversion process, and it is recommended that their meaningfulness be emphasized.

If a child has already been circumcised, a symbolic circumcision, called *hatafat dam brit* ("the drop of blood of the covenant") is required. It involves taking a drop of blood from the side of the penis and can be performed by a mohel before a single witness. Increasingly, however, Jewish families are adopting children from countries that do not routinely perform medical circumcisions on infant boys. In this case, the child must undergo a circumcision, providing that there are no health risks. Because this can be very traumatic for both parents and child, rabbis and *mohelim* must be extremely sensitive when counseling an adoptive family about this.

Tevilah is required for both boys and girls at any time prior to bar or bat mitzvah. Many parents wait until the child is completely comfortable in the water, since the ceremony

requires total immersion. The ceremony should take place in a *mikvah* (ritual bath) before a *bet din*.

The Same and Different

Ordinarily, Jews do not perform conversions without the express and knowing consent of the convert. How, then, is it permissible to convert an infant or toddler? The answer is found in the assumption that being a Jew is a *zekhut* (privilege), and that one can perform a meritorious act on a person's behalf without the individual's consent.

This assumption leads, however, to the first of several halakhic ways in which an adoptee, even after conversion, is different from a person who is born Jewish. In most ways, adoptees are treated like any other Jew. Adoptive parents have the same obligations as other Jewish parents to provide a proper Jewish home and education for their adopted child. The child has the same obligations as other children, to "honor his [her] father and mother," to sit *shiva*, and to recite *kaddish*. In these instances, the tradition that whoever raises a child is to be considered the child's parent prevails. Yet Judaism's insistence on the primacy of blood still has authority, even after a child has been adopted and converted to Judaism. Bloodlines cannot be replaced; biology gives a child his religious status, not a court proceeding.

Thus, an adoptee who was converted as a child retains the halakhic right, upon reaching the age of reli-

gious majority (bar or bat mitzvah), to renounce the conversion. Rabbis differ on how this difficult and emotionally charged issue should be handled. Some advise that a child must be informed of the situation and consciously choose Judaism. Others believe that this is too difficult a choice to offer a young teen, often in the throes of adolescent rebellion and identity crisis. Some say that the conversion should be confirmed by a positive Jewish act upon reaching the age of majority, and that any such step will suffice. Many rabbis and adoptive parents consider the bar or bat mitzvah itself such a reaffirmation and find particular significance in the ceremony for this reason.

As the Adopted Child Grows

In Jewish tradition, names indicate religious lineage; a person is identified as the son or daughter of his or her father. Liberal Jews also identify the mother. Converts, however, are identified as the son or daughter of Abraham and Sarah, the first Jews. Some rabbinic authorities insist that an adoptee be treated like any other convert to avoid the halakhic problems that could arise when not identifying a person properly on a *ketubah* (marriage certificate) or *get* (divorce document). This constant reminder that a person was adopted can be distressing to both parents and child. Other rabbis permit the adoptive father's name to be used if it is followed by the word "*hemegadlo*" ("who

raised him"). Still others allow an adopted person to be called by the adoptive parents' names, with the condition that the person makes his or her adoptive status known if necessary.

Blood also holds primacy in determining a person's status as a *Kohen* or *Levi* (member of the priestly tribe). An adopted child is always a *Yisra'el* (one of the common people), regardless of his adopted father's status, and cannot be called to the Torah for one of the first two *aliyot*, which in synagogues that follow this tradition reserve these honors for *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. In addition, a *Kohen* cannot marry a woman who was adopted and is Jewish by conversion. The Conservative movement has a procedure making this possible through the renunciation of *Kohen* status by the husband. Reconstructionism and Reform, which no longer recognize the divisions of *Kohen*, *Levi* and *Yisra'el*, do not observe this restriction.

While these laws do not directly affect liberal Jews, who do not choose to follow them, they are troubling reminders of the different status an adopted person holds. And, to Jews who observe classical *halakhah*, they can be painful realities that offer no alternatives.

Building Jewish Identity

Whether or not an adoptive family observes classical *halakhah*, it is not unusual for an adoptee, knowing or suspecting that he or she was not born Jewish, to question his/her

adopted identity and religion. What are parents and community to do?

Adoptive parents may be threatened by this and wish to discount their child's questions about his/her birth religion. Yet it is important for them to acknowledge that their adopted child wasn't born Jewish. The child has normal feelings of loss and wonders what life would have been like had he or she remained with the birth parents or been adopted by a different family. This may be even more acute among Jewish children who realize they would not have been members of a minority. It creates problems if parents get into a power struggle with their child over whether he or she is "really" Jewish, or feel the need to wipe out the child's birth heritage. The child wonders what is "wrong" with him or her and why his or her birth heritage isn't acceptable. Adoptive families who acknowledge differences fare much better than those that deny them.

On the other hand, Judaism can be shared by family tradition and choice, not only through blood. Adoptive Jewish parents who are actively involved in Judaism and Jewish life and involve their children in it — offering it as a gift — connect their children to Judaism in important and lifelong ways. If their children choose to explore their birth heritage, as they may well do, they usually return to their "home" in Judaism. They have something of value to hang on to when, as is natural, they are attempting to form an identity with which they are comfort-

able. When adoptive parents allow their children to work through the process of finding their identity, they often feel free to choose Judaism.

Rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, and members of the Jewish community can help — or hinder — an adoptive family. When members of the community express doubts about the adoptee's connection to their adopted religion and community, they may provide ammunition for a self-fulfilling prophecy. When, on the other hand, they model acceptance of the adoptee, and help normalize adoption, they imprint adoption with the Jewish community's seal

of approval. Judaism is more than a religion; it is an international community, a civilization with a language, history, food, art, literature, music, religion, and social structure of its own. Judaism's influence can pervade every aspect of a person's life. The community has a unique opportunity and responsibility to welcome and integrate all of its members. When that happens, the adoptee will, in the words of the Psalm, be made strong, the adoptive family will be strengthened, and the adoptee, the family and the Jewish community can grow from strength to strength together.

Charting the New Maps: Reflections on Jewish Lesbian and Gay Life Cycle Celebrations

BY LEILA GAL BERNER

"[T]he rules break like a thermometer . . . the maps they gave us were out of date by years . . ." — Adrienne Rich

Jewish lesbians and gay men encounter a variety of challenges as we try to mark important moments in our lives in the fullness of who we are — Jewish *and* homosexual. As we approach life cycle moments, we ask ourselves: how do we fit into Judaism as lesbians and gay men? We ask ourselves: what are the rules, what are the right paths, in what direction should we travel? At these moments, we are powerfully aware of the words of the Jewish poet, Adrienne Rich.

Several years ago, Leah and Ruth,¹ knowledgeable Jewish lesbians who identified as Reconstructionists, both deeply committed to their Judaism, decided to consecrate their love in a

ceremony that, in a heterosexual context, would be called a "wedding." Ruth had felt comfortable with calling their ritual a wedding, and assumed that they would adapt traditional Jewish marriage rituals as needed. Ruth also believed that staying within a traditional Jewish marriage format would accomplish two important goals. First, it would make a strong, public statement that even though the tradition recoils from homosexuals, they had the right to embrace it. Second, their attempt to stay within a more customary Jewish ritual context would contribute to the *tikun* (repair) and transformation of the tradition, so that some day lesbian and gay "weddings" would become an authentic part of the tradition.²

Leah, on the other hand, felt deep discomfort at using the language and

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symbols of heterosexual relationships. In the initial stages of their planning, Leah refused to call the event a wedding and questioned the overall structure and use of the elements of a Jewish wedding, such as *huppah* (the wedding canopy), *ketubah* (the marriage contract), the *sheva brahot* (the seven blessings). Leah felt that “since Jewish tradition has rejected [Ruth and her] as lesbians,” it would be inappropriate to create their ceremony within the traditional Jewish ritual frame of reference. Additionally, Leah was concerned that by using a traditional format, they would simply be mimicking heterosexual weddings and that this would not be authentic to who they were.

With the assistance of their rabbi, they explored their different perspectives. After many months, Leah began to come around to Ruth’s way of thinking and in the end, they used many traditional elements of the Jewish wedding ceremony, adapted in creative and meaningful ways to reflect the love of two women.

Navigating and Negotiation

Several questions lay at the heart of Leah and Ruth’s dialogue, issues that may be applied to the whole area of the relationship of lesbian and gay Jews with ritual.

First, they debated the fundamental question of where they stood — within or outside of Jewish “Tradition” (with a capital “T”). They asked whether they could and *should* embrace a tradition that rejects them.

Ultimately, they concluded that self-enfranchisement was crucial, that whether or not the historical Tradition chose to include and affirm them, *they* would affirm themselves as legitimate, valuable and *full* members of an “evolving religious civilization,” in Mordecai Kaplan’s words. In this spirit, Leah and Ruth included in their ceremony Torah’s words (Numbers 24:5): “*mah tovu ohaleha Ya’akov mishkenoteha Yisra’el*” (“how goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places O Israel”), and they made a place for themselves within Israel’s tents.

Second, the two women explored the question of authenticity. They asked whether their own choice to self-enfranchise, and their attempt to adapt traditional rituals, were legitimate. They asked whether their innovations (though deeply grounded in traditional ritual and language) would be considered “authentic” in any way by the rest of the Jewish world. Would their ceremony bring them closer to the Jewish community, or would they still be outsiders, waiting at the entrance to Israel’s “tent?”

This question reflects a dilemma common to many lesbian and gay Jews. Yoel Kahn, who served for many years as rabbi to the predominantly lesbian and gay synagogue, Sha’ar Zahav, in San Francisco, has commented that “gay and lesbian Jews are sometimes excessively concerned with [the] question of authenticity. Having been told for so long that we are not valid members of the community, we go out of our way to

show that we are 'correct' in every respect. This internalized oppression is expressed, I believe, in an excessive concern for doing things 'the right way' . . ."³

Claiming Tradition

Ruth and Leah ultimately freed themselves from internalized oppression in choosing to claim traditional rites for themselves. As they crafted their own ceremony, starting from a base of traditional words and acts, they adapted the Hebrew words and sometimes changed the acts. For example, they asserted that the traditional concept of *kiddushin* (indicating the sacred nature of marriage) applied to their union as well because they considered their own relationship sacred. However, they acknowledged that the halakhic words customarily spoken by the groom to the bride as he gave her the ring could not correctly be used in the context of their covenant. Thus, instead of including the words, "with this ring you are consecrated to me *according to the laws of Moses and Israel*," they chose to say the words that the biblical Ruth spoke to her mother-in-law Naomi, because these words reflected a deep (though not necessarily lesbian) bond between the two women — "Wherever you go, I shall go, and wherever you lodge, I shall lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God, and where you die, I shall die, and there I shall be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17).

In adapting biblical words from

one context into a very different one, Ruth and Leah went further than simply seeking a place within the Jewish ritual tent; they asserted their right to be legitimate participants in a centuries-old Jewish process of liturgical innovation and change. Indeed, what the women were doing was not all that radical — new prayers, poems, melodies and rituals had been introduced into the ceremonial repertoire by Jews in many lands living in different contexts, reflecting a variety of spiritual orientations.⁴

Moments in the Life Cycle

Lesbians and gay men encounter the same challenges described above not only with regard to "wedding" or commitment ceremonies. Each time we approach another moment in the cycle of life, we ask new questions and wonder whether at this particular juncture, our ritual celebration should be different than that of "mainstream" Judaism. Most often, we conclude that our questions demand ritual responses that are substantively different than those of our heterosexual coreligionists. Here are a few representative examples:

- At a *brit milah*, we wonder (with obvious apprehension) whether the *mohel* (ritual circumciser) will announce the baby's name as the "son of Max and Jonathan" or "Susan and Linda." We find that we need to respond by speaking first with the *mohel*, and ensuring that s/he will indeed acknowledge and honor both of

us as parents. Frequently, we must be our own best advocates, and in ceremonial contexts, we often do this by including explicit language and rituals. At the *brit* of the son of two gay men, for example, the new fathers first held the baby in one partner's *tallit* (prayer shawl) and later in the other's. As each man held his son, he said to his partner: "This is our son, beloved child of two fathers. I make this covenant (*brit*) with you: I will joyfully and lovingly share with you as we raise him up to a life of Torah, loving relationships and deeds of loving kindness."

- At the naming of the child of lesbian parents whose baby was conceived through alternative (some say, "artificial") insemination, some of us feel the need to acknowledge the man who helped us bring our baby into the world, the donor. In some namings, for example, we recite a special blessing, included in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's (RRA) Rabbi's Manual, "*Baruh ha'ish shehithalek mitzalmu venatan lanu lehakir et hahayim* — Blessed is the man who has shared with us his divine spark and offered us the gift to nurture life."

- On Shabbat, parents traditionally bless their sons with the words, "may God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh," and their daughters by saying, "may God make you like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah," followed by the traditional *birkat kohanim* (priestly blessing). Gay and

lesbian parents, too, want to bless their children in the traditional way, but we are also aware that all our traditional role models are heterosexual. Some of us also feel a need to provide our sons and daughters with lesbian and gay Jewish role models as well. In this context, we have explored creating a blessing such as "May you be like Harvey Milk, who fought for justice for gay men and lesbians," or "May you be like _____ [a name of a lesbian rabbi is inserted], who courageously helped to open the door to full inclusion for all within the Jewish family."

- At the death of one's life-partner, we wonder again if our love and relationship will be acknowledged and honored, both in the eulogies spoken and in the designation of the surviving partner as an "official" mourner. We wonder, if we reveal that we are gay or lesbian life-partners, whether we will be allowed to be buried next to one another in a Jewish cemetery owned and operated by halakhically-oriented Jews.

In response to our fear that our life-commitment will be dishonored or ignored, we often prepare ahead of time, purchasing burial plots, drafting notarized documents composed by attorneys indicating our desire to be buried together. Ritually, we often include special readings and prayers to express our sorrow. For example, *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*, the Reconstructionist daily prayer book, has included a prayer for the "loss of a gay or lesbian lover,"

and at the funeral of a gay man, some surviving partners recite the biblical words that David spoke about Jonathan, “. . . very dear you have been to me, your love was to me wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (Samuel II 1:25-26).

Reconstructionist Responses

These examples and many more, reflect the Reconstructionist movement's approach to liturgy. Since its inception, it has supported the process of liturgical innovation, with the aim of addressing the spiritual and intellectual needs of “Jews who are devoted to the Jewish tradition and also to the truths and aspirations of the modern spirit.”⁵ Indeed, the first published Reconstructionist prayer book listed among its four guiding principles that the prayer book “. . . must exhibit courage as well as reverence, the courage to set aside or modify such prayers or phrases as are unacceptable to modern men [sic], whether intellectually, morally or aesthetically.”⁶

In speaking of community, Mordecai Kaplan once said that “the need for belonging is the need to feel ourselves part of a People that is dedicated to the consecration of life and that seeks to help us achieve, through participation in its life, our own self-fulfillment as human beings.”⁷ In the end, lesbian and gay Jews' ritual creativity is one expression of their desire to belong.

Reconstructionism has come farther than any of the major Jewish

denominations in satisfying lesbian and gay Jews' deep need for community and celebration within a Jewish context. The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality offered the first comprehensive endorsement of full inclusion of lesbian and gay Jews that was grounded in abiding Jewish values.⁸ In that report, the *kedushah* (holiness) of “loving, caring, intimate” and “committed” gay or lesbian partnerships, and their ritual consecration were affirmed, and an openness to lesbian and gay liturgical innovation was expressed in the statement that “inclusion means more than participation in existing rituals and customs. It also means finding ways to allow and encourage gay and lesbian Jews to celebrate their unique life-cycle events and the other special events in their lives.”⁹

More recently, the RRA *Rabbi's Manual*, published in 1997, includes lesbians and gay men in all sections published to date. It is the first rabbi's manual of any denomination to include full suggested gay and lesbian “wedding” or commitment ceremonies.

Our movement has been at the forefront of inclusiveness and ritual creativity and has taken seriously the dictum that though “it is not up to [us] to finish the work, [we] are not free to avoid it.”¹⁰ We have made an excellent start. It is now our responsibility to explore more deeply, to discern the ways in which we can address the needs of all Jews — lesbian, gay and heterosexual alike —

to deepen life's meaning through ritual expression.

Adrienne Rich's words echo again powerfully: "the rules break like a thermometer. . . the maps they gave us were out of date by years. . ." Now it is our responsibility to chart the new maps, and discard the broken rules of exclusion, replacing them with new values that embrace all. Now is the time to do what the authors of the first Reconstructionist prayer book aimed to do over a half century ago, to "create new prayers and meditations reflective of our age and articulate of its soul."¹¹

1. To preserve this couple's privacy, I have changed the names of the individuals mentioned.

2. "By choosing to embrace the tradition, even if it recoils from them, Jewish lesbians and gay men contribute to its *tikun* and transformation." *RRA Rabbi's*

Manual (Wyncote, PA: R.R.A.), R-1.

3. Yoel H. Kahn, "The Liturgy of Gay and Lesbian Jews," in *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay and Jewish*, Christie Balka and Andy Rose, eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 185.

4. For an excellent survey of the evolution of Jewish liturgy through history, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service*. In describing the early nineteenth-century Jewish scholarly movement, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Hoffman wrote: "Underlying this enterprise was the assumption that the Jewish heritage was a product of the same immutable laws of development that shaped any culture."

5. *Sabbath Prayer Book* (New York: The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1965) xvii.

6. *Ibid.*, xviii.

7. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, p. 16.

8. "Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position — The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality," 1992.

9. *Ibid.*, 38.

10. M. *Avot* 2:16.

11. *Sabbath Prayer Book*, *op. cit.*, xviii.

My Special Daughter (and Her Special Brother)

BY BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON

My son, Jacob, believes that Disneyland is the happiest place on earth. For my daughter, Shira, it may or may not be a happy place, but Disneyland is certainly the place where she is happiest to be Jacob's sister. Because Jacob is autistic, we don't have to wait on line to enjoy any of the rides. Instead, we flash his IEP (Independent Education Plan, given by the public school system and attesting to his condition), Disney bestows a VIP pass on Jacob, we skip the line and get stared at by all the other guests. As we breeze onto the ride, Shira beaming, I routinely overhear people mumbling, "What's so special about them?"

What is so special indeed?

In the language of our age, our son is "special" and our daughter is "typical." Ten years earlier, he would have been "disabled" and she, "normal." A decade passes, the compass shifts, the language moves. But having a special child often doesn't feel special. It feels hard, burdensome, relentless,

a joke. When our twins were born, we had dreams of them as inseparable, a playmate always at the ready. We dreamed of their always having an intense connection with someone who would understand them on an intuitive level. Those dreams have withered, scorched in an inferno of special therapies, medications, procedures, and behaviors. Dare I cling to the hope that Shira will feel a connection to Jacob when they are grown? Will she make for him a loving presence in her heart and her life?

Each Child Unique

Jacob is "special," and that will be Shira's burden throughout her life. Should any child have to mature in the shadow of that additional responsibility? Jacob may be special, but Shira isn't typical, which is fortunate; she can't afford to be.

- At three years old, Shira wanted to join me in greeting congregants arriving at Rosh Hashanah services. I

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told her she could pick her own clothes, so she picked two items that expressed the fullness of her own unique personality: her Cinderella ballroom gown, and her *avba kanafot* underneath (complete with *tzitzit* hanging out below). Thus attired, she reached up and shook hundreds of hands, wishing them a smiling “*Shanah Tovah!*” That is no typical child.

- As a child of four, Shira found out that people die. During one of several conversations about mortality, Shira informed me that, when the time came, she would hold my hand and die with me. When I told her that I hoped she would live for many, many years after I did, she burst into tears. “Abba, I don’t want to live if you aren’t living!” That’s not typical either.

- At age seven, still a white belt in karate, Shira received a wooden board by mistake (only the higher belts get their own boards). When her instructor tried to retrieve it, Shira was so adamant that he relented. Shira smashed it in two with her first kick.

Shira knows who she is, feels passionately, and lives without restraint. I can’t help but suspect that, in part, she is so special because she has a “special” brother.

A Place in the Family

Once, Elana (my wife/her mother) was reading Shira *Mori’s Story*, a wonderful book about an autistic boy,

written by his wise 11-year-old brother. Shira began to cry when we got to the parents’ loving decision to place their autistic child with a foster family who could provide him with the care he needed. “We won’t ever do that to Jacob, will we?” she cried, horrified at the possibility. We explained that each family was different, and had different needs. Jacob would stay with us.

Shira, in the middle of nothing in particular, announces that it is unfair that she has an autistic brother when none of her friends do. She plugs both ears when Jacob makes his nonsense sounds, his “silly talk.” She rolls her eyes in disgust when he emerges from the bathroom with his pants still around his ankles. She deliberately picks the video that she knows will make him scream, cry and fling himself to the ground.

But Shira is also the one attracted to friends who are distinctive and unusual children. She is the sister who hands Jacob half her french fries, without his asking, because she knows he likes them. Or her leftover brownies. Shira is the first to try to assure him that the hotel room is safe and secure, when it feels unknown and threatening to him. And if we discuss some future plan without mentioning Jacob, Shira is the one to insist, “Jacob too!”

Raising a child with special needs is challenge enough. But raising that child’s sibling is a task requiring no less consciousness, planning and consideration. In the press of an autistic meltdown, Shira’s more subtle needs

can easily appear less pressing. Because she is more verbal, her acting like a 7-year-old feels petulant when Jacob's problems rise to the surface. And finally, because Jacob requires constant attention and assistance, it's easy to let Shira fade into the background. Her very sweetness, understanding and sympathy make it easier to give her short shrift.

For all that, it is also true that having to make room for an autistic

brother, mentally, emotionally, and in the prosaic details of her family, Shira has developed a depth and a caring that takes my breath away.

Shira is the miracle of our lives. And like all miracles, she defies simple understanding, eludes neat categorization. There is no one quite like her. It turns out that she is, in her own way, special too.

And isn't that typical?

Birth, Death and Rebirth: Cycles of Sacred Transformation

BARBARA EVE BREITMAN

Several times during the year, the Jewish calendar provides opportunities for us to reflect on the process of change in our lives. These are opportunities for making changes in relationships and redirecting ourselves toward holiness and ethical living through *teshuvah*; for celebrating the turning of the seasons in nature; for looking at our lives as a spiritual journey through which we pass from moments of enslavement through revelation toward liberation and back again; times for celebrating and contemplating how miracles and tragedies can dramatically alter the life of a people, the history of both individuals and nations. The sacred calendar supports the difficult process of change.

As a therapist I have had many opportunities to reflect on how hard it is for people to make changes in their lives. When we go to therapists, we

do so because we want to get out of emotional distress; we want our relationships to improve (which often means we want the other person to change); or big changes have already happened — a major developmental transition, a graduation, a move, a loss, a divorce, an illness, a birth, a death — and we are having difficulty adapting to the change, or downright resisting it.

Somewhere in the midst of the process of therapy, a realization begins to dawn on us. “Uh oh, you mean for me to feel better, I have to change? And I have to change that?” Whatever that is, it is usually something we don’t want or know how to change or we would have already done so. I say this with complete humility, having spent a great deal of time on both sides of the couch.

Embracing the process of change and transformation as sacred, draw-

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ing on the wisdom of spiritual traditions to understand and sustain us in the process, is one of the gifts of participation in religious life and community. I have been learning this deeply through the journey of my own life over the past few years.

Suffering and Impermanence

Four years ago, my husband died. He died suddenly of a heart attack at age 46 while we were on a summer vacation. Just a year before his death, a first cousin of mine had been murdered and my husband and I took her orphaned children into our home. When I heard of my cousin's murder, I felt at that moment in the depths of my being that one of the reasons I had been put on this earth was to say "*Hineni*," "Here I am," to assume responsibility for the care of my cousin's children after their mother's brutal murder.

A year later, my husband died. Within a year's time, my life was turned upside down. I went from being a professional woman in mid-life with an adult partner to being a widow and the single parent of two traumatized children.

About three months after my husband's death, I sat at a table in a restaurant with an old friend, and in a rage said to him "This whole idea of God is a crock. There is no meaning to life, no purpose to the universe, no pattern or design, except the meaning we create painstakingly

one toothpick at a time." From my point of view, my world had been shattered. The way I understood my life did not work anymore.

I searched Judaism for a theology of suffering and I did not find that wisdom. Then I stumbled on a book by a feminist, Jungian, Buddhist therapist, Polly Young-Eisendrath, entitled *Gifts of Suffering*.¹ This book (whose title was subsequently changed [!] to *The Resilient Spirit*) provided me with the wisdom I needed to begin a process of healing, which eventually led back to Judaism.

Buddhist Insights

From a Buddhist perspective, suffering is caused by our inability to honor change as the basis of life, and impermanence as the basis of self. As Sylvia Boorstein, a Jewish-born teacher of mindfulness and American Buddhism, says "pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional." Change is happening all the time. It is built into the fabric of life. It is the condition of mortality. It is when we resist change that we create suffering . . . when we hang onto things as they were, when we try to make them be what they were before or what we wish them to be, we create more suffering.²

To live with the impermanence of the self, however, is no small task. Since the necessity to change often feels like an unwelcome intrusion, we resist it even when our resistance leads to regret, depression, anger or

resentment. The truth is, there are many times when we must die to an old identity if we want to stay alive.³

Buddhists believe in ongoing cycles of death and rebirth, a process we in the West have vastly misunderstood. We often think of reincarnation in a simplistic way, for example, dying and coming back as a bird, or, if we have lived a good life, dying and coming back as a prince. Actually, as American Buddhist teacher and writer Philip Kapleau says, a deeper understanding of reincarnation is to see that in each moment of life, the individual is born and dies.

The same is true of the moment of death. From a Buddhist perspective, we die and are reborn many times during a single lifespan, and that process continues after the body dies as well. In other words, spirit dies and is reborn many times in the course of a single lifetime, and that process continues within and beyond the lifetime of a singular embodiment.

Living Several Lifetimes

As I was reading *The Gifts of Suffering*, I had an experience that sealed this wisdom into my consciousness. About five or six months after my husband died, I was invited to Shabbat dinner with people I had known when my husband was alive but to whose home we had never been together. We were standing around the Shabbat table, and before saying the traditional blessing for lighting the candles, this family

sang a song entitled, "As We Bless the Source of Life."

Well, I had been present, literally, at the moment that song had been written about fifteen years earlier. I had led a Shabbat morning service with friends at a Jewish women's retreat, and, in the spirit of feminist experimentation, instead of reading from the Torah, I had led the group in a guided meditation and then sent them out into the beautiful spring morning to "receive Torah" and bring back what they received. One of the women, Faith Rogow, received that song, and returned to the service to sing it to us.

As I stood around the Shabbat table fifteen years later, that song came back to me as Torah. Singing, I flashed back to the first time I had heard the song. I had not yet met my husband. The child whose hand I held, who was now my daughter, had not even been born. I was unsure at that time in my life if I would eventually partner with a man or a woman. It was a different lifetime. Suddenly, I understood.

My husband's death was not the end of my life. It was the end of that life, of our life together. That life was shattered. But actually, I had already lived several lifetimes. I knew how to give birth to myself. I had done it several times. It would be very difficult, as difficult as birth is. But I knew how. I had done it before. That awareness was the beginning of a process of saving my life.

Months later, speaking with another friend and telling him about

what had happened in my life, how I, who had always wanted children but had never been able to have them, had now become a mother in mid-life after the brutal murder of my cousin, and then a widow a year later . . . he quoted me a passage from the *Midrash Tanhuma* and said he had never really understood it before. It is a comment on the verse from Exodus 20:1, “And God spoke (at Sinai) all these words . . .” What does “all these words” mean? All at one and the same time: killing and giving life at one and the same time, afflicting and healing at one and the same time . . . dust is turned into a person and a person is turned into dust, as it is said: “And God turns the shadow of death into morning.”

The Power of Transformation

This passage acknowledges an unbearable truth about how the world is constructed: that in one and the same instant, one person is suffering the pangs of death and another the joys of birth. In one instant, my cousin is murdered, and in that same instant, I, a childless woman, have the miraculous opportunity of becoming a mother in my middle age. In one moment, someone’s child is killed in a car crash, and someone else’s child is given life through the donation of a heart.

My brother-in-law was saying the final *kaddish* of *shiva* for my husband when the call came in that his daughter had just gone into labor. Because of the intricate web of life through

which we are all interconnected, it can happen — what is death for one person can be a gateway to life for another. It is an almost unthinkable truth about the web of existence.

Polarities of Life

In every moment, a past is dying and a future is being born. In the blink of an eye our lives can change. When those deaths and births are traumatic or miraculous, we are shocked into seeing this truth. But it is equally true that in a much subtler, but no less profound form, this process is happening at every moment.

Judaism has its own unique way of harnessing the power of transformation inherent in the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. As we move through the holiday cycle, we can open ourselves to opportunities for transformation by entering into the mythos of the sacred calendar. Through the calendar we are given many opportunities for standing in liminal time, between birth and death, time when we can remake ourselves.

Often, I think, when we search our souls to do *teshuvah*, repentance, what we encounter is an old self that needs to die so a new self can be born. When we face aspects of ourselves that are hard to look at, when we truly forgive another person who has harmed us, we allow an old self to die and a new self to be born. When we examine relationships in which *teshuvah* is called for, often we need

to let go of an old way of being and interpreting to clear the way for something new to be born in a relationship.

The Capacity to Love

There were times after my husband's death when I was depressed and struggling with the difficulties of being a widow and single parent, when I found myself wondering if I would be able to do all this. How could I continue to handle all the responsibilities of being the sole provider for our family, be caregiver for an elderly and ailing parent, and raise the girls on my own?

When I sank into hopelessness, I got both terrified and horrified at myself. I could not believe I had discovered a place inside myself that was capable of considering abandoning the children. Perhaps this is a moment that other troubled and overstressed single parents have felt. Discovering this feeling within myself was shocking and humbling.

As I touched that place, I knew it was painfully familiar. It was the place in me that was capable of abandoning people I loved, except that I had never experienced it toward vulnerable children before. I had always felt it toward other adults, and with adults there was always some hook on which to hang my discontent. They deserved my anger because they had done this or that. I found it too hard to forgive them. The relationship deserved to end.

I hated looking at this part of my-

self. It was the part of myself that was capable of hurting other people. That is the part of each of us at which we least want to look.

An Open Heart

But in looking at it, gradually, my heart opened in a deeper way than ever before. I came to know not only that I could never abandon the children, but that the spiritual practice for the rest of my life was to keep my heart open to them, never to close my heart to them, and to continue to grow in my capacity to love, not only them, but others as well. I began a healing of heart perhaps more profound than anything I had yet lived through and it had been occasioned by looking at a part of myself I was horrified to see.

From a spiritual perspective, I have come to believe that the reason we are put on this earth is to learn how to love, to ever deepen and expand our capacity for love. We live in an overly psychologized, narcissistic culture that tells us we have to love ourselves before we can really love anyone else.

I do not think that is true. A spiritual perspective, a Jewish perspective, is different. From a spiritual perspective, we are called upon to love others whether or not we can yet fully love ourselves. "Love your neighbor as yourself"—love your neighbor as you would like to be loved. This is *teshuvah*.

By loving others, we heal ourselves. By looking into the hard places, the

ugly places, making ourselves transparent to God and to other people, asking for forgiveness, we open our hearts and a miracle can occur. A greater love can flow through our open hearts, carrying compassion for others and for ourselves.

Forgiveness changes both the forgiver and the forgiven, and as it ripples through the web of relationships in which we are all embedded, *teshuvah* shimmers with redemptive possibilities. When we look at the

hard places in ourselves and see how the place in us that is capable of hurting others is the same place in them that is capable of hurting us, we open to ever greater compassion and actually begin to change the world.

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1. Young-Eisendrath, Polly, *The Gifts of Suffering* (New York: Adison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 99.
 2. Boorstein, Sylvia, *It's Easier Than You Think* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995).
 3. *Ibid.*, 101-102.

Saying Goodbye to My Yiddishe Mama

ALLEN GLICKSMAN

My "Yiddishe mama" is no more. Neither is "mama-le," and "bubbie" is taking on a whole new meaning. The American Jewish elderly of today may understand many of the words to the song "A Yiddishe Mama," but if you want to be sure they understand the song, you had better sing it in English, or, in some locations, in Russian. Yiddish just won't do.

Ten years ago, data from the National Jewish Population Study of 1990 showed that the overwhelming majority of Jewish elderly (86%) living in the United States were born in the United States. No quaint immigrant customs or memories of *shtetl* life characterize this generation of elderly Jews.

Rather, most of them grew up in Conservative and Reform congregations, and although the America they knew as children is long gone, they are as native to this soil as are their children and grandchildren. In many ways they have much more in common with their progeny than they do

with their immigrant parents and the generations who preceded their parents.

The Americanized Elderly

The Americanization of the Jewish elderly is the defining characteristic of their generation. At the same time, most current Jewish elderly are also children of immigrants, and as such are a bridge generation between those born in the Old Country and those born in the New. But as native Americans, the Jewish elderly are very different from any generation of Jewish elderly who came before them. They are the first generation of American-born Jewish grandparents and the last generation to have Yiddish spoken in their childhood home.

As American-born, the American Jewish elderly need to be understood in the light of changes that have affected the senior population in the United States as a whole. The proportion of elderly in the American

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population as a whole is steadily rising (as it is in the American Jewish community). As with American Jews, some of this change reflects a decline in fertility. However, some of it reflects the growing number of years that Americans live, sometimes with increased frailty; one researcher has commented that the average American couple has more living parents than living children.

How can we understand the changes in the lives of the American Jewish elderly, and what do these changes mean for the elderly in terms of their roles in the Jewish family, their roles as volunteers and teachers in the Jewish community and their roles as recipients of health and social services when they become frail?

Myths and Realities

To begin with, Bubbie and Zeide not only don't exist any more; to a certain extent, they never existed. The images of Bubbie and Zeide are of a couple who were born in Eastern Europe, migrated to the United States because of persecutions in the Old Country, and settled here in the hope that their children would have a better life. Orthodox in practice and belief, Bubbie and Zeide raised a family of children who did not always understand the Old World customs and ways of their beloved parents, but respected them for their fidelity to tradition and willingness to take the risk of settling in a new land. This warm, nostalgic image is very much a part of what many American

Jews consider to be part of their history in the United States.

The truth was often slightly different. While many Jews did come to the United States to escape discrimination, as often the immediate incentive for migration was a desire to do better economically, even at the expense of their traditional Jewish way of life. Many of these Jews wanted to become part of the American fabric as quickly as possible. On the whole they modified their religious lives and tried to learn English. In part they continued to speak Yiddish because it was the only language available to them. But in their Yiddish press, there was no end to discussions of how to become more "American."

Although the vast majority did not want to abandon their Jewish heritage, the majority also showed no interest in maintaining the Orthodox life most had led in Europe. Instead, they wanted a middle ground, one that would allow them to retain their Jewish identity and at the same time to become part of American society. *Kashrut* might be observed, but only in the home; one could take off on holidays but only on the "important" ones; and slowly the language of their new land also became, to some extent, the language of prayer and of discourse in Jewish settings.

Ethnicity and Religion

The type of Jewish identity that they wanted to maintain was a complex mix of ethnic/national as well as

religious elements. Jews in Eastern Europe and especially in the Tsarist Empire were defined as a national minority with a religion of their own. This sense of nationality, translated in the American context as ethnicity, formed the basis for the way many of these immigrants saw themselves as Jews and the way they expressed their identity.

The immigrants built synagogues, and the synagogue became important centers of community activity. But they were also very conscious of their identities as members of a separate ethnic/national group and expressed that aspect of their identities through membership in a wide variety of ethnically based organizations — some political, some fraternal, and some both. There was never a clear and systematic expression of this synthesis of ethnicity and religion, nostalgia and acculturation.

In some ways the Conservative movement reflected much of what that generation believed possible — an attempt to balance the old and the new, with a wide range of beliefs and practices allowed. Reconstructionism was a response to the need for a more systematic and understandable belief system. The extent to which ideas proposed by Mordecai Kaplan and Ira Eisenstein have been embraced by all corners of the Jewish community indicates that their responses to the problems of finding an intellectual belief system remain acceptable to many American Jews.

The current generation of Jewish elderly, however, is not primarily

composed of these immigrants. Instead it is composed, by and large, of their children. This is a generation that grew up knowing their immigrant parents and tried to be the bridge between the old and the new. But having more in common with their children and grandchildren than with their parents does not mean that they share all the values and experiences of succeeding generations.

Caught Between Two Worlds

In many ways the Jewish elderly are caught between the world of their fathers and mothers and the world of their daughters and sons. Does giving up a traditional view of a personal God who listens to the voice of His petitioners, a belief that in many cases survived the loss of a more central Jewish conviction — revelation at Sinai — mean that in some fundamental way they are breaking with their parents? On the other end of the generational divide, how do those raised in a world where the lines between Jews and non-Jews were clearly drawn (except for a few marginal cases nobody dared, or even wanted to, step over those boundaries) understand younger generations where the concept of such boundaries seems as remote as the East European world from which their ancestors came?

Finding a way between the traditions of their parents and the values of their children was made more difficult by the conflicting values of the “two civilizations” in which they lived. Both American and Jewish tra-

ditions expect that children will mature and take responsibility for their own lives, and as part of this learn a trade and make their own way in the world. At the same time those children should continue to feel responsibility for their parents and assist their parents when there is need.

However, the balance between these two imperatives differs in the two civilizations. In Jewish tradition, taking care of one's parents is an absolute. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments with a specific reward associated with its observance (perhaps ironically, the reward is long life). In fact, the assumption in most of rabbinic Judaism (Maimonides being an exception) is that the adult child is responsible for providing care personally, and not delegating that care to someone else. Few obligations in Jewish tradition are as clear, absolute and unavoidable as the obligation to care for one's parents.

In America, on the other hand, the primary focus in child rearing has been on developing a sense of autonomy and independence. Fittingly enough, in a country built on an unambiguous Calvinist heritage, the expectation is that mature people will take responsibility for themselves, and to the greatest extent possible care for themselves. Calvinists too are heirs to the Torah and its injunctions concerning care for parents, but honoring parents does not mean sacrificing one's own ambitions, desires, or the fundamental responsibility to make one's own way in the world. At some point the child, and

by extent the parent as well, has to take personal responsibility for themselves and not assume that members of other generations will always be there to care for them.

Filial Piety and American Jews

How then do the Jewish elderly, who taught their children from an early age to respect and obey both civilizational imperatives, reconcile these differences between the Jewish version of filial piety and personal responsibility? Do American Jewish elders want their children near them or do they want their children to be as successful as they can be, regardless of where that takes them geographically? Do they want their children to be fully integrated into American civilization, which would mean that virtually every opportunity in American society is open to them and that virtually any person may also become their child's mate? Or do they want children who maintain strong fidelity to tradition, which would enforce the strong obligations that this tradition carries in regard to care for parents, obligations that would also restrict choices of a life partner to another person within the Jewish Covenant?

Jewish tradition, through a myriad of regulations and rules of conduct in daily life, also limits where children can live, what they can do (since work on certain days is absolutely prohibited) and ultimately limits to at least some degree the child's full participation in the American soci-

ety of opportunity.

The average older American Jew wants both. It may not be formally or even consciously expressed in those terms, but they want their children to be fully “American” and fully “Jewish,” supremely successful in business and society and supremely loyal to family and faith. The expectation is often unconscious but continues and is rarely fully resolved, and consequently American Jewish elderly and their children continue to struggle to conform to both sets of values.

Using Illness for Insight

So how do older Jews respond? Certainly not by directly confronting the conflict between the desire to see children succeed and to see children care for older parents. Rather, they deal with this problem by using a skill that has often been identified with the Jewish elderly — the ability to talk about illness.

To return for a moment to the Calvinist influence, in that tradition pain and suffering are seen as a test from God. If one “takes pain well,” then one has accepted what God has provided. In Catholicism, one can “donate” one’s pain as a gift to God. Such a donation can also release souls from purgatory.

In contrast, the imperative in Jewish tradition has been toward healing. There is nothing redemptive about suffering in the same way as in the Christian tradition. (The rabbinic category of *yissurin shel ahavah*,

“chastisements derived from affection,” brushes up against the idea of suffering being both ennobling and a sign of divine attention, but does not cross the boundary into suffering as redemptive.)

In Judaism, it is relief from suffering that is required, especially through medical intervention. For this reason talking about aches and pains need not be seen as “complaining.” It alerts others to the need for relief from pain, and allows them to fulfill their obligation in that regard. In addition, it is a way of showing how one can suffer through what the world throws at you, and yet come out triumphant.

Since it is so easy to talk about aches and pains, and so difficult to talk about one’s distant children, health problems provide a vocabulary for dealing with feelings about family. Granted, this is a very indirect approach. But the great military historian Keegan has shown that time and again it was the army that took the indirect approach that won the battle. Desires for greater contact with children, as well as anxieties about who will care for them if they become frail, lead many Jewish elderly to use health issues as an indirect way of talking about sensitive family issues.

At the same time it is also important to remember that many older persons have legitimate health concerns, sometimes several, so that the discussion is as much about real and pressing problems as it is about family matters.

Multi-Generation Households

To understand why such concerns manifest themselves, it is important to note that most older Jews in the United States live alone or with a spouse. Few live with their children or with younger generations. While there is a lovely myth that in the “olden days” three generations or more lived in a single, loving household, there is little evidence to support it. Elders may have lived with children because there was nowhere else to live, or when they became incapacitated. But elders did not live as long, for example, in a severely impaired state as they do now. So the time the generations lived together could be quite short, until the elder succumbed to the health problem that brought him or her to the children's homes in the first place.

As a consequence of elders living longer periods in more frail condition, today's adult Jewish children use formal services for the care of their parents at a higher rate than non-Jews. Further, Jewish families seek help for their elders earlier in the process of declining physical health than non-Jews. In contrast to non-Jewish families, Jewish families will often bring in formal support services when the elder can still do many things independently.

The reasons for this are complex. To some extent, the factors promoting this are not religious and cultural in origin, but reflect the social and economic status of many Jewish families. The availability of services

and the educational and social standing to understand and access these services is a critical element.

But being Jewish also makes a difference. The very existence of separate Jewish services for the elderly usually considered to be high quality, and catering to the needs of the Jewish elderly, is one reason that Jewish families see the use of institutional services as positive. (Why the Jewish community has established so many such institutions is an interesting question in itself.) It is clear that the expectations parents have of children and children of their parents continue across the life course.

Jewish parents expect their children to be professionals and not to “dirty themselves” with menial work. While appearing to be a stereotype, there is a great deal of evidence to back up this image.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Attention

As the children get older, parents — primarily mothers in relationship to daughters (rarely are we talking about fathers and sons, another related topic worth exploring) — might expect their children to be companions, shopping buddies, even someone who can complete the number of people needed for a card game, but not as someone who would provide intimate or personal services like grooming and toilet. Activities that would require the daughter to perform menial tasks, tasks beneath the

daughter's status in the eyes of her mother, are to be completed by someone else, someone who already has low status in the eyes of the mother.

Further, the intense intimacy that exists between generations in many Jewish families has a flip side: a strong desire for privacy, especially privacy from those with whom the elder has the most intimate relationships. This sense of privacy means that the elder wants to look her best for her children, as well as for strangers. Even in the nursing home, the hairdresser (if one is available) is busiest on the day before the children visit on the weekend. These types of attitudes also play a role in the decision to institutionalize elders, although we do not know how much of a role.

Family Issues

The well Jewish elderly also are living differently. A significant number are "snowbirds," flying south for the winter and sometimes making it a more or less permanent address. What is remarkable about the Jewish elderly who do relocate is the extent to which they remain an integral part of their families' lives. Communication is frequent, although many adult children still feel they should be in more contact, a feeling usually shared by their parents. And in terms of caring for parents, there is now a toll-free "1-800" number so that distant children can have their parents cared for by the local Jewish family service agency.

At the same time, as stated earlier,

no matter how healthy or interested in their children and grandchildren the well Jewish elderly might be, they often lack the resources to be informal Jewish educators in their own families. This loss of intergenerational Jewish education is a critical component in the overall change in the role of Jewish life in the Jewish family.

The greatest challenge to the American Jewish elderly is the intermarriage of their children or, more likely, their grandchildren. Something almost unthinkable in their own generation has become commonplace in the lives of their descendants. The conflict exists for ideological reasons but is particularly intense because the senior generation has identified religion and family as two inseparable concepts. When asked in a research study why religion was important to them, older Jews often responded that religion drew family together. For family to be unable to come together around religious ritual, or for religious ritual to become a divider between family members, is very difficult for many older Jews to contemplate.

Intermarriage

Formal ideological barriers to intermarriage were less necessary when social barriers were firmly in place. But for many older Jews the ultimate ideological barrier was what intermarriage would do the family, not the violation of a halachic restriction of Jewish law. With the nature of fam-

ily totally transformed in modern American life, the family is seen as a collection of individuals rather than a basic unit of human organization.

Marriage may not be forever, as most of the current generation of Jewish elderly assumed it would be, and for better or worse for most it was. Further, it is the emphasis on the rights of the individual to the exclusion of the family and the larger community that has become the hallmark of the modern middle class white American, precisely where most contemporary American Jews are situated.

In such circumstances, one's commitment to heritage becomes an individual commitment, not a family commitment. So why can't one maintain an identity as a member of the Jewish community while at the same time being married to someone of a different faith? Further, when the argument that one faith is in some manner more true than other faiths becomes culturally offensive, it is difficult to find a way to argue for the conversion of the spouse (outside of the need to raise a child in a single faith, for those who accept that argument).

This differentiation of faith and family is perhaps the most important and difficult change in American Jewish life for the Jewish elderly to accept. It probably is related to the very profound ethnic element in the Jewish identity of older American Jews, something that is slowly being replaced with a stronger (and more individual) religious element as a

measure of one's Jewishness. Clearly this change has implications far beyond family relations in the American Jewish community.

Trends in the Jewish Community

The special role played by Jewish agencies that provide services to the healthy and ill Jewish elderly may not survive long into the future. Two related trends are converging that will have a serious impact on Jewish institutional life. First, the growth of managed care systems and for-profit health care organizations that are coming to dominate the landscape are changing the nature of ethnically-based health provision. The whole concept of ethnically-based service provisions flies in the face of the pure profit motive of such organizations and institutions. As these replace faith-based systems, the assumptions that have carried such institutions for decades are being replaced as well.

While ethnically-sponsored organizations continue to exist (social service organizations are usually exempt from being swallowed up by the for-profit health systems and insurers) the ideology of these new health care giants is already influencing some social and health agencies that are still nominally under Jewish sponsorship. For example, one local JCC, while continuing to offer special rates for senior citizens, now restricts the hours the seniors can use the facility if they choose to pay the senior rate.

While such decisions can easily be defended using a free-market ideology, to subject seniors to this type of treatment clearly flies in the face of honoring the elderly, casting shame on those who cannot or will not pay the higher fee.

The presence of such free-market thinking in the board rooms of Jewish social welfare and health agencies represents a sea change in the worldview that motivates these agencies, and could bring drastic changes in the nature of Jewish-sponsored social and health services for the elderly – and for younger Jews as well. Jewish agencies are not prepared for these changes, and neither are most communities and Jewish federations.

Focus On Identity Issues

The second trend affecting Jewish communal attention to the elderly is the focus in the past decade by Jewish communal planners on identity issues, with much less attention paid to issues of social welfare and health. The attention that has been paid to health issues has more often been in terms of medical ethics — focused on individual behavior and not on institutions or social systems. While some individuals have been thinking seriously about the changes in Jewish social and health services, on the whole the thinking has been either on an individual basis or about government policies and their effect on the elderly (such as issues of universal prescription coverage for older persons).

While it would be very easy to make the case that providing basic health care, including prescription medications to all older persons, is mandated by Jewish tradition, the hard questions about the future of sectarian agencies and their motivating ideologies has not been so clearly addressed.

This of course is part of a much bigger question that the majority of organizations and institutions in the American Jewish community have scrupulously avoided: what are Jewish values and what are the norms of the Jewish community? Who decides? To the extent that the current community organization and standards are the product of the values, attitudes and behaviors of the previous generation of American Jews, the American Jewish elderly are also reaping what they have sown.

We often assume a uniformity about the Jewish elderly that is increasingly untrue. Just as important as the people who migrated during the early part of the 20th century (the grand and great-grandparents of today's Jewish adults) are the older but more recent Soviet Jewish immigrants. Many migrated in old age from the former Soviet Union, and other Soviet migrants are aging in the United States. As the proportion of Soviet Jews in the larger Jewish population can be as high as 10% in some cities, the diversity of national origins among the Jewish elderly should not be forgotten. And soon we will have Jewish Israelis aging in our midst as well.

An Unclear Future

The current generation of American Jewish elderly is the first generation of Jewish elders in the U.S. to be mostly American born. Because of this they better understand the generations of their children and grandchildren than their immigrant parents could ever have hoped to do.

Whether this understanding also

means greater solidarity and closeness between the generations is an open question. Most Jewish families have a strong bond of solidarity between the generations; yet there is also a great deal of stress in these families that comes from the constant changes in American social norms, culture and values. Whether solidarity or stress will ultimately prove determinative remains to be seen.

Beyond the Egalitarian *Get*

BY LEAH RICHMAN

In the Orthodox world (and in the Conservative world as well) a *get*, or a Jewish divorce document, is given from the man to the woman. Because of this fact, and because of the fact that the man must give the *get* of his own free will, the situation arises on occasion when a woman is trapped in a marriage she no longer wants to be in, thus making her what is known as an *agunah* (a “chained woman,” i.e., one who cannot remarry). Recalcitrant husbands (as the *get*-refusing husbands are called) are not the only cause of *agunah*. A woman can also become an *agunah* if her husband disappears and is presumed to be dead, although halakhic authorities try to find ways (as they do, to a lesser degree, in the case of a recalcitrant husband) to permit these women to remarry. If a woman who is an *agunah* gets married or engages in sex, the relationship is considered adulterous (she is still considered married) and any offspring are considered *mamzerim* or illegitimate.

Mamzerim may only marry other *mamzerim*. Being a *mamzer* is a permanent problem; there is no convert-

ing out of it, no way to rectify it. From the Orthodox perspective, non-Orthodox Jewry has created many problems. Most of them, however, are rectifiable. But when a rabbi does not require a *get* in order to officiate at a remarriage, any children from this marriage are *mamzerim* in the eyes of the *halakhah*.

Theoretically, a woman can also refuse a *get*, but the man is not guilty of adultery if he remarries. Polygamy (the marriage of a man to multiple women) is only forbidden by the rabbis (*derabanan*) but not the Torah (*de'oraita*). Also, the incidence of women refusing to receive a *get* appears to be less frequent than the incidence of a man refusing to give a *get*. Or, alternatively, the rabbinic courts are able to find halakhic solutions allowing men to remarry more easily because the prohibition is only *derabanan*. There are few cases of the male equivalent of an *agunah*.

Alternative Approaches

The non-Orthodox Jewish movements have responded to the non-egalitarian nature of the *get* ritual and

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the problem of *agunah* that results from it in various ways. The Reform movement considers a civil divorce sufficient to allow remarriage. The Conservative movement still requires a *get* in order to remarry. However, out of concern for the problem of *agunah*, many Conservative rabbis include a clause in the *ketubah* (called the Lieberman clause after its author, Prof. Saul Lieberman) through which the bride and groom give the Conservative *Beit Din* (rabbinic court) the power to penalize the recalcitrant spouse.

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) has its own *get* procedure. It is often cited as one of the examples of how Reconstructionism differs from Reform Judaism. Instead of discarding a ritual that no longer seems meaningful, we reconstruct it to our values. Recognizing the need for religious ritual at the dissolution of a relationship, Reconstructionism took an old form and gave it new meaning and power.

The Reconstructionist *get* is egalitarian. Either party can initiate, or it can be initiated jointly. The RRA encourages the execution of a *get* before remarriage. Rabbis have various policies as to whether they require a *get* for remarriage, and each case is dealt with individually. Therefore, there is no issue of *agunah* in Reconstructionist Judaism.

Our movement, being the only one to have an alternative *get* procedure, and recognizing the possible ramifications of remarrying on the basis of a *get* not accepted by all, in-

structs its rabbis to explain these ramifications to the potential divorcees. The RRA feels responsible for explaining to the potential divorcees that if they remarry on the basis of this *get* that any future children they might have will be considered *mamzerim* by Orthodox and Conservative rabbis.

We also feel that the couple should understand the traditional gender inequality in a *get*. To prevent the woman from ever being an *agunah* we require the husband to sign a statement saying that if his wife ever requests a second *get* in order to remarry that he will give one to her. Following is a careful discussion of this requirement.

Trying to Cover All Bases

The instructions given to rabbis for the RRA “Egalitarian *Get* Procedure” (revised 12/95) include the following statement: “At the beginning of this process [meaning the divorce process] it is required that you explain the possible ramifications of *agunah* and *mamzerim*.” Education is extremely important in this area considering the issues as they have been outlined above. The instructions continue, “Because of these two issues have only the husband sign the ‘Informed Consent’ page.” The “Informed Consent” page reads as follows:

“Dear _____,

Please be aware that this Reconstructionist Egalitarian *Get* may not be accepted by some Orthodox or

Conservative rabbis. In the interest of *klal Yisrael* and *shalom am* please read the below statement and sign this form.

"I seek to obtain a Reconstructionist Egalitarian *Get* with full knowledge and understanding of the above statement. I agree to cooperate fully in obtaining another *Get* should one be required by another rabbi for the purpose of remarriage.

Signature _____"

Educational Objectives

There are four values that are implied by the instructions given to rabbis and by the letter of consent for the husband. The instructions to the *get* imply a value to educate the couple about 1) *agunah*, and 2) *mamzerut*. The letter of consent, on the other hand, cites the values of promoting 3) *klal Yisrael* and 4) *shalom am*. The instructions for the *get* require educating the couple about *agunah* and *mamzerut* and note that for those reasons, only the husband should sign the consent form. However, the consent form itself has no mention of those issues, but rather mentions different values, *klal Yisrael* and *shalom am*. It is important to examine the reasons why these values are different from one another. In order to do this, it is important to separate them.

Values of an Egalitarian *Get*

Agunah: Reading the instructions for the *get*, one notes that it is the

rabbi's obligation to explain the possible ramifications of *agunah*. "At the beginning of the process it is required that you explain the possible ramifications of *agunah* and *mamzerim*."

Each rabbi will interpret this obligation differently. I imagine that most rabbis would explain to the couple something similar to this: "Although I consider this *get* to be a severance of your marriage and to allow remarriage should you choose, there are other rabbis, particularly some Orthodox or Conservative rabbis, who will not see this *get* as legitimate and therefore will not consider you divorced. They would require another *get* before officiating at your remarriage.

"The non-egalitarian *get* can only be given with the husband's consent. This means that women can often be trapped in marriage, unable to remarry. Partly to prevent this occurrence, we will require you (husband) to sign a form saying that if your wife ever needs another *get* for remarriage that you will not withhold it from her."

Mamzerim: The rabbi is also required to explain to the couple that any rabbi (or Jew, for that matter) who does not consider the *get* valid will consider any future children the woman has as *mamzerim*, or children of an adulterous relationship. This is because the woman is still considered married to her former husband. *Mamzerim* are considered by some to be outcasts and some rabbis would never officiate at their possible future wedding ceremony unless it was to

another *mamzer*.

The rabbi might explain that according to these rabbis and Jews, only a married woman can give birth to *mamzerim*. According to Jewish law, these Jews would explain, adultery always involves a married woman. Therefore, if the husband were to remarry and have children, his children would not be considered *mamzerim* unless his future wife was also previously married without a *get* (a *get* they consider legitimate).

I would also explain that the reason a woman without a *get* cannot remarry, according to some Conservatives and Orthodox, is not only because it would be considered an adulterous relationship, but also because any future children would be considered *mamzerim*.

Wider Concerns

Klal Yisrael: The rabbi is not required to discuss this with the couple, in contrast to the first two issues. However, it is included in the letter of consent as the reason the husband signs the letter. Why? “*Klal Yisrael*” (the worldwide Jewish people) is most often used to address issues that are threatening to split the Jewish community. Both sides are asked to be accommodating for the sake of *klal Yisrael*. In most cases, both sides value something that conflicts with accommodating for *klal Yisrael*, and each needs to decide how far it will go in compromising on the conflicting value.

In this case, it is not clear what the

conflict between the “two sides” is. I would guess that the Conservatives and Orthodox are upset that we are officiating at divorces that they do not necessarily consider to be in accordance with *halakhah*. This could lead to either person’s anger at those movements when being told that they need another *get*. This type of anger between rabbi and potential marrieds is not good for *klal Yisrael*. If the previous recipient of our *get* was insulted enough, it could even lead to him or her turning away from those movements after having approached them for marriage officiation, and instead going on to marry through some other rabbi and producing what some consider *mamzerim*.

The Conservative and Orthodox might argue that had we never gotten into the *get* business in the first place, there would be much less potential friction.

Shalom Am: I have never heard this term before and do not know how it is different from *klal Yisrael*. If I have not heard of it, I am probably not the only one and it seems important that we should be able to explain to divorcees these two terms. Therefore, explanatory material should accompany the instructions to the *get*.

Balancing Innovation and Tradition

I would like to return now to the fact that the reason the instructions insist the man sign the consent form is because of the issues of *mamzerim*

and *agunah*. What does “because of these issues” mean? Does it simply affirm that he has been educated in these issues? If so then the woman would surely sign a form as well. “Because of these issues” must mean “to prevent these issues from occurring as often.”

And why do we care if the cases of *agunah* and *mamzerim* increase in the world? Maybe we care about the cases of *agunah* because of its impact on women, despite the fact that they are woman who have chosen of their own free will to get involved in that system. Could our concern about *agunah* be simply a *klal Yisrael* concern? Probably not. The other movements may be angry with us for telling people they are divorced when according to some interpretations of Jewish law they are not. But how could they get angry with us about the problem of *agunah*, a source of shame within the Orthodox community, which to this point has yet to propose a solution from within the halachic framework?

There is only one case I can think of where our concern about *agunah* could be a *klal Yisrael* issue. After all, as mentioned before, *agunah* is not a *klal Yisrael* issue in the way we usually understand the term. We don’t cause the *agunah* problem; we actually have nothing to do with it.

Except for one possibility: let’s say a man gave and received an egalitarian *get*. Then the rare case occurred where the woman wanted another (halachic) *get*. Then he refused to give his former wife another *get* —

not based on any ill-feeling toward the wife but rather based on the principle of already having gone through the Reconstructionist ceremony. Here we have taken a perfectly polite person who would have given a halachic *get* in the first place and turned him into a person who refuses. Therefore we have the consent form and can say that the issue of *agunah* and *klal Yisrael* are intertwined.

But what about *mamzerim*? Why do we care if those cases increase? It must be for *klal Yisrael*, which is mentioned as the reason for signing the letter of consent. However, it is clear that his consent will prevent him from making his wife an *agunah*, but how does it also prevent *mamzerim*? I can only imagine one case where it would prevent *mamzerim*, which is the case where the woman is going to have children and she herself cares about the issue of *mamzerim* and wants another *get*. In the majority of cases we deal with, the woman does not want another *get* after her first one and therefore the husband’s signing of the consent form really does nothing to prevent *mamzerim*.

The letter of consent asserts that the husband should sign it for the reasons of *klal Yisrael* and *shalom am*. However, I have just shown that there is only a minority of cases where the husband’s consent to give another *get* in the future should one be requested actually affects the issues involving *klal Yisrael*. It also affects, however, *agunah*, which is not mentioned in the letter, and to a lesser degree *mamzerim*, which is also not mentioned.

RRA *Get* in Need of Revision

Something should change. Our words should reflect our actions. If we are not promoting *klal Yisrael*, we should not state that we are. The consent letter to the husband should emphasize *agunah*, and only secondarily *mamzerim* and *klal Yisrael*. If we really care about *klal Yisrael* as we state in the consent letter, then the woman should be required to sign a similar consent form. If part of the purpose of the form, as the instructions suggest, is to educate the couple about the issue of *mamzerim*, then the woman is the one who needs to understand the issue clearly.

As mentioned before, only the woman can have offspring who will be considered *mamzerim* if she remarries. The man, if remarried to someone who has not been married before, will be in a state of being married to two people, a violation of Rabbeinu Gershom's rabbinic decree, but his children will not be *mamzerim*.

The RRA consent form is vague in its wording. It makes the husband promise "I agree to cooperate fully in obtaining another *get* should one be required by another rabbi for the purpose of remarriage." It does not specify whose remarriage — his own, or his former wife's. Both remarriages would be forbidden according to those who do not accept our *get* as legitimate. In the case of the husband's remarriage, it would be forbidden *derabanan*, in the case of the wife, *de'oraita*. For Orthodox and Conservative rabbis, a *get* is required

in either circumstance, and I do not believe that the fact that this form refers to the remarriage of his former wife is clear to the husband, nor necessarily to the rabbi. (I for one, when I read it, was not sure to what it referred).

A Pre-nuptial Clause?

If we want to prevent *agunot*, wouldn't we do a better job by requiring rabbis to get the consent of soon-to-be-husbands before they marry? We require very few things in our movement, yet the instructions state, ". . . it is *required* [emphasis mine] that you explain the possible ramifications of *agunah* and *mamzerim*. Because of these two issues, have only the husband sign the 'Informed Consent' page." This means that in order to undergo a heterosexual divorce facilitated by one of our rabbis, the man is required to sign that form, which essentially makes him promise to never make his (former) wife an *agunah*.

Would it not make much more sense, if we are honestly concerned about the prospect of *agunah*, to do as many Conservative rabbis do and include a clause in the heterosexual *ketubah* (for example the Lieberman Clause)? Alternatively some rabbis make a pre-nuptial agreement concerning the issue of *agunah*. For us, this would essentially have the same "consent" as the "informed consent" form required at a divorce.

I recognize that the Reconstructionist rabbi often does not meet the

said couple until they are getting a divorce or coming to him/her for remarriage. This is why it is so important to educate the couple about the issues of *agunah* and *mamzerut* before the execution of the egalitarian *get*.

Even if rabbis take my suggestion and institute discussion and consent forms at the time of the *ketubah*, it is still important to educate at the time of divorce. This is for the sake of those who have not previously gotten that education and for the sake of those who received the education as part of their pre-wedding meetings but subsequently forgot about those issues, never expecting to get divorced. The consent form, on the other hand, would be better placed only at the time of marriage and should be taken from the divorce proceedings, for reasons I will now enumerate.

Anticipating Issues

I believe the consent form requiring a husband to agree to give an Orthodox *get* if requested should be used pre-nuptially instead of at divorce for several reasons. One, as mentioned above, is that the issue of *agunah* can be better prevented if it is incorporated in the documents surrounding marriage. We could satisfy at least Conservative rabbis by including the Lieberman clause, which gives a *Bet Din* power to influence the two people. Even with the Lieberman clause, an Orthodox rabbi will not be able to help the woman.

But if we required a letter of consent from the husband before marriage, then we would never officiate at weddings where the man would refuse to sign the form; thus we would prevent the whole issue in the first place. We would also assert the importance of the issue if we addressed it at marriage.

A second reason I believe the consent form is misplaced is because it requires a person to promise that in the future, if asked, he will participate in a non-egalitarian (probably Orthodox) ritual. In order to participate in our Reconstructionist ritual, he has to first promise this. This is making someone promise that at some point he may have to relive the painful process of *get*. The process is likely to be even more painful in a context with which he is not familiar. He may have to go through another divorce when he considers himself divorced already! (Imagine the pain of his future partner as well.)

In addition, there are many Reconstructionists who refuse to engage in non-egalitarian prayer services and other rituals. I understand that the issue here is the protection of the woman; however, we need to think about protecting Reconstructionists' egalitarian sensibilities as well.

Kiddushin and Gitin

I believe that both traditional and egalitarian concerns can be addressed at the same time by using the consent form at marriage, not divorce. If at the time of marriage, the man

refuses to sign such a form because he is opposed to involvement with the Conservative or Orthodox movements, or because of his egalitarian sensibilities, he should still have another option. The couple can decide to work with the Reconstructionist rabbi to make a ceremony and *ketubah* that are not *leshem kiddushin* (in accordance with what Jewish law would recognize as halachic marriage). The Reconstructionist rabbi could even write a letter that could accompany the *ketubah* (or be written inside) which explains the purpose of not doing the ceremony *leshem kiddushin*. It may be that some halachic authorities would not require a *get* for a ceremony that had been done in this way. Reconstructionist rabbis, who generally prefer a *get* for remarriage, would most often still require a *get*, even for this non-*kiddushin* ceremony. This is because the reason the Reconstructionist rabbi requires a *get* is not usually halachic but rather is to address the ritual needs of the couple.

An example of such a non-*kiddushin* wedding ceremony (*Brit Ahuvim*) is found in Rachel Adler's book, *Engendering Judaism*. She is opposed to *kiddushin* on feminist grounds. She believes that since *kiddushin* is traditionally a ceremony by which the man "acquires" the woman, this ceremony and term cannot be reclaimed. She also refuses to use the term "*ketubah*" for it is part of the whole system of inequality. I have thus used the word "*ketubah*" in quotation marks throughout when

describing the document that might be used in this non-*kiddushin* marriage.

A Personal Perspective

I cannot help but mention an anecdote from Israel. My partner and I got married in Israel through the official rabbinate. In Israel, there is no such thing as a secular wedding that is recognized by the state. If you are Muslim, you must get married by a state-sanctioned Muslim clergy. The same is true, respectively, for Christians and Jews.

The only state-sanctioned Jewish clergy are Orthodox rabbis who have been investigated by the rabbinate and found to be valid. Therefore any Jew who wants to be married legally in Israel must be married by an Orthodox rabbi or be married outside of Israel. Luckily, a Conservative rabbi dear to us also had been ordained Orthodox so we had the benefit of having the rabbi we would have chosen in any case.

I was complaining to an Orthodox friend about the anti-democratic nature of the rabbinate in Israel. He said that he believes that the Orthodox rabbinate should retain control over *kiddushin*; however, he believes that non-Orthodox rabbis should be allowed to officiate at marriages that include a statement that they are not *leshem kiddushin*.

I was completely offended and said, "Where would that put people like me, who want to have *kiddushin*, but not with an Orthodox rabbi?"

What about my suffering in that proposed system?" He answered that for the sake of *klal Yisrael* sometimes individuals have to suffer.

I completely disagree with his proposal although I am ironically suggesting something similar. In my scenario, however, doing the ceremony *leshem kiddushin* would require that the husband sign a consent form. If he is such a strong feminist that he refuses to sign the form based on the fact that he would never participate in a non-egalitarian *get*, he will probably be able to be convinced by Rachel Adler's arguments to do away with *kiddushin* in the first place.

This does not mean to say that any strong feminist will be convinced that *kiddushin* has to go by the wayside. Adler takes a purist egalitarian position which may be accepted by someone who also has a purist egalitarian position. If he insists on an egalitarian *kiddushin*, we are not depriving him of one. He can always go to a Conservative or Reform rabbi who would not require his consent about *get*.

Commitment to *Klal Yisrael*

I do not know how committed the Reconstructionist movement is to *klal Yisrael*. The consent form that is required at divorce seems to address the issue of *agunah*, but not the issue of assuring Conservative and Orthodox rabbis that there will not be *mamzerim* running around.

If we are concerned with *klal Yisrael* as we so state in the consent letter, then the important part of the work is the educational piece of informing the divorcees of their status in the eyes of others. Requiring the form to be signed by the husband may placate orthodox feminists, and in that regard contribute to *klal Yisrael*, but the rabbis we generally think of when we think of *klal Yisrael* do not seem to care too much about the issue of *agunah*. If it was up to them, we would make men and women promise to get an Orthodox divorce if necessary. I believe we need to examine and explore our commitment to *klal Yisrael* and how this is reflected in our life cycle events.

Reviving American Families

A Review Essay

Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Ballantine: 1994); *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding our Families* (Ballantine: 1996); *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of our Elders* (Riverhead: 1999)

BY NANCY FUCHS-KREIMER

When a therapist writes three books in five years and each makes the *New York Times* best seller list, one is likely to become suspicious. Is this author a genius at telling people what they want to hear? But Mary Pipher, the Nebraska psychologist who wrote the best sellers above, actually has a quite sobering message: we live in a family-unfriendly culture. It is harder than ever to care for our elders, sustain our families and nurture the next generation. Today, many well meaning families are struggling mightily just to do a good enough job. *Ophelia* tells of adolescent girls prey to depression, eating disorders and addictions. *Shelter* describes the kind of stress families live with as they suffer the loss of traditional communities and extended families while adjusting to the disconnection from one another created by job demands, conflicting individual schedules and information overload. Finally, in *Another Country*, Pipher presents the very old in

age-segregated America as isolated and misunderstood, while their grown children, wanting to do the right thing, try to juggle their complicated lives. None of this sounds like good news and the stories Pipher tells are often heart-breaking. Yet, her books sell multiple copies.

Cultural Forces and the Family

I believe that Mary Pipher deserves her wide readership and I encourage people who care about families to encounter her work. Despite Pipher's tendency to be a bit overwrought about present difficulties and overly sentimental concerning past glories, her voice is an important one that should be heard. She is a lively writer who recounts compelling stories from her own life and the lives of the people with whom she has worked. She has a great eye for the telling detail ("children play with cyberpets while old women stare out their win-

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dows at empty streets"). Moreover, she writes with compassion and respect about painful topics. She is the proverbial "non-anxious presence" in a stressful situation, striking a note of calm and hope despite her dire descriptions of current realities. Most important, Pipher refuses to pathologize her subjects. Rather, she hopes to politicize us.

Just as the field of family therapy taught us to look not only at the "identified patient" but at the whole family system, so Pipher, who has a background in anthropology, teaches us to look not only at the "identified family" but at the cultural forces with which families have to contend. Pipher, a psychologist, has some harsh words for her own profession. When families in pain turn to the therapeutic community, they sometimes end up feeling worse about themselves. They are labeled "dysfunctional," and members of the family begin to blame one another, wondering what went wrong. But focusing solely on family dynamics lets the culture off the hook.

Liberating as this message may be ("You mean it is not all our fault?"), it is hardly of the I'm OK/You're OK variety. This is an analysis that still leaves the reader with a challenging assignment. Pipher's spirituality is not feel-good New Age piety. She ultimately argues that it is up to us to rebuild our families and communities, to protect our children from what is toxic in our culture, and to connect them with what is character building and life affirming. This is a

prescription for hard work, but at least she has identified the task.

Loss of Community

What is the culture which Pipher finds so problematic for families? First, there is the loss of old-fashioned communities in which a variety of adults of different ages, both relatives and neighbors, helped to nurture children. This arrangement often helped to mitigate problems within a nuclear family. The Sioux have a word, *tiospaye*, the people with whom one lives. It is not only Native Americans who have lost their strong extended families and tribes during the last century. American culture has led the world in the value it has placed on the independent ego, on freedom, and on individual rights. You don't like your aunts and uncles? Fine, don't see them any more. You think your religious community is boring? Fine, don't go. Unfortunately, we then find ourselves isolated in our families, alone on "social ice floes" and trying to do a job for which we need a *tiospaye* now more than ever.

Related to the loss of community is the rise of technology — TVs, radios, VCRs, Nintendos and computers — which has created what Pipher calls the electronic village. Pipher sees the hours spent with these devices as hours in which family members are often disconnected from one another. Children and adolescents see and hear information that is inappropriate to their developmental

stage, particularly in relation to sex. They discuss the lives of movie stars and sports heroes, but these people do not care about them. Young people have always grown up on stories, but the stories told on TV today were “designed to raise profits not children.” Finally, advertisements are definitely “educational television” — teaching the clear message that the cure for any pain is another product.

Assumptions of Psychology

Pipher is critical of therapy and popular psychology. She uses the image of the Trojan Horse to suggest that therapists, under the guise of bringing gifts, sometimes invade families and do them harm. Pipher attributes this not to malice but to assumptions that no longer fit current realities. Not so long ago, it was appropriate for therapists to help families build boundaries between themselves and overly involved extended kin, to help individuals in enmeshed families individuate and figure out what they wanted apart from cultural rules. Now, however, young families often need to be reconnected to whatever family supports are available. The individual members of a family need to rediscover one another and the joys of mutuality and responsibility.

The individualistic assumptions upon which psychology is based reflect and strengthen our self-involved, narcissistic culture at a time in our history when we need just the opposite thrust. Pipher worries about the

“stories” therapists tell their clients about why they are in pain, stories such as the “codependent,” the “inner child” or the “dysfunctional family.” Old people die alone while their children are encouraged by therapists to “take care of themselves.” She argues that therapists should be helping families rebuild their sense of obligation to one another, connect with community resources and find opportunities for service.

Organic Insights

Reading all three books as a unit is instructive. Many of the problems Pipher describes are connected to each other. For example, in *Ophelia*, Pipher notes how our culture’s emphasis on physical appearance can create pressures for young girls, many of whom will never measure up to the media’s ideals of beauty. Similarly, old people are ill-served by a culture that sets up an image of what it means to be attractive which, as our bodies age, we inevitably grow further from realizing.

Age segregation, according to Pipher, hurts people at each stage of the life cycle. Children from a very early age now spend the better part of their days with peers in extended day care while their parents work. Elders create their own communities and, when they need care, special living arrangements are often designed just for them. Everyone loses out from the fragmentation. For older people, there is the isolation at a time when they need care and connection.

But young people could benefit from the wisdom of elders. And, in the case of adolescent girls, more inter-generational connections would mean less power given to the peer culture and its notoriously noxious potential for cliques and other cruelties.

Pipher admits in *Shelter* that her book will be more about problems than solutions. This is true of all three works. They are stronger on analysis and powerful stories about what is wrong and what used to be right than they are on prescriptions for how to improve matters. Pipher defends herself by arguing that the solutions must be sought “community by community.” This is what makes her books so exciting. Given some of the problems Pipher identifies, what sort of solutions emerge from the resources of Jewish text, tradition and community?

Jewish Responses

First and most obvious, Jewish tradition has long ago discovered what Pipher so vigorously is trying to impress upon Americans, that a good life is one lived with other people — with extended family, with neighbors, with tribe. Furthermore, traditional Jewish culture provides a good corrective to the American love affair with individual self-reliance. Indeed, Jewish communities have historically been built on the assumption that there is great dignity and holiness in giving and receiving support from others. Unfortunately, many American Jews are more Amer-

ican than Jewish on this score; tragically, assimilated elderly Jews in our society often lament their needing to ask for help. We need more aggressively to tell our Jewish stories about what makes a good life.

Clearly, as we think about our families, the most scarce resource for many of us is time. We see money as something to be budgeted, yet it is really time that we must learn to vigorously protect. In a fascinating case history in *Shelter*, Pipher describes how she worked with a highly stressed two-career family whose presenting problem was three troubled teenagers. She prescribed several evenings a week during which the family could not use computers or television. Difficult as it was to comply at the start, the family eventually began to rediscover each other. Next, she sent them out to the prairie to hike together. Slowly, a spiritual connection began to emerge among them which became a source of strength as each individual coped with their own problems.

In fact, a “technology” for protecting time has been in place since the Torah — Shabbat. After reading Pipher’s first two books, one is struck by the genius of an institution that, long before our homes had been invaded by the media or our lives consumed by commercialism, figured out that people would need one day of freedom from it all — a day to devote to family, prayer, nature, community and quieter pursuits.

Organic Insights

How does one “raise a *mensch*?” Pipher describes the need for families to bond together in communities with shared values. Clearly, two parents in a home, however strong a family it may be, will never be as convincing to children as a community backing them up. Besides, children need to differentiate from their parents, which is why it is a clever trick to have your values taught to your kids by someone else! What incredible potential we have in synagogue communities to help transmit values to the next generation, adults working together for the benefit of all the children. As the trends and forces Pipher decries strengthen, the religious community will grow in importance as the place where groups of adults can care about groups of children and help them flourish, to recreate the *tiospaye*.

Hebrew school, long ago turned over to the hands of professionals, could be reclaimed (at least in part) as a forum through which adults in a community could share their life wisdom with children. Jewish youth movements, similarly, are incredibly important resources to help young people find adults and peers to support them in commitments which run counter to the general culture.

After reading *Ophelia*, one is struck by the seemingly providential timing of the bat mitzvah ceremony. Between the ages of twelve and thirteen, girls are deep into what Pipher calls the “social and developmental Bermuda Triangle” in which “the selves of young girls go down in droves.”

What an incredible opportunity for affirming young girls’ own selfhood and for connecting them to women mentors in their community. Bar and bat mitzvahs in our mobile American society have evolved, in some cases, into large family reunions, providing an occasion for gathering the clan from their far-flung residences to celebrate and to reconnect. This aspect of the occasion could well be capitalized on for the benefit of the youth who need to learn the family lore and develop their sense of being rooted in something larger than themselves.

Intergenerational Connections

The whole field of intergenerational activity is one that suits the Jewish community perfectly. With our strong heritage of respect and honor for the elderly, and with our own extended families often separated by distance, it is a natural step to turn to Jewish community as a place to connect with others of different generations. The Jewish Family and Children’s Service in Philadelphia, for example, has a highly successful “foster grandparent” volunteer opportunity. Children are matched with an older couple in a win/win situation. In another wonderfully creative program, a chaplain in a Jewish residence for the elderly invited local preteens who were not affiliated with synagogues to train for their bar or bat mitzvah within the

context of the home. The students volunteer with the elderly and learn from them about their lives while being trained in synagogue skills by the chaplain. They then celebrate their coming of age in the residence's chapel with family and friends *and* their new-found community of elders. We must continue to explore the resources we have in the Jewish community and its traditions to address the issues Pipher identifies.

Pipher's at times sermonic texts are really a call to arms for *tikkun olam*. As she quotes, "collective action is not all of us taking our Prozac at the same

time." We who care about families — kids and elders — need to make our voices heard where policies are made at the local, state and federal level. Whether we are advocating for gun control, pressuring advertisers and the media, or helping create affordable day care, we are living out our commitment to the people we love. We should all be working harder not only to save our own families but to build a family-friendly society. Growing up and growing old are difficult, but they do not have to be as hard as they are in America today.

Facing Infertility and Pregnancy Loss

Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 172 pages

REVIEWED BY REBECCA T. ALPERT

As someone who lived for many years with infertility and pregnancy loss, I was overjoyed to learn about Nina Cardin's book on this topic. Missing from my experience during those very difficult years was a social and religious framework for my very complex personal emotions. The absence of public Jewish acknowledgment of the difficulty of those experiences added yet another layer to the pain I and my then-husband were already experiencing.

The person I was during that period would have found this book to be a godsend, providing emotional support, communal recognition, and some very useful practical advice. This is an invaluable resource for people who are dealing with these issues themselves, for people close to them, and for professionals who are giving them advice. It is a sorely

needed addition to the contemporary Jewish library, and one more example of the tremendous contribution made to Jewish life by the questions women have asked about the marginalization of their issues by an androcentric Jewish tradition.

Cardin acknowledges that infertility and pregnancy loss have many stages and encompass an array of experiences. The rituals necessary for those who are beginning the process of trying to conceive and find themselves having difficulties differ vastly from those needed by those who have decided to engage in medical procedures, those who cannot carry a child to term, those who experience stillbirth, and those who choose to stop trying to get pregnant. Cardin has combed available resources thoroughly and found ancient and contemporary prayers and rituals to support all these different experiences.

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Rituals and Prayers

The variety of possibilities for rituals and prayers is the greatest asset of this work. It is almost impossible to imagine that someone living with infertility or pregnancy loss wouldn't find some comforting words, powerful action or soothing support here, especially in the chapter on mourning the loss from infertility or miscarriage. In my experience, no one knew how to provide comfort. A lesson of this book is that we can find ways to comfort ourselves. One that stood out for me was the challah-baking ritual contributed by Debra Nussbaum Cohen. Cohen compares making challah to mothering:

. . . first you mix the ingredients and hope that the alchemy of honey, warm water, and yeast makes its fragrant and mysterious magic. Then you stir and shmush them together with a firm hand, but a sense of delicacy, too. Then you put the dough in a warm place, cover it with a soft cloth, and hope that your work pays off. (p. 75)

It was in baking (and mixing and punching the dough) that she found the strength to heal from her miscarriage. And for her it was no accident that "one of the loaves looked remarkably like the Venus of Willendorf, that ancient fertility symbol who is all heavy breast and belly" (p. 77).

Cardin also makes an important contribution in the chapter on prayers for medical intervention. The conception that takes place in a hospital or doctor's office surely needs the additional support of prayers and rituals to make the experience more personal and intimate. These prayers make it possible to create a feeling of holiness even in a medicalized environment.

Problematic Areas

I also liked the chapter on holidays, which Cardin highlights as important times to insert ritual observances that meet specific needs for the infertile. However, I was concerned that Cardin did not acknowledge that holiday celebrations are frequently the times when those who are coping with infertility feel the most pain and anxiety. Getting together with extended family in rooms full of children was often enormously difficult for me during those years. The rituals for Rosh Hashanah also struck me as incomplete. They were full of the symbolism of food and fertility, and reflected a very hopeful approach. Yet for me, getting my period on Rosh Hashanah and listening to the stories of Hannah and Sarah and their successful pregnancies as I was feeling grief and disappointment always made me weep even more. This section could have benefited from acknowledgement of the painful holiday connections as well as the positive ones.

Cardin includes a section on therapeutic termination of pregnancy, which was also useful. But she might have tried to tackle the difficulties around intentional therapeutic termination of pregnancy, otherwise called abortion. This is a difficult subject, but I think it is important to acknowledge that some women (although certainly not all women) who do terminate pregnancies may also experience grief and loss, and their experience should be included here.

Many years ago I published a prayer in *The Reconstructionist* for women who experienced miscarriage or abortion. There were several very hostile reactions. But the fact that the issue is controversial is all the more reason that it should be included in a book like this. If the goal is to reach out to Jewish women who are experiencing pain that has previously not been acknowledged by the community, then women who feel pain and grief after abortions need to have rituals created for their special needs.

Alternative Perspectives

I also had some difficulty with Cardin's approach to adoption. This chapter focuses on coming to terms with the loss women and men experience when they acknowledge that they cannot conceive. But the chapter is framed in a way that makes this seem like an acknowledgement of failure. Adoption is viewed as one alternative people may choose in response to infertility, rather than a choice in and of itself. The decision

to adopt may be the result of an inability to conceive, but it also may be a positive decision unrelated to infertility. The only advice Cardin gives is to consult adoption agencies and convert a child who isn't born Jewish. Adoptive parents (and children) deserve better.

The epilogue recognizes the importance of what Cardin calls "mamas"—those women who are not biological or adoptive mothers, but who mother nonetheless through their connections to children as teachers, caretakers and relatives. It is crucial that these women (and often men) are included in this volume, and I was happy to see that their invaluable role in the Jewish community is recognized here.

Despite the breadth of this book, Cardin unnecessarily limits her audience to heterosexual Jewish couples. A woman who is not married and decides to adopt will not find herself described in any of the stories, or her singleness acknowledged in any way. A lesbian couple that is having problems establishing a pregnancy will feel excluded by the assumed heterosexuality of every couple described here. In the introduction, Cardin argues for the power of ritual with the following example:

When a Jewish bride puts a veil over her face, she becomes every Jewish woman who has ever loved a Jewish man. All love collapses into her love. She is filled with the ways Jewish women have ever loved Jewish

men. (p. 21)

This book serves well those women who identify with the statement above. But for those of us who refused to veil at our weddings, married non-Jews, have never married, or

loved Jewish women instead, and who have also lived with the pain of infertility and loss in pregnancy, it could have served us better by acknowledging our presence in the community and finding ways to tell our stories.

Embracing Science: A Reconstructionist Vision for the Twenty-First Century

BY GEORGE B. DRIESEN

“Classic” Reconstructionism, the philosophy of Mordecai Kaplan, Ira Eisenstein, and their early colleagues, promised to marry the best of Jewish and western civilizations. When the classic Reconstructionists thought about western civilization’s achievements, they ranked science highly. Early Reconstructionist liturgy affirmed our scientific heritage in two prayers. One, Eugene Kohn’s “The Upward Climb of Man,” sets the stage for a paean extolling God’s gifts of understanding and love by sketching earth’s place in the Cosmos and the evolution of human from microscopic life.¹ Another was Kaplan’s magnificent reading, “God the Life of Nature,” which our current prayer book series preserves in a truncated form.² Little else in contemporary Reconstructionist liturgy or in our writing and teaching invokes or responds to the wonders and promise

of scientific endeavor. I think that is a serious and, in the long run, dangerous omission, and that it is time we corrected it.

Lost In The Editing

The editing of “God the Life of Nature” for republication in the *Kol Haneshamah* series illustrates our present stance. The editors deleted the pivotal line which gave the poem its energy and focus. Kaplan’s poem opens with the idea that “our ancestors” worshipped the God whose “handiwork they read in the mysterious heavens above. . . .” In Kaplan’s original, the prayer continued:

*Meantime have the vaulting skies
dissolved;*

Night reveals the limitless caverns of
space,
Hidden by the light of day,
And unfolds horizonless vistas
Far beyond imagination’s ken.

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The mind is staggered,
 Yet soon regains its poise,
 And orients itself anew
 By the light of distant suns
 Shrunk to glittering sparks
 The soul is faint,
 Yet soon revives,
 And learns to spell once more the
 name of God
 Across the newly visioned
 firmament.³

Kol Haneshamah omitted the italicized line. But without it, what staggers the mind, makes the soul faint, newly visions the firmament, and requires the mind to “orient itself anew” and “learn to spell once more the name of God?” Surely nightfall alone cannot cause such an upheaval; it occurs daily.

The answer, it seems to me, is the scientific revolution. Science “dissolved” the “vault” that once was thought to contain the Universe. Science “newly visioned” the biblical “firmament” and taught that the stars were “distant suns.” The scientific revolution “staggered” the religious mind and required a “new orientation” to the night sky. It required, and Kaplan provided, a new conception of God, which the rest of his poem encapsulates.

The “meantime” sets the stage for the poem. It refers to the interval between our ancestors and the cosmological/scientific revolution of which we are the continuing heirs. The current omission of the pivotal line suggests that we latter-day Reconstructionists have moved so far

from Kaplan’s appreciation of the scientific revolution that we do not fully grasp his message.

Another example: We have restored as an option for the second paragraph of the *Shema* the Bible’s warning that if the Israelites worship idols and disobey God’s commandments God will withhold rain. Kaplan and his colleagues removed that paragraph because it offended their notion of scientific causality. They were vilified for substituting a different Deuteronomic passage more compatible with the scientific view of the consequences of human conduct (Deut. 28:1-6). Here, it is not omission but commission that suggests our abandonment of the Kaplanian vision of Judaism that embraces science. Little else in our liturgy or in our writing and teaching invokes or responds to the wonders and promise of scientific endeavor.⁴

Science or Religion?

Many people still think of science and religion as mutually antagonistic. In western civilization, that view is epitomized by the Catholic Church’s struggle with Galileo. By threats of excommunication or worse, the Church forced Galileo to recant the inference that his telescopic observations and theoretical analysis had confirmed: contrary to the Church’s teaching, the Earth was not an immovable body resting at the center of the universe. Rather, he believed, the earth moved around the sun in a circular orbit. Long after

Galileo died, the Church capitulated.

But modern science posed an even more fundamental threat to “religion,” as most pre-Kaplanian Jews understood that term. Religion finds truth in God’s revelation to man, and for “religious” Jews and Christians that included Genesis with its mythological explanation of the birth of the universe.

Science, by contrast, bases its conclusions on empirical observation and close, often mathematical, inferences that if not derived from observations, at least organize them. Observation and theory convinced scientists that natural selection, not *creatio ex nihilo*, explained the extraordinary variety of life on earth.⁵ Thus, one had to choose: science or religion.

Forced to choose, I would have opted for science without a backward glance. Science, especially astronomy, cosmology and evolutionary biology, captured my imagination early on. Nothing evoked my sense of awe as powerfully as the “limitless caverns of space” of which Kaplan wrote in “God the Life of Nature.”⁶ And nothing could move me more eagerly to try to master the clean, careful discipline of rational thought than did my vigorous attempts to understand how the motions of the sun, the moon, and the planets had been transformed from (in William James’ felicitous phrase) “the buzzing blooming confusion” of Ptolemy’s epicycles and perfect spheres to the “orderly march” of the solar system that successive generations of obser-

vational and theoretical astronomers and physicists had gradually revealed.

Growing up at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism when Rabbi Kaplan and Eisenstein presided over it, I knew we had a better idea. “We” Reconstructionists did not believe in a supernatural “Man Writ Large,” let alone that God had spoken every word in the Torah to Moses. So we were free to build a new Judaism that accepted the fruits of scientific discovery and celebrated them. How marvelous to be taught Judaism under the watchful eyes of men and women who shared my youthful enthusiasm! It was a gift beyond measure, enabling me to join together the two worlds, which I passionately sought to embrace.

Freed from the notion that every word in the Bible is “true,” I did not have to take sides in the war between science and religion. And in due course, as the Reconstructionist vision inspired gifted liturgists, in “our” prayer book the scientific picture of the universe would take its place alongside, if not supplant, the biblical and medieval worlds’ pictures of a cosmos peopled with supernatural beings and sun-bearing chariots. We would have a religion that spoke to the convictions and the hopes of modernity! The future belonged to *us*. And we were, and in my view until recently remained, distinct from other liberal Jewish religious movements primarily, if not solely, in our express rejection of imaginary, supernatural beings.

Science Becomes Suspect

The intervening years have not dealt kindly with my 1950s expectations for the bracing new religious philosophy in which I was raised. The apocalyptic horrors of modern warfare, the merciless destruction of human and animal habitats in the name of “progress,” and a renewed appreciation of the power of self-interest, irrationality and intuition in human life have made many suspicious of science. In part, that suspicion stems from confusing science and technology—the first, a dedicated search for truth, and the second, the harnessing of the fruits of scientific discovery for purposes dictated by those whose power enables them to appropriate those fruits.

At the same time, we are witnessing a worldwide reactionary renaissance of assertive, religious orthodoxy that deprecates “mere” human observation and thought in favor of sacred texts and their approved interpreters. At the extremes, we see a revival of superstition, Satanism, and the occult.

Nearer to home, we are witnessing a renewed emphasis upon altered mind states that supposedly bring one closer to a god beyond understanding and the elevation of paradox from a stimulus to curiosity to a mark of truth. Finally, the surrounding culture has awoken to what scientists have long recognized, indeed applauded: scientific ideas are not immutable truths but are constantly being revised, and some discarded out-

right, in light of new discoveries. Reconstructionists are not immune to these and related developments in the surrounding culture.

Reconstructionism Evolves

Reconstructionism, moreover, is no longer so much a unified religious philosophy as a movement, a broad coalition that embraces communarians, mystics, and deconstructionists, as well as Kaplanians. Equally important, like every segment of the Jewish community, we have dedicated ourselves to the critical struggle for Jewish literacy. We have also responded energetically to the urgent need to introduce egalitarianism in practice, liturgy, and thought. Early on, we introduced the bat mitzvah ceremony to the Jewish world. In later years, we wholeheartedly embraced the feminist perspective on the Jewish past, and ideas such as “patriarchy” and “the suppression of women’s experience” and set about to reverse both, retroactively if possible but contemporaneously for certain. Our commitment to the feminist agenda infuses our recent prayer books and our teaching.

Elaborating on the theme of egalitarianism, Reconstructionists have made acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews in all aspects of Jewish communal life a central concern. These were and are important goals, no less so because the Reform Movement has also embraced them, and they have properly and profitably absorbed our creative energies.

In the meantime, however, we have neglected the exciting possibilities inherent in the early Reconstructionists' rejection of supernaturalism and their acceptance of modern science. In part, that neglect is evidenced by silence.

Nowhere in our ritual or, so far as I am aware, in our teaching — including our teaching of rabbis — does the excitement, beauty and power of modern science intrude. Nowhere do we celebrate the cosmos revealed by the application of mathematics to the streams of data that have inundated astronomy as scientists learned to see beyond the spectrum of visible light and joined forces with particle physicists to revolutionize our understanding of the universe. Nor do we celebrate science's immense gifts to the healing arts.

In contrast, we hear much about the perfect spheres the Kabbalists thought emanated from God. Those spheres not coincidentally mirrored medieval neo-Platonism, itself a cosmogony that goes back to Ptolemy's geocentric astronomy, the very astronomy that Copernicus, Galileo, Brahe, Kepler, and finally Einstein supposedly buried forever.

The Gifts Of Science

I think we ought to abandon our reticence. Scientific knowledge and its application to life-enhancing enterprises are aspects of the Divine. We tend to forget what human life was like before the scientific revolution. Only one hundred and fifty

years ago, anesthesia was unknown. Wounded soldiers writhed in agony while their limbs were sawn off to prevent gangrene from killing them. Until quite early in this century, even in comparatively "advanced" societies, when something went wrong in childbirth, women suffered excruciating pain, and very many died. Infant and maternal death rates were staggering.

A bare two hundred years ago, superstition reigned supreme even in the supposedly "enlightened" corners of the world. Women were burned alive as witches. Instead of observing the essentials of communal and personal hygiene, a significant portion of the western world sought to avoid plague and infectious diseases by wearing amulets, muttering incantations, or, closer to home, fining, expelling, or killing Jews who were thought to be bent on destroying Christendom. At least in "advanced" countries, widespread dissemination of scientific ideas and of science-based practices eliminated or vastly reduced many of these evils, except for the Nazi embrace of anti-Semitism.

I suppose one could characterize these benefits as "material," although I would argue that removing the stark terror that accompanied childbirth is more than a material gain for women and for those who love them. That aside, science has brought vast benefits to the human spirit as well. The great joy of scientific discovery has buoyed the hearts and minds of scientists and interested laymen for

many generations. Furthermore, scientific methodologies have given us tools to solve social problems and, given the political and social will, for the first time in history to feed, clothe and shelter the destitute who make up much of the world's population.

For some of us, indeed, science provides a "religious" response to death. Unlike other animals, humans are acutely aware of their own mortality and are terrified of death. But the study of cosmology gives us a sense of timelessness, of being part of something much larger. The fact that your own personal life is finite is less frightening when you know you are part of an evolving universe — an ever-unfolding drama. The same goes for the study of evolution, for it gives you a sense of time and place, allowing you to see yourself as part of a great journey. And likewise for the brain sciences. In this revolution, we have given up the idea that there is a soul separate from our minds and bodies. Far from being terrifying, this idea is very liberating.⁷

Science And Reconstructionists: Natural Allies

The values implicit in the pursuit of science also undergird the Reconstructionist commitment to democratic, religious communities. Scientific discoveries are dependent upon integrity, clarity of thought, minds open to others' ideas, sharing of information, and a commitment to excellence that cannot withstand dis-

crimination based upon characteristics that have no bearing upon the success of the enterprise, such as religion, race, gender and sexual preference. Finally, the scientific community can function only when it holds steadfastly to an ideal, the ideal of the pursuit of truth, one imbedded in Judaism. "The seal of the Holy One, Blessed be ([God], is truth," the rabbis taught.⁸

Science is our natural ally. We argue and base our claim to legitimacy upon the assertion that Judaism is "an *evolving* religious civilization." Evolution is a concept we borrowed from Darwin. And the proof that Judaism has "evolved" rests upon an analysis of Jewish history that must be supported by evidence, and carefully reasoned analysis, if it is to withstand attack from others wedded to different formulations.

Of course, "ultimate" proof of the validity of our position will always elude us, much as "ultimate" truth eludes the scientific community.⁹ But our tools are analogous to theirs. We cannot, nor should we, win the future by elucidating the intimate, individual reasons why each of us has formed an attachment to the idea of Judaism's evolution. Indeed, my own experience teaches that when Jews in dialogue begin to search out the personal bases of each other's differing conclusions, they often wound one another at worst and change the subject at best. What can be more infuriating than having an interlocutor reject your carefully buttressed conclusions as the product of your hav-

ing reached maturity before the Vietnam War.¹⁰

Science also lies close to the heart of our movement's developing embrace of environmentalism. Our conviction that the continuation of human life on this planet requires us to change the extent and the manner in which we consume the earth's bounty; destroy forests and habitat; dump toxic gases and industrial byproducts into the atmosphere, oceans and rivers; and permit overgrazing and overfishing all rest in large measure upon interdisciplinary, sophisticated, scientific data collection, analysis and projections.¹¹

Science is also an important ally in preventing a renaissance of anti-Semitism. We know all too well that hate-filled demagogues can and have perverted "science," as they have perverted religion, to serve malevolent ends. The scientific habit of mind, of careful sifting of data and withholding judgment until all the facts are in, of reasoning precisely from cause to effect, constitute a bulwark against making any people or person a scapegoat.

Science Under Siege

Yet science is under siege. Of course, science has suffered from the excessive optimism of earlier generations that expected the scientific method and scientific discoveries momentarily to usher in the Messianic Age and that failed to recognize the complex role that irrationality and non-rationality play in human behav-

ior. Furthermore, while all students of the scientific method (to say nothing of the history of science) know that "science" is a "self-correcting dialectic" and therefore that even the most well-founded scientific theories are likely to be modified if not superseded in time, the popular imagination equated science with "revealed religion" as a source of immutable truth. As the pace of discovery has quickened, and seemingly well-entrenched scientific ideas have been forced on the defensive and even abandoned, science's credibility has been impeached in the popular mind. Because training in the physical sciences is no longer required at most colleges, many are quite uninformed about the history and methodology of science. That has made science more vulnerable than ever.

In recent years, however, attacks on science have reached a new level of intensity. On the one hand, religious fundamentalists have mounted such an intense campaign on the teaching of evolution that they have cowed some teachers into silence about the descent of humans and apes from a common primate ancestor and gotten "biblically based," oxymoronic "scientific creationism" included and the word "evolution" excised from some high school science curricula.¹²

Just recently a Kansas School Board determined to remove virtually any mention of evolution from the state's science curriculum.¹³ We have witnessed a rebirth of astrology, resort to "crystals" and other magical techniques to fight illness, and

paranormal charlatanism among educated men and women. On the more serious academic front, we have seen the entire scientific corpus deprecated as a mere cultural artifact of white, European males or a series of texts that any literate dilettante may freely “deconstruct.” Traditional scientific methods have been analogized to “marital rape, the husband as scientist forcing nature to his wishes.”¹⁴

The same corruption of thought has embroiled the study of history. Although thoughtful historians have long recognized that in attempting to reconstruct the past, they must guard against the distorting effects of their own commitments and beliefs, in recent years some younger scholars have waged a successful revolution against empirically based history altogether. They argue that “truth” is unattainable and the past unknowable, thus freeing themselves from the tedium of factual research and giving their ideological presuppositions free reign. These arguments, though beyond the scope of this paper, do not withstand close scrutiny, but, like the assault on science and empiricism, they have attracted numerous adherents.¹⁵ The implications of these claims for Reconstructionism, and its reliance upon the determination that Judaism has in fact evolved, are plain.

Ironically, in the midst of the siege, the media have declared that the “war” between science and religion is over. Some scientists, confronting mysteries that seem insoluble even in principle, while simultaneously aware, as were their more optimistic

predecessors, that much of the physical world is amenable to human understanding, have become persuaded that behind the phenomena they keep uncovering lurks an Intelligent Creator.

That is hardly a novel philosophical position. But until recently, most scientists were unwilling to consider it. And, unsurprisingly in my view, many scientists belong to religious communities, orthodox included. Religiously affiliated scientists are inclined to harmonize religion and science, not to fight one in the name of the other. Finally, scientists have been affected by the same forces fueling the religious revival in the wider population and are affiliating with churches and synagogues.

Reconstructionism Should Embrace Science Again

For Reconstructionism, as I have suggested, the “war” between religion and science never began. On the contrary, intellectually at least, we were initially accepting, if not allies, of scientific thought and the enormous gifts of understanding and hope that science offers. If Jewish scientists and others who feel comfortable with scientific methodology and its products, technology and understanding are seeking a home in Judaism, we ought to be providing it. Yet our prayers, our teaching and our literary output do not welcome the scientifically minded, as we so plainly welcome homosexuals, non-Jews

and, of course, women. We should.

The microcosm and the macrocosm as we late-twentieth-century moderns know provide a rich lode of inspiration for liturgy and teaching. We could augment our Shabbat celebration of the Creation, for example, by prayer and *divrei hinuh* (educational talks), perhaps supported by videos and other materials that would sensitize us to the awesome majesty and beauty of the cosmos and the wondrous intricacy of the microcosm.

Similarly, looking at science from a Reconstructionist religious perspective could provide inspiration to young people and adults. We might stress the ethical values that must be observed in scientific research and teach about the Jewish men and women who have made major contributions to science, attempting to understand their contributions. We might also tell the story of how science led humans to recognize that by acting together they could put an end to famine and to fatal and enervating diseases, and how we may yet ward off the destruction of the earth's habitat by harnessing scientific understanding to our religiously based commitment to the welfare of later generations.

JRF and RRA might devote one of their conventions to the theme of science and Judaism. Both the subject and some of the speakers who might be invited could prove highly stimulating. Only if we look will we discover whether there are materials on the "Jewish Bookshelf" that might be invoked in support of our effort.¹⁶

I believe this new direction would enable our movement to maintain its position as the most far-seeing of Judaism's branches. The first generation of Reconstructionists recognized that one of the functions of any religion is to infuse meaning into the lives of those who practice it. That means, among other things, integrating the discoveries and, where appropriate, the methods of modern science into our religious life. Doing that might help put us on the map in Israel by drawing a clear, principled distinction between our approach to Judaism and the others on offer there. More important, I believe that encounters with vast reaches of space, the tiny world of the atom and the myriad, intricate structures that living creatures have evolved will infuse our religious life with the excitement, awe and gratitude that our ancestors felt in the face of existence.

I believe further that a heightened awareness of the imagination, rigorous discipline and dedication to truth, which are the hallmarks of scientific endeavor, will inspire us and our children to live ethical and fruitful lives. Not insignificantly, an infusion of the world of science into our religious awareness may help us resist the vapid, misleading images and slogans dominating the surrounding culture and enable us better to emulate one of the virtues of our rabbinic forebears: the harnessing of sustained, careful thought in the pursuit of understanding.

Ultimately, the narratives of scien-

tific discovery are our narratives, for they are quintessentially the narratives of our era. A religion that purports to give meaning to human life in the twenty-first century must encompass them.¹⁷ Because we Reconstructionists are committed to the conscious evolution of the Jewish religion and are the heirs of Kaplan's vision of a "newly visioned firmament," we should joyfully respond to the challenge to integrate Judaism and science. Let us begin.

1. "Avodah Service" in Reconstructionist *High Holiday Prayer Book* (Yom Kippur) (New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation) 368.

2. *Kol Haneshamah, Shabbat Vehagim* (Wyncote, Pa.: The Reconstructionist Press, 1993) 757. The original appeared in *Sabbath Prayer Book* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1948) 382.

3. *Ibid.*, 385.

4. A few months ago the editors of *Kol Haneshamah* published the last version of the new Reconstructionist prayer book series, *Kol Haneshamah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe* (Wyncote, Pa.: The Reconstructionist Press, 1999). It contains a moving *Zihronot* reading by John Haines that captures and responds to the awesome majesty of contemporary cosmology. *Days of Awe*, 650. Perhaps the publication of Haines' poem signals a movement in the direction urged in this article. It was prepared before the movement distributed the new *Mahzor*.

5. Similarly, Kaplan, like historians who sought to emulate the physical sciences in their work to the extent possible, rejected the idea that history revealed God's direct, miraculous intervention in human affairs.

6. *Sabbath Prayer Book*, *op.cit.*, 385.

7. V.S. Ramachandran and S. Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1998) 157.

8. B. *Yoma* 60b.

9. Though not bearing directly upon the subject of this paper, it is important to point out that there is no "ultimate" proof of divine revelation either. A claim to ultimate truth, in my view, is a statement of the depth of one's conviction and of one's unwillingness to subject it to reasoned argument. We yield too much when we imagine that those who believe in "Torah True" Judaism have faith and we do not.

10. In the legal profession, such arguments are characterized as *ad hominem* and deemed beyond the pale.

11. E.O. Wilson, "Back From Chaos," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1998, 41 et seq.

12. "Scientific Panel Pushes Teaching of Evolution in Public Schools," *New York Times*, National Desk, April 10, 1998.

13. Yahoo Business Wire, <http://biz.yahoo.com/bw/990820>, Aug. 24, 1999; "Evolution Struggles Shifts to Kansas School Districts," *The New York Times*, Aug. 25, 1999, p. A1.

14. M.W. Browne, "Scientists Deplore Flight From Reason," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1995, p. C1.

15. For a detailed study of this phenomenon, see K. Windschuttle, *The Killing of History* (New York: Encounter Books: 1997). Windschuttle's attempt to defend empirical historical research, inevitably, rests upon empirical case studies of the work of the new historians. His liveliest argument, however, is his demonstration that attacks empirical historians who utilize empirical methods, but badly.

16. In *Genesis and the Big Bang* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990) 16, G. L. Schroeder quotes Maimonides' *The Guide of The Perplexed*: "Study Astronomy and physics if you desire to comprehend the relation between the world and God's management of it."

17. Arthur Green's *Seek My Face, Speak My Name* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1992), and "A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age," *Tikkun*, September/October 1999, p. 33 profoundly demonstrate how fruitful integrating scientific understanding and religious sensibility can prove. See also *Zihronot*, cited at note 4.

Vintage Perspectives

Two Views on Jewish Population Growth: A Retrospective from the Pages of *The Reconstructionist*

Concern about the Jewish birth rate in North America has been raised on a regular basis over the past decades. On more than one occasion, *The Reconstructionist* has taken an editorial position in response. The twenty-year interval between the following two citations correlates with the rise of Jewish feminism, dramatic changes in the concept of the family and a number of other social evolutions and revolutions. Of particular interest are the parallel references to Jewish affluence which yield divergent conclusions. The contrast between the two citations dramatizes the changes in Jewish family, social and economic life. — Ed.

Balancing Imperatives

I. From “The Dangerously Low Jewish Birth Rate”, an editorial, Volume 30 Number 18 (January 8, 1965)

. . . Some headlines have been screaming: Jews are committing group suicide! The facts do not actually corroborate this melancholy prediction. But American Jews would be foolish to ignore the warnings . . . Psychologically, the effect can be harmful if Jews become conscious of the fact that they belong to a “vanishing” community. No one wants to be part of a losing team.

However, one hesitates to launch a campaign for larger Jewish families at a time when danger signals are being raised about the population explosion in the world. A serious moral issue confronts those who recognize the hazards of uncontrolled population growth, on

the one hand, and the dangers to Jewry of a low birth rate. How reconcile the two?

We truly believe there is a difference between the two questions. Certainly, in those parts of the world where health measures have decreased infant mortality and increased longevity, but where the political, social and economic problems have not been resolved, an enormous increase in population can lead only to revolution and war, and to terrible suffering due to malnutrition.

On the other hand, to call the attention of generally affluent, suburban Jewish parents to their responsibility for doing their share to insure a future for the civilization we call Judaism, is another matter altogether . . . The call goes out to those who find themselves in comfortable circumstances, and who should understand what the mitzvah, “Be fruitful and multiply,” means in

terms of Jewish group survival . . . every Jew who cares about the future of the Jewish people should feel responsible for his and her share in that future. . . .

Quality and Quantity

II. From "Jewish Population Growth," an editorial, Volume 50 Number 2 (October-November 1984)

Much concern has been expressed recently in the Jewish community about the continuing low fertility rate among American Jews . . . one can only wonder if the real crisis is statistical — in the numerical decline of Jewish population.

If the crisis were statistical, we would probably do better to devote our resources to programs which reach out to intermarried couples and their children. They constitute a growing population pool . . .

Moreover, given the percentage of American Jews who have minimal Jewish commitments, it is not clear why we should be concerned about increasing the number of Jews by birth who are not also Jewishly committed. Even if we wanted to do so, there is no evidence that we are capable of doing so. Given the low rate of affiliation and the low rate of response to the initiatives of Jewish leadership, whom can we expect to reach with our views on child-bearing, and should we really expect that people will respond as we wish?

. . . We believe that attention should

be focused primarily on the question: Why have Jewish people stopped having children? Presumably, it is partly because of the economic standards which we have achieved and to which we aspire. It costs more to raise children today, especially when one considers our increased standards of aspiration . . .

Are we prepared to say that it is more important to raise three or four children than it is to live as affluently as one's parents? . . . Unless we are willing to work to establish a Jewish community which offers as much self-esteem to full-time parents (mothers or fathers) as to successful professionals, we have no reason to expect that our exhortations about fertility will be credible.

If these questions are difficult to answer, it is because we are not ready to abandon the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed in America. We accept the prevailing societal values of affluence, career success, and self-actualization, all of which bear negatively upon decisions to bear children. Better child care, for example, is desirable because it is of value to working parents; it should not be expected to alter the fertility rate. For that, we need a change in our philosophies of life.

. . . Let us not mistake symptoms for causes. It is Jewish life itself that requires an infusion of creativity and resources. Only if the commitments of Jews are cultivated do we have reason to expect that the traditional Jewish values of family life will achieve renewed popularity.

Branching Out: The Growth of Jewish Environmental Literature

Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology
Ari Elon, Naomi Mara Hyman, Arthur Waskow, editors
(Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 492 pages.

Ecology & the Jewish Spirit, Where Nature & the Sacred Meet
Ellen Bernstein, editor (Vermont, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 277 pages.

REVIEWED BY FRED DOBB

The Jewish feminist movement originated in 1973, marked by a conference and the publication of important papers. A decade later, Susannah Heschel edited the popular and wide-ranging anthology, *On Being a Jewish Feminist*. Over the past seventeen years many new works have greatly enriched the field — Judith Plaskow's and Rachel Adler's contributions chief among them — yet even today I often recommend that earlier anthology as introduction and resource.

The maturation of another critical late-20th century development, Jewish environmentalism, has lagged behind Jewish feminism by a decade or two.¹

Until recently, most of the literature was simplistic and apologetic. Yet in the past two years alone, it has gained both an accessible introductory anthology, *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* (hereafter EJS), and a collection which adds greatly to the field, *Trees, Earth, and Torah* (hereafter TET).

Time, Space and Community

Ellen Bernstein deserves credit not only as author/editor, but as history's first full-time Jewish environmental professional. In 1988 Ellen founded (with significant support from the Reconstructionist movement) Shomrei

Rabbi Fred Dobb serves Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Rockville Maryland. A Jewish environmental educator and activist for over a decade, he is the Reconstructionist representative to the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

Adamah/Guardians of the Earth, the field's earliest organization. EJS sums up a decade of Ellen's work — her words introduce not only the book and its three sections, but each of the thirty-seven entries.

The first two sections of EJS are distinctive. "Sacred Space," beginning in Israel with the Bible, moves toward a Jewish land ethic for the Grand Canyon and Jersey City. "Sacred Time" presents agricultural/environmental implications of the Jewish calendar and its holidays. The third section, which expounds on Jewish law and philosophy, could easily be divided back into "Space" or "Time" — yet its very title, "Sacred Community," suggests a valuable (and eminently Reconstructionist) approach to Jewish environmentalism.

A second pioneer in this field is Arthur Waskow, whose ground-breaking Jewish peace and social justice work has for years been evolving towards ecology. Waskow, Ari Elon, and Naomi Mara Hyman have brought Tu B'Shvat into the Jewish Publication Society's canon of "major" holidays, as anthologized in a series of holiday volumes by Philip Goodman in the 1970s.

Yet "Tu B'Shvat Anthology" is appropriate only as a subtitle: TET traces trees and Judaism in general from biblical roots, through their rabbinic "trunk" into younger "branches" of kabbalah, Zionism, and our contemporary Jewish environmental movement.

Only in the final section of TET do we taste the "Fruit of the Lovely Tree: Tu B'Shvat Itself." Those looking for ideas on planning a Tu B'Shvat seder

or leading a Jewish school holiday celebration can simply skim the first 341 pages, and find all they seek in Part Seven. But those wanting to sample the cutting edge of Jewish ecological studies should carefully read the entire book; for each entry that appears unnecessarily technical or somewhat off-point, two or more shine with brilliance and insight.

Ecology and the Jewish Spirit

Bernstein's anthology opens with two summaries of biblical environmental thought, and a midrash: Shamu Fenyvesi's "Befriending the Desert Owl" is an original meditation on Job, who gains perspective from tragedy only by opening his eyes to Creation's remarkable intricacy. Brad Artson, illuminating the biblical and rabbinic evolution away from Israeli soil as solely holy, helps us develop deeper relationships with the diaspora lands of our modern existence.

Two pieces of creative writing by Charles Fenyvesi and Robert Sand, while offering no new insights, do much to drive home the eco-Jewish synthesis in very personal ways. Eliezer Diamond, in taking an ecological look at classical Jewish teachings on moderation, implies a great challenge: either we reappropriate the medieval model of "sumptuary laws" against conspicuous consumption, or consumerist society encroaches ever further into our homes, synagogues, and communities.

"Sacred Time" similarly applies ancient wisdom, here from the Jewish cal-

endar, to modern environmental concerns. Debra Robbins shows that ever since Sinai, Jews have lived according to the rhythms of nature. Larry Troster offers a solid overview of the environmental themes we often take for granted in our fixed liturgy. We learn from Marc Sirinsky that Shabbat is to time as wilderness is to space. Everett Gendler, in some ways the spiritual godfather of Jewish environmentalism, shares a sweet reminiscence about “the marvelous adaptability of the Jewish ritual tradition.”

Jewish holidays are also reviewed with fresh eyes. Growing your own springtime barley gives new meaning to counting the Omer between Pesah and Shavuot. Dan Fink recalls anecdotes which connect ecology with one’s own life cycle. Such fresh perspectives lead Ellen Cohn to conclude: “The cycle of rain maps the Jewish year, determining our crops and our holidays and defining our lives.”

Insights of Jewish Tradition

The final section of EJS mines Jewish law and philosophy for nuggets of environmental insight: interdependence is gleaned from the *Shema*’s dance between singular and plural language; the halachic category of *Pe’ah* (“corners” [of the field]) becomes a paradigm for social justice and environmental sustainability — *halakhah* balances economics with ecology.

Maimonides is brought forward to resolve the contemporary tension between proponents of “stewardship” and “deep ecology” (David Ehrenfeld, Vic-

tor Raboy, Philip Bentley and Dan Fink, respectively). Barry Freundel notes useful parallels between talmudic and modern regulations and the existing literature on Jewish environmental law — for example, the notion that for an industry to pollute at all, it must fairly compensate everyone whom it affects.

This anthology does have its drawbacks. While making great contributions, just two authors (Bernstein and Fink) account for fully a third of the entries. Only five women contributed to the volume, compared with eighteen men, which partially explains the glaring absence of today’s increasingly important eco-feminist voice.²

An article on Sukkot exposes a few shortcoming of EJS. In the author’s attempt to stay simple, the reader misses even such relevant and resonant Hebrew phrases as *pri etz hadar* (fruit of the goodly tree, widely taken as “etrog”). A perhaps over-extended interpretation leads Bernstein to infer from Yom Kippur’s eclipsing of Sukkot that we seem “more committed to examining our failings [than] to creating joy.” Grave environmental issues notwithstanding, the essays mostly avoid making programmatic suggestions, let alone imparting any sense of urgency.

Yet despite these flaws, there is no better or broader introduction to the emerging field of eco-Judaism. This volume belongs on every Jewish bookshelf.

Trees, Earth and Torah

Arthur Waskow’s opening essay in

Trees, Earth, and Torah suggests a focus similar to that of Bernstein's anthology (Bernstein's "Space" becomes Waskow's "Doing," Bernstein's "Time" becomes Waskow's "Being"; "Community" remains central to both). In fact, the two works share many such similarities. Both are wide-ranging in perspective, alternating between academic and personal styles. Each is uniquely valuable, though neither is uniformly strong. Each includes representatives of every movement in modern Judaism. Both place scores of previously extant but disparate ideas within one volume.

Yet the differences between the two are striking as well. Where EJS chooses only breadth, TET also offers remarkable depth. EJS avoids detailed explanations of classical concepts; TET revels in them. The one is consistently neutral; the other, frequently strident. TET, with over forty percent of its contributors female, includes a range of eco-feminist voices. Where EJS chose not go, TET dives right in.

Range of Voices and Visions

Numerous examples of this anthology's textual and historical gems stand out, including Joyce Galaski's translation of a rare medieval *piyut* (pietistic poem) for the Amidah of Tu B'Shvat. Eilon Schwartz's spectacular and original in-depth study of the "eco-mitzvah" *bal tashit* (do not waste/destroy) is written in an environmental yet academic tone; future essays on Judaism and ecology would do well to follow this example.³

On the kabbalistic "branch," TET

includes Miles Krassen's long-awaited full translation and annotation of the classic Tu B'Shvat seder, *Pri Etz Hadar* (circa 1700; translation from a decade-long Shomrei Adamah commission).

As Krassen summarizes it: "The structure of different kinds of fruit, the growing patterns of trees, the habits of birds, indeed all natural phenomena are, in essence, aspects of a divine epiphany that proclaims the truth of God's existence."

At the base of TET's second branch is a masterful translation by Jeremy Schwartz of Labor Zionist theoretician A. D. Gordon. Tsili Doleve-Gandelman focuses on the Jewish National Fund's ambivalent role in inculcating Zionist identity. Yael Zerubavel compares two classic short stories to see how political, social and ecological themes have matured in Israeli literature.

Shaul Cohen writes about "The Aggressive Nature of [Tree-] Planting" and its implications for land use, ecology, and the peace process.

Contemporary "Eco-Judaism"

The third "branch" in TET is the weightiest. It includes classic midrashim applied to today's environmental problems; a strident neo-mystical eco-feminist re-reading of Genesis and Psalms; a piece entitled "Nebuchadnezzar, Nahman's *The Cripple*, and *Groundhog Day*;" and a midrash on a midrash which locates the Messiah in the very act of tree-planting (respectively from Ismar Schorsch, Alix Pirani, Howard Solomon and Rami Shapiro).

David Seidenberg nicely articulates

the book's overall theme in calling kabbalah's "unity of human and tree . . . not just a metaphor for how important trees are to us, but a meditation on the idea that both trees and human creatures are patterned after the life of the cosmos."

In one uniquely powerful passage, Naomi Hyman recalls looking up at the grand, imperiled redwoods among which she and Waskow were joining in a civilly-disobedient Tu B'Shvat seder. "What would a Torah scroll be like that had these *eitzim* [trees] as its *eitzim* [poles]?" she mused. And she answered, "Each of us would be just the right size to be one letter in such a Torah scroll!" They conclude: "That is what we are, of course: each one of us a letter in God's great Torah scroll of all life on the planet."

From Tu B'Shvat to Yah B'Shvat

The centerpiece of the anthology is Ari Elon's roller-coaster ride "Through Tu B'Shvat to Yah B'Shvat." The article notes four types of *tikkun*/repair ("social, theological, national-historical, ecological") and two types of commandments ("*mitzvot* that hang on the sky, *mitzvot* that hang on the land"). We travel from 20th-century Israel's infantilization of Tu B'Shvat, to 2nd-century Israel's proto-mystical Talmudist, Shimon Bar Yochai, who, with his son, "is in urgent need of a lot of *tikkun*."

Elon seeks "a vital and relevant mixture of political-practical *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) and verbal-spiritual *tikkun olam* . . . [in order to] get a

kind of Tu B'Shvat that moves between kabbalist believers who plant trees in the sky and Zionist believers who plant letters in the ground." This one-of-a-kind article is exhaustive, exhausting and exhilarating.

Resources and Reprise

The volume concludes with a hundred pages of excellent resources for Tu B'Shvat observance. Earlier the book had broken new ground with eco-feminist perspectives, featuring original poetry (from Marcia Falk and Marge Piercy among others), and even a chart of the moon's phases by the late David Wolfe-Blank. Now it opens up even further to include recipes, songs and chants, curricular suggestions for every grade level (in both formal and informal education), pedagogical tips for teaching outdoors, meditations, and even cartoons. Everett Gendler shows that to encounter a tree is to be inspired by it and to protect it; Jonathan Wolf and Richard Schwartz describe the Tu B'Shvat diet as not only vegetarian (and thus environmentally sound) but vegan.

Arthur Waskow concludes TET with a reprise of his opening essay. His powerful, prophetic conclusion: "Tu B'Shvat approaches once again. The trees of the world are in danger; the poor of the world are in need; the teachers and celebrants of the world are at risk. Give! Or the flow of abundance will choke on the friction of its own outpouring, and God's Own Self will choke on our refusal of compassion."

Additional Insights

Both *Trees, Earth, and Torah* and *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* deserve to be read by everyone concerned with the Earth and/or with Judaism. Among the few other books and numerous articles in this field, two deserve mention here; both have connections to the Reconstructionist movement.

One is a recent article in *Tikkun* magazine (Sept/Oct 1999) by Arthur Green, "Eco-Kabbalah Spirituality." Green invokes kabbalah in his search for "a Judaism unafraid to proclaim the holiness of the natural world." The *Shema* and its blessings are central in this search: "Life's meaning is to be found in discovering the One, and that means realizing the ultimate unity of all being" (p. 38). And seeing ourselves as profoundly connected to the rest of Creation, we may just step back from destroying it.

The other needed resource is already in many rabbinic and synagogue bookshelves: *To Till and To Tend*, published in 1994 by COEJL (Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life). COEJL is the most broad-based coalition in today's Jewish community, enjoying support from every movement and most national organizations.

Another important anthology, also edited by Arthur Waskow, should be coming later this year from Jewish Lights Publishing — *Earth & Earthling, Adam & Adamah: Jewish Teachings on Ecology*. This volume will include reprints of many important articles, as well as a number of new contributions from Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Alon Tal,

Evan Eisenberg, Naomi Hyman, and many more.

R-ECO-nstructionism

The Reconstructionist movement played a crucial role in the early years of Jewish environmentalism. Today, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) and the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF) are sponsors of COEJL's important work of Jewish environmental education, leadership development, organization and activism.

Yet despite the many clear ideological connections between Reconstructionism and ecology, institutionally our movement is hardly taking a lead — yet we can, and should. We would do well to follow the lead of Miami Congregation Beth Or, where, as Rabbi Rami Shapiro describes, "[we] take our congregation 'on the road' and hold our Shabbat morning service closest to Tu B'Shvat at a site connected with endangered species or environmental crisis . . . We have committed our community and ourselves to eco-kashrut (ethical consuming), *bal tashit* (ending waste) and *tza'ar ba'alei hayyim* (protecting animals) . . . and accepting our personal and communal responsibilities for the health and diversity of our neighborhoods and our world."

We might also follow the lead of many Reconstructionist synagogues (including Maryland's Adat Shalom) in establishing Environment Committees. Kehillat Israel in Los Angeles offers numerous environmental projects as part of its Tikkun Olam program.

Philadelphia's Mishkan Shalom gives ecological and social sustainability top billing in its statement of principles. St. Louis' Reconstructionist Havurah has taken the lead in organizing the local COEJL affiliate organization.

Environmental issues are only going to become more pressing in the years ahead. For outreach and for community relations, we should redouble our efforts in this vital field. For the sake of our own survival, we should do the same. Ecology should be high on our Jewish and Reconstructionist agendas, simply because it's an integral part of our tradition — one that today, more than ever, requires our attention.

In Genesis 2:15, the archetypal humans enter the archetypal ecosystem of Gan Eden “*l'ovdah ul'shomrah*” — to serve the land, and to protect it. May we today live up to this sacred responsibility.

1. Likewise in the larger world: Simone de Beauvoir's 1954 *The Second Sex* prefigured the rise of modern, or “second-stage” feminism. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* gave it new impetus in 1962, and by 1970 there was a full-fledged movement. Another woman sowed environmental seeds in 1962: Rachel Carson, publishing *Silent Spring*. Though Earth Day 1970 scored important legislative achievements and raised much consciousness, today's environmental movement found its stride only in the 1980s.

2. Shira Decker's analogy of childbirth with being in nature comes close; yet even that one essay streamrolls over such vital concerns as sustainability, sprawl and global equity as it extols a rural lifestyle.

3. This is one place where I agree with Manfred Gerstenfeld, who also wrote a recent book entitled *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment: Mapping and Analysis* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 1988, see p. 75). Even without its noticeable errors and biases, this book would remain of limited interest outside the scholarly community.