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Storied Lives in a Living Tradition: Women Rabbis and Jewish Community in 21st Century New Mexico

Miria Kano

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Storied Lives in a Living Tradition:

Women Rabbis and Jewish Community in 21st Century New Mexico

by

MIRIA KANO

B.U.S., University Studies, University of New Mexico, 1999
M.A., Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 2002

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctorate of Philosophy

Anthropology

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2013
DEDICATION

For our beautiful Hannah with love --

Your brief life and enduring memories will always be a blessing.
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ABSTRACT

Between 2001 and 2012, I collaborated with Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Rabbi Malka Drucker, Rabbi Shefa Gold, Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, and Rabbi Deborah Brin to investigate the challenges and opportunities afforded by women’s recent attainment of rabbinic ordination. As members of the first and second generations of women rabbis, they offer unique perspectives on the recent histories of both American and Jewish cultures. This dissertation is a narrative exploration of how these rabbis came of age, cultivated self-understanding, chose careers as spiritual leaders, crafted public identities, and formed communities in 20th/21st Century American Jewish societies.

This research focuses on the role of autobiographical story construction and performance in the transformation of rabbinic leadership, and examines the ways in which these stories provide new models for people seeking contemporary or alternative Jewish practice and connection. I question too the ways in which these stories foster Jewish identity and community in two New Mexico congregations, Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom, the Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism, as well as in the expanding margins of less traditional, electronically mediated Jewish communities, Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom, and Kol Zimra.
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New Mexico’s Living Tradition: Women Rabbis at the Center of 21st Century Liberal Judaisms

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PREFACE

Between 2001 and 2012, I collaborated with Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Rabbi Malka Drucker, Rabbi Shefa Gold, Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, and Rabbi Deborah Brin. As members of the first and second generations of women rabbis to practice in the United States, these five women offer unique perspectives on the recent histories of both American and Jewish cultures. They have experienced the opportunities and the challenges that many women in these societies have faced over the second half of the 20th century. They have also experienced pressures specifically relating to their choices to receive rabbinic ordination, an option that only became available to women in 1972. While I anticipated such experiences to play significant roles in the stories each rabbi conveyed, I did not anticipate the importance of the form and content in each rabbi’s story. The rabbis, as practiced storytellers, seemed fully aware of the ways in which their narrative selections, story form and content would be received by their intended audiences, and were careful to build their stories of profession and community in ways that evoked authenticity, integrity, insight, and inspiration.

Through this work I have had the fortune of working with five remarkable women whose experiences and stories have recorded, transformed, and created Jewish communities in New Mexico. I have a tremendous respect for each storyteller. In our collaborations, I have benefited from their knowledge, dedication, patience, and passion. Our conversations have changed my understanding of Judaism, shaped my insight into American history, and inspired me toward social justice and activism.
Storied Lives in a Living Tradition: Women Rabbis and Jewish Community in 21st Century New Mexico is a narrative exploration of how five women came of age, developed self-understanding, crafted public identities, and professionalized through their experiences of a transforming Judaism and drastically changing American society. In this dissertation I consider the role of story construction and performance in transforming Jewish leadership, as well as in creating and maintaining identity and community.

Following Chapter 1, “Introduction: The Storytellers: The Storytelling,” I situate the first part of this three section dissertation with regards to key historical and intellectual transformations that allowed women’s access to the rabbinate and Jewish spiritual leadership, in Chapter 2, “A Brief History of Women’s Quest for Ordination in a Shifting American Jewish Landscape.” The chapters that follow are oriented historically, and the stories presented are organized chronologically: Chapter 3, “Spiritual Callings: Identity and Cohesion in the Life Stories of Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Rabbi Malka Drucker;” Chapter 4, “Growing up ‘Jewish:’ Body, Relation and Authenticity in the Life Stories of Three Women Rabbis;” Chapter 5, “Education, Activism, Leadership: Stories at the Intersection of Personal and Social Histories;” Chapter 6, “Spiritual Journeys: The Sovereign Self and the Path to Purpose;” Chapter 7, “Creating New Judaism(s) in New Mexico: Performing Community at Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism,” Chapter 8, “Traditionalizing the Modern Spiritual Seeker: Tying Innovation to Tradition through Autobiography;” and Chapter 9, “Making Meaningful Judaism(s) for a Capricious World: Imagined Contexts for Spiritual Community in Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom and Kol Zimra.” I conclude with a few thoughts on the significance of the rabbis’ storied identities and the Jewish
communities they create in, “New Mexico’s Living Tradition: Women Rabbis at the Center of 21st Century Liberal Judaism(s).”

Four of the chapters in this dissertation are likewise ordered chronologically: Chapters 3 and 4 from the point at which I began my collaborations with each rabbi, and Chapter 7 and 9 based upon the founding of the rabbis’ various communities. The stories of Chapters 5, 6 and 8 have been organized according to similarities in stories and experiences. Each chapter provides an assembly of stories, the rabbis’ and my own, as well as contextual materials drawn from literary sources and websites. I have also included, when appropriate, materials from field observations as well as notes from conversations and interviews with members in each of the communities.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

The Storytellers: The Storytelling

I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico in August 1997 in the wake of a family crisis. Having always felt somehow different within the family in which I grew up, my most deeply felt questions were acknowledged, when under duress due to my grandmother’s illness, my mother was forced to admit that my curly dark hair, distinctly different nose, and curvy, short physique, were gifts from the biological father I had never known. Astounded, yet relieved, I began the search for my biological father and the mysterious origins of my difference.

I met my father the next year, holding my breath as I noted our similarly laughing eyes and smile. Over drinks, I learned that he was Jewish, and that his parents, both Holocaust survivors, left Russia following their families’ devastation. After answering what must have felt like a thousand questions, my father, laughed, and said, “You definitely get the questioning from our side of the family.”

I began to explore Jewish history, ritual, and law through on-line websites, books and periodicals. By the time I relocated to Albuquerque for graduate school in 2000, my appreciation for the religion and culture had grown, and my searches seemed too peripheral and abstracted. I desired direct experiences with Judaism, and felt the need to be part of a community. Filled with new questions, and needing space in which to explore them, I began graduate school at the University of New Mexico and started teaching in the Women Studies Department. In this new space and place, I engaged with feminist and
anthropological literature. When a professor asked, “What do you think you want to study?” I merged two of my loves, and blurted, “I want to study Jewish storytelling.”

An English professor, Dr. Janet Gaines, told me about Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, a nationally known storyteller and the leader of the Renewal\(^1\) community in Albuquerque. I asked Lynn to speak in my class on the issues of women in contemporary religion, and she invited me to her synagogue, Congregation Nahalat Shalom. Overcoming my tendencies toward introversion, I attended B’nai Mitzvah classes at the Rabbi’s house, became a regular at Shabbat services, and having been raised Catholic, had a somewhat casual conversion ceremony the following year.

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Lynn, a Muslim Imam named Abdul Rauf Campos-Marquetti, and more than two hundred people, met at the synagogue for a Peace Walk from the synagogue to the Islamic Center of New Mexico. Lynn stood at the front doors leading songs and offering prayers with other religious leaders for peace between our respective communities. Engaged as I was, I could not help but overhear the woman standing beside me as she turned to her husband and muttered, “What in the world is she wearing?”

\(^1\) Jewish Renewal emerged in the 1960s/1970s when American Jews inspired by neo-Hassidism, desired more hands-on, participatory, and intimate forms of Jewish community, social and racial justice in efforts of peace, and equality between women and men driven by insights from feminist Judaism. In the 1980s/1990s, meditation, both in Eastern and Jewish meditative traditions, and Environmentalism were also incorporated into the Renewal ideology (adapted from an article by Rabbi Arthur Waskow - [https://theshalomcenter.org/node/167](https://theshalomcenter.org/node/167) - Retrieved on March 25, 2013).
I looked back at Lynn, took in her white garb, a linen tunic with fringes over cropped red pants, bulky socks and running shoes. She wore a white bowler type hat with a large flower in the front over long dark locks. Her attire seemed simply a reflection of a natural eccentricity, and my curiosity about the comment and the rabbi stirred. As we walked the eight miles, I listened. A few people in passing cars shouted obscenities, while others within our group commented about the rabbi’s voice, appearance, relationship status, and rabbinic focus. I realized that even in the midst of the beautiful, important and moving ritual, the rabbi herself, and not necessarily the event or the colorful tales she spun, was the focus of much attention. I was familiar with the struggles that many women experienced when performing in professions previously under the exclusive dominion of men, and I imagined the same to be true for women rabbis.

**Women Rabbis**

Women in the rabbinate have been a topic in Jewish discussion for more than a century. In the 1850s, when leaders of Reform Judaism removed the gender divide that prevented men and women from sitting side by side in synagogues, the discussion of women in positions of religious leadership began but was squelched by Jewish patriarchs (Nadell 1998). Nevertheless, Reform Judaism, like the more recent branches of Reconstructionism and Renewal Judaism, held that contemporary culture and morality had precedence over traditional Jewish law and custom. This ideological shift encouraged liberal Jews to modify Jewish practice actively responding to the social and historical developments of the day. Coupled with the political fervor provoked by the Women’s and

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2 A 19th Century religious movement born of ideals from the Haskalah and European Enlightenment. Rabbis Gustavus Poznanski and Isaac Mayer Wise inspired its growth in the United States (circa 1836-1850). Modeled largely on Protestant services, Reform Jewish services included use of English instead of Hebrew, gender integration in synagogue, and choirs, to name but a few of the factors that distinguished it from Euro-American Jewish Orthodoxy.
Civil Rights Movements, progressive students’ and anti-war movements, as well as the radical and Jewish feminist movements, Jewish women reengaged in the leadership discussion and pushed through the hegemonic barriers imposed by rabbinic schools, and the first American woman rabbi, Sally Priesand, was ordained in 1972. The first six women ordained in the 1970s are now joined by more than nine hundred women rabbis in the U.S. alone, causing significant changes in American Judaism. The women rabbis participating in this study represent both first and second generations of ordained women rabbis. This dissertation draws upon stories that are currently being circulated by Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Malka Drucker, Shefa Gold, Deborah Brin, and Min Kantrowitz about their choices to live, work and create Jewish practice in, and/or from, this beautiful, but somewhat marginal space in the Jewish world, New Mexico.

**Jewish New Mexico**

The New Mexico landscape is promoted by the Department of Tourism as having a “rich heritage, tri-cultural people, exciting outdoor activities, great food, world-renowned art, wonderful festivals, and [a] gorgeous climate.” While much of this gloss is true, and designed to draw visitors to the state’s tourist attractions, it nonetheless conceals the more complex social realities of this space and place. In short, this myth of tri-racial harmony, negates, among other things, a distinctive Jewish history dating back to the fifteenth century. Jews arrived in New Mexico in three primary waves. The first wave of Jewish immigration comes in the stories of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who left their homelands in the fifteenth century, adopted outwardly Christian characteristics, and have become known as Crypto-Jews, or Hidden Jews. A second group of Jewish immigrants arrived from Germany in the mid-1800s along with other German pioneers, erecting the
first synagogue in 1886 in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Albuquerque then became the Jewish center of New Mexico in the 1897 with the formation of Congregation Albert, a Reform temple located in downtown Albuquerque on the corner of Seventh and Gold. The final wave of Jewish immigration occurred after the Second World War. The Jewish population exploded during that time jumping from 1179 in 1937, to 1500 in 1955. These numbers have increased steadily over the years, and according to Sam Sokolove, the Director of the Jewish Federation in Albuquerque, there are currently between 9000 and 11,000 Jews currently living in New Mexico.

That said, 11,000 is small number of people, certainly less than 1% of the overall New Mexico population. While there are Jewish communities smattered across the United States, the larger communities remain in the urban centers of the East and West coast, causing many rabbis to take up residence there. The women in this study, however, have chosen New Mexico. Not just a space with the interesting Jewish past I have just mentioned, New Mexico has also been a site for women’s re-creation and challenge to existing social order since the early 20th Century. An often romanticized, frontier space with simultaneous expressions of modernity and ‘tradition,’ New Mexico provided a new space for many Anglo women to imagine realities free of existent gender expectations. Anthropologists such as Elsie Clews Parsons and Gladys Reichard, authors in the vein of Willa Cather and Elizabeth Sergeant, and artists like Georgia O’Keeffe embraced the spaciousness of the Southwest as a landscape in which to invent or reinvent themselves, often responding to the constricting pressures of their East Coast influences. In this light, New Mexico provides a unique backdrop in which to consider the inventiveness of women leaders who are not so directly affected by the pressures of more entrenched,
traditional Jewish societies, and who through life story and community building likewise engage in self-reinvention, recreating leadership roles and transforming Jewish tradition and community in New Mexico.

**The Storytellers**

After working with Lynn for more than a year and shifting my focus from Jewish folk storytelling to the life stories told by Jewish storytellers, I approached Rabbis Malka Drucker, Shefa Gold, Deborah Brin, and Min Kantrowitz. They agreed to participate in what was to become my dissertation project, an exploration of the life and professional stories New Mexico women rabbis tell as they practice spiritual leadership and build alternative communities in contemporary New Mexico. The following introductions are presented in the order in which we began our collaborations.

**Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb** received her Bachelor of Science degree from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1972. Lynn was in New York studying for the rabbinate from the fall of 1973 to the summer of 1981, first at Hebrew Union College, then at the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as privately with various scholars and rabbis. Lynn began to work as a rabbi in the fall of 1973 with Temple Beth Or of the Deaf, in 1974 with the Hebrew Association of the Deaf and in 1975 with Mishkan A Shul, one of the first experimental shuls in the country that met in lofts in New York City. After years of practicing as a pulpit rabbi, Lynn received *semicha*\(^3\), private ordination, in 1981 from Rabbis Zalman Schachter and Everett Gendler, leaders

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\(^3\) Literally “leaning on of hands,” *semicha* refers to an ordination process for Jewish rabbis. It is meant for established rabbis to convey rabbinic authority upon the rabbinic candidate according to Jewish law and custom.
in Renewal Judaism. Following her ordination, Lynn moved to New Mexico, founding Congregation Nahalat Shalom in 1982.

At Congregation Nahalat Shalom, Lynn used her love of theater, storytelling and teaching to build a community focused on discovering and exploring Jewish identity and heritage through the arts. She continued to engage her Jewish practice with considerations of the larger world, and explored Jewish feminism in her book, *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Revisioning of Judaism*. Lynn was instrumental in developing a Sephardic Jewish service to reflect the diverse Jewish cultural heritage in New Mexico, and has written and spoken extensively on the issues surrounding the Jewish/Palestinian conflict, domestic violence, and peace work, particularly among Jewish youth. Lynn left Congregation Nahalat Shalom in 2005 to focus on her writing and developing Interfaith Inventions, such as peace camps designed to challenge interfaith youth to face differences, consider the effects of violence and to engage in discussions about global concerns.

**Rabbi Malka Drucker**, founder of HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism in Santa Fe was ordained in 1998 by the Academy for Jewish Religion, a transdenominational seminary. Malka has served in Conservative⁴, Reconstructionist⁵, and Reform congregations. She is the author of nearly twenty books including the award winning

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⁴ A 19th Century religious movement started in Germany in response to the pull between Orthodox tradition and changes brought by Jewish Reformers.

⁵ Started by Mordecai M. Kaplan between 1920 and 1940, this American based Jewish movement views Judaism as a living and evolving community. Reconstructionists embrace theological diversity, progress, communal decision making and advocates the use of traditional Jewish sources.

**Rabbi Shefa Gold** is a leader in Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal and received her ordination both from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and from Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. She is the director of C-DEEP: The Center for Devotional, Energy and Ecstatic Practice in Jemez Springs, New Mexico. Shefa composes and performs spiritual music, has produced ten albums, and her liturgies have been published in several prayer books. She teaches workshops and retreats on the theory and art of Chanting, Devotional Healing, Spiritual Community Building, Meditation, and trains Chant Leaders in *Kol Zimra*, a two year program for rabbis, cantors and lay leaders. She is on the faculty of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. Shefa combines her grounding in Judaism with a background in Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Native American spiritual traditions and considers her work to serve as a spiritual bridge in the celebration of the shared path of devotion. She authored "Torah Journeys: The Inner Path to the
Promised Land" (2006) and "In The Fever of Love: An Illumination of the Song of Songs" (2008).

**Rabbi Min Kantrowitz** was the Director of the Jewish Community Chaplaincy Program of Jewish Family Service of New Mexico at the time this dissertation was written. In this capacity, Min provided spiritual support and pastoral care services to thousands of unaffiliated Jews. Min directs the Albuquerque Community Chevre Kaddisha⁶, facilitates grief support groups and conducts Healing Groups for Jewish survivors of domestic abuse. Min is also author of *Counting the Omer: A Kabbalistic Meditation Guide* (2010). She is a sought after speaker and teacher, having conducted services, workshops and lectures in Europe, California, Montana, Arizona, and across New Mexico.

Min received her Rabbinic Ordination in May 2004 from the Academy of Jewish Religion in Los Angeles. In addition, she holds a Bachelors Degree in Psychology and Masters Degree in Psychology, Architecture, and Rabbinic Studies, as well as a Masters of Science in Jewish Studies.

**Rabbi Deborah J. Brin**, a Minneapolis native, is a fifth generation American Jew. Deborah’s rabbinic career has taken her in many directions, as a geriatric chaplain, hospice chaplain, college chaplain and pulpit rabbi. She has worked in Philadelphia, Toronto, Grinnell and Albuquerque, helping to create vibrant Jewish life by connecting people to each other and their shared traditions. Deborah works to bridge

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⁶ A group of women and men who see that the bodies of Jews are kept safe from desecration and prepared for burial according to *Halacha* (Jewish law).
differences and increase inclusiveness in all of the communities in which she has served without diminishing the diversity of the people with whom she works. She helped establish a community *mikveh*⁷ in Toronto, and started a *Chevre Kaddisha* Society in Albuquerque. She is the founding President of the Rabbinical and Cantorial Association of Albuquerque [RACA].

One of the first 100 women rabbis to be ordained, and one of the first lesbian rabbis, Deborah holds a Bachelor's Degree in Religious Studies from Macalester College in St. Paul, MN, a Master's Degree in Pastoral Counseling from La Salle University in Philadelphia, and a Master of Hebrew Letters and Ordination from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pennsylvania.

Concerned with health and healing, Deborah is also a licensed massage therapist and author. She co-edited the poetry section for the Reconstructionist prayer book *KOL HANESHAMAH: Shabbat Vehagim*, published an article chronicling her experience leading the first women’s prayer service and Torah reading at the Western Wall in, *Women of the Wall*; and wrote “The Use of Rituals in Grieving for a Miscarriage or Stillbirth”, in *From Menarche to Menopause: The Female Body in Feminist Therapy*.

**The Ethnographer – storying the storytellers**

When I began discussions of this project with my professors, colleagues, and friends, I was met with a few questioning glances that seemed to say, “But aren’t you Jewish?” At one point, a professor of Anthropology and Judaism asked directly, “If you are studying your own culture how is this anthropology?” In response, I admitted, “I wasn’t raised Jewish,” adding, “and I’ve never been a rabbi, so it’s new to me.”

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⁷ Ritual bath.
In fact, the structure and process of this dissertation responded more to the norms of our shared feminist community than a mutual ‘Jewishness.’ When I began this dissertation research, I assumed that that these women stepping into positions of religious leadership formerly occupied exclusively by men would change Judaism based solely on their gendered experiences in and understandings of the world. This belief, while not clearly defined or rooted in observation, guided my initial questions, and in many ways the stories the rabbis chose to tell, as women who, to various degrees, share this positionality.

In our initial conversations, I attempted to establish a collaborative process. The rabbis would have the opportunity to read, clarify, and omit elements of their stories if they felt they were not being represented accurately. While the analysis would be open for discussion and debate, I would still determine the final analytic interpretations but would note areas in which their interpretations differed from my own. In this way, the project became explicitly dialogic.

The elicited stories were recorded in private spaces, such as in the rabbis’ homes. In these interview moments, the storyteller and I faced one another over a tape recorder with our social and political positions and ensuing expectations or goals on the table. Though the rabbis and I share many commonalities, such as education, feminism, liberal politics, whiteness (although many Jews take exception to this classification), and an appreciation of Judaism, our differences are substantial. I did not attend synagogue as a child, grew up in a different generation, and have different educational experiences. I am positioned as somewhat of an insider as a half Jewish woman, but feel frequently like an outsider as a convert who still struggles with the Hebrew parts of religious services, and
an anthropologist whose task at times requires distance and observation (see Myerhoff 1978, Kondo 1990 and Narayan 1997 for discussions on this point). Both positions are problematic, the outsider aspect due to an ethnographer’s unfounded assumptions, and an insider’s due to his or her tendency as Jones contends to “depend too much on his own background, his own sentiments, his desires for what is good for his people” (1970:256).

Even so, we share a common academic language, a desire to understand and influence the world around us, and an understanding of our accountability to one another and to a larger audience. These rabbis agreed to participate in my research, and know that their identities will be transparent to readers. They recognize the utility of our work together, and view our interactions as a new way to circulate their perspectives on contemporary issues to different audiences.

**Theoretical Approaches to Stories of Self and Identity**

The rabbis whose stories are presented here navigate multiple cultural identities: conceptual and embodied private senses of ‘self,’ and public identities as women, family members, Jews, Americans, New Mexicans, rabbis, teachers, authors, friends, and more. As they tell stories about their experiences across these intersecting identity vectors, they create tapestries of histories, both personal and social. Stories such as these, that fit within the life history/life story genre, have been the focus for many social scientists.

Originally used as a means of gathering information that was considered factual or historical to construct a record of events, life history research, like all anthropological

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8 Franz Boas and his students collected life histories to gather information that was factual, historical, and capable of “reconstructing a veridical record of events” for the indigenous tribes they encountered (Peacock and Holland 1993:369). This limited use of life history for salvage anthropology was later critiqued by Arnold Krupat due to its tendency to “preserve the material and ceremonial (but not the social and political) culture of the ‘vanishing race’” (1985:18). Krupat’s critique indicated the limitations of the life history method of the day, as well as alluding to the colonial history of the anthropological discipline.
tools, has changed and developed under subsequent scholars’ deployment. Pierre Bourdieu cautioned theorists about the illusory quality of life history narratives in which “coherence” reflects a particular convention of the social world, in which a ‘normal’ identity is “understood as the constancy to oneself of a responsible being that is predictable, or at least intelligible, in the way of a well-constructed history” (1987:2-3).

This conventional quality of life history narration has been considered from the perspectives of both authors and narrators as in Sidonie Smith’s (1987) work which she explored how life histories rely upon specific literary traditions to publish the oral tales, or Julie Cruikshank’s (1990) account in which she observed that life history narrators tell stories using familiar cultural storytelling styles and tropes.

The position and responsibility of the life historian likewise provide cause for concern. Through his work with Tuhami, his Moroccan consultant, Vincent Crapanzano (1980) became aware of the complex power dynamic that exists between a narrator intent on impressing a social scientist who is more than the recipient of the narrative, but is in fact the analyst, editor and publicist of the textual product. Feminist life historians have also been concerned with such power differentials. Ruth Behar goes to great lengths to keep Esperanza’s “voice centrally located in the text” as she debates the ways in which she can portray her collaborator with an integrity that adequately reflects their time spent together (1993:270). Similarly, Gelya Frank (2000) grapples with the perceptions, both conscious and unconscious, that influence the ways in which she interprets the life and stories of Diane DeVries, whose life experiences as a quadriplegic, while normal to Diane, are distinctly different and even incomprehensible at times to Frank, an able-bodied anthropologist.
Such critiques, regarding power and position of storyteller and life story author, are joined by those of James Peacock and Dorothy Holland (1993), who critique the reductionist aspect of the method for failing to take into account the nuances and complexity of life histories. I too am mindful that “the individual self is fragmented rather than unitary and fixed” (Peacock and Holland 1993:368). While I attempt to avoid creating coherent stories in the homogenizing and normalizing senses employed by Bourdieu (1987) and Peacock and Holland (1993), I find Charlotte Linde’s (1993) use of “coherence” as a means of gaining insight into a teller’s purposeful narration to be a key organizational strategy in these sometimes disconnected tales. Linde observes that the middle-class professionals who participated in her life history research often self-edited in response to expectations for coherence. Many would gloss over dates and times to explain gaps in their storied resumes or use character traits, such as ‘I always had a propensity for,’ to explain life choices that did not necessarily follow the common sense rules held by the listener (Linde 1993). For these reasons, the seeming coherence of these stories derives from the double ‘telling’ of these tales and the conscious and often unconscious editing processes of both the storyteller and the anthropologist.

The rabbis’ stories I present here are told most frequently along chronological lines, yet at times are more recognizably organized by theme. They are told with the teller’s profession in mind and are not intended to be comprehensive accounts of the rabbis’ total lives. They are instead selected memories articulated by the narrators to describe important events and occurrences with regard to their present positions. In the printed narratives, I have attempted stay true to the each rabbi’s intended tale, and have only made minor editorial revisions to eliminate verbal pauses. Much like the middle-
class professionals in Linde’s study, the rabbis frequently omit specific dates, class markers, and locations, narrative choices that I have honored for the sake of maintaining the story cohesion and aesthetic choices they have made.

**Theoretical Approach to Story Performance and Audience**

This research also emerged through my understanding that the rabbis’ personal stories were not told in a vacuum: they were performed in social interactions, and gained meaning as they came to exist between the narrator and listener. Richard Bauman describes performance as the “interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of participants, within the context of particular situations” (1977:38). Simply put, performance involves the ability to communicate effectively to an intended audience, and to respond appropriately within a given context. Within Western culture, life stories are “an elemental, ubiquitous, and consequential part of daily life” (Langellier and Peterson in Madison and Hamera 2006:151). Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson suggest that “personal narrative is performed everywhere: in conversation, in print, on radio, television, and stage, and over the Internet” (in Madison and Hamera 2006:151).

At one level, the rabbis performed their life stories for me in conversations across dining room tables, desks, and living room furnishings. As the audience, I was the ethnographer and researcher, the woman with the audio recorder, the acknowledged co-editor, and co-author of their printed life stories. I was also a new member of their congregational audiences. As the rabbis were aware of my intent to publish their stories, these narratives were also told for the intended yet unknown reader, who may or may not share cultural, linguistic, religious and/or generational similarities. As Bakhtin reminds
us, audiences hear in a way particular to them (1981:259-422). Keeping this in mind, the multiple roles I played simultaneously shaped the context and structure of each of these narratives, even though I have made a conscious effort to stick closely to the actual narratives created by the rabbis.

Susan Sered suggests that women in positions of religious leadership, like the women participating in this project, are accustomed to performing or recounting their “religious autobiographies” to craft themselves as spiritual leaders in professions that were previously held exclusively by men (1994:220). These rabbis perform their stories in many different spaces for various audiences: individuals, groups of friends, members of their congregations, or for a multitude of other people and circumstances that they come in contact with over the courses of their daily lives. Some stories are scripted, others emergent. Yet, in each circumstance, there exists a connection between the rabbi telling the story and the person or persons listening.

In Suzanne Oakdale’s study of Kayabi leaders, she finds that among Kayabi, “ritual genres of autobiography are a medium through which experiences can circulate between people” (2005:173). She suggests that the narrators reference their experiences of specific times and places, giving guidance to their audiences by providing them with exemplars about how they have learned to live healthy and well, participate in society, and navigate the challenges of life. Oakdale’s observation seems immediately relevant at the level of standardized performance in which the rabbis lead rituals based on the conventions of Jewish tradition, such as Shabbat services, bar and bat mitzvahs, and High Holy Day services, rituals that provide space for life story narratives about the rabbis’ spiritual journeys, social commentaries, or other messages that they wish to communicate.
to members of their congregations. In these venues, a rabbi’s constructed identity, as a spiritual leader of a community, as a woman, and as a storyteller, are interconnected, leveraged, and performed for narrative goals such as developing intimacy, eliciting emotions, tapping into memory, swaying opinions, or stimulating actions in those who listen.

Even so, performance does not stop with the immediate effects of the spoken words. Performance studies scholar Judith Hamer suggests that there is a “relationship between performance and cultural process” (in Madison and Hamer 2006:46). This ‘relationship’ is evident in the stories of women who have stepped into the role of rabbi, a role with a history of male dominance. Many tell stories of creating new roles for Jewish women, revisioning patriarchal texts, and developing rituals which have previously excluded women. While these cultural innovations are captured in their performed life stories, there is also a way in which the rabbis themselves become part of the performance through performativity. Performativity here refers to “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1988:519) yet differs from narrative performance in its reference to the historical situation of the performer’s personal experiences, identity, and social connections. According to Judith Butler, through performativity one’s “body comes to bear cultural meanings” (1988:520). Performance then becomes a space for considering what life stories ‘do’ as in Oakdale’s work, and what life story narrators ‘become,’ as in the approaches of Hamera and Butler. My approach to the rabbis and their stories is greatly influenced by these scholars, as well as the late Clifford Geertz. Here, I look at how the rabbis’ stories become “models of and models for” behavior and cultural change in New Mexico’s Jewish communities (Geertz 1973:93).
The Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I provide a brief history of Eastern European and American Judaisms, intellectual movements, and social movements that led to significant transformations in Jewish denominationalism, religious practice, and Jewish gender roles. Within this historic context, I examine the ways in which Jewish women negotiated the tensions between secularization and acculturation, traditionalism and modernity, and orthodoxy and religious reform to challenge the existing social order and to seek ordination as rabbis, paving the way for the women rabbis participating in this study.

Chapter 3 highlights the coming of age stories of Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Rabbi Malka Drucker. With an eye towards Linde’s (1993) notion of “coherence,” I explore the ways in which the rabbis fashion coherent accounts from disparate stories of family, gender, religion, politics, and secular worldviews. I consider the degree to which these coherent tales are built using Western storytelling conventions and understandings of selfhood as familiar literary structures that enable the rabbis to construct foundations for the women they have become, as well as to foreshadow their eventual choices to seek careers, and to communicate their experiences and ideas effectively in the formerly male-dominated rabbinate. I examine how each rabbi highlights specific personal and spiritual developments that demonstrate their potentials to relate to their anticipated audiences through shared senses of moral, social, and civic responsibilities.

In Chapter 4, I explore the ways in which Rabbis Shefa Gold, Min Kantrowitz and Deborah Brin tell stories about growing up Jewish by creating embodied ‘selves’ set in relationships with others, such as family members, friends, and teachers. I consider the ways in which the ‘storied selves’ become active in the story, through references to the
body, communication of emotion and development of other characters. In these tales of individuation, the storyteller’s reflexivity, constructed dialogues and proximity to others, fosters authenticity, as the more mature, self-aware storyteller is able to narrate youthful experiences that demonstrate consistency, intention, and motivation, as they anticipate the public audience and their needs to understand who the storytellers are, and how they came to be the women, and leaders, they are today.

Chapter 5 centers on the relationship between the personal stories that Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Rabbi Deborah Brin tell about their experiences in the educational milieus of 1970s U.S. society, and their professional development in a society undergoing drastic shifts in social and political priorities. Following a brief discussion of the sociopolitical contexts of post-World War America, and the growing momentum of the Civil and Women’s Rights Movements, I explore the stories each rabbi tells about their experiences of the progressive student movement, anti-war movement, radical feminist movement, and Jewish feminist movement. I query what their stories reveal about the transforming gender roles, social networks, political activism, and religious plurality that influenced their personal/professional developments, as well as the communities in which they practice today.

In Chapter 6, I engage stories told by Rabbi Shefa Gold, Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, and Rabbi Malka Drucker, to explore how social and political transformations in post-World War II America changed the ways people viewed, and continue to view, religion and community participation. Employing Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan’s concept of the “sovereign self” (2009), I read the rabbis’ narratives with an eye toward how each woman crafts her own spiritual journey. I reflect on their very personal storied
experiences of Jewish spirituality, and seek to understand how their own searches for spiritual meaning allow them to be timely leaders for others who similarly embrace sovereign notions of spiritual experience, turning away from adherence to dogma and social/community obligations, and moving towards their own personal, fluid and multifaceted experiences of a “meaningful” Judaism (2000:31).

For Chapter 7, I move from stories of individuals to stories of two brick and mortar communities created and shaped by the leadership of Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker: Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism in Santa Fe. The texts in this chapter are drawn from ethnographic observations, community interviews, and stories told by the rabbis in social and ritual contexts, such as from the bimah for their High Holy Day sermons. Applying linguistic and performative approaches, such as those used by Mikhail Bakhtin (1987), Victor Turner (1987), and Suzanne Oakdale (2005), I search for understanding about how the performed life stories, circulated between the rabbi and those in her audience in ways that help build community and transform spiritual practice as the stories extend beyond individuals and become collective stories of fluid, embodied persons who make up the membership of these two congregations.

Chapter 8 is likewise focused on High Holy Day sermons told by Rabbis Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker. Through the stories in this chapter, I consider the ways in which the rabbis speak of their own individual spiritual practices and experiences of self-exploration to teach others to create their own spiritual experiences and unique spiritual paths. To these ends, I look to two narrative strategies used by each rabbi. The first, a type of self-revelation, demonstrates how the rabbis learned to be skilled spiritual seekers
through connections to family and rabbinic mentors, and are now capable of negotiating traditional Jewish heritages (both literal and imagined) and contemporary American Jewish realities for the purpose of teaching and leading others. The second strategy, ‘traditionalization,’ allows the rabbis to reference more distant and historic pasts to link contemporary spiritual seekers to Jewish ancestral practices and lineages, legitimizing Jewish practice and experience for new generations of Jews.

In Chapter 9, I consider the ways in which Rabbis Min Kantrowitz, Lynn Gottlieb, and Shefa Gold expand the definition of community, creating less traditional, virtual and often mediated communities to reach those seeking different or diverse of Jewish experiences in the 21st Century United States. I use Benedict Anderson’s formulation of the “imagined” community (1983) to look at how Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom, and Kol Zimra offer alternative communities for individuals with multiple identities, complex motivations, and varying requirements for spiritual, religious, and ‘community’ participation in one or more Jewish settings.

In the conclusion, I consider how the rabbis’ stories and the communities in which they practice reflect substantive shifts in 21st Century liberal Judaism as many move away from authoritative and prescriptive models of leadership toward leaders whose styles are described as more personal, spiritual, and egalitarian. Keeping in mind the shifting patterns of religious participation, Jewish practice, and personalized spiritualism, I describe how qualities such as authenticity, flexibility, openness, and even struggle, enhance the credibility and appeal of the women rabbis participating in this study whose diverse audiences seek the spiritual lessons and engagement these new leaders present. Finally, I conclude by describing the implications of the very real challenges these rabbis
face as they transform Jewish tradition and create meaning for highly sovereign and less integrated individuals seeking Jewish community in New Mexico and throughout the world.
CHAPTER 2

A Brief History of Women’s Quest for Ordination in a Shifting American Jewish Landscape

Changing women’s place within Jewish society, transformations that would eventually lead to women’s rabbinic attainment, became a topic of discussion in the eighteenth century as Jewish leaders responded to the influences of acculturation, progress, universalism, secularization, and religious reform. Many of these changes were inspired by the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, an intellectual movement which paralleled ideals of rationalization and reason promoted by the European Enlightenment. Tailored for the advancement and emancipation of Ashkenazi Jewish communities, proponents advocated for “Jewish citizenship in the secular world, making education and cosmopolitan life accessible to increasing numbers” (Prell 1982:577). Occurring roughly from the 1770s to 1880s, Isaac Eisenstein-Barzilay suggested that the primary characteristics of the *Haskalah* were, “its admiration of reason, its devotion to the humanitarian ideal of the brotherhood of man and, its desire to restore the Jewish people to the world of reality” (1956:1). Encouraged by these ideals, proponents of the *Haskalah*, known as the *Maskilim*, were encouraged by the discoveries of science, captivated by the idea of tolerance and ethnic inclusivity, and inspired by “the spreading consciousness of social justice and humanitarianism” all of which they believed were “the first visible signs of a new attitude toward the Jews (1956:8).

Michael A. Meyer adds that the trappings of Modernity were “seductive” to many Jews who feared that the very existence of their religion was in doubt. He reasons that European modernization required “the demolition of competing structures that impeded
its direct authority” (1988:152). As “Jewish solidarity had been constructed upon separation,” he continues, “integration replaced separation [and] the implication was religious assimilation” as opposed to the religious tolerance sought by modernizing Jewish leaders (1988:153). The significance of this with regards to women rabbis is this, with this move to a single governing body, the rabbinic authority that had been a fundamental element to the unification of the Jewish community led to an “increasing disregard of the norms that held the Jewish community together,” reducing rabbis “to making ritual decisions for those who would bother to consult them” (Meyer 1988:154) and creating fissures in existing prestige structures.

Still clinging to the hope of religious tolerance, Jewish intellectuals, like Moses Mendelssohn, advocated for Jews to sanction the centralized state, thus making “Judaism a private matter between the individual and God, following the lead of Protestantism” and adjusting the Jewish polity into an organization “more similar to a church” (Meyer 1988:155). Mendelssohn attempted to form Jewish life into one closely aligned with Enlightenment values to prevent cultural and religious assimilation, encouraging secular learning, adherence to European aesthetics, linguistic assimilation, and literacy for Jewish women.

The issue of language literacy and Jewish education, germane issues for Jewish women, occurred at two levels. At one level, idealistic members of the Maskilim focused on rationality admonished the Jewish educational system, asking that “more attention be given to the education of women…[who] should be taught Hebrew so that the Biblical Books might be accessible to them and thus turn their minds away from the superstitious” (Eisenstein-Barzilay 1956:33). Such admonitions reveal a significant shift in the
perception of women as intellectually capable of comprehending the enigmatic texts by themselves when previously women gleaned through the interpretation of rabbis and male family members.

At another, perhaps more pragmatic level, Iris Parush and Ann Brener contend that the political upheavals and financial pressures of 19th century also contributed to women’s literacy. In the traditional educational system of the day, status and respect were given to male scholars who devoted their lives to religious study, a condition that led women to shoulder the economic stresses and responsibilities for much of their families’ livelihoods and the satisfaction of the household needs. Parush and Brener explain, “Popular belief sanctioned the status quo by invoking divine order” in which “men were to devote themselves to the higher life of the spirit, while women were intended for the hustle and bustle of a work-a-day world” (1995:188). An unanticipated outcome of this gendered prestige system was Jewish women’s participation in commerce, a condition that by necessity prompted women to gain knowledge of the foreign languages of the persons with whom they worked. Although the domain of Torah was exclusively seen as the right of Jewish men, the world of commerce was considered part of the domestic domain, and Jewish men felt that it was within their own best interest to encourage the secular education of their wives and daughters.

This newfound acceptance of women’s education prompted the Maskilim to advocate for “a calculated deployment of women for serving as the vanguard of the spirit of Haskalah and modernization” (Parush and Brener 1995:194). Education for girls increased dramatically and by the 1860s, girls from wealthier families were sent to private schools run by Jewish or even Christian women in European states. In response to
Jewish leaders who warned against the threat of assimilation, Parush and Brener conclude that their concerns may not have been unsubstantiated.

The internal justification underlying the differences in education was to maintain the status quo of traditional Jewish society and to prevent the infiltration of external influences. However, in everything relating to the female half of society, the very strategies meant to ensure this goal backfired, and indeed paved the way to change women’s status among ever-widening circles of Jewish society. The neglect of women’s Jewish education and the encouragement to study foreign languages created a situation in which circles of educated women constituted a breach in the fortress of social control adopted by Jewish society in order to preserve its time-hallowed ways” (1995:200).

**Religious Reform in Europe and the United States in the Lives of Jewish Women**

The issue of women’s status was rendered increasingly conspicuous as Haskalah ideas clashed with those of Jewish Orthodoxy. Orthodox Jews strictly followed the literal and very traditional interpretation of Written Torah and the Oral Law, known as Halakah. In Orthodox life, so named in response to later Jewish movements, Jews were to observe God's commandments, the six hundred and thirteen found in the Torah, concerning areas such as, prayer, attire, food prescriptions, sexuality, social behavior, family relations, and observance of the Sabbath. Adherence to these Orthodox strictures resulted in a discrete Jewish community with a unique aesthetic and visible cultural mores. Compelled by the tensions of faithful Jewish adherence and participation in the non-Jewish nation states that were their homes, Jewish Reform leaders sought the middle-ground. Prell suggests, “Reform Judaism was born in this milieu of broadening interactions with the Gentiles, new freedoms for Jews, and increasing possibilities for assimilation and secularization” (1982:577). Reformers seeking to save Judaism from what they perceived to be the imminent threat of assimilation, attempted to create a Judaism that was both authentically
Jewish yet “sensible and appropriate for both the modern era and European cultures in which they must survive” (Prell 1982:577).

European Jews brought these Enlightenment ideals to a rapidly expanding American Jewish world in the mid nineteenth century. Up to this point, American Jews tended to be Sephardic, from the regions of Spain and Portugal, as opposed to Ashkenazic, i.e. those who hailed from Central and Eastern Europe. Between 1881 and 1914 more than two million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States (Satlow 2006). Unlike the Ashkenazic communities of Europe that were controlled by the Gemeinde, community organizations that managed “Jewish life, including synagogues, Jewish education, philanthropy, and social services” (Rosenthal 1973:13), American Jewish synagogues developed independently of one another, and many American Jews were considered unobservant by Ashkenazic standards. The lack of a centralized Jewish authority that was deeply involved in daily Jewish life, coupled with complications stemming from the fact that Jewish immigrants came from numerous countries, spoke different languages, and had differing religious traditions, resulted in a key transformation, a shift in the locus of religious life.

Premodern European Judaism exhibited a clear divide between domestic religious practice under the control of women, and synagogue-based religious ritual which was solely within the domain of men. These divides became blurred as Pamela S. Nadell suggests in American societies “which located religiosity more in the public space of the church rather than in the private realm of the home” (1998:8). This shift deemphasized the importance of the Jewish home and women’s domestic ritual, and underscored the
synagogue’s centrality to the ritual experiences of men and women, an adjustment that was complemented by Reform values.

Rabbis Gustavus Poznanski and Isaac Mayer Wise brought innovations from Reform Judaism to the United States between 1836 and 1850 (Sachar 1992:104). By 1890 there were 535 synagogues in the United States, of which 316 were Orthodox and 217 were Reform (Rosenthal 1973:12). The Americanized Reform Movement was founded on ‘values’ that included the modeling of Jewish synagogue services on Protestant services, the elimination of “redundant” prayers, the utilization of English and German instead of Hebrew, and the adoption of “Americanized” values such as gender integrated choirs, a major transformation that opposed “Judaism’s precept against women raising their voices in public prayer” (Nadell 1998:9). Such modifications of Jewish practice reinforced the anxieties of Orthodox Jews who believed that at its core, American Reform Judaism was receptive to the innovations of the dominant culture, its languages and ideals, and was thusly at risk of diluting Jewish culture (Frankel 2000, Goldman 2000, Hyman 1995, Sachar 1992).

One aspect of this Reform worldview that proponents consider an antiquated expression of Judaism, involved the place of Jewish women, described by Riv-Ellen Prell as a place in which, “women occupy a unique legal status tied to biology” (1982:576). Prell asserts that the ideological conflicts between conservative Orthodox ideals, on the one hand, and those of Reformers, on the other, hinged on Reformers ideas regarding gender equality. She writes, “The Enlightenment postulates a view of status freed from tradition, history and biology” (1982:576), a view quite contrary to the lived statuses of Ashkenazi women of the period. Prell argues that while Reformers succeeded in shifting
the legal status of women in Jewish religion, they failed to bring equality to women. By dissolving women’s existing place within Judaism, the Reform Movement opened a discussion of women’s roles within Judaism, but failed to create a new place for women within the changing religion. While Jewish women were intrigued by “a social and intellectual status denied them within the confines of the traditional Jewish community,” (Baum quoted in Prell 1982:581) many were conflicted about their religious invisibility and changing social role.

The nebulous place inhabited by Jewish women in the late 19th, early 20th century can also be observed in the physical expressions of synagogue architecture. In Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism, Karla Goldman observes modernizing changes in American synagogues and the subsequent changes in women’s place within Judaism through modifications in temple architecture. Noting early synagogues, and European synagogues, in which there were no spaces for women, Goldman tracks the creation of women’s galleries which were separated from men’s ritual spaces by thick walls, and narrow windows or screens, to the innovation of women’s balconies, which while open, remained removed from the core ritual space of the synagogue. Based on these incremental changes, Goldman argues, “The transformation of the women’s gallery in early American synagogues suggests that women’s presence in the synagogue was gaining a new significance and meaning” (2000:51), and intermingled seating became the norm in liberal American synagogues by the 1870s (Sarna 1987).
Changes in American Jewish Women’s Social Status (1850s to 1950s)

Changes in Jewish gender roles also occurred as Jews assimilated into American society. Though many Jewish newcomers expected to find financial opportunities on American shores, many found themselves sufferers of intense economic hardships. Many Jews chose to abandon ritual observances for the sake of earning a living, as in the case of those forced to work in sweatshops where “bosses forced Jews to work on the Sabbath” (Rosenthal 1973:23). These economic pressures prompted many Jews to join labor unions or fight for Socialist or Communist causes (Rosenthal 1973). Hyman elaborates, “Jewish leaders defined the goals of assimilation as the acculturation and social integration of the Jews, ideally into the bourgeoisie, along with the retention of some form of Jewish identity based upon a shared religious culture and memory,” yet this process was not expedient, as the impoverished or working class Jews found themselves confronting prejudices and scarce financial opportunities on their journey towards middle-class American citizenship.

One strategy designed to expedite this acculturation process during this period of Jewish identity negotiation and pursuit of economic purchase involved the appropriate display of essential qualities associated with the American middle-class, not the least of which centered on modifications in the social expectations for American Jewish women. Hyman writes, “Americanization of young immigrant women, as Jewish reformers understood it, entailed adoption of American middle-class gendered norms and values” (1995:109). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, this norm involved the creation of the social homemaker, and classes were conducted at institutions such as the Educational Alliance and the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls to ensure the women’s
effectiveness in the arenas of “cooking, laundry, and serving” (Hyman 1995:109). The de Hirsch home advertised a curriculum that combined “class and gender-bound values” designed to Americanize immigrant Jewish girls and women (Hyman 1995:108). While being instructed in the arts of domesticity, many women worked as wage laborers in factories and small businesses, particularly in the garment industry.

These experiences introduced those Jewish women to union issues and socialist ideas. Hyman, like Parush and Brener (1995), maintains that “the norms of east European Jewish culture that had permitted women to play a role in the secular public sphere as well as women’s premigration experience with work and politics were crucial in determining Jewish women’s role in the American immigrant community, fostering an openness to issues beyond their domestic concerns” (Hyman 1995:111). These women became heavily involved in political and social issues, led kosher meat boycotts and rent and garment workers strikes, and were active in the women’s suffrage movement of 1915 and 1917 (Hyman 1995, Nadell 2003).

Assimilation and Acculturation in American Jewish Identity

Jonathan D. Sarna argues that immigrant Jews strove for assimilation into American society though religious channels as well. In the “Great Awakening: The Transformation That Shaped Twentieth-Century American Judaism,” Sarna suggests that several young Jewish men of the era instigated a religious revival, rising not from a rabbinic level, but from the “bottom up” (Nadell and Sarna 2003:49). This American revival “mirror[ed] the ‘organizing process’…associated with the Protestant Second Great Awakening…[and] sought to provide ‘meaning and direction’ to Jews suffering from the social and cultural strains of a transitional era” (Nadell and Sarna 2003:51).
Unlike the *Haskalah* which sought to emancipate Jewish communities through secularization, this “Great Awakening” promoted religious and cultural revitalization by aligning modernizing Jews with modernizing Protestant communities in the U.S.

Proponents of this revival hoped to present a more positive image of Jews to Gentile members of their new communities by improving Jewish cultural representation, education, scholarship and professionalism for the sake of elevating “American Jewry to positions of greater prominence, if not preeminence, among the Jews of the world” (Nadell and Sarna 2003:51). This movement led to the formation of several organizations that remain important today, the Jewish Theological Seminary\(^9\), the Jewish Publication Society\(^10\), and The American Jewish Historical Society\(^11\), to name but a few.

While this revival resulted predominantly from, and centered on the efforts of young, unmarried Jewish men, it had tremendous effects on the place of American Jewish women as well. Jewish women who for centuries had been excluded from synagogue life found themselves highly involved in two worlds which had formerly been within the

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\(^9\) The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) was founded in 1886 “to preserve the knowledge and practice of historical Judaism. In 1887, JTS held its first class of ten students in the vestry of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, New York City’s oldest congregation.” Since then, JTS has expanded into a prestigious Jewish university offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees through its five schools. More information is available at [www.jtsa.edu](http://www.jtsa.edu).

\(^10\) Founded in 1888, The Jewish Publication Society is a nonprofit, educational publishing house. When it was first founded, its mission was “to provide the children of Jewish immigrants to America with books about their heritage in the language of the New World. JPS is the oldest publisher of Jewish titles in the English language” ([www.jewishpub.org](http://www.jewishpub.org)).

\(^11\) “Founded in 1892, the American Jewish Historical Society’s holdings include 20 million documents, 50,000 books, paintings and other objects that bear witness to the remarkable contributions of the American Jewish community to life in the Americas from the 16th century to the present. Among the treasures of this heritage are the first American book published in Hebrew; the handwritten original of Emma Lazarus’ *The New Colossus*, which graces the Statue of Liberty; records of the nation’s leading Jewish communal organizations and important collections in the fields of education, philanthropy, science, sports, business and the arts” ([www.ajhs.org](http://www.ajhs.org)).
province of men, philanthropy and Jewish education. In 1819, the first Female Hebrew Benevolent Society was created in Philadelphia, then a center of American Jewish life (Nadell and Sarna 2003:52). Through these benevolent societies, many Jewish women successfully held events to raise funds to adorn the new synagogues and to care for members of their communities who were struggling financially. Although such activities tended to be confined to their religious and denominational circles, some benefited from the experiences of Jewish women who, like members of their European communities, conversed with and learned from their non-Jewish neighbors. An instance of such a collaboration between Jewish and Gentile women occurred in 1801, when twenty-three women, eight of whom were Jewish, founded the “Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances,” a Philadelphia based organization designed to bring financial relief to the previously well-to-do and orphans who had experienced hardships (Goldman 2000:60). In this joint collaboration, American Jewish women were exposed to “American models of association life” and found validation with the middle-class American women with whom they worked. (Goldman 2000:60). These early models provided structures for these new efforts, as women’s benevolent societies sprang up across the U.S.

Another fundamental change in women’s roles occurred when women became “responsible for the religious education and spiritual guidance of the young” (Nadell and Sarna 2003:52). Beginning as early as 1838 in progressive areas like Philadelphia, the Jewish Sunday Schools movement proliferated to such a degree that Sarna writes, “By the time [the school’s founder, Rebecca Gratz] died, in 1869, it can safely be estimated that the majority of American Jews who received any formal education at all learned
most of what they knew from female teachers” who “had to educate themselves in Judaism,” with the guidance of textbooks some of which were “written by women” (Nadell and Sarna 2003:52).

As American Jews navigated the desire for ‘Americanization,’ the fear of assimilation, and the seduction of secularization, the discussion of women in the rabbinate began, was quelled, yet sputtered along. Coinciding with the surfacing of women as the primary educators of Jewish children, women pushed against traditional barriers that prevented them from fully participating in religious life. In *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination 1889-1985*, Pamela S. Nadell chronicles the numerous conversations that centered on the subject, and begins her book with a question posed in 1889 by journalist and community activist Mary M. Cohen, “Could not—our women—be—ministers?” (1998:1). Cohen, a member of the Jewish community in Philadelphia, became superintendent of Philadelphia’s Hebrew Sunday School after the school’s founder Rebecca Gratz and her successor Louisa B. Hart. In her account, Cohen anticipated responses from Jewish men who would argue “that people ‘would laugh openly to see a woman in the pulpit’” (Nadell 1998:2).

**The Continued Push at the Gender Barrier**

Yet women continued to push for equality within the Jewish world. In 1889, in a pamphlet entitled *Woman in the Pulpit*, Frances E. Willard, an advocate and educator, made the case for women in the ministry, estimating that “some 500 women were evangelical preachers, another 350 were Quaker leaders, and that at least some functioned as pastors in the six mainstream Protestant denominations then ordaining women—

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12 An outgrowth of the “Great Awakening” centered in the Philadelphia Jewish community in the late 19th century.
Methodist, Baptist, Free Baptist, Congregationalist, Universalist, and Unitarian” (Nadell 1998:27). Yet in this changing Jewish world, in which women began to “function as scholars and preachers…to stand before Christian America and before other Jews as exemplars of American Jewry—roles traditionally left to the province of the rabbinate,” Jewish women’s expectations for ordination continued to rise (Nadell 1998:31).

By 1900 two women had attended Reform Judaism’s rabbinic seminary earning Bachelors of Hebrew Letters degrees (Nadell 1998:39). One of these women, Ray Frank, would be known as “the girl rabbi of the golden west” (Nadell 1998:39). As a Sabbath school teacher in Berkeley, Frank was given the opportunity to run the school after the rabbi resigned. When the synagogue had yet to hire a rabbi for the high holidays, Frank approached influential members of the community who agreed to organize the services if she would preach. Nadell writes, “Before too long, the press…acclaimed her ‘the only female rabbi’ in America” (1998:40). Nadell contends that Frank’s rise as “The Jewess in the Pulpit” paralleled experiences of female ministers in other liberal branches of religion such as Unitarianism (1998:40). Desirous of a greater Jewish presence, women formed the Congress of Jewish Women in 1893, and at its convention, Frank stood next to ordained Unitarian minister Reverend Ida C. Hultin (1998:41). Following receipt of her education at Hebrew Union College, Frank continued to preach, actually acting as rabbi in some situations, and lectured in many public venues. Frank used her public voice, like other women’s rights leaders of the day, to rally against barriers to women’s equality. This push was taken up by male rabbis as well. Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch wrote an editorial “Woman in the Pulpit” to argue that Jewish women should have the same rights as Christian women who were already acting as ordained spiritual leaders (Nadell 1998:44).
Contending that Jewish women had entered other male-dominated professions as doctors, lawyers, academics, and scientists, proponents of women in the rabbinate maintained that women should be allowed to practice as ministers.

Be that as it may, while women continued to study in seminary and women were encouraged to be Jewish educators, they were denied access to rabbinic study and ordination causing the discussion to die down. However, in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, and women were given the right to vote, women were re-inspired to push for rabbinic ordination. Five women in the U.S., Martha Neumark, Irma Levy Lindheim, Dora Ashowith, Helen Hadassah Levinthal, and one woman in Germany, Regina Jonas, had spent sufficient time in seminary and rabbinic schools to petition for pulpit positions and push for ordination (Nadell 1998:61-116). While some Reform leaders saw “no logical reason why women should not be entitled to receive a rabbinical degree” (Nadell 1998:62), others railed against what they feared would be a feminization of the profession and synagogue space, thus diluting Jewish tradition. Opponents argued that it would be impossible to “accommodate female rabbinical students…[who would require] ‘[s]eparate rest rooms, wash rooms and locker rooms’” (Nadell 1998:64). Others maintained that Judaism “assigns women ‘a certain sphere of duties’” that would prevent women from performing public functions, such as marriage and family obligations which would cause her to “abandon her profession” and force the college to make a “very bad investment” (Nadell 1998:65). Jewish leaders argued from both positions, Jacob Lauterback, a professor, and opponent of women’s ordination prepared a response to the women’s rabbinate question, and contended that “Admitting women to the rabbinate remained contrary to the very spirit of Judaism the rabbis had to uphold” (Nadell
1998:67). He claimed that women’s sphere was in the home, and that women would not be able to perform rabbinic duties. “most of the fifteen rabbis on the record sharply disagreed with the professor” looking to synagogue life to describe women’s changing positions in American Judaism, and contending that women could maintain professional positions and still be mothers, as David Neurmark suggested after bearing a child, “[a woman] will be a better rabbi for the experience” (Nadell 1998:70). Even so, the various discussions were not sufficient to see women ordained rabbis. While women continued to seek education to become Jewish educators there were “insurmountable hurdles” that created barriers for women who sought Jewish leadership positions (Nadell 1998:101).

By the 1950s, the discussion which had been termed “purely academic” in a Report on the Ordination of Women, intensified when opponents became aware of Paula Herskovitz Ackerman’s work as an acting woman rabbi in Meridian, Mississippi (Nadell 1998:120). Ackerman’s husband, Rabbi William Ackerman, ordained at the Jewish Theological seminary, became the rabbi of a new congregation in Natchez, Mississippi, Temple Beth Israel. Ackerman was an active member of the synagogue and a “leader in her own right” (Nadell 1998:121). Ackerman taught Sabbath school, pre-confirmation classes, raised money for the temple, and was a “member of the board of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, and chairman of its National Committee on Religious Schools” (Nadell 1998:121). When her husband of thirty-one years passed away, the temple president, with the support of the board, asked Ackerman “to carry on the ministry until they could get a Rabbi” (Nadell 1998:121). The press latched onto the idea of Ackerman as “the first woman in the U.S. to execute a rabbi’s functions” (Nadell 1998:123), despite the fact that Ackerman’s position was debated and denied as
“objections to her temporary rabbinate rested on the fact that she was neither formally trained nor ordained” (Nadell 1998:123). In fact, Rabbi Samuel H. Goldenson, the past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis “feared her appointment might set a precedent for the ‘exceedingly able wives’ of other rabbis, not all of whom shared her ‘personal and mental qualities’” creating a situation that could lead to “considerable embarrassment in other communities” (Nadell 1998:124). Ackerman continued nonetheless to advocate for women’s ordination, and “lived long enough to see women ordained as rabbis,” as Nadell writes, “Rabbi Constance A. Golden conducted her funeral” (1998:125).

The United States Census of 1950 “reported the all-time high figure of 6,777 female clergy, more than double the number in 1940” (Nadell 1998:130). In response, Reform rabbis took up the topic yet again, as Rabbi Barnett Brickner stated in reference to the Presbyterian Church and Harvard Divinity School, “Many Christian Protestant denominations have also changed their minds and now ordain women” (Nadell 1998:131). In 1955, “the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations held joint biennial meeting in Toronto” and “the first lady of Reform Judaism,” Jane Evans asserted, “[W]omen are uniquely suited by temperament, intuition and spiritual sensitivity to be rabbis” (Nadell 1998:133). All the same, the conversation was once again thwarted as Reform rabbis claimed ironically that they had already decided that women could have full access to participation in the synagogue. Yet they failed to acknowledge that there were no institutional channels available to facilitate this process.
Other social forces encouraged the Jewish community’s quest for women in the rabbinate as well. Debate about the segregation of black school children led Jewish women to argue against the segregation of women in the temple and in Jewish leadership. President John F. Kennedy established the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women” which, scholars maintain, “implicitly recognized the existence of gender-based discrimination in American society” (Nadell 1998:135). Members of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods continued to argue that “women were specifically minded and especially adapted to teach and to inspire…[they] would make marvelous rabbis” (Nadell:1998:137). Women continued to attend Hebrew Union College, complete the requirements for rabbinic degrees, and leave without ordination. Indeed, a “survey of the prominent American Jewish women included in Who’s Who in World Jewry 1955 affirms [that]…[b]y far the largest category of American Jewish women who won a space in that volume—over 40 percent—did so for their work, preponderantly unpaid work in the Jewish community” (Nadell 1998:145).

Disputes about women’s ‘place’ intensified as the Women’s and Civil Rights Movements catalyzed shifts in arenas where previously accepted gender roles continued to prevent women from participating in positions of leadership. Subordinated groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, called attention to the unequal distribution of political, economic, and social power in the United States. Todd Gitlin writes, “customs hitherto thought ‘natural’ were redefined as ‘sexist’,” and American women, Jewish women included, began to challenge the gender hierarchy very directly. Amidst this political charged backdrop, Sally J. Priesand completed rabbinic school, and on June 3,
1972 was ordained the first woman rabbi through Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

**Sally J. Priesand: The First Woman Rabbi**

Called the “reluctant pioneer” by Paul Zakrzewski of the *New York Times*, Priesand says that she had dreamed of being a rabbi since her teenage years, and wanted to be a rabbi for the sake of being a rabbi and, “not to champion women’s rights” (2006). A private person, Priesand “never thought much about being a pioneer” and shied away from publicity and advocacy (in a statement for the *Jewish Women’s Archive*). Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1946, she and her parents attended classes and services at the Conservative Community Temple. Looking back at those childhood experiences from a teenage vantage point, Priesand wrote that “she neither enjoyed Sunday school nor felt particularly religious” (Nadell 1998: 148). During Priesand’s junior year of high school the family moved to the west side of Cleveland and joined Beth Israel, a Reform synagogue. Priesand remembers being “rather shocked” by the services, explaining, “Naturally, it was not necessary for a man to wear a yarmulke¹³ or a tallith¹⁴. Furthermore, a girl was called upon to chant the blessings before and after the Torah reading. This is what probably surprised me the most, for at Community Temple the women had done very little in connection with the services” (Nadell 1998: 148). Religion classes were different as well, constructed of small numbers of students to encourage participation. Priesand became very interested in Judaism, joined the Temple Youth Group, “gave sermons at its annual youth service, and, in the summer of 1961, accepted a

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¹³ A skullcap worn by Jewish men and boys, especially those adhering to Orthodox or Conservative Judaism.

¹⁴ A shawl with ritually knotted fringe at each of four corners traditionally worn by Jewish males, especially at morning prayer.
scholarship from Beth Israel’s Sisterhood to attend Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregation Camp Institute,” experiences that would encourage her to later seek the rabbinate.

Priesand’s participation in the synagogue continued through high school. She was confirmed, graduated from Hebrew high school, became chairman of the youth group ritual committee, planned youth services, wrote for the congregational newsletter, and gave sermons. “In June 1963, Joseph Karasick, assistant to the provost, graciously welcomed Priesand’s interest in [Hebrew Union College]. But since she indicated she wanted the rabbinate, he cautioned: ‘[W]e would have to inform you candidly that we do not know what opportunities are available for women in the active rabbinate, since we have, as yet, not ordained any women. Most women prefer to enter the field of Jewish religious education’” (Nadell 1998: 149). Priesand was admitted in 1964 as a “Special Student” because she was unmarried yet female, and could therefore not live in the male on-campus housing that was designated for unmarried male students. Another student, hearing of Priesand’s acceptance, Ann Blitzstein, wrote Priesand a letter about her experiences upon arrival at HUC. “The ‘boys…were quite cynical about my reason for coming to H.U.C.’; they assumed ‘I wanted a husband more than an education’…[but] they had come to take her ‘academic ambitions seriously’” (Nadell 1998: 150). While Priesand was ultimately the only woman on the rabbinic track in 1968, “she no longer stood alone in her ambition,” as Nadell writes, “‘[b]y then her goal to become a rabbi was joined to the resurgent feminist movement” (1998: 151). The press once again played a “pivotal role in raising the question of women’s rabbinic ordination, sustaining it before a wide audience” as stories about Priesand were broadcast to both national and Jewish
presses (Nadell 1998: 152). Rising to the occasion, Priesand began to speak publicly in appearances that she herself called “consciousness raising” (Nadell 1998: 154). Even so, Priesand was forced to pull back from her association with the Women’s Movement, saying, “I am not an active supporter of the movement and didn’t go into the rabbinate to break down barriers” (Nadell 1998: 155). Even so, Priesand’s public appearances, in which she “simply told her story, of how since the tenth grade she had wanted to be a rabbi,” won out over adverse experiences such as when a professor asked a male “student she dated to do the school a favor” and marry her so that “they would get rid of her” (Nadell 1998: 155). In June 1972, the College President, Alfred Gottschalk, “told his board of governors that ‘Sally Priesand was the first woman admitted to the program leading to ordination with the assurance that it would be guaranteed her upon the successful completion of her studies’” (Nadell 1998: 157). That same year, Priesand received ordination. Over the course of her career, Priesand served as a congregational rabbi at Stephen Wise free Synagogue in New York City, Temple Beth El in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and from 1981 to 2006, at Monmouth Reform Temple in Tinton Falls, New Jersey.

**21st Century American Judaisms: An Ever-changing Landscape**

Priesand is now joined by close to 900 women rabbis in the United States. These rabbis and their male colleagues navigate the five primary branches of Judaism: Orthodoxy, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Renewal, though women continue to be excluded from rabbinic leadership positions in Orthodox communities. While these branches of Judaism are defined by doctrine and practice, differences in religious practices are more subtle and not as clearly defined as they may have been
previously. Codified in the 16th century, Orthodoxy is the most liturgically and socially
conservative, oldest branch of Judaism (Rosenthal 1973:26). Orthodoxy “sees Judaism as
a religious way of life predicated on the belief in God and His Torah, which was revealed
at Sinai along with the Oral Law that was ultimately unfolded by succeeding generations
of sages” (Rosenthal 1973:57). Orthodox rabbis hold the traditional belief in God as a
deity, the Torah as divine, and Jewish liturgy as an immutable expression of Halakah\textsuperscript{15}.

Traditional Orthodoxy adheres to gender restrictions in which the primary
synagogue space is inhabited by men, while women are separated by seating in women’s
galleries or behind partitions or curtains, known as \textit{mechitzot}. Synagogue services tend to
be conducted in Hebrew. Orthodox boys are educated at schools called \textit{yeshivas} or
\textit{heders}, while girls do not attend either. Orthodox gender roles like those in classical
Judaism, require men to pray daily in a \textit{minyan}\textsuperscript{16} wearing \textit{tallith}\textsuperscript{17} and \textit{tefillin}\textsuperscript{18}. Women,
in contrast are to focus on \textit{mitzvoth}\textsuperscript{19} centered in the home such as lighting Shabbat
candles, baking Challah, observing \textit{niddah} laws which require a woman’s separation
from her husband during menstruation, and immersion in the \textit{mikveh} afterwards. In
\textbf{Orthodox Judaism, women do not count as part of a \textit{minyan}}. In recent years, however,
some American Orthodox communities have begun to offer English language services.
Orthodox Judaism was the only form of American Judaism prior to the introduction of
Reform Judaism in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textbf{Reform Judaism emerged in 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Germany. Whereas Orthodox Judaism}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} Jewish law
\textsuperscript{16} Quorum, or group of ten men
\textsuperscript{17} Prayer shawl
\textsuperscript{18} Phylacteries or leather objects used in Jewish prayer, containing Biblical verses
\textsuperscript{19} Commandments of Jewish law}
Halakic law, Reform Judaism sees Jewish life and culture in constant flux, and “sees Judaism as an evolving, ever-dynamic religious culture that adapts to every age” (Rosenthal 1973:147). Reform Judaism has adopted many attributes of the dominant cultures in which they reside, adopting German first and then English as ritual languages, first mixed seating for men and women, eventually egalitarian services in which women participated from the bimah\(^\text{20}\), modifying Jewish laws to reflect contemporary concerns, and granting the first woman ordination as a rabbi. Reform leaders, like Orthodox Jews view God as divine, are deeply committed to ideas of social justice, activism, humanism, and gender equality, with recent emphases on equality for ethnic minorities and people of differing sexual orientations.

Created in response to the insecurities of many 19\(^\text{th}\) Century German Jews pulled between a desire for Orthodoxy’s tradition and stability and Reform’s radical changes, Conservative Judaism attempted to provide a middle place within these extreme positions. Gilbert S. Rosenthal explains, “Conservatism represents an attempt to check the excesses of Reform while prodding Orthodoxy into dynamic action” (1973:149). Arriving in America in the 1850s, “Conservative Judaism defines Judaism as an ever-changing religious civilization that has adapted in the past and must constantly adapt itself to new challenges and crises,” without abandoning its primary goal to “preserve the Jewish people” (Rosenthal 1973:211). While holding to the traditional trappings of Orthodox Judaism, retaining the idea of a supreme deity, and continuing use of core prayers in Hebrew, Conservative Judaism is more flexible regarding gender expectations, eventually allowing women to be counted in a minyan, and ordaining Conservative

\(\text{20 A bimah is a raised platform in the synagogue or temple from which the rabbi, cantor, and others lead services.}\)
women rabbis starting in 1983. Conservative Judaism teaches that “social action is considered a primary Jewish obligation” and like Reformers, Conservative Jews focus on civil rights, women’s rights, anti-war activism, and other social concerns (Rosenthal 1973:212).

Reconstructionist Judaism was started by Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, who sought to “actualize his concept that a synagogue should be more than merely a house of prayer or study, that is should be a center encompassing all aspects of Jewish expression—religious and cultural, social and athletic” (Rosenthal 1973:216). It was not Kaplan’s desire to fragment Jewish life any further by creating a new movement, and he continued to write articles about his ideas and engage in discussions with Conservative leaders. Even so, disciples of Kaplan’s started the Reconstructionist Foundation in 1940 to help develop the movement and garner support from Conservative and Reform rabbis.

Reconstructionism adheres to naturalistic and humanistic philosophies. Like Reform and Conservative Judaism, Reconstructionism holds that Judaism is an evolving institution. It differs significantly in its attempt to “to reinterpret Jewish values and institutions and unite diverse Jewish groups of all shades of opinion who are committed to the creative survival of the Jewish people and its civilization” (Rosenthal 1973:254), as well as removing the supernatural or divine aspect of a anthropomorphized God to the less defined but more encompassing power that innately leads to self-understanding and fulfillment. Rosenthal summarizes Reconstructionism as an “attempt to blend Orthodoxy’s plentitude of Jewish living with Conservativism’s love for Jewish peoplehood and Reform’s dynamism and critical outlook” (1973:256). Reconstructionism ordained women rabbis starting in 1974.
Emerging from the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish Renewal is a recent movement that unites elements of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic practice, and seeks to remove a focus on the Jewish establishment. Jewish Renewal was created to re-inspire Jewish practice by combining mysticism, Hasidism, meditative practices from Sufi and Buddhist traditions, music drawn from traditional and untraditional sources, and ideas from the Civil and Women’s Rights Movements.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi is a primary teacher in the Jewish Renewal movement. Hasidic trained and ordained in the Lubavitch movement, Schachter-Shalomi broke from traditional Orthodoxy in the 1960s to found B’nai Or Religious Fellowship to promote Jewish spiritualism through Kabalistic\(^2\) theories and Hasidic theories. Renewal Judaism is known for its charismatic leadership, creative transformation of Jewish liturgy and law, and focus on dance, music, art, and storytelling, as ways in which members of Jewish Renewal can express their relationship to God, religion, and global concerns.

It is necessary to note that many of these transformations emerged in a world deeply affected by the Holocaust. By 1945, the population of more than sixteen million Jews had been reduced to 11 million over the course of only a few years. In the decades following the genocide, the remaining Jews fled Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Arab countries where they had lived for hundreds of years. By 2002, Michael L. Satlow reports that there were “approximately 13.2 million Jews worldwide, with about 5.7 million living in the United States and 5 million in Israel” (2006:26). The once booming Eastern European center of Jewish life was no more, and the Jewish communities of America and Israel “are more distinct than they are similar” (Satlow 2006:26).

\(^2\) Mystical or esoteric teachings of Judaism
To fully represent the diversity of the American Jewish communities in which this project is situated, I find Satlow’s characterization of Judaism as “a family of communities struggling to make sense of a common identity and tradition” helpful (2006:291). While many of America’s 6 million Jews are affiliated to various degrees to one or more of the religious movements mentioned here, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of contemporary American Jewry is the lack of synagogue affiliation and/or religious identification. A 2007 study conducted by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute indicated that population figures may actually be closer to 6.5 and 7.5 million Jews in the United States. These numbers represent the 20% of the population that remains uncounted due to their lack of religious affiliation, as well as the 500,000 to 1,000,000 children from families with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent (Saxe, Tighe, Phillips, and Kudushin 2007:7). To be sure, the cultural, ideological, and religious diversity in these American Jewish communities pose both challenges and opportunities for today’s rabbis.

In Chapter 3, I begin to tell the stories of two rabbis, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Rabbi Malka Drucker, who have embraced these challenges and opportunities, successfully navigating the diverse domains of contemporary American Judaism. Using the stories of childhood that the rabbis tell, I consider the ways in which they construct their identities by telling cohesive life stories modeled on Western conventions of selfhood and storytelling. I investigate the ways that each rabbi crafts her story of self, establishing her capacity for spiritual leadership, and engaging her anticipated audience through shared spiritual, political, and familial concerns.
CHAPTER 3

Spiritual Callings:

Identity and Cohesion in the Life Stories of Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Rabbi Malka Drucker

“The Jewish aspect of my childhood was a place of inspiration and comfort and community…I was inspired, and very, very passionate about trying to understand good and evil in the world, why Vietnam, India and hunger, the Holocaust, death and destruction.”

– Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

“If anything has anything to do with where I’m standing now, it was my mother tying social justice to this path, and…my grandfather’s Seders. [He said], “It is time for you to recite the four questions.”…And I felt like I was sort of a delinquent, a flunky, and to suddenly have a sense that I’m being counted on to do this, that they need me to do this because I was the youngest eligible person to do it, was profoundly important to me, for my self-esteem, for my sense that I was doing something for more than myself.”

-- Rabbi Malka Drucker

I began recording Lynn’s life story in 2003 and Malka’s in 2004, and noted that the stories they told had several similarities: both seemed effortless, cohesive, and familiar. I considered that each rabbi was responding to the interview context, realizing that I was interested in their lives as women who made choices to become religious leaders, and could be selecting and ordering the content of their life histories, consciously and/or unconsciously, to tell stories of those whose lives led them in particular directions. As I read the stories again, however, I came to believe that the similarity of their narratives has greater significance, as the structures of the stories seemed somehow to legitimize the storytellers. This linear form of storytelling is associated with the qualities stereotypically seen to be important for leaders in the contemporary United States, namely the ability to overcome adversity and succeed.
Even so, I have come to believe that as rabbinic pioneers and spiritual leaders, these women face more challenges than leaders in business, political, and educational arenas. These rabbis are telling stories for many in their intended audiences who grew up with rabbis who were distinctly different, who conformed to traditional gendered norms and who, for many, continue to evoke “nostalgia” (Fishman 1993). In the religious domain, this nostalgia manifests in memories of childhood, and youthful understandings of authority, security, and belonging. Such visceral memories cause some to place a premium on tradition, making it difficult for new leaders, who by virtue of their gender and novelty disturb the delicate foundations of these early memories.

In response, Lynn and Malka, like the business professionals interviewed by Linde, strive for a higher level of coherence due to “cultural and subcultural beliefs about the nature of proper lives, proper sequences of events, and proper reasons for professional choice” (1993:128). Whereas Linde’s study participants made comments such as “I knew I could always…” or “I was always good at” (1993:131) to explain gaps in career or life choices that might not follow the common sense notions held by the listener, the rabbis’ stories are rooted in childhood. This strategy, according to Linde, demonstrates a strong sense of coherence of the storyteller. She writes, “One tenet of our common-sense view of the self is that an activity, an aptitude, or an ambition that goes back to early childhood must be seen as intrinsic to the self. A profession based on such aptitude or ambition therefore cannot be challenged as having inadequate causality” (1993:135). In these cases, both rabbis fashion accounts that reference religion, secularism, gender, family, and political influences in ways that explain their senses of the girls they were, and develop plausible foundations for the women they have become, foreshadowing their
chosen professional paths, and highlighting their own personal and spiritual struggles in ways that engage the listener in stories of people to whom they can relate and become invested.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

My first attempts to reach Lynn failed miserably. I called the office number at Congregation Nahalat Shalom, the community in which she presided, numerous times yet received no call back. A month later, I received a call from a person whose name I never caught. The message was short, “The rabbi will speak to you at 7:00 tomorrow morning.” I was given a home number. I woke early, made the necessary pot of coffee, and considered what I would say. I called, and Lynn answered, although she sounded a bit groggy. I introduced myself, and said that I had heard about her work and would be very interested in having her talk to my class about her role as a woman rabbi if she would be willing.

“Have you read my book?” she asked.

“Not yet,” I responded.

She paused, and said, “Well, get my book, read it and then contact me again if you still want me to come to your class.”

I whispered a surprised, “ok,” and she hung up abruptly.

Not to be deterred, I picked up a copy of her book by day’s end, read it, and composed a note which I sent to the synagogue. To paraphrase, the note said, “I have read your book, find it most interesting, and would still love for you to come talk to my
class.” I provided a day and time for the class, my office number, as well as the classroom number, and suggested that she might meet me at my office so that we could walk over together and talk about the day’s topic, which I defined broadly as “women and religious leadership.”

The day of the intended class, I sat in my office scrambling for something to teach, as I had not yet heard a word from the rabbi. Picking up a stack of books, and mentally prepping my lecture, I hurried across campus. As I entered the room, my eyes met those of a woman clad in a bright red peasant shirt over a turquoise broomstick skirt, and adorned with beaded jewelry. The woman’s long dark hair hung loosely over her shoulders making an impression that was quite contrary to the Catholic priests with whom I had grown up. I told her how glad I was that she could make it, thanked her, and asked how she would like to be introduced. “Rabbi Lynn is fine,” she said. I tried to tell her a bit about the class. She nodded absently. Although I intended for Lynn to speak to the issues of being a woman spiritual leader, Lynn, the storyteller, took over and entertained the class.

She told her story of Adam and Lilith. The students listened, rapt in the tone of her tale. Lynn was whooping and twirling, her hair and skirts swaying around her. Many of the students seemed shocked, staring open-mouthed at the woman who singlehandedly transformed a utilitarian, drab classroom into a theater in the round. Others glanced nervously at the thin walls, worried about the boisterous breech of classroom etiquette. By the end, all were completely entertained, thanking her for her stories and the material she introduced in such an extraordinary manner. Her visit, in short, inspired conversations over the next several weeks.
I offered to take Lynn to lunch, and when she refused, I walked her to her car. The car turned out to be a couple of miles away. I told her about my project, and asked if she would be willing to work with me as an anthropology student. She said that she would, and invited me to a class at her home. A week later, sinking into a brightly colored chair in her living room, I learned that it was a B’nai Mitzvah\(^{22}\) class for adult students interested in exploring their Jewish identities. I learned quite a lot, met many members of her community, and started to piece together the project and build the relationships that would frame this dissertation.

\[\text{“It was always the path I’ve walked.” – Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb}\]

I grew up in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Thinking about the track that my life took, probably the most salient aspect of my youth, and it’s really a saving grace in a lot of ways, was growing up in a household where my mother was a puppeteer and also taught children’s theater. So from a very early age, I was on stage, and in the midst of a storytelling culture…through her line. Telling stories in front of people and learning stories about people around the world was very, very, very natural.

Growing up in the theater also allows a person to become very flexible and to be able to see many sides of the story and to play many parts, as well as to consider the motivation, feelings and outcome of the characters in a particular story. It also helps you to work collectively with other actors and kids as you are putting together theater and to let your imagination run wild. You learn how to paint sets, and you gain a kind of understanding of the material world by making the puppets, building the sets, designing the costumes or doing makeup. I participated in all of these disciplines, and that was terrific.

\(^{22}\) In this context, B’nai Mitzvah refers to a study class for adults who wish to participate in a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. Bar and bat mitzvah traditionally involves a 13-year-old boy or girl’s ritual proclamation to follow God’s commandments and live a Jewish life as they are now considered old enough to be responsible for their own actions.
In the course of that, I got to play many parts. I think my favorite role was the Wicked Witch of the West; this is kind of archetypal too, because at the time, I was offered a role as either Dorothy or the Wicked Witch of the West…and this was a great dilemma for me. (Lynn looks slyly at me and laughs.) Should I be the good girl who goes on the adventure, or the Wicked Witch of the West?

And, so I consulted with the Oracle – my mother. And she said, “Dear, it’s much more fun to play the Wicked Witch of the West because as a nice girl all you have to do is click your shoes and smile, but the Wicked Witch of the West has character.”

So she convinced me to play the Wicked Witch of the West. It turned out the Wicked Witch of the West had a very small role. I was imagining Margaret Hamilton, the movie persona, but in this play she was in, I think, two or three scenes, a brief period, and so I cried.

And my mother said to me, “This is your opportunity to go deep. Even though it’s a small role, you can really create a profound opportunity; if you go deeply into something, it doesn’t matter how long it is.”

So, I took that advice too and really enjoyed playing that part. I got a standing ovation every night. I got water thrown at me when I melted. I learned how to cackle and scream on the stage, which kept me in good stead in later life. (She laughs.) So that was quite a wonderful experience.

I also got to meet an awful lot of interesting people, including the disabled community of Allentown, Pennsylvania, because my mother was interested in them, and taught drama in an agency that served children that had a whole variety of impairments, including loss of limbs, kids with mental challenges, kids that were visually impaired and so forth and so on. I would go with my mom to classes and kind of be her teacher’s assistant. And it was very wonderful also to watch her in that world and to learn how to see beyond the conventional image of society.

My mother would take me to New York, me and my sister, every Christmas, to see Broadway plays and movies in New York City. So, in that way, she took me out of Allentown and into the cities, and kind of expanded my world in that way.
They also sent me to summer camp, which was a terrible and wonderful experience, both. It was deep in the woods, and I learned to love the woods. That’s where I acquired my love for nature. But, I was very young – 7, 8, 9 – and I was very far from home. So it was very traumatic, but it was also quite an adventure, and it taught me in a way that I could make it on my own; which was good, because my mother died when I was 21, and I needed that experience in order to know how to survive.

The Jewish aspect of my childhood was also a place of inspiration and comfort and community. It was wonderful running around temple on Friday nights and eating those incredible cookies that the Sisterhood ladies made off these silver trays and getting tea poured in china cups and all this kind of stuff. (She pantomimes the motion, little finger up in the air, and laughs.) It’s hard to find that at Nahalat Shalom\(^{23}\). There’s awfully good food, but not the same décor. (We both laugh because Congregation Nahalat Shalom is just recently in a new building, and the furnishings and serving utensils are quite hodgepodge.)

Hebrew school was fun, but I think it mostly involved torturing the teachers and each other, if I remember correctly. Such as putting thumb tacks on chairs, and telling on the boys that made paper airplanes, and making the Hebrew school teachers mad at us. Even with all that, I seem to have enjoyed learning very much, enough so that when the opportunity came to get active in youth group and to become a liturgist at the congregation, through the youth group, I took that opportunity.

So in 9\(^{\text{th}}\), 10\(^{\text{th}}\) and 11\(^{\text{th}}\) grades, I produced so many creative services…I was like Ms. Creative Service Factory Girl, and the love of my rabbi inspired me. I was inspired, and also very, very passionate about trying to understand good and evil in the world, and why Vietnam, and India and hunger, the Holocaust, and death and destruction and so forth and so on, and trying to come to terms with that. And actually, the synagogue turned out to be an excellent place to discuss these issues with my peers, and also to transform interests into poetry, and these liturgical play poems.

So, there was really early on a fusing of what later became Rabbi Lynn. (Her eyes sparkle in amusement,) It was latent. Many of these things came together – political activism, moral concern, interfaith concern, and the arts, and creative approach to Jewish life, all came together in high school.

\(^{23}\) The Albuquerque, New Mexico synagogue in which she was the founding rabbi.
Feminism didn’t really enter the picture until 1972, mysticism and ecology in 1972 as well, and Native American...no, that’s not true, I take that back. But, Native America as a spiritual issue, that sort of stuff all came together in 1972.

(She looks at me blankly for a moment, and says, “Oh yeah, Jewish, Jewish.”)

So, I’ll tell you one thing that really stands out, and one of the main reasons I probably became a rabbi is because when I was five years old, I got to wear my little black shoes, and put the strap in the back, so I got to wear patent leather black strapless shoes at my coming out party for the Kindergarten at Congregation Keneseth Israel. That so impressed me. That was my opportunity to be female, right there in the shul.

Anyway, that was the one place, too, where the rabbi and other adults seemed to care on a deeper level what we thought. I’ve always taken that with me. We were treated as humans and not as kids, students, or children and families. It’s the same with the theater. In both those places I got to experience myself as a fully creative person outside of the traditional role as child.

In 1964 and ’65, I went to summer camp that involved Judaism, a form of it. Actually I did that in 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and maybe the summer before my freshman year, maybe 3 or 4 years and twice as a counselor and twice as a camper. There were also specific, 10-day camps for kids in the youth group movement.

I also started to travel with the youth group. I was elected vice president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Temple Youth, and that allowed me to travel. I thought, “Man! This is pretty cool,” getting on a plane and going somewhere else.

One summer, I went to a Jewish arts camp. I think I was in 10th grade, or 11th, I can’t remember, and I met Isaac Bashevis Singer 24 and I met other Jewish artists. I met someone who invited me to go and be an exchange

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24 Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902 - 1991) was a Nobel Prize-winning Polish-born American author. Singer was a key figure in the Yiddish literary movement. For more biographical information, see the Nobel Prize website at (http://www.nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1978/singer-bio.html).
student in Israel my senior year, which I did, and that also transformed my life. That was an amazing experience.

One story that I tell that perhaps captures the pathos of being an exchange student in Israel was getting to know the Palestinian community and interviewing a young man about my age at a YMCA and listening to his feelings of displacement and distress and talking about wanting to take his land back.

And in that same year, meeting first-generation Israeli kids my age, and their parents, many of whom were Holocaust survivors, and learning all their stories, including some terrible, terrible things that had happened to the parents, and also meeting the first generation of German kids who had come to Israel in search of salvation for what their parents had done.

I was in a meeting when these kids were together, and taking in how painful it was for the German kids, how painful it was for the Israelis, and how far reconciliation seemed from those two groups, even though there was an effort made to bring these two populations together. And that experience definitely got me thinking about reconciliation and peace work as an essential direction or aspect of being a rabbi. Then, of course, there is the rabbi story itself, which happened when I was 14.

We were in a confirmation with the rabbi (Stephen Schaffer), and he had it organized so that the confirmation class would present the Shavuot service, and he had prewritten 10 speeches for the 10 commandments for however many students there were, so I guess there must have been around 10 (she adds sarcastically), and it was a miracle! A couple of us, another kid who eventually became a rabbi, didn’t want to take the pre-canned speech. We wanted to write our own naturally.

Mine was called “Man and the Moral Law,” and it was kind of a narrative poem. I remember one line was “why this Mother Nature,” and I went on to rattle off all of the terrible things I saw in the world. I do have a copy of it somewhere. And I read it with all of my dramatic fervor, having been trained since the age of 6 to perform on stage and several times a week for my entire life up to that point, and schooled in theater. So naturally I gave

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25 “The late spring harvest festival of first fruits, which also commemorates the giving of the TORAH on Mt. Sinai” (Diamont 1991:320).
a stirring performance compared to most of the kids who could barely talk and were about to faint.

Anyway, so I gave this speech, and believe it or not, people clapped, people went wild. At Nahalat Shalom we clap for the kids all the time; it’s not that unusual. But at the time, in the Reform temple, it was unusual to clap at services. And you know, I was like, “Well, what do you know…thank you.” And I turned around and went to the bimah, and the rabbi, who was short, was standing up a few steps, so I’m looking toward him, the ark is open behind him, the Torah is there, and above him it says, “Da Lifnei Ata Omed,” [Lynn translates] “Know before Whom you stand.” The eternal light is hanging down, the 10 Commandments are above that, and they are in white marble with gold letters, very beautiful.

And he looked at me and said, more or less, these words: “Lynn, you have a poetic soul, and I hope we will be friends throughout our lives. And some day, you will be a rabbi.” And when he said those words, on Shavuos, with the ark open and the congregation clapping, it just kind of sealed the direction, and I never looked back from that. It was always the path I’ve walked.

True to Lynn’s self-deprecating wit, she jokingly adds, “Maybe someday I’ll wake up and say ‘Oy! I should have been a clown!’ And some people will say, ‘You are a clown!’ I should have been a scientist.” Shaking her head, she adds with a note of feigned sadness, “but that wouldn’t have been possible. Poor math skills.”

Rabbi Malka Drucker

I met Rabbi Malka Drucker, officially, at her home in Tesuque, New Mexico in February 2004. I pulled up to the security gate and pushed the button. The gate buzzed open and I drove up the gravely drive to park beneath the large trees shading an
expansive yard. I knocked on a large rustic wood door. It swung open, revealing a
smiling Malka, a small gray schnauzer, and a wide foyer leading into a beautiful adobe
home. Malka is small in stature, with a twinkle in her eyes, and a powerful presence. She
turned, leading the way into a living room with smooth plaster walls lined with black-
and-white portraits taken by her partner, photographer Gay Block. We sat across from
each other on the two love seats that were perpendicular to a fireplace, and separated by a
rectangular coffee table. I admired the numerous faces, glancing out of picture frames,
with expressions ranging from open joy to quiet trepidation. Offering a plate of cookies,
Malka leaned forward, sipped tea, and asked, “What can I do for you?”

She listened thoughtfully as I present the project. Having attended Shabbat
services at HaMakom the previous weekend, I recognized a pattern in her intensity.
Malka is extremely well-spoken, passionate about her Jewish practice, and presides in a
manner that, while intellectual, seems somehow intimate. It seemed at time as if her
words could touch and inspire each individual who is listening, a quality I heard
described by more than one of her congregants.

Even so, I found Malka’s intensity, skill and polish intimidating at times, and
when she agreed to participate in my project, I relaxed and breathed easier as the
swarming butterflies in the pit of my stomach ceased their frantic flapping. I wonder
fleetingly if she agreed to participate, in part, because she was once in my position, a
hunch confirmed later in our conversation when she tells me about interviewing baseball
great Tom Seaver, the subject of her first book. “I was 30 years old wearing my Navy
blazer and doing what you are doing now,” motioning to the table, she chuckles, “with
the tape recorder.”
“To be a Jew was to make the world more fair” -- Rabbi Malka Drucker

I was born 60, almost 61 years ago in Tucson, Arizona and moved to New York very soon after that, and grew up really in New York and Los Angeles, California. From a spiritual/religious perspective, one of my earliest memories was growing up on Long Island. I was about 5 years old. And there are two things. One is the McCarthy hearings. This was very powerful in my life, learning early on who the good guys were and who the bad guys were. This was illustrated by the art in our house, because my mother had been an undergraduate at the University of Arizona. She discovered Orozco, Siqueiros and Rivera, the three painters, who were the revolutionary painters, and so in the house there were all these really somewhat menacing paintings or very dour portraits.

I asked my mother, “Who are these people? Are they relatives or something?” I mean like other people had pleasant art, impressionists, you know. My mother showed me this Orozco painting, famous painting with the gigantic soldiers on horses and the very small people below, and the big shall ride, and the small shall walk. And the teaching from that was, life isn’t fair, and it’s our job to make it fairer. So I grew up with this very, very strong, you know, sense of social justice from the youngest age, and I somehow associated that with a family value.

My mother, who’d grown up in an Orthodox background sort of, had absolutely no understanding or respect for the ritual. She met Roland Gittelson in 1950, one of the great architects of postwar American Judaism. A Reform rabbi. And, he was at the beginning of his career then. I mean he lived into his 90s and wrote practically all that time, but at this time he was in New York on Long Island, and he was the first person to introduce Rational Judaism to my mother and Ethical Judaism. So one’s cultural and spiritual path now could be contained, under the rubric of Judaism. It was clear to me by the time I was 7 years old that to be a Jew was to make the world more fair.

You know, nobody ever said it like that, and there was certainly no chauvinism about it, but it was definitely seeing my mother work for Adlai Stevenson\(^\text{26}\), and there was just a real sense that’s what you’re supposed to

\(^{26}\) "Adlai Ewing Stevenson (1900-1965), governor of Illinois, twice Democratic candidate for president, and ambassador to the United Nations, was born to politics. His maternal great-grandfather, Jesse Fell, a founder of the Republican party, was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln and the first to propose him for the presidency. His paternal grandfather, Adlai E. Stevenson, was vice president during Grover Cleveland's
do, get out there and work on the right side, and being Jewish was part of that.

My earliest memory in synagogue was being consecrated, which they do in reformed congregations. You walk in, wearing white or something and they hand you these little Torahs and Gittelson was like God, you know he was like, his robes, you know, whoa!

I mean it’s sort of funny, but you look at your life, and you can make up any story you want about making sense of it. But this much I know. I was very young. I was somewhere between my 5th and 6th year, and they had a talent show or something for kids, I remember standing up on the stage, in the temple. And this is again one of my earliest memories, and it was one of the early triumphs in my life. I stood up there and sang Take Me Out to the Ball Game. And I had no nervousness, and I was so enthusiastic about it, that I think I’m like, “Three strikes you’re out…” and I kind of leaned forward, and apparently everybody came running to make sure I wasn’t going to fall off the stage!

And I remember I was just conscious, that I was unaware because I was so into this. It just strikes me as so funny that first of all, I sort of fell in love with performance in a synagogue, and that my first book was about baseball. I always made this joke that, you know, there is a connection between Torah and baseball. In the big inning… (We laugh.)

My first books were about baseball and about Jewish ritual. So clearly there was something in that direction.

I was not exactly good. I really had a very difficult time with school and I think that in retrospect, it kind of ran against my creative core. But as a child I just assumed that there was something really wrong with me, because it was very difficult for me to sit and I couldn’t exactly get it. By the time I was eight years old, I was convinced that I was headed towards prison by the time I was an adult.

My parents sent me to sleep away camp. In those days, you’d go for eight weeks. I was devastated. You know, to go away for eight weeks when you’ve never been away for more than two nights. I was so homesick, and
it was a strange camp. It was camp Seguin. It was a Workman’s Circle Camp. I always thought Workman’s Circle was not religious but my going from Roland Gittelson’s once a week Reform congregation, to a place where you get no mail on Saturday, you have to dress in white, you have to go to services, you have to pray before every meal. I was so homesick. So I make this association now with Jewish practice and personal heartache. I had a counselor who cried all day on Shabbat. She was fasting and her father had died, but I didn’t understand that.

I was there about three weeks, four weeks and they put a box of cereal on the table. The cereal had a pig on the back of it, as a mask. It was Corn Flakes or something, and I was about to reach for the Corn Flakes, and they took the box off the table because of the image of the pig on it. And when I found out why, I came home and I told my parents, “I’m not doing this anymore, because this is really stupid!”

You know, it’s really stupid that there’s something wrong with a mask of a pig that you can’t eat what’s inside of the box. I mean I was just completely, I was an apostate. I don’t remember exactly what happened after that. I don’t remember that I didn’t like go to Hebrew school, but I know that whatever it is I learned, I don’t remember learning. I don’t remember liking it. I don’t remember it being consistent.

I remember my grandfather’s seders and if anything has anything to do with where I’m standing now, it was first my mother tying social justice to this path, and second, I was already now maybe 9, and my grandfather, the gentlest, sweetest of men, said, “It’s time for you to recite the four questions.” And this was the one event in our family, Passover, where there were extended relatives and my grandfather would sit at the head of

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27 Passover is an eight-day festival, celebrated in the early spring, from the 15th through the 22nd of the Hebrew month of Nissan. It commemorates the escape of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt. Observance of Passover involves refraining from consuming "chametz." Representing the unleavened bread eaten by our ancestors, Chametz means leavened grain—any food or drink that contains wheat, barley, rye, oats, and spelt, including bread, cake, cookies, cereal, pasta and most alcoholic beverages. Ritual observance of the holiday involves participation in Seder meals, in which matzah (unleavened bread) is featured, bitter herbs are eaten, four cups of wine or grape juice is consumed, and the story of the Exodus from Egypt is recounted through recitation of the Haggadah. The four questions are asked by the children for explanation by the adults.
He had certainly long ago abandoned his upbringing as an Orthodox Jew.

And I felt like I was sort of a delinquent, a flunky, and to suddenly have a sense that I’m being counted on to do this. They need me to do this, because I was the youngest eligible person to do it. Not the youngest person. It was profoundly important to me, for my self-esteem, for my sense that I was doing something for more than myself. It was a really, really great moment, even though I wouldn’t say that I straightened up after this and just became a good citizen.

When I was 11, I remember walking with my step-sister, who was two years younger than I. It was a fall day. My grandmother, my father’s mother, had a house on the water in Amityville — the Amityville — and it was a wonderful, spooky house. It had been owned by a fisherman; it was a fisherman’s shack. You never came in the front door; you always walked around to the back to come into the house. It was on the Great South Bay. I spent much of my summers clamming, going out and digging for clams with my toes. My grandmother would give us coat hangers covered with fish heads, and we dangled them from the dock and would bring in the crabs to have for lunch. This is my Jewish upbringing! (She laughs.) I had no idea that there was anything wrong with it. I had no idea that this was unusual. Every now and then I might meet somebody on the horizon who really wasn’t like this, and I just thought, “How weird.” I mean, I cut my teeth on bacon. Ham and Swiss cheese sandwiches are my favorites. My Kashrut is so much more holy than other people’s because I know, I know!

I didn’t know about the Holocaust until I was bored out of my mind in Hebrew school one day. It was Sunday morning, and this girl, who was very dark and sallow, was telling me about the Nazis, and about how they killed all the Jews. This was 1953 or ’54. And I said, “My God!” I came home and said to my parents, “Is this true?” And I could tell that I had definitely asked what I shouldn’t have asked. You’re not supposed to know about this. It was like talking about oral sex or something, like you’re not supposed to know.

And I never brought it up again. They sort of answered tersely, I don’t even know what they said, but I knew. All I remember is that you’re not supposed to talk about this, and I really wasn’t. Then I was 13 and I read
The Diary of Anne Frank. That helped me until I was about 30. I was protected from this. I was much more conscious of people like Joe McCarthy and the bad guys in the United States. I had no sense really of Jewish history in this way.

Chanukah was a big deal. My mother did the fireplace for weeks, we got piles of presents, you know, where you’re so excited you could hardly breathe - until Chanukah began. In later years she did a Chanukah bush, I mean, really got into this stuff. Then, of course, I learned this is NOT what to do.

So, I don’t know exactly when it was, but I just developed profound ahava (love of) Israel. Not necessarily for the people around me, but for this civilization, this tradition. I know that I had a strong sense of it when I was president of my youth group when I was a teenager in high school, and what I really liked about that is that you got to go on these special leadership weekends where you meet other kids from other parts of the city, and I was living in the San Fernando Valley, somewhere between lower-middle to upper-lower class, and it was just great to meet these kids from the West Side of L.A. It was in the early 60s, so civil rights was really happening. We came home singing We Shall Overcome, really caring about this community, Israel. I was blown away by the idea that there was this country that was founded on these principles of egalitarian democracy. God! You know, it was very, very exciting to be part of all of that.

And when I was 16, my parents gave me a car. The primary reason was that I could do carpool for them for my younger sisters when they had to go to Hebrew school. I look back at this like it was another person. I would go to services Friday night alone. I was 16 years old. I think about this now and I think whoa! And I remember it was because it was a very warm rabbi, an old man if I remember, probably my age now, and the congregation was small and heymish28, maybe like HaMakom. And on Sunday mornings they would serve bagels and cream cheese for the adults who would drop their kids off and pick them up. I think how funny it was that I really enjoyed doing that. My parents didn’t participate in this at all. But I felt very at home with these people. I mean even now, talking about it, I’m moved when I think of it.

28 Homey, cozy or familiar.
One Friday night I remember I must have been reading some part of the liturgy. I don’t remember what kind of congregation, what kind of prayer book, but there was something in there that connected to this idea that we’re all God’s children. “Oh! Thank God!,” I thought. My parents were 20 when I was born. They loved me. They did the best they could. They didn’t know anything until I was walking down the aisle and they were both 41 at the time. Maybe then they were ready to kick in as parents. I felt that through my parents’ divorce and having to negotiate step parents in a time when it wasn’t so common, contributed to my feelings like I just didn’t know where I belonged.

And one day, there I am, that Friday night, Shabbos, and “Whoa! I have another parent!” Profound. Profound. Years later I heard the negro spiritual *All God’s Children*. Why’d you become a rabbi? There are one thousand ways you can tell that story. But most profoundly, and we don’t use this language much in our tradition, but I had some sense of being called29.

That reminds me of another very early memory, and I think is important from a spiritual perspective. I was one of these really skinny, sort of yellow-completed children, and after the war there was feeling like you had to be really robust. And I was not robust. I got sick a lot. I was 4 years old and we had this pediatrician, Dr. Ben, who they referred to always as “a refugee who had lost his family.” Of course you have to understand that when you’re 4 years old, you’re thinking, “Where had he left them?” What did it mean to lose your family? And he spoke with an accent. I knew nothing about the Holocaust. Nothing. Dr. Ben would come once a month or whatever it was, and look in my ears. “Yes, another ear infection, another bit of penicillin.” Eventually, he said, “A change of scenery could be helpful.” He was just sort of esoteric, offering a somewhat mystical suggestion for healing that changes hearing.

So I remember I went down to Florida with my mother on the train, and I wasn’t 5 yet. And it was just enchanting. Some of my earliest memories were of going through an Indian reservation, going to an alligator farm.

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29 While the term “calling” is not traditionally used in Jewish milieus, I use the term purposefully. The term “calling” is employed by the rabbis themselves to explain their experiences of feeling compelled to participate in the rabbinate, a spiritual context that underlies several of the stories contained in this chapter. Adoption of this language also demonstrates how seamlessly the rabbis incorporate ideas and norms from broader cultures in which they participate in order to make specific points.
But I remember, I had loving grandparents. I had all these great relatives around me. I was the first grandchild, first niece and all that. But there was something about being in the midst of people who were different from my family, who were affectionate and friendly. And one Friday night, I saw candles lit. I had no idea what it was. I didn’t connect it to whatever Jewish means. But boy did it knock me out to watch this woman cover her head, wave her hands, cover her eyes and say these words that I then recognized as Jewish.

We had cousins there. My mother had cousins. This one Friday night my older cousin, who was 7, who was like an adult to me, took me to shul. You know also, from Reform context, by “shul” I mean they were conservative. David was the sweetest boy, he was very kindly. He ultimately became a rabbi. But what was so funny was that David put me on his lap, and like I just fell in love. It was like, “Oh my God.”

And all these people, all these kids were wearing these things on their heads. I’d never seen them before. Some were white and some were black. But while there were girls and boys, only boys were wearing them. I figured that out. It’s a boy deal. But why some black and some white? You know big ones, little? No. Little ones wearing one of those too. So I could never figure that out. And of course it was arbitrary. And it was whatever they had, the kippot. You know, it was so funny, and I remember just this association with hearing the prayers and these very early memories of these candles being lit, and going to services with David.

Years later hearing my grandfather say, “Well, David’s going to become a rabbi.” And this wasn’t said with great pride, by the way, or with joy. Just like, “Why?” He was going to become a doctor and changed his major. And my grandfather said, “He felt the call.” I don’t know how old I was, but I certainly had no idea of what he was talking about, and I probably didn’t know what it meant to feel the call, although I had, I realized later.

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30 A kippah, or kippot in the plural, also called a yarmulke, is a thin, slightly-rounded skullcap traditionally worn by observant Jewish men, and by men and some women in contemporary Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and Renewal religious services. Symbolically, it demonstrates reverence for God.
Maybe when I could no longer avoid it. Sort of like coming out. Like I have to do this.

But I think it was, that it was such a powerful force, and when I look back on these early experiences, that hardly anything was working for me in my life, except the sense that without even having language for it something had my back. Something. You know, and that there was some sense that I wasn’t alone. That something was keeping me from destructing. But years later I started writing these Jewish books.

There are times now, Miria, where, like last night, I’m sort of sitting in this place of leadership, and in this place of having a community, and thinking, “Oh! Amazing!” And part of me thinking, surprise to you Malka, but not to everything in the universe.

*Identity and Cohesion in the Rabbis’ Stories*

Turning to the rabbis’ constructed ‘characters’, defining events, and motivational factors in these stories, I am aware that many of the elements of Lynn’s and Malka’s narratives derive from particular Western storytelling conventions. Both evidence similar structures and particular tones that resonate with me as an adult in 21st Century American society whose expectations for ‘good stories’ are primed by my experiences of acculturation. Within this context, the most successful stories are relevant to the person with whom the author is speaking and marked by coherence.

Life stories are inherently the vehicle through which people communicate experiences. Peacock and Holland claim that life stories can be “envisioned as a product of the interaction and desire for understanding between the teller and listener” (1993:372). In this desire for intimacy, the accuracy of the narrative content seems less important than how the content works to engage the listener in moments of shared or recognizable experiences thus promoting mutual understanding and commonality. As Linde suggests, “we use stories to claim or negotiate group membership and to
demonstrate that we are worthy members of these groups, properly following (or at least understanding) their moral standards” (1993:219) and, here I add, shared understandings of the ‘self.’

The subject of life stories, the narrated “self” in these cases, derives from Western templates. Seventeenth century philosopher John Locke said that people are simultaneously individual and social with the capacity to develop moral understanding within a given lifetime. In Essay, he explained that one’s identity is actively shaped as “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places” (quoted in Seigel 2005:94). Locke’s idea of the self in relation to one’s moral positionality, as well as those supplied by Rene Descartes and others inspired by ideals of the Enlightenment, formed foundations for the “selves” expressed through the rabbis’ stories. As in Locke’s considerations of personal identity in which an “individual’s’ responsibilities for who they are [exists] at the center of it” (quoted in Seigel 2005:108), the rabbis tell stories inspired by these Western storytelling genres in which their narrated selves emerge in relation to their perceptions of social, civic and moral responsibilities.

Further, each woman’s storied self, is like the identity discussed by Jonathan Boyarin, crafted “out of a dynamically chosen selection of memories, and the constant reshaping, reinvention, and reinforcement of those memories” (1994:26). This self, and the events in which it figures, is remembered through a specific lens that relates to the way an autobiographer thinks of herself in her present life. Timelines and experiences are fluid, connecting to self-constructed and subjective themes rather than detailed accounts presumed to derive from impartial self-observation and perfect recollection. These
narratives demonstrate how both self-understanding and story coherence are not matters of a singular progression of events, but instead relate to each storyteller’s self-exploration. Remembering her life, each woman crafts of an account that reflects backwards, finds ground in the present, and anticipates the future. Life stories can be said to represent the “creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past” (Boyarin 1994:22). Taking a cue from these scholars and the narrative work of Elaine Lawless, I look at the ways in which these women story their selves and experiences with an eye toward how the “patterns, beliefs, and opinions” they share might “offer a total, larger picture” (1993:128) of women’s experiences of growing up, and exploring spirituality.

**Storying ‘Malka’**

All of the women on whom this project is focused are telling stories of how and why they chose to enter the rabbinate. Each author grapples not only with multiple aspects of her “self” – the self she was, the self she is and the self she is becoming, but also with her moral understandings of the world around her at each of these stages. In Malka’s early narration, for example, she tells us that at an early age (i.e., 5 years old) she began to question, develop and voice her theoretical position on the treatment of others. Starting from “a spiritual/religious perspective,” Malka invites her audience to move with her through her developing understanding of morality. Listening to the McCarthy hearings, she tells us that she learns who, “the good guys…and…the bad guys” were. As a curious child, a foreshadowing to the engaged intellectualism of her rabbinic style, she asks her mother about the “dour” paintings in her home, forming questions regarding the work’s subjects in relation to her and gleaning lessons about class difference and political
power. From these childhood case studies, Malka’s early spiritual trajectory is understood to be intricately connected to “social justice.” In her words, “life isn’t fair, and it’s our job to make it fairer.”

Malka’s narrative is unavoidably filtered through the lens of present experiences and position in life. There is a self-conscious quality to Malka’s story, an awareness of her own moral becoming, her emerging subjectivity shaped through engagement with ideas and materials in her immediate vicinity, i.e., her television, the art in her home, her mother. This subjective sense of self, writes George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochberg, “is not the romantic fiction of a self prior to and safe from socialization. On the contrary, it is what bears the marks of the person’s interactions with the world and seeks yet to erase them” (1992:8). In this story of Malka’s engagement with her mother, we meet a young girl who is curious, socially engaged, and amenable to moral explanation.

Butler contends, “The self at issue is clearly ‘formed’ within a set of social conventions that raise the question whether a good life can be conducted within a bad one, and whether we might, in recrafting ourselves with and for another, participate in the remaking of social conditions” (2005:134-135). Malka’s story, in effect, creates a foundation to do just that. The young girl in the story strives to make sense of good and bad. She learns from her questioning, and creates a moral foundation that carries her through her life and anticipates the social-justice focus of her Jewish practice. As a rabbi whose very path to spiritualism emanates from such principles, Malka’s ability to convey herself as one capable of wrestling with difficult ethnical questions, reaching an understanding of her position in a complex world, and effectively communicating her acquired values to others may, in fact, be read as a professional prerequisite. Her
articulated self and moral position are coherent threads that tie the disjointed aspects of her life story together.

As Linde reminds us, “The very notion of a life story requires a notion of sequence…[as it] is not merely a collection of events that happened in some unknown or irrelevant order…[but instead] must have an order that both the speaker and the addressee take as significant” (1993:13). By focusing on the elemental issues of right and wrong, the framework of Malka’s story instantly becomes comprehensible to her audience, as she successfully develops a story that is relevant and important, and structures a persona that seems not only capable of achieving her status as an author and a rabbi, but appears somehow destined to follow such a course. The self is not only related to her internal means of personal understanding, it also becomes a “character” capable of action and accomplishment.

*Storying ‘Lynn’*

As one of the first seven women to practice rabbinics in the United States in the fall of 1973, Lynn too is self-consciously aware of the significance of her life’s work and the ways in which she recounts her story. Employing similar narrative coherence principles of “causality and continuity” (Linde 1993:127), the rabbi crafts her life story through memories reconstructed with regard to her present position – beginning, in a way not unlike Malka, with “thinking about the track that my life took.” Lynn narrates her rabbinic development, explaining how she experienced difference by helping her mother work with the disabled community in Allentown, learned to love nature and Judaism through her experiences at summer camps, matured as a leader in youth groups, and received inspiration at synagogue. These experiences are reinforced as an exchange
student in Israel during her freshman year of high school, when she interviewed a young Palestinian man at the YMCA and listened to what she describes as “his feelings of displacement and distress about wanting to take his land back.”

On the same trip she met German students who “came to Israel in search of salvation for what their parents had done.” She describes the encounter between these German students and a group of Israeli students, noting “how far from reconciliation these two groups” seemed. Lynn claims, “That experience definitely got me thinking about reconciliation and peace work” and created a “fusing of what later became Rabbi Lynn.” Deviating from a seamless historical chronology, she anticipates her future career, referring to ideological strands that influence her current work, saying “political activism, moral concern, interfaith concern, and the arts, and creative approach to Jewish life, all came together in high school.”

Lynn’s construction and presentation of a coherent narrative that builds toward her current leadership position, allows her audience to understand that an engaged and critical young woman might, in fact, have an aptitude for spiritual leadership. Whereas Malka’s quest for moral understanding provides the groundwork for a woman capable of becoming a spiritual leader, Lynn’s life story reads much like a resume: a sequence of events that, when engaged critically in terms of existing societal models of professionalization, demonstrates that the young Lynn had the capacity, opportunity, and drive to become an activist and leader, proving her worth as one of the first women to break through the gender barriers that prevented women from holding positions of synagogue-based Jewish authority.
While the stories told by both Lynn and Malka emerge in Western life history or autobiographical contexts, they deviate somewhat with respect to the autobiographical genre they use. Though both use autobiography in what Karl J. Weintraub might consider its “genuine” sense, as their stories are “guided by desire(s) to discern and assign meaning to” their lives (1974:824). Even so, Malka tells her story as memoir, whereas Lynn’s adheres to more traditional autobiographical standards. The distinction is this: Malka’s narrative, like those written in memoir, derives its strength from her internal reflection, a process through which external occurrences are assigned meaning through “inward absorption” and contemplation (Weintraub 1974:823). Malka tells us, “When I look back on these early experiences, hardly anything was working for me in my life, except the sense that without even having language for it something had my back.” Like the memoirists Weintraub discusses, aspects of Malka’s life seem woven together with a sense of purpose, in this case, even when she does not necessarily believe in herself, there is a presence that “has her back” and somehow guides her toward a spiritual life.

Lynn’s autobiography, however, follows a different literary tradition, that of the “Western great man,” which gained cultural significance in the 1800s with the “emergence of the particular modern form of historical mindedness we call historism” (Weintraub 1974:821). Like these literary ‘great men,’ Lynn’s storied life seems exceptional, singular and guided. Whereas Malka’s story develops through internal reflections, Lynn’s storied actions respond to a convergence of unforeseen events that connect in unanticipated ways. In short, “the message about the person lies in the value of
the deeds done and less in the conscious reflection on the inner meaning of these acts for the personality” (Weintraub 1974:823).

Both styles of narration employed by Lynn and Malka derive from templates used by successful leaders in the larger, encompassing American and Jewish cultures. While Lynn’s style demonstrates leadership through stories of events, challenges and successes, Malka’s highlights qualities of leadership through stories of self-awareness, knowledge, and passion. Both stories nod to an external guiding force that carries these women into their present positions (see Lynn’s confirmation story and Malka’s moments of revelation). In this light, we see that women who seek recognition in the dominant canon, like their male predecessors and contemporary counterparts, must distinguish themselves, in thought and word, as those who can accomplish great things, and who are supported in their life choices, whether directly as in Lynn’s story by Rabbi Schaffer, or indirectly as Malka’s understanding of a guiding force.

Their narratives are the well rehearsed stories of public leaders. Their autobiographies demonstrate the interplay between individual women and the social forces of the world. As Weintraub writes, “one forms a self as the world moves on, and one helps form a world as one’s self is being formed” (1974:833). While I have considered how the Western tropes used may be in part products of the women’s entrées into the formerly masculine province of the Jewish rabbinate, the notion seems simplistic. These authors combine core conceptions of Western selfhood, with storytelling tropes of reflection, action and accomplishment, to effectively communicate experiences that helped make them the leaders they are today for an audience whose cultural experiences render the rabbis’ tellings sensible and significant.
The rabbis’ chosen styles of narration are not accidental. Many scholars, including Julie Cruikshank, have observed that, in general, “women’s autobiographies rarely present a coherent polished synthesis, and the form of presentation is frequently discontinuous, reflecting the nature of women’s experiences” (1990:3). Yet these authors do not simply tell the stories of who they are as ‘women.’ They are telling us who they are: rabbis and leaders.

While Lynn’s story is developed along the most linear trajectory through a series of personal and career accomplishments, Malka’s story is recounted to highlight specific aspects of her character that lend credibility to her chosen professional path. In Malka’s story, personal attributes such as a love of performance, evidenced in her singing of *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, combine with explanations of her “creative core” in relation to early academic experiences – providing context for fundamental stories about social justice, love of Israel, and early religious encounters which, when woven together, lay a foundation for her current identity and life experiences.

Malka’s narrative, much like Lynn’s, is also interesting in the ways it does not adhere to a trajectory of strictly religious accomplishment, retaining constancy as it winds between stories of both secular and religious influences. This ability to weave back and forth between these two spheres lends their tales a very modern feel, letting the readers know that they are in-sync with their audiences, that they too are real people who have not always been religiously observant, and like the rest of us, have had to learn about Jewish practice, their places in the world, and what makes a just society. Whereas Lynn’s stories focus on lessons learned in the secular world that then relate to her understanding of discrimination, oppression, and personal depth, Malka’s tales are told as humorous and
humanizing counterpoints to her present identity, as exemplified in the stories of her
grandparent.

When summering with her father’s mother in Amityville, Malka finds joy in
“going out and digging for clams” with her toes. She explains, “My grandmother would
give us coat hangers covered with fish heads, and we dangled them from the dock and
would bring in the crabs to have for lunch.” This story of catching and eating food that
many Jews would consider tref, or non-Kosher, opens the door for her to joke about
cutting her teeth on bacon and loving ham and Swiss cheese sandwiches.

While visiting her mother’s father, Malka participates in a seder, and finds that
she is important, or “counted on,” when he asks her to recite the four questions. This
experience for Malka “was profoundly important,” increasing her “self-esteem” and
being part of “something for more than [her]self.” These frames demonstrate that Malka
has lived fully in religious and non-religious spaces, finding belonging and joy in both.
The openness of her early years makes her subsequent decision to become a rabbi an
important, well contemplated matter. We see this in the discussion of her mother’s
celebration of Chanukah with “piles of presents” and a “Chanukah bush” which Malka
has subsequently learned “is not what to do.” She jokes of her current attendance to laws
regarding food consumption, saying “My Kashrut is so much more holy than other
people’s because I know [how good bacon is].”

Malka’s tale balances storylines in both the past and present. She breaks from the
childhood chronicle to engage the present, telling me, “I mean, it’s sort of funny, but you
know you look at your life, and you can make up any story you want about making sense
of it.” She adds, “There are times now, Miria, where I’m sort of sitting in the place of
leadership, and in this place of having a community, and thinking, ‘Oh! Amazing!’ And a part of me thinking, ‘surprise to you Malka, but not to everything in the universe.’” With this, early experiences that might seem fragmentary or unimportant come to be part of a divine plan supported in the fact that a “powerful force” was always present, preventing the young woman from being alone, and “from destructing.”

Stories in Social Contexts

Leadership qualities such as morality, religiosity, and activism are further illuminated in relation to stories of social secularization and political contexts. Secularization, the process of social change in which people living in a ‘modernizing’ world choose less religious ways of life, is seen in Malka’s storied upbringing in a Reform synagogue. While she credits her early rabbis for teaching her about social justice, she describes her early years as largely unreligious.

…we were Presbyterian Jews. And ritual was so looked down on by my mother, on principle. On my father’s side, everybody had Bar Mitzvahs, but it was still so nominal. We weren’t affiliated. We weren’t connected to Jews. There was no anti-Semitism among us. There was pride in being Jewish, and it was good to be a Jew, but the religious piece, forget about it.

Lynn mentions similar Protestant influences in her upbringing, saying that she and her fellow bat/bar mitzvah candidates had to wear a “choir robe sort of thing... because we were Reform Jews and we had to dress like Protestants.” Such observations in both Lynn’s and Malka’s stories read as thinly veiled commentary that such trends now seem somehow less authentic than the revitalized Jewish traditions practiced in the communities in which the women both preside.

Politics too are responsible for many of the rabbis’ pivotal experiences. Malka emphasizes social justice emerging from postwar American Reform Judaism, as well as
the political atmosphere in the United States at the time, as salient aspects of her Jewish identity (i.e. the artwork in her home, the McCarthy hearings, and her mother’s early influence in her budding ideas of morality). Malka arrives at her need to be on the “right” side of politics by observing her mother’s work with Adlai Stevenson. While not an overly religious person, Malka’s mother found a comfortable space within Judaism when she met Rabbi Roland Gittelson and was introduced to “Rational and Ethnical Judaism.” Malka maintains that through this branch of Reform Judaism, it became possible for “one’s cultural and spiritual path to be contained under the rubric of Judaism,” preventing the need to divide one’s life between the secular and the sacred.

A concern with social justice in the form of awareness of the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement permeates Malka’s and Lynn’s stories. Malka tells of her burgeoning comprehension of the Holocaust. When a girl in her class tells her that the Nazis “killed the Jews,” Malka rushes home to her parents to ask, “Is this true?” Her parents’ response leads her to believe that this topic is something that she is not supposed to know about. Her family’s secrecy regarding the matter is also noted in her lack of clarity regarding the strange accent and mystifying loss of family in her parent’s friend Dr. Ben. In Malka’s story, the Holocaust finally comes to light in school, when she reads *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

As a sixth-generation American, Lynn, too, felt compelled to understand herself as a Jew in relation to a larger Jewish world shaped by the Holocaust, Jewish history, and creation of Israel. The young Lynn thrived under the leadership of rabbis who encouraged her questioning – not only discussing social justice, but acting as role models in their political attempts to confront oppression.
Such propensities for social justice are reinforced as the women experience the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights Movements. Malka tells us that as president of her youth group in high school, she participated in leadership weekends with other teenagers. “It was in the early 60s, so Civil Rights was…really happening. You know, coming home and singing *We Shall Overcome*… was very, very exciting.”

Similarly, as an inspired 9th grader, Lynn attempted to participate in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. A political rally in support of civil and economic rights for African-Americans, the March boasted 200,000 to 300,000 participants, mostly African American. It took place in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, August 28, 1963. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. famously delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech at the March. Lynn was disappointed in missing out on a pivotal event in Civil Rights history, yet credits her rabbis for encouraging her continued interest in activism in the context of the temple. “At a basic level,” she says, “they considered Jewish and black suffering to be similar, as they were both oppressed groups. These rabbis sent a clear message, and people took action. They went on walks and were arrested.”

**Childhood and Callings**

Even though these stories seem so clearly remembered in the context of their present positions, there are still elements of childhood, innocence, and discovery. Through their tales, Malka and Lynn call attention to the ways in which the younger versions of themselves grew aware of gender, their own and others, in relation to broader American and Jewish values and communities. Lynn finds at age five that she can wear patent leather shoes and sip tea from dainty cups, and feels like she found a place for herself as a feminine being who was more than a child. One of Malka’s early memories is
sitting on her cousin’s lap at shul and trying to decide who got to wear yarmulkes and who could not, recognizing that it somehow distinguished men from women.

Their words explain how childhood experiences such as attending summer camp allowed Lynn and Malka to discover their independence, develop leadership skills, and find stronger connection to their Jewish identities. Youth groups, synagogue services and bat mitzvah ceremonies, too, created spaces in which the storytellers could come into their own as young women and leaders, providing venues to create their own meaningful religious moments. Similarly, narratives about education and mentorship, in the form of teachers and rabbis, played an important role in inspiring the girls to reach beyond their families’ limitations.

Significantly, these stories reveal how each of the women dealt with adversity at young ages. Both tell stories about vulnerability and feelings of difference. Malka faced childhood illnesses and struggled with her parents’ divorce. Lynn offhandedly mentions her mother’s death when she is a young woman, remarking “I needed that experience in order to know how to survive.” Both women overcame the challenges they were presented.

**Necessary Constructions**

To understand what Lynn and Malka bring to a new form of spiritual leadership, and to a new, loosely bound community of Jews, it is helpful to look at the vignettes the women share and the qualities they privilege. Their stories of childhood feelings of belonging, joy, learning and loss have the potential to bring audiences back to their own childhood memories in creative and visceral ways. Their stories of engagement in the world around them, demonstrate that they, like the audiences, have struggled with society
and religion. These women are leaders ‘of their time.’ They are activists, artists, and scholars steeped in issues relating to ethnic and gender relations, politics, war, poverty who exemplify moral obligation and concern for social justice. Like those listening to or reading their stories, they have felt ambivalence toward their spiritual paths, rediscovered them, and importantly, now freely express feelings of being ‘called’ to spiritual leadership. These coming of age stories, carefully crafted, coherent and motivated, design foundations for their lives that are now public, meaningful, and in the service of others.

In Chapter 3, I focus on stories of growing up Jewish as told by Rabbis Shefa Gold, Min Kantrowitz and Deborah Brin. Moving away from story selection and narrative construction which informed this chapter, I bring attention to how the rabbis construct ‘storied selves’ through references of physical embodiment and emotional realities, as well as through relationships with others (i.e., family members, friends, teachers, etc.). I contemplate the degree to which these ‘storied selves,’ as crafted characters, become capable of action in the story, allowing the storyteller to communicate her process of individuation and developing self-understanding. I examine too how the storied characters engage in dialogic interplays with other characters in the story, revealing the storyteller’s intentions, motivation, and thoughts in ways that lends authenticity to their tales.
CHAPTER 4

Growing up ‘Jewish:’

Body, Relation and Authenticity in the Life Stories of Three Women Rabbis

“When I went to Hebrew school, I found it boring. It was not fun. When I got bat mitzvahed I had a big fight because the boys would have their bar mitzvahs on Saturday morning, and read from the Torah, and the girls would have their bat mitzvah on Friday night, and they weren’t allowed to read from the Torah. This was a conservative synagogue. I wanted to read from the Torah and they wouldn’t let me. So, I did a little subversive thing…I took a few different passages that were about light from the Torah, and I chanted them as part of my speech. So I kind of snuck it in there!”

-- Rabbi Shefa Gold

“I did not realize it then, but there was some kind of pull that was there really from a very young age. I never went to Hebrew School, I never had a Bat Mitzvah. The first Shabbat service that I remember going to was in college…And people would ask me questions, “Well, you’re a Jew, what is that?” And, I really didn’t know. So, I did then what turned out to be one of my themes… if you don’t know something, run toward it, and I started learning, and I joined Hillel.”

-- Rabbi Min Kantrowitz

“I didn't see myself fitting in…I did not see myself fitting into the roles for women within the Jewish world. It wasn't right for me. So, how to be a Jew was a question that was going on for me. How to be a Jew and a woman and a feminist was a question for me. Whether or not to be a Jew was a question. Did I have a choice about this and could I walk away from it?”

-- Rabbi Deborah Brin

While story selection and narrative structure are important aspects of well told tales, in examining the stories told by Rabbis Shefa Gold, Min Kantrowitz, and Deborah Brin, I focus on another important aspect of a ‘good’ life story—the rabbis’ abilities to create characters that bring their stories to life. Jack J. Bauer and Dan P. McAdams write, “Life stories are like other stories in that they involve a cast of characters (namely the self and others), important episodes (e.g., high points, low points,
turning points), and an interplay of motivations, intentions, expectations, actions, reactions, and evaluations” (2000:276). Bauer and McAdams take a psychological position, arguing that ‘others’ are referenced in story to express the narrator’s need for intimacy and to “emphasize caring for others and connections to others on varying levels” (2000:277). While emotional connection is clearly one aspect of this narrative strategy, the rabbis’ evocation of ‘others’ who play important parts in their stories seems to serve different purposes as well.

In these stories of ‘growing up Jewish,’ the rabbis weave ‘others’ into their narratives for juxtaposition, camaraderie, and individuation. The characters highlight aspects of the rabbis’ self-understandings as people against which their storied ‘selves’ individuate, splitting apart from those who are familiar or overly dissimilar in their narrated searches for self-awareness and self-acceptance. These other characters form a type of relational map against which the narrators remain identifiable and congruent even as time, contexts, and identities change. Deborah Schiffrin explains, “A life story...discursively constructs a self that sits at the center node of a network of relationships” (2002:316). The storyteller is a daughter, a friend, a rival, etc. to the other referenced characters in her life story, and in this network the storied self becomes a fixed point through connections to others.

The storyteller’s relationship to people referenced in the narrative also directs the reader to the social identities to which the rabbi wishes to align. Through relationships that reinforce and challenge the narrator’s ideas and values, the reader is given access to the storyteller’s memories, thoughts, and reactions revealing the storyteller’s internal motivations. While we often think that we can glean the veracity of a speaker’s
motivation through tone, expression, and gesture during face-to-face exchanges, in
written story, the narrator’s internal motivations must be described and made evident in
other ways. As readers, we evaluate the text to determine its accuracy and the
storyteller’s authenticity based upon our assessments of the feasible link between these
internal motivations and the narrator’s actions in the outside world. As spiritual leaders,
whose jobs in many ways cast them as midwives to the emotional well-being, integrity,
and spiritual growth of others, an ability to demonstrate self-understanding, moral
aptitude, and virtuous, or at the least reasonable, internal motivations in a manner that
seems authentic is crucial. In the following stories, Rabbis Shefa Gold, Min Kantrowitz,
and Deborah Brin, tell us who they are, and how they became the people they are today,
through memories of growing up ‘Jewish’ in the presence of others.

**Rabbi Shefa Gold**

Following a phone conversation and brief meeting in 2005, Shefa invited me to
Washington DC where she was to preside during a three day Shabbaton\(^{32}\). I arrived at the
synagogue, moved to the periphery, listened to snippets of conversations, and noted that
Shefa mingled briefly with those in attendance, but remained removed from the crowd,
focusing instead on the task at hand. As a guest rabbi, Shefa was a stranger to most
people there. Garbed in a flowing dress accessorized by crystal jewelry, she carried a

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\(^{32}\) In this case, shabbaton refers to three days, over the course of a weekend, focused on Shabbat, and the
practice of Shabbat. These events take place in one or more synagogue communities, and involve a range of
participants who differ in generations, background, and synagogue membership.
drum and shruti box\textsuperscript{33}. Shefa took her place on the \textit{bimah}. She placed the wooden box on the floor in front of her. She undid a latch, and the sides opened slightly. Wrapping her hand over the top of the box, she squeezed lightly with her fingers, and the accordion like instrument emitted a melodic hum. Closing her eyes, she hummed a \textit{niggun}\textsuperscript{34}. Others in the audience swayed as they too began to sing the wordless melody. When the singing stopped, she quietly led prayers setting a tone more like a meditation than the Shabbat services to which I had grown accustomed.

Two days later, at the home of one of Shefa’s students from \textit{Kol Zimra}, her chant leaders training, I enjoyed bagels, ate my first lox, and answered their questions about the project. Shefa listened intently as I explained my still limited understanding of anthropology and dissertation goals. I fielded questions about Judaism and gender, and received support from the group of students. Satisfied with my intentions, she invited me to her home for Shabbat dinner the following weekend.

I drove carefully though the winding mountain roads of Jemez Springs, looking for the correct mile-marker and sign. Bumping up the washboard road, I stopped at a house with two four-wheel drive vehicles and a \textit{chamsah}\textsuperscript{35} on the door. I knocked, offered Shefa the two loaves of challah I was holding, and was greeted with a hug. Removing my shoes, I placed them on the shelf to the left of the front door and padded into the living room.

\textsuperscript{33} A hand-pumped instrument that produces a slightly pulsating, droning tone

\textsuperscript{34} A wordless melody used in prayer

\textsuperscript{35} Pictures or amulets depicting a hand, in Jewish tradition this is sometimes called Miriam’s hand. It represents protection of the five senses and is found in Arabic and Indian traditions as well.
Shefa and her husband, Rachmiel O’Reagan, share a home filled with generous windows that overlook the Jemez Mountains and the Village of Jemez. We talked as she prepared dinner and I watched the birds play in the birdbath and eat from the feeders on the deck around her living room. When she served dinner, we sat and held hands as she and Rachmiel prayed and I listened. We drew angel cards (little cards with one word on them) and talked about what the word meant to each of us at this time in our lives. After dinner, Rachmiel excused himself and went upstairs.

Shefa and I planted ourselves on the sofa and watched the moon rise. We drank herbal tea, and talked about our lives, identities and interests. The conversation drifted to the work we would do together. We discussed how to approach difficult issues. We talked about our mutual understandings of collaboration. I explained that she would be able to edit out parts of the transcript she felt were inappropriate or misrepresentative. She liked the idea, and told me that some of her life experiences might deviate from the somewhat narrow path others might expect should be followed by a spiritual leader.

In the morning, Shefa asked if I would like to hike around her land. It was stunning. The sky was clear and brilliant blue as we tracked across rocky earth interrupted by patches of chamisa, cacti and juniper. We walked to a small wooden bridge she built to commemorate her father. “He loved bridges,” she said. She placed pictures and writings of their life together along the railings, and finished it to preserve it. She told me that the weather had finally taken its toll, but felt that this seemed somehow appropriate “as words and images eventually dissolve, moving on as life has a tendency to do.” When we returned to the house, I turned on the recorder and started the first of many interviews.
“I had this identity as an artist...a mystic” – Rabbi Shefa Gold

There is one way that I think of my life history, and maybe this is a typical female way of approaching it, but it has to do with relationships. I want to look at those periods of my life, consider what the primary relationships were at those periods and understand what came out of those relationships. I don’t think a lot of people look at life histories like that, but that’s the way I look at my life, in relationship to other people. So I can sort of begin with what is up for me.

One of the first and most important relationships in my life was with this best friend growing up, Naomi. We became estranged from one another after we grew up, and that became a whole complicated thing. But this past High Holy Days, when I was trying to get some direction for Rosh Hashanah, and it was the first year I wasn’t leading a congregation in 20 years, that’s how it worked out. So I did this shamanic journey to see what do with this holy time, asking what kind of work am I supposed to do. And the answer that I got was to connect with my family, appreciate and enjoy each member and do a tikkun to repair this relationship, from when I was a child, with Naomi.

So I called her up, and asked her if she would meet me on the shore in New Jersey so that we could do Shabbat together. We are both very important people in each other’s lives even though there is this estrangement, and I had this realization that this estrangement from her was actually affecting all of the friendships in my life and to heal that with her would actually allow me to be present in a new way in all of my friendships. I think this is an important part of my life. When I met with her we went through a remembering of our early life together.

I met her on her third birthday, I was five and she was three. We were best friends up through adolescence when her mother forbade her to see me! Actually, there was a time in my adolescence when all of my friends’ parents had forbidden them from seeing me! There were like five people that I was close to, and they were all forbidden from seeing me! It was very shocking!

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36 Rosh Hashanah is the fall holiday that marks the beginning of the Jewish year.

37 From Tikkun Olam which refers to taking responsibility for damage one has done to another or to the planet. Hebrew for “repairing the world” (Diamant 1991:322)
Naomi’s mother thought I was a lesbian, and was going to corrupt her daughter. You know, because we loved each other. She was very scared of that. But, we actually kept seeing each other through all of that. It probably strengthened our relationship for it to be forbidden.

But I would say she was the one person who I shared my inner life with. And I had a very strong, very strong cosmic inner life when I was very young. I had perceptions. I felt like my whole early life was learning not to share; learning that it was not appropriate to share what was going on inside. I had perceptions of the world that were not this worldly...a sense of both time and space that was different than what everyone else was saying was reality. And it was a very dramatic thing inside me. But I was leading a very double life because it was a secret. And I was very afraid to let anybody know what I was experiencing. Except with Naomi, I could talk. I could share that.

Naomi and I started a society called the B’Emett Society, which means “in truth,” where we made vows to the truth, to commit ourselves to the path of truth.” This was important because we saw the whole world as mired in hypocrisy even when we were little, and we didn’t want to become the grownups we saw around us.

So when I got together with Naomi we reviewed that: what were the good things about that commitment, and what were the not so good things about that commitment? Having a partner on that path had been wonderful, one that you could tell the deepest stuff to and not be told that you were crazy. It was really a gift, but it was separating too.

I had this identity as an artist. I didn’t have the word mystic, but I think that is what I was, a mystic. It gave me this kind of freedom to do with my life what I wanted to do because I was exempt from the rules such as first you go to high school, and then you go to college, and then you have kids. I was exempt from that trajectory. So there was a real freedom.

I also had a place behind the house where I grew up. It was called the gully. It was my secret place. Being out in the gully was the most important thing when I was young. I got a lot of comfort from having my special places with a name for every rock and tree and corner of the gully. I had a real sense of ownership, I guess.
Naomi and I actually decided when we were very young to be rabbis. And there were no women rabbis. But we decided that we were going to be rabbis so we went out to the park, to the duck pond and made up services and rituals. I look back and they are all very pagan rituals that we were just making up. They had to do with trees and flowers, the place where we were, and addressing God through nature. We also had this book of poetry. We had this whole life in the park.

We would also go to synagogue with our fathers. And my father just really loved to sing. So I would sit next to him, and he would sing all of these beautiful harmonies, and the cantor would always give him dirty looks…the cantor wanted to be performing, not as a duet.

But, I felt like the sound of Hebrew really touched me, and I really loved singing in Hebrew. At some point when I started to read and look at what it meant, I felt like what the book said was wrong. I felt like the God they were talking about in the prayer book was really stupid and petty and not at all what God was. I had experienced God as so much beyond that. The idea that God could be angry was so ridiculous to me, just so ridiculous, that I thought they just got it wrong.

Hebrew had this whole other meaning besides what [the rabbi and cantor] said that it meant. Naomi and I would stand at the very front of the synagogue, and at the end of the service there would be a prayer that was the Aleinu\textsuperscript{38} prayer where you’d bow down and there were always flowers on the bimah and at a certain point in the prayer where we would say, “Va’anachnu qor’im, umishtachavim umodim,” we bend our knees, we would bow down and put our faces in the flowers. And then when we lifted our heads, the words are, “lif’nei Melekh, Mal’khei haM’lakhim,” which literally means “before the King,” but to my ears it sounded like “lift your melekh,” like lifting our heads, and we were lifting our melekhhs! So I was making up my own meaning really for the prayers, but it was like the most exalted moment in the prayer, and I put my head in these flowers, my face in these flowers, and breathed in the fragrance and then come up. That was a prayerful experience.

\textsuperscript{38} The Aleinu (עָלֵינוּ) which translates as “It is upon us,” as in “It is our duty,” is a prayer recited during daily services praising G-d for allowing those practicing Judaism to live in service to G-d, and expressing hope that all peoples of the world will recognize G-d and abandon idolatry.
So coming to the synagogue was mostly a joy, because it was mostly singing. When you are a young girl, you can come up on the bimah, and be a person there, but when I reached adolescence, I felt like I was demoted. It was like I was not a person welcomed in the synagogue anymore. We weren’t allowed to go up on the bimah anymore. I remember this moment when the son of the Hebrew school principal looked at me walking down the steps of the synagogue. I had a short skirt on, because that’s what you wore in the ’60s, that was the style, and he just looked at me, and said venomously, “You’re disgusting!” I was devastated. But that was the feeling, that when you reached puberty, you became a problematic presence at synagogue. You weren’t cute anymore. It was really the sexuality that was forbidden there or something.

When I went to Hebrew school, I found it boring. It was not fun. When I got bat mitzvahed I had a big fight because the boys would have their bar mitzvahs on Saturday morning, and read from the Torah, and the girls would have their bat mitzvah on Friday night, and they weren’t allowed to read from the Torah. This was a conservative synagogue. So I wanted to read from the Torah and they wouldn’t let me. So, I did a little subversive thing. I was allowed to give a speech. So, I gave a speech about light. I took a few different passages that were about light from the Torah, and I chanted them as part of my speech. So I kind of snuck it in there!

But I think the most powerful part of the ritual was going to the suburban diner the next morning, and ordering a cup of coffee. In my family you couldn’t have coffee until you were 13. So the whole family sat around, as I ordered a cup of coffee. It was diner coffee, so it was awful! But, I tasted it and pretended that it was good and said “mmmm.” And I pretended that I liked it. So that was my introduction to adulthood.

After I got bat mitzvahed there was this little Hebrew class. It was a class for people who wanted to study more, and there were these two people, these two teachers that I had that were very influential. One was named Avi Weiss. He later became a big leader in Modern Orthodox. He was a rabbinic student at the time, and now he is a very famous leader and writer. We had kind of this small class. And with these two teachers, Ira Rappaport and Avi Weiss, who were passionate about life. I had never met an adult who was like that. What I had learned about life in general at that point was that you don’t want to be a fanatic about anything. You can be
religious, but not too religious. You can be anything, but not too anything. So to meet these two teachers who were just passionate people was just a completely opening and permission giving experience, and I knew that they would have been considered fanatics by my parents.

But by the time I was 13 or 14, my father was having a nervous breakdown and was diagnosed with bi-polar. The whole family really fell apart. We were all just concerned with keeping my father out of institutions. That was before lithium was invented, so they were trying many different drugs on him, and each drug would just make him crazier. He was depressed and manic. When I was 14, and in the midst of all of this, I made the decision to be independent of my family, and to get away as soon as I could. Being in the family meant taking care of my father in some way. And I didn’t want to do that. I didn’t want the responsibility of it. By taking care of him, it meant trying not to upset him. When you are a teenager, how do you not upset your parents? I felt like my very being and the truth that I was connected to was going to upset him and would be destructive. And that led to my decision to get away as soon as I could and to be independent. I made my distance to protect myself from a painful situation.

I did have this real commitment to truth, and while I was living with my parents at their house, I didn’t want to do anything that I would have to lie about. So, while all my friends whose parents had forbidden them from seeing me were doing drugs and having sex, I was doing neither. I didn’t get stoned and I didn’t have sex until I left my parents’ house because otherwise I would end up having to go down that path of having to lie to them. And I just felt like I had made this vow against that.

I think that my path has been about recovering or reclaiming what I knew as a child. Naomi was important because she was the only person that I could talk to about this.

**Individuality and Authenticity**

In this account, the storied Shefa takes shape in relation to others who figure into her experiences of the world. She says, “There is one way that I think of my life history, and maybe this is a typical female way of approaching it, but it has to do with
relationships.” Seemingly ambivalent about her connection to her family during these early years, Shefa structures her narrative around her relationship with a childhood friend, Naomi. This relationship is significant not only because Naomi and Shefa share a common history, but because in that shared history, they come to recognize the exceptionality of the other. Outside of this friendship, Shefa feels like an outsider. Her unique perceptions of the world around her, coupled with the reactions of others exacerbate her awareness that she is unconventional. Somewhat shy and introspective by nature, Shefa believes that she cannot share her thoughts and beliefs with her family and others, but Naomi was the “one person who I shared my inner life with.” She explains, “I have a very strong cosmic inner life” and “my whole early life was learning not to share.” These perceptions were “not this worldly,” and seemed so because they were “different than what everyone else was saying was reality.” Part of Naomi’s importance lies in part in her ability to comprehend this and to co-create a private world with the storyteller, helping to alleviate Shefa’s feelings of isolation and of leading a “double life.”

Here Naomi witnesses Shefa’s individuation from child to teen, and participates in a developing mysticism, understanding of truth, and love of nature that foreshadow Shefa’s current rabbinate. Shefa weaves these strands through her story at multiple points. First, the girls start the B’Emett Society, to “commit…to the path of truth,” and to individuate from a world that they recognize is “mired in hypocrisy.” While this story is significant because the girls recognize hypocrisy in the adults around them, it seems more relevant than a simple commentary on ‘right’ versus ‘wrong,’ it is instead an early indicator that these two young girls are willing to “commit to” and fight for “truth.” They are in effect active creators of a better world. Values communicated in this one story
foreground subsequent stories such as the vignette in which Shefa explains her commitment to abstain from using illicit substances or having sex while under her parents’ roof. Against the backdrop of these stories, such choices that might seem unintuitive or even unbelievable to the reader or listener seem authentic because the reader/listener has come to know that truth is a key value and internal motivator for Shefa.

Second, Naomi sees and understands Shefa’s identity as an “artist…[and] a mystic.” Shefa admits that this “gift…[was] separating too.” With Naomi, the extremely shy young Shefa, finds belonging and a partner to practice “pagan” rituals with while pretending to be rabbis in the gully. As a mystic, Shefa is exempted from the “rules” that others have to follow. She finds nature to be her sanctuary and teacher, as opposed to Hebrew school which she finds “boring.” When in synagogue, she and Naomi hear different words in the Hebrew prayers, and Shefa feels free to interpret the words as she hears them, thinking the standard meaning of the words wrong, because she knows a God who is not “stupid,” “petty,” and “angry.”

While mysticism has come in and out of favor in Jewish intellectualism, increasing in popularity in the thirteenth century then coming under fire during the eighteenth century Haskalah, there has been a definite resurgence of mystical philosophies among contemporary Neohassidic, Jewish Renewal and New Age practitioners (see Asher 1980, Huzz 2009, and others). Boaz Huzz describes modern understandings of non-Christian mysticism as, “referring to subjective, private experiences of union or direct encounter with a transcendental reality (2009:144). Shefa’s experiences of God and spiritualism clearly derive from her subjective understanding of
the tangible world (i.e. the gully, nature) and the ideological world (Hebrew words, ritual), and these stories foreshadow her present focus and unique rabbinate.

These stories place Shefa squarely within the traditions of other mystical rabbis and Hassidic masters such as Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, his great grandson, Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav and others who propelled followers toward deep spiritual or ecstatic religious practices and in-depth Torah study. As women were denied access to the study of Kabbalah and other mystical Jewish traditions due to gender restrictions regarding women, prayer, and Torah study this is significant. While contemporary authors such as Rabbi Tirzah Firestone (2000), Jay Michaelson (2006), and others currently introduce women to such traditions, Shefa’s childhood stories make clear that her openness to direct spiritual experience and propensity for discovery and invention have always been part of her character. These examples, combined with Naomi’s observation and comprehension of these aspects of her character, bring authenticity to her present rabbinate with its focus on Hebrew words, chant and ecstatic practice.

Even so, this early self-awareness does not go unchallenged, as the trust and acceptance she feels as a girl is affected adversely when she reaches adolescence. She explains, “Coming to the synagogue was mostly a joy, because it was mostly singing. When you are a young girl, you can come up on the bimah and be a person there, but when I reached adolescence, I felt like I was demoted. It was like I was not welcomed in the synagogue anymore.” Previous experiences of hearing the beautiful Hebrew and smelling the fragrance of the flowers are replaced by the self-consciousness created by growing femininity and sexuality. She is called “disgusting” and knows that she is not

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39 Rabbi Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer (August 27, 1698 – May 22, 1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov is considered to be the founder of Hasidic Judaism.
“cute” anymore. In ritual events, she comes to understand the limitations of practice when as a girl, she is not allowed to chant Hebrew during her bat mitzvah, but she lets us know that she sneaks it in anyway.

Nevertheless, Shefa proves that her values and core ‘self’ remain unchanged when faced with the trail of her father’s mental illness. She tells us, “when I was 14…I really made the decision to be independent of my family…Because being in the family meant taking care of my father… trying not to upset him. When you are a teenager, how do you not upset your parents?” Here, Shefa’s memories of her past provide a context for early decisions that others may view as controversial while simultaneously communicating values that shape her current spiritual teachings. While conventional wisdom might offer narrow understandings of the axiom to ‘honor one’s parents,’ Shefa explains that to truly honor her own directives as well as to honor her father, she must make the somewhat difficult choice to get away from a stressful situation. In so doing, she follows her inner guidance system, reiterating her need to follow “the truth that [she] was connected to” and justifying her need to “recover” and “reclaim” what she knew as a child.

Rabbi Min Kantrowitz

In my conversations with each of the rabbis, as well as with members of Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom, Rabbi Min Kantrowitz was frequently mentioned as an important person in the community with whom I should speak. A founding member of Congregation Nahalat Shalom, Min helped to create the “Tuesday Night Group” a group who has met for several years to explore Jewish meditation and
education beyond what the synagogues have to offer. A former psychologist and architect, Min returned to school to become a rabbi in her midlife years. She now serves as the rabbi for Albuquerque Jewish Family Services. I phoned Min, explained the project, and she agreed to meet with me.

It was May of 2006 when once again accessorized by a digital recorder and jittery with unasked questions, I opened the glass doors at the Jewish Community Center, walked to the front desk, and asked where I might find the office of Rabbi Min Kantrowitz. The receptionist motioned for me to veer left down the long corridor until I saw the sign for Jewish Family Services. I did as instructed, found the doors and was led to the rabbi’s office. Min sat poised, glasses balanced upon her nose. She looked the very picture of an academic, calmly awaiting the questions of a new student as she sat quietly behind her desk. Her presence must have been a benefit in her former role as a psychologist. As the current Director of the Jewish Community Chaplaincy Program\(^{40}\), I now imagined her reserve to lend her the instant credibility of one capable of compassion and support for those she sees who are in crisis, ill, dying or left to mourn the loss of loved ones. Leaning forward, she smiled, and I felt instantly at ease. After a very brief conversation about the project, Min slipped into her story. Eyes sparkling, her voice took on the alluring measure of a practiced storyteller.

“If you don’t know something, run toward it” – Rabbi Min Kantrowitz

So when I tell the story … about how come I am where I am, I usually start with my grandfather, who came here from Russia to New York, and was a tailor. He used to celebrate every Yom Kippur by going out to Radio City Music Hall to see the dancing girls and then go out for a ham sandwich.

\(^{40}\) At the time of these interviews, Rabbi Min was working at Jewish Family Services (JFS) an organization that lost funding, and was forced to close, in the Spring of 2013. The closure of this organization and changes in Min’s rabbinate are discussed in Chapter 9.
He was very much a rebel and very much against formal religion of any kind; particularly against Judaism.

I was brought up in an extremely secular Jewish household; kind of a bagels and lox Jewish household, where Passover was celebrated by, you know, let’s ask the four questions, have a cup of wine and now it’s time to eat. And the rye bread was in the bread basket next to the matzo!

I was always interested in Jewish stuff, but my parents really did not support, and actively actually campaigned against my interests. I asked to go to Hebrew School, and they wouldn’t let me go, and on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah where the other kids in the neighborhood would go to Synagogue, they said, “Well you shouldn’t go to school. You know, it wouldn’t look good for the neighbors if you went to school, so I would just get dressed up and walk around the neighborhood.” I would walk around the neighborhood and I would go and I would stand outside the synagogue and listen.

I’m a twin, which is an important thing. Fraternal twin, and so most of childhood I had to retrain myself to speak in singular, because for many years childhood was always we did this and we did this and we went there. And it took me years to realize I was talking plural. Because plural was everything I knew. That was kind of neat. It was early, early stuff.

I was very sick when I was born. I mean not only were we twins and premature, but I was also quite ill when I was born. My lungs didn’t want to work. My stomach didn’t want to work. Things didn’t really want to work, and they were not sure if I was going to live or not. I was like 4 pounds or something, which at that time was little. Now it’s big. I was born in a Catholic hospital, and so a priest came along and baptized me. He was going to ‘Save my soul!’ And so I figure, you know, I had religion in me from a very early age, although not necessarily the one I was born into!

We were brought up the first five years in a tiny little apartment in the Bronx. A one-bedroom place where my parents slept on the pullout couch in the living room, and the twins had the bedroom, with little matched cribs. My earliest memories are of sensations from that place…the feel of the satin at the edge of the baby blanket, moving it on my cheek when it got too warm, and the texture of the special chair that my mother sat on. Things like that. There was also the smell of the butcher shop where they had sawdust on the floor to catch the blood of the chickens. My early memories were very specific, mostly smell and texture memories.
We moved to Long Island when I was 5 to what my parents called “the country” because it wasn’t a tenement. It was what they call garden apartments, a kind of little apartment complex with some upstairs/downstairs apartments and some flats. It was special low-income housing for veterans. My father had been in World War II for about a month and a half until they discovered he had lots of physical problems and said goodbye. But it was enough to make him eligible for this housing. So everyone who lived in this big housing complex had a parent who was a veteran, and had no money. It was a requirement. At one point in my childhood, my father was offered some advancement in his job that would have put him over the line and he refused it, because they were paying like $25 a month rent, or some kind of amazing, ridiculous thing. As a result, there were lots and lots of kids crowded together in these places, which was mostly really good.

My sister and I were always very different from each other. Physically we’re quite different. She’s four inches shorter than I am. She has kind of an olive complexion with almost black eyes. She looks very Mediterranean. In terms of personality, it was the same way. I was very quiet, very shy; never wanted to say a thing. Even when we were like in a playpen, a stranger would come up, and she would run up to the front of the playpen to say, “Hello,” and I would go in the back, sit in the corner, and cry. (She laughs) “People! Leave me alone!”

And that kind of pattern continued really all through the time that we were growing up. She was always the social one, the outgoing one. She always had lots and lots of friends. She was artistic and musical and very athletic. I was the one who sat in the corner and read books, and did well in school. My parents didn’t quite know what to do with kids in general, let alone twins, to the point where maybe ten years ago I asked my mother, “Well, how did you bring up two of us at the same time?” She said, “I didn’t bring you up. You just kind of raised yourselves. I just fed you.”

She had no clue! Their way of dealing with the fact of having twins was to divide up the world. And so they said, “Oh, she’s the one who, blah, blah, blah … Therefore she’s the one who isn’t, blah, blah, blah.” So Jan was the one who was athletic; therefore, I was the one who was not athletic. Min was the one who did well in school, therefore Jan was the one who did not do well in school. And so we both played along with the expectations of ourselves all the way through high school. So Jan belongs to this high school sorority, with stacks of friends, who all got Ds. And I got As and Bs and had two friends. That’s kind of how it was until I left home. Actually, probably a little bit earlier than that, but about until I left home, which I did when I was 16.
I graduated from high school early. I did an advanced junior high school in two years instead of three, mostly to get away from my sister. (She laughs) I was tired of being compared with her all the time. She was delighted to not be compared to me as well. It was only after I left home that we realized the fallacy of dividing up the world that way, and we both flowed into each other’s turf, which was really amazing to see.

The neighborhood we grew up in was probably ninety percent Jewish, and so the high school closed for the Jewish holidays. As I said before, my parents were not interested. I mean not only disinterested, they were actively opposed to the concept of us having anything to do with organized religion. A bunch of my friends belonged to the Bell Park Jewish Center which was four blocks away. The only time I remember going with them was once to some Purim41 thing. It was like the most disgusting of the sexist Purim carnival things. All the little girls had to get dressed up and parade before one guy who picked who was the prettiest. I was like, forget it! Maybe my parents are right!

My parents did have some theater albums of old Yiddish songs and I remember as a young kid sneaking downstairs after everyone was asleep, putting those records on the record player and listening to the point where I had them memorized. I still have a number of those songs memorized in the back of my brain. Where that was coming from? Who knows? My grandparents, my mother’s parents, spoke Yiddish. So I heard a lot of that as a kid, although they never wanted me to know it. My parents would occasionally speak Yiddish if they didn’t want me to understand what they were saying, so I know a bunch of expressions, but not much else. My grandmother was completely uneducated. She never learned to read or write. She could sign her first name. That was the complete extent of her literacy. But in Russia, girls didn’t need that. If you were just going to cook, which she did…poorly, that was all you did.

My grandfather opened this little tailor shop, and that’s what he did. He learned enough English to function, although he never could quite figure out how to count in English. People ripped him off left and right.

Then the neighborhood started changing a number of years later. A lot of Puerto Rican people started moving in, so he had to learn a little Spanish. So he would speak this little bit of Spanish with an

41 Based on stories from the book of Esther, this festival celebrates the rescue of the Jews living in ancient Persia from annihilation at the hands of Haman the Agagite, the royal vizier to King Ahasuerus. In the story, the beautiful Esther was taken into the King’s palace to be part of his harem. Her cousin, and the man who raised her, Mordecai, instructed her to keep her Jewish identity secret. Upon learning of Haman’s plot, however, Mordecai encouraged her to reveal her identity and speak on the Jew’s behalf. After much preparation, Queen Esther risked death by breaking the customs surrounding the throne, and plead on behalf of the Jews. The king responded to Esther’s plea, rid the kingdom of Haman, and replaced him with Esther’s cousin, Mordecai.
English/Russian/Yiddish accent. It was amazing anybody understood a word he said! He was this little tiny guy. Little, compact, energetic guy, and he had had some kind of very traditional Jewish education where you had to memorize lots of things and don’t ask any questions and none of it means anything. So that’s why he turned out to be who he was, the socialist who went out on Yom Kippur and ate a ham sandwich after going to Radio City Music Hall to celebrate Yom Kippur.

My grandmother kept a kosher house, but she had no idea why or what it meant. She just said, this is what you do, and she had no idea of any meaning of her actions. They never went to services, they never did anything religiously. My mother grew up in what at the time was Jewish Harlem. Her friends were hanging around the Jewish Center kind of thing, and she hung around with them and ended up getting a fairly decent Jewish education. She was learning Rashi in high school, which was amazing, especially considering she threw it all away and did nothing about it after she and my father met.

My father was also a socialist, anti-religious kind of person. His upbringing was very painful, difficult. His father died when he was 2, leaving his mother with two young kids. She had no way to support herself. She married some guy who had two kids of his own, who wanted someone to take care of those two kids, then they had two kids, and then she died. And so my father was left with the nasty stepfather who really didn’t like him, who wanted to take care of his own four kids first. So my father left home shortly after his mother died. He was ten.

He rode the rails to Chicago as a homeless boy. Somehow managed to get back to New York and was brought up the rest of the way by an aunt of his. But he never really had anything like a home life, and so it turned out to make him very traditional at home. “I want everyone to sit down at the table together at 5:30. We will eat together no matter what. I won’t take any risks in terms of work life, because I know what it’s like to have nothing.” He dropped out of school when he was twelve, never went back, and worked in a warehouse all his life, because you never know when the bottom was going to fall out again--that was his experience.

My mother was quite bright, and she liked to read. If she had been born in another time I think she would have really done well and gotten a higher education. She did make it through high school, tried to do night school

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42 Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, better known as Rashi, (1040 – 1105), was a French rabbi. He is famous for writing comprehensive commentaries on the Talmud and Tanakh (Hebrew Bible).
college courses, but kept falling asleep because she was working all day as a bookkeeper. Then after she and my father got married, he was very, very threatened by the fact that she had more education than he did because she had made it through high school and he hadn’t. So any attempts that she made to try to advance herself either educationally, or even in terms of work, when it looked like she might get a job that might pay more than his, he freaked out. Absolutely freaked out!

They did not have a very good relationship. Both of my parents, because of their own childhood traumas, which I absolutely understand and accept, never could communicate about anything emotional either to each other or to their three children. We have a younger sister. After the twins, my mother had two miscarriages and then finally got pregnant. My father really wanted to have a boy, because he was the last of his name. He had a sister who never married. Well, she married at the age of 65 for the first time. But he really wanted a boy. So when my younger sister was born, he was so profoundly disappointed that she wasn’t a boy that he never let her forget it. It was just very inappropriate emotionally, because he was, you know, a man. That’s how it is. So my poor younger sister really had a very hard time just being accepted for who she was, because in so many ways she was rejected by my dad from the moment of her birth. It’s just horrible. But we can all talk about it now. Not my mother, but the sisters talk about all that stuff now.

One of the things that happened since my parents didn’t know how to do anything emotionally is that all of the kids ended up feeling like we had emotional lives that were our own and un-shared with anybody else since the message was always, “Don’t talk about anything that’s emotionally real.” So if I would get upset at something at the dinner table where we all had to be sitting at 5:30, and started to cry, I would get sent out of the room. If my twin would get upset, she would yell, because of course we had opposite strategies, which were reinforced. “She’s the one who cries, she’s the one who yells.” She’d get yelled at and be banished. But the underlying phenomenon was the same; you are not allowed to have real feelings, whether they are positive feelings or negative feelings. They’re just too scary or something. And unfortunately, they lived and died that way. My mother is still alive, but is still emotionally frozen, has been emotionally frozen her whole life and knows it—we’ve talked about it.

I did not realize it then, it took me many years to realize it, but there was some kind of pull that was there really from a very young age. I never went to Hebrew School, I never had a Bat Mitzvah. The first Shabbat service that I remember going to was in college. And I went to the University of Rhode Island which was eighty-five to ninety-five percent Catholic and pretty much the rest Protestant, and there were maybe ten Jews on campus. People would ask me questions, “Well, you’re a Jew,
what is that?” I really didn’t know. So, I did then what turned out to be one of my themes, if you don’t know something, run toward it, and I started learning, and I joined Hillel43: “

I started learning, and I joined Hillel, and that was a real important thing. I met a bunch of people, one of whom turned out to be the man I married a couple of years later. He was actually president of Hillel during his senior year in college and my junior year in college, and I thought Hillel was kind of a cool organization because it was this small organization. I didn’t know anything, but the next year, I was elected president of Hillel.

When [Marty, my husband] finished his year of being president of Hillel, they gifted him with a nice little Kiddush44 cup that was engraved with his name and the year, etc. The following year, when I was about to graduate, they couldn’t give me a Kiddush cup, because I was a woman and women didn’t get Kiddush cups, so they didn’t give me anything because they couldn’t figure out what to do. And that was one of those kinds of turning-point places.

Min’s story emerges through vivid recollections of sensate experiences set among a cast of family members. Through narratives of embodiment and emotion Min stories her early ‘self’ as vulnerable and sensitive surrounded by others who categorically lack such attributes. Born prematurely, Min almost dies. “My lungs didn’t want to work. My stomach didn’t want to work. Things didn’t really want to work, and they were not sure if I was going to live or not.” Min’s self-awareness and identification as one who is fragile is amplified through the social dynamics and perceptions of her family.

Constantly compared to her fraternal twin sister, Min is branded by a type of shorthand division of qualities that her family uses to distinguish the two young girls. Min is shy, studious, and physically and emotionally sensitive in contrast to her outgoing, athletic, artistic and more forceful sister. Min is the one who “cries,” while her sister is

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43 “The largest Jewish campus organization in the world, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life provides opportunities for Jewish students at more than 500 colleges and universities to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network of regional centers, campus foundations and Hillel student organizations. Hillel is working to provoke a renaissance of Jewish life.” For more information, go to www.hillel.org.

44 A cup used for the ritual blessing of wine for Shabbat, Jewish holidays and mealtimes.
the one who “yells.” The girls appear different, Jan is shorter and darker than Min. By all accounts, the girls are opposites during childhood either by conditioning or character, yet they remain close. Min has to learn to speak in the singular as her entire point of reference was plural, that of a twin. Although later in life they would challenge and discuss the error of these early classifications, still, her initial identity takes shape in opposition to her essentialized sister, and Min’s own natural propensities, such as her tendency toward introversion and academics become accentuated through the constant comparison.

Though Jan is a key character in her story of growing up, other characters too seem to reinforce Min’s difference as the emotional and sensitive intellectual. Min tellingly lists her family members’ educational achievements or lack thereof. Min’s grandmother is illiterate. Despite the fact that her mother has a good education and loves to read, she cannot pursue it further, as Min’s father, who lacks a high school education, feels somehow diminished or threatened by her achievements. Min’s grandfather, a tailor, spoke “Spanish with an English/Russian/Yiddish accent,” and never learned to count money correctly in English. In fact, even though her grandfather had a “very traditional Jewish education where you had to memorize lots of things,” he was not encouraged to ask questions and his knowledge did not “mean anything.”

In Min’s account, these varying levels of education coalesce with early traumas to justify or explain her family members’ stunted emotionalism and parental limitations. Her father was a homeless boy who as a man works in a tedious job because it is steady. He insists on having his family home for dinner because he did not have that as a child. Min’s mother lack’s maternal insight, admitting to Min that she does not know how she
raised she and her sister, saying that they “raised themselves.” Min says her parents, “did not have a very good relationship…because of their own childhood traumas…[and] never could communicate about anything emotional either to each other or to their three children.” While limited education seemed to contribute to emotional inattentiveness on the part of her parents, her grandfather’s failed education led him towards socialism and anti-religious attitudes. Min tells me, “So that’s why he turned out to be who he was, the socialist who went out on Yom Kippur and ate a ham sandwich after going to Radio City Music Hall to celebrate Yom Kippur.” All the same, Min locates her early relationship to Judaism through stories about her grandfather.

So when I tell the story…about how come I am where I am, I usually start with my grandfather, who came here from Russia to New York, and was a tailor. He used to celebrate every Yom Kippur by going out to Radio City Music Hall to see the dancing girls and then go out for a ham sandwich.

While education might have been one factor in the choice of Min’s grandparents and parents to live culturally or secularly Jewish lives, that is only part of the picture. Like many European immigrants attempting Americanization in the face of anti-Semitism, this secularism stemmed from a complex marriage of socialist/Marxist attitudes and American assimilation, influencing “very blue-collar values and ideas.” Her grandfather was “very much a rebel and very much against formal religion of any kind; particularly against Judaism.” Such experiences contextualize Min’s family’s active campaign against her pursuit of religious participation.

Min’s stories are compelled by her divergence from her family, and are held together by an exclusion from religious experience that intensifies her spiritual yearning. In a vignette about her parent’s insistence that she not attend synagogue for the High Holidays, we find her getting dressed up and walking around the neighborhood.
Underscoring this key moment, she adds, “I would walk around the neighborhood and I would go and I would stand outside the synagogue and listen.” In such narratives, Min emphasizes that even trapped within a secular household her interest in things Jewish remained central in her life. She is aware that the neighborhood she grows up in is “90% Jewish.” She rebels against her parent’s wishes and attends Purim at the Bell Park Jewish Center with friends. The experience is not exactly what she expects, instead seeming to be rooted in sexism and traditional gender roles. In response, Min thinks, “Forget it! Maybe my parents are right!” With this, Min lets that reader know that even in the thralls of spiritual yearning, she is still the thoughtful, analytical, and capable person we have come to know, noting injustice even within this space that promises community and belonging.

Min continues to pepper her tale with anecdotes that portend her eventual choice to study Judaism. She is mystified by her grandmother’s maintenance of a kosher household with no understanding of its significance. She notes that the rye bread in the basket next to the matzo at Passover is somehow wrong. She points out that she has to sneak downstairs while her family slept to listen to “albums of old Yiddish songs.” Although such stories give depth to Min as an individual, they also portend qualities important in a rabbi: an understanding of right and wrong, an ability to question and analyze, and a rebellious spirit that finds what it needs even in the absence of modeling or acceptance.

While we are led through many concrete aspects of Min’s childhood, the small apartment in which she grew up, the scent of the butcher shop, the neighborhood, it is her ability to convey her incorporeal, emotional life that contributes to our understanding of
her storied ‘self,’ a seemingly authentic ‘self.’ When at last the young woman graduates early to “get away from her sister,” and to pursue her own path through college education, a space in which finally attends her first Shabbat service, we applaud her gumption and understand her choice. Out of her parents’ household, Min meets other Jews on campus, including Martin, her future husband, and finally learns about Judaism, and finds a welcome community.

Min’s story is made more interesting by a final allusion that predicts her spiritual path. After serving as president of Hillel, she notes that while Martin received a kiddush cup for his tenure, she received nothing, because women could not get kiddush cups and they did not know what to give a woman. Her awareness of this slight was “one of those turning-point places,” a seemingly reasonable progression in a life influenced by exclusion from, yet pull toward, Judaism.

Rabbi Deborah Brin

I met Deborah at Congregation Nahalat Shalom in April 2007. After a brief chat, she met me at the Flying Star Café, a couple of blocks up from the synagogue, on Rio Grande in Albuquerque’s North Valley. The brightly colored restaurant is frequented by congregants, students, and locals. Surrounded by big, beautiful trees, at least according to desert standards, it is a popular spot for diners and their dogs who pack the outdoor patio, and fill the air with wisps of conversation. Across the red topped table, drinks in hand and food on the way, Deborah and I began negotiations about the project. Deborah’s smile,
one of her most distinguishing features, seemed restrained. She appeared more cautious than the other rabbis I worked with, and asked many questions about confidentiality, publication and her ability to edit the final transcript. As we gained a sense of one another, her somewhat serious and reserved impression softened, and I began to understand her reticence, and the courage it took for her to open up about rather painful parts of her past.

“I did not see myself fitting into the roles for women within the Jewish world” – Rabbi Deborah Brin

I was born in 1953. I'm currently 53 years old. I was three months premature. My mother's water broke early, but she took to her bed and managed to hang on for another six weeks. I was 2 pounds 5 ounces when I was born.

They didn't have incubators yet. They still had Isolettes. The reason that I have my eyesight is that my pediatrician happened to read an article a matter of weeks before I was born that speculated that the reason preemies were going blind in the Isolettes was because of the oxygen mix. So he gave separate orders against hospital protocol, and fought to change the oxygen mix in my Isolette.

I went to school with other kids who were preemies, and some of those kids were blind. So, Hershel Kaufman, may his memory be a blessing, was a special guy. I know this from the stories that have been told to me.

I'm the youngest of four. My sister Judith is the oldest, my brother Aaron is next, then there is David and then me. Aaron was five when I was born, and when my father came home from the hospital, he told the other kids that the baby wasn't coming home yet and that the baby was pretty sick, and they weren't sure what was going to happen. And my brother Aaron reportedly said, "Well the important thing is, she's still alive."

Aaron later went to Williams College and was magna cum laude in Philosophy.

45 Isolettes were earlier versions of the incubators used today that help to control a baby’s temperature and assist her in gaining weight until she is sufficiently healthy to do it on her own.
(She laughs) So I had a rough entry. I used to joke that I was the youngest of six, because my parents were so much a part of my whole development that it was like I was the youngest of all of those people instead of being just the youngest of four kids.

There were lots of expectations in my household from the very beginning. My grandmothers were both college educated. My father's mother was class valedictorian at the University of Minnesota in something like 1904. And my mother's mother, Irma, went to Vassar. My mother went to Vassar and my father went to Harvard, so there were high expectations.

I was the one who didn't comply with all those expectations. While the older kids were all very diligent about doing homework and they were straight-A students and I skated by with Bs and didn't do much.

I hear parents talk now about their kids and I smile, because I know it's totally possible to get through high school without doing much, and to survive college in much the same way. It is a different universe now, so maybe it's more challenging. I don't know.

I am third or fourth generation American Jew, depending on how you count it, and grew up in Minneapolis in a house that was a mile from the house my father grew up in. We lived in that house my whole life. They bought it when my dad got back from World War II. My sister was about 5 when they bought that house, and my brother Aaron was 2. David was in utero. My parents stayed in that house. My mother even stayed in the house after my father died. He died in 1988 and she sold it four or five years later. So that place, not just Minneapolis, but that neighborhood, that house, that piece of turf was very grounding for me, for lack of a better word.

My mother grew up in St. Paul. My father grew up in Minneapolis. Both grandparents were very active in the Jewish community. They were community builders. The synagogue I grew up in has now moved, but the building that I grew up in was built in my grandfather's generation and the plaque over the sanctuary said “Arthur Brin.” The stained glass windows, on the right-hand side of the synagogue where we always sat, were given by the Brin/Fliegelman families so their names were in the windows. My mother's family was very influential in St. Paul. They were part of the
Reform congregation there. Gunther Plaut was the rabbi there when my grandfather was the president of the congregation.

I went to Macalester College as an undergraduate. My siblings all went East to school, but I stayed in the same territory and I still ran into people in St. Paul who knew my mother's family. I was either somebody's little sister, or Ruth and Howard's daughter, or somebody's granddaughter. I didn't get out. I was never able to go into that place that some teenagers can go to college or graduate from school where their family is an incidental part of their lives and nobody knows them from way back, or nobody knows of them, or nobody knows of their family. That doesn't work for me. And now, I love it.

My sister is a dancer/choreographer/writer, and she was living in Minneapolis when I was in college. She came and taught in the dance program at Macalester for a couple of semesters. I was really mad about it. Now it seems kind of quaint. And my mother got a Masters in American Studies. I got her a teaching gig at Macalester as an adjunct in the Religion Department. It was actually the first college level course she ever taught, and I was in it because she needed a certain number of students in order to be able to teach it.

This morning I was having coffee with Rabbi Chavah Carp, and she said, "Oh, this morning we were davening\(^4\) out of a different prayer book and there was one of your mom's poems." I get more nachas\(^4\) from my mother's poetry than she does. People say, "Oh, are you Ruth Brin's...are you related to Ruth Brin, the poet?" A couple of years ago, at one of my Reconstructionist Rabbinical conferences, one of the colleagues that I was just meeting came up to me and said, "Oh, I'm so glad to meet you! I love your poetry!" That was a first. I thought oh man! I've got too much gray hair! I said, "Oh, thank you but that is my mother."

Well, when I was growing up being a woman rabbi wasn't possible, so there was no chance when asked, "What did you want to be when you grew up?"

To respond, "Well I want to be a rabbi."

So, I came out [i.e. as a lesbian] when I was 19 and in college. I was at Macalester. I was underwhelmed by my college experience. I had grown up with these stories of Vassar and Harvard and how wonderful it was, and how intellectually stimulating, and how my family members were

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\(^4\) Reciting Jewish prayer and liturgy.
\(^4\) "To derive pleasure or pride (especially from one's children); enjoy”
(http://www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com/).
really on their own, away from their families and treated like adults. That was not the way college was in the United States, in the early ’70s.

I started in 1971. I realized quickly that as long as you turned in your papers and showed up for exams that was all you needed to do. Not in every class, but I did have one class that was like that, that I remember. I showed up for the exams and turned in my papers, and made it through. But it wasn’t just fine. It was a rocky road for me, emotionally. I was dealing with my sexual identity, and I missed a bit, an important bit.

The summer between high school and college I went to Israel. I was on an exchange program. A Jewish Community center in Israel and the Minneapolis JCC48 had a swap. My dad set this up when he was the president. My brother David went on it and then I went on it. Six kids would go from Minneapolis to Rishon Le Tzion and live with families, work in a day camp, and tour around the country a little bit, and some kids from Israel would come to Minneapolis. The Israeli kids did do some camping stuff, but they were also all performers, so more was expected of them than of us. They were expected to teach Israeli dance and sing Hebrew songs, play the guitar, and be representatives of Israel, and that level of expectation was not on us.

[On the trip] I started getting sick. We flew from Minneapolis to New York, New York to London. We were in London maybe four or five days and then to Israel. And I started getting really bad headaches in London, and by the time I got to Israel I wasn’t doing very well. And my family was very Israeli, and they kept saying things to me like, ”Get up! Get up! You put a healthy man in bed and you make him stay there and he’ll be sick. Get out of bed. Go do things.” So I did. I tried to be a good citizen, and I can tell you the gory details if you want to know more, but I had spinal meningitis and encephalitis.

And they finally took me to the hospital when I was up all night throwing up. And if they had delayed half a day, I probably would have died. I mean I was really very, very sick. So other than Hebrew school and a little bit of conversational Hebrew I learned in order to prepare for the trip, you know, gevina is cheese, lechem and gevina is bread and cheese, Aypho ha hinuch?” where’s the store?” The first Hebrew I really learned was Achot. Ani tzricha seer laila. ”Nurse, I need a bedpan. I need something to throw up into.” Ma shewho koayv li. ”Something hurts me.” Ha rosh koayv li. ”My head hurts me.”

Between their English and my Hebrew, I understood they were going to give me a shot in the back. I couldn’t figure out why they were giving me a

48 Jewish Community Center
shot in the back. I found out it was a spinal tap. If I had known, I probably would have freaked out even more.

My mother came to be with me. By the time she got there, I was out of the woods, but it was pretty dicey.

So that was actually my second Israel experience. My first one was the summer before my brother, David's, bar mitzvah. I would have been like nine and a half years old, and my family went to Israel. We also went to Greece and Denmark, but I can't really remember it all. It was a tour. I remember David, and there's a photograph, with his hands through the mesh of the fence at the back of the King David Hotel, looking into the old part of Jerusalem, the old Jewish area, and us being told to keep our hands in our pockets, because there were snipers that might mistake an, "Oh look mom," for a rifle and shoot us.

That was the summer of 1963, because I wasn't yet ten. So that was my second trip to Israel, but it was really the first one on my own. I mean, I wasn't on my own, there was an adult with us from Minneapolis, but I wasn't with my family. And it was not a successful individuating experience.

If you were to poll rabbis of my generation and younger, I would guess, that most of my colleagues, somewhere close to 100% of them, have spent significant time in Israel, and that's where they learned a lot of their Hebrew. I had a severe emotional barrier to going to Israel. I wondered about whether or not it was going to kill me the next time. I feared it was going to finish me off.

I have been back twice, but not for any extended period. I didn't study Hebrew there. That turned out to be a deficit in terms of my learning both prior to rabbinical school and in rabbinical school and after rabbinical school, because for a long time Hebrew was just so intertwined with that horrible health experience.

And also, that experience was the first time that I began to come to terms with the reality of Israel as a State, as opposed to the Zionist dream, and I realized that it wasn't this wonderful society. They had jails, and there were Jewish people in those jails. They had whores and there were Jews who were whores. They had corrupt politicians, and there were Jews who were corrupt. If I had been healthier, I could have accommodated it a little better, but it was a big shock. And when I came back from that trip, I did not want to have anything to do with Jews or Judaism.

It had a huge impact on my body. I came back from Israel. My mother had rented a room when we left the hospital. At that point I was not strong
enough to be in any position other than completely flat. I mean not even a pillow. I mean completely flat. Fifteen minutes was my max. So the car ride from the hospital to the place she was staying was very hard, and I remember she gave me my first shower, and in terms of spiritual experiences, that's one of those epic moments, because I couldn't stand up by myself with reliability in a slippery surface. So my mother got in the shower with me and was holding onto my waist to keep me steady. And I hadn't had anything other than a sponge bath every once in a while for weeks, and my hair had gone from totally greasy, itchy, yucky, to the other side of that to where it looked normal. It was so dirty it looked normal. I don't know how the hair did that, but I'm sure some physiological reason, but it was so amazing to have my hair washed. And it was so amazing to have water falling on me, and I remember just laughing and being just ecstatic to take a shower.

We stayed there at least overnight, maybe a few days. And then we flew to Amsterdam and stayed overnight. Flew to New York and stayed overnight, and then flew to Minneapolis. Those airplane rides were very hard. The airlines were wonderful. They gave us three seats for the price of two, but that still meant that I had to have my head in my mom's lap, and even though she's a small person, the elevation of her thigh was very painful for me.

Part of what happens with spinal meningitis and encephalitis is you get all this fluid in your head. And so the position my head and neck was in would move that fluid, and it would be incredibly painful.

So a few days later I ended up in the hospital in Minneapolis, because it was just too much for me. And my parents' wedding anniversary was August 6th, and I was given permission to leave the hospital to go to dinner with the family, but I went back to the hospital and was there for three or four more days.

I started college at the end of August. I should not have gone. I was not strong enough. I wasn't strong enough emotionally; I wasn't strong enough, physically. I was certainly not strong enough physically. Now that I've been a chaplain at a college, I know what completely healthy, normal kids go through in the transition from high school to college, and I had just about died, and I didn't have the physical strength. Even though Mac is a small campus, I didn't have the physical strength to walk around the campus. I would get up, go to breakfast, come back to my dorm room, lie down for a while, go to my first class, come back and lie down for a while. That's not the way a brand-new, first-year student is supposed to start college. So it was a rough go, and I had all of this anger and confusion now about being a Jew.
Individuation and Relatedness

Deborah’s story begins with an event quite beyond her control, her premature birth. At 2.5 pounds, Deborah was quite literally isolated in an “Isolette,” and at risk of losing her eyesight due to standard medical practices of the day. Though this story provides a venue for her gratitude toward Dr. Hershel Kaufman for his defiance of those standard medical practices and for consequently saving her sight, it also points out that from birth she was separate, alone and different. This story of Deborah’s “rough entry” introduces her to the audience while it places her within the context of a full cast of other important characters, her family.

When her father comes home from the hospital, explaining that the baby (i.e. Deborah) was “pretty sick” and that they were uncertain about what would happen in terms of her survival, Deborah’s brother, Aaron, then five years old, says, “Well the important thing is, she’s still alive.” Deborah’s choice to quote Aaron’s speech is significant. Aaron is not a background character whose storied attributes are simply used as an individuation mechanism for Deborah’s storied self, his character gains presence through his active participation in the narrative. In this story, we understand Deborah to be a survivor, who against the odds emerges healthy from a near death experience, and we locate her within a strong family unit. If her differences are emphasized, (i.e. Aaron, already a philosopher, and Deborah, preverbal, vulnerable, a fighter), so too is her belonging. Aaron’s words demonstrate concern and love. Deborah’s choice to co-narrate this experience reveals the importance of the family to the storyteller. In this narrative strategy, Deborah’s ‘self’ takes shape through both affinity and differentiation, at the
nexus of her desire to belong and to individuate. These are important aspects of identity construction for 20th and 21st century America adults. As McAdams explains,

Modern and postmodern democratic societies do not explicitly tell adults who they should be. At the same time, however, these societies insist that an adult should be someone who both fits in and is unique (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). The self should be defined so that it is both separate and connected, individuated and integrated at the same time” (1995:381).

Whereas individuation is generally understood in terms of adolescence with referring to a teenager’s successful break from dependence on the family to a more autonomous adult role, it can also refer to an individual’s internal quest for wholeness that can exist in differing degrees at different points throughout one’s life. As Francis Gray suggests:

Individuation aims at the completion and wholeness of an individual self or subject once certain conditions, figured out by the subject, are met. Those conditions include assessing and then addressing one’s own status as the subject of individuation: one is led to the individuating process by life’s circumstances, by the need to identify oneself as an individual self-distinct from one’s life involvements (Gray 2008:2).

In this story, Deborah’s individuation begins with her family, but continues through her experiences of those she encounters through travel, education, and religion. These early stories contextualize and explain aspects of her developing sense of ‘self.’ She tells us that her family members play an important role in her life, as those who provide her with deep roots. She grows up in a neighborhood minutes away from where her father grew up. The house she grew up in was “very grounding.” Her family is made up of important members of the Jewish communities in which they resided. The names of one side of the family are embedded in the stained glass windows that adorn the synagogue, as well as in a plaque (i.e. in memory of) placed over the door to the
synagogue. The other side, Deborah calls “influential” in their Reform congregation, as her grandfather was once president of the congregation and her family was deeply involved.

This family also establishes a home environment in which there are high expectations. Her grandmothers, mother and sister are distinguished college educated women. Her mother, Ruth Brin, is a famous poet, and her sister is a dancer/choreographer/writer. Deborah grows up with “stories of Vassar and Harvard.” Deborah’s chronicling of her family’s pedigree, allows the reader to enter her story and understand her internal conflict as she loves and belongs in her family yet differs in a myriad of ways. She establishes her identity in this regard as the one in her family who “skated by with Bs [and] didn’t do much,” a clearly distinguishing trait in a family recognized for its educational accomplishments.

As in the opening vignette, her difference is also accentuated by her continual struggles with health issues. This troubling theme from her early childhood reasserts itself on a trip to Israel when, as an exchange student, she becomes horribly ill with spinal meningitis and encephalitis. The experience was traumatizing.

*Authenticity at the Meeting Point of Self and Other*

The life stories told by Shefa, Min and Deborah are built around casts of characters; family members, friends, rabbis, and teachers who clearly affect the storytellers’ senses of themselves, their growth, and their Jewish identities. Through these stories of growing up, we are able to see how the narrators’ storied ‘selves’ are somewhat cursorily juxtaposed against other characters in their stories. Shefa tells us that she does not do drugs or have sex while living at home with her parents unlike her friends. Min
lets us know that she was the brainy academic while her sister was the popular athlete. Deborah is a B student in school while other family members made A’s. When I look beyond these obvious distinctions, however, I also notice the ways in which these storytellers seem to utilize the structure of growing up as a vehicle for the individuation of their storied ‘selves.’

As each rabbi’s storied ‘self’ grows up in the narrative world she crafts, her character, much like the child, teen and young woman she was, matures, becomes self-aware, embraces distinctiveness, and acquires qualities that tip the reader to the storyteller’s internal motivation. In re-reading these stories, I am struck by how the storytellers effectively convey this internal motivation through stories of adversity. Shefa stories her early self as a spiritual sensitive, an artist, a Jewish/pagan mystic. Her unique perceptions of the world, and understanding of the ‘truth’ of these perceptions, make it difficult for her to conform to what others perceive is ‘normal.’ Her differences compel the parents of her friends to forbid them from seeing her. This very account is motivated by Shefa’s attempt, many years later to reconnect with the friend whose loss she feels the most, Naomi. It is significant that Shefa chose this story to begin the collaborative process of eliciting her life story. It explains Shefa’s ‘reality,’ and gives the reader parameters for subsequent tales in which Shefa discusses mysticism and spirituality, letting us know that these stories are authentic, not contrived, and have consistently been an aspect of lived experiences.

Whereas Shefa crafts her character as a type of spiritual prodigy, and her motivation as stemming from this innate quality, Min’s character and motivation stem from a very different place, she develops herself as a neophyte with a thirst for learning
and a deep seeded spiritual yearning. Min “runs toward” education and Jewish
spirituality, desires that are not supported by her working-class and anti-religious family.
Although their motivations are poles apart, both women tell stories that seem guided by
what the storytellers know to be ‘right.’ Alan S. Waterman considers these inner
directives to be part of “ethical individualism” (1984:166). He explains, “Ethical
individualism places a value on self-realization achieved through submitting to the
rigorous demands necessary for the full development and utilization of one’s talents…[it]
involves the values of personal freedom and personal responsibility expressed through
individual decision making and accountability” (Waterman 1984:166). In Shefa’s story,
these themes are apparent, resonating with her focus on the ‘truth’ and communicating
some sense of an obligation to bring her form of spirituality and comprehension of Jewish
mysteries to the world. In Min’s story, her internal motivation relies less on divine
guidance, and more on her need for self-understanding.

Philosopher Charles Taylor locates this desire for self-understanding and
individuation within the “modern identity” (1989). In this “contemporary understanding
of what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self,” Taylor argues that an individual’s
understanding of her own agency varies over time, yet remains connected to her moral
understanding relating to a “spiritual predicament” (1994:185). He claims that this
decidedly modern Western phenomenon stems from a journey inward. Two attributes of
this journey are self-control and self-exploration. In Min’s tale, she responds to the pull
for Jewish connection, but does not accept all things Jewish without question. She reacts
strongly to the sexist Purim event, and notes the double standard when Martin receives a
Kiddush cup following his position as president of Hillel, and she does not. Min’s
ongoing malaise with her home life and lack of Jewish community acts as catalysts for an individuation that truly happens when she graduates early from high school and goes to college.

Deborah, unlike Min, grew up in a very close, religious family, yet she too grapples with a type of spiritual predicament. Individuation is difficult for Deborah. She is the “youngest of six” her parents and siblings. She is known in the community through her relation with her family, a granddaughter, daughter, sister, etc. Even so, a large part of her storied identity arises from the experiences she does not share with her close and loving family. Unlike her family members who have had positive experiences in Israel, such trips have been very traumatizing to Deborah. She tells of snipers, whores and jails, and suffers from spinal meningitis, nearly dying, while there on her own. Her spiritual predicament arises from this trip. Upon her return, she is physically weakened. She starts college before she should. In the midst of the trauma, she admits, “So it was a rough go, and I had all of this anger and confusion now about being a Jew.”

Each of the rabbi’s stories, like the individuation stories of most young women, convey the struggles to find oneself, amid fluctuations of belonging and alienation. In these narratives, we can see how difficult family lives, physical maladies, and spiritual predicaments clarify the storytellers’ ‘selves,’ while simultaneously motivating action in the stories. When we see the connection between self-understanding and action, the story seems true, the characterization of the storyteller, authentic. Authenticity in storytelling is key to the communication of successful public stories.

The public in this case, exists beyond the somewhat limited storytelling event of the life story interview. The rabbis participating in this project are telling stories for their
family and friends, religious community members, the larger Albuquerque Jewish community, as well as to those members of the general public who are interested in the cultural, ideological, and religious implications of a very eclectic 21st Century American Judaism and the emergence of strong women spiritual leaders. Though unique in story structure, internal motivation, and content, the stories told by Shefa, Min and Deborah for this anticipated public consumption succeed in telling who they are, and how they came to be the women they are today: dynamic women, capable of articulating their own inner transformations, navigating difficult spiritual struggles, and capable of guiding other spiritual seekers through trying times, spiritual ambivalence, and rapidly changing Jewish identities.

In Chapter 5, I consider the relationship between the personal stories that Lynn and Deborah tell about their experiences of education and professional development, and the broader social and political historical narratives of 1970s1980s America. In the following pages, I offer a brief discussion about the changing priorities in U.S. society at the time starting with tacit post-World War social contracts for men returning to their homes, growing discontent for citizens overlooked in those contracts (i.e. ethnic minorities and women, to name a few), the resulting Civil and Women’s Rights Movements, and the influences of the progressive student movement, anti-war movement, radical feminist movement, and Jewish feminist movement. Situating Lynn’s and Deborah’s stories within these contexts, I consider how their stories reveal perspectives of transforming gender roles, increasing religious plurality, dynamic social activism, political engagement, and grassroots organizing from very personal and distinct vantage points.
CHAPTER 5

Education, Activism, Leadership:

Stories at the Intersection of Personal and Social Histories

“In February of ‘73, the first Jewish Feminist Conference occurred in New York. It was quite a scene change for me. If you can believe it…I just totally didn’t have a clue…There were Orthodox women to butch biker women, and the whole political spectrum. It was fabulous. It was like all of Jewish life, female Jewish life in one place, 300 or so women… And what it did for me was of course open up a true dialectic – a true dialogue with Judaism from a feminist point of view…By the time I left that conference, I definitely had a clue.”

– Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

“I had this drive for wholeness. Drive for integrity, and a drive to make it right…to elbow more room for people like me and people not like me. I wanted to change the world. And we did.”

– Rabbi Deborah Brin

When I went to grade school in Oklahoma in the 1970s, the ‘American history’ presented in our books was a grand monologue of loosely connected events, people and places. The take home message regarding the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s contained within these abbreviated texts seemed to be that American citizens, generally male, who had been promised the ‘American Dream’ following World War II had been suddenly plunged into civil chaos as the Vietnam War raged, Civil Rights activists marched, women ‘demanded’ equality in the workplace, and peace loving hippies threatened wholesome American values. Since then, I have supplemented my early educational experiences with several years of university studies, reading literature, and watching historical documentaries. I now understand more about the ideological shifts in the American consciousness that led to these movements, as well as how significantly these movements changed priorities for many in this country as different social values,
political positions, and gender awareness fused to create the world in which I now live. Even so, until I conducted these interviews, most of the faces I connected to these histories remained the two-dimensional, black and white images of politicians, activists and actors.

When at first I sat with Lynn and Deborah to record their stories, I listened intently to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the stories they were telling. Once I grew more comfortable, however, first with the storytellers, and then their narratives, I relaxed and tuned in to what they were saying about the social and political narratives that shaped their early lives and underpinned the simplified histories with which I had grown up. Lynn and Deborah came of age in a 1950s post-Cold War culture, and had experienced, and were active in, the heightened political milieus of the 1960s and 1970s. As individuals looking through ever changing kaleidoscopic lenses of a turbulent, dynamic, and charged period, each was privy to, and related to, differing aspects of discourses that promised possibilities for Americans who felt the weight of gender discrimination, racial oppression, and other forms of social, political and economic exclusion. Through their stories, abstracted accounts were animated; their words providing nuance, perspective, emotion and context to the abridged grade school textbook histories. In reading these stories, I am taken by how their personal and unique narratives speak to meta-contexts of disillusionment among women and ethnic minorities, a new radicalism fueled by black rights groups, second wave feminists and liberal university environs, anti-war movements, countercultural movements, and the subsequent push to change social policies surrounding education and employment for women, minorities and others excluded from the 1950s era social contract that privileged white middle class men.
Historians, such as Todd Gitlin (1987), Stuart Burns (1990), Edward Spann (2003), and many others note that the 1950s/1960s were periods of intensely changing priorities in the United States. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and World Wars, Burns claims that an implicit postwar social contract emerged containing, “unwritten rules to govern the new social order driven by massive industrial and technological growth, global economic ascendance, and a permanent war economy” (1990:xiv). The “gist” of the contract, according to Burns, “was a promise of middle-class prosperity for hard-working white males…in exchange for conformity, for not questioning authority” (1990:xiv).

Having recently experienced the horrors of World War II, this social contract must have seemed a fitting reward to men returning from a conflict in which they felt victorious in the “war against totalitarianism” (Spann 2003:9). In this ideal new world, there was an appreciation for the “the ideal of the democratic family” (Spann 2003:9). This promise of middle-class prosperity provided sufficient security for the returning soldiers to begin having families. Between 1946 and 1964 approximately 79 million babies were born in the U.S. in what is commonly called the ‘Baby Boom’ (http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/natproj.html:2011). Thriving financially, many young men were able to seek college educations through the GI Bill49, an opportunity that seemed to presage similar opportunities for subsequent generations,

49 The GI Bill, formerly the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, was a bill designed to provide college or vocational education for men returning home from service in World War II. The bill also included one year of unemployment compensation, various loans for the purchase of homes, and seed money to start businesses. See Milton Greenberg (1997) and Edward Hume (2006) for further discussion.
as Spann suggests, “many men who had entered college under the GI Bill [expected] as much or more education for their children” (2003:34).

Projects such as the Citizen Education Project were adopted by many high schools in the 1950s. These efforts sought to train youth to be active citizens, informed about American policies, so that they “would emerge from the schools equipped with habits and skills in democratic living far beyond those possessed by their parents (2003:18). Some proponents of progressive education, such as George S. Counts and Theodore Brameld, two New York professors of education, theorized that progressive education combined with “the radical liberal democracy of the New Deal” could “bring into being a new international order ‘in which all nationalities, races, and religions receive equal rights in democratic control’” (Spann 2003:18). However, these utopian visions were not realized for the majority of American citizens (Stall 2003:20). This new social contract excluded African Americans and women, whose continued experiences of racism, sexism, and economic/educational exclusion stood in stark relief to an ideal image of white, middle-class American successes, exacerbating existent tensions and provoking the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement occurred in response to long standing strained race relationships in the United States, most visibly in the Southern states. In particular, the Jim Crow system, dating from the late 19th Century, which operationalized discrimination against African Americans through restrictive laws, practices that limited economic and educational opportunities, sanctioned or unpunished acts of violence, and public segregation practices (e.g., “separate by equal”) (Burns1990:2). By the 1950s, the black freedom movement adopted a number of strategies to confront such practices including
lobbying and legislation. In May of 1954, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, won a unanimous court decision that led to the desegregation of black youth in public schools (Burns 1990:3). This victory inspired a tremendous upwelling of organizational and nonviolent resistant strategies that came to be known as civil disobedience. Boycotts, sit-ins, and marches worked to maintain the momentum of the movement and provided venues for leaders to speak of new visions, such as Reverent Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I have a dream” speech delivered during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.

At the same time, second-wave feminist activists pushed for women’s equality in economic and social domains. In 1963, largely at the insistence of Esther Peterson of the Women’s Bureau, President John F. Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women. The commission issued several reports documenting women’s second-class status in the U.S. When the Civil Rights Act came before Congress in 1964, feminists lobbied to add an amendment that would effectively prohibit sex discrimination in employment situations. While the act was passed, many women felt the protection offered was still insufficient and attempts to prohibit sex segregation and discrimination in the workforce proved difficult as members of the newly appointed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) soon discovered.

In June of 1966, hundreds, including Betty Friedan, author of the *Feminine Mystique*, a 1963 publication that explored "the problem that has no name" - a sense of dissatisfaction experienced by American women in the 1950s, and Dr. Pauli Murray, Yale law professor and member of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women,
attended the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women. Frustrated with the progress made at the conference, as well as the lack of response by government agencies and employers to commission recommendations, a core group of women and their male allies founded the National Organization for Women (i.e. NOW) that sought to: “take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men” (www.now.org/history/purpos66.html). On the ground, many women participating in the Civil Rights Movement, progressive students and anti-war movements became aware of their continued second class status even within progressive circles. Debra C. Minkoff suggests, “The impetus for much early feminist activism was the sexism experienced by women in the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s” (1997:783), a condition that led to a new radical feminism, less concerned with mainstream acceptance and more concerned with drastic changes at all social/cultural levels of society from family structure to political leadership.

Shulamith Firestone, a daughter of Orthodox Jewish parents, helped create one of the first radical feminist groups in the country. While in Chicago, attending a coalition of leftist groups meeting to discuss civil rights and the Vietnam War, Firestone noticed that the “secondary status of women” was left off of the agenda (Faludi 2013:4). Shulamith connected with Jo Freeman, an author and feminist, who was also troubled by the omission. When the women pushed to be added to the agenda, “Freeman recalled…The chair said, ‘Move on, little girl. We have more important issues to talk about here than women’s problems.’” (Faludi 2013:4). Made furious by the sexist response, Firestone and Freeman created the first radical-feminist group, the first of many, as radical feminism
grew, and calls for women’s liberation spread through women in consciousness raising groups, large scale and grassroots organizing, political organizations such as the Red Stockings\textsuperscript{50}, as well as networking and lobbying efforts to radically change women’s place in society.

As the efforts for women’s equality and liberation progressed, politicians continued to debate the issue. President Nixon formed a Task Force on Women’s Rights and Responsibilities in 1970. The task force “linked sex discrimination in education to a denial of employment opportunity” stating, “Discrimination in education is one of the most damaging injustices women suffer. It denies them equal education and equal employment opportunity, contributing to a second class self-image” (quoted in Stetson 1991:108). Representative Edith Green, a Democrat from Oregon, chair of a special subcommittee of the House and Labor Committee, incorporated many of the task force recommendations into a proposal for renewal of federal education funding that became Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments and was passed by Congress in 1972. It read: “No person in the United State shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance” (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681, p 15 quoted in Stetson 1991:109). According to a report by Mark Mather and Dia Adams of the Population Reference Bureau, “changes in societal values, and a shift in women’s

\textsuperscript{50} One of the founding women’s liberations groups, Redstockings was a name taken “to represent the union of two traditions: the ‘bluestocking’ label disparagingly pinned on feminists of earlier centuries—and ‘red’ for revolution. Redstocking members coined terms such as “the personal is political,” “sisterhood is powerful” and led speakouts about the Miss America Protest and took on taboo topics such as rape, abortion (http://redstockings.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=67-Retrieved on April 15, 2013).
expectations for future employment,” finally converged in the 1970s, and the numbers of women in American colleges increased substantially, as this graph indicates:

Figure 1

Proportion of 18-to-24-Year-Old Men and Women Enrolled in College, 1967-2005

Source: U.S. Census Bureau:

Lynn and Deborah, and a generation of women who participated in the events discussed in this chapter, were among those who traversed these new educational environments. As the following stories indicate, politics, activism and education intersected at a myriad of points, allowing Lynn and Deborah to become activists in distinct, personally relevant ways.

Stories of Education and Activism in the Late 1960s/early 1970s

Lynn’s Story

Lynn entered Ohio Wesleyan University in the late 1960s. Having recently returned from Israel, she found the environment to be “not Jewish enough” and “very disconcerting.” Feeling “not at home” she befriended a Palestinian from Northern Israel, but left the following year to go to George Washington University in the District of Columbia. She tells me that it was “around the Moratorium and it was an overwhelming city to be in at that time.”
The October Moratorium, a nationwide protest against the Vietnam War, was the brainchild of millionaire industrialist Jerome Grossman and named by Harvard Divinity School student, Sam Brown as a response to President Richard Nixon’s push to increase military force against Hanoi. Both men had supported Eugene McCarthy, a Minnesota Congressman, whose campaign against incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson had been run on an anti-war platform. Grossman strategized a protest that “would grow one day longer each month until the war ended” (Burns 1990:105). The Vietnam Moratorium Committee met to “activate hundreds of student body presidents” and launched a publicity campaign, gaining the support of thirty members of Congress and making the covers of both Time and Newsweek (Burns 1990:106). Stewart Burns writes:

The mighty tidal wave engulfed the nation on Wednesday, 15 October. In thousands of cities and towns, students, workers, homemakers, politicians, executives—people from all walks of life, but mostly middle-class and young—left their routines to join marches, rallies, vigils, teach-ins, doorbell-ringing, and readings of the U.S. war dead in Vietnam. An incalculable number simply wore black arm bands to work or school. Hundreds of colleges and high schools closed for the day, while hundreds more sponsored official gatherings. Few campuses or communities were untouched (1990:106).

The Moratorium succeeded, at least on the surface. On November 3, 1969, President Nixon announced a dramatic change in his Indochina policy. His televised speech appeared as though he planned to wind down the war, however, his real strategy was to “prolong the war indefinitely,” and reduce media access (Burns 1990:107). Nixon and Henry Kissinger increased military aid to Saigon to enhance ground war effectiveness and bolstered air strikes by the U.S. military. At the same time, he sought to undercut further protest actions by Moratorium supports, accusing organizers of subsequent events of radical and violent politics and threatened to “cancel licenses and
pursue antitrust suits” against television networks who covered the protests or provided other media support or coverage (Burns 1990:107).

As Lynn, then a college sophomore, fought to navigate both the university and political climates, she was faced with an even more daunting situation.

My sophomore year, fall semester, my mother got sick with kidney disease. She had been sick. She had one kidney removed when I was 10 maybe, and I do remember thinking she was going to die at that point. That kind of floated in and out, and seemed to disappear. So, it came back when I was 20, I guess. And she lived another year maybe during that time. She was on dialysis. And I left school and came home. Then I decided mostly at her encouragement to go back to Israel to finish out college. And while I was there, she died.

That was just a horrific experience, almost missing the plane, getting phone calls, trying to get home, and not making it home on time. It was a surreal feeling, riding a plane, with people all around you doing their things, when you know you are going home to the death of your mother. It was very sobering, and actually it was very good preparation for being a rabbi. It has really created empathy in me for people who have experienced a loss. I can understand what that means.

“Oy vei,” Lynn whispered, shaking her head.

After she died, I went back to Israel. But I was really floating in those days, in a lot of ways, I couldn’t finish a lot of things, and I had a hard time focusing. Nonetheless, I managed to come home and get myself admitted into Hebrew Union College, which is sort of amazing. Looking back, I realize I was very, very depressed during that time period, but it didn’t keep me from living and doing great things.

While Lynn’s mother encouraged her quest for education, individuation and activism, as a first generation college student, Lynn did not benefit from the guidance of family members who knew how to navigate the postsecondary education process. Re-reading Lynn’s narrative, I am aware of how little support she received from university faculty and staff. Structures to provide support for students like Lynn were simply not existent in the early ‘70s. Similarly, college campuses were more homogenous, with little
ethnic, gender, religious and/or socioeconomic diversity. Lynn’s mention that Ohio Westland College was not Jewish enough is an acknowledgement of these gaps as emotional support and mentorship were lacking.

In fact, for numerous reasons, Stall observes that the “behavior of many [students] in the 1960s indicated that they were not happy with a system that emphasized standards over individual needs and interests” (2003:22). In a 1964 New York Times piece, Fred M. Hechinger “reported a steady improvement in the quality of students but also increases in the emotional problems and personal dissatisfaction” of college students (Stall 2003:80) who now entered into education milieus that focused on research agendas as opposed to teaching, resulting in increased class size, anonymous participation, and instructor indifference. These conditions not only affected Lynn but certainly seemed to affect Deborah as well, for even though she had come from a family with multiple generations of university educated women, she still struggled with the college atmosphere of early 1970’s American society.

**Deborah’s Story**

Having recently turned from a physically grueling trip to Israel, Deborah began to question her religion, identity and politics.

I came out when I was 19 and in college. I was at Macalester. I was underwhelmed by my college experience. I had grown up with these stories of Vassar and Harvard and how wonderful it was, and how intellectually stimulating, and how students were really on their own, away from their families and treated like adults, and that was not the way college was in the United States, in the early ’70s.

I showed up for the exams and turned in my papers.

And made it through, but it wasn't fine. It was a rocky road for me. It was rocky emotionally. So in that process coming out to myself, coming to awareness about who I was part of the process, there was a lot of struggle
and angst about how there wasn't a place for me. In my first or second year of college, I can't remember which, a group of students started something called Hebrew House. It didn't actually become a House-house until later, but there were a group of us. There wasn't a Hillel. There wasn't a rabbi. There wasn't a Jewish chaplain. There wasn't any of that stuff, so a group of us kind of got together. We brought a rabbi to campus to give a talk -- to teach something, and I had no idea who this guy was. I remember him telling us that the only role for women in Judaism was to have children, that they weren't really Jews, it was men who were Jews, and that the women were the ones that had the children and the Jewish status passed through the women, but they weren't Jews independent of themselves. Well! I was a tinderbox waiting to go off, and that did it!

Actually now I could say God works in mysterious ways, because that horrible rabbi whoever the hell he is or was, was the catalyst to my ultimately deciding that I was going stay a Jew, and I was going find a way to be who I was in my totality, and be a Jew, and be in the Jewish community, and that's the quest that ultimately took me to Rabbinical school; was how to be a Jewish, lesbian feminist and find a place in Judaism. And on one very clear level it seemed to me that the only way to do that was to go to the power place and to elbow some room for people like me.

Focusing on another pivotal situation, she asks, “Do you remember anything about Anita Bryant and the orange juice company?”

Having only the vaguest recollection, I say, “Maybe you should fill me in.”

She smiles at my obvious lack of awareness, and continues, “Well, it’s reaching into ancient history, and I’m not sure I remember it all well, but it had to do with the Florida Orange Juice Grower’s Association. You’ll have to look it up, to check history, because it’s a long time ago, and I get fuzzy.” She sips her tea, gathers her thoughts, and tells her story.

Anita Bryant was their spokesperson, and she was this very comely, attractive, powerful, middle-aged woman who was adamantly against gays and lesbians. And so the GLBT world started picketing wherever she went to talk and to stump orange juice.

Deborah chuckles somewhat self-effacingly, and adds:
And it radicalized me! It was the first real situation that was not just about who I am, but that I also understood was also just wrong! I realized that we had to fight against this societal attitude/philosophy/policy/law, whatever, that negatively affected an entire group of people.

She adds almost reflectively, “It seems so very long ago.”

In 1977, Anita Bryant was “America’s Sweetheart,” a former Miss Oklahoma in the Miss America competition, and a singer with “several gold albums…at the height of her popularity in the late 1960s,” most notably “Paper Roses” (Lane 2006:108). Bryant, a born-again Christian known as a pitch woman for Florida orange juice, Kraft products and other household items, campaigned ardently against an ordinance in Miami-Dade County that would prohibit discrimination “against gays ‘in housing, public accommodation and employment’” (Lane 2006:109). In her campaign, “Save Our Children,” Bryant made such claims as “Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they must recruit our children” and “If homosexuality were the normal way, God would have made Adam and Bruce” (http://www.stonewall-library.org/anita).

When “the ordinance was adopted by the Miami-Dade County Commission on January 18, 1977, by a 5-3 vote,” Bryant quipped, “We’re not going to take this sitting down…the ordinance condones immorality and discriminates against my children’s rights to grow up in a healthy, decent community” (“Bias Against Homosexuals is Outlawed in Miami, quoted in Lane 2006:109). The Bryant situation not only galvanized Deborah’s politicization, it inspired coalitions among the lesbian and gay communities across the nation. When interviewed by Trish Ponder of the Pensito Review about an exhibit entitled, “Days Without Sunshine: Anita Bryant’s Anti-Gay Crusade” John Coppola, the curator and former head of exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., explained, “In a completely unintended way, Anita Bryant was about
the best thing to happen to the gay rights movement. She and her cohorts were so over the
top that it just completely galvanized the gay rights movement” (Ponder 2007).

Deborah’s politicization extended beyond the Gay Rights Movement. She explains:

There's a woman who's the partner of a rabbi that I bump into at the
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association conventions periodically, and
she reminded me that I had blown apart the Los Angeles GLBT\(^{51}\)
community about that same time period. Minneapolis was, among other
things, the hotbed of 12-step programs\(^{52}\), because Hazelton is nearby.
Minneapolis in the 70s was very PC\(^ {53} \), although that wasn't the language.
You know, you didn't use those words then, but it was very PC to do 12-
step stuff. The Women's Coffeehouse always made sure that there was
grape juice. Wherever there was a feminist gathering, if there was alcohol,
there was always grape juice. You know, and a lot of times there wasn't
alcohol because we didn’t think people should be drinking.

So a couple of friends and I went to one of the very first groups of gay and
lesbian, GLBT Jews. Not rabbis, just Jews. And they later started doing
conferences, and I actually spoke at one once, so I know it continued for a
long time. And they only had alcohol for Kiddush, and my friends and I
were absolutely outraged.

Turning toward the recorder, she jokes to the unseen audience, “I mean you can't
tell that I've got a broad grin on my face.” Sighing dramatically, she adds, “The
escapades of one's youth.”

So we were absolutely outraged, partly by the lack of regard for people
who were struggling with sobriety, or just didn’t drink, and partly because
it was also a gay Jewish organization and we wanted it to be gay and
lesbian. We were agitating that it be lesbian also, and then when it came to
Shabbos and it was gay centric and there was no grape juice, which we
just took as the way it was supposed to be, we got outraged again! So we
had quite a reputation apparently, long after we left. And this woman
remembers me from back then.

\(^{51}\) Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender

\(^{52}\) Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith founded the first 12-step program, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), in 1935.
Since then the 12-step model has been adapted to help people struggling with a variety of addictions from
narcotics to food to most recently, sex.

\(^{53}\) Politically Correct
So God only knows who remembers me for what!

Stall suggests that the 1960s brought “new hopes for a meaningful life” (2003:61) to people’s whose lives were touched by the fear, violence, and poverty of previous decades. In these stories, we see how Deborah’s family encourages her to follow in their footsteps, to embrace her legacy as an college educated woman, as Lynn’s mother encourages her to reach for lofty goals as well. Yet, we come to realize through these narratives that their journeys were not necessarily easy. Deborah struggled with physical frailties, her lesbian identity, and social conservatism, while Lynn faced the abrupt and devastating loss of her mother and feeling a lack of groundedness or “floating.” As the storytellers express how they felt undergoing these difficulties, they create new models for others who deal with similar adversities, and speak to ways in which they became somehow stronger, more aware in the process. These storied struggles underpin narratives that reveal how learning and self-discovery gleaned through secular, institutional milieus, still contribute to their Jewish/religious and activistic/political identities, as these identities and experiences are not mutually exclusive.

These stories also reveal how the university environment catalyzes the leadership trajectories of Lynn and Deborah as they address difference, engage the world critically, and form political identities to varying degrees. Tuula Gorden writes:

Schooling is a national project and a practice of the state, preparing young people for adulthood. The context of this preparation involves negotiations between difference and diversity among young people, and the neutral sameness of ‘citizens.’ ‘Citizenship’ frames notions of what it is to be an adult in the political systems in the countries with which we are concerned…[as] a member of a nation state…[with] particular duties and rights (2006:3).
The very specific context of 1960’s citizenship and politicization took a radical departure from the imagined citizenship of previous decades. Todd Gitlin notes that the overly organized and sanitized, fear based culture of the 1950s (think Holocaust, Cold War and McCarthyism) led to a “generation…haunted by history” (1987:84). He claims college age people of the day “had been taught that political failure or apathy can have the direst consequences; they had extracted the lesson that the fate of the world is not something automatically to be entrusted to authorities” (Gitlin 1987:84). In these stories two young adults seize political responsibility. Even as Lynn recalls the trauma of her mother’s death, she still nods at the hostilities that exist between Palestinian and Jewish people that persist in the present. Deborah’s politicization happens on multiple fronts (i.e. gay and lesbian, sobriety, and Jewish). In each story there is a confluence of education, political awareness, and personal development that mark them as new types of citizens in the United States in the late 20th Century capable of entering the formerly male province of rabbinic school to find new spaces for collaboration.

*Stories of Inclusion and Exclusion: Rabbinic School in the 1970s/1980s*

*Lynn’s Story*

When Lynn arrived in New York to attend Hebrew Union College, she met the rabbi of the deaf community, Temple Beth Or.

It was November and I had just gotten to New York. It was the rabbi’s last year at Hebrew Union College. He was leaving. He wanted to find a replacement and he thought for some reason that I would make a good candidate. So he took me to services one night, and I completely fell in love with the community. They were so wonderful. It was just intriguing to me as well, you know, discovering a whole other culture in the midst of the Jewish community; one that used sign language, which I found to be a most beautiful and very spiritual language.
I started going to services once a month and showing up at the Hebrew school on Sundays to kind of just hang out and experience the community. Well they thought it was kind of unusual that anyone wanted to do that, but by the end of the year I got a phone call that said they wanted to hire me as their rabbi.

I’m like “What?”

Remembering the events and people that foreshadowed this this opportunity,

Lynn spoke of her time at Hebrew Union College.

I was floating around [HUC] for the first year I was in New York and taking classes. This was a whole other dimension of my life at that point. That first year in rabbinic school, I still didn’t have a congregation. I was working in Westchester. I was still very depressed, I guess, by the death of my mother, which had happened maybe two years earlier. Something like that, a year-and-a-half or two, just really recent, and was feeling very homeless. No moorings. My sister moved. She either was in New York or moved to New York soon after that, and that was really nice. We had an opportunity to spend some time together of quality, since we both lived in the City.

Rabbinic school was really interesting. I was on the one hand interested in the studies, very interested in the studies. And some of the teachers were quite wonderful. On the other hand, there was this revolution happening with the fifth-year students, in which they were unhappy with the course of rabbinic studies. It wasn’t contemporary enough or relevant enough, meaningful enough, and they actually shut down the school and had a three-day colloquium to discuss rabbinic education.

At the same time, there was a movement by Arthur Green to start alternative rabbinic school, which I guess he finally has done. In the meantime, he was president of Reconstructionist Rabbinic College. He wasn’t at that time. At that time, he was still at the Boston Chavurah. And the Boston Chavurah and the New York Chavurah I believe were the only two Chavurah in the country, and I was a member of the New York Chavurah. So I was just coming into life in New York City, Jewish life in New York City after several years in Israel.

And the other stream that was happening was the founding of Breira, and I was a founding member of Breira. That was almost by accident. There were nine guys and me, just because I was friendly with one of the fifth-year students, and I ended up being a founding member of Breira. But I was interested. And of that founding committee, maybe the only person, I don’t know if that’s true or not, who was in dialogue with Palestinians.
For clarification, I ask, “So what is Breira?”

Lynn says, “Breira”, means “alternative.” Then adds, “There is an alternative or a choice.” It was the first progressive Jewish organization by my generation to want to have a different policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, which was more embracing of the Palestinian’s national struggle.” Breira was formed in 1973 in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in opposition to hard line Jewish perspectives that claimed there could be no alternative solution, other than a two state solution for Israelis and Palestinians. Formed of “liberal Conservative and Reform rabbis, left-leaning and moderate intellectuals, and young Jewish radicals and students in the Jewish counterculture” (Staub 2002:290), Breira challenged “right-wing Zionists both in Israel and the United States” and opened debates about Palestinian nationalism and Jewish settlement (Staub 2002:290). Breira created major rifts in Jewish communities about the acceptability of Jewish dissension against Israel. Breira succeeded in instigating communications across intergenerational gaps within the Jewish community and also demonstrated “a post-sixties commitment to lessen sectarian conflict” bringing together “secularist and religious—as well as Zionist and non-Zionist—elements” (Staub 2002 290-291). It also showed a “strong presence of women…[that] reflected feminism’s recent powerful impact on nearly every dimension of American Jewish communal existence” (Staub 2002 290-291). The confluence of these movements and their influence on American and Jewish culture is apparent in Lynn’s continued story.

That was 1972. In the beginning of ‘73, February, the first Jewish Feminist Conference occurred in New York. It was quite a scene change for me. If you can believe it, I actually wrote a paper at the time about transcending feminism or something. I didn’t have a clue. I wrote it on yellow legal paper. I wish I had it. Oh, I really wish I had it. I wish I could
read it, but I remember feeling it was almost like a confirmation speech; very undeveloped.

Thank God nobody has a record of it! Geez! I didn’t say that. It was some stupid ass reflection on why men and women had to sort of overcome their differences and be together or something, I don’t know.

We laugh, and I say, “Some things have changed!”

Giggling, she responds, “Just completely.” It was a completely uneducated response. Because that was really my first feminist conference. There were Orthodox women to butch biker women, and the whole political spectrum. It was fabulous. It was like all of Jewish life, female Jewish life in one place, 300 or so women. From Blu Greenberg and Rachel Adler to Judith Plaskow. You know, everybody was there. Hadassah women, Arlene Goldberg, Liz Coulsen and the woman who eventually founded New Jewish Agenda, Rena Bernard. I mean just everybody was there.

I say, “And you.”

And me. This little know-nothing. This little puppeteer from Allentown Pennsylvania who spent some time in Jerusalem. Taking it all in. And what it did for me was of course open up a true dialectic – a true dialogue with Judaism from a feminist point of view. And even when I came into the conference and wrote for the conference, I didn’t have a clue. By the time I left that conference, I definitely had a clue.

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54 Author of *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (1981) and *Black Bread: Poems, After the Holocaust* (1994), Blu Greenberg is an activist concerned with bridging feminism with Jewish Orthodoxy.

55 Rachel Adler is an associate professor of Modern Jewish Thought, Judaism and Gender at the School of Religion, University of Southern California and at the Las Angeles campus of the Hebrew Union Rabbinical College.


57 Founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, “is a volunteer women's organization whose members are motivated and inspired to strengthen their partnership with Israel, ensure Jewish continuity, and realize their potential as a dynamic force in American society” (www.hadassah.org).
And it was like, “Oh! I get it.” Judith [Plaskow] read the story, _Apple Source_58. It was very influential. Judith Cantor59 and Susan Weidman-Schneider60 the editor of _Lilith_ magazine were also there. All of those voices came together in conversation. Orthodox Jewish women initiated the rest of the women into _Rosh Chodesh_61. I took that and ran with it like nobody’s business. And there were conversations about ceremony, and whether we were invisible in history, and what would happen if we asked our own questions and took the perspective of the women in the stories.

Well, it all made sense to me as a storyteller. And having an incipient feminism within me, an uncultured, unstructured, unformed, unshaped, unarticulated feminism by virtue of the kinds of choices I made for myself, which were empowered choices along the way. You know, choosing to play the Wicked Witch of the West over Dorothy, or going off to Israel in my senior year. So when Feminism opened, it was very natural for me to step in, and to step in on the experimental end of it.

That was a very charged moment. To hear the story of Lilith opened up an entire realm of knowledge and also the very idea that all these Jewish women were getting together, had organized the conference and it wasn’t sisterhood. [The women at the conference] weren’t serving tea to any guys or the synagogue or bringing good cookies or anything like that. They were engaged intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, every way that one might associate with Jewish men, arguing over text, and tradition and the fine points of Jewish existence; that in and of itself was very liberating. But from my perspective and where I had come from and lived, it was very traditional. And that was nice too, because I got to learn what egalitarian traditionalism looked like and felt like and that was also part of the conference, had that dimension to it. You know, so I saw women


60 Susan Weidman-Schneider has been the Lilith Editor in Chief since 1976, and “is one of Lilith's founding mothers.” She is the author of the books _Jewish and Female_ and _Interrmarriage: The Challenge of Living with Differences between Christians and Jews_, and co-author of _Head and Heart_, about money in the lives of women. For more information please go to http://www.lilth.org.

61 A ritual celebration of the first day of the lunar month.
across the spectrum. That’s what was most powerful about it, more than any one particular vignette. It was the whole experience. And in it, I shifted.

This portion of Lynn’s story chronicles her feminist consciousness as it emerges through interactions with friends, mentors, and others Jewish feminists who challenged existing Jewish laws, rituals and customs and/or engaged in consciousness raising groups, conferences and conversations. In her story, we glimpse the early days of the Jewish Feminist Movement. Inspired by the Women’s and Civil Rights Movements, as well as radical feminism, the Jewish Feminist Movement of the 1960s prompted Jewish women to examine “critically both their own status within Jewish tradition and the political and social structure of the American Jewish community” (Lipstadt in Nadell et. al: 2001:292). Deborah E. Lipstadt makes the point that it was “not only women who felt estranged from the community or on the periphery of Jewish life” but also women who were active and committed to their Jewish communities but still felt “that all was not right” calling Conservative Judaism the “staging ground” for women’s challenge to the existing order (2001:292-293).

This incident of staging occurred in 1972, when Ezrat Nashim, a group of women “who had been studying Jewish text pertaining to women” attended a meeting of the Conservative Movement’s Rabbinical Assembly (Lipstadt 2001:293). According to Lipstadt, the women presented a list of demands such as:

...women should be considered bound to fulfill all mitzvoth (ritual obligations) equally with men; granted membership in synagogues; counted as part of the minyan (the prayer quorum, traditionally consisting of ten men, necessary for public prayer); allowed full participation in religious observances; recognized as witnesses in Jewish law; granted the right to initiate divorce; permitted to attend rabbinical and cantorial school; and encouraged to assume professional leadership roles in synagogues and in the general Jewish community (2001:293).
While the Conservative Movement adopted the bulk of the requests, it would be another ten years before the decision would be made to allow women to be ordained as Conservative rabbis.

Yet seeds had been sown, and when the first Jewish Feminist Conference in New York convened, once singular voices came together for a shared, if somewhat nebulous, purpose. In a statement for the *Jewish Women’s Archives*, Professor Rachel Adler writes, “In February of 1973, over 500 U.S. and Canadian women had come together at the first Jewish Women’s Conference in New York City. The size and diversity of the gathering were strong evidence that we were not just disaffected individuals. We were a *movement*” ([http://jwa.org/feminism/ html/JWA001.htm Retrieved on December 30, 2011](http://jwa.org/feminism/ html/JWA001.htm)). In Dr. Adler’s statement, we see that even the primary architects of the conference were uncertain about the breadth and importance of the gathering. Other conference attendees, like Lynn, who admitted a lack of comprehension of feminist issues and how they were directly connected to her life and Judaism, gained support, direction and motivation in the presence of the dynamic group of women, presentations, and space for self-reflection. As Lynn’s individual feminist consciousness grows, so too does a gathering of Jewish women become a Jewish Feminist Movement.

Lynn’s ‘shift’ speaks directly to the transformative potential of shared efforts. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw explains, “Drawing from the strength of shared experience, women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than do the pleas of a few isolated voices” (Fineman 1994:93). Deborah’s stories likewise emphasize the importance of shared experiences in the development of identity (her own and others), social position and political activism.
Deborah's Story

Deborah went to rabbinical school in 1979. She begins her story by telling me that it was a “privilege” to “be in a cohort of men and women who really have changed Judaism.”

I had been closeted in rabbinical school. Because it was a continuation of what I'd been doing. When I was at RRC [Reconstructionist Rabbinical College]62 you couldn't go there and be a lesbian.

When I was leaving for my interview, I had dinner with my parents the night before. And my father, may his memory be a blessing, said to me, "You're not going to come out to them, are you?" I said, "I want to get in. If I come out they won't let me in. I want to get in." So I was in this twang from the beginning.

My senior year, both fourth and fifth year of rabbinical school, I was co-president of the Reconstructionist Student Association. During my fourth year, the faculty was debating whether or not to accept openly gay and lesbian students who were qualified to study. You know, if they were to leave off the sexuality, would the rest of the package be qualified? Do you then allow gay or lesbian students to come to the college?

So that fourth year was really challenging for me, because there were conversations in the hallways, in classes, in the lunchroom about gay and lesbians, and I was theoretically closeted, unable to be open and participate fully. I say theoretically, because it wasn't official. By that time, it was a living room-sized closet. There were a lot of people who knew, but it wasn't official and I wasn’t able to be out at that point. I was terrified always that the leaders of RRC were going to throw me out. But the reality was that once I'd gotten that far, they probably wouldn't. It would have been a big challenge, but still they were totally within their rights to throw me out if I officially came out before the decision had been made to accept gay and lesbian applicants.

By the fifth year, fall of 1984, I was able as the co-student body president to announce at our first student association meeting that the faculty had voted to accept openly gay and lesbian students for the coming year, but I

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62 Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, established in Philadelphia in 1968, is located in Wyncote, Pennsylvania. RRC currently serves 80 students. Accepting a diverse student body, figures suggest that nearly half of all enrolled students are women. For more information, go to http://www.rrc.edu.
still didn’t feel safe to come out. In my mind, this still didn't make my status there legal, because I wasn't incoming in the next fall. I was a senior. I was a graduating student. It still seemed so dicey, and the fear that I felt then is still so very easy to touch.

Jumping to a current story to explain the residual fear she still encounters as a result of being closeted, she tells me,

While I was living in Grinnell, Iowa, so somewhere around ’02, ’01-'02, Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, asked me if I would write something for the upcoming book that she, and Sue Levi Elwell and Shirley Idelson were writing on the first generation of lesbian rabbis. And I'm in the first generation of lesbian rabbis, but I could not write anything for the book. I was paralyzed. It is still such an intense source of pain for me that I'm not there. I was caught in a total bind. I couldn't deal with coming out in print, and I couldn't deal with not being in the book. But in the end, the fear of coming out openly in print won out, and my story did not make it into the book.

When I met with Deborah the first time to discuss her participation in this project, she explained her fears of “coming out in print.” Deborah’s concerns are not without merit. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) members of both Jewish and American societies are frequently subjected to discrimination and violence resulting from homophobia (fear of LGBTQ individuals) and heterosexism (institutionalized discrimination against LGBTQ persons). Countless LGBTQ individuals face rejection by family and friends, members of their religious communities, as well as discrimination in areas of employment, housing, adoption, and marriage. Many LGBTQ persons have experienced verbal or physical violence, and/or potentially harmful reparative or conversion ‘therapies’ motivated by antiquated psychological theories or conservative religious beliefs in their attempts to navigate new, complex identities. In response to these aggressions, some suffer the indignities of feeling compelled to ‘pass’ as heterosexual, or asexual, acting ‘normal’ by avoiding conversations about relationships,
omitting a lover’s name and/or gender when engaged in conversation, and dressing in
gender appropriate, socially sanctioned fashions. While the 21st century American climate
is generally more accepting of middle to upper class, urban and Caucasian LGBTQ
individuals who have ‘come out’ of the closet to live openly as a member of the LGBTQ
community, these issues persist, and the process of coming out publically remains
arduous.

One reason for Jewish individuals’ fears of anti-LGBTQ sentiment is found in the
Torah. Rebecca Alpert explains the implications of the Torah portion, Leviticus, chapter
18, “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination:”

Three times a year, on Yom Kippur afternoon and then twice during the
annual cycle of Torah readings, every year for the past 2,500 years, Jews
around the world have listened to the public reading of the words of
Leviticus declaring a sexual act between two men “an abomination.”
When the prohibition is read from Leviticus 20, during the third yearly
reading, it is declared not only an abomination, but also a capital crime.

What could be more profoundly alienating than to know that the most
sacred text of your people, read aloud on the holiest day of the year, calls
that which is central to your life an abomination? What could be more
terrifying than to know that what for you is a sacred loving act was
considered by your ancestors to be punishable by death (Alpert in Balka
and Rose ed. al. 1989:62)?

Recognizing the religious, political and personal implications of Deborah’s
decision to talk to me about her life, I thank her again for agreeing to participate in this
project. I remind her that she can remove parts that makes her feel overexposed or
vulnerable, but tell her sincerely, that her storied struggles have power and the potential
to touch and perhaps transform her readers. She nods, and continues.

Well, it's always just a question, because I have not been safe in my life.
I remember when the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association made its
determination that it would be okay to do a ceremony of commitment for
gays or lesbians and that you, as the officiant wouldn't be thrown out of
the Rabbinical Association. Many of us wanted them to say clearly, "Of course it's all right," and we expect that Reconstructionist rabbis will do this. But they hedged their bets a bit and said, “It's up to the rabbi, whether he or she will do it. We support the idea. Anyway, I'm telling you things you already know. But I lived through it and it's very different now.”

Returning to the tale of rabbinic school, she continues:

I remember the very first wedding ceremony I did of any kind was a lesbian ceremony for Rabbi Linda Holtzman and her partner Betsy Constant. They are still together. But I was terrified that I would be thrown out of rabbinical school for doing that ceremony.

I think it was the summer of 1984. It might have been '83. During that time, it was very lonely. It was very hard. It was very isolating. I lived with a level of anxiety that was very, very deep because it was about my being -- who I was in my being-ness that some perceived wasn't okay, and so it deeply, deeply affected me. It's not something you can really figure out. You can't think yourself out of this predicament. You can't.

Turning away from the round wooden table in her office, she turns toward a row of bookshelves. To underscore her point, she says, “Rebecca Alpert, [who wrote] Like Bread on the Seder Plate, was the Dean of Students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College when I started. And she was one of the first women ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. In her introduction, [she says that] she was ordained in 1976, and came out in 1986.” Glancing at her acknowledgements, Deborah reads, “My story is not unique. There are dozens of lesbian rabbis today. Each of us has found a way to make sense of these parts of our lives and sometimes to fit them together. This book is my way.”

That was what I was trying to do, to make sense out of my life to be integrated, because when I was in rabbinical school, I was allowed to be the intellectual part of myself and the Jewish part of myself, and it was okay to be a woman at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. That was not an issue. I mean it was at HUC\textsuperscript{63} and JTS\textsuperscript{64}, but not RRC. But being a

\textsuperscript{63} Hebrew Union College

\textsuperscript{64} Jewish Theological Seminary
lesbian, being queer, being a dyke, whatever language you want to use, that was not okay. It was hard because it was a wonderful place to be. I loved being in rabbinical school, yet it was a place of great torment for me. It was both. It was wonderful and it was tortuous, and to try to figure out how to make your life work in the center of this conflict was a major deal.

Deborah’s voice tapers off, and I ask, “With all of this going on, what was motivating you in your life and studies at this time?”

This drive toward wholeness I think. I was tired of being okay over here if this part of my personality was in the foreground and okay over here if this part of my personality was in the foreground, but there was no place where I felt I could just be. And it felt terribly wrong to me that because I was a lesbian I was disbarred. It makes no sense to me, that being a lesbian barred me from full participation in the Jewish world. And it's really quite amazing and very miraculous that I am a full participant in the Jewish world, and that I have a wonderful reputation here in Albuquerque. I feel very, very fortunate.

In an effort to demonstrate that this acceptance was not always the case, she switches to stories about her first rabbinic position.

When I first went to Toronto, I guess it was my second year there, because [my partner] moved to be with me, and my father, may his memory be a blessing, said to me, "Do you want people to know that Denni is there and that she's your partner?" I said, "I don't think so." And he said, "Okay, then she can never answer the telephone and you can never leave the house together."

I just couldn't do that. I couldn't tell Denni that she wasn't allowed to answer the telephone in her own house. I wouldn't. I mean it wasn't that I couldn't, I wouldn't. And to never go anywhere together? To never be seen together? I can't do that. And I know that there are people who succeed at being closeted for decades. I was not one of them. I couldn't do it. I had this drive for wholeness. Drive for integrity, and a drive to make it right, to elbow more room for people like me and people not like me. I wanted to change the world. And we did.

Speaking of the other students with whom she attended rabbinic school, and with whom she collaborated to make important changes to Jewish practice, she adds:
We made different God language happen. Rabbi Lee Friedlander\(^{65}\) and I were the poetry editors for the first Shabbat prayer book, the Reconstructionist Shabbat Prayer Book, *Kol Haneshamah*. We got women's voices in there. In addition to my mother’s work\(^{66}\), we were the first to publish a prayer book that included Merle Feld\(^{67}\) and Ruth Sohn. It helped to include all kinds of other Jewish experiences.

I'm proud to be a Reconstructionist rabbi. I'm proud of what the Reconstructionists have done. I'm proud of being one of the people who helped really change Judaism in our day, in America anyway, in North America. North American Liberal Judaism really is very different because of the people that I was privileged to study with, the people I was privileged to be students with and the people I'm privileged to call colleagues, and together we really have made Judaism different.

I was trying to make room inside Judaism for me and for people like me, and to change it. But to change it from the inside. I wasn't trying to break it.

While both Lynn and Deborah gain access to college life and rabbinic school, neither experiences the utopian environments for which she had hoped. Lynn flits from space to space, not finding an academic/religious home. She eventually finds belonging working at Temple Beth Or, in the Jewish Feminist Movement, and through relationships with various mentors. Deborah feels connection and belonging at the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College, but is still forced to keep a substantial part of herself, her sexual orientation, a secret. These stories communicate the tensions that existed as new, but

\(^{65}\) Rabbi Lee Friedlander is Senior Rabbi at the Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore. “A past president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, he is also readings editor of *Kol HaNeshama*, the prayerbook series of the Reconstructionist movement. He currently serves as the chair of his rabbinical association’s Ethics Committee” (http://rsns.org/who-we-are/leadership - Retrieved on January 11, 2012).

\(^{66}\) Ruth Brin, Deborah’s mother, was a famous poet and teacher of Judaic Studies at MacAlester and University of Minnesota. Called a “liturgical pioneer” by Rhoda G. Lewin, Ruth’s works can be found in prayer books in Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative synagogues across the Americas (http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/brin-ruth-f - Retrieved January 11, 2012).

limited, social roles for women were created, but institutional supports, mentors and models were not yet in place. Both women’s stories convey arrays of emotions: isolation, fear, belonging, hope, courage, and more. These feelings prompt Lynn’s journey into experimental, Renewal Jewish practice, and inspire Deborah to reach beyond her comfort zone to change Judaism “from the inside” while “not trying to break it.”

In each of these cases, the women work with others to change institutions, policies, and beliefs that they feel are outmoded or damaging. Lynn becomes part of groups acting to confront sexism in Judaism and challenge notions about the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Deborah works to include lesbians in gay spaces, to make ritual venues inclusive for those who are sober, and to remove exclusively patriarchal God language from Reconstructionist services in favor of gender neutral expressions for God. These moments of transformations are novel, discrete, localized, and wrought by groups of specific individuals working together. In the following stories about early rabbinic experiences, Lynn and Deborah reveal that the ideological changes made in these somewhat rarified environments (academic, urban, etc.) moved more slowly, and were sometimes more difficult, to integrate into the day to day lives of Jewish communities.

*Stories of Early Rabbinic Experiences – 1970s/1980s*

*Lynn’s Story*

Speaking of her first pulpit position at Temple Beth Or, Lynn says it was a “special universe,” and is still amazed that they hired her. With incredulity in her voice she explains,

To hire this 23-year-old girl who they really knew nothing about except that I showed up and apparently signed very beautifully? They loved my sign language. I think they hired me on the basis of my ability to speak to them in sign language. I learned from a master there, a woman that was
part of the congregation, which in looking back, or if I had stayed with
them over a lifetime, she should have been the cantor, that sort of
equivalent, because she was just… she was just a virtuoso.

When I ask her name, Lynn smiles and says, “Betty Oshman.”
So she taught me. She went over the entire service with me, and I rewrote
the service so that I wasn’t signing antiquated material. They were still
using the old reform prayer book from the 1950s or whatever, and it was
very hard to speak that and sign. So I wrote my first translation of the
siddur (i.e. prayer book), and in that translation, which I’m pretty sure I
still have, that was my first attempt at neutralizing the language of God.
So that summer, I spent learning sign language, translating the siddur, and
preparing for my first season as a pulpit rabbi in 1973.

Mostly I was translating from Hebrew and trying to create a language that
was more reflective of sign language. It worked out really well. They liked
it a lot. They really liked it. But of course, Betty and I talked about the
meaning and Betty choreographed it.

During this period, Lynn left HUC, and began studying with Irving Greenberg68
who invited her to a retreat with Elie Wiesel69 who agreed to work with Lynn as a private
ordination student. Twenty-three years old at the time, Lynn describes herself as
“clueless” and “naïve.”

Let’s put it that way. I was very naïve. But it was offered to me. And it
was always offered to me, like the first rabbi who said, “Lynn, you’re
going to be a rabbi.” And here’s this other one who’s like, “Okay, I’m
going to take you on for private ordination.” And I look back and I think,
this is very unusual. Very unusual. You’d almost think it was meant to be,
bashert, or the hand of God. Is Shekinah pushing me through the gates or
something?

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68 Irving (Yitz) Greenberg is a Modern Orthodox rabbi, Jewish-American scholar and author who is
married to Blu Greenberg. He is a supporter of Israel and work to promote intercultural understanding
between Jewish and Christian individuals and communities.

69 Elie Wiesel is a Holocaust survivor, author and human rights activist who has “received numerous
awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal, the National
Humanities Medal, the Medal of Liberty, and the rank of Grand-Croix in the French Legion of Honor. In
1986, Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Prize for Peace, and soon after, Marion and Elie Wiesel established The
She jokes, “And now these guys are like, “I don’t know what I said! What was I thinking?”

Lynn goes on to recount a list of people with whom she studied including Shelly Zimmerman, the eventual president of the Reform Movement, Arthur Hertzberg, Elaine Pagels. She had private classes with Seymour Seigel and Wolf Kelman. She says, “I sort of moved into the Jewish Theological Seminary, and also all these guys, let me sit in their classes! Why did they do that? I don’t know. So I was sitting in the rabbinic classes at the seminary, and studying privately. I had this enormous spectrum of teachers, and really [this mentorship and education model with various scholars and rabbinic experts] became the prototype of the Jewish Renewal Movement.” Yet Lynn’s entry into the worlds of rabbinic education was not without its limitations and challenges.


[Wiesel] transformed Hebraic texts into delicate and eternal mysteries. He resonated with tales of ecstatic rabbis and melancholy madmen, or strange meetings and distant places, of the human heart’s desperate longing to penetrate the silence of God.

This, my third course with the master, was entitled “Heroes of the Bible.” I was poised once again to receive his instruction and revel at his *tish*

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70 Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg was a conservative rabbi and Civil Rights Activist who participated in the 1943 Rabbis’ March, and walked Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1963 March on Washington and Bloody Sunday at the height of the American civil rights movement. He was known to be highly critical of the policies of Israel toward the Palestinians (http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/18/nyregion/18hertzberg.html).


72 Rabbi Seymour Siegel was considered the "an architect of Conservative Jewish theology." He was a Professor of Ethics and Theology at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), and the 1983-1984 Executive Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council" (Goldman 1988).
After greeting us, Wiesel began intoning the names of the biblical heroes he wished us to study. By the time he pronounced the final name, I was crestfallen. His litany included Adam, but not Eve; Cain and Abel, but not their legendary sister; Abraham, but not Sarah or Hagar; Isaac, but not Rebecca; Jacob, but not Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, or Zilpah; Joseph, but not Zuleikah or Asnat; Moses and Aaron, but not Miriam or Yocheved; even Pharaoh, but not his daughter Batya.

My heart pounded in my throat. I raised my hand. He nodded in my direction.

“What about the women?” I ventured.

“Oh, the women. Ah, yes, the women. Why don’t you do the women” (Gottlieb 1995:1-2)?

First dumfounded by her teacher’s use of the word, “do,” Lynn began to compose a midrash about Eve. She continues:

When called upon, I offered my version of Eve to the class. I spoke of the first woman’s quest for wisdom and her desire to know from the sight of her own eyes, the taste of her own tongue, and the touch of her own hands. I spoke of the courage she summoned to trespass the boundaries imposed on her choices by a man and a God who feared her outreach. I described her initiation into the spirit world by a serpent, who taught her the art of shedding skins. Then I paused. I looked at my teacher’s face. How would he respond to my rendition of Eve?

Wiesel smiled, sighed, rolled his eyes, and countered my tale with one of his own. According to my teacher, woman’s basic gullibility doomed her to exile from the garden. As Wiesel told the story, Eve found herself alone one afternoon for the first time after Adam strolled off somewhere. Drawing on traditional commentary, Wiesel related how the snake took the opportunity to seduce Eve, using her own words, into eating the forbidden fruit. Alas, conjectured Wiesel, if only Adam had stayed home to supervise his foolish wife. She wouldn’t have gotten herself and the rest of humanity into so much trouble. When Adam finally returned from his adventure, Eve cried until her befuddled husband ate the forbidden fruit as well. “and who can refuse a tearful wife?” quipped Wiesel. “Anyway, no tragedy is complete without a woman” (Gottlieb 1995:2-3).

Needless to say, Lynn was extremely disappointed. She writes, “For all his powers of imagination he could not think beyond the weary stereotypes of women so
endlessly repeated in Jewish literature” (Gottlieb 1995:3). She admits that it might have been difficult for Wiesel to have a feminist framework in 1977, but that still did not alleviate her unease. Another, more pointed incident occurred as well. Lynn tells me that another teacher, and famous Jewish scholar and activist, touched her breast.

I was so shocked, because it was...I had eaten in his home with his wife. And we started then corresponding about what I should be reading. He agreed to take me on, he gave me a list of things to read, and it was all his books. And I said, “Can I study primary sources as well?” And he wrote me back, “I am a primary source.”

And then I said “no.” I was thinking there’s something really off about that. Because I was so young, I didn’t really have the intellectual framework at the time to think about what people were saying, but it was very off. So I went to see him in his office, and he touched my breast. Literally got up, leaned over the table. I was so shocked, I just gathered my stuff and walked out, and that was it.

And I didn’t say anything to anybody. And I didn’t even know how to think about it. Outside of being completely shocked. I didn’t have the words, “sexual misconduct.” I didn’t have the words “domestic violence.” I didn’t have the words, “sexual abuse.” I didn’t have any of those words in my vocabulary.

While she continued at Temple Beth Or, another congregation formed around Lynn that came to be known as Mishkan A’Shul. In this group, she led various experimental ceremonies that she describes as “experimental holiday forms with people who were completely not interested in organized Judaism but were very interesting in their Jewishness and their religion and culture but in a much more open way.” She led Mishkan A’Shul without pay, and called it an “experimental entity...much in the tradition of street theater.” During this period, Lynn lived off of “maybe $10,000 a year.”

I lived in five different places. I started out on 79th and 1st. I really didn’t like that neighborhood at all. It was just block buildings. And then I moved to Greenwich Village, where I lived in a closet. I hated that. It was my first experience not getting along with Jewish girls.
We did not click very well. It was a very unfamiliar world to me. I was completely in a foreign culture. More so than in Israel, was New York Jewry. I adapted much better to Israel in high school. Much better. Really fit. Partly I guess because there were a lot of German Jewish people, and I was staying with a German Jewish family, and there was a kind of pioneer spirit and very earthy and adventurous, and there was a lot of experimentation going on there too, in Israel. In New York Jewry, however, the people that I met seemed somewhat materialistic, brilliant, judgmental, overly involved in their clothes and that kind of thing.

So I moved to 100th and Central Park West, sort of the first street of Harlem, and moved in with a woman who eventually became an Orthodox Jew. That was kind of interesting. She was dating an Orthodox guy. She killed my cat. She was so absentminded she left the pot on the stove, locked herself in her room with her Orthodox boyfriend, and the entire apartment filled up with fire, and my one cat jumped out the window and died.

I came home to this. It was not pleasant. So, I moved out of there. I was like, I have to go. And then I moved to 64th and Central Park West, where I could hear the lions at the zoo in Central Park. I paid $325 a month or something for this one-bedroom closet, you know. It was all right for a while. Then I moved down to 27th and Lex. Little India. And then I moved out of the city. So I was there for about nine years.

In the meantime, when I was in the city, there was this Alternative Jewish Renewal happening in the theater. And I was part of a group of people that put together an enormous Jewish Festival.

And that put me in touch with all these artist-type people. And I got involved a bit in the Jewish Agenda. I was the first performing artist at the Conference in Alternatives in Jewish Education, which later became the Conference for the Advancement of Jewish Education. They actually paid me a salary that day. They don’t anymore. Now you have to pay to go. It was great. And I was part of the Chavurah Movement, and those summit conferences, and there’s just a lot positive, creative stuff going on between people who were leaving the confines of their movements and starting to talk to Jewish people from other denominations and so forth.

And those were the days when I was experimenting with ceremony and ritual and story and everything. And the new, next couple waves of women rabbis who came after me, were to some degree horrified, even though later it became standard fare.

I remember taking a bunch of women outside for Rosh Chodesh and they were getting bitten up by mosquitoes and so I passed out tiger balm. And
it was their first time drumming, and rattling, and singing and gettin’
down.

Ellen Umansky\textsuperscript{73} wrote a little bit about that in the sense that there were
people who wanted equal access and I wanted, I guess, transformation.

In those days I was also, traveling like crazy all over everywhere. In 10
years, I must have been to hundreds and hundreds of places, all over the
country. I was one of the first women rabbis, so a lot of people
experienced me as their first woman rabbi.

I mean, when the deaf community hired me to be a rabbi, I was one of the
first women ever, certainly one of the first ten women in history to serve
on a pulpit: Lily Montagu\textsuperscript{74}, Regina Jonas\textsuperscript{75}, Sally Priesand\textsuperscript{76}, and me.

But it was nice. You know, I got to dunk women into a \textit{mikveh} and to do
ceremonies and to help people think outside the box, and I remember even
going this past year when I went to Baylor and I gave a seminar on women
in the bible.

And I suggested that when you’re reading the text, you cannot think about
who’s good and who’s bad and what’s right and what’s wrong as a
measure, but rather identify with the character, each character, and try to
find their motivation, or their goodness, or their reason for acting. And so
they each chose a woman and you know, said a line and afterwards were,
“Wow! You can interpret these stories?” You can identify with these
stories? And I think that’s maybe what the whole gift was. Just that
permission to interpret and identify. The power to interpret and to identify,
and at the same time to acquire knowledge and skills to create a
framework.

As we talk, Lynn references an incident that occurred while she still lived in New
York, in the late 1970s. Invited to a conservative \textit{shul} in Bayside, Queens, Lynn

\textsuperscript{73} Ellen M. Umansky is a prolific author of articles, essays and fiction. She wrote the Forward to Lynn

\textsuperscript{74} “Lilian Helen Montagu was a British social worker, a magistrate in the London juvenile courts,
suffragist, writer, religious organizer, and spiritual leader who founded and long remained the driving force
behind the Liberal Jewish movement in England” (Umansky in the Jewish Women’s Archives:

\textsuperscript{75} Regina Jonas, born in Berlin, was the first ordained woman rabbi. She served as a rabbi during the
Holocaust and was eventually murdered in Auschwitz.

\textsuperscript{76} Sally Priesand became the first ordained Reform rabbi in 1972.
encountered a more conservative element of the Jewish community. Shrugging it off, she tells me that this story is in her book. Even so, I ask her to tell me again. She begins by saying that the shul apparently had “a liberal Friday night crowd and a very Conservadox Saturday morning crowd.” Lynn says that on Shabbos evening she felt warmth and appreciation from the people in attendance. Saturday morning, however, she was met with some hostility. As Lynn waited on the bimah to deliver her sermon, entitled, “Women and Judaism – the Hidden Tradition,” she was approached by two “men who represented the Conservadox point of view ritually” and had not been at services the evening before.

So they walked in, the rabbi was nowhere in sight, and I was sitting up on the bimah, and they rushed out and started screaming in the hallway. I could hear them yelling. And everybody was kind of turning around and, “Uh oh! These are… Sermon’s ruined! Hey! We’re about to see a fist fight.”

So they came back in and marched up, and tried to pull me off. And I didn’t go. So then people were talking about why I couldn’t be on the bimah and I don’t really remember what they said. Stupid things.

What can you say. You know. What can you say, why women can’t be on the bimah? “It is not tradition. It is not tradition. It is not tradition.”

Women started to get really annoyed, and an elderly woman stood up and pointed to the Torah curtains. “See those Torah curtains? I made those Torah curtains. If that young woman comes off the bimah, I’m marching right up and taking the Torah curtains off the arc.” I’m taking them home. And everybody went “Hmm.”

And some people started yelling, “Shabbos! Shabbos!” You know, “Get back to services! Shabbos!” So that ended the conversation. Everybody sat down. I stayed on the bimah, and I had to give a sermon about why women could speak from the bimah.

And it was quorum time, and I addressed the whole issue of kovod hatzibur. The honor of the congregation in Megila Talmud 23B, I think it is, could be A, I don’t remember, there is a description of the fact that women were once called up for aliyyot to recite the blessing before and
after reading the Torah, but because of the honor of the congregation, meaning because there might be some men who couldn’t read, and so therefore having a woman that could read and a man who couldn’t read would be too shameful for the man, and therefore women can’t read. So I addressed that.

And I asked the congregation. Is there a man here who would feel shamed because his daughter reads Torah? And I kind of built that up, then went into the story of Esther, that she had to find her public voice in order to save her people and maybe that’s where we are now, maybe we need the public voices of women, and instead of feeling shamed, we could feel great pride that we honor the congregation, kovod hatzibur, we honor the congregation by teaching all of our daughters to feel comfortable as Jewish scholars and participants in Jewish life.

Lynn tells me that the incident “divided the congregation,” and provided a learning opportunity for her.

I understand why so many rabbis are reticent to deal with difficult issues, because there is no guidance, and if you bring up an issue, which involves the loss of privilege and the gaining of privilege, a redistribution of privilege, the people who are giving up their privilege or asked to change, put up a fight. So a congregation like this when the more conservative element is in the minority, but in control of the Ritual Committee or the money, creates a fight in the congregation. And what it taught me is the only way through that is by democratizing the process of conversation. Having a different kind of dialogue technique, in which everybody sits mutually around the table and that’s not always possible, but it is something to strive for.

Lynn met Ray Johnson, her former husband and father of her son, Nataniel at a Fellowship of Reconciliation Conference in Dubuque. He lived in Las Vegas, Nevada, and did not want to move to New York. They decided instead to check out the West.

I had a gig in Albuquerque, and I was standing on the corner of Cornell and University outside the Frontier having just eaten one of the cinnamon rolls, the first and last time I ever ate one of those things.

And I had a message that said, “Lynn, move here.” Just like that. Clear as a bell. Move here, came into my mind. Move here. I went back and I said to Ray, “Let’s move to Albuquerque,” and he said okay. And then I told some of the folks that I was thinking of moving to Albuquerque. So they brought me back a month later and there were enough people… It was
Passover. They brought me back for Passover. So twelve women or something like that formed, and they brought me back for Passover. They actually got Federation\textsuperscript{77} money\textsuperscript{78}.

\textbf{Deborah’s Story}

After I graduated from rabbinical school, my first gig was in Toronto. I was out of my element. I was an American in Canada. I was the only woman rabbi in the country.

It was 1986. I was one of somewhere between eight and a dozen women rabbis in North America that had their own pulpits. But I was the only woman rabbi in Canada of any variety, no chaplains, no educators, just me.

I was a Reconstructionist. Canada is a much more traditional society in terms of Judaism then we are in the states. \textit{Darchei Noam}. That was the Reconstructionist Congregation in Toronto. \textit{Darekh} means a road, or a path, or a way. \textit{Darchei} is construct. \textit{Noam} is pleasantness. So, the name means the paths of pleasantness, or the ways of pleasantness, which is a sweet title, but after a while it wasn't such a pleasant path.

Canada. Well I was just the wrong \textit{schmeggegie}, in the wrong place. I went to Toronto in '86. That would have made me 33. I wasn't savvy about career things. What I knew was it was a Reconstructionist Congregation, I was a Reconstructionist rabbi, there weren't very many jobs for Reconstructionist rabbis, and it seemed to be a good match between me and the congregation. That's what I was focused on. I had no idea in any real sense, about the differences between Canadian society and the United States society. I had no idea that for instance, the entire religious spectrum shifted to the right so that the Reform movement there looked more like liberal conservatism in the United States. Conservative there looked much more like what we would call Modern Orthodox here, and that, not just the Jews but the Christian spectrum is also much more shifted in that regard as well.

So, I was an American in Canada. I was a Reconstructionist, which is very liberal and although it's more traditional than Reform, it reads liberal, radical. And I was a feminist, and I was a fourth generation American Jew. Most of the population of Jews in Canada has been there only since 1950 or 1945 or later. That's a very different kind of innate consciousness about being Jewish in the country than the one that I came with. They had lots

\textsuperscript{77} Jewish Federation of Albuquerque.

\textsuperscript{78} She says this irony since she experienced difficulties with members of the Federation once she had relocated permanently to Albuquerque and started Congregation Nahalat Shalom.
and lots and lots of day schools. When I lived there, there were 120,000 Jews there.

I went to the Board of Rabbis meetings just to be there, because clearly I was the only woman, and it was an incredibly anxiety-producing experience. I didn't have colleagues, and there was one Reform rabbi who was really nice to me; Danny Gottlieb. He was very accepting of who I am, and he knew I was a lesbian, and that was okay with him, and he tried to help me. But that was a lonely time, and what can I say? The first couple of years actually went really, really well. I was very excited. I was very dedicated to what I was doing.

_Darchei Noam_ was looking for something very different in a rabbi than they had had before, and I was it. My first contract was for two years, and we negotiated another contract that would be for three years, but they were concerned about finances, so we left the details of the third year of the contract to be negotiated later. I was already into my new contract, and I had begun the process of coming out, because I wasn't going to make a new commitment for longer when they didn't really know who I was. So it was important to me that people know, but I wasn't extremely flamboyant about it. I was pretty quiet about it, and at the time they gave me the contract renewal, they knew that I was a lesbian.

It went pretty well for a while, and then came the tipping point: my partner at the time and I wanted to have a commitment ceremony. Looking back on it, I can say that I was incredibly naïve, being driven by my sense of what the ideal was and not tuned in enough to the pragmatics. We invited members of the congregation to the commitment ceremony, and most of them were delighted and generous and loving, exactly the way I thought that it should be if your rabbi is having a commitment ceremony. That was part of what drove me. If I was a young man getting married to a young woman, my congregation would be thrilled for me and they would be there. And that's part of what I had in my head. But that was really not politically astute of me, because some of the people that were invited much to my dismay, took it as a political statement rather than a personal invitation, and believed that I was coming out publicly by having a commitment ceremony. That was over the top for them. It was one thing for me to have a partner, and it was one thing for me to sort of quietly live my life. It was another thing for me to be publicly a lesbian, and for them a private invitation with their name on it to my commitment ceremony was way too public. That crossed a line for them, and my life became quite miserable.

Deborah’s voice catches, apparently still shaken by the memory, but she continues.
Needless to say, in the process of negotiating that third year of my contract everything broke down. I never made it to my third year of that contract. So I was there for four years, not five, and I wrote a letter of resignation that I sent to the entire congregation. And again, I learned things too late. Because I had addressed the letter as, "Dear Congregant" and didn't have each person's -- each family's name on it, it wasn't considered to be a private communication, and so someone took it -- took my letter and sent it to the editor of The Canadian Jewish News, and The Canadian Jewish News, it's like The Link\(^79\), only more so. I mean it's the National Canadian Jewish newspaper. They were going to print an article about my resignation with the headline, something like, "Lesbian rabbi resigns citing discrimination." And I tried to get them to suppress the article. My friend Rabbi Danny Gottlieb, who at that point was the Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Reform Movement and headquartered in Toronto tried to get it suppressed. Other liberal rabbis who didn't even particularly like me, thought it was completely inappropriate, and they tried to get it suppressed, but it wasn't.

And it was picked up on The Religious Wire Service and published all over North America. I was in my misery. I was outed. My nightmare had come true. I was outed publicly in the newspapers, and it's because I wrote a letter to my congregation explaining why I was leaving, and because I didn't know that it had to be addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Blah, Blah, Blah, and not "Dear Congregant."

She trails off, looking deep in thought.

Well, today, you know, we've got email and people copy and paste and put stuff on You Tube and My Space and people are devastated overnight. And it's an entirely different format, being electronic. It spreads to far more people. But in 1990, that was [unusual].

I remember I met Tikva Frymer-Kensky. She was a professor at the Rabbinical College long after I was there, but I remember meeting her at a rabbinic convention, and she said, "Oh yeah. I read an article about you."

Well, the 1990s, those were still the dark ages for lesbian rabbis. And that was my catastrophic fantasy long, long, long before I was a rabbi. My first lover, may her memory be a blessing, Vicki Gold, worked at the JCC, the Minneapolis Jewish Community Center, and my father was the President of the JCC, and I was 19. We were deeply closeted then. And we used to talk about. It was supposed to be a joke about it. "JCCs president's daughter, caught in… nah, nah, nah, nah, nah." Right? But you joke about the thing that's the most scary to you, and so you know, long before I

\(^79\) Albuquerque’s Jewish news publication.
became a rabbi, my catastrophic fantasy was being outing in the newspapers, and it came to pass. And it was absolutely devastating to me.

To more fully convey the atmosphere of her final year at Darchei Noam, she adds:

I guess I should tell you the actual story of what the straw was that broke the camel's back. There was a lesbian couple in my congregation, and one of them adopted a baby. And my congregation for whatever reason, had a high percentage of adoptive families. So it was my custom that after we took the baby to the mikveh, we would give them an aliyah to the Torah and make an announcement of the baby's name and do a little welcoming thing during Shabbat morning services. So that was a well-established custom or Minhag. And Ellen was the official adoptive mother, and Judith and Ellen were living together. You know how that works. It took a long time before the other parent could officially adopt, before it could be legal that they were both parents. But for a lesbian couple, they were doing it together, even if only one of them could be the legal parent.

So, it became a topic of conversation at my Ritual Committee. I was a rookie, I mean that was part of my learning. But I didn't yet understand that there were things that you tell your Ritual Committee and things that you simply don't bring up to your Ritual Committee, and that there are ways of doing and telling and all that stuff. I hadn't learned that stuff, and it seems like I have to learn the hard way. I guess everybody does. So my Ritual Committee was absolutely opposed to Ellen and Judith having an aliyah together to welcome their child into the community, and that tore me apart.

It happens that Judith was very skilled at chanting Haftorah. And the person that does the Haftorah gets an aliyah as well. So I was able to have Judith on the bimah because I called her up as the maftir and then I gave Ellen that aliyah. So Ellen comes up with the baby and Judith is there because she's going to read the Haftorah, and so they did the aliyah together, even though I didn't call them up together. That was the thing. I wasn't supposed to call them up together, and they weren't supposed to be on the bimah together at the same time, but that I couldn't do. I just could not participate in my own oppression. I couldn't do it. So I figured out a way to have them both be up there at the same time, without calling them up together, and I resigned the next morning. You couldn't make me participate in oppressing other lesbians. I just couldn't do it.

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80 "'Conclusion" referring to readings from the biblical books of the Prophets, which conclude Torah services (Diamant 1991: 316).
And I mean the sweet part about it is that Ellen and Judith and I are still in touch, and when that baby had her bat mitzvah, they brought me up to Toronto and we rented space, and I was the rabbi. And when her younger sister had a bat mitzvah last summer they brought me up and I did that bat mitzvah, so you know, it's a long relationship.

So, I resigned and Mordechai Liebling, my classmate and Executive Director of what was then FRCH came up to Toronto to be with me when I officially resigned. Mordechai was in my office beforehand, and he was crying, and he said, "Deb, I can't believe that I'm here for this and that this is what it's come to. You can still change your mind. I'll help you and the congregation work this out." And I said I couldn't. I couldn't change my mind. And so we left my office and came out onto the bimah. It was the public moment, but the Reconstructionist Movement was not yet ready for a lesbian rabbi to run into trouble with their congregation. They didn't know how to help me. I asked for help. These were my buddies who were in leadership, and they knew how to come into an organization and do training and raise awareness and raise sensitivity and do language trainings, and all that stuff, but they weren't yet ready for this.

When Leila Berner ran into trouble in Media, Pennsylvania, maybe two, three, four years later, the Movement got behind her. Since my experience, the Movement has gotten its act together many, many times over and is totally able to go in and help a rabbi. It's not always successful, because the relationship between a rabbi and a congregation is exceedingly complicated and sometimes you can't help them over a hurdle and get them to the other side together. You can help them over the hurdle and make a more peaceful separation than what happened for me. And what happened to me was a bombshell went off in my life.

So, I actually stayed in Toronto for two more years, because my partner, who I had just made a commitment to, Denni, had been unable to work in Canada because of the immigration issues, and finally had gotten her landed status, (i.e. the equivalent of a green card in Canada) and she could finally work, and she wasn't about to leave Toronto just because my work situation had exploded. At the time, that made perfect sense to me, so we stayed in Toronto, we moved to a different neighborhood, it's a big city. I tried to freelance as a rabbi. I tried to freelance as a therapist, I did a little bit of this, a little bit of that, but the truth is it never really worked, and I was very, very wounded by this experience. I was in a lot of pieces. My major drive being for wholeness and integrity had shattered. I was still functioning, but I was a mess, and eventually the relationship couldn't sustain itself.

Many houses [in Canada] had basements with separate entrances, and they would rent out the basement or they would rent out the first floor and the
family lived on the second floor, and there would be multiple kitchens and multiple bathrooms in it. From the street what looked like a single dwelling, a family lived there but they rented out part of the house too. So, we had one of those situations. Our basement had a separate entrance, and when things with me and Denni got really rugged and the tenant moved, I took that opportunity to move into the basement. So I was hibernating in a very small, dark space. And I remember that it was from there that I decided to move to Albuquerque, and all I knew about what I wanted was, I didn't want to go back to anywhere I'd been. So I didn't want to go to Minneapolis or Philadelphia, or Chicago. I wanted someplace new. I wanted someplace where I knew a few people, because I didn't want to go someplace where I didn't know anybody, and I wanted someplace where most of the buildings were smaller than most of the trees. That was my other criteria. And Albuquerque won the lottery, and I packed up my stuff and drove here.

And the three people I knew: one was Lynn Gottlieb. I didn't know her well but I knew her. One was Lia Rosen, who I'd known from Minneapolis, because we were part of a Women's Minyan at the University of Minnesota together. And I knew Rosie Murin, because Rosie and I played softball together in Minneapolis. If you ask my mother why I moved to Albuquerque, she'd say it's because I read too many Tony Hillerman novels!

She may be right, I don't know. But I'd never been to the American Southwest, and so I came. I showed up. And on some level, I really thought that my professional life was over.

That was 1992, so I was 39 and everything had exploded and just as when I came back from Israel after having spinal meningitis and encephalitis, I did not want to have much to do with Judaism. I felt the same after coming here, but you can't escape being a rabbi. I discovered that you can't get a waitress job if you're a rabbi.

Thanks to helpful people in the community, Deborah found part-time work at the Shalom House. She also taught at Congregation Albert, and began doing hospice chaplaincy work as well. Deborah collaborated with other members of the community, namely Walter Forman and Estelle Rosenblum, and Marty Kantrowitz (Min’s husband), to start Jewish Hospice Support Services, at Jewish Family Service. While this program no longer exists, it was created in response to their discovery that “Jews were being proselytized on their deathbeds by Christian clergy/chaplain types.” Following a training by Rabbi Linda Holtzman, Deborah was
instrumental in starting the *Chevra Kadisha*\textsuperscript{81} program, run until Spring 2013 by Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, that filled this void in the Jewish community until its closure in the midst of this dissertation. Deborah tells me that Min was deeply involved at the time of the program’s inception, and adds, “I’m thrilled that she’s a rabbi, and thrilled that she’s a colleague.” While Deborah left Albuquerque again, she returned in 2007 as the new rabbi at Congregation Nahalat Shalom.

*Intersections of Education and Activism, Citizenship and Leadership*

These life stories, told by Lynn and Deborah, demonstrate the interconnection of personal histories and broader social histories. Whereas canonical histories generally derive from very broad concerns such as political framing, citizen education, national identity, and group cohesion these life stories are the personal accounts of two individuals who came of age, were educated and professionalized in the 1970s and 1980s U.S. society. The stories told by Lynn and Deborah provide a view of the many factors that came together to create shifts in attitudes towards gender, religious plurality, social action, politics, citizenship, etc. made possible by the Women’s, Feminist and Civil Rights Movements. Their stories explain how the Jewish Feminist Movement, Gay Rights Movement, 12 Step Movement, Anti-War Movements, consciousness-raising groups and educational cohorts worked concurrently with the dominant political movements to inspire sustainable social and institutional change. The personal life stories of Lynn and Deborah explain how two young women struggled to became political actors that challenged education, work, and religious structures.

Still, I am compelled to note that even though there are more than 900 women rabbis in the U.S. today, these initial and continued changes in the status quo have been

\textsuperscript{81} A group of women and men responsible for the ritual preparation (according to *Halachah*) of a body for burial. This involves ritual cleansing and dressing of the deceased.
and continue to be disquieting for many in the diverse Jewish community. Jewish commentators have frequently, and justifiably, expressed anxieties when faced with cultural and religious transformation. Existing in diaspora for more than two thousand years, Jewish people have negotiated relations as subjects of dominant nation states, a condition that has necessitated a balancing between their own religious/cultural identities and secular identities as citizens of the communities in which they reside. The diasporic situation perpetuates feelings of uneasiness as, according to Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, “everything is permanently at risk” (2002:4). Under these conditions, trappings of tradition, such as Jewish identification, ritual and halachic observance, and continuation of family life including perpetuation of gender expectations, become focal points or centers of concern.

This ‘concern’ is noted in these narratives as the women address arbiters of tradition as they challenge Judaism, patriarchal language, gender roles and sexual acceptance, stepping into new leadership positions and creating spaces for alternative Jewish practice. In Deborah’s and Lynn’s stories we see how they take political stances against sexism, heterosexism, and racism, positions that inspired them to become pioneers in liberal Jewish leadership. Through these life stories readers are able to experience the emotional consequences of navigating these imperfect systems such as Lynn’s dismay at being sexually harassed, and Deborah’s fear as she felt forced to remain in the closet as a lesbian, and her devastation when she was outed in the press. In some ways, the pain of these experiences, allowed these new rabbis to become translators of Jewish tradition to new Jewish audiences who might also feel hurt, marginalized, or conflicted in part as a result of aspects of Jewish tradition. Lynn participated in

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82 Jewish law.
experimental Jewish theater and rituals, and literally worked to translate Jewish services into sign-friendly language. Deborah worked with other Reconstructionist rabbis to transform the names for God in Jewish ritual and prayer from exclusively male terms to gender neutral and even women-centered terms.

Both women cited numerous mentors, teachers, colleagues and friends who inspired, encouraged and supported their work and activism. Judaism places much emphasis on lineage. Whether the lineage is that of matrilineal descent whereby one is recognized to be Jewish, rabbinic lineage through which one’s family line may historically give rise to numerous rabbis, or other recognized lines, such as those of rabbinic teachers, storytellers, Kabbalists, etc., lineage is a significant factor in how one self-identifies and relates to others. Through stories of feminist conferences, conversations, writings, and experiences, Lynn and Deborah begin to recite new lineages of Jewish Feminists, Jewish lesbians, and women rabbis. Amidst the obstacles and challenges, these women, their colleagues and contemporaries created new models of leadership and new social histories bringing changes to Jewish practice and becoming important voices in dialogues about gender, sexuality, civil rights, human rights and national policies.
CHAPTER 6

Spiritual Journeys:

The Sovereign Self and the Path to Purpose

“I had a vision on the way to Philadelphia to interview for the [Reconstructionist Rabbinic College] where these angels came into the car and said, ‘If you sing this song, all the doors will open.’ And they gave me a song to sing. I needed to get a job, get into school, and find a place to live in three days, and all the doors opened.”

– Rabbi Shefa Gold

“I spent four-and-a-half years commuting [to the Academy of Jewish Religion] every week between Albuquerque and Los Angeles via Southwest Airlines. I couldn’t have done it without Southwest Airlines! It was a wonderful, wonderful experience…I had a mother in town, a husband in town, an extremely challenging teenager, a consulting practice, and I was teaching half-time at the University, and I added this on top, and I got more energy. That was one of the ways I knew that it was really right, was when it gave me more energy, even though it was absolutely crazy commuting to L.A and coming home with homework about the obscurities of Hebrew grammar.”

– Rabbi Min Kantrowitz

“After the first few days of classes, I remember lying in bed, lying there a long time and finally saying to Gay, ‘I’m not sure I can do this.’ It’s really hard. It’s really hard. It was humiliating. I mean read in Hebrew, translate what you just read, and explain what it means to a table of twelve people? And Gay said, ‘Don’t waste any energy here. You’re going to do it.’… So, I decided that I was going to do this. And the school was just such a place where they really supported you in your strengths. They held you in the other places. And pretty soon, I was so happy. I was thanking my teachers after each class, and thinking, ‘I get to do this? I get to learn? This is what I’ve always wanted…So I felt like everything fit for the first time in my life.”

– Rabbi Malka Drucker

Although the social movements of the 1960s/1970s were extremely instrumental in breaking down some of the barriers that prevented women from participating fully in American society and Jewish leadership, through my interviews with each of the rabbis I also noticed a pattern in the ways each woman spoke of her personal journey of spirituality and religiosity that seemed to reflect more internalized aspects of these social

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transformations. Their tellings seemed familiar, the type of discussions that my friends
and I, mostly Generation Xers, have as we question and discuss our religious heritages
and our various belief systems. As I step back from the transcripts and place these stories
within both historic and social contexts, I realize that this way of perceiving of and
speaking to religious practice is indicative of a significant shift in the way people have
somewhat recently come to view religion and spirituality as deeply personal experiences
communicated to others through the genre of the spiritual journey (Von Broembsen 1999;
Cohen and Eisen 2000; Elshtain 2008).

dramatically since 1945” (2009:1). Religion prior to World War II in the United States
was seen “as an ascribed part of identity rather than an achieved status” (Kaplan 2009:1).
After World War II, people have begun to reconsider the religious identities into which
they are born, discovering that it is possible to adopt new identities as a result of greater
geographic mobility, intermarriage, changing social values, and in the case of Jewish
Americans, finding that these once separate identities can and often do coalesce into a
single, new identity with distinctive characteristics.

For many Americans, Kaplan claims, there has been a shift from “believing in a
religion that has an established church and set rituals to a privatized spirituality,” which
he and others term a “sovereign self” (Kaplan 2009:2 – also see Elshtain 2008; Cohen
and Eisen 2000; Von Broembsen 1999). Those practicing spirituality as a personal matter
no longer feel obligated to uphold the doctrines of the temple; instead they question
authority in its many guises, and use religion as a way to find peace, personal
empowerment, inspiration and meaning. Kaplan, quoting George Gallup Jr., writes, “Americans do not see their role, as it once was, to ‘pay, pray and obey.’ They see their role as taking part fully in church life, the church, they believe, serves them, not the other way around” (2009:2). This liberation from “their inherited identities” (Kaplan 2002:3) allows people to select which rituals they observe, what communities they join, and which spiritual leaders they support. In their work with fifty American Jews, many of whom were Baby Boomers, Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen observed:

Each person now performs the labor of fashioning his or her own self, pulling together elements from the various Jewish and non-Jewish repertories available, rather than stepping into an ‘inescapable framework’ of identity (familial, communal, traditional) given at birth. Decisions about ritual observance and involvement in Jewish institutions are made and made again, considered and reconsidered, year by year and even week by week (2000:2).

This move in the source of Jewish identity, from community affiliation to self-understanding when combined with the transition from home-centered ritual to synagogue based religious services (Nadell 1998), creates a paradox in which traditional paradigms of Jewish observance are challenged, and new spiritual leaders emerge to create innovative rituals and to build Jewish religious communities that meet the needs of contemporary community members. As women with unique and profound experiences who have not always participated in narrowly-scripted traditional Jewish religious practices, and whose complex life experiences inform and direct their spiritual journeys, Shefa, Min, and Malka are three such leaders. The stories told by these rabbis occur over a number of years and in many different places. In them, education, travel, accidents, marriage, crises, family, and career are motivators for personal spiritual growth and direction, as well as catalysts for self-change and reinvention. In these stories about their
continuous spiritual growth and paths to the rabbinate, we come to know leaders who have great capacities to empathize with and guide spiritual journeys for others whose lives likewise veer from more linear trajectories, as well as for those who simply seek more flexible Jewish identities, self-reflexive spiritual models, and sacred practices beyond the synagogue walls.

Shefa’s Story

The self-described “mystic” and free spirit, Shefa explains that part of the freedom in her early life rose from her exemption from the “rules:” “that trajectory” where “you go to high school…and then college, and then you have kids.”

When I was 16 I managed to get invited to one of my friend’s homes. She was living in California, and she was so unhappy, and her parents were so rich, that they decided to give her me for the summer. And, that summer, we were not supervised. So, I fooled around, hitchhiked all over California, became a vegetarian and a hippy. It just opened up my whole life. When I came back [to New Jersey], I had really tasted freedom. I had really experienced energy. Everything was really broken open, and I couldn’t be in school.

In school, Shefa began to hallucinate. “Not with drugs,” she adds, but she started seeing this “being whose name was Flight.” She tells me that he would “come take me out of my body and take me on wonderful journeys.”

There I was at sixteen, sitting in my classes, but leaving my body. I would ask him to come when I was bored. He would come, and we would be gone. It was wonderful. Then one time, he came when I didn’t ask, and I got really scared. At the time, I told no one about it. But I was really scared, because it became a dangerous thing. I think what was happening was that school was unbearable to me.

Rebelling against the rigidity of the educational process, Shefa decided that she did not want to salute the flag. Putting her hand over her heart, and mumbling the first part of the Pledge of Allegiance, Shefa says that she felt it was a “stupid” thing that
represented the “stupidity of school.” She began to “walk quietly out of the room.”

Reported for misconduct, Shefa was suspended from 10th grade, and never went back to school.

My older brother and I heard about this Free School thing. Some kids were planning to drop out of school, and we joined and decided to start our own school. Thirteen of us dropped out of school. And it wasn’t the parents, and it wasn’t the teachers, it was the students, who were all kind of misfits in some way. So, we started this Free School.

My family was in a really bad way at the time. My younger brother was getting arrested with drugs. My father was having breakdowns and shock treatments. And my mother was trying to hold all of this together. My mom always had this sense of me being able to take care of myself. She had a trust in me. Since she knew I was going to do whatever I wanted to anyway, she would give her “OK.”

So, we had this wonderful school. As soon as I quit the other school, Flight stopped coming. I know that it happened because it was about being in a place I didn’t want to be in. It made me vulnerable. As soon as I had the freedom to decide where I wanted to be, my whole love of learning came back to me.

The Free School was really about how to start a school. That was the education. The administrators of the school system started to threaten us and our parents with truancy. We did some research into New Jersey laws and found that it was the burden of proof for the State to prove that we were not getting an equivalent education. We set up an appointment with the Superintendent of Schools, and told him that we knew the law. We showed the administrators all the classes that we had, explained that we had thirty volunteer teachers who would teach interesting classes and who were out there living in the world.

I got to go to a class by someone teaching medicine and watch an operation at Columbia Medical Center. I went to the courthouse to learn about the law. We had this design. It was about saying “the world is our classroom.” It was empowering. I was really, painfully shy. It was hard for me to speak, although I could always sing. In the Free School, my life was about writing songs and making music. The other kids would sit and listen to my latest song each week. It was a very dramatic and emotional thing that would just come out in the music. Then I took my GED\(^3\), which was easy, and I thought, “Why did I waste all of that time in school?”

\(^3\) General Educational Development – a series of subject tests that when passed certify that person tested has levels of education equivalent to a high school education.
Feeling no desire to attend college, Shefa and her then boyfriend, an artist from Argentina, traveled to an artist colony in Southern France. They worked short stints, three months, “or until [she] couldn’t stand it anymore,” and continued traveling. During this time, she says, “I was always reading and studying. At the Free School, I had a favorite philosophy teacher, and philosophy was always my favorite. I read Plato’s *Bylaws* and Martin Buber. After a few years of having “these adventures,” and working in “different factories and other things,” Shefa got an “*I Ching*” reading” that told her clearly that it was time to go to college. She laughs and says, “It said something about the difficulties of learning for the self-taught and that I need to learn with other people.”

I went to college, and college was the best thing for me. I really, really loved it. I started writing poetry and giving poetry readings. I found my voice. I would give these public poetry readings with this group of people called the Ramapo poets because it was Ramapo College. We would give readings together and there was this incredible freedom in finding my voice.

I studied philosophy and poetry. My philosophy teacher thought I was too much of a poet, and my poetry teacher thought I was too much of a philosopher! It was an exciting and wonderful time. I learned about different kinds of consciousnesses. One teacher introduced me to Carlos Castenada, Ram Dass and Allen Watts. It was great being exposed to these things. And then, I started doing psychedelics. They were among the best things I ever done. They helped confirm my intuition about reality being much bigger then everyone was acting like it was. I felt like I had been given a small reality map and then LSD kind of broke it open. I felt connected to the reality of my soul, and it confirmed the possibilities of where consciousness can go. It took me six months to digest that first trip, so I never tripped more than once every six months. I tried to set it up responsibly, as a sacrament. It was never a recreational thing. In a way, it

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84 The *I Ching*, or *Classic of Changes*, *Book of Changes* and *Zhouyi*, is one of the oldest Chinese systems of divination.
85 An American anthropologist and author whose 1968 publication the *Teachings of Don Juan* chronicled his mentorship with a shaman named Yaqui.
86 An American contemporary spiritual leader and author who work focuses his travels to India and work with Hindu guru Neem Karoli Baba.
87 A British author and speaker who helped translate and popularize Eastern philosophies and practices, such as Zen, for Western audiences.
was a religious experience. I was just hungry for religious experience. I needed to make reality sacred, and I didn’t have another medium for it except through music and art. But there was something about the world of the artist that often bordered on Nihilism, art for its own sake, and that was not where I wanted to go.

After college, Shefa enrolled in the Goddard graduate program to work independently on her master’s degree in philosophy. Having been called a “creative person” throughout her life, Shefa asked, “So, what does it mean to be creative?” She decided to pursue her “masters in the philosophy of creativity” from the road, telling me, “When I was traveling there was much more of a raw, naked encounter that would call forth my creative spirit. In this encounter, I could define creativity much more broadly than just a product such as a song or painting. I’m an artist because of my orientation, my relationship to the world.”

So, I took out a student loan, and my first husband, Sky and I filled a backpack with books. I took my guitar and we traveled for nine months in Europe and Asia. I was writing to my advisor about my creative process the entire time. I started to call the locus of the creative process the “between.” It’s like when you are in the world and you are given two choices, this or that. The impulse of creativity is not to go with either of them, but to stay in the between, to create out of the paradox of not making those choices, allowing something else to emerge. Following a series of correspondences on the between, my advisor wrote back and said, “Well, Martin Buber beat you to it!”

When I got this letter, I had not received mail for some time because we had been traveling to Turkey, Syria and Jordan. So, I got to Jerusalem, and opened this letter. There I was, in Jerusalem, and that was where Martin Buber’s family and archives were, so I decided to do an intensive study of Martin Buber and my thesis became a play that was a dialogue with Martin Buber about the creative process.

I was trying to locate his family, and they did not want to be found. One day, I was standing in line at a phone booth, and struck up a conversation with the woman behind me. She turned out to be the great-granddaughter of Martin Buber! She introduced me to the family and gave me access to the archives so that I could get to know him and write his character for the play.
Shefa laughs, and says that she forgot to tell me about the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She fills in some blanks about the hardships of the journey, being in Syria during their civil war, deciding to take the “bus to Damascus” a romantic notion that turned out to take a month, and arriving at Damascus just as the war broke out between Iran and Iraq. Once in Damascus, her Italian traveling companion left a note saying “Ciao” at the end of it, and the Secret Police thought it said CIA. The police picked up two other Americans traveling with them, and beat them up. Shefa and Sky decided then that it was time to leave. When they finally made it through the Jordanian border, a process made difficult by the officials requirement of Jordanian money in exchange for their passports, they hitchhiked across Jordan to Petra where she “hung out with Bedouins in the caves.”

When Shefa finally arrived at Jerusalem from Amman, she wandered upon an amazing scene. We got “there in the middle of the night and went right to the Western Wall. It was pouring rain, and I was having this very dramatic, climax to my trip to Jerusalem. As I’m approaching the wall, an Israeli guard said, ‘Hey baby.’ It was just so silly! There I was having this profound moment that had been building up for a month, and this guy harasses me with, ‘Hey baby!’”

Shefa’s travels taught her to be “reliant on the creative process of each day.” Toward the end, she made a deep vow to herself that when she “settled,” she “would not lose that.” Returning the States, Shefa and Sky moved into a communal home in upstate New York. They started a “Reggae-ish” band in which Shefa sang. Playing in clubs and bars, Shefa grew frustrated, because she felt the music to be sacred, and singing in front of people who were drinking seemed “out of place.” She finished her thesis, and she and
Sky traveled through the U.S. and Canada for the next five years, performing the
dialogue with Martin Buber to audiences and answering questions about the play and
process. They settled in California, but then went to Florida to perform the play. The trip
changed her life dramatically.

Car accidents are mythic events. This was in December of 1987, and the
car accident was a religious experience for me. I was in the back seat of
the car. We were driving along a two-lane highway. We stopped to turn
left. I had been looking at a calendar, and I leaned all the way forward to
tell my friend Dennis and Sky, “My birthday’s going to be on Shabbat!”
At the same time, a truck from Entenmann’s Bakery came and slammed
into the back of the car. Had I been sitting back, I would have been totally
crushed. There was no back seat left. The back of the car was against the
front seat. I got pushed between the seats further into the front. My ribs
were broken. I went into an altered state, where it felt like the whole car
was filled with love. I didn’t really feel as scared as I should have. I was
somehow totally awake.

The truck driver ran to the car and said, “Is everybody OK?” I remember
saying, “No.” They couldn’t open the car. They had to use the Jaws of
Life thing to open it up. So, we had to wait inside the car, but I really did
feel like it was filled with love. At the time, I felt puzzled. I asked myself,
“What is this stuff?” “Is this love?” I remember thinking, “This is the hand
of God.” Afterward, when my entire life fell apart, I harkened back to that
moment to make sense of it.

Shefa’s marriage fell apart. She says that she and Sky just had “different styles of
healing.” She dove deeper into her experience of healing her life and body. She tried
chiropractic, herbal remedies, and other things, but remembers physical therapy being the
most effective. “It was like a sports kind of place, where there would be a coach saying,
‘Come on! Let’s go! You can do it! Give me more!’” She adds, “All these gentle kinds of
healing things with the soft music and loving people around you made me feel passive
and disempowered.” In physical therapy, Shefa felt “surrounded by heroes” where she
could “feel the energy of others around her” and participate in their healing. While Sky
desired to be cared for by others, Shefa says, “I began writing dialogues with my pain,
and at one point, my pain said to me, ‘I love you so much that I’ll die for you.’ And it was as if my heart just broke open.”

Meanwhile, I was going to Paul, who was a very important Sufi teacher for me. I was working for the Melia Foundation, which was created to bridge psychology and religion. Since I wanted to go to the workshops they offered, but had no money, I did work for them in exchange. There was a workshop on the feminine face of God. There is a book by Sherry Anderson by that title, and I went to this workshop and really loved it. I hung out with Sherry Anderson afterwards and she said, “I think you need to meet my husband.”

So, I met Paul. He is one of the most obnoxious people in the universe. Brilliant! But obnoxious! He would sometimes go into a trance, and could channel the truth in this most loving way. One of the first times he met me, he told me I was going to be a rabbi. I said, “No way! You don’t understand.”

I became his assistant, leading these groups since I had no money to pay him. I made phone calls and took peoples’ money, and did different stuff to help. We would check in before each group, and he would talk to me about energy and we would do these practices in the group. Not chanting, nothing melodic, but using the different names of God to tune into his qualities and open up places within ourselves. I learned about energy from Paul. I was really his only long term student, because nobody else could deal with how obnoxious he was. For example, when I was in bad shape one time, I remember him saying, “OK, chant Allah 10,000 times.” Where other people would go, “What?” I would go home and do it because I trusted him.

This whole time was really difficult for me, because the rug was being pulled out from under me and what I thought was my identity; my identity as a wife to Sky, as a person, and as a capable physical being, because I couldn’t do anything. I felt like I couldn’t work, couldn’t be in a relationship, and it was like all the things I felt were me, were pulled out from under me. What happened though was that God was underneath that rug. I found this sense of God’s presence holding me, so while the worst stuff was going on outwardly, I was falling in love inwardly. When I left Sky, I got the call.

I packed up my car and drove across country. My mother flew to Lincoln, Nebraska and drove the rest of the way with me. She read every sign out loud between Nebraska and New Jersey. I called the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, because I felt that it was probably the place that would allow the most creativity.
I had a vision on the way to Philadelphia [to interview for the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College] where these angels came into the car and said, “If you sing this song, all the doors will open.” And they gave me a song to sing. I needed to get a job, to get into school, and to find a place to live in three days, and all the doors opened.

This was all part of my process of really accepting the call to spiritual leadership. For a while, I would think, “Well, maybe I’ll be a Unity minister.” Because my idea of Unity was that you could be whatever you want. It seemed very flexible. But when I called up RRC, the Director of Admissions said, “Oh! We’ve been looking for you. We are putting together this new prayer book and there is the prayer that you wrote that we want to put in the new prayer book.” I decided that was a really good sign.

But rabbinic school was very hard. When I started, I was in constant pain, and I didn’t really tell anyone because I didn’t want to be disqualified. So, I was in pain a lot, and I didn’t have any money. I remember that I didn’t have money to buy a tallit. And I had made a commitment with myself to not go into debt because I saw people in debt taking jobs they weren’t good at. So, I always went into second hand stores. In one of those second hand stores, there was a tallit with a little sign on it, that said, “Shawl $10.” Again, I felt like it was a sign; kind of like I was being taken care of. I bought it, crying. It wasn’t a fancy tallit, but it was a very important sign that whatever I needed, I would have. Soon after, I got a settlement from my accident that helped pay for my tuition.

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you a kind of funny story!

Art Green was the President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College when I went in for my interview. During the interview process, he asked, “How do we know that you are not going to go through rabbinical school and then start your own religion?”

She laughs at the memory.

I was not insulted, but I was indignant at his question! Years later I was on the faculty with him at the Spirituality Institute, and I told that story. I said, “If I was going to start my own religion, it would be called the religion of Zeh, which means the religion of celebrating and appreciating what’s right in front of you, receiving God through that.

I think this speaks to the way I have come to understand Judaism as a tradition that is alive and always changing. I am an agent of that change.

88 A prayer shawl with fringes at each of the four corners.
Becoming a rabbi meant taking responsibility for the life of Judaism to keep it evolving and growing. I felt that if I did not take on this responsibility to spiritual leadership, there would actually be a death of Judaism. I think it is a misconception that you inherit something unchangeable, if you do, people end up disillusioned because they don’t fit into it. I see Judaism as more of a living conversation, and if I don’t claim my part of the conversation then the conversation dies. Then I end up with a relic, something that does not serve me or help in the transformation of the planet. I believe that the creative impulse in me is my inheritance. My job is to keep Judaism alive by tuning into what is the core essence of it. That is exciting and fun!

**Min’s Story**

Immediately after graduate school, Min married Martin, a man that she met through the University Hillel, and who proved to be an important companion on her spiritual journey.

I decided that being Jewish was important. My husband was brought up in a kosher home, but he didn’t particularly care about that. He just wanted Judaism to be part of our life together, and so did I. I decided it would be very interesting to keep a kosher home, as a way of keeping that Jewish awareness part of my daily life. So, when we got married, we set everything up in the living room and said, “Okay this is going to be milchig for Passover, and this is going to be flayshig for every day.” But I had never done this before, and I really did not know very much about how to do it. So I had a set of books, and I had labels on everything, and I had a flowerpot in the corner of the kitchen where we were living in Louisville, Kentucky, because he was going to school in Kentucky. And I always had flowers in the flowerpot, but I also had forks in the flowerpot for when I made a mistake and used the milchig fork to stir the meat. So when you make a mistake, you bury the fork for three days and that makes it okay. So, I had a flowerpot full of forks and knives and other things I made mistakes with.

We lived in Kentucky for a couple of years, and went to services and did a few things with the Jewish community, but I was never at home in it. It was a community that was a very old community, very traditional community, and I was still at that point someone who was very interested and committed, but I didn’t know very much. I certainly did not have the kind of traditional culture to know how to be a Jewish wife in a traditional

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89 Yiddish word for foods containing dairy or milk, which in accord with the dietary laws of Kashrut cannot be mixed with meat products, except fish.

90 Yiddish for meat, which in accord with the dietary laws of Kashrut cannot be mixed with dairy.
Jewish community, so I remember panicking. I would go to the kosher butcher, and all of these ladies would be, “No! Not this one! No this cut of flanken!” I didn’t know what to do there. I was very intimidated by the whole scene. I somehow managed to do it anyway, but it was a very weird kind of time in my life in lots of ways.

I was working as a psychologist there and we also spent some time, a summer, in Southern Arizona working on what used to be the Papago Indian Reservation outside of Tucson. It is now the Tohono O’odham Reservation in a place called Sells. It was really my first taste of the desert, which I really, really enjoyed. We came out to Albuquerque to visit a friend who was living here at the time in ’67. We really liked it and said, “You know, we’ve got to find some way to move to Albuquerque.” We didn’t know how or when, but we did several years later.

In ’69, we moved here for the first time, and I was looking for a job. I had gotten involved with doing program evaluation kind of things at the agency I was working for in Kentucky. So I got a job working for the Model Cities Program in Albuquerque which was doing some interesting, innovative kindergarten things. I was doing program development, program evaluation kind of stuff. About the same time, I was starting to question my Psychology stuff, so it was an interesting kind of way to branch out.

I remember for High Holidays that year, and the two synagogues; there only were two then, like four blocks away from each other, in downtown Albuquerque. Temple Albert and Congregation B’Nai Israel were both on Lead or Coal near downtown. Both of the buildings are gone. It’s a very long time ago. I remember walking from one to the other, and again feeling like, “I don’t belong here. What is this? I feel like I should go. I wish I could get something out of it,” but there was just too big a gap between anything I knew and anything that was there, because they all kind of assumed that you knew something, and I didn’t know very much.

Min and Martin moved from Albuquerque to Tuba City, Arizona in the middle of the Navajo Nation, eighty miles north of Flagstaff. “This was an alternative service for my husband, instead of going to Vietnam. We were very blessed to go to live in the middle of the Navajo Reservation instead.” Even so, they were stationed in the middle of “pretty much nothing.” There was no radio, no television, and what she says was an
“empty and Right Wing” newspaper called the Arizona Republic. The two year experience was very isolating.

The only time you got any news at all is if somebody came to town, the nearest movie theater, dry cleaner, anything was 80 miles away, and in the wintertime you couldn’t get there because of the snows, and it was a time when the only thing you could rely on really were your own inner resources and your neighbors. Half of the marriages did not survive the two years because you didn’t have outside entertainment.

It was really in Tuba City that I started to get a sense of what spirituality was. It was partially from the emptiness of the desert and the isolation, and partially from the Navajos. The Navajos we met and got to know had such an internalized understanding of spirituality and such a clear sense of the way everything is connected to everything else. That was a real spiritual opening for me. We kept kosher on the Navajo reservation. The nearest kosher butcher was 250 miles away in Phoenix. We would send him a letter every six months and say, “50 pounds of ground beef in one-pound packages, please, etc.” And then we would drive the VW Van down to Phoenix. He would have frozen the stuff for days, and he was so thrilled by the idea this young couple keeping kosher in the middle of the Navajo Reservation, he would throw in extra pastrami or a salami or something. It was great.

Laughing, she adds, “I used to kid around about making the only kosher enchiladas on the entire reservation.”

When the two years concluded, she and Martin emptied their bank accounts and bought one-way tickets to Iceland, because they wanted to travel and it was the cheapest place they could fly. From Iceland they flew to Europe and then to Israel. They spent the next six months as volunteers on a kibbutz91 in the north of Israel.

We made friends that are still our closest friends in the world. There were a number of English speakers, people from Britain who made Aliyah92 to that particular kibbutz and so we got to know them and worked doing everything from picking grapefruits and avocados, to working in the banana plantations and working in the kids’ houses, and all kinds of stuff.

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91 A community in Israel generally based on collective or communal ideals and an agricultural lifestyle.
92 Jews who moved to Israel from other diasporic communities.
After maybe the first couple of months there, the people on the kibbutz wanted us to stay, and so they moved us over from the cruddy volunteer housing where we were sleeping on straw mattresses over onto the member’s side. They were trying to get us to stay, and we seriously considered just staying there permanently. But we decided that we still had other things that we wanted to do and explore in our lives, so we were not prepared to do that.

We spent some more time in Israel and did some traveling in the desert. We went back to Egypt and explored the Sinai and participated in archaeological digs. One of the things that happened during that trip to Israel is that it really made me rethink keeping kosher, because there were so many other ways to have Judaism be an integral part of life, that keeping kosher didn’t seem to be a relevant one, and so I stopped. Sort of an odd thing to stop keeping kosher, but that’s what happened.

They left Israel and traveled to the Far East. Bangkok, India and parts of Malaysia were the most intense in terms of the people and their lives. These spaces made an impression on her in terms of, “the extent to which culture was completely integral to all of their daily decisions, beauty and poverty intertwined.” After their adventures, Min and Martin asked, “Now what?” Without a house, money or car, they decided to return to New Mexico, living in Santa Fe for a couple of months and then returning to Albuquerque.

I knew I was finished with Psychology or it was finished with me. I had had the experience one too many times of having someone come in my office and start to tell me their troubles and finding that I was saying, “Oh that problem.” I was pigeonholing them. I wasn’t looking at their uniqueness. I wasn’t treating their problems as anything particularly interesting to me, so I knew I had to get out.

During our travels, any time there was a library that had an English-speaking section, I would do the tarot of libraries just to see what books jumped off the shelf at me, and it turned out to be all these books about architecture and planning, which I had a taste of when working for the Model Cities Program in Albuquerque in ’69 and ’70. So, I decided to go back to school and study architecture and planning, which I did at the University of New Mexico.
What I was really interested in was how Psychology and Architecture influenced each other; how do places influence people? How do people make their mark on the places that they live in? What’s that whole interaction? I was really never interested in stair details or heating systems, or what you call the little flippies on the corner of the buildings. Other people find that interesting, but I was really interested in the people/places interaction.

What followed was a twenty year career, in a consulting firm that Min started, as a consultant helping others make “places work better for people,” and as an instructor at the University of New Mexico. They moved to Washington, D.C. for a couple of years. She worked for a “big beltway bandit consulting company doing energy policy research.” Of that experience, Min adds, “living in Washington was a great ego thing. It’s a lot of money, a lot of power, a lot of ego stuff, and it was really corrupting. And my husband and I went for a walk one night, and he had a parallel kind of job; a lot of power, a big title, you know. We just didn’t like what it was doing to us. And I remember saying, ‘This place is great for the ego and bad for the soul. We have to get out of here.’”

Quitting their jobs the next day, they began to travel using the money they had accumulated.

We went to an Irish bar that night and said, “Okay, where do you want to go? I’ve always want to go to Bali. Let’s put Bali down on the napkin. Let’s go to Egypt. Let’s put Egypt down. Well you know, let’s climb to the bottom of Mount Everest. When is the season of the year to do that?” We’d write that down on the napkin, and by the end of the evening we had this itinerary worked out, so we spent about eight months traveling. We went back to England to see our friends. Went back to Israel. Went to Egypt and spent about a month-and a half in Nepal hiking to Everest base camp and then spending a bunch of time other places in Nepal, which was another spiritual high and turning point, again for the same kind of reasons. Then we went to Bali and a bunch of other places.

The couple returned to the United States. Min began to teach and Martin picked up his former job.
We had not been active in anything Jewish for a 10-year period outside of our very strong connections to Israel and our strong connections to the Israeli people. But the Jewish community, not very much. We came back [to Albuquerque] and said, “We really ought to get involved with something.” So we joined the Chavarah. We were really most comfortable there because of all the Israelis. And so, it felt like a kind of comfortable place to be. Then in 1984 we adopted a daughter and wanted to have a celebration of her arrival.

Lynn Gottlieb had come to town and done a weekend and at the end of the weekend, a group of us took her out to Monroe’s Restaurant and said, “Why don’t you think about moving to Albuquerque?” And she said, “Oh! Good idea, I think I will. Let me talk to Ray and see if he is interested in coming.” And they came. So, I was involved with the early beginnings in Nahalat Shalom.

After our daughter arrived, we wanted to have a celebration, so we had two; one at the Chavarah and one, that Lynn led, through Nahalat Shalom, actually at our house. It was at that point that we pretty much dropped the Chavarah as an affiliation because they didn’t make such a big deal out of this little baby, and Lynn made a huge big deal out of this baby, and of course for us it was a huge big deal. And so it was good.

I learned a lot from Lynn. I learned a lot about stepping one’s toes into Judaism, which is really what I was doing, and that worked well for the first maybe five-eight years of my being involved with that congregation. Then it started not working so well because I was really interested in learning more and for whatever reasons, I just couldn’t with Lynn. So, I started learning elsewhere in other kinds of places. I would go to other congregations and I was trying to figure out what are the next little pieces. I was really interested in doing some more learning, and I was kind of randomly doing bits and pieces.

Somewhere in there, a guy moved to town who had been involved with Rabbi Zalman. I had heard of Zalman from Lynn, but I didn’t know anything really about him. I knew that he was real important to her. And this guy, who had moved here from Philadelphia said, “Well there are these big events that happen every other year called Kallah93.” And I said,

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93 “The Kallah is a biennial gathering that brings together hundreds of Jewish seekers, artists, authors, activists and teachers for an amazing week of study, prayer, music, creative expression and community.” The Kallah is hosted by ALEPH. “ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal dedicates its work to reclaiming the Jewish people’s sacred purpose of partnership with the Divine in the inseparable tasks of healing the world (tikkun olam) and healing our hearts (tikkun halev). For more information go to www.aleph.org.
“What’s that?” So I went to Kallah in Berkeley and discovered that there was this whole huge Jewish Renewal movement, which I hadn’t known about. I thought Lynn was the only person in the world who was doing these things; she had never mentioned that there was anybody else doing it.

So I went to Kallah, and it was a real eye-opening experience, because here are 800 people from all kinds of beliefs and paths and practices in Judaism, were all involved with Renewal in one way or another. So that was really my introduction to Jewish Renewal, and I got very interested and pretty involved with that movement and really have been ever since. That’s where I started doing some more learning and getting recommendations and connecting with teachers.

Somewhere, I never have the sequence exactly right, but I was reading the Link94 one day and found that there was a person who was doing a distance learning program in Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute in Chicago95. Her picture was in the paper, and I said, “This sounds very interesting.” I called this woman up. I didn’t know her, and I said, “Tell me what this thing is,” and she told me, and I clapped and said, “Where can I sign up?”

I started doing a distance learning Master’s program in Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute in Chicago. You go there for a week a year and in addition to that you do a lot of distance learning kind of programs like video tapes and independent studies. It’s a really interesting program and a very high level of learning, and I got really excited. It was great.

Somewhere in there I went to Elat Chayyim96, which is a retreat center in upstate New York, for a week of studying. I don’t remember exactly what. They had two services every morning. They had a Renewal service and they had a Traditional service. I knew what a Renewal service was by

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94 New Mexico’s Jewish newspaper.

95 “Spertus is a Jewish institution grounded in Jewish values that invites people of all ages and backgrounds to explore the multi-faceted Jewish experience. Through its innovative public programming, exhibitions, collections, research facilities and degree programs, Spertus inspires learning, serves diverse communities and fosters understanding for Jews and people of all faiths, locally, regionally and around the world” (http://www.spertus.edu).

96 Founded in 1992, Elat Chayyim, the Jewish Spiritual Retreat Center, moved from Accord, New York and is now affiliated with the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. Elat Chayyim focuses on exploring new and dynamic ways of engaging with Jewish spiritual life. They currently offer retreats and workshops for those interested.
then, but I had never been to a Traditional morning service before, not a Shabbat service, a regular morning service, so I went. I was incredibly uncomfortable, the same way that I was in my early years, when I first got to Hillel and people are standing up and they’re sitting down and they’re bowing and they’re babbling away in this foreign language, and I just wanted to run away, but instead, I ran toward.

The same kind of thing happened at the Elat Chayyim. They did this service and I thought, “What is this?” So I came back to Albuquerque and I called the cantor of B’Nai Israel who I didn’t know, thinking, “Well this is the most conservative place in town. Surely he can answer my questions.” I called him and said, “Can I come and just ask you what this thing is about? What was going on at this morning service?” So I went in. It was Josh Perlman, who has since left. He answered my questions and we chatted for an hour and at the end of the hour he said to me, “See ya next week, same time.” I went, “Okay.”

I started meeting with him every week for an hour. He started just teaching me all kinds of things. He is another really important influence. I started occasionally going over to B’Nai Israel and I got to know Rabbi Celnik, who was just an incredible scholar. Often I would come up with some issue in my studies at Spertus that I needed some help with, and I would go to Isaac and say, “Tell me what this is. Help me with this,” and he could not have been more generous or knowledgeable. He was just amazing. He is the scholar in Albuquerque.

I got near the end of my program at Spertus, and I realized I just wanted more, because Jewish Studies program is an academic program. It is like looking at Judaism from the outside, and I realized I wanted to be on the inside.

People in Jewish Renewal had asked me why didn’t I just apply to the Jewish Renewal rabbinic training program, the Aleph Rabbinic Program, and I realized I didn’t want to do that for a couple of reasons. I didn’t want to do it because it is a mentor-based program, and I couldn’t figure out who I would get as mentors that I really would want to study with particularly. Also I wanted a broader range of input than you’d get from just a couple of main mentors. I also realized I wanted chevra97; I wanted people to study with. I wanted a study environment if there was any way to get one, but I couldn’t figure out how I was going to do that, because it didn’t exist.

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97 Friends/study partners
I went and I talked to all the rabbis in town, when I realized I wanted to do that. I went to Rabbi Joe Black who said; well you should really just go to HUC, because that way you will get a real seminary environment. Basically, everyone was trying to show me their path, of course.

Shefa also was an important part of the story, because at the time that she and Andy broke up, she basically moved into my house, and lived in the back room for over a year in between her trips. I think it was a year and a half or something. She started to take a look at what books I had by the side of my bed, and I didn’t have the mysteries at the side of the bed. I had the *Reference Guide to the Talmud* and if I remember correctly, one day she said to me, “Who are you kidding?” I learned a lot from her. I did a number of her training sessions.

Now somewhere in here, Lynn had gone on sabbatical, her first sabbatical, about fifteen years ago. A group of people got together and asked, “Well what are we going to do? She is going on sabbatical over the High Holidays. What do we do? We can either go try to rent a rabbi or we cannot have High Holiday services, or we can try to do it ourselves. We have to do something.” So a group of about ten of us got together and said, “Well, let’s see if we can get someone to teach us something.” And Lynn was already gone by that point, and we hooked up with a guy who was the former cantor at Temple Albert and was still in town. He said, “I’ll help you.” So, a group of us started meeting with him, and he said, “You know, before learning liturgy for High Holidays. Before learning what you have to do to conduct services for the holidays, you really need to learn to meditate first.” So we started meeting with him every week. About three weeks before the holiday we were all completely nervous wrecks. We were thinking, “The holiday is coming! Teach us something!” He said, “No. You have to learn how to meditate first.” About three weeks before the High Holidays, he said, “Okay. You’re going do one part, you’re going do another, you’re going to do...” he gave people parts, and we did it. We did it ourselves, and it was quite wonderful. We decided we didn’t want to stop meeting. And so since then, what is now known as the Tuesday Night Group, has been meeting every Tuesday night for fifteen years. So that’s been another important thread.

Then I heard that there was a group of people in Los Angeles who were putting together a new rabbinical school that was going to be a branch of the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York, and Rabbi Stan Levy was one of the rabbis that was putting it together. I knew Stan from Renewal

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98 Rabbi Joe Black was the rabbi at Temple Albert, Albuquerque’s Reform Synagogue at the time.

99 Hebrew Union College

100 Maggid Andy Gold, Shefa’s second husband
Circle. So, I flew out to L.A., and I met with him and I said, “Tell me about this.” And he told me about it and I said, “Put me on the list.”

And he did. When it started I went out to California and jumped through all the hoops and interviews to get into AJR. I crammed for eight months for the entry exams on Hebrew grammar and got in. Then I spent four-and-a-half years commuting every week between Albuquerque and Los Angeles via Southwest Airlines. I couldn’t have done it without Southwest Airlines! It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

One of the ways I knew it was right, was at that time I had a mother in town, a husband in town, an extremely challenging teenager, a consulting practice, and I was teaching half-time at the University, and I added this on top, and I got more energy. That was one of the ways I knew that it was really right, was when it gave me more energy, even though it was absolutely crazy to be commuting to L.A. several days a week and coming home to do homework about the obscurities of Hebrew grammar. But it was clearly the right thing to do.

After about three years I finally quit the University and decided the schizophrenia of doing those two very separate things was not consistent with my learning as much as I wanted to learn, and I was really finished with my Architecture and Planning career at that point. I was kind of done with it, and so I left the University, and here I am.

*Malka’s Story*

Part of the reason my marriage was right for me, was that I really wanted to live a Jewish life, and Steven had come from that background. That was very much from the beginning part of who we were. There was no question that we wanted to raise children within that. Steven had gone to a Jewish day school, and we wanted to send our children there, and we were able to.

Somewhere before I was thirty, I began to have this itch to write. I began telling stories to Ivan, my firstborn.

Sort of a sidebar on just children, I wrote a piece called *Tazria.* That was the piece that is very much about how transcendent childbirth is, as I understood it from my own experience. This was 1970. It was a natural birth, which in those days was, whoa! You know, it was like, “What am I doing here?” And it really was one of the most remarkable experiences; the childbirth itself, and also that first milky month. I’d read that children until they’re six months don’t really know the difference between themselves and mother. They don’t have that distinction of individuality. But I’d never read it was the other way around too. That I too, was not
who I was, and that there was in that first month a sense of his face, my face that I couldn’t distinguish. So that was a major spiritual awakening.

And it was also at that time that I met Rabbi Harold Schulweis and started going to Saturday morning services. I think that being a new mother and hearing him, was mind blowing. One day, I realized, I’m not an agnostic anymore. I’ve crossed the river. When did that happen? Then I start writing, and what do you write? How do you know what to write?

And I went to my first book conference, and the one thing I understood was always, always write your passion. And I’m thinking not about writing for ten-year-olds, but about me, what I would have read. And God, I needed inspiration. I mean without knowing it, I needed to know that it’s not so important how you begin but what you become.

I read sports biographies because it was clear: Babe Ruth, Roger Bannister, these are incredible stories. And I thought, “What was my passion when I was ten?” I lived and died baseball! So my first book was about Tom Seaver. It was amazing! God, you know! Here I was walking around in my navy blazer, looking really very serious, but doing cartwheels inside; walking around Dodgers Stadium with these ballplayers!

It was fabulous, fabulous. And my first book! It was reviewed in the New York Times, and it was sort of this unreal experience. I look back on it now, and it’s like another person, another life. It was great.

I had fear of flying from the time I was eighteen to thirty. It ended when I wrote my first book. There it was. So I knew that was the right path. And then I wrote. And then I wrote.

As Malka approached her fortieth birthday, she spent time with Mary Jane O’Donnell, a good friend that she describes as “Irish Catholic” and “a spiritual sister.” The two often spoke of spiritual matters. She laughs telling me they would have these talks during dinner parties, and “The room would empty in seconds. Nothing would cause people to run out of the room faster than me going to Torah.” Following one of these conversations on a beautiful Sunday afternoon, in Venice, California, Mary Jane said, “You know Malka, you should become a rabbi.” Malka tells me, “It never occurred to me.”
It was like I needed somebody to give me permission or something. That must have been in March. At the time she was dating this, ultimately married and divorced Warren Bennis...from the business world [he has written] millions of books on leadership and all these things. Anyway, very handsome guy. Jewish guy. Warren was at USC. He brought me a catalog from HUC\textsuperscript{101}. We had dinner a few nights. There was the catalog and I looked at him and I said, “Yeah, I’m just sort of exploring things.” And Mary Jane and Warren seriously encouraged me to apply. Seriously encouraged.

So, I did all these things you have to do...letters of recommendation and all this stuff. I’d hated school. I’d just despised it. I mean the happiest day was when I knew I’d never have to do this shit again. I mean I’m forty, thinking I’ll have to do this again.

It’s 1985, and they asked me about circumcision. And I’m a nice conservative Jew. But I’m applying to the Reform Movement at Hebrew Union College because there was nothing really happening with the Conservative Movement yet. I tend to be very conservative. I take the middle ground. I’m not going to be the great pioneer out there. [And they ask me to] give an argument for circumcision. That was easy. Two sons – I’ve got one. Give me an argument against it. I was like, “What?” I mean, I didn’t know there was an argument against it in Judaism! I didn’t know where this was coming from. But I’m fast. So whatever I answered, I answered. And it was a hard interview. Afterwards I realized it was because I was forty and they expected me to know a little more.

I remember I saw the \textit{Purple Rose of Cairo} before the interview; the Woody Allen movie. It was a four o’clock interview, so I was very nervous that day and my sister said, “Have a lunch that you really enjoy and go to a movie.” So I did. I had sushi. I went to see the movie. I was terrified they were going to ask me, “What was the last movie you saw?”

I don’t remember the rest of the interview. They accepted me. By July 1\textsuperscript{st} I was in Israel. We’re talking about no time. I mean in six months. I’m in Israel, with my oldest son. He was fifteen. And it was like, Private Benjamin enters rabbinical school.

I couldn’t imagine. It was really like, “I can’t have a glass of wine at night now?” And I thought, “Is that really what happens because I have to do homework?”

What was I thinking?

\textsuperscript{101} Hebrew Union College
Now I think about this and I’m just moved by it. It was an amazing feeling at forty to be free. To have one key. No car. Nothing, really to think about, except school. And also being with Ivan, like almost as a friend even more than a son at times, because we were both...well, I was really alone. He was fine because I was there, but I just kept questioning what I was doing. It felt like a band had been cut from my heart. It just felt like freedom. I don’t think that I had any idea that I was beginning to be able to take a breath in a deeper place than I ever could before.

I met Gay [Gay Block, Malka’s former partner]. I’d gone to Santorini for a week’s break with some students in my class. I look back now and it was all this surrender and all these things that are so inchoate. I was just really riding on that river, and I could no longer even get onto the shore now.

By the time Steven and I rendezvoused, even though we spoke once a week at least, if not more, we realized that it was over. I came in July. It probably was the first time we saw each other, and it was over. For both of us. It had been over. But now we knew it. And then my whole life just kind of changed. It was a lot. I returned home in December. Finished my year in LA. And I didn’t continue. It just felt like everything was irrelevant right then until my life sort of settled. My children were all over the place. Especially Max, the younger one.

It’s now 1989. This was another major glimpse. I think I was studying with Jonathan at the time. And I was doing that for about three-and-a-half years. I saw this connection between Max and me, this connection. And I began studying all kinds of stuff. Reading all kinds of spiritual things and all these different paths, and realized that I clearly entered into serious altered space. (She laughs) I’d just been through a vision in these years.

Was I called? Yeah. Yeah. Furthermore, what I heard was that I hadn’t just been called I’d been screamed at! Fax! Faxes, emails, everything! And finally, finally I was in the frame to answer.

I had a book come out in ’86. For about two or three years, I was like a car accident. I mean socially people who I had counted as friends wanted nothing to do with me. I mean the end of a marriage, being with a woman, and oh God, and Max. I couldn’t get published. Nobody even wanted anything to do with me as a writer. So that identity was gone. So it was very, very much, like I didn’t know where I stood anymore.

Meanwhile, Gay and I had begun working on Rescuers. People often say, “Why did you write this?” My answer was then was that it was important to write about the Holocaust, and that was all true. I wanted to tell this part of the story. But really, I think more personally, to parallel the
paradigmatic holocaust I had been in and to recognize those who stepped in, who I never expected to be there during that time in my life.

So, the book came out in ’92. Meanwhile, Frida Kahlo had come out, I’d written that, Jewish Holidays ABC, and Grandma’s Latkes. I think a number of things had come out by then. And these are the books of course from that period of time, and the books are still around and, thank God, doing well.

And God, I was, you know, being with Gay, finding happiness this way. Understanding something I’d never understood before. Having to see this whole gender thing within myself. I thought, “What is this? What does this mean? Who am I?”

I was connecting very much to what became ultimately my rabbinate. When Rescuers came out, we talked. We gave tons of interviews and tons of talks, and I realized that peoples’ responses to the book would make a great rabbinic pulpit. And just as I had when I was forty, I turned away from writing for a while because I was lonely. I wanted. I wanted. I mean here God begins with speaking to someone. I felt like I was very uncertain about everything, it was like spitting into a well.

And it was then face to face. And I asked, “Could I be this in the world, in that role?” I found that in giving these talks, I really got inspired. I could really feel this fire rising. I wanted to talk about it. And Rescuers is a model for who not only we could become but who we must become.

By ’94, politics were changing in America. I don’t remember why. But I know that I was always very unhappy with my studies at the time. I might have been ordained after I’d given the school X-million dollars, but it was like putting my name on a book that I hadn’t written. I didn’t know enough. I knew I didn’t.

Malka called two people who pointed her to the Academy of Jewish Religion (AJR), a situation that she now calls “amazing.” At fifty years old, Malka decided that she was “old enough,” and that “it had better be fun.” Moving to Los Angeles, California, she studied for nine months. She says, “It was one of the best times of my life.” She felt that all of the pieces of her spiritual practice and various studies had fallen into place. She applied to AJR and went for an interview in early October. She was encouraged to apply for February in New York. At the time she was still plagued by doubts.
I mean school was not my forte. I got through because I was afraid I was going to work in Woolworth’s. That was always what my parents held over me! I went to college. But it kind of runs against my grain, you know?

And yet I had envy: PhD envy, and title envy. I mean I had all that stuff, and I knew that wasn’t a reason, but I really, really felt that there was something I needed to complete about this. I didn’t want an academic approach, so it seemed to me ordination would be good. I learned a lot. I could be focused and learn and then go home. After the first few days of classes, I remember lying in bed, lying there a long time and finally saying to Gay, “I’m not sure I can do this.”

It’s really hard. It’s really hard. It was humiliating. I mean read in Hebrew, translate what you just read, and explain what it means to a table of twelve people?

And Gay said, “Don’t waste any energy here. You’re going to do it. We’re here.” She’s thinking, “We have a sublet here! What are we going to do for six months? It costs God knows what to be here!” But, she doesn’t say any of that to me, but she’s thinking that and, I’m thinking, she’s right!

So, I decided that I was going to do this. And the school was just such a place where they really supported you in your strengths. They held you in the other places. I made a good friend the first few days, who’s remained just a dear friend, Rabbi Judy Edelstein. And pretty soon, I was so happy. I was thanking my teachers after each class, and thinking, “I get to do this? I get to learn? This is what I’ve always wanted. This is my favorite thing to sit here and learn around the table.”

I was taking Talmud and mediation. That was the kind of school it was. So I felt like everything fit for the first time in my life. And loved being in New York. I just reveled in going down to the street. It was just a wonderful, wonderful time. We really did the most. It was like God wanted me to go to rabbinical school, because after that sublet, during that semester we went looking around for the next year. We found this apartment on 86th and Broadway, in the building where Isaac Bashevis Singer lived. It had a courtyard in the center. Oh my God! It was like the apartment I remember my grandparents lived in. You know, it just meant everything to me because it was like my grandparents walked with me every day I was there. So it was great.

Malka told her instructors at AJR, “I have two-and-a-half years to give you. You can ordain me or not. It’s your call. Whatever you think. But I can’t be here longer than
that.” They asked her “Why not?” to which she replied, “I live in New Mexico.” She adds, “I mean, I’ve got a life!” She says that she was very devoted during that time, and afterward, “They chose to ordain me,” She laughs, “Which was probably a mistake!” Malka says that she continues to feel a “longing to learn more.” She tells me that she loved the rabbinic program at AJR. In rabbinic school, she felt “seen,” “known,” and “came to see who [she] could become.” After her program, she was informed that she had to do fieldwork in order to be ordained.

She sighs, and adds dramatically, “I’ll kill myself! How? I can’t do this!”

The very nervous recently ordained rabbi served a congregation once a month, an experience Malka now believes, “taught [her] to be a rabbi.” She explains, “The faith of members of that congregation gave me gave me faith in myself.”

**The Spiritual Journey**

In the 1911 classic, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, Evelyn Underhill described the spiritual task of the mystic as a “movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality” (71). Underhill believed this process would occur through a series of mystic states: awakening, purification, illumination, dark night of the soul, and unitive life (Underhill 1961 177-443). Carol Ochs writes that such models, “presuppose a linear progression with later stages that are valued more highly than earlier ones” (1997:23), an issue for those whose paths seem more circuitous. Nevertheless, genres such as those of travel, quest, and adventure were adapted by those whose quests were imbued by a deeper search for meaning, and the ‘spiritual journey’
was created, first as a written genre and now with increasing frequency as a part of a life story told in conversations, such as those shared here.

Shefa’s story seems most closely aligned with this model. Already a traveler and spiritual seeker, Shefa’s awakening in this story occurs upon impact when the car she is riding in is struck from behind by an Entenman’s Baker truck breaking her ribs pushing her between the front seats of the car. Unable to move, Shefa moves into the next stage, purification. Underhill writes, “then, stands the newly awakened self: aware, for the first time, of reality, responding to the reality by deep movements of love and of awe” (1961:198). Shefa describes her experience of an “altered state, where it felt like the whole car was filled with love.” In this space, she is not frightened, and she remembers thinking, “This is the hand of God.” Through this, Shefa enters the phase of illumination, seeing reality more clearly, a condition which causes the mystic to “part company” with others who are not as enlightened, choosing to share experiences with “certain prophets, poets, artists, dreamers—initiates of beauty or of wisdom…[who] share in some degree the experiences of the way of illumination” or the “transcendental world” (Underhill 1961:233).

In Shefa’s narrative, her marriage falls apart because she and Sky have “different styles of healing” and she meets and begins her work with Paul, the Sufi teacher who tells her that she will be a rabbi. In this space where Shefa feels that the “rug has been pulled out from under” her. Still she notes that “God was underneath that rug” and she continues to have a “sense of God holding” her. Yet her journey is not yet complete. It becomes difficult as she enters the ‘dark night of the soul.’ Shefa drives to Philadelphia to apply to rabbinic school with no job, no promise of admission, and no place to live. In her pain
and isolation, she harkens back to those feelings of love and awe to give her strength, and remains open to the signs that confirm that she is on the right path. She comes to know through such signs as finding a place to live and discovering a tallit in a thrift store that she will have “whatever” she “needs.” Here, Shefa’s story deviates somewhat from Underhill’s diagram. Whereas Underhill’s mystics experience the “perfect and permanent form, as the Spiritual Marriage of his soul with God” and become “completely absorbed in the interests of the Infinite” (1961:415-416), Shefa does not retreat entirely from life but chooses instead to take an active role as, “an agent of…change” in the living tradition of Judaism.

The stories told by Min and Malka, while not as overtly mystical in their tellings, are no less profound, describing journeys that seem to unfold and to demonstrate how a spiritual path can appear and transform throughout one’s life. Initially in more traditional marriages, Min and Malka both explored conservative Jewish practices, had children, thrived in secular professions, and received their ‘calls’ to the rabbinate and made choices to enter rabbinic school later in life. Their stories are less about revelation and surrender, and more about choice, a hallmark of the shift toward the sovereign spiritual self in contemporary Jewish identity.

The Sovereign Self

The concept of the sovereign self in regards to religious participation generally indicates a turn away from adherence to dogma and social/community obligations and towards a more individual, personal, and multifaceted experience of Judaism. In those interviewed by Cohen and Eisen, this frequently manifested in what they refer to as “choosing choseness” where individuals freely decide “to take on commitments which
one could (perhaps just as easily) have rejected” (2000:22). In Min’s story we see this right away in her choice to keep kosher. While Min lacked an observant Jewish background, she felt that “being Jewish was important.” Without the training others had in childhood, Min “didn’t know very much.” Min made mistakes with the forks she used (i.e. milchig or flayshig), didn’t know how to pick a “cut of flanken,” and could not find a synagogue in Albuquerque where she felt she belonged because “there was just too big a gap between anything I knew and anything that was there.”

Min’s spiritual journey, and her choice to “run towards” Judaism, is motivated by her feelings of otherness, her questioning nature, and her desire for Jewish learning. For Min, there was not a single space, teacher, or practice that met her needs as a spiritual seeker. Min gets a “sense of what spirituality” is in Tuba City, when her husband is stationed there as an alternative to serving in Vietnam. In the “emptiness of the desert and the isolation” she has a “spiritual opening.” She learns from the sense that her Navajo neighbors have that “everything is connected to everything else.” She continues to keep kosher even though it is inconvenient. When Min leaves the Navajo Nation, she goes to Israel. She lives in a Kibbutz, becomes more comfortable with her Jewish practice, realizes that there are other ways to practice Judaism, and stops practicing Koshrut. Leaving Israel for the Far East, Min is impressed by the “extent to which culture was completely integral to all of their daily decisions, beauty and poverty intertwined.” These openings prompt shifts in Min’s life. She realizes that she is done with Psychology, and realizes that she is most interested in people/places interactions and chooses to become an architect. This works well for a while, but following a move to Washington DC, which
Min describes as “great for the ego and bad for the soul” she and Martin make a choice to move to Albuquerque, a place to which they both feel connected.

Min’s spiritual journey exemplifies Kaplan’s observation that for some, religion is no longer strictly about observance to a church, or in this case, synagogue, but is instead about a very personal, diverse path of spiritual meaning. Through these travels, Min learns more about herself, and her path opens up. She and Martin join the Chavarah in Albuquerque, but when the people there fail to make a “big deal” out of the adoption of her daughter Min begins to work more closely with Lynn at Congregation Nahalat Shalom. Still, she wants more, and finds out about Kallah. From there, Min attends Spertus Institute in Chicago for a Master’s program in Jewish studies. Prior to attending the Academy for Jewish Religion, Min studies with numerous rabbis and teachers. She has conversations with Shefa. She reads voraciously. In these stories, Min finds meaning in multiple spaces with multiple people and continues to make choices that enliven her spiritual quest and create her complex and unique Jewish identity.

Malka too chooses Judaism as a spiritual path when she and her husband choose to “live a religious life” and to send her children to Jewish day school. In Malka’s story, these decisions, however, seem cognitive, and her real spiritual awakening comes through the birth of her eldest child. She finds a connection beyond any she knows to that point, finding love and feeling that she and her son are somehow indistinguishable from one another for his first month of life. This sparks a somewhat dormant spirituality, as she says, “I realized, I’m not an agnostic anymore.”

Telling stories to her son, Malka realizes that she wants to write. She decided to write about what she loves, baseball. She loves walking around the baseball field,
meeting the players, and once she finds success as a writer, she loses her “fear of flying” and knows that she is on the right path. Part of this right path also involves Malka’s choice to delve more deeply into her Jewish identity. She writes a series of books including *Jewish Holidays ABC* and *Grandma’s Latkes*. She has deep talks with her friends about the *Torah* and is encouraged to check into Hebrew Union College. Although frightened by the prospect of the necessary learning that will accompany the path, Malka begins her rabbinic education.

At forty years of age, she finds herself, in Israel, with a fifteen year old, learning and feeling free. While in this free space, she meets Gay, her current partner. She says, “I look back now and it was all this surrender and all these things that are so inchoate. I was really riding on the river.” From within this place of transition, Malka realizes that her marriage to Steven is over and that her life is taking a dramatic turn. During this time her books are published, yet she loses many friends due to her choice to be with a woman, yet she still finds happiness and a new sense of self. She and Gay collaborate on the *Rescuers*, a book about the people who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust, a work that eventually inspires her rabbinate. For Malka, love, learning and freedom are the bricks that form her spiritual path. Once grounded, she is able to enjoy rabbinic school, and finds supportive others who help her feel “seen” and “known.” Though her story touches upon many instances of loss and hardship, in the end, as a newly ordained rabbi she finds faith in herself.

Cohen and Eisen note that many of the changes in Jewish selfhood began to surface with the increasing popularity of American Reform Judaism, some of the same transformations that created openings for women to become rabbis. In terms of identity,
the changes allowed Jews to challenge their long held notion of exclusivity (i.e. the Chosen People), supported the “autonomy of human beings in general and of each individual vis-à-vis God,” and created a situation where Jews had to “qualify” Jewish identity with an adjective (i.e. Reform, Orthodox, etc.) (2000:31). Cohen and Eisen dub these new seekers “the Postmodern Jew” with qualities described as:

- Personal meaning is the arbiter of their Jewish involvement
- Jewish meaning is not only personal but constructed, one experience at a time
- A related development is the emergence of Jews who combine great concern for issues of spirituality and meaning with severely diminished interest in the organizational life of the Jewish community
- Identity is far more fluid than ever before (2000:36-38).

While these are the spiritual journeys of women who are the product of these transformations in Jewish identities, they are also the stories of dynamic, unique women, who have undertaken very personal journeys that are shaped by their own direction and inner guidance systems. Ochs describes spirituality as the “culmination of our natural maturation process—its fulfillment of humanity” (1997:145). She suggests that traditionally, this process for men “stressed independence,” while women’s spiritual life seemed to “grow out of the ordinary and to be present, unrecognized, in the lives of many (Ochs 1997:145).

This shifts with the advent of women in roles of spiritual leadership. In these stories, these experiences are communicated and recognized as they teach us that the search for spiritual understanding is not a simple or direct process. There are moments of awe, during Shefa’s accident and Malka’s childbirth as well as moments of fear and self-doubt, at each stage of the learning process, as evidenced in Min’s and Malka’s choices to change careers and attend rabbinic school later in life. Although each of the women felt called to spiritual leadership at some level, all had to be told by friends that they
should be rabbis. They are, as Ochs claims, “role models for a new spirituality,” yet have been largely ‘invisible’ in society” (1997:146). Jewish women have traditionally not had the benefits of Yeshiva education, complete access to Jewish ritual participation and spiritual leadership. These conditions have necessitated women’s flexible learning and personal spiritual expression.

Through these stories, the rabbis’ “powerful individual memories and experiences” (Cohen and Eisen 2001:2), grant the reader access to information about how three individuals can successfully practice and experience spiritualties that are sufficiently flexible to support changes not only in the presence of sweeping social movements, but also through relationships, through personal development, and through motion. By choosing to share these stories and the lessons of their spiritual journeys with their others, these women take responsibility for shaping Judaism as it is currently “imagined and enacted” (Cohen and Eisen 2001:2). The power of each rabbi’s story lies not exclusively in the content of the narratives, but in the storyteller’s ability to convey experiences and hopes, challenges and accomplishments to audiences who can relate to the stories, resonate with their lessons and messages, and come to understand their own abilities to craft their own Jewish identities.

In this next chapter, I shift the focus from stories of individuals to stories of communities built and shaped by the leadership of Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker, Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism in Santa Fe. To depict the growing and changing Jewish spaces, I tie ethnographic observations to community interviews, stories told by the rabbis in interpersonal interactions to stories they tell on the bimah during
High Holidays. I consider the ways in which the rabbis’ perspectives and interests speak to the contemporary Jews in these communities, building a space for many, who like those discussed in this chapter, have varied and complex understandings of their Jewish identities, and subsequently have diverse needs to community engagement.
CHAPTER 7

Creating New Judaism(s) in New Mexico:

Performing Community at Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism

“When I walked in [to Nahalat Shalom] I was skeptical. I didn’t have good memories of being Jewish as a child…It just wasn’t for me. The two rabbis in my past, both men, were good people I’m sure, but they seemed stern. Kind of aloof. I just didn’t relate to them. I felt like they didn’t understand me…or represent me. I felt judged. But, when I walked through these doors…well, this community just became my family. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Rabbi Lynn. She inspired me. She freed me to feel Jewish again.”

– Esther, A congregant at Nahalat Shalom

“When Lynn left, many of us were wondering what would happen. There was definitely a void. We weren’t sure what the next step would be. Then we got Deborah, and she is a good match. She’s solid, patient. I like the way she talks about tradition and uses the Torah. She seems to love it. She reminds me of the rabbi I grew up with. Weird, I know, with her being a woman and all, but, I learn from her. Somehow, she made our community gel in a different way.”

– Emory, a congregant at Nahalat Shalom

“I love Rabbi Malka! I just do. I love her sermons! She is so intelligent and witty! She delves into Torah in a way that totally makes sense to me. The stories about her life and family make Judaism seem real, personal. I didn’t have a traditional upbringing, and felt lost in synagogue, even though I also felt this pull, this need for Judaism. Rabbi Malka has really helped me to understand the prayers, and I guess I might say, the cycles of Judaism. She touches my heart, gives me a home where I didn’t have one before.”

– Ruth, a congregant at HaMakom

Whereas the stories presented in previous chapters were elicited in one-on-one interactions, the final three chapters of this dissertation focus on the performed and published public life stories of Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Malka Drucker, Shefa Gold, Deborah Brin and Min Kantrowitz, as well as information gleaned through participation in social and ritual events. This chapter is about the histories of two New Mexico congregations, Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate
and Progressive Judaism. In the first part of the chapter, I weave together the accounts by Lynn and others from the congregation, as well as a few published pieces, to describe key moments that led to the creation of Congregation Nahalat Shalom. As many of these events occurred prior to my collaboration with Lynn, this historical approach provided the necessary background for this study. In the second part of the chapter, however, I move away from this more traditional historical approach, and look instead to the discursive events that I witnessed as an ethnographer. Focusing on Deborah’s and Malka’s stories incorporated into their High Holy Day sermons, I examine the ways in which these stories act to circulate the rabbis’ perspective, develop group cohesion, and speak to the needs of those who practice Judaism in these unique community spaces.

**Histories of Congregation Nahalat Shalom**

On a brisk autumn evening in 2001, I walked toward the first synagogue to which I would belong. Congregation Nahalat Shalom’s somewhat plain exterior, beige stucco walls trimmed in bright turquoise blue rose starkly from a rough gravel lot. I hesitated, nervously pausing, hand fixed to the handle. I opened the door slowly, stepped into a small entryway, and gazed on photos of smiling people lining a second set of doors to a vacuous sanctuary. White walls covered in vivid tapestries and large canvases of contemporary art framed an open wood floor the color of amber. An edge of unpainted wall, lined the space stretching to an empty platform where the alter had once been in the building’s days as a Christian church. Now along the East-facing wall of the synagogue, an unassuming bimah covered with ornate kilims supported a single unadorned table, a

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102 The High Holidays refer to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which begins and ends teshuvah, a ten day period of introspection and repentance.

103 Vividly colored flat, woven rugs frequently made in middle-Eastern countries and the Balkans.
folding chair, and two *dumbek* drums. An intricate and unusual wooden ark was mounted on the wall to the left of the table, and to the same side, a white eternal light hung from the rafters, casting gentle light upon the space.

A few people milled about, talking animatedly to other attendees and to the rabbi. Most were dressed casually, in jeans and T-shirts sporting Tevas, Berkenstocks or Danskos. A few of the women wore flowing, brightly colored dresses. Half an hour after services were scheduled to start, we moved slowly to the crescent of folding chairs that faced the *bimah*. Lynn formed the chairs into a circle, dropped into one, picked up a drum and began to tap a rhythm. She led prayers in English, Hebrew and Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish language developed from old Spanish, kept alive by Sephardic Jews. Some participants seemed to know the prayers and songs, while others followed through a hodgepodge of photocopied transliterations, many of which I would later learn had been written and/or translated by Lynn to eliminate androcentric or non-inclusive language. As the evening progressed, we sang songs, talked about people, places and issues that were on our minds, remembered people who had recently passed away, and listened as Lynn spoke passionately about non-violence and social justice, at home, through her focus on domestic violence, and on a global scale, in her recent experiences in Palestine and Israel. We ended the Shabbat services with a discussion about our own social justice concerns and personal responsibility, topics that continued as we stood about chatting after services.

In 1982, Lynn and a small group people met in a back yard of one of the founding members. Each possessed the vision and desire to create a space in which to practice an inclusive Judaism that would be welcoming to members of a diverse community filled

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104 Middle Eastern chalice shaped drum
with young parents, vivacious children, feminists, activists, artists, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews, and others who simply wanted to learn about a more egalitarian, open form of Jewish expression. Lynn and the founding group named the community, Congregation Nahalat Shalom, or “Inheritance of Peace.” Lynn’s reputation was known, and they welcomed her passion for theater, art, feminism, peace, and environmentalism.

Initially, the small congregation met at people’s homes and in their backyards. The community steadily grew, and those first years gave way to the 1990s, a period the community lovingly dubbed the “Great Schlepp.” Lynn and the community moved from space to space, renting room in churches, community centers, and parks. The community formed a *Heder* in which members of the community taught children Hebrew, Jewish ritual and culture. Lynn’s services frequently involved the children. Community members speak with nostalgia of theatrical services in which children waved sheets to represent the crossing of the red sea, huge puppets danced and swayed, and the rabbi clowned to the tones of delighted laughter. Congregation Nahalat Shalom became a space of music, dancing, festive Seders, and impassioned High Holiday services. In these moments, Lynn told stories about growing up, travel, and folktales, Jewish and otherwise, in which she found meaning. People tell me that their children would sit transfixed, listening to Lynn’s stories, and say that these formative moments remain precious to these children even now in their adulthoods. The community grew, children had bar and bat mitzvahs, people celebrated marriages, and many mourned the deaths of loved ones.

Lynn attempted to connect with the broader Albuquerque Jewish community. While members of the congregation held Lynn in high esteem, members of the larger Jewish community were not pleased by her presence. When Lynn first appeared in front

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105 A Jewish day school for students who have yet to have their bar and bat mitzvahs.
of what she described as “conservative” North East Heights communities, dressed in a red Guatemalan top and blue harem pants, her story telling costume, she created a stir. Telling her favorite story about Lilith, she intoned, “For those of you not in the know, in Jewish lore, Lilith was Adam’s first wife.” In a gesture to suggest back in time, she sang, “A long time ago, so long ago it might not have happened, the spirit of life gave birth to life!” She twirled and whooped and gave an exaggerated wink as she related Adam’s request for Lilith to assume the missionary position, and Lilith’s stalwart refusal. Lynn described how Lilith had been cast from the garden, becoming a prototype of evil women at best, and baby killing night demon at worst. Triumphantly, Lynn proclaimed Lilith the “first divorcée.”

In Lynn’s recollection the audience was somewhat shocked and indignant, with reactions that seemed to say: “What is that? Where’d she come from? Who ordained her? Who gave her permission? She can’t start a congregation here!” The Reform rabbi at the time, from Temple Albert, went into what Lynn calls “apoplexy.” He refused to talk to her, be in the same space with her, and began a campaign to have her “disbarred.” Lynn tells me that the rabbi was keeping a file on her. When this information came to her attention, and following the advice of legal counsel, she met with him. In her book, *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of a Renewed Judaism*, she writes:

He said that if I ever used the title rabbi again, he would expose my charade. The issue for him was my private ordination. I reminded him how many rabbis were involved in my training...[and] recounted a long list of privately ordained Reform rabbis...Two days later my name appeared in the local newspaper to announce a workshop I was conducting, and the following day I received a three-page letter that was to appear in the Jewish newspaper. I was given three days to respond to charges that none of my former teachers supported me, [and] that I was a charlatan (Gottlieb 1995: 215).
Over the next two days, Lynn contacted sixty five rabbis, representing Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Movements. The rabbis supported Lynn on record in a letter to the Jewish Federation of Albuquerque. She continues, “I was told that when he saw the material, he said, ‘I didn’t realize it involved more than just her’” (Gottlieb 1995:216). He apologized to Lynn twelve years later.

An active traveler and social activist, Lynn frequently brought stories of her travels and social justice concerns back to her community. After a 1994 trip to Palestine and Israel, Lynn returned with new awareness and deepening passion. She told members of the congregation about this most recent experience and about her increasing need to advocate for a peaceful solution to end the violence and war. Reflecting on a specific incident from the trip that changed her perspective and the way she celebrated Purim, Lynn wrote:

Reflections on Amalek for Purim. Time to eradicate all incitements to violence?

Remember what Amalek did to you
On your journey
As you came out of Mitzryim
How he surprised you/chilled your spirit
On the road
Smote those lagging behind
All that were enfeebled,
When you were faint and weary;
Not fearing his own act.
When Adonai Eloheka gives you safety
From all your enemies around about,
In the land which Adonai Eloheka gives you as a hereditary portion
You shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek
From under the heavens.

The winter weather and gray skies deepened the chill of the broken stones we sat upon, the remains of a house destroyed in Hebron. I sat in the silent mourning with a Muslim family whose father had been murdered by
Barukh Goldstein on Purim, 1994. Goldstein believed he was fulfilling the mitzvah to eradicate the name of Amalek which he identified as Palestinian Muslims praying in the mosque of our common ancestor Abraham. Goldstein believed the Lord’s ‘war with Amalek from generation to generation’ (Ex.15:17) commanded him to kill an entire people. While costumed Jewish children took their plastic Purim hammers to the street, playfully bopping people on the head on their way to hear the megillah, I sat amidst the rubble of a former home facing people who, unknown to them, were cast into the role of villains in an ancient story and forced to endure a plot line which targeted them for destruction. 1994 changed forever, the way I celebrated Purim with my congregation. From that time forward, the passages of revenge were expunged from the text. Along with our revamped feminist versions of the Purim tale in which Vashti was restored to her former glory and the women of the harem were given their freedom, my congregation elected to offer Haman community service and diversity training! The resolution of the story in my Albuquerque community came to reflect the ideas of restorative justice so dear to us, rather than revenge justice which had no place in our communal life” (Gottlieb 2001).

Such stories sparked in many the desire to become more directly involved in broader social and political issues. Lynn, members of the congregation, representatives of the local Muslim community, as well as students and faculty from the University of New Mexico created the Muslim/Jewish Dialogue. The group met regularly for many years to discuss experiences, perceptions and solutions to the ongoing hostilities between the two communities. Joshua, a member of Nahalat Shalom told me that the “peace work” was one of the most important aspects of his experiences at Congregation Nahalat Shalom. He called Lynn, “revolutionary,” and talked about how “powerful” it was to “sit with people and witness the stories of their lives.”

Members of the community relished the freedom to engage the world through interfaith work, self-exploration and celebration. The community worked with local Native American communities and leaders as well. One community member was moved when they created a “giant medicine wheel” the year the Congregation had the
community *Seder* at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. A group of people interested in exploring their Sephardic heritage began to meet regularly, planting a seed that would develop into the now standard monthly Sephardic Shabbat service. The Congregation Nahalat Shalom Klezmer Band was formed, and played its first “gig” at the Nahalat Shalom Chanukah Service in 1995, giving rise to the Rikkud folk dancers, and Klezmerquereque, a weekend long Klezmer music event with concerts, seminars and celebration.

In the mid-1990s the community began fund-raising efforts to purchase a building. Members of the building committee held yard sales and approached potential funders. In September of 2000, the community bought a property, a former Christian church which had fallen into disrepair, on Rio Grande Boulevard in Albuquerque’s lush North Valley. While the property was paid in full, it required significant maintenance. The community banded together, cleaning up the horrible mess and clearing out the adjoining buildings. People painted, laid tile, and cleared the ground for the gardens and stage that they envisioned for services and performances. People were optimistic, laughing about the leaky roofs, perpetually open windows, and uninhabitable rooms. It was home, and like a blank canvass, was inscribed simultaneously with present tension and hope for the future.

Lynn developed new programming and the community met for Shabbat and High Holiday services in the new building. On September 11, 2001, shortly after the move into the synagogue, the United States was rocked when an Islamic militant sect, al-Qaeda high-jacked four passenger planes for suicide attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. People around the world watched as the first plane flew into the World Trade Center
complex in New York City. In disbelief and horror, those watching saw the building collapse amid searing flames and curling smoke, and the weight of the loss of life took hold in the hearts and minds of many. The word “terror” entered the national discourse in a new and aggressive way as fear and anti-Muslim sentiment was perpetuated by politicians, the media and through daily discussions.

In the face of this catastrophe, Lynn and members of the Nahalat Shalom community remained committed to peace. Lynn called a meeting, of which I was a part, and asked, “What can we, as a congregation, do about this situation?” Following up on the congregation’s desire to connect with the Muslim community in Albuquerque, she met with an Imam, Abdul Rauf Campos Marquetti, to collaborate and plan a Muslim-Jewish Peace Walk as a response to September 11, as well as the continued strife between Israel and Palestine. On April 13, 2002, I joined a crowd of more than 250 people representing numerous religions and political positions who arrived at Congregation Nahalat Shalom to make a 6.6 mile pilgrimage of peace from the synagogue to the Islamic Center of Albuquerque. As we marched, Lynn chanted:

“Let us say salaam!” and we responded, “Salaam!”

“Let us say Shalom!”

“Shalom!”

“Let us say peace in the languages that we love!”

Martha Dominguez, who attended the event, described it on the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) blog, *Caught in the Crossfire: After 9/11 Stories.*

The Islamic Center of Albuquerque and Congregation Nahalat Shalom invited people of all faiths to participate in a peace pilgrimage between a synagogue and a mosque on April 13...Over [250] people participated in the pilgrimage walk, various community speakers expressed their support
for the voices on all sides who remain committed to honoring the dignity and security of both peoples. They spoke about how, at a time of despair after the inhumanity of September 11, we have to choose hope. As people of faith, we remain committed to a future based on mutual recognition. An enduring security for Israel inextricably linked to a secure and viable Palestine that, at long last, realizes the dream of freedom…During the walk, people released white doves for peace, and carried signs that read "Salam and Shalom". Prayers were part of the march from beginning to end, and the pilgrimage made stops at various areas of the community. Peace and unity was the chant of the people as they walked (http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughtinthecrossfire/after911.html: January 4, 2013).

Lynn’s leadership, events such as these, and the dedication of many individuals created a vibrant, and at the time, twenty-year old community that boasted many artists and activists yet held no accountants. For a variety of reasons, including the unorthodox nature of the ritual performed at Congregation Nahalat Shalom, the influence of Lynn’s reputation, the continuation of liberal programming regarding Palestine and Israel, as well as the diversity of the congregation membership which included those from the LGBTQ community and others who were in marriages with non-Jewish partners, Congregation Nahalat Shalom remained at the margins of more conservative Jewish establishments, and was frequently referred to as “nonchalant shalom,” or “the hippie synagogue.”

In the end, the pressures of managing a large physical synagogue space in need of repair, and the changing needs of a growing community, conflicted with Lynn’s growing desires to engage more directly with social activism on a global scene. In 2004, she began negotiations to shift from acting rabbi to rabbi emeritus. It was a difficult and emotional time for Lynn and the members of the community, yet Lynn remained invested in the community she founded and loved. When I asked her about the changes and stages in her
life, and why she had moved to New Mexico and now felt compelled to leave, she said, “You know, when I moved here, I had spent 10 years on the circuit. So by that time, I was more in a nesting mode…And so it just evolved, and it was really a matter of building relationships with people and trying to create a space…and this is a synagogue of people who want to play, and have fun, and explore things.” She stopped, looked thoughtful and added, “Being Jewish in New Mexico. I think Rebecca Solomon said it wonderfully, ‘When you walk into the shul you don’t have to leave part of yourself behind. You can just be who you are, and think what you think, and say what you say, and nobody is going to drop dead if you mention Palestinians.’” She concluded, “It has been an amazing place to be, but now it is time to move on.”

When Lynn left, members of the congregation experienced loss, and tried to determine what their identity would be even as they grieved. After a year-long series of conversations about what qualities members wished to have in a new rabbi and in what direction the community wished to grow, a rabbinic search committee conducted an extensive search, and in January 2006, the congregation hired Rabbi Deborah Brin.

Deborah was one of the first women to be ordained a rabbi in the United States by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1985. Involved in the early Jewish feminist movement, twelve step movement, LGBTQ movement and most recently in the environmental movement, Deborah once told me that she finds it amusing that compared to Lynn, she is considered “normative.” Deborah feels that the community here is a good fit for her. She tells me, “We [meaning Nahalat Shalom] are always going to be on the edge. We’re edgy folk. I used to joke, we’re tzitzit. This was about myself when I first
came out, but it is also about Nahalat Shalom. It is always going to be on the edge. But being on the edge, you’re still part of the fabric.”

Deborah, an effective diplomat, activated the positive working relationships she had cultivated throughout the years with people at the Jewish Federation and at Jewish Family Services of Albuquerque, and feels strongly about working to bring Nahalat Shalom into conversation with members of the larger Albuquerque Jewish community. One day, when I sat across the table from her in her office at Nahalat Shalom, Deborah said, “I’ve been having the opportunity to have coffee lately with some of the fairly entrenched members of the Jewish community. Entrenched is the wrong word, but you know, the muckety-mucks, the moneyed-in-the-middle people. They are glad that I am the new rabbi, and are interested in supporting the congregation in whatever way they can. They are very clear that it’s not the kind of place they want to be, but they know that it’s the one shul in town that makes it possible for people who have a mixture of identities in their families to be part of the Jewish world, and for them that’s important.”

Six years later, this pattern remains consistent. Deborah is frequently involved with, and presides with, other rabbis and cantors from the broader community. She helped bring Judith Plaskow, a well-known Jewish feminist, as a presenter to an interdenominational Albuquerque Jewish audience. She has participated in Rabbis for Human Rights106, an organization founded to defend human rights for vulnerable people.

106 Rabbis for Human Rights is the only rabbinic voice of conscience in Israel, defending human rights of marginalized communities within Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The organization was founded in 1988, and today has over 100 members—all Israelis and all ordained Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Renewal rabbis as well as some rabbinical students (http://rhr.org.il/eng/about — Retrieved on January 21, 2013).
communities in Israel and Palestine. She has also worked hard to continue building the community itself. Congregation Nahalat Shalom is now surrounded with beautiful gardens, is handicap accessible, has beautiful new doors, a new bimah and ark, and a newly renovated Heder space. It is no longer uncommon to see members of other communities participating in High Holiday services, or to listen as Min, Shefa or others join in the services and celebrations.

*From stories of a synagogue to storying a synagogue: Performing Congregation Nahalat Shalom*

*Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Lynn’s Words*

These stories of Congregation Nahalat Shalom, like the rabbis’ stories of their own lives, provide histories of living, coherent, growing entities. Whereas this history could be told in a concise, linear form, I have chosen instead to convey the memories of events and milestones in this chapter through stories told in public situations and through community interactions. Here, Lynn narrates the space of Congregation Nahalat Shalom providing the listener/reader with information about contexts, times, places and people. Through her stories, we know how and when the community was founded (i.e. in 1982 by a group of people desiring a different kind of Judaism in Albuquerque). We know that the ‘place’ of the Congregation shifted from back yard to living room, from store front to church, eventually taking root in the neglected yet fertile grounds of the North Valley. Even so, these narratives do not just explain relevant ‘historical’ information. They are common stories, shared recollections with the potential to elicit visceral responses from listeners who have participated in the exact moments the stories reference, other moments with similar contexts, or in some cases emotional realties, values or experiences that
resonate with their own memories, and ignite within them the desire to be a part of this specific Jewish community.

Jonathan Boyarin suggests that memory is a focal point for the Jewish community (1994). He writes, “…memory is…a potential for creative collaboration between present consciousness and the experience or expression of the past” (1994:22). Jewish identity “relies on the contingent narrative associations between generations that are coming and those that are going” (1994:144). The community of Congregation Nahalat Shalom is created as memories of how it came into being are recounted not only by the rabbi, but by the community members as well. As they participate in the creation of a new, different, and personal community, individual members find space to challenge previously held understandings of the practice of Judaism and the parameters of Jewish community.

Esther, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, told me “When I walked in [to Nahalat Shalom] I was skeptical. I didn’t have good memories of being Jewish as a child…It just wasn’t for me. The two rabbis in my past, both men, were good people I’m sure, but they seemed stern. Kind of aloof. I just didn’t relate to them. I felt like they didn’t understand me…or represent me. I felt judged. But, when I walked through these doors…well, this community just became my family. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Rabbi Lynn. She inspired me. She freed me to feel Jewish again.”

While Congregation Nahalat Shalom provides a literal space for Esther’s experience, it is actually the dynamic interplay between the rabbi, context, and shared experiences that transforms Esther’s perspectives, ritual practice and Jewish identity. Lynn is Esther’s rabbi in this story, but the entire community becomes her “family.” Still, as the rabbi, Lynn is responsible for inspiring and motivating community members,
shaping content and practice within the community, and crafting a space in which people feel adequately supported to challenge previous beliefs and discover new ones.

In this series of stories we can see how a loosely bound group of people becomes a community, and gain understanding about how the rabbi influences the focus of those with whom she works. There is a progression from Lynn as a solitary agent of change to Lynn as a leader/participant engaging others in collective acts that are performed to instigate broader change(s). As the story begins, Lynn is a lone voice, challenging androcentric stories and patriarchal power structures in moments such as the storytelling performance in which she introduces her version of Lilith to Jews outside of her immediate community, and in her direct response to an antagonist rabbi’s challenge to her rabbinate and practice. While the community acts as a backdrop to these stories, the people are not active elements in the tale until such time as the community grows and Lynn’s ideas are heard, adopted, and enacted in a collective and embodied way, effectively transforming tradition and creating a new Jewish space.

In Lynn’s story of her trip to Palestine, for example, she reintroduces the reader to a familiar thread in her life stories, a focus on peace work and advocacy. During the trip she considers the textual and religious contexts that prompted an extreme act of violence. She recommits to this path, encouraging members of her community to transform the way they practice Purim. As she teaches about “restorative justice,” through context and feminist revisionings of the original story she engages her community in diversity training and community service thereby creating a positive practice designed to transform less desired attitudes that focus solely on revenge and/or ethnocentrism perpetuated by unchallenged readings of the original biblical story.
As some point in this storied history, Congregation Nahalat Shalom becomes a living, breathing community, led by, but separate from the rabbi, as a container for experience and Jewish practice is constructed. When Lynn leaves the congregation, members experience a momentary ‘identity crisis,’ discussing directions for growth and considering the type of leader they would like to see help them in their new development. When the committee selects Deborah as the new rabbi, a more moderate, less politicized rabbi by comparison, they make a decision to build a community around a rabbi whose skills are well suited to fostering the day-to-day operations of their community, a choice which seems to affirm their desire to create positive and lasting relationships within the Congregation and into the deeper fabric of the Albuquerque community.

Deborah embraces the role setting quickly about the tasks at hand continuing to develop the physical space, building bridges to the broader Jewish community in New Mexico, and establishing a ‘learning’ community in which people engage in traditional aspects of Judaism while personalizing their spiritual practices. Still, as a new leader, stepping into a role previously filled so completely with Lynn’s vision and reputation that change did not occur without challenges. Seeking to meet the needs of the community in this initial period of flux and others, Deborah uses the consistency of ritual moments, and the ongoing creation of the ritual space, to inspire members with her point of view regarding spiritual practice, community development, and Jewish identity. To understand how Deborah stepped into the role of rabbi and helped to shape an existent community, I began to consider the role of performance.
An Approach to Performance

While we generally think of performance in terms of theater, music, or dance, performance is a term used by anthropologists, linguists, and more interdisciplinary performance scholars as well. One aspect of performance that I find helpful for this discussion derives from Richard Bauman’s definition of performance as “a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill” (1986:3). The rabbis, as spiritual leaders and teachers, are by profession, public figures, and therefore subject to such expectations of competence from members of the Jewish communities and others with whom they work. While prayer and ritual order are honed through extensive rabbinic training and Torah studies, a rabbi’s ability to speak effectively, to imbue ritual moments or public talks with emotion, intelligence, wit, intimacy, poignancy, and in this case, to provide vision and direction sufficient to create new communities and spiritual environments in New Mexico, is a different matter altogether.

Bauman and Charles Briggs call performance a “poetic function” (1990:73). It is artful, reflexive. They write, “…performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking…performance puts the act of speaking on display—objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73). The authors’ suggestion that there is “scrutiny by the audience” can refer to aspects of rabbinic leadership that can be open to direct comparisons, such as specific prayer and ritual selection. Frequently, however, listeners scrutinize the less scripted, stylistic tones and messages of each performance as the storyteller brings her own life narrative, sensibilities, and passions to speaking engagements, Jewish practice,
and more broadly speaking to the spaces and communities she helps to create. It is these incomparable aspects of leadership performance that congregants, as sovereign agents in their choices of spiritual paths and religious affiliations, weigh when making decisions about which rabbis to whom they most clearly relate, and to which synagogues they choose to belong.

Many of the life stories in this chapter, like the Kayabi autobiographical narratives studied by Suzanne Oakdale, are performed and situated within ritual contexts. Oakdale notes that the Kayabi leaders, who participate in her research, use autobiography in ritual performances to describe their own experiences of life in heavily colonized Amazonian society. She observes that autobiographical narratives told during shamanic cures, mortuary rites and in political rhetoric provide a “medium through which experiences can circulate between people” (2005:173). Much like the Kayabi leaders whose stories “encourage others to approach contemporary problems in specific ways” (Oakdale 2005:173), through life story performance, the rabbis provide examples from their own lived experiences of how they have, and we can infer, others could or should, negotiate spiritual challenges, encourage meaning in day-to-day life, and build sustainable relationships and create communities that offer opportunities for spiritual growth. These life stories accordingly, though often beautiful and poetic, communicate matters of importance, namely a rabbi’s perspective on spirituality, politics, instruction, identity, and more.

The life stories in this chapter, performed publically, are not simply the property of a singular person, they become in some ways, shared or collective stories of people participating in a common experience, a “productive and generative time” (Bakhtin
Mikhail Bakhtin claimed that language exists “on the border-line between oneself and the other” (1987:293). In his estimation, language belongs partially to the storyteller and partially to the person listening. Bakhtin’s description is particularly relevant in regards to development of community and space, as both are formed, in effect, on this “border-line,” through interactions and relationships, as sharing one’s life story creates an active space between the storyteller and listeners.

Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson explain that this active space is developed, “when voice and body coincide in performance” (in Madison and Hamera 2006:157). In this process, embodied individuals “marked by experience and the discursive forces of sex, race, class, age,” etc. engage in the acts of “hearing and voicing, gesturing, seeing and being seen, feeling and being touched” (Langellier and Peterson 2006:157). The stories in this chapter are told by distinct women, inhabiting unique spaces as spiritual leaders and storytellers. Significantly, these storytellers reference their lives, as self-aware women, growing and changing, as individuals, as Victor Turner maintained, “man”, and in this case woman, is a “self-performing animal—his performances are, in a way, reflexive, in performing he reveals himself to himself” (1987:81). Fully revealed and embodied, according to Turner, storytellers and performers are capable of “converting particular values and ends” into a “system” (1987:97), a notion I find compelling as I consider how Lynn, Deborah, and Malka make meaning, and create structures, by performing stories of their life experiences.

*Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Deborah’s Words*

As a newly installed rabbi, Deborah embraced the High Holy Days as the prime opportunity to introduce herself and communicate her new vision for the community.
Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services are filled with people who regularly attend services and others who appear rarely or exclusively for the High Holy Days. Ritually, the High Holy Days align with Turner’s 1969 account of the ritual process (a retooling of Arnold van Gennep’s original “rite of passage” circa 1909 translated in 1960) as those in attendance are separated from one state of being (i.e. the persons they were over the last year), move into states of liminality (i.e. entering a state of prayer and repentance), and emerge ten days later as people who are ritually cleansed, and prepared to engage in the new year having learned from the mistakes of the last year and received forgiveness from God, those wronged, and oneself. Rites of passage such as the High Holy Days are ideal for introducing new ideas, reinforcing values, and building group cohesion as they are shared, performative and subsequently transformative moments.

On Monday, October 1, 2006, Deborah stepped onto the bimah to lead Yom Kippur services. Her short brown hair was capped with an ivory yarmulke, a Navajo print tallit draped across her shoulders. In nice, white comfortable clothes, a rabbi’s version of Yom Kippur business casual, Deborah instantly set a new tone as ritual leader for Congregation Nahalat Shalom. She introduced the cantor, Beth Cohen, and other musicians. She led the audience into prayers with a serious and studied focus. When it was time for her Yom Kippur sermon, Deborah placed a written copy on the podium, looked out into the crowd, and read, “Choose life.”

Today’s Torah portion has a verse in it that I love: “I call as witness for you today the heavens and the earth: both life and death I place before you now, both blessing and curse…Choose life that you may live.” (Deut. 30:15-16).

“Choose life.” In the Hebrew it is the imperative. Choose life. It is a command. Choose life. It is a command, what kind of a choice is it?
Choose life, Moses tells us, even as he himself knows that his own death is imminent and that he will not cross over the River Jordan. He will never set foot in the Land. He will only be permitted to see it from afar, see it from atop the mountain right before his death.

This covenant, by which we choose and are chosen, has perplexed us ever since it began at Mt. Sinai. I set before you life and death and I command you to choose life. Who would choose death? Isn’t the whole myth of God’s Chosen People more of an involuntary draft than an invitation to us to make a choice?

[sarcastically] Mount Sinai was hardly a summit meeting between equals with talking points on either side and skillful negotiation reaching consensus. In the midrash found in the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Avdim bar Hama tells us that God influenced the people to enter into the covenant by lifting the entire mountain up and holding it over their heads.

It was pretty much a take it or leave it proposition, with some pretty heavy threats of annihilation as a consequence of walking away. At that time, those who said, “yes” to the Ten Commandments and the covenant with God, were a weary group of former slaves who had few prospects and not much experience making decisions on their own.

Seen from the vantage point of spirit, however, the choice of our ancestors was quite remarkable. In their fear, misery and confusion, they expressed the willingness to have faith in the future, to trust in God and to undertake the discipline of law. They chose to be a people and to raise up their children to be a holy people, for generations and generations to come.

WE are the inheritors of that opportunity to make a spiritual choice. In the 21st century, in North America, our choice is not a collective decision as it was at Sinai, but an intimately personal one. Each one of us is faced with the choice of acknowledging our Jewish identity and agreeing to be a part of the community. By ourselves we are prone to feel isolated, alienated, abandoned. As part of the community we feel connected to others and to the Source of Divinity in the Cosmos. Alone we are prone to feelings of fear: fear of death, fear of violence, fear of chaos, and fear of personal failure. Together we perform the positive and life affirming act of turning our will over to the Fount of Life.

Together in community, we can realize the ultimate freedom, the Divine freedom, to Choose Life and to be free of fear.

Yom Kippur is a day of choice and, since the gates of repentance are closing, there is a deadline, the clock is ticking. The rituals of the day are designed to put us into that state of emotional agitation, anticipation,
engagement of choice. Making a choice can be distressing. Making a choice can be pleasant and exciting. Today, I encourage you to choose life, choose to let go of the burdensome baggage, choose to be as fully alive as possible, become your best self. What are we to do to choose life? What does that mean?

Take a look at page 11 in your supplement. The 7th aliyah, verse 16 tells us: “For I command you this day, to love the Lord as your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments…” L’ahava et Adonai Elohecha, Lalechet bidrachav, v’leshmore mitzvotai…

Ultimately, these simple and elegant words are the essence or our spiritual life as Jews. Let’s take a closer look at each one.

1. Love God. To choose life means to apprehend the Divine Presence as the Source of Life and all that we value. Nothing stands in the place of the Divine. No person, book, object or idea can be in the Center of All. To love God means to create a sacred space in the heart where we can be in right relationship with all things. When the mind and the heart are unified we love God. Our being is united, at one. As Arthur Waskow would say, at-one-ment. Atonement is being at one with God.

2. Walk in God’s ways. To choose life means to carry on in our daily-ness with an awareness of the sacred path, to come into alignment with the Source of Life, so that divine energies move through us and connects us to our purpose in life, and in our community. Kavannah, the conscious act of forming a sacred intention, is a Jewish way to stay in contact with the Divine Energy. To choose life means to consciously form the kavannah to be a conduit for the Divine Energy, to be of service to others, to be a part of the life force that can repair the world. God has no hands but our hands. Let us use them for the good of all.

3. Keep God’s commandments. We do so by paying attention to the Voice that calls out to us, the Voice that came to us in the thunder and the lightening at Mt. Sinai, and the Still Small Voice that is within each of us. Listen to God’s voice. We are a part of an ordered universe. Chaos becomes organized, order and predictability are the way of God. Sh’ma Yisrael. To choose life means to listen to the Voice wherever we hear it, wherever we find it. There is an underlying unity to all that exists and we are a part of it. Choosing life means to listen to the law, both that which is written and the still small voice of conscience within.

Take a look at page 11 of your supplement, verses 11-15. “Surely, this instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you,
nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, ‘Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?’ No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. See I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.”

I understand these texts to mean that in each moment of our lives we have the opportunities to choose behaviors and attitudes that enhance life or diminish it. The ways in which we comport ourselves brings more blessings into our lives or more distress. We are either in the flow or alienated, isolated and alone. Moment to moment we choose.

It is inevitable that we will have bad moments and difficult days. We will lose our temper, be overwhelmed with frustration, anxiety and despair. What does one do in these situations? If you find that you have behaved inappropriately, apologize and correct your error as soon as possible. If you find yourself overwhelmed with too much to do or emotions that are engulfing, try to remember to pause and breathe and reconnect. Don’t isolate. Connect. An uplifting attitude and menschlich behavior is not too hard. Remember that you already know what you need to do. It does not require special expertise; it is as close as your own breath.

We don’t need any special expertise to learn how to be Godly, to be in sync with the underlying Oneness of the Universe. No, it is in our mouths, in our hearts. Every day, all day, we have opportunities to reconnect with the Sacred. Our beating heart, our breathing lungs, can be pathways to God. Notice that being alive is amazing. This moment is wonderful. This moment offers us the opportunity to be thankful. Please join me in the traditional blessing for acknowledging our gratitude for being alive and aware of this moment. Blessed are you, Eternal One, Our God, the Sovereign of All Worlds, who gave us life, sustained us, and brought us to this moment. Baruch…

When I re-read this sermon, I am struck by Deborah’s concern with community, as well as her understanding of ritual as a means of affirming identity, teaching connection, and developing structures to support the changing, growing community of Congregation Nahalat Shalom. Rituals and community interactions such as these are essential in creating what Victor Turner has famously termed, “communitas” (1969). Congregation Nahalat Shalom, clearly a community of people whose self-perceptions, and the perceptions of others seemed to accentuate their position on the margins of
Albuquerque’s Jewish center, as newcomers, artists, poets, musicians, sexual and gender minorities, new families and political liberals, had to this point occupied a liminal space, betwixt and between, a central location that outsiders might consider Jewish social norms. This condition seemed at times to be perpetuated by Lynn’s leadership style as a renegade and activist, who was and is perpetually on the margins striving to rectify global injustices through critiques of social, religious and nationalistic norms. Once the building was purchased, however, the swirling energies of the community focused on this physical synagogue space, and increasing needs of some members to feel rooted would, temporarily, trump concerns with global peace activism.

While some might find it curious that community members seemed to shift their desires and commitments, I suggest that such questions regarding personal and community identity are inevitable as people confront such a manifestation of community as an empty space not yet inscribed with values and memories. As Steven Feld and Keith Basso contend, creating a sense of place involves, “the experiential and expresses ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, [and] contested” (1996:11). Without the guidance of a familiar leader, members of the community had an opportunity to question their spiritual needs and imagine a community that would meet new or unvoiced needs. In the face of these questions, Deborah’s commitment to connection and community would help shape the foundation of the newly housed congregation.

In “Choose Life,” Deborah situates her concern for rooted community at the center of the service explaining that choosing life is a commandment, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and to fully choose life one must make the spiritual choice to choose
community. As an introduction to a new community, this is a fairly direct and powerful one. Deborah goes on record, so to speak, as one who believes in community as a core part of spiritual practice. She tells her audience that when alone, people are prone to feelings of isolation, alienation and abandonment, and a multitude of fears ranging from fear of death to fear of failure. Through community, people have the potential to feel connected to others and to “the Source of Divinity.”

This message has particular significance during the High Holy Days as it is a point at which people are approached to reaffirm their choices to be part of the community or encouraged to become new members if they are not. Synagogue leaders make an annual pitch for funds during these services, and members pledge to pay membership dues, join various boards or committees, and commit to another year of membership in the community. While some may feel reticent to commit to the time or financial constraints of such membership, Deborah seeks to allay such fears saying, “Together in community, we can realize the ultimate freedom, the Divine freedom, to Choose Life and to be free of fear.” Deborah’s message reaches beyond such mundane choices as synagogue membership however, for her, choosing life, and community, is to be “fully alive,” to be “your best self,” to be “sacred,” and to be “in right relationship with all things.” This last part, “right relationship with all things,” is also an important turn of phrase as a response to, or a posture to adopt in the midst of, change. As a community that has undergone transitions in leadership, space, and identity, as well as changes within their own families, identities, spiritual practice, or other aspects of their lives, Deborah reminds her new community that there is an “underlying Oneness of the
Universe,” a very cornerstone of Judaism as indicated in the Shema, and that they can always choose to be a part of this sense of greatness and godliness.

Basing her sermon on Deuteronomy, Deborah engages the Torah to guide her audience through this choice. She reads, “‘Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it? No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity.’”

Deborah breaks this down for those listening. She says, “I understand these texts to mean that in each moment of our lives we have the opportunities to choose behaviors and attitudes that enhance life or diminish it...moment to moment we choose.” Such reflections, reduce the distance between Deborah and her community. She is not speaking to them as a leader gifted with all of the answers. She is like them. She too has had “bad moments and difficult days.” She has been “overwhelmed with frustration, anxiety and despair.”

As in the life stories I elicited, Deborah consistently reveals very personal moments in her life in which she has struggled and overcome. In the performed context of this sermon, these hardships and the ensuing self-examination are teachable moments as she connects to and guides members of her community.

*Storying HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism*

Malka’s community, HaMakom, while only a short, hour long drive to Santa Fe from Congregation Nahalat Shalom, is a different community altogether. HaMakom is located in Santa Fe, coined “The City Different.” When I pulled into the parking lot, of

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107 *Shema Yisrael* (Hebrew: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל) are the first two words of a section of the Torah that is a main prayer in morning and evening Jewish services. It is translated: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one,” and is found in Deuteronomy 6:4.
HaMakom for the first time, I was impressed by the sheer beauty of the venue. Subaru Outbacks, Toyota and Honda hybrids, the occasional Smart car and small Sports Utility Vehicles formed colorful dots against the breathtaking natural beauty of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Piñons, junipers and sage brush formed a mottled panorama against a brilliant deep blue sky. I remember distinctly inhaling the early fall, and thinking that the rarified air was void of the emissions of excessive traffic, the sounds of over-population, and the realities of deprivation.

I entered HaMakom on a Sunday evening in September, 2004, for the Kol Nidre service of Yom Kippur. I fell in line with others who filed through the open glass doors of St. Bede’s Episcopal Church, as St. Bede’s houses this Jewish congregation as well. Morsels of conversation floated above individuals dressed in hues of white accentuated by brightly colored, silk or beaded kippot and vivid talits. I realized a bit too late that I had made a wardrobe error, wearing boots to services, forgetting Malka’s reminder to avoid leather shoes on Yom Kippur. Even so, there was no admonishment from the familiar faces. A smiling woman greeted me at the door, commenting that we both are wearing similar white linen tunics. Glancing down, I noted the similar necklines and smiled, as she added, “But yours has pockets!”

There were two tables set up, one for members who have purchased tickets in advance for the High Holy Days, and a table for non-members who have not yet purchased tickets. I moved to the non-member table, falling into the latter category as I tended to pay for events rather than membership since I moved so frequently between synagogues. I greeted Marcelle, the administrator for the congregation, handing her my bundle of cash, and saying, “I don’t think I’m on the list. I didn’t get my letter back to
you.” Smiling knowingly, the consummate professional, Marcelle looked down at her list, and placed a check next to my name.

“I put you on there,” she tells me, and thanked me for my generosity, a detail that I add only to indicate that as a doctoral student working between multiple field sites, my contribution was probably not as significant as that of many others in attendance, but this difference never seemed to matter when I attended services or events at HaMakom. The people there always worked to make me feel welcome.

When I entered the sanctuary, I was handed a mahzor,108 and took a seat in the pews to the side, taking note of the people who surrounded me. The rows were lined by many sporting the natural silver locks popular among the fifty to sixty five set of Santa Fe. Many wore clothing made of natural fibers, or in some cases, more conservative dress attire. Fantastic eyewear was apparent in all directions, as eyeglasses seemed equally fashionable and functional for the well-appointed individuals in attendance. I realized that I was one of the youngest people in the crowd. A small blond girl with a pretty dress and silver sparkly shoes, one of only a handful of children in attendance, flitted among the pews beaming and twirling. While I was in the minority in terms of age, I was definitely among the majority in regards to gender. Women seemed to outnumber men four to one.

Services began as a cellist played the haunting melody of Kol Nidre. From the back of the sanctuary, Malka and the Hazzan109, Cindy Freedman, walked solemnly up the isle to the bimah. Malka, the most conservative rabbi with whom I work, led services to the letter of the book, offering explanation and critique as she moved along. Malka’s presentation style is always very thoughtful; her words chosen carefully with regards to

108 Prayer Book
109 Cindy’s preferred title, meaning Cantor, a musician trained in Jewish vocal arts and prayer and who leads the congregation in the prayer/musical aspects of the services.
Before the end of services, Malka explained that although she loves to hug people as they leave, it is not the thing to do on Yom Kippur. She also told us which appropriate greetings we could use for the evening. After a formal procession out of the sanctuary, Malka stood and the back, and greeted every person who passed.

HaMakom has an interesting history in the Santa Fe Jewish world. Whereas Lynn was without preexisting relations in the Albuquerque Jewish community, Malka had served as a lay leader at Temple Beth Shalom, a Reform synagogue, for six years as she studied for the rabbinate. The author of twenty books for adults and children, Malka began her rabbinic studies when she was in her forties. Amidst the many changes occurring in Malka’s life owing to her divorce and changing relationship status, she did not find the correct space to study until she went to New York, to the Academy for Jewish Religion, at the age of fifty. She was ordained after two and a half years, and returned to New Mexico in 1998. Believing that Beth Shalom would create a space for her upon her return, Malka was deeply affected when she was told that there was no paid position for her and that she could volunteer as a teacher, but not as a rabbi, even though the congregation was without a rabbi at that point.

Malka looks resigned as she tells me, “I didn’t have a place. I didn’t have anything to do.” Beth Shalom asked her to serve with a man from the congregation. Even though he was not a rabbi, he made it a point to tell her, “There can only be one rabbi. You’re the associate rabbi.” She served with him for six months, without pay. The board then voted to give her a one year contract, yet rescinded the offer. She recounts, “Within forty-eight hours, it is overturned and there is going to be a search.” Malka sent in her portfolio and waited to be interviewed. The search committee led focus groups and sent
questionnaires to the four hundred members of the community. She has been told that three hundred community members wrote “get Malka” on their questionnaires. After eight years of serving the community, and six months of waiting for an interview, Malka withdrew her application after being told that the search committee did not know when they would get around to interviewing her.

Malka was courted by Congregation Beit Tikva the following year only to be disappointed once again. The congregation, who rented space at Capital Christian for the High Holy Days, was forced to let Malka go when the fundamentalist Christian church sent a letter to the board. Malka remembers the letter as reading, “This is a very difficult letter to write. We love you. We love your people. We always want you here, and yet we have heard from one of our congregants that you have a lesbian who you have just hired. And of course, you understand we cannot have a homosexual, any more than a fornicator or an adulterer preach from our pulpit.” Having been hired, Malka was unceremoniously unhired.

She says that this second rejection caused her to go “back into therapy.” She tells me, “I was nuts. I mean there was a spiritual betrayal of a type.” That same year, the events of 9-11 occurred and the rabbi, like so many others in the world experienced a deep sense of anguish and confusion. In the wake of the tragedy, Malka built a sukkah to celebrate the harvest holiday of Sukkot, and to re-connect with others who were likewise feeling disconnected. Eighty people came to the rabbis’ house for the holiday. She was then asked to host a Chanukah party. Again, more than eighty people showed up. Malka went to St. Bede’s and spoke with Father Richard Murphy. St. Bede’s, an Episcopal Church, known for its openness to traditional and nontraditional families, welcomed
Malka’s community. Father Murphy told Malka, “It would be good to have you here.”

Seven years later, the community, which would become HaMakom, still calls St. Bede’s home.

HaMakom, which means place, a name conceived coincidentally by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, like Congregation Nahalat Shalom, is somewhat left of the center due to its feminized congregation membership (women outnumber men) and its high percentage of LGBTQ members. Like Nahalat Shalom, membership continues to grow. Of her community, Malka tells me:

HaMakom showed me that now I had the opportunity for the laboratory. I could really cook something new. I didn’t have to fit a job description. I didn’t have a tradition to fit. People who gathered here…all had something in common that is inchoate, that longing. They were with me because they really liked what was going on…It was my kind of Judaism that was frankly traditional in practice, yet completely egalitarian, and intellectually challenging, and most of all a place where you could try out being the person you really wanted to be, the one you were born to be.

Like the other rabbis collaborating in this research, Malka’s sermons set a tone for her community. As a similar point of reference to the material presented for Congregation Nahalat Shalom, I turn to one of Malka’s High Holidays sermons, from 2005, to explore the ways Malka engages her congregation, and uses her pulpit to model spiritual practices, good leadership, and supportive community in ways that she feels are important and edifying for those she serves.

**ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP**

One of the reasons that I went to rabbinical school was because I thought it was eternity I wanted to study, not profit and loss. Imagine my surprise when I found myself in a mandatory class on leadership with a book list of titles and included names like Stephen Covey, Warren Bennis, and Peter Drucker. I read books about the difference between managers and leaders, the importance of board minutes, and how to get the most out of one's employees.
Being a rabbi clearly involved more than knowing how to pray. Some books were commonsensical; know your customer and be sure to deliver the best product you can. Others promised success if you adhered to spiritual principles such as honesty, integrity, and empathy.

Who knew that a rabbi was a kind of CEO? In truth, the path to enlightened leadership applies to anyone who has the charge to show the way, including parents, as we discovered last night.

Those who know me understand very well that I came to this work with a treasury of inexperience. I was, and remain, a writer, and something of an introvert. It took more than a village. It took New York City to give me the confidence and faith that I could be a rabbi, one who could lead Jews in the direction of God, Torah, and Israel.

In this season of confession, I'll tell you that I could hardly belong to a congregation or be on a temple board, let alone serve as a rabbi. God and my seminary had a plan, however. To be ordained I had to serve a community. On my first and only interview, I gratefully accepted the position offered me, and it was there that I learned how to be a rabbi.

Their hiring me was my first lesson. That I did not have five minutes of experience wasn't an obstacle to this chavurah that had enjoyed 25 years of illustrious rabbis from the Reform movement. They took a chance and followed their intuition. Behavior is contagious; if they thought I could be their leader, then maybe I could. They were looking for something new, and my being a woman was already a revolution for them. Something told them that we would be a good match, and they were right.

We met once a month for Friday night services, High Holidays, and a few teachings during the year. Their custom was to have a couple of members — they were around 25 families — work with the rabbi to create a Friday night service.

After seeing my quizzical and panicked face in response to their questions about restructuring committees, they quickly determined that I would be of no use in helping them with organization, so they left me to be their spiritual leader.
The only trouble was, I had no idea how to do it. Did they know how much I needed a glass of water on the bimah because I was dry-mouthed with terror at each service that first year? What did I know that they didn't know? Why should they listen to me?

My rabbi, Harold Schulweis, once said that a rabbi has two tasks, to bring forth creativity in others and to reveal oneself. Was I supposed to let them know that they'd hired a very insecure person? Could I turn my humility into an asset as a leader?

I begged the seminary to let me out of this responsibility, but they made clear that to be ordained you must have a pulpit. So I struggled along, got a little less nervous, and one day God answered me through Torah when I read the Torah portion in Exodus about Moses as a young shepherd who one day sees a radically amazing sight, a bush burning with fire.

Much as he is awed, he is frightened by it, and when God calls his name, he hides his face. God must say "Moses! Moses!" twice because he can't answer in his fear. He whispers, "Here I am!" God then tells him that he must go to the Pharaoh to get them freed from slavery.

"Ugh, maybe you have the wrong man. Who am I that I should be doing this?" Moses asks. God assures him that he won't be alone: God will be with him. But Moses protests, "They're going to say, who picked you to be our leader? What's your name?"

God tells him to say I've been sent by "ehyeh asher eyeh. I will be there howsoever I will be there." "Right," Moses thinks. "They're not going to listen to me!" God keeps at it, trying to assure him. Moses stammers, "But they're going to say, 'You haven't even seen God!' " So God resorts to Houdini tactics. "What's in your hand?" God asks.

"My shepherd's stick." "Throw it to the ground!" Moses throws it down and it turns into a snake. Once again Moses turns his head away, this time afraid of the snake. "Grab its tail," God commands, and when Moses does this, the snake became his staff again. "Do that, and they'll trust you," God assures.

You'd think this would convince anyone, but not our teacher, Moses. He wants to remind God that he can't speak clearly. God retorts, "You think I
don't know that? Who made you?! Now Go! Don't worry about your mouth. I'll put words into it."

Moses is still not convinced. He whines that he wants God to choose someone else, and at this point God goes ballistic. "God's anger burned" is how Torah reads. "You have a brother, Aaron! He's a good talker. He'll speak for you to the people. He'll be your mouth. Now take your stick and do magic with it!"

Well, I can't tell you how much better I felt after reading this. If God's faith in Moses got him to go forward, surely I could trust my new congregation's faith in me. Moshe Rabbeinu, my teacher and yours, is arguing with God in his insecurity. This was a chutzpah that encouraged me. More than simply identifying with his self-doubt, I came to see why Moses would become a leader for the ages. Moses is so human here, so afraid that he is not ready for primetime, the same way I felt. There is an expression that fear is a lack of faith. Thank God Moses lacks faith from time to time, too.

Yet it is his very doubt that makes him a great leader. Torah tells us that there was no man more humble: "More humble than any other person on earth."

Some have said that those who would be president are the least worthy of the position. Only humility can save us from the power of leadership. Moses never forgets whom he serves; God has chosen him for the task and has given him the gifts he needs to accomplish.

Every new book on leadership begins the same way: we are living in a time where we are in a crisis of leadership. From governments to schools to families, the sense that no one is in charge is pervasive. Just look at this country and Israel! We long for leadership yet we resist it, because those who have power too often lack the humility to know its source.

Like all our Torah heroes, Moses is a flawed man. Besides his lisp and insecurity, he has a terrible temper, and he'll pay for it later in the book. Perfection is not the criterion for a leader. Having a sovereign principle, i.e. knowing whom you serve, is. How often do we meet charismatic people whose ego doesn't see that each of us is in the divine image?
His humility allowed Moses to call upon the gifts of all the people to sustain the community. As Schulweis taught me, it's about bringing forth creativity in others. Some were priests and some served the priests. Aaron and Miriam, Moses' older siblings were subordinate to him, yet they and he knew that he could not succeed without them.

Moses was a shepherd in Midian when God appeared to him. We have a story that tells us why he was the one chosen. A baby kid ran away from the flock and Moses chases him until the kid stops by a stream for water. His heart was touched by the animal's thirst and he knew that he was exhausted. He lifted the kid into his arms and carried him back to the flock. God tells him, "Since you have such compassion for an animal, you shall surely pasture My flock, Israel."

Moses also carries the vision of Israel. He never forgets that he must free the people and lead them to a new land. He learns that courage isn't a lack of fear but not letting it defeat him. Pharaoh is great but God is greater. Again, when I looked for signs of God in my own reluctance, I found it in the kindness and support of my first community.

That was ten years ago. Now I am at another stage and once again Torah guides me. During the summer, we hear Moses' last words to the people. Although he is old and mightily tired of the people, he has trouble letting go. He begs to enter the land. After all, he's put up with rebellion, revolt, whining, and death for forty years, but it's no go.

God tells Moses to put his hand upon Joshua, his successor, and bless him. "Single out Joshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand upon him. Invest him with some of your majesty upon him, so that they may listen, the entire community." Moses does more than God asks; he places both hands upon Joshua. He gives him all his majesty, all his heart, and all his might.

Letting go with the grace, humility, and generosity of Moses is the challenge. Founding leaders are notorious for hanging around and weakening the authority of new leaders.

I am not only a rabbi, I am also a mother of grown children. I have shared with you my delight in becoming a grandmother. I've learned, most of the time, to keep my mouth shut and let my children raise their children. I am
now the grandmother, no longer the mother of our community, and here too, I am learning to be quiet and have faith in the strength of our community.

What I know is this: I am a teacher. The Talmud says about teachers of Torah, "More than the calf wishes to suck does the cow yearn to suckle." I will be your teacher as long as you give me that privilege.

I am more fortunate than Moses, because, with God's help, I will get to see the community move forward. Rather than wave the staff, I will learn to listen and follow the new leaders. I look forward to serving as an elder who can be counsel for individuals and the community. Meanwhile, a pot of soup will sit on my stove as I await your visit. May it be soon!

In Malka’s sermon themes of leadership, vulnerability and personal and social transformation respond to the inquiries of a congregation born of the Baby Boom. The majority of HaMakom members, like the rabbi herself, were born between 1946 and 1964. Dubbed the “Me Generation” by author Tom Wolfe, Baby Boomers, more so than generations in the past, are aware of their generational distinctiveness, and unlike their parents’ generation in which religious adherence and congregational membership were the norms, Boomers desire greater freedoms, and have cultivated a form of spiritual individualism, characterized by “spiritual quests” and “reflexivity” (Roof 1999), themes discussed previously in Chapter 5, and which I will visit again within the context of performance in Chapter 8.

Malka’s rabbinic style, like Deborah’s in many ways, is highly reflexive. In her sermon, “Enlightened Leadership,” Malka reveals many of her vulnerabilities as a leader; among them, introversion, inexperience, and self-doubt. Malka explains the process of how she overcomes these insecurities. She begins by considering the words of her rabbi, Harold Schulweis, that to be a rabbi one must “reveal” herself and “bring forth the
creativity in others.” Struggling with how she will be able to do these seemingly impossible tasks in her fear, God leads her to the answer in the Torah through the story of Moses. In the story, God calls Moses to lead His people, yet Moses is very frightened. Moses attempts to negotiate with God, and get out of this responsibility, but in the end, God wins. Even though Moses’s prophetic beginnings are not so auspicious, and he is by all accounts a flawed leader, in the end, he is able to bring out the best in his followers, lead them to the Promised Land, and pass his “majesty” and leadership to his successor, Joshua. Through this story, Malka finds a model for facing her own fears, and accepts her first pulpit position. Like Moses, her decision is rewarded by a community who welcomes her and teaches her to be a good rabbi, lessons she takes into her present community.

Malka’s reflection on her fear, her journey to overcome it, and her subsequent decision to be a humble leader, are more than a series of boilerplate lessons. This sermon speaks directly Malka’s community of “spiritual seekers,” who, like the Baby Boomers interviewed by Wade Clark Roof, may feel a “spiritual emptiness” and a desire to cultivate a meaningful inner life with deeper religious experiences (1999:310). Through her own experiences of doubt and loss of faith, she provides her community with tools to find this meaning: consult teachers/mentors, turn to the Torah, pray, and rely on the advice, strength and faith of community.

Placing her deficiencies and defenselessness at the center of the teaching is a significant strategy. A basic distrust of leaders is inherent in many of her congregation’s generation. Roof explains, “Boomers in great numbers questioned religious authority when they were growing up,” and as a result, “remained somewhat distrustful of
institutions” (1999:117). Malka, a product of the same generation, likely has the same issues of distrust, though she now finds herself in the challenging position of being the leader whose work it is to foster community among those in her congregation. She questions her own leadership, and that of others, naming a “crisis of leadership…From governments to schools to families” to “this country and Israel.” Malka’s internal struggle, demonstrates that she does not take her position lightly, that she is a different kind of leader than the more authoritarian, less reflexive, leaders in the world. In fact, Malka proposes a new model of leadership altogether, one that is flexible and participatory, a leadership model more commonly found in egalitarian feminist organizations than in traditional Jewish synagogues.

Malka takes the leader role out of the institution and places it within the domestic sphere of the family. She tells those listening that she was once the “mother” of both her children and the community, has shared her “delight” in becoming a “grandmother,” and feels that her role has shifted in in both family and community. Malka’s version of leadership is one in which imperfections become strengths, and leaders teach others to lead. Reciprocally, as the leader provides guidance to the community, the community’s faith makes the leader. Through this mutuality, a cycle is developed in which new leaders’ abilities can be encouraged, and the community can become sufficiently flexible to grow in new directions. In the past several years, Malka’s leadership, and the flexibility of the new community she has created have drawn others from the Santa Fe community. The congregation now has a visibly diversified membership, with larger numbers of male congregants, young families, and others who are new to the practice of Judaism.
Embracing Alterity: Creating Jewish Centers

Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom buck models of Jewish authority, those of the literal and nostalgic pasts, and I suggest the rigid, hierarchical, or androcentric models that persist in the present as well. While these new communities meet the changing needs of contemporary Jews by developing spaces that promote individual spiritual exploration and ritual practice, support the complex identities of a diverse range of spiritual seekers, and facilitate a more egalitarian environment as these new rabbis engage in their own processes of self-reflection and spiritual seeking, and communicate those experiences effectively to members of these forward-looking communities, it is important to note that the creation of these alternate structures occurs frequently out of necessity, not simply invention.

In her article, “Are Women Changing the Rabbinate? A Reform Perspective,” Rabbi Janet R. Marder presents findings from interviews with sixty-five rabbinic colleagues, fifty of whom are women. The study, conducted in 1991, found that while women had gained entry into the rabbinate, they remained in smaller congregations, part-time positions and/or more peripheral positions such as Hillel and chaplaincy programs. While some of those interviewed claimed that such positions allowed them to have more balance in life, as mothers, wives, and better-rounded people, others disagreed. Marder explains, “Some contend that there are no real part-time congregational jobs—only part-time salaries—and that women who take these positions may be exploited” (in Wessinger 1996:274).

Congregations Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom, as recently created synagogues have certainly struggled to pay the rabbis living wages. Each year, fund-raising efforts
center on maintaining the rabbi salary lines since neither of these communities has an endowment to ensure that the rabbis and staff are able to be compensated over the next year. In fact, Temple Albert, the Reform community in Albuquerque, and the only Albuquerque congregation to have such expansive resources, has yet to have a woman rabbi on their roster. When Rabbi Joe Black, Temple Albert’s rabbi for many years, took a larger position at Temple Emanuel in Denver, a move in line with the traditional rabbinic track, his position was quickly filled with another male rabbi.

As a result, the rabbis in this study are challenged with creating new spaces that invoke aspects of Jewish tradition while encouraging reinvention in realms of leadership, ritual practice and community. Alan Gussow, “We are homesick for places, we are reminded of places…it is the sounds and smells and sights of places which haunt us and against which we often measure our present” (in Van Matre and Weiler 1983:45). For this work, the rabbis’ life story performances and autobiographic rituals are conduits for emotion and memory, and as a consequence are both the subject of this “measure” as well as an instrument for personal and social transformation.

As Oakdale suggests in regards to the Kayabi leaders within whom she worked:

Kayabi rituals…work to shift participants’ consciousness, particularly their sense of how they are situated within the cosmos, that is, how the present moment they are experiencing fits with other times and how those presently living relate to others…The autobiographical portions of the performances are crucial to this process, as it is the quoted speech and distinct points of view invoked in autobiographical accounts that bring ritual participants into subjective alignment with these other times (2005:161).

While the spiritual leaders of Oakdale’s project are directly concerned with beings of this human life as well as spirit beings, the rabbis similarly draw meaning through an ongoing negotiation between current Judaism and the Judaism of their ancestors. Take as
examples, Lynn’s “Reflections on Amalek for Purim,” a piece which urges critical engagement with Torah and traditional beliefs in the pursuit of justice driven practices in the present, as well as Deborah’s and Malka’s allusions to Moses, one of the most significant prophets and teachers in the Jewish past who freed Jewish slaves from Egypt, received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and led the Jews to the promised land of Israel. It seems that one very effective strategy for bridging past and present involves invoking nostalgic Judaisms of the past that reach beyond a ready memory of a childhood synagogue and into the more distant, yet somehow more easily accessible spiritual ancestral legacy. Through these ancestral memories, the rabbis can circulate perspectives that circumvent aspects of Judaism mired in gendered and political practicalities of outmoded, localized natures and into a symbolic past in which a new present can be reimagined and still be Jewish, familial and relevant.

The rabbis’ performances create new realities, new Jewish communities in very embodied ways as well. In a study of ballet as a performance capable of space making, Hamera writes, “ballet…recreates space by literally ‘placing’ it in dialogue with the body, and cites de Certeau claiming that space is a “practiced place” (in Madison and Hamera 2006:51). Congregation Nahalat Shalom, is likewise a “practiced place.” The Congregation takes on ‘body’ as people move into their new home, plant trees, paint walls, perform rituals, and tell stories of the community, where it once was, how it is now, and how they hope it will be for future generations.

As the stage acts as a focal point for Hamera’s ballet performances, the bimah is the site for performances of Jewish leadership and ritual. The bimah, a once, or still, contested space (remember Lynn’s story of being pulled physically from the bimah, or
the pivotal moment in Malka’s life where she was denied a promised position at Beit Tikva) is purposefully set apart from daily life and less ritualistic rooms of the synagogue. When these women step onto the bimah with the recognition of those in their congregations, the interaction of body and space serves to legitimize these ‘new’ rabbis. As in Judith Butler’s work in which gender is made through a “stylized repetition of acts through time” (1988:520), rabbis are ‘made’ in much the same way. These rabbis stand in historically, politically, religiously, and gender inscribed spaces, as physically and socially embodied women inhabiting previously restricted spaces. This act alone transforms ritual space, creates new socio-religious expectations, and stretches the boundaries of Judaism.

When I interviewed a young woman, eighteen at the time, who had grown up in Congregation Nahalat Shalom, with Lynn as her rabbi, I was told, “I thought all rabbis were women! (she laughs) I was completely shocked when I left Albuquerque and discovered that men could be rabbis too…It just didn’t seem right!” I add this quote here to make the point that ‘tradition’ can shift quickly, as it has in this case, in situations in which there are not competing nostalgic memories, yet tradition and social changes are more slowly adopted when memories and experiences conflict with new social realities. Even so, as Lynn, Deborah and Malka repeat their roles of spiritual leaders in marked and sacred ways, circulate their perspectives through life stories, and teach new ways of practicing Judaism that seem relevant to contemporary experience and spiritual/community needs, they become “models of and models for” new forms of Jewish leadership and Jewish community (Geertz 1973:93), and communities such as Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom will continue to grow.
In Chapter 8, I turn to two other High Holy Day sermons told by Rabbis Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker, to understand more completely how each rabbi employs stories of her own individual spiritual experiences as models for self-exploration and innovative personal spiritual practices intended to teach others to create spiritual experiences that honor their own unique spiritual paths. Taking two approaches, I explore the ways in which the rabbis reveal themselves as capable seekers able to negotiate traditional Jewish heritages (both literal and imagined) and contemporary American Jewish realities by tying their ideas to traditional the mediating social networks of family and rabbinic legacies. In addition, I consider the rabbis’ references to more distant and historic pasts as they engage in ‘traditionalization.’
CHAPTER 8

Traditionalizing the Modern Spiritual Seeker:

Tying Innovation to Tradition through Autobiography

“Deborah really thinks about her life and tries to find something teachable and positive in it. Even when she and Yael [her partner] were really sick, she was open about it, and we were there for them. When things happen in our lives, she is there for us. It is great to have a rabbi who is so open and honest. I like that she shares memories of her family, and talks about her dog. I feel grateful to have her as my rabbi. This place doesn’t feel like a synagogue or whatever. It is just this great place I get to come to, to see people I care about, and to celebrate life. That is why I come to Nahalat Shalom.”

– Micah, a congregant at Nahalat Shalom

“I have never felt particularly religious. My family was Jewish in a secular sense only, and while I was curious about spirituality and explored many other spiritual paths, I could never imagine myself as part of a Jewish congregation. When I met Malka that changed. I was just drawn to her. I started going to HaMakom, and fell in love with Judaism, for really the first time in my life. When Malka talks about her spiritual path, it gives me permission to discover my own. She is wise and insightful. She is truly an amazing rabbi, teacher and friend.”

– Sharon, a congregant at HaMakom

Just as modern religious communities, such as Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism, are important spaces for spiritual practice and social connection, private, individualistic aspects of spiritual experience are becoming increasingly important to contemporary Jewish spiritual seekers, and must, therefore, be addressed by the rabbis if their teachings and messages are to be timely and relevant. In my review of High Holy Day sermons given by Rabbis Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker, I discovered that the rabbis effectively discussed the notion of individual spiritual experiences through self-revelation. In these autobiographical performances, the storyteller’s own spiritual experiences are posited as models for self-exploration, as well as innovative Jewish, and even non-Jewish, personal
spiritual practices intended to inspire direct and meaningful spiritual experience for members of their congregations in ways that honor the unique and complex aspects of the seekers’ spiritual paths while remaining true to Jewish paradigms.

The rabbis’ underlying messages, crafted to reinforce the significance of moving spirituality to the center of one’s life for the purpose of cultivating loving and responsible personal character, are sustained by the skillful depiction of the storytellers’ life events linked to, and illuminated by, people and lessons within Jewish pasts, both recent and historical. To better understand this phenomenon, I turn to High Holy Day sermons by both Deborah and Malka focusing on how each rabbi tells profound stories for spiritual seekers whose desires to transform and modernize identities, religion and society are at times contrary to simultaneous longings for traditional Jewish identities and understandings of traditional Jewish practices.

I consider these stories from two angles. First, I explore the ways the rabbis reveal themselves as capable seekers able to negotiate these tensions through their distinctive positions as modern women and inventive leaders who still represent traditional Jewish family structures and rabbinic legacies. Second, I shift to the rabbis’ use of more distant, historic and textual references as they engage in ‘traditionalization,’ defined by Richard Bauman and Donald Braid, as “the creation in the present of ties to a meaningful past that is itself constructed in the act of performance” (1998:112). In these performances, they link their autobiographies and selves to various past events and personages (see Oakdale 2005 on the “traditionalization” of the autobiographies of ritual specialists). In the following pages, I incorporate these perspectives to examine how Deborah and Malka use
these fundamental stratagems to familiarize and authenticate spiritual teachings that expand the living traditions of Judaism.

**Literal and Metaphorical Journeys: Deepening the High Holy Days Experience**

Prior to the High Holy Days in 2007, Deborah prepared as she often did, with a trek into the natural worlds of New Mexico. An acknowledged environmentalist, Deborah’s sermons over the years have frequently emerged through her interactions with birds and animals, as well as her deep appreciation for the landscapes she encounters. Deborah chose a day hike to Bandelier, a beautiful 33,000 acre New Mexico National Monument set amid canyons and mesas, as the inspiration for her Rosh Hashanah sermon, an invitation to her congregants to “Wake up” to these “pivotal days in our spiritual lives.”

**WATCH OUT: JOY AHEAD!**

At the end of July, I took off for a few days to explore Northern New Mexico. I stayed in Chimayo, used that as my base and went on little day trips from there. One day I went to Bandelier. I had been there when I lived in Albuquerque in the 90’s, but hadn’t been back there since.

When I arrived at the entrance to the park, I paid my visitor’s fee, and received a parking permit and a photo-copied notice advising me that bears had been sighted in the park and to be extra cautious.

After I parked, I got out my binoculars, in case I might see some interesting birds or wild-life, preferably nothing as big as a bear! I got out my water bottle and my picnic lunch and went looking for the trail-head. I found a sign that told me that there was a trail to the upper falls and I figured that round trip that would be about a three mile hike. I knew that I had to take it slow and stop and rest a lot because I was still recovering from a couple of car accidents. Even so, I was determined to go to the upper falls even if it took me five times longer than it would take anyone else. Going as far as the lower falls, twice as far and with lots of shifts in elevation will have to wait.

I hardly saw any wildlife, and even the people were few and far between. After a while I sat down on a stump and enjoyed a snack of Queen Anne
Cherries. I rested a little bit and then continued on my way. After a while I rounded a corner and came upon a sign that said: “Hazardous Trail Conditions May Exist Beyond This Point.” Well, that brought me up short. I was hiking alone, and admittedly not in very good shape. They had already warned me that there might be bears and now there was a sign that was warning me that there might be dangerous conditions ahead.

What did I do? I thought about it for a while and decided to keep going. I also bent down picked up a small, black lava rock, put it in my pocket. It would be a touchstone for me during the rest of my hike.

I am glad to be able to report to you that there were no hazardous conditions ahead and I reached the upper falls safely. The only hazard around was another hiker who had staked out the best spot above the falls. She glared at me and effectively communicated through her body language that I was intruding on her space and should go away. I didn't go away. I did back track a little bit and when she left, I went and sat where she had been sitting. I saw the water fall of course, that’s what I came for, and as I sat there, quietly watching, the birds and squirrels began to emerge from their hiding places.

As I sat there, watching and listening to the natural world around me, I began to think about the warning sign further back on the trail. In fact, there had been lots of signs along the way, beginning with the signs that told you where you could park, the big sign with a map at the trail head, and small signs along the way reminding you not to litter. There were signs posted periodically to tell you to stay on the trail and there was even a sign that said that there were video cameras concealed on the trail to discourage vandalism.

A lot of signage for a trail where one might go to escape and be with nature. Thankfully, as it turned out, I had a safe and delightful hike and did not need to be warned about any of the dangers, bears, video cameras or hazardous conditions.

I got to thinking about the signs and wondered what it would be like if instead of danger, we were reminded to pay attention because we might come upon something that made us happy. I can see the sign now: Watch out! Joy ahead.

I got to thinking about how easy it is to get caught up in our busy daily routines and forget to notice what is going well. We numb out in order to get through the difficulties, handle the stress of our lives and the danger is that we also block out the good things. We tend not to mark the moments, or make time for a little bit of holiness, as we go along.
Tomorrow, on the first day of Rosh HaShannah, we are going to blow the shofar. Why do we do this? We know from stories in the Torah that the shofar was blown prior to big events taking place, like the giving of the Ten Commandments. The sound of the shofar is meant to herald special moments. Rosh HaShannah is a special day, an awesome day, a day when we take note of what transformations in our lives need to be enacted. One of the reasons that we do this is to wake us up from our routines, from our numbness, and notice that this is an awesome day, a pivotal day in our spiritual lives, a day when we can return to who we are truly meant to be.

Maimonides, a great Jewish scholar who lived in Spain in the 12th Century taught us that the shofar blasts are meant to wake us up from our slumber, to rouse us from our lethargy. The shofar should remind us to do teshuvah and remember that much of what we get caught up in is trivial and vain compared to God, compared to the essential and eternal truths and the deep meaning of life. In his manuscript Hilkhot Teshubah 3:4, he wrote: “Awake, ye sleepers from your slumber, and rouse you from your lethargy. Scrutinize your deeps and return in repentance. Remember your Creator, ye who forget eternal truth in the trifles of the hour, who go astray all your year after vain illusions and mend your ways and your actions; let each of you forsake his evil path and his unworthy purpose, and return to God, so that God may have mercy upon you.”

So, I am inviting you to wake up. Hear the sound of the shofar in your soul. Notice, pay attention. Wonderful things might happen to you. Joy may lie right around the corner. Watch for it! Expect it! When something nice happens, notice it and enjoy it! One way to enjoy what’s happening is to make a bracha, a blessing. Everyone can make a blessing. It is a basic spiritual tool for us Jews and it is not the sole property of the Orthodox.

How does it work? Let’s say something wonderful just happened. Rather than quickly moving on to whatever is next, stop for a moment and say, “thanks.” I am going to share with you the texts of four of my favorite blessings that I use liberally throughout the day. The more I use them, the more I stay grounded in a meaningful reality that is filled with as much joy and positive energy as possible. I found that this is an easy counterbalance to the negativity, fear, anxiety and complaint energies that run rampant in our culture.

Deborah then passes out cards for each of the blessings. She advises that people can keep them in their pockets or wallets, put them on their desks or post them on their refrigerator. She explains that she wrote the cards using traditional language, but that one can “mix ‘n match” language to address “implications of masculine gender and
hierarchical power” implicit in the traditional language. She gives an example, and says that language is not the most important thing, but saying something as you mark the moment is crucial. She leads the congregation through the four blessings, teaching how to make blessings for food, baked goods, or water; how to bless periods in which one feels amazed; how to bless those times when stress or catastrophe are avoided; and her “favorite all-purpose blessing” the Shehechiyanu:

I probably first learned this prayer in nursery school, but it was using it at home at my parent’s dinner table that made me really understand it. My parents had four children and I am the youngest. My sister first went off to college when I was in fourth grade. From then on, whenever she, or later, my brothers came home from college, at the first family meal that we had together, we would all recite the Shehechiyanu. Ever since, it has been one of my favorite prayers to say. It is a wonderful way to mark the moment, to say—something special is happening here and I know it. It is especially wonderful if there is someone else who can also say the blessing with you, or say “amen” to yours.

What does the prayer say? Hebrew is a language that uses roots to make words. So words that have the same core letters in them are related. Shehechiyanu, the first word of this blessing after the opening formula, has at its core the letters for “chai” which means life. Shehechiyanu is linguistically related to “lchayim” a word that means “to life.” The word shehechiyanu means, “The one who gave us life.” When we say this blessing, we are consciously thanking God for giving us life, sustaining us and bringing us to this moment of time.

Once those present have practiced the brachas, Deborah provides an opportunity to bless the community, to acknowledge the amazing changes that have happened. She invites people to go into the beautiful new courtyard where apples and honey, traditional Rosh Hashanah treats, have been placed. She says that the blessings she has passed out are fitting for using the new courtyard for the first time, for blessing the apples and honey. She ends the sermon by saying, “May it be a sweet New Year, a year of beginnings, a year of increasing health and well-being, a year of happiness and prosperity
for you and our synagogue community, a year of peace for us and for those people and places that are now being torn by war.”

Whereas the sermon presented in Chapter 7 speaks to the ways in which Deborah values community as an ideal, in this sermon, we see how Deborah approaches actual, physical relationships with people and communities in a way that seems authentic to her spiritual path. She starts by positioning herself as someone with a love and appreciation for New Mexico. Although new to the community, Deborah has been here before (e.g. in the 90’s), knows important sites, (e.g. Bandelier), and like many New Mexicans enjoys hiking in the mountains. More importantly, however, in this performance, she models two key teachings of her rabbinate: first, how to slow down and recognize life’s immediate happenings, and second, how to bring sacredness into the moments that might be missed if one fails to shift attention when they are present. Debroah’s literary journey mirrors the spiritual journey she seeks to inspire for her community, as they enter the liminal, self-reflective passage of the High Holy Days with hopes of emerging transformed, cleansed, and readied for the new year.

As in Van Gennep’s (1960) “rite of passage,” Deborah leaves the real world stepping onto a path that leads her into the unknown wilderness (i.e. separation). On her journey, she is forced to slow down, and confront her fears as she considers the warnings offered in the signs (i.e. bears, hazardous trail conditions, etc.). Once she reaches her destination, the waterfall, she encounters yet another obstacle, the other hiker, but patiently waits for the other hiker to leave before making it to the summit above the waterfall where she can be still, contemplate life, and witness the squirrels and birds emerging from their hiding places. Here, she comes to understand that joy, like danger,
can also be hiding around the bend (i.e. transition). When she reenters the world (i.e. reincorporation), this shift remains with her, a new learning and the principle that she wishes to teach her community. Deborah’s intended lesson, the importance of staying “grounded in a meaningful reality that is filled with as much joy and positive energy as possible” so as to counterbalance “the negativity, fear, anxiety and complaint energies that run rampant in our culture,” is both an acknowledgement of the challenges in life as well as a reminder that an individual can control her responses to those challenges by shifting her perspective in ways that are grounded and more positive.

Though the lesson transcends religious denominationalism, Deborah connects it to Jewish tradition by introducing a spiritual practice that she learned as a girl. She explains how her parents taught her to recognize special moments, and embrace their sacredness with Jewish blessings (i.e., bruchas). Now part of the Nahalat Shalom family, Deborah steps into a somewhat parental role, and shares this knowledge with her new community, teaching others the words to the prayers she learned from her parents, and explaining when to use each one.

I notice that the prayers seem to touch those in the audience, those who knew them, as well as those who are just learning. The cards Deborah passes out make this divide less obvious as everyone has within their possession new keys to Jewish practice, as well as a tangible symbol of their connection to Deborah and her family, the family of Congregation Nahalat Shalom, and a broader Jewish heritage made visible through the Hebrew letters whose roots form words as prayers shape tradition. Deborah’s suggestion to use the brachas to affirm the new courtyard, allows the community to pray together,
ritualizing their move into a beautiful new space, developing ownership, and preparing it for future experiences.

Linking innovation to tradition to teach and transform ritual practice in ways that seem logical and effortless is a significant strategy in Deborah’s sermons. Whereas autobiography is the medium through which this link is communicated, Deborah’s allusion to common experiences, such as connection to family and nature are features that act to familiarize, and traditionalize rituals that may be new, foreign, or abstract to members of her audience.

In a second sermon entitled, “Our Night Sky: Portal to Meaning,” Deborah describes how she and her partner, Yael, went camping in the Santa Fe mountains near Abiquiú. When they arrived at the site Yael had researched on-line, they found the charred remains of a forest fire. Still, they left their car, and walked around. Deborah describes the scene as “kind of creepy” with “remnants of burnt trees, pointing starkly to the sky.” Deborah says that “despite” their first reaction, they chose to set up camp.

It turned out to be glorious. I was amazed by the mysterious strength and tenacity of the force of life. In the midst of the stark reminders of the capriciousness and danger of wind and fire, there were signs of life. I just needed to notice them. We camped at the base of several magnificent pine trees that showed fire damage but had survived. The scrub oak was thriving. Occasionally we saw squirrels and then as sunset approached, we became aware of the songbirds and swooping of the swallows.

At night, tucked away in our tent, we were glad that we had stayed. Waking during the night, we crawled out of the tent to look at the sky. Few trees impeded our view. The sky was a huge bowl of shining stars, and we could see the vast expanse of the heavens lit up in all of its glory.

It was absolutely awesome.

The Torah portion for the day was from the Book of Genesis. Deborah says, “In the beginning, all was chaos. Darkness was everywhere. Then, as our story has it, God
said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. The light was called day and the darkness was called night.” Deborah calls the “night sky” the “educator of our ancestors.” She tells us that it helped us measure “weeks, months, seasons, and lifetimes,” but then laments that our “modern way of life jeopardizes the dependability of the cycles and seasons.”

Deborah uses her camping experience as a doorway for talking about connection to Jewish history and ancestral legacy. She tells us that she came out of her tent, looked up to the sky, and a “wow!” escaped unbidden from her lips. She says that this sense of wonder is something we hold in common with “human beings in all cultures around the world and with our human ancestors stretching back through time.” This history/legacy becomes a frame through which Deborah can speak to issues that face Jews in contemporary society, namely those ills that arise from busy, technology driven lives housed in constructed environments. The sky to which she initially refers acts as both impetus for awe and wonder, as well as the subject of a cautionary tale about the negative effects of current lifestyles which pollute the sky with synthetic light, remove people from connection with the natural world through internal dwellings, stores, offices and other built environments, and subsequently distance people from their own natural rhythms and internal well-being. Deborah explains, that human are not only “losing contact with the night sky,” but are also “suffering from ill effects,” cancer, insomnia, irritability and depression. In this story, nature, the physical world, and our own ‘human nature,’ are the very accessible ingredients necessary for a therapeutic intervention to the synthetic fabrication of our current lives.

Deborah ends her sermon by bringing the message close to home.

I hope that you will not only look at the sky, the mountains, and our glorious landscape during the day, but that you will also make an effort to
look at the unpolluted night sky. The night sky in New Mexico is slipping away from us. In 1999, the night sky was declared our state’s most endangered resource. Lights from Rio Rancho can be seen as far away as Chaco Canyon. This is not just about switching light bulbs and properly aiming our outside lights so that they point down rather than up.

It is about our connection with the mysteries of creation. It is about our access to the ineffable, inexplicable vastness of the Universe. It is about knowing that life is precious and unique and vulnerable. It is about preserving the spectacular for our children and our children’s children stretching out for thousands of generations into the future.

Though Deborah’s concerns with environmentalism and social justice stem from her participation in a decidedly modern world, in her sermon, she traditionalizes her concerns by using the continuous presence of the sky manifest in both nature and Torah, to place herself along a continuum of Jewish experience. Deborah teaches that Jewish practice includes more than Torah and prayer, it involves realized connections to the Divine, Jewish ancestors, one another, and the natural world. The subtle dictate is that it is the responsibility of contemporary Jews to attend to the spiritual rhythms of day to day life, to witness the world around them, to bless existence itself, and to combat the social and environmental ills of modernity.

**A Note on Tradition and Traditionalization**

In this chapter, I use “tradition” as it relates to modernity in much the same way Dell Hymes considered it in his initial formulation of traditionalization, as it is rooted “not in time, but in social life” (1975:353). The tradition invoked by the rabbis’ refers to ideas, concepts, rituals and practices that are generally considered ‘traditional’ by contemporary Jews based upon their shared readings of Jewish texts such as the *Talmud*, the *Torah*, Midrashim (i.e. rabbinic oral tradition), as well as contemporary rabbinic commentary. The rabbis, whose work is the focus of this dissertation, employ a Liberal
Jewish perspective when considering the traditions formulated from these various texts, acknowledging that such matters are not reified notions, and considering that elements of tradition are open to interpretation and reinterpretation at various points in time.

Unlike Orthodox understandings of an unchanging quality of tradition that results in strict adherence to Halakhah (i.e., Jewish law) and Jewish texts, Deborah’s and Malka’s fluid allusions to tradition refer in many ways to symbolic and ideological qualities of and systems within Judaism. Tom Mould explains a similar understanding of tradition stemming from his work with the Choctaw, writing, ‘tradition” is a “concept [that] can be understood as a symbolic quality granted to elements of culture in an ongoing interpretative process that establishes continuity with the past by standing in opposition to modernity (2005:259). Similarly, for the purposes of this analysis, I consider tradition to be a fluid symbolic expression of beliefs at the core of Judaism. Traditionalization, subsequently, refers to a specific way of communicating about Jewish religious and cultural pasts for the purpose of creating meaningful Jewish dialogue and experiences that support Jewish identities, of both storyteller and audience, fostering spiritual communities in the present.

“Balancing the realities of the moment with the dreams of the ancestors”: Storying the Experience of Ecstatic Prayer

Where Deborah’s sermon teaches others to recognize special moments in their daily lives through blessing recitation, in the following sermon, Malka uses her personal story to show others that they can experience joy and connection in each day by attending to the mind, spirit and world through the regular practice of prayer.

HOW THIS RABBI PRAYS
One morning the renowned mystic Menachem Mendel of Kotzk had a surprise visit from a Lithuanian scholar. Despite their passionate love of God, everyone knew that the Jews of Kotzk rarely prayed at any set time, so the esteemed Litvak decided to see for himself. Knowing that Menachem Mendel was the most pious and wise member of the community, he asked him, "Is it true that no one, including you, davens morning prayers in the morning?"

The rabbi smiled sheepishly and nodded. When asked why, he replied, "I wake up while it's still dark and the first thing I do is open the window. The air is sweet and quiet. I look at the moon and stars and watch them melt into the sky at dawn."

"The next thing I know, I hear footsteps and I see my friends going to work. I thank God for my hearing and sight! Because of my friends I have milk for my tea and bread to dunk in it — thank you, friends! I hear children laughing on the way to school. Before I know it, it's eleven!"

The punctilious scholar was silent. After a moment, he asked if Menachem Mendel ever davened according to Jewish law. "Yes," he answered. "When I don't open the window."

What I want to talk about this morning is how to open the window to prayer. The Yiddish word is davenen, which can simply mean prayer, or it can mean a constant effort to experience God no matter what you're doing. Reb Zalman calls the art of praying davenology, and this is what this generation needs: a guide to giving us the experience that brought our ancestors into ecstatic relationship with God. When we no longer had a place for animal sacrifice, we found a new way to draw near to the Beloved through sung words that came straight from the heart.

The prayerbook became our love song to God, but do we still find God in the siddur? My beloved teacher, Harold Schulweis writes, "Where do I begin? Where do I find God? How do I begin to pray? There is a tzelem Elohim, an image of God, implanted in me. The image of God I find in myself, in whom God breathes nishmat hayim—the divine breath of life. In each of us is a neshama, a soul whose origin is God. In prayer, I enter into the deepest parts of my self, discover who I am, and touch God's presence."
Is this your experience in prayer? Regardless of the community or movement, most Jews don't experience services as a love fest. Services may trigger poignant memory, put you in touch with the community, and offer a new perspective about something, but few expect what Rabbi Schulweis describes. How many of you feel something when you pray? What is it that you feel?

Even the leaders have lost faith in prayer to open the heart. Rabbis and cantors, aware that they are gradually losing the attention of congregants during prayer, attempt to make services more entertaining. Many shuls have an early Torah study at nine that is well attended. Most leave before the service begins and no one talks about it. For the few that stay, the cantor offers music they can sing to, and the service becomes singalong. Is prayer becoming irrelevant in Jewish practice?

Praying, like living, is a creative activity that requires concentration, honesty, and a willingness to be vulnerable like a child. The formal prayers that we recite point us there to remind us that we are not angels, we are physical beings who know God with our bodies. In Psalm 81, we hear God kvetching: "If only My people would listen to Me, if the people Israel would walk in My ways…I would feed you with the richest wheat, with honey from the rock would I satisfy you." We love those who feed us.

This morning I'll share how I am wrestling with traditional text to find my prayer. The prayers we began the service with acknowledge our magnificent bodies that have sight as well as insight, that stand erect, and direct us to good deeds. Without our bodies that include our brains, how would we know we exist? I begin davening with the moment I am aware that I am here, and I start the journey to God by noticing and appreciating my miraculous container.

The first thing to do upon awakening is to say thank You. "Modah Ani l'faneca... I'm here again! You've given me breath and consciousness today, even before I know why. You've done it with compassion and abundant faith that I'll do something to make the world better today. If You believe in me, how can I do less?"

When I reflect upon my returned consciousness and upon the intricacy of communication I know as awareness, I am no longer alone. This is how I find "access to invisible support", as Reb Zalman says. What I'm
describing is intimate. It isn't "out there or up there", but within me. I have a sense of the part of myself that feels interconnection. To put this more boldly, I am God and so are you.

To reach the godly part of myself, I dress to get into the mood. I put on a tallit, imagining God's tallit as the light of the world, and I've got a little piece of it. As we did this morning, I put it over my head after the blessing, and it feels like the wings of the mother eagle taking me to the highest place.

When I place the shawl on my shoulders, I feel different. I am ready to move into the Godfield, the place of most transparency and vulnerability. I feel open, loving, relaxed, even cozy. It is here that I can and must tell the truth. I am going to meet the Indwelling One, the place where I feel, where I experience my heart.

Am I grateful that I have the desire and freedom to pray, to take a few minutes to remember who I really am? Or am I more conscious of an unresolved disagreement from the day before? I scan my body and am surprised to discover some dull ache or discomfort that I'd removed from consciousness. What else am I not noticing about me? Praying stops my obliviousness and calls me to a deeper awareness.

It's taken me a long time to get to this place of intimacy. When I began a regular prayer practice over twenty years ago, it took me years before I became good enough friends with the words to know them in my heart so I could close my eyes when I prayed. I prayed diligently, word for word, for years. Sometimes I'd ask myself why I did it. Who did I imagine was listening? A few years ago, I had to admit that my prayer had become automatic, the opposite of what it is supposed to be.

I credit Jewish Renewal for my dissatisfaction, because it was there that I discovered how davening opens the heart. Our intention is to give you this experience, and probably the machzor in your hands, heavy with all those words, by itself, will not do it.

Here is what might. Imagine right now that our wonderful angels who have made this room our holy space for the High Holidays walking up and down the aisles with your favorite food. I'm thinking coffee ice cream, creamy Haagen Dazs. It's cold on my tongue and sweet. Mmm. Thank you, God, for this delicious ice cream beginning with the cows, the grass
that feeds them, the farmer that harvests the sugar cane. You've given me
taste buds to enjoy it. I want You to taste with me so you'll know how
much I love it.

You might think this is a little unsophisticated as a way to know God. In
truth, the way I have learned to pray goes against everything I've come to
know as being a rational, powerful adult. Imagining the invisible and
talking about it takes courage that some call faith.

Besides spending about twenty minutes a day in the morning davening, I
spend a few minutes before I go to sleep reflecting on the miracle of sleep
and awakening, asking that terrible thoughts and feelings stay away, and
reviewing the day. I say the Shema and end with the last words of Adon
Olam, "Into Your hand I entrust my spirit, while I sleep and awaken. With
my spirit and body, You are with me and I am not afraid." This prayer is
so effective that I rarely finish it.

Because of my practice, I have moments throughout the day when I also
feel God's presence. When I'm listening to the radio in the car and hear a
song from 1962, it takes me back to a summer day at my grandparents'
house on the Great South Bay of Long Island. I stop at that memory and
enter into it.

What information do those feelings bring when I think of Grandma's faded
immaculate housedress and Grandpa bending over his prized tomato
plants next to the hammock I fell out of a dozen times with my cousins?
Although they have been dead for decades, I thank God for memory and
for relationship that never ends while I have it. In that moment, I
remember the joy and ease of sitting on the dock and eating plums, no
worries of where they came from and how much they cost. It's taken me a
long time to say thank You for that day of pleasure.

The Jewish dance has always been like the fiddler on the roof, carefully
balancing the realities of the moment with the dream of the ancestors.
Each generation has the responsibility to find Torah in its time, and while
Torah and God are unchanging, the way to access them does. Chabad may
argue with this, but I don't smell the fragrance of sacrificial lambs coming
from their altar. Judaism still lives because for three thousand years it has
continually changed its approach to God as it has evolved and matured in
its understanding of God.
Why did they sacrifice their choicest animals? Like almost everything in Jewish ritual, the practice originated with neighboring cultures. What distinguished Jewish sacrifice was that it wasn't done in fear but in love. "Here, God, is my best calf. I give her to you to remember where life comes from. I don't want to learn this by losing a dear one or myself. So, in giving you a calf, I thank You for all You've given me."

Why are we so reluctant to change the words of the siddur? There are thousands of prayer books, each reflecting the longing of a community, whether it is Polish, German, Ashkenazic, or Sephardic. All the books have one thing in common: a desire to feel God. For most of us, God is more imaginable as a friend than as a king. We don't know how to relate to a monarch because we've never had one.

Every siddur, which means order, as in the word, seder, has the same structure that takes us through "Kol ha olamim", through the four worlds of action, feeling, thought, and contemplation. We begin in our bodies, move into our hearts to feel appreciation, bring our minds into awareness, and finally to stand before God and ask nakedly for what we need.

Rote prayer was easier than conscious prayer, yet I wanted more of God. By digging into the ancient wisdom revealed in the traditional service to find the pieces that have my name on them and by including my own words as well as contemporary readings, I'm getting to know myself better and am discovering the intention and power of prayer.

This is a great year to learn the healing power of davening and to dedicate your life to live with an awareness of the numinous with all your heart, soul, and might. If not now, when?

In this sermon, Malka takes on traditions of Jewish text, prayer and law, to explore the contexts, limitations and potentials of Jewish prayer. Narrating her own journey of prayer, Malka teaches others that, when experienced fully, prayer has the potential to connect individuals to the indwelling presence of God. Malka begins with a story about Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, a renowned mystic, whose wisdom and piety are beyond reproach. In the story, Mendel explains that he eschews the prayer of Jewish law in favor of a more intimate experience of the beauty of nature, his gratitude for his
hearing and sight, and his enjoyment of the laughter of children. Beyond the obvious message of this tale, that prayer, at its best, facilitates ecstatic connection with the Divine, it frames Malka’s lesson for members of her community who exist upon a continuum of varied Jewish experiences, yet who as a general rule seek tools to create meaning in lives that are increasingly complex, rational, and unconscious.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, contemporary Jews are a complex and loosely bound group, with mottled notions of Jewish identity, ritual experience, and need for spiritual and community connection. This stems, in part, as Kaplan (2009) suggests, from the move from pre-1950s synagogue centered rituals to more recent desires for “privatized spirituality” evidenced in personalized spiritual paths and practices discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6. Without the consistency of formalized communities and ritual encounters, people rely upon these individualized practices to create deep experiences that are tailored and replicable. It is to these needs that Malka speaks in this sermon.

Referencing her own very personal experiences of prayer, Malka tells her listeners that it took her twenty years to feel at home with the words in her morning prayers, and when she did find a home in the words, the practice somehow became rote. This led to a deep dissatisfaction. Recognizing that achieving deep connection with God requires “constant effort,” Malka turned to the teachings of her rabbinic mentors--Mendel’s historic presence as well as the contemporary teachings of Reb Zalman and Harold Schulweis.

Malka uses a traditionalizing discourse, evidenced through her references to historical Jewish figures, Hebrew prayer, rabbinic lineage, and Jewish ancestors to
legitimize her quest for the ‘ecstatic’ practice that she hopes will alleviate her dissatisfaction with the mindless recitation of morning prayers. Ties to rabbinic teachers and to the Renewal movement, demonstrate the validity of Malka’s quest lending authority to her position as a ritual leader whose knowledge has grown not merely through personal crisis and growth, but through study with ritual masters whose legacies she carries forward through her role as rabbi. Malka’s reflection into the imagined Jewish ritual heritage of Mendel justifies more than her professional role. Through Mendel’s story, Malka demonstrates historical precedence for Jewish prayer that emerges organically through personal awareness of the surrounding world. This is significant, for Malka’s community, in part, because ecstatic prayer, in this formulation, relies on direct experience as opposed to specific language and prayer structure.

By revealing herself in such an intimate fashion, Malka echoes the vulnerability she believes lies at the heart of ecstatic prayer experience, performing the role of an individualistic, timely and compassionate leader for the members of her community who may share similar challenges in their searches for meaningful spiritual practice. Robert Wuthnow characterizes the needs of post 1960s spiritual seekers as a desire for “practice-oriented spirituality” (1998:178). He suggests that achieving this contemporary, personal spirituality “requires devoting a significant amount of time and effort to praying, meditating, examining deep desires, and focusing attention in a worshipful manner on one’s relationship to God” (1998:178).

Malka’s sermon seems to speak quite directly to this need, as she addresses the challenges her congregants may face in unique quests for profound connection to God. Like many post World War II American Jews, some members of HaMakom grew up in
secular homes, or in liberal Jewish families in which Hebrew and daily prayer were not practiced in this traditional sense. Others, like Sharon, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, took different spiritual paths and only recently discovered that Judaism could be a source of personal inspiration. Malka acknowledges and naturalizes the schism that exists for those who desire direct, embodied experiences of the spiritual yet who may in fact lack the words and understanding necessary to integrate prayer into their daily lives.

Malka teaches by example, saying, “in prayer, I enter into the deepest parts of my self, discover who I am, and touch God’s presence.” Tailored for those in her community who, like the rabbi, share a sensibility as members of the Boomer generation, this message focuses on ways to transform and make real the “the sacred,” into what Roof describes as “something that enlivens and quickens, something felt within the body” (1999:297). Malka lets her listeners know that previous inabilities to reach these sensate experiences of the Divine are not failures on their parts, but result instead from a crisis of faith in Judaism. She says that even “leaders have lost faith in prayer to open the heart.” Prayer becomes automatic, causing a loss of connection to the divine and dissatisfaction in the one praying. Still, Malka is clear that prayer is the panacea to this spiritual malaise. Using the siddur, she shows how Jewish ancestors passed on the order of prayer through which one can achieve connection with God. She says, “All the books have one thing in common: a desire to feel God. She teaches, “We begin in our bodies, move into our hearts to feel appreciation, bring our minds into awareness, and finally…stand before God and ask nakedly for what we need.” Malka’s ability to bridge concerns with broad social issues and local contexts works in other ways as well, not relying exclusively on
traditionalization inferred through distant pasts, but through negotiations between Judaisms in more accessible, recent pasts as well.

In May of 2005, I sat in a small library at St. Bedes with twelve others for Shabbat service. The service centered on remembering the Holocaust. Malka talked of her experiences with Holocaust survivors, their families, and those who had rescued Jews prior to and during the genocide, conversations which inspired her book *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust* (2005). Malka created an atmosphere of remembering in which one congregant performed a reading about those who survived the atrocity, two adult children of Holocaust survivors shared their experiences of growing up with parents who had forever been changed by the genocide, and Malka and her former partner Gay Block, showed slides from their photo/essay compilation about those who rescued Jews during the holocaust. After leading prayers and guiding us into moments of silence, Malka switched the conversation to a pressing issue affecting their congregation and the Santa Fe community more generally.

The weekend before, an anti-LGBTQ (e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) group had arrived in Santa Fe and made their intentions known to make trouble for all religious communities who accepted queer members. With Malka’s prompting, members of HaMakom showed up to the community of St. Bede’s. Dressed in white, they escorted members of St. Bede’s into the church for Sunday services. While there was no violence per se, the united front reinforced both HaMakom and St. Bede’s commitments to queer members and their families. Malka’s initial talk drew parallels between those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, and the brave members of the community who came together to confront hatred and prejudice in their own
communities. This ritual these times and spaces, effectively engaged memory and emotion, and brought awareness to a situation that Malka perceived to be wrought by similarly destructive beliefs and emotions. Malka’s call to her community and their overwhelmingly positive response helped to fortify the values of those present from both HaMakom and St. Bede’s, as well as to send a message that such animosity would be met with a unified front of people whose lives have been forever touched by tragedy, and who now make choices to attend to similar threats with a loving and supportive vigilance.

**Traditionalizing Spiritual Individualism: Engaging the Living Tradition**

The rabbis whose stories make up this dissertation, are the conscious architects of contemporary Jewish tradition, innovative leaders with the insight and experience to deconstruct antiquated beliefs, resurrect significant rituals, and fashion new and resonant practices for people with changing spiritual needs. As these women do not benefit from the gendered pedigrees of Hasidic and (Ultra)Orthodox male rabbis, their abilities to communicate with others in authentic, authoritative and meaningful ways is of the upmost importance. Even so, these rabbis are not simply employing communicative strategies to legitimize their messages and positions in an effort to mimic their male predecessors and counterparts. I propose instead that they are reconfiguring the rabbinic position itself, achieving authority through a new rubric of desired values that challenge existing hierarchies of power by privileging individualism in spiritual practice and egalitarian models for religious community.

Deborah and Malka use similar strategies to construct this ‘new’ authority, and to bridge tradition and invention in Jewish practice. At the most obvious level, both women position themselves in dialogic relation to others who substantiate specific lineages.
Deborah’s early connection to Judaism comes through her family, and later through her teachers in rabbinical school, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Malka’s connection is shaped through interactions with her rabbincic mentors. Both rabbis demonstrate that they learned through these relationships, making points that they are scions of legitimizing familial and intellectual kinship networks. While these networks reflect traditional Jewish values, in these stories, the rabbis push the bounds of such traditions including their same sex partners in the messages they create for their communities. By introducing Yael and Gay as life partners, as well as partners in their spiritual work, Deborah and Malka expand and legitimate alternative family structures, creating access for others for whom sexual and/or gender orientation(s) may have precluded participation in Judaism previously.

The rabbis’ use of traditionalization is likewise key in their presentation as successful spiritual leaders. Where Mould suggest that traditionalization allows a speaker to present an air of authority through the adoption of “an anti-modern stance” (2005:261), I do not feel that this is entirely accurate as regards these particular storytellers. Though Deborah’s sermon on the night sky seems to adopt this tone due in part to her conservationist motivations, Malka’s references to tradition seem less to speak against modernity as to dissolve distinctions between ancestral Judaism and contemporary Judaism.

Both rabbis construct a continuum of Jewish experience, connecting past to present through the incorporation of mediating elements. For Deborah, the night sky is the omnipresent source of wonder and enlightenment for those who simply look up. For Malka, the unchanging, and indwelling presence of God serves much the same purpose,
as through her teachings we come to understand that with the proper time and attention, this presence can be accessed and felt by any individual. The rabbis’ references to teachings and ideas in the past that mirror and substantiate these claims, act as a form of “symbolic shorthand” (Mould 2005:260), allowing people in the audience to feel secure in the rabbis’ assertions understanding them to be the vetted teachings of other scholars responsible who creating the Judaism with whom those of similar Jewish backgrounds are most familiar. Although some scholars seem to discuss traditionalization as an affectation, a somewhat manipulative strategy designed to imbue the speaker and message with more relevance then they in fact possess, in the cases of the rabbis who are part of this project, I maintain that traditionalization can more accurately be described as a job requirement.

For Deborah and Malka, the function of their very position is to connect Jewish pasts to present in an authoritative and culturally authentic manner for the purpose of sustaining a community with a diasporic history of fluctuation, relocation and assimilation. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin write:

> Within this process of repeated removal and regrounding, Jewish culture has elaborated a range of absolutely indispensable technologies of cultural transformation such as modeling of commemorations for newer collective losses…or the use of precedent and hermeneutics in rabbinic law to articulate workable and authoritative responses to dilemmas encountered for the first time by “the tradition”; or famously, the centrality of public reading of the Bible in the formation and replication of the Jewish “textual community…which taken together have afforded Jewishness the paradoxic power of nakhmu-ma, survival and presence through absence and loss (2002:11-12).

In this chapter, we come to understand that today’s Jewish leaders must be not only exceptional individuals, capable of sharing very personal experiences as a means of teaching others new, individualist spiritual paths, but they must also be Jewish historical
and ritual experts, able to communicate to varying and complex assemblages, primed by thousands of years of absence and loss, changing national and political identities, and socioreligious priorities.

Keeping in mind such diverse needs for spiritual practice and community engagement, in Chapter 9, I delve into the ways in which Rabbis Min Kantrowitz, Lynn Gottlieb and Shefa Gold expand concepts and practices of Judaism beyond the synagogue, developing communities less constrained by physical location. In particular, I look at the different concepts of communities in the non-denominational or unaffiliated Jewish community in which Min practices, the global peace activism communities in which Lynn plays a significant role, and the nation-wide chant and Kol Zimra communities sustained through Shefa’s work. I investigate how differing methods of communication, from interpersonal to mediated, increase the rabbis’ abilities to disseminate their teachings more broadly, and address the needs of a more diverse audience of Jews and non-Jews as well.
CHAPTER 9

Making Meaningful Judaism(s) for a Capricious World:

Imagined Contexts for Spiritual Community in Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom and Kol Zimra

“Rabbi Min is truly a healer. She listens with her heart on a level that I don’t think anyone else in our community can.”

– Chaplain Linda Friedman

“Through Shomer Shalom Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb has raised awareness of global injustices. She inspires me to practice Jewish nonviolence as a way of life.”

– Joshua, a member of Shomer Shalom

“Shefa is deeply committed to creating a community without walls and across physical boundaries because we are connected in a community of souls.”

– Orna, a participant in Kol Zimra

In previous chapters, I sought understanding of the rabbis participating in this study as historically situated individuals who have drawn upon Jewish intellectualism, American social movements, and increasingly sovereign self-understandings to build communities that meet the needs of contemporary Jews with shifting notions of Jewish identity, community responsibility, religious pluralism, and spiritual practice. While communities such as Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism are tangible expressions of communities created through the leadership efforts of Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Deborah Brin and Malka Drucker, physical communities such as these are singular instruments in a more expansive and complex array of options available for those seeking Jewish experience in the 21st Century United States. In this chapter, I concentrate less on traditional communities, employing instead Benedict Anderson’s formulation of the “imagined” community (1983) to explore the virtual or mediated Jewish communities created by
Rabbis Min Kantrowitz, Lynn Gottlieb, and Shefa Gold. Expanding the definition of community, I look to Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom, and Kol Zimra, as alternative structures built and maintained by communicative means beyond those requiring “face-to-face contact” (Anderson 1983:6) that are sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of individuals with compound identities, complex motivations, and varying requirements for spiritual, religious, and ‘community’ participation in one or more Jewish settings.

**Jewish Family Services: The Humanistic Works of Rabbi Min Kantrowitz**

Min once described her job as serving those “hanging onto Judaism by their fingers and toes.” When we began this work, Min worked as the Rabbi and Chaplain for Jewish Family Services (JFS) where she provided social services for a variety of Jewish and non-Jewish people who were experiencing emotional, financial, and spiritual difficulties. Established in 1985, JFS was a nonprofit, social service wing of the Jewish Community Center. Those working for JFS developed services and programs in accordance with the values of *tikkun olam* (e.g., to repair the world).

JFS was located in the Jewish Community Center in the Northeast Heights of Albuquerque and provided programs such as the “Seniors Aging Well at Home Program” that involved health and wellness assistance, medication management services, senior transportation, a site for seniors to come enjoy meals, HANDS (i.e., home-delivered food boxes), and housekeeping and companion services. They also offered a Jewish Food Pantry, an Emergency Utility Assistance Program, and a Holocaust Survivor Program.

Min’s primary vocation involved ministering to the needs of people who were ill, dying, in crisis, those who had experienced domestic violence, or those who had survived
the death of loved ones. She helped others who sought spiritual counseling and assistance for any number of unknown causes. A former counselor, Min brought unique skills and spiritual understanding to a ‘community’ made up of people positioned along a sweeping spectrum of Judaism, those who were cultural but not religious, those who were religious but not affiliated with a synagogue, and others who were ultra-religious but needed additional support. On her website, Min explained:

"Could you send a Rabbi to see my father who is in the hospital?"; "My wife is dying and would like to talk to a rabbi"; "This is a chaplain at Hope Hospice. We have a Jewish patient..."

Until now, it was difficult for Jewish communal organizations like JFS to respond to these calls. Since it is estimated that fewer than 50% of the Jews in the Albuquerque area are formally affiliated with a congregation, the pastoral care needs of many Jewish people were often left unmet until the initiation of the Jewish Community Chaplaincy Program in 2004. The program assists those in the Albuquerque Jewish community who are not affiliated with congregations, and who do not have direct access to clergy (http://www.jfsnm.org/how_we_help/chaplaincy_section/chevra_kadisha.html - Retrieved on December 15, 2012).

Besides the Chaplaincy Program, Min also coordinated the Chevre Kaddisha, or Jewish Sacred Society:

Jewish law and custom provide guidance for every life cycle event: birth, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage and death. The overriding principle of Jewish burial customs is kavod hameit, (respect for the body of the deceased). One important way we demonstrate this respect is in the traditional ritual preparation for burial, known as tahara (purification), a ceremony conducted by the Chevre Kaddisha (Holy Society). The Chevre Kaddisha of Greater Albuquerque is a group of dedicated volunteers trained to conduct this ritual free of charge for any member of the Jewish community. Participation in the Chevre Kaddisha is a mitzvah, an act of loving-kindness. There are almost fifty men and women members of the Chevre Kaddisha of Greater Albuquerque.

Our Chevre Kaddisha goes to the funeral home and prepares the body for burial in accordance with Jewish tradition and community standards (http://www.jfsnm.org/how_we_help/chaplaincy_section/chevra_kadisha.html - Retrieved on December 15, 2012).
Beyond her roles as Chaplain, and rabbi for the Chevre Kaddisha project, Min also ran the D’Vora Project. She told me, “We run a healing group once a month for survivors of domestic violence, Jewish survivors of domestic violence, and I also run a couple of grief groups that are ongoing all the time for people who are grieving. I see people in hospitals, and hospices, and jails, and coffee shops, and in my office or in their offices… anywhere they need me to go.” In short, she explained, “I am always on call.”

In our conversations, Min described her work as “trans-denominational” and “multi-denominational.”

When somebody calls me up, I have no idea what their religious background is. It may be not at all or it may be very. To be able to have enough understanding of the range of beliefs and practices has really stood me in good stead in lots and lots of ways. One of the things I also do is teach anywhere I can about Jewish beliefs and practices, particularly around illness, death and dying. So I teach the Presbyterian Pastoral Education students, and I teach hospice staffs all over town and hospital staffs all over town; anywhere they’ll let me. To be able to present a range of things feels useful and fun.

Of those with whom she worked at JFS, Min expressed the importance of providing support and spiritual counseling in ways that were relevant to their lives and experiences. Expounding her perspective on healing, she told me:

There is often a very fine line between people with spiritual crises and people with mental illness. There are some people who are just right on that line of competency, and I sometimes act as their spiritual lifeline, and that’s important.

There is this Kabbalistic concept of the Four Worlds. In it, everything that exists, exists simultaneously in four worlds or four kinds of reality. There is the physical reality that we can touch and taste and measure. There is emotional reality, which we are still trying to measure with limited success, but that we somehow know is different from physical reality.
There is intellectual reality that we know to be different than emotional reality, as our ideas are different than emotions. Wisdom is a different kind of thing than feelings. And then there is spiritual reality, which refers to whatever concept of God you might have, or what you perceive to have meaning, or greater meaning, like a higher power or something beyond us. So Kabbalistic theory says that everything exists simultaneously in those four kinds of realities.

Min explains that this understanding emerged through her life experiences.

When I think about my life, in a way, I was spending the first chunk of my life doing physical reality of living…I was almost dead when I was born and they did not know that. They actually baptized me because they thought I was going to die. I was premature and really sick a lot. So the first chunk of my life had to do with establishing my physical or physicality in my world. Then I did the Psychology thing dealing with the emotional reality. Next I did the academic, intellectual, architecture planning thing. And, in this last chunk of my life I am dealing with the spiritual.

When people speak about Min, they frequently mention her dedication to a Jewish spiritual path, describing her “soulfulness” in her work with the Albuquerque Jewish community. Henry, a member of Congregation Nahalat Shalom called Min a “gentle teacher,” and said that he values her “passion for learning and teaching.” Others tell me that Min is a “perfect” rabbi for the chaplaincy program because she is “so personable” and able to “help facilitate working relationships between people with different beliefs and different agendas.” Chaplain Linda Friedman, a member of Min’s meditation group, co-facilitator for the support group on grieving, and a member of Chevre Kaddisha, told me, “Min is truly a healer. She listens with her heart on a level that I don’t think anyone else in our community can.” The chaplain went on to tell me that when Min arrives at the David Specter Shalom house, a Jewish retirement facility, to lead Shabbat services, the residents are always happy to see her because of her warmth and wisdom.
Although Min’s role in the community seemed essential to me and others with whom I spoke, Jewish Family Services lost its funding while I was completing this dissertation, and the Chaplaincy Program, and Min’s position were cut. Even though JFS reported that within the fiscal year 2009-2010, they:

- Provided over 5,527 one-way van rides to seniors
- Assisted 301 seniors in our transportation program
- Distributed 119,005 pounds of food to 2,475 people of all ages
- Served 3,267 meals at our Congregate Meal Site
- Touched the lives of over 626 people through our community chaplains
- The Jewish Burial Society (Chevre Kaddisha) directed 30 Taharot
- Provided 3 interest-free loans through the Beatrice Bittner Memorial Loan Fund
- Brought Health & Wellness Program to 630 seniors
- Helped 468 people with Utilities Assistance
- Welcomed the assistance of 122 active volunteers
- Benefited from the generosity of over 913 donors (http://www.jfsnm.org/-Retrieved February 10, 2013),

JFS was no longer able to provide services. On January 28, 2013, they posted the following letter:

Jewish Family Service of New Mexico (JFS) has served New Mexican seniors and families since 1985. We are sad to announce that the continued erosion in funding by federal, state, and corporate funders; contributions from individuals; and grants from private foundations has forced us to close our doors.

JFS has provided services such as care management, a community food pantry, transportation for seniors, wellness programs, Jewish community chaplaincy, holocaust survivor support, and housekeeping companion services to thousands of needy New Mexicans over the years. Demand for services continued to increase, while the availability of funding decreased significantly.

JFS’s Aging In Place Program was known throughout the United States and used as a model in the federal demonstration project “Community Innovations in Aging in Place”. JFS recently received national recognition via the Diversity in Aging Award from Grantmakers in Aging.

Executive Director Michael Gemme states, “We had been very fortunate to have strong community support and able to get foundation grants and other funding despite the declining economy. However, over the past year
we saw major changes in the funding climate and despite submitting numerous grant proposals and other requests for funding, we were unable to obtain sufficient resources to keep our programs going.”

JFS is sending out letters to notify our clients and supporters of the closure, effective February 1st. Additionally, we are making every effort to contact our most vulnerable clients by telephone and refer them to other service providers.

All former JFS Staff and Board members appreciated the support of our dedicated donors and funders over the years. Thank you for giving JFS the honor of serving our community! (http://www.jfsnm.org/- Retrieved February 10, 2013).

This closure of Jewish Family Services is a tremendous loss for the Albuquerque Jewish community. Helen, a Jewish elder, confided that she “did not know what she would do now.” She said that she felt “more secure” knowing that there was financial assistance available through JFS if she were ever in need of it, and that she personally benefited from the knowledge that “Rabbi Min was there if I needed to talk to someone.” Helen added that she thought Min was the “type of rabbi who would continue to do good work” in the community due to a “sincere dedication to people.” Although this observation speaks volumes about Min’s character and commitment to both Judaism and her rabbinate, it also reveals an assumption that many women rabbis from around the U.S. have expressed to me over the last ten years, namely that women are expected to continue to work even if uncompensated or under compensated.

The closure of JFS and the discontinuation of funding for Min’s position highlight the growing chasm between the service needs of a burgeoning, aging, and less cohesive community, and the limited resources available for non-profits during periods of economic recession. Such challenges further exacerbate the economic instability that many women rabbis already face due to gendered pay inequities and limited positions
available in larger, established synagogues. A recent study conducted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis found that “male rabbis out-earned female Reform rabbis” (http://www.ccarnet.org/media/filer_public/2012/06/20/salary_study_by_gender.pdf-Retrieved on February 15, 2013). In the CCAR press release, Rabbi Steven A. Fox, the organization’s chief executive, states, “The results were troubling but not surprising; it quantified that which we knew anecdotally. A salary gap in 2012 is unacceptable” (http://www.ccarnet.org/media/filer_public/2012/06/20/salary_study_by_gender.pdf-Retrieved on March 1, 2013). Such salary inequalities have also been noted by the Conservative Movement’s Rabbinic Assembly (http://www.ccarnet.org/media/filer_public/2012/06/22/survey_women_jewishweek.pdf - Retrieved March 1), and more broadly by the Jewish Forward’s third annual survey of 76 national Jewish organizations (http://forward.com/articles/147568/gender-equality-elusive-in-salary-survey/?p=all- Retrieved on March 1, 2013). Citing findings from the 2011 Jewish Forward survey, Maia Efrem and Jane Eisner report that of 76 surveyed national Jewish organizations, “the number of women in leadership roles remains at the same low level, and the gap between male and female salaries has grown even larger” as indicated in the following chart:
Women rabbis such as Min, who are new, work part-time and/or are working in smaller or peripheral communities are challenged to practice spiritual leadership differently, prompting many to develop alternative methods for communication, either through the texts of traditional books and journals or through new media and cyber alternatives found on websites, blogs, or social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter.

*Virtual Communities: Electronically Imagined Judaism(s)*

When Arjun Appadurai identified “five dimensions of global cultural flow… ethnoscapes; mediascapes; technoscapes; finanscapes; and ideoscapes” (http://www.intcul.tohoku.ac.jp/~holden/MediatedSociety/Readings/2003_04/Appadurai.html-Retrieved on December 02, 2012), he described more than the multi-sited
anthropological field; he captured the complex world in which today’s spiritual leaders practice as well. Where once the primary task of rabbis was to teach and guide people within localized communities, 21st century perceptions of community have changed, small groups and service specific communities have emerged, and as in the case of Jewish Family Services, funding for such communities is often scarce or nonexistent. In their pursuits to develop relevant Jewish learning and spiritual communities, the rabbis participating in this study, and other rabbis as well, are now challenged with communicating their visions of Judaism to both local and dispersed populations of people, whose “religious and spiritual practices” have become fluid, and as Roof suggests, whose “meaning systems” have become “more permeable” (1999:307).

To make meaning for today’s spiritual seekers, successful rabbis require diversified skills sets which allow them to communicate effectively in person as well as through print, media, and cyber technologies. While mastery of these channels for information and cultural flow may seem daunting, the scope and flexibility of the technologies combined with the rabbis’ masterful story-telling abilities, offer unique opportunities for them to create innovative approaches to Jewish community and practice by tailoring multiple and consistent messages that reach both targeted and broad audiences.

Clearly a rabbi of her time, Min circulates her perspectives to this unbound audience in varying ways. Like the other rabbis in this study who have published books to reach a larger audience (see She Who Dwells Within by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb 1995, Women and Judaism by Rabbi Malka Drucker 2009, Torah Journeys by Rabbi Shefa Gold 2006 to name a few) Min published Counting the Omer: A Kabbalistic Meditation
Guide in 2010. Counting the Omer is a mitzvah that refers to an ancient tradition in which the Israelites would offer a portion of their spring barley harvest at the Temple in Jerusalem in gratitude for a good harvest. Min explains, “…counting the Omer is fulfilled by reciting the special blessing of the Omer, and then counting the number of days and weeks since the beginning of the count, according to a traditional formula. The blessings and counting are done after nightfall, but before dawn, while standing” (2010:22). Min provides the transliterated Hebrew Blessing, “Baruch atah Adonai elohaynu melech ha’olam asher kidshanu b ‘mitzvotav v’tzivanu al sefirat ha’omer” and translates it as, “Blessed are You, God, Source of all space and time, You make us holy through Your mitzvoth, commanding us to count the Omer” (2010:22). The count begins on Passover, and continues for forty-nine days until the next harvest of wheat. Min weaves together biblical references, Kabbalistic teachings, and suggestions for imaginings, remembrances, and prayers sharing with others the tools she discovered over the course of many years that continue to enrich her spiritual journey.

Although Counting the Omer was originally printed in book format, it has prompted numerous on-line exchanges. As booksellers have moved to on-line distribution sites, they have increased bi-directional communications as buyers are encouraged to submit on-line reviews. In a series of Amazon.com reviews, Min’s book has been called “beautifully written,” as well as “clear” and “concise,” and “a must for everyone’s library.” Whereas such language is clearly an affectation of today’s marketing culture, it still has relevance, as lengthier reviews speak to potential buyers, while simultaneously providing Min with a sense of her audience.
In one such review, Lisa Jacobs writes:

Rabbi Min Kantrowitz has laid out a guidebook for the 49 day spiritual practice of Counting the Omer which begins on the second night of Passover. Although the reader may initially be drawn in by the clarity and simplicity of Rabbi Kantrowitz's words, there is a profound depth of intention to this practice and to Rabbi Kantrowitz's understanding and ability to guide us well in this journey of spiritual liberation. This book can be used year after year, and, with each reading, new insights towards self-renewal will develop and blossom. Rabbi Kantrowitz has blessed us with a valuable tool for enriching our lives.

Paula A. Schwartz, a member of the Albuquerque Jewish community writes:

Rabbi Min Kantrowitz has written a lovely, lively, and enduring guide for the annual practice of counting the Omer. I have been blessed to have been among the group of meditators who have used it and worked with it for several years. It sustains its interest with repetition and encourages me to go deeper with each year. I highly recommend it for both beginners who are exploring the practice of counting the Omer, as well as for those who, like me, count this counting among our blessings.

Author Kimberly Burnham, PhD of West Hartford, Connecticut writes:

I am always a little sad at the end of the Counting of the Omer because it is such a calming relaxing ritual at night for the 49 days. This year each night we read from Rabbi Min Kantrowitz' book Counting the Omer: A Kabbalistic Meditation Guide. So very special. The insights and connection with our physical body as well as the natural world. So much of the book is about relationships - our relationship with ourselves, the universe and others. Especially like the analogies from math and science (i.e.) fractals. Thanks you Rabbi Min Kantrowitz for this wonderful book that has deepened my meditation practice over the last 49 days (http://www.amazon.com/Counting-Omer-Kabbalistic-Meditation-Guide/product-reviews/1935604007/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending-Retrieved on February 21, 2013).
Despite the fact that reviews such as these provide limited information about the book and its influence on the reader, the materials are a much utilized aspect of our sound-bite driven culture. Understanding the importance of maintaining consistent communications with her geographically dispersed yet technologically wired audience, Min offers bits of wisdom and brief observations through her website, instigating conversations about emergent issues in her own work as well as broader Jewish societies. In one such entry on her blog, “Counting the Omer,” Min takes on highly contested issue of the modern Jewish family.

**WHAT IS THE MODERN AMERICAN JEWISH FAMILY?**

What’s a Jewish Family today? What makes a family Jewish? We’ve come a long way from the norm of a Jewish mom and a Jewish dad living together, married, raising Jewish children. That family constellation, of Morris and Sadie, with their children Abe, Marvin, Ethel and Frieda gathering around the Shabbos table for a kosher chicken dinner every Friday night, with occasional visits from Bubbie and Zayde who lived not too far away, is a rarity now. Economic times were rough then, as they are now, but a stay-at-home mom was the norm then, as were children, who, whatever their ages, felt a responsibility to contribute to the economic well-being of the family. Things could hardly be more different just three or four generations later.

By 1990 the most common Jewish American household consisted of one adult Jew living alone! These single person household consist of people who have never married, those who are divorced and those who survive the death of their spouses. The second most common configuration was two adult Jews living together, without any children. What is often assumed to be the ‘normative’ Jewish family — two adult Jews, married to each other and with at least one child under the age of 18 living in the house comprised only about 15% of the Jewish household measured in that year. I suspect that by now that percentage has decreased even more. Even within the households that appear structurally intact there are profound internal changes. One or both spouses might be in their second marriage and one or both might be converts to Judaism. As a consequence, among the children one could find those who were “yours,” “mine,” and “ours”; those who were Jewish, half-Jewish, or Christian; those who had the same grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins; and those who had some but not all in common. A frequent Jewish family constellation today
is a single adult raising children or sharing child custody. With many
congregational programs focusing on the minority “two-Jewish-parent-
married-to-each-other” families, these people sometimes feel that they are
not accepted by the larger Jewish community. In San Diego Jewish Family
Service sponsors a “Supporting Jewish Single Parents” program. JFS in
New Mexico is planning an educational session about alternative
approaches to mediation and collaborative divorce.

The most descriptive adjective for the American Jewish family today is
diverse. Over the past few generations, Jews got more education and better
jobs. Our parents and grandparents moved out of traditional
neighborhoods to suburbs, and then, to different cities as employment
opportunities opened up. My family is an example: my Russian immigrant
grandparents brought up their children in Jewish neighborhoods in New
York City. My parents brought up their children there and then after
retirement they moved—first to Florida and then to New Mexico. My
sisters and I lived in many places and now live in New Mexico, California
and Canada. Our children lived in a variety of places and now reside in
New Mexico, California, Canada and Spain! Cousins, aunts and uncles
and grandparents are scattered across the globe. Geographic diversity.

The Jewish family is now religiously diverse. Not only has the trend from
Orthodox to Conservative, Conservative to Reform followed these
generations, but the gradual move away from organized, institutional
Jewish life also now characterizes the American Jewish family. “Playlist
Judaism” is how Rabbi Kerry Olitzky describes engagement in Jewish life
for the seemingly ever-increasing group showing up as “other” or “just
Jewish” on recent American Jewish identity surveys. “I no longer have to
buy the entire package in order to have the [Jewish] service I want,” says
Olitzky, the New York-based Jewish Outreach Institute’s executive
director, referring to how iTunes and Napster broke the stranglehold on a
music industry that once forced consumers to buy entire albums to hear
one preferred song on demand. According to surveys in New York, 15%
of Jews described themselves as “Just Jewish” in 1991. By 2002 that
number had increased to 25% and recent surveys put that percentage at
37%!

In Albuquerque, estimates are that more than 75% of the Jews do not
belong to synagogues. There are more and more ethnically diverse
Jews. A June 20, 2012 article in the Huffington Post states that according
to the newest New York Jewish Federation population study, 12 percent of
New York Jewish households are “non-white” (Black, Asian, Hispanic or
bi-or multi-racial) and 13 percent are Sephardic (origins to North Africa,
Spain or the Middle East) for a total of — with some overlap — an
impressive 25 percent of the Jewish population of America’s most Jewish
city. Over 400,000 Jews are living in diverse Jewish households,
approximating or exceeding the total Jewish population of any one country in the world, excepting the United States and Israel. At least three different organizations support and celebrate the ethnic diversity of Jewish people and communities around the world: Be’Chol Lashon, Kulanu and the Jewish Multiracial Network.

The increasing recognition and acceptance of the continuum of sexual orientation and gender identity is another huge shift in the perception of the modern American Jewish family. Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Jews have joined established congregations and created their own. GLBTQ Jews are openly accepted into Rabbinical training in the liberal communities. The Orthodox community has a website “Orthogays.org” and passionate spokespeople. Members of the GLBTQI community have websites, a published Torah commentary and prayerbook. Families headed by two adults of the same gender are visible among across the spectrum of religious affiliation and practice. Some of the special issues revolving around Transgender Jews are being addressed: for example the sensitive issues around the gender makeup of a Chevre Kaddisha team working with a transgender Jew who has passed away.

The variation in Jewish families is reflected in the relatively high rate of adoption in the Jewish community. About 5% of American Jewish families have adopted children, according to the National Jewish Population Survey, collected by the United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Federation system. That’s higher than the national average of 3.7% for all Americans.

There are grandparents raising grandchildren. There are families with ‘boomerang’ children–young adult children who have completed their education but have moved back into their childhood homes. These alternative types of families also need a home within the Jewish community. There are families who bring aging relatives from across the country here to be close to them, but discover the elders to feel isolated and lonely, culturally adrift so far from the local deli and the sound of Yiddish.

Religious diversity within families is another challenging trend. Although the general trend is toward fewer young people engaging in Jewish ritual and affiliation, there are some families where the opposite is occurring: the younger generations becoming more Jewishly observant, causing tension in the family. Intermarried families result in children being raised as Jewish, Christian, both or neither. Will the child raised as ‘both’ have a Bar Mitzvah? Will the Christian grandparent attend?

In New Mexico, there are a number of Hispanics who are claiming or rediscovering their Jewish heritage. Although the legacy may be hundreds
of years old, families where some individuals openly declare their Jewishness, convert and/or practice, other relatives in the family may feel confused or angry.

The Jewish family today still needs to feel connected — to other Jews, to Jewish community, and to other people with whom they share experiences and challenges. The need for mutual support for all these relatively new kinds of Jewish families is apparent. The question for the whole Jewish community is this: how do we help provide those opportunities so that the Jewish families of today (http://www.rabbiminkantrowitz.com/blog--Retrieved on February 02, 2013)

In this blog entry, Min documents the changing of the Jewish American family over the last decades. Using her own family as an example, she notes that the once normative two parent geographically stable Jewish identified family has been radically changed over the last twenty years. She cites increasing residential mobility, intermarriage between Jewish and non-Jewish partners and the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) Jews and their families as the primary ways of identifying such changes. Yet Min does not discuss these changes to incite fear about loss of Jewish culture, religion or even family, she describes these changes as a context for a new Jewish family, and I suggest, a new Judaism: one linked to Jewish identities of the past that anticipate Jewish families of tomorrow. Min’s message takes on the very relevant task of teaching about inclusivity as a spiritual practice. The perspective and teaching Min shares here seem driven from her own experiences, growing up secular, relocating from the East Coast with her husband, and discovering her own sense of Judaism and spirituality from a variety of sources. While this is an electronic communication, in some ways remote, removed from the immediacy of a listener/audience, Min’s authenticity is evident. The message bridges her life experiences, with a very real American context, aligned with the work she has done with Jews who are
loosely connected to Judaism. In this way, this blog entry acts as an extension of her Albuquerque-based rabbinate, that still has the potential to touch the lives of those she has yet to meet or may never meet.

*Shomer Shalom: Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb’s Calls for Peace in the Middle East and at Home*

Whereas Min’s use of cyber technologies are an extension of the community she has created in Albuquerque, Lynn’s use of cyber technologies, websites and social media in particular, is designed to reach people beyond a specific locale, who may share her commitment to nonviolence and to expand a community of likeminded individuals. Although the technology is new and different, her use of these communication pathways mirrors the engagement she cultivated through conference circuits, feminist gatherings, and civil rights meetings during the earlier years of her rabbinate.

Since leaving Congregation Nahalat Shalom, Lynn’s primary focus has been in the development of the Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence, an organization and movement that she co-founded with Ross Hyman. Lynn explains the Network on her website, “Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence:”

Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence is a movement within Judaism dedicated to the study and practice of Jewish nonviolence as a way of life. Our members span the denominational spectrum from Hasidic to Secular.

We are Jews who want to replace war, economic injustice and violence with restorative justice, nonviolence and peace (http://www.shomershalom.org – retrieved November 1, 2012).

The website explains that there are multiple ways to become involved with Shomer Shalom:
Learn more about Jewish Nonviolence: “The entire Torah is for the sake of Peace.” Shomer Shalom promotes the study and practice of Jewish conflict resolution methods and contemporary anti-oppression work. How do you plan a social change campaign, work on self-healing, face conflict? Participate in our Programs: We offer retreats, training programs, delegation experiences, and a supplementary ordination program for rabbis and cantors who want to explore a practice based in Jewish nonviolence.

Create a Shomer Shalom Circle: Deepen your relationship to Jewish nonviolence as a way of life in the company of other individuals in your community. We support multifaith, multicultural and multigenerational relationship building (http://www.shomershalom.org – retrieved November 1, 2012).

As in Lynn’s former projects such as the Peace Walk Movement and Peace Camps designed to inspire multiculturalism and peace activism in youth, Shomer Shalom derives its strength through grass-roots (albeit mediated) organizing, collaboration and activism. To these ends, Lynn goes to great lengths to acknowledge her partner organizations, including the Jewish Voice for Peace, The Community of Living Traditions, Luke 6 Project, Muslim Peace Fellowship, and Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Similarly, Lynn lists the venerable members of the Advisory Council: Rabbi Everett Gendler, Mary Gendler, Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Rabbi Debora Kohn, Rabbi David Shneyer, Rabbi Leonard Beerman, Rabbi Zev Hayyim Feyer, Rabbi Naomi Steinberg, Rabbi Bonny Grosz, Rabbi Brant Rosen, Rabbi David J. Cooper, Rabbi Burt Jacobson, Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg, Rabbi Phil Bentley, Rabbi David Seidenberg, Rabbi Jane Litman, Rabbi James Stone Goodman, Rabbi Victor Reinstein, Rabbi Albert Axelrad, Aaron Hahn Tapper, EPRyhme, Marge Eiseman, Barbara Breitman, Alan Solomonow, and Dr. Ellen Umansky. She singles out a representation from Israel and Palestinian, Yacoub Hussein, and introduces the Council of Interfaith Elders’ made up of Chief Tom Dostou of the Algonquin
Nation, Abdul Rauf Campos Marquetti (cofounder of Muslim Jewish Peace Walk), Kathy Kelly (Voices for Creative Nonviolence), Pamela Meidell (Buddhist Priest of Zen tradition), Peace Pastor Doug Hostetter (Director, Mennonite Central Committee United Nations Liaison Office) Rabia Terry Harris (Muslim Peace Fellowship), Ibrihim Ramey (Muslim American Freedom foundation), Reverend Richard Deats (IFOR).

These collaborators are significant, as those listed are revered members of a larger society that represent interfaith, cross-cultural, and transnational connections, to whom, thorough engagement with Shomer Shalom, one can in effect share in membership within this imagined community of people working together for global peace. In this new paradigm of community building, space and community, are created through connections, electronically facilitated conversations and well placed stories that work to catalyze the desire in others to learn more about peace work and to belong to an organization that shares complementary values, beliefs and ideals.

This partnership is only one aspect of the community building; dissemination of the message is of equal import. Where once, brick and mortar communities could rely upon shared language, symbols and location, cyber communities such as Shomer Shalom rely upon shared ideas. In Lynn’s community, these ideas are expressed through “Organizational Principles.” On the homepage of the Shomer Shalom site, she writes:

By adopting the practice of a shomeret shalom, I enter the discipleship of Shomeret Shalom and follow eight guidelines for all participants in our community.

1. Healthy and safe communities emerge from a network of loving relationships based on mutual respect and openness.

2. The fullness of each person’s complex history, identity and religious affiliation is a welcome part of our collective story.
3. Compassionate listening and speaking from the heart opens us to new perspectives for realizing our collective goals.

4. Learning diversity involves awareness of histories that carry tragedy as well as beauty. We are committed to the human dream of dismantling legacies of economic and social oppression as the path to a shared future of well-being for all members of our human society.

5. Ceremony and traditional peacemaking wisdom can play a healing role in moving individuals and communities toward reconciliation and social transformation. As shomrei shalom, we are committed to lifting up the traditions of Jewish nonviolence as well as a truthful examination of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in our own tradition that may contribute to sustaining structural violence. In addition, we honor the dignity and right of all religious traditions including indigenous peoples to choose when to share and when not to share certain aspects of their tradition and to hold them sacred unto their own communities.

6. Artistic expression in the context of culture and individual creativity are highly valued as sources of joy, excellence and hope.

7. Youthful voices are necessary for the creation of a viable future.

8. A shomeret shalom adheres to conscientious objection to war.

These “Organizational Principles” are more than unifying ideas. They are an invitation to participate in a way of life, sufficiently flexible to be shaped by the reader’s interests and desired pace. The Shomer Shalom community, either on the website or Facebook page, functions to bring likeminded people into conversation about the importance of nonviolence in international relations, as well as establishes a set of values based upon individual, ethnic, cultural and religious acceptance, feminist egalitarianism, grass-roots activism and leadership, and creative living. Posts on important international occurrences either positively in regards to peace activism or adversely in matters of national or international policies that promote violence or dissuade peace, interesting articles published by anti-war activists, and teachings and meditations from the rabbi based upon her teachings of the “Torah of Nonviolence” act to galvanize the Shomer
Shalom community, as evidenced in the following examples taken directly from the Shomer Shalom Facebook page:


The site also acts as a virtual home for Lynn, whose activism necessitates frequent travel to various institutions in which she teaches or to the Middle East as she leads peace delegations. Members of the Shomer Shalom community follow Lynn’s activities, frequently posting links to articles about her activism.
When the above link is clicked on, the following article appears from the Fight Hatred website.

**Lynn Gottlieb, a Rabbi of the Jewish Renewal movement, joins other Jews in spearheading a failed effort to have the Presbyterian Church boycott three U.S. companies doing business with Israel**

*WEDNESDAY, 11 JULY 2012 04:43*
Lynn Gottlieb, Rabbi of the Jewish Renewal movement, and active in the Jewish Voice for Peace, made a strong effort to convince the Presbyterian Church to divest from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions because of their activities in Israel. The General Assembly of the Church, however, turned down the chance to boycott the companies by a vote of 333-331 on July 5, 2012.

Gottlieb wrote in June that the reason for supporting the boycott on companies doing business in Israel is because:

Most Jews and Christians are not willing to go to Palestine to personally resist Israeli policies of land confiscation, home demolition, destruction of trees and property, military invasion, denial of freedom of movement, administrative detention or the arrest of children through nonviolent protest. Most Jews and Christians do not travel to Israel to work for an end to the blockade of Gaza and are not shot when they try to harvest their wheat or fish in the sea.

Lynn Gottlieb was ordained as a rabbi in the Jewish Renewal movement in 1981. She co-founded congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque, New Mexico, as well as founding the feminist theatre troupe Bat Kol.

Jewish Renewal is a recent movement in Judaism which endeavours to reinvigorate modern Judaism with mystical, Hasidic, musical and meditative practices. The Jewish Renewal movement incorporates social views such as feminism, environmentalism, and pacifism. In augmenting Jewish ritual, some Renewal Jews borrow freely and openly from Buddhism, Sufism and other faiths.

Since 1975, more than 98 rabbis have been ordained in the movement. Most are “graduates of the ALEPH rabbinic program with its low-residency requirement. Each student works with a mentoring committee to develop their own path through the 60 course minimum required for smicha (ordination.). Each student's program of study may include classes at other seminaries, synagogues and universities, independent reading and traditional hevruta, or Torah study in pairs, as well as teleconference courses led by ALEPH teachers.

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the 1,500 member Conservative-movement Rabbinical Assembly described the program: “Quickie ordinations, ordinations done without people going through an in-depth period of study and learning, weaken the rabbinate and weaken Jewish life.”

Lynn Gottlieb went to Israel as an exchange student at the Leo Beck High School in Haifa in the summer of 1966, when she was 17. Upon arriving at the kibbutz where she would stay, Gottlieb recalled, she saw lights twinkling in the distance and was told, “Arabs live there,” Gottlieb was stunned, she said—nobody had told her Arabs live in Israel. She wanted to meet one and asked an Israeli friend if she knew any Arabs. “Sure. Atallah Mansour. He lives in Nazareth.”

Mansour was a well-known Palestinian correspondent for Haaretz. Gottlieb found Mansour's home and when Mansour asked Gottlieb why she had come. She replied, "I want to know what it's like to be an Israeli Arab." He then described the Nakba (the catastrophe to Arabs from the creation of a Jewish State in 1948) and the erasure of Palestinians from the Israeli imagination. From that day on, Gottlieb said, she has felt the need to do something about that injustice.

After a brief stay as a student in the New York State University in Albany, she enrolled at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where she received her B.S. Degree in 1972. She began with dialogue, and then moved to supporting a two-state solution. She felt a brief euphoria during the Oslo era until she realized that the "peace process" was a means of diverting attention while something ugly, a rise in brutality, was happening. Many people who had been indifferent became morally outraged at images of Palestinian children burned by white phosphorus during the Cast Lead operation in Gaza. Now, Gottlieb insisted, that outrage must be channelled into something that will make a difference.
Gottlieb co-lead a Fellowship of Reconciliation delegation of 21 peace activists to the Islamic Republic of Iran from April 29 - May 13, 2008. Their mission was "to humanize the face of Iran, lest we end up with a disaster of global proportions we cannot imagine." Her title of Rabbi (from the Jewish Renewal movement) gave the impression that this delegation was representing world Jewry.

When asked about Iran’s threat to Israel? "I don't think Iran is going to attack Israel; I think it’s a chimera. Iran has never initiated a war. And the fact that Israel has never signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that it has nuclear weapons, is one of the reasons Iran wants nuclear weapons.

Gottlieb is convinced that boycott and divestment offer the most forceful, nonviolent tool for effecting change. It requires strategy, she cautioned, and research to identify effective targets: "Whatever you boycott," she urged, "focus and do it as a group." When a J Street supporter expressed opposition to BDS because "it leads to a siege mentality in Israel and only a confident Israel can make changes for peace," Gottlieb replied, "It is in fact Palestinians who are under a very real siege and dying behind walls, whose homes are demolished and who are excluded from Jewish-only roads."

Besides Lynn Gottleib, other so-called Rabbis Margaret Holub, Brant Rosen, Alissa Wise, Julie Greenberg, Michael Feinberg, Michael Davis, Rachel Barenblatt, Laurie Zimmerman, Rebecca Alpert, Joseph Berman, David Mivasair, Borukh Goldberg, Meryl Crean, Howard A Cohen, Mordechai Liebling, Elizabeth Bolton, Everett Gendler, Michael Lerner, Michael Feinberg, and Leonard Beerman, sent an "Open Letter to the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA)":

We are aware that the Jewish Council on Public Affairs (JCPA) has unleashed a powerful campaign to dissuade you, and consequently dissuade the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) from moving forward with their well-considered divestment campaign... As Jewish leaders, we believe the JCPA’s stance against church divestment does not represent the broader consensus of the American Jewish community. There is in fact a growing desire within the North American Jewish community to end our silence over Israel's oppressive occupation of Palestine... ...However, even if the American Jewish community were unanimously opposed to such phased selective divestment by your Church – which is not at all the case – we believe it is still important that you move forward with the thoughtful multi-year process which your Church has begun.
In the small committee session, open hearings were held in which 90 speakers brought personal stories before voting members. Presbyterians, mainstream American Jews, and Arab Christians all testified, but six committee members and three observers interviewed said the most influential testimony came from young Jewish activists.

These activists were mostly affiliated with Jewish Voice for Peace, a small but vocal left-wing advocacy coalition that many describe as a "fringe" group. They spoke about their pain at witnessing firsthand suffering in the West Bank and frustration that mainstream Jews were threatening to sever relationships over divestment. Commissioners said their personal testimony helped undercut prevailing rhetoric on the mainstream Jewish perspective.

"The young Jewish voices were the voices that stuck with me," said Rob Trawick from New York, who supported divestment. "I understood that they represented a minority. But sometimes small minorities tell us uncomfortable truths."

Tripp Stuart from Texas said he personally opposed divestment, but supported the committee's recommendation in part because "it was impressive to me that there were Jews on both sides of divestment."

Resolution 15-10 to divest easily passed at the committee level. Committee 15 of the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States voted with 36 in favor, 11 against and 1 abstention for a motion supporting the recommendation of the Mission Responsibility through Investment Committee (MRTI) to divest the holdings in Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard over Israel's use of their products in violations of Palestinian human rights.
At the full conference, young Jewish activists stood outside the meeting hall in loose T-shirts wearing colored signs that read, "I'm a Jew and I support divestment. Ask me why." Rabbi Gil Rosenthal of the National Council of Synagogues had been invited to offer an ecumenical greeting the morning of the debate, but surprised some by using the occasion to present a seven-minute speech attacking divestment. He warned that "all of those accomplishments [of Jewish- Presbyterian partnership] are in jeopardy if the divestment overture is adopted." A number of anti-divestment speakers echoed Rabbi Rosenthal's language during debate.

The divestment issue was strongly opposed by many Jewish and pro-Israel organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League, Americans for Peace Now, J Street and the American Jewish Committee. Over 1,300 Rabbis and over 12,000 American Jews signed letters to delegates of the biennial Presbyterian Church General Assembly, calling them to reject the "counterproductive" resolution.

The official announcement of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church reads: "After two hours of debate and presentations Thursday night (July 5), the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) said no to divestment as part of its position on peace in the Middle East by 333-331."

The Rev. Brian Ellison, chair of the church committee that had recommended divestment, said the rabbi's speech accentuated fears of angering American Jews and becoming the first major U.S. denomination to support divestment that were already coursing through the church body.

In that climate, Rev. Brown said the threat that "if you vote for divestment all heck will break loose" resonated with voters. Many have spent decades cultivating relations with American Jews.

Less widely acknowledged tensions over pushing out church members with connections to Caterpillar also spurred opposition to divestment. The Rev. Blake Brinegar of Houston, Texas, acknowledged that he was swayed by conversations with contractors in his congregation who have relationships with Caterpillar. "They were having serious issues with remaining in the church if divestment passed."

The Rev. Susan Krummel is head of the Great Rivers Presbytery in Peoria. She explained that divestment threatened the Presbyterian Church in a city where Caterpillar employs over twice as many people as the next largest employer. One-third of the members of one Peoria congregation are Caterpillar employees. She said some employees have stopped making personal contributions to the church because they worry it doesn't want their Caterpillar-generated funds. For others, she said, divestment could be the straw that finally sends them out of the church.

Besides the pro-Israel vote on divestment, the Assembly voted 463 to 175 against the labeling of Israeli policy toward Palestinians "apartheid." However, in a pro-Palestinian vote, the assembly voted 457-180 (with 3 abstentions) to boycott Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories Ltd. and Hadiklaim Israel Date Growers Co-operative Ltd. because the companies are based beyond the Green Line.

Such examples demonstrate the scope of Lynn's work, as well as confirm that she is a woman of action, who walks her talk. Her push for peaceful solutions takes a holistic approach, confronting injustices apparent in nationalistic/military violence, and/or to
violence as it is tied to economics, gender, and ethnicity. Lynn’s image, teachings and actions make her a frequent target of pointed criticism.

As evidenced by the above Facebook posting, however, such criticisms from oppositional forces only serve to legitimize Lynn’s work and bolster the connections she cultivates through this self-selected community.

Beyond the Shomer Shalom site, Lynn actively leverages electronic spaces to expand her influences, creating a type of cyber-pulpit through which she can bring her teachings to a larger world. One such example can be found in the article published on December 2, 2009 as a blog entry for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an organization with whom Lynn has regularly worked, helping to shape programming on Palestine and Israel, and as a delegate to Palestine and Israel, Iran and other regions in the Middle East.
THE TORAH OF NONVIOLENCE

Written in the wake of Obama's speech at West Point, New York on December 1, 2009

Not by military might, nor force of arms; only by Spirit. (Zechariah 4:6, during the Babylonian exile)

Once an arrow leaves the bow, not even the strongest warrior can bring it back. (Avot de Rebbe Natan, 2nd century Israel, during Roman occupation) "Many stupid beliefs people once held, such as idol worship that demanded child sacrifice, etc., thank God, have disappeared. But, as of yet, the foolish belief in the pursuit of war... has not disappeared... Is there any greater stupidity than this? To murder so many people for nothing?" (Rebbe Nachman of Bratislav, during the Napoleonic wars)

"All her pathways lead to peace." The kind of Judaism I practice is Shomer Shalom, a Jewish way of life based on principles of The Torah of Nonviolence. The principles are simple and all encompassing: Life is sacred and we are all interconnected. Do not use destructive means to bring about constructive ends; rather, resolve conflict so that all parties benefit and peace is restored. Abstain from war.

Last night I stood at the gates of the United States Military Academy at West Point with three hundred people near the shimmering waters of the ample Muh-he-kun-ne-tuk(*) who danced in the soft winter cold wearing the moon like a white feather headdress. Those of us who gathered in the town square huddle together, the warmth of the candles we hold in our hands reflect our prayerful sorrow, our sense of disappointment, our outrage. We stand with friends and strangers, a gathering of Americans deeply skeptical of Obama's strategy of sending 30,000 more troops. While Obama orates his well-thought out reasons for a surge in troops before the very soldiers who will no doubt carry out this next round of military strategy, a young tow haired soldier who refuses to go back to Afghanistan leans on a crutch and addresses the crowd. 'We're just killing women and children," he says, piercing the night with his lament.

Among the crowd gathered near the gates of America's most famous military academy founded in March 1802, I observed veterans for peace from the Korean War who have witnessed American Empire's military follies since the 1950s and freshmen from Sarah Lawrence, some of whom have come here to demonstrate against war for the first time. For a while, I stood near Andrew, and we spoke of the Iraqi Student Project with which he is involved in order to create a future for a few of the tens of thousands of displaced young people trying to piece together their lives after 'shock and awe' onslaughts drove them from their family homes and killed their
families. Many of us with graying hair and sagging skin spoke of Vietnam which seared our once youthful vision with images of Asian forests burning with the poisons that scorched flesh and earth so nothing lives. Dirges after war sound alike. "No plants grow, no animals roam, no birds fly, we sit alone. What will become of us?"

In the gentle nip of young winter, by the waters of the mighty Hudson River where golden eagles nest and teach their fledglings to fly, Carolyn shares the dream she had last night, of looking up at the New York skies and seeing the drones that drop death on the deserts of Afghanistan, firing upon us.

Several people already asked, "Will the candlelight vigil make a difference?"

Obama's address clarified our need to network, for regional, national and international pulling together of all groups working on human rights, safe families and communities, and peaceful alternatives to pull together and resist the urge to war. This is partly why we elected Obama. The Nobel Peace Prize properly goes to us, the American people. By electing Barack Obama, we were expressing our deepest desire for a future without racism and war, but only we can create such a future by generating nonviolent alternatives that construct peace and transform conflict, until violence as a means of 'peace through strength' is no longer considered a sane option.

It is our duty to discover what Afgani peace activists telling us, so we can construct our response to the newest call for military solutions on the basis of the people who will be most negatively impacted.

Here is a quote from RAWA's home page. The Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan have a long history of struggling for women's human rights in their own country, first under the Soviet Empire, and now under the United States.

"The US 'War on Terrorism' removed the Taliban regime in October 2001, but it has not removed religious fundamentalism which is the main cause of all our miseries. In fact, by reinstalling the warlords in power in Afghanistan, the US administration is replacing one fundamentalist regime with another. The US government and Mr. Karzai mostly rely on Northern Alliance criminal leaders who are as brutal and misogynist as the Taliban.

RAWA believes that freedom and democracy can't be donated; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values. Under the US-supported government, the sworn enemies of human rights, democracy, and secularism have gripped their claws over our country and attempt to restore their religious fascism on our people.
Whenever fundamentalists exist as a military and political force in our injured land, the problem of Afghanistan will not be solved. Today RAWA’s mission for women's rights is far from over and we have to work hard for establishment of an independent, free, democratic and secular Afghanistan. We need the solidarity and support of all people around the world."

As the full moon begins its descent to the longest night, let us hold a candle to a force more powerful, that is, the wisdom of nonviolence, and find new ways to support a peaceful tomorrow for the sake of all our children. (*) Muhhekunnetuk is the Haudenosaune (Iroquois) name of the Hudson River.


Publications such as this, even outside of her immediate Shomer Shalom community function to circulate her perspectives and extend the influence of the Shomer Shalom movement in order to reach others who may be interested in participating. As in the articles and posts discussed earlier, story elements such as this blog entry, place her within a continued context of activism bringing awareness to the social issues that form the core of her rabbinic focus. Her story of standing in front of West Point with other anti-war activists involves a cast of characters (i.e., much like the life stories I discuss in Chapter 4), a soldier who refuses to go fight a war that leads to the death of “women and children,” anti-war veterans, other protestors, and even President Obama. The polyvocal quality of the story demonstrates that Lynn is not in this alone, that atrocities of war have been observed by others, and that the stand against violence is a worthy endeavor. From this vantage point, Lynn is able to level her critiques of the misdirected “U.S. War on Terrorism,” the brutality and misogyny that plague Afghanistan, and the religious fundamentalism that inevitably thwart efforts to support human rights, democracy and secularism in the region. Lynn’s work with Shomer Shalom, as well as her prolific
publications on other web-based electronic sites demonstrates how cyber technologies can reduce distance between people, communities and nations, and create new communities of people through shared values of peace and activism.

*Kol Zimra: Embodying Sacred Leadership through Practice with Rabbi Shefa Gold*

Shefa’s communities, whose members participate in C-DEEP, the Center for Devotional Energy and Ecstatic Practice, and Kol Zimra are drawn to the chant and ecstatic practices that characterize her unique rabbinate. Although the communities of C-DEEP and Kol Zimra benefit from cyber technologies like the communities discussed to this point, participants in C-DEEP and Kol Zimra benefit from a more dynamic, interactive system of communications that allows members to connect in a variety of ways.

Like the principles Lynn puts forth for members of Shomer Shalom, Shefa explains that C-DEEP is a community for:

- Those who would build a deep and abiding Center of Awareness through Meditation and Jewish Contemplative practice;
- Those on a Devotional path who have a commitment to live from the heart and do the work required to grow in love each day;
- Those who understand what it means to perceive the world as Energy and want to become energy-workers;
- Those who want to explore Ecstatic states in order to expand their perceptive and creative potential;
- And those who have a commitment to Practice on a daily, and hopefully moment to moment, basis (http://rabbishefagold.com/ - Retrieved on November 11, 2012).

A main aspect of Shefa’s devotional Judaism is a daily or regular practice. Through her website members of the C-DEEP community have access to an on-line calendar of events and locations with information about pilgrimages led by Shefa,
shabbatons, and chant circles. There are also recorded chants to facilitate the learning and practice of interested parties, community members and others who are new to chant. Articles about the rabbi and participant comments work like Lynn’s Facebook page to help those who are interested understand, at least superficially, the potential of chant and ecstatic practice. The website however, acts simply as a navigation tool to introduce people to Shefa’s work and to direct them to a space in which they can participate in direct experience.

For the last few years, Shefa has led one such group in Albuquerque. The Enchanted Circle meets at Congregation Nahalat Shalom. Fifteen to twenty-five people, mostly women, meet in the Heder building. As Shefa chants a niggun, people fill the chairs in the circle while others sit on cushions on the floor. On the south side of the circle, Shefa moves the shruti box, and taps the drum to her right. Settling in, those present relax into the light of the candles, and begin to hum along. Eventually, Shefa eases into the evening, telling stories about her life, her thoughts, and the inspiration for the chants. The stories allow people to feel her humanity as she speaks of those she loves, her feelings of insecurity, the ways in which she confronts challenges, and how she negotiates all facets of life in a spiritual manner. Eve, one of Shefa’s students tells me, “Shefa’s stories help communicate in a transparent authentic way… when I am with her she opens her heart and soul so that I can relate to her fully. So that I can learn. She allows us to watch how she lives by giving an accounting of an instance in her life.”

Once Shefa has introduced the group to the context of the evening’s chant, the ritual begins. Shefa hands out a sheet of paper with five or six chants from her repertoire. She explains the chant, as attendees read transliterations, such as:
Ashrei yoshvei vetecha od y'hal'luchah

מְלֹא הָאָרֶץ שֵׁם יוֹשֵׁבָיו וְשֵׁם יְהֹוָה

Happy are those that dwell in Your house; they keep on praising. (psalm 84:5)

As she strums the shruti box, she explains in her soft voice:

Sometimes our perspective gets very narrow. Our view is determined by "small mind"- mochin de-katnut. From this state, the possibilities seem quite limited, and our sense of who we are and where our consciousness can reach is constricted and finite. From this state, it feels quite natural to complain and be filled with despair about the world.

But then it is possible to step into a wider perspective, to expand into "big mind"- mochin de-gadlut. This is called stepping into the "God-house." By chanting this sacred phrase we can move into a state of consciousness that is wide and spacious. From here we can feel a sense of limitless possibility. We can feel our awareness reach out to the far edges of the universe, as far as the imagination can touch. From this state, it feels completely right to express praise for everything we perceive. Praise becomes our natural way of being in the world.

May we all radiate with the happiness that comes from knowing that we live in the God-House and may praise pour forth from that knowing. (http://rabbishefagold.com/Ashrei.html--Retrieved on November 1, 2013).

Shefa begins by singing the chant, and the group joins in. Generally, the chant is soft at first, as those present who do not know the chants read the text and feel the strange words upon their lips. Yet, as the words become familiar, people begin to close their eyes, to sway with the rhythm, to raise their voices in a beautiful harmony. When Shefa gives a signal, either by slowing down her words or slowing the rhythm of her drum, the group again chants softly in the final chorus. Shefa reminds those in attendance to “Take a deep breath” and “to bring awareness to how you feel in the silence.” After a few minutes, the people in the circle open their eyes, look around, and smile at the others who shared the experience with them. Shefa often asks how the chant made people feel, or
what it made them think of, eliciting participation from those present. The chant circle meets for an hour and a half, once a month. It is an opportunity for those present, who do not attend synagogue regularly, or do not attend the same synagogues to build a community in an alternative space by sharing in a prayerful and deepening practice.

Shefa explains the significance of chant as a spiritual tool:

Chanting is both a contemplative and an ecstatic practice. It is contemplative because it is a form of meditation that opens the door to deep, reflective and silent communion with Reality/God. And chant is an ecstatic practice because it facilitates a kind of rapture that allows the soul to expand beyond the confines of ordinary discursive consciousness…

This is what happens when I chant: I heighten my attention as I use the music, breath, power and beauty of the chant to relax the tensions of body, heart and mind…and thus get out of the way, so that The Spirit can descend. After a while, it feels as if God is chanting through me.

While Shefa uses chant as part of her individual practice, she sees it as a means of creating spiritual community. In her book, *Torah Journeys: The Inner Path to the Promised Land*, she writes:

When we chant together with a community we create something so much more beautiful than any one of us could accomplish alone. We begin to appreciate the shared project of a chant and see that it is a microcosm of our lives. We can time our varying rhythms to create counterpoint. Each of us learns to bring the fullness of our presence to the group in ways that will enhance the overall feeling and tone of the chant. Even people who feel that they cannot sing can learn to chant and contribute their unique tone and feeling to the whole of the shared creation. As we enter the silence after the chant, each of us lays down our differences and experiences a collective silence that is framed by the highest intentions of everyone in the group (Gold 2006:230).

After attending numerous chant circles and speaking with many of Shefa’s students, I have come to understand the individual and transformative potential of chant as a spiritual tool. Having come to Judaism later in life, I struggled with learning Hebrew.
Chanting with Shefa, helped bring the Hebrew to life, and provided an avenue to access the meaning of Torah in approachable elements.

Dena, one of Shefa’s students told me, “Wherever she goes whether people are Jewish or not she is able to touch people even though she uses Hebrew as her modality. It does not get in the way because she relates it to her life and in turn to the lives of others. She doesn’t think of her music as songs; she thinks of them as medicine for particular things that are hurting inside of us. The chants are to be used thoughtfully.”

Josephine, another of Shefa’s students said working with Shefa helped “me merge my Judaism and my spirituality together. Judaism used to be bookish and the old modality with which I was raised. While I felt Zionism, I didn’t feel a spiritual pull. Through studying with her I have realized that it is one in the same. Her chanting with sacred Jewish texts elevates me to a place I have never experienced before and I can feel divine energy flowing through me…and because of this my whole life has opened up to a rich spiritual world where I have daily practices in the morning and evening.”

When people, such as Josephine, feel called to work with Shefa more closely, and to understand how such community is formed, they can consider becoming a member of Kol Zimra. Potential candidates apply, are selected, and pay tuition to participate in this intensive two year professional training program. On the surface, Kol Zimra appears to be a medium through which people hone their skills as spiritual leaders, yet this very narrow definition of the program does not adequately capture overall program intent or the transformative effects that many participants convey as a result of their membership in Kol Zimra. Designed for rabbis, cantors, lay leaders, ritual leaders, meditation teachers, and others who wish to learn chant practice, meditation, and energy work as
aspects of their spiritual leadership, Shefa envisions Kol Zimra as a conduit through which K-Zers (Kol Zimra participants) create an expansive spiritual community. Though Shefa uses her website to recruit future K-Zers, the K-Z community comes together beyond the virtual world, meeting twice annually during their initial training, once a year thereafter for the alumni retreat, and participating on monthly group phone calls, or for individual coaching sessions with Shefa.

Shefa describes the training and practice on her website and in printed materials.

Chanting is the melodic and rhythmic repetition of a sacred phrase, is a way of transforming the words of liturgy and Torah into doorways to expanded states of consciousness. The chant can attune us to ever-deepening levels of meaning, unlock the treasures of the heart, and give us an opportunity to generously serve each other. This Chant Training will be an opportunity to explore this powerful ecstatic practice with both rigorous attention to detail and expansive enjoyment of its transformative effects.

Participants will be asked to organize a chanting group in their own communities in order to develop and refine the skills of chant and group energy. We will learn about the dynamics and potential of a spiritual group, using our own group as a living laboratory.

At Kol Zimra, we build a Mishkan for spiritual work. The sacred phrase becomes the tool of that building project. By using that tool, we are gradually initiated into an intimate relationship with text. The sacred text becomes our modality for... healing, community-building, deep inner exploration, the doorway into meditative states, cultivating midot, connection with the ancestors, with God and with our deepest truth.

The sacred phrase becomes the doorway into greater awareness, deeper love and the kind of connection with community and God that can sustain us in our practice and in our leadership. We study the text and we study the many dimensions of intention that fuel and animate the text.

We engage in ritual and then we reflect on what exactly did that ritual accomplish; what doors were opened; what were the components that effected transformation.

Using the laboratory of our own community, we explore the “shadow” and our own resistances to intimacy with each other, God and spiritual

\[110\] Tabernacle or portable sanctuary
practice. We learn how to dedicate our practice in service, and bring awareness to what keeps us from that service. We support each other in growing our leadership, crafting practices that will sustain us in leadership.

We explore the power of breath, melody, harmony, rhythm, and tone to bring Life to the sacred phrase so that it can become a transformative tool. This is how liturgy comes off the page and into our hearts. This is how Torah becomes a Living force.

We learn the art of stereoscopic consciousness (Keeping a dual awareness on the group energy AND our own deepest presence.) We learn to ground energy and open to guidance. We study the functions of liturgy. We learn to inquire into the nature and purpose of ecstatic states, so that our awareness might become a bridge to access those states when needed. We explore the geography of The Heart (http://rabbishefagold.com/KolZimra.html#KZ6 – Retrieved March 2, 2013).

One fundamental teaching of Kol Zimra involves unlearning passive habits of group involvement, embracing instead the self as an embodied member of a community.

In her soon to be released book, *The Magic of Hebrew Chant: Healing the Spirit, Transforming the Mind, Deepening Love*, Shefa tells the story of how she came to understand the importance of this process:

I used to shy away from groups, and I perceived myself as the proverbial “outsider”—someone who would never fit in. Being the outsider, my habit was to judge. I would be secretly critical, look for what was not working, and then become disappointed and alienated. As I began to become aware of my own heart, I realized that this habit was self-destructive. It separated me from the possibility of connection and collaboration and perpetuated my role as an outsider. I realized that my habit of judging was painful and destructive to my own heart.

In stepping into leadership and truly opening to the spirit of service, I began to see that the quality of presence I embodied in any relationship or group actually had an effect. The question was whether I might bring that quality of presence deliberately in response to what was needed…or just accidentally in response to my changing moods. The realization of the power of my own presence was coupled with a growing curiosity about “group energy.” I spent about a year assisting Paul Ray, a great teacher of energy work, in his meditation groups. We would meet after each group
and talk about the quality of energy that had been raised, noting the moments of shift and transformation. Paul taught me to tune into the energy of the group (not just the individual members) and ask the questions, “What is this?” “What is the potential here?” and “What is needed in this moment that I might bring with the quality of my own presence?” Asking these questions changed my relationship to the group. Instead of standing outside and criticizing, I could dedicate all my energy to bringing my presence in a way that might help. It felt subversive (because I could do it without anyone knowing), and at the same time, this new stance unlocked a flowing generosity that I didn’t know was possible.

In my first years of rabbinical school, I had the honor of studying Bible with a great scholar, Tikva Frymer-Kensky (may her memory be a blessing). After participating in a service that I led, Tkeva said, “Shefa, you have great gifts as a leader, but it’s not something that can be taught.” Well, whenever someone says that something can’t be done, I receive it as a challenge. Perhaps I could teach this. I took it on as an experiment. My “gift” was in perceiving what was true in this moment, sensing the potential of a group, and being willing to respond to the energy before me. I always had a plan, but I was also willing to change the plan at any moment if it wasn’t working. The weakness that I observed in many leaders was that they didn’t seem to notice when the plan they had made wasn’t working and they just plowed ahead.

I also began noticing what components were present when the group energy felt complete, when the energy soared and was transformative. I became very curious about why something “worked,” what qualities were present, and how those qualities fit together to create a sum that was greater than its parts (Gold 2013:57).

Shefa developed “eight functions of consciousness” (Gold 2013:57). They include: “The Empowerer, The Guide, The Observer, The Container, The Exalter, The Foundation, The Secret Heart, and The Bridge” (Gold 2013:57-58). Through activities, rituals, and meditations, members of Kol Zimra find the role that they inhabit most naturally, while practicing different roles as well. They learn how to identify these roles in others, and learn to build community beyond the K-Z community and into their daily lives through their chant practices.
Of her experience in Kol Zimra, Dena states:

I found this community in this Kol Zimra cohort. It is unbelievable how connected and close we came to each other and how we learned to build community that way. It is a close small community where you come to know each other so intimately. The power that comes from that is life changing. When it over, I didn’t know how it would continue. Then, I went to my first alumni retreat, and a pool of twenty-five people came. I’ll never forget what it is like when a group of like-minded souls gets together in such a space. I’m good walking in both worlds [daily life and K-Z life], but I can’t do it for too long. I need to find my spiritual counterparts. The K-Z alumni retreat is like instantaneous coming home. You have shared this experience; you don’t have to explain anything; people get it and get you.

She adds:

Shefa just expanded it to monthly phone calls. Once a month we get together and chant together. It is like getting a booster shot. If you fall off of your practice and lose your commitment, these moments are amazingly profound. Since participating in Kol Zimra, I now co-lead a chant group with a friend and the magic that happens, and this all stems back to Shefa.

Nora, another of Shefa’s students, also says that chant has helped her to build community inside and outside of Kol Zimra. A Jewish scholar and spiritual leader in her own right, she adds:

One thing to know about Shefa is that she is different from all of the other teachers I have studied. With all of the teachers that I love, have read, and have studied with, I begin to get them, to do what they do after five years, seven years, ten years. I come to understand how they do what they do. I read a passage, and know how so and so would read this, and do this. This has not been my experience with Shefa. With Shefa, the well does not run dry. She doesn’t just teach you her way of looking at things. She is teaching you to commit to the process of being an explorer. Her teaching is beyond the content. I’m so inspired by her dedication. She always opens my heart, and gives a special permission to be authentic. I never feel like I have to impress her. She just invites me to come on the path with her. With Shefa, it keeps evolving and it keeps getting stronger.

In Shefa’s work, in particular, we can see the role that story plays in the development in these alternative community structures. For some, it is the vulnerability and humanity of Shefa’s stories that help those in her audience see how they too, with
their own perceived human inadequacies and insecurities, can embark upon a spiritual path and find a spiritual community. For others, her stories lend authenticity to a body of work that might be difficult to understand; a body of work that challenges some current Jewish practices, while seeming to resurrect practices from a more mystical, historic tradition. The stories reaffirm her identity as a mystic, whose nature and life experiences have in some ways guided her to this work and to these understandings of community. Shefa’s stories become paradigms of how to engage the world as a spiritual person, using life in some ways, like an oracle, an external reflection of Torah and one’s inner dimensions, using tools that help connect the practitioner with others through chant and community creation.

**Contemporary Judaism: Making Meaning in the Margins**

As Robert Wuthnow argues, “traditional spirituality of inhabiting the sacred has given way to a new spirituality of seeking—that people have been losing faith in a metaphysic that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom” (1998:3). The communities of Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom and Kol Zimra certainly seem to speak to the needs of this shifting community of religious seekers for whom “glimpses of the sacred” and “partial knowledge” are the desired commodity. Yet even as I posit these communities as imagined due to their virtual and loose formulation, I feel compelled to step back and see a larger picture of Judaism that I feel has in many ways always been an imagined community.

Like the “religiously imagined communities” that Anderson describes (1983:14), Judaism has been sustained through shared language (i.e., Hebrew), through art (i.e.,
paintings, paper cuttings, jewelry, etc.), and through a cosmological history, not necessarily through shared geographical location, government, or ritual. Hence, storytelling, communication, teaching, and learning have always been key factors in the perpetuation of this religion in the diaspora. With the continued diversification of Judaism resulting from Americanization, geographic distribution, secularism, intermarriage, and increasingly critical and personal considerations of religion and community, these shared understandings of Jewish identity and belonging do not necessarily speak to the needs and concerns of contemporary Jews who tend to find community in increasingly varied settings. As Wuthnow suggests:

…at one time, people identified their faith by membership; now they do so increasingly by the search for connections with various organizations, groups, and the disciplines, all the while feeling marginal to any particular group or place…In their faith, they once relied heavily on bricks and mortar, on altars, and on gods who were likened to physical beings and who called them to dwell eternally in sacred places. Now they concentrate on information flows—ideas that may help with the particular needs they have at the moment but that do not require permanent investments of resources (Wuthnow 1998:7).

As products of and producers of contemporary American Jewish culture, religion and society, Rabbis Min Kantrowitz, Lynn Gottlieb, and Shefa Gold respond to these changing spiritual patterns and the subsequent complex needs of those who seek connection with Judaism, as a conduit for healing and connection, sociopolitical activism, or as a practice to deepen spiritual experience. Each rabbi stories her version of a transforming Judaism in her own unique voice. Min presents herself as a statistic, her experiences emblematic of larger social issues facing contemporary Jews. In “What is the Modern American Jewish Family?” Min uses her own families’ experiences to discuss how geographic mobility,
intermarriage, changing religious needs have diversified contemporary Jewish families, trends that affect large numbers of people in the United States. Min’s cyber character is completely relatable. Through her story, we come to know that diversity can be a positive thing, an opportunity for growth, and not simply the end of Judaism.

Lynn’s electronically storied character is relatable to a different demographic of spiritual seeker. Lynn presents quite consistently as a radical, the voice that stands in opposition to oppression’s many faces in today’s society. In this role, she is timeless; fluctuating between the wizened, experienced activist, and the youthful entertainer that paints murals and brings smiles to youth in war-torn countries. Whereas Min speaks to the masses, Lynn appeals to a more specific swatch of people, those with left leaning politics who are actively engaged in global politics and the search for peaceful solutions to conflict.

Shefa’s character is distinct as well. Shefa’s mediated persona, is much like the rabbi herself, the mystic, outsider, who exists within, yet on the edge of traditional society. She is uniquely situated to reach others who likewise feel like outsiders, or those for whom tradition is simply not enough. Her stories and practices expand the boundaries of Judaism, providing tools for those who wish to deep experiences, and for whom traditional forms of davening are not sufficient. Shefa’s on-line communications must also be seen as one element of a larger, global rabbinate. Through this site, she connects with people who wish to learn with her directly or to participate in one of many Shabbatons she participates in throughout the year. In this way, the website is more a portal to her work, then
simply a conduit for information dissemination. (I hope you are all enjoying your last weeks away.

By telling stories at personal and social levels in print, through cyber technologies, and in personal communications, these rabbis evoke emotions, engage memories, and inspire learning to such extents that others are able to imagine themselves a part of these new, and newly imagined, communities. Whereas Wuthnow argues that people who once found meaning through “membership,” now find meaning through participation in multiple organizations that promise glimpses of the sacred, I suggest that the two notions are not mutually exclusive, and might in fact, enhance the overall experiences of people who seek to engage fully in a less divided sacred/secular world. In the communities of Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom, C-DEEP and Kol Zimra, the rabbis have created structures that are sufficiently new and flexible to accommodate the desires of contemporary people with competing interests who wish to experience new facets of spirituality, and who want membership in communities that strengthen their relationships to the other communities that sustain their daily lives.

In the next and final chapter, I return to this point, discussing the significance of the rabbis who have participated in this study and the communities they have created as expressions of a living tradition of Judaism that not only exists at the intersection of tradition and invention, but is strengthened through the interrogation of the past, and a self-conscious, politically and socially aware storying of a contemporary American Judaism.
CONCLUSION:

New Mexico’s Living Tradition:

Women Rabbis at the Center of 21st Century Liberal Judaisms

I have listened to, or interacted in one way or another, with each of the women you are working with. They are all really amazing women and leaders, in totally different ways. To answer your question, I do think that they have expanded the possibilities of being Jewish in New Mexico, at least from my perspective. For me, the New Mexico piece is significant. We have our own flavor here. When you live here, you have an awareness of some very specific historical contexts. More so than in other areas of the country, I think. We are just always aware of diversity…the beautiful parts like the Native American and Hispanic cultures, foods, traditions, and the more difficult things like war, colonization, and trauma. We know what it is to be a poor state, to struggle to make better lives for people even though we have really limited resources. We should really resonate with these topics as Jews because of our own cultural pasts, and I think these rabbis, more so than some of the other rabbis, really get this. I’m not sure why exactly. I mean, I think they just somehow share similar sensibilities or something. I don’t know if it is because they are women, or if it just because of the people they are, but at some level, I think they understand what it means to struggle, and to work to overcome those struggles. They are open about it, and that, to me is refreshing, and just really important.

--Jordon, a member of the New Mexico Jewish Community

Rabbis Lynn Gottlieb, Malka Drucker, Shefa Gold, Deborah Brin and Min Kantrowitz, the women whose stories are at the heart of this dissertation, while living and practicing in New Mexico, are also architects of a more broadly constituted and dynamic 21st Century American Jewish culture. To understand these broader contexts, I situated the first part of this three section dissertation with regards to key historical and intellectual transformations that led to women’s rabbinic ordination and contemporary Judaism. I discussed briefly examples of Jewish intellectual movements in the works of Eisenstein-Barzilay (1956), Meyer (1988) and Parush and Brener (1995); the evolution of American denominationalism by Rosenthal (1973), Prell (1982), Sachar (1992), and Kaplan (2009); changes in Jewish women’s roles in domestic and public spheres in
Hyman (1994), Frankel (2000), Goldman (2000), Lipstadt (in Nadell and Sarna 2001), and Nadell (2003); and gave specific focus to assimilation and acculturation by way of Sarna (in Nadell and Sarna 2003) and the diaspora in the Boyarins’ writing (2002), topics indexed in several of the other pieces listed to this point as well. This research was heavily influenced by, and directly linked, to Nadell’s detailed account of women’s hundred year bid for the rabbinate in *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination 1889-1985* (1998).

While my dissertation contributed to these larger discussions, it differed in scope and method, my intent being to fashion intimate, contextualized portraits of the five women rabbis participating in this ten year collaborative project. I took an anthropological approach, focusing on defined physical field sites (e.g., New Mexico, synagogue spaces, and virtually created spaces), engaging community through participant observation, recording elicited and performed life stories, and conducting formal and informal community interviews. I incorporated narrative and performance approaches in the interpretive analysis to answer the following questions that were central to this research: What were the roles of the rabbis’ elicited and performed life stories in self-understanding, spiritual leadership and in the creation of new Jewish communities in New Mexico? In what ways did the women participating in this study craft life stories that spoke to their positions as first and second generation women rabbis practicing in late 20th/early 21st Century American Judaism? And, to what degree are the women in this study and women rabbis more generally, transforming contemporary American Judaism?
In the middle portion of this dissertation, I analyzed the elicited life stories told by Lynn, Malka, Shefa, Deborah and Min highlighting the ways the rabbis crafted cohesive, recognizable, and dialogic accounts purposely to engage unknown, yet anticipated audiences. I argued that the rabbis in this study, as first and second generation women rabbis, simultaneously embody and orchestrate transformations in contemporary American Judaism. Embodiment of the transformation occurs through the rabbis own lived and storied experiences of changing Jewish and American histories, as each of the women in this study tells stories that offer individual glimpses into an era where it was not possible to be ordained a woman rabbi and women’s roles in a broader society changed as well. Though a century long discussion about women’s omission from Jewish spiritual leadership was held by numerous Jewish women and spiritual leaders (Nadell 1998), the women in this study were not privy to such discussions, and still, they made the difficult choices to pursue work that defied traditional gender and religious roles.

The framework of a life story interview process allowed the rabbis time and space for self-reflection, and to make meaning from the disparate experiences they now remember as formative and essential to the people they have become. The rabbis, as storytellers, did not approach these topics lightly, considering that their stories, and I would suggest, their very beings, may be challenged by audiences or readers who question their motives, actions, legitimacy and profession. The rabbis seemed to share an awareness with the women autobiographers studied by Sidonie Smith. She explains:

…women who tell their stories ‘understand that a statement or a story will receive a different ideological interpretation if attributed to a man or to a woman. As a result, the [female] autobiographer…approaches her ‘fictive’ reader as if ‘he’ were the representative of the dominant order, the arbiter of the ideology of gender and its stories of selfhood. In other words, their stories will be judged by
people who, to say the least, are uncomfortable with the very idea of a woman leader (1994:220).

As savvy storytellers, Lynn, Malka, Shefa, Deborah and Min told their stories to me with the understanding that they could be published, and read by potential audiences who may evidence nostalgia, or hold sexist perspectives. Their stories had to function as explanatory models for the unique paths they selected in the slowly transforming Jewish society, lending weight to their childhood tales, as the origin stories of future spiritual leaders. Seen in this light, Lynn’s stories of creating synagogue services, performing poems about perceived injustice in synagogue, and being told that she would be “a rabbi someday” by the rabbi of her childhood synagogue, and Malka’s participation in her grandfather’s rituals or dialogues with her mother about justice in the world demonstrate that they are intelligent, inquisitive girls, with moral understandings and natural leadership qualities. Both are recognized as spiritually significant, external validations of internal qualities that are fundamental to their present roles as rabbis.

The life stories told by Shefa, Deborah and Min, while different, still feature characteristics that come to define their future rabbinates. Shefa finds her mystic core creating rituals in nature with a childhood friend, and learns to communicate those nebulous realities to enhance spiritual connection. Deborah, a member of a tightly-knit, highly recognized Jewish family, learns to question, pray, and participate in multiple communities, qualities that serve her in her present position as a liaison between Congregation Nahalat Shalom and the greater Albuquerque Jewish community. Min feels a deep pull toward the Judaism eschewed by her family, circumventing their lack of involvement by learning how to be Jewish on her own, experiences that help her reach other Jews for whom religious participation is new or Jewish identity ambivalent. The
storytellers draw from these emotions and experiences when revisiting their own lives and story those experiences in ways that foreshadow and explain present positions. Yet, even in these coherent and polished narratives about pivotal childhood moments, there are telling gaps: family experiences are carefully selected and childhood rabbis occupy only peripheral roles. Not one of the storytellers speaks of her childhood synagogues as a model upon which her present community is constructed. Ritual moments such as Protestant styled synagogue services in Lynn’s and Malka’s stories, and personal moments such as Malka’s enjoyment of pork and crabs, serve as exemplars of what to avoid, not to replicate.

The rabbis’ accounts also drew upon the familiar models of Western autobiography and memoir to explain their life experiences, choices, and actions in ways that contemporary audiences recognize as styles employed by other successful leaders, narrative strategies intended to mitigate reactivity or rejection. The rabbis’ stories, like these models, relied on the careful selection of meaningful stories, were told with a high degree of coherence, and involved a clearly identified storied character set within a constellation of additional characters against whom the storyteller was able to describe distinctiveness, motivation and intention, as in Lynn’s comment that being a rabbi is “always the path I’ve walked.”

Beyond their individual experiences, the rabbis’ stories speak to changing histories as they explain the effects of navigating politically driven American movements, college, rabbinic school, and early rabbinic positions within an individual’s experiences. These stories highlighted how the rabbis struggled with transforming expectations and options, and negotiated challenges. By circulating these perspectives, the storytellers
demonstrate that they now possess the requisite skills to lead those seeking meaningful contemporary Jewish experience, offering templates for others who might face similar social and spiritual obstacles. Lynn’s and Deborah’s stories in particular, like the rabbis who participated in Rita J. Simon’s research told their tales as “pioneers in the profession” (1993:67). Simon writes, “the message had a familiar ring to it: the journey of the pioneer was harder and more uncertain” (Simon 1993:68). Lynn’s tale of being pulled from the bimah by conservodox men, and Deborah’s story of the hardships of her first position in Canada reflect this point.

The others in the study relied less on this trope, but utilized other familiar models for discussing modern spirituality telling stories of spiritual awakening and personal journeys, literally as in Shefa’s journey through the Middle East, Min’s travels through the Navajo Nation and Deborah’s trips to Israel. In stories told by Malka, Shefa, and Deborah, the metaphor of the spiritual journey is also invoked as a conduit for deeper spiritual messages. Each of these storied moments resonates with the complex spiritual seekers who inhabit a culture marked by Baby Boomer, or Post Modern Jewish, sensibilities where the search for personal meaning shapes Jewish involvement, identify is fluid (Cohen and Eisen 2000:36-38), authority is open to question, and community is formed out of will not obligation.

At present, the American Jewish societies in which the rabbis in this study find themselves have power structures that are localized and less influential on a broad scale. There is no monolithic, ‘mainstream’ Judaism. A lack of centralized authority is a distinguishing feature of American Judaism, and individual people exhibit “a diverse range of religious behaviors” (Satlow 2006:29). To be relevant and successful leaders for
this new cadre of Jews, the rabbis’ stories must speak to themes of personal and spiritual challenges, spiritual sovereignty and transforming community, not out of artifice, but recognition of similar vision and values. In these stories we see new values emerge as the rabbis and members of their community speak of authenticity instead of authority, inclusivity as opposed to exclusion, and egalitarianism where hierarchy was once acceptable.

Yet change is slow, and difficult. Sylvia Barack Fishman reminds us that prior to immigration into America (the context for the rabbis in this study as well), rabbis functioned in “an all-male world” (Fishman 1993:201). These rabbis were “politically skilled men” within “all-male power structures” in the places they lived (Fishman 1993:202). These early rabbis were “esteemed primarily for their devotion to learning, their ritual piety, and their scholarly brilliance” (Fishman 1993:201), as in the term rabbi, derived from rav meaning “teacher” or “great man.” Even though the role of ‘rabbi’ has changed, women in this position will continue to be held to the same standards.

In a comparative exploration of American women working as ministers and rabbis, Simon found that her participants described their roles as “counselor,” “spiritual advisor,” “leader,” “community spokesperson,” “resource person” and “moral voice” (Simon 1993:67). “Almost all of the rabbis and seventeen of the ministers,” she notes, “said that they carried out their duties as ministers and rabbis differently from male colleagues of comparable age and background” (Simon 1993:68). The rabbis described themselves as “less formal,” “more engaging,” “more approachable,” “more likely to reach out to touch and hug,” or “more people oriented” – impressions that Simon contends are “unsubstantiated by outside observations and analyses” (1993:68).
When I undertook this project, it was in many ways to trouble such essentializing qualities frequently attributed to women leaders, either by self or other. Such descriptions were not used to describe the rabbis with whom I worked. All clearly referred to themselves as rabbi, even though some did indicate secondary titles, i.e., Deborah is also a counselor, Malka an author, and Min a chaplain. This discrepancy, I am convinced, results from the challenge to their authority as women rabbis, a condition that persists twenty years after Simon’s publication. As such, the rabbis’ present needs to identify clearly with their titles, not succumbing to more recognizably feminized attributes or professional titles, even though many do possess similar qualities, can be read as a continued effort to buck androcentric trends that remain at the center of prestige structures within contemporary Judaism. To be a successful or relevant leader, and to create sustainable Jewish communities, these rabbis must be able to communicate effectively across gender divides.

The rabbis’ abilities to succeed as relevant leaders is taken up in the final section of this dissertation as I turned my attentions to the communities the rabbis created: two New Mexico congregational communities, Congregation Nahalat Shalom and HaMakom: The Place for Passionate and Progressive Judaism, and three less bounded or virtual communities, Jewish Family Services, Shomer Shalom, and Kol Zimra. Taking into account the formation of each community in terms of the preexisting Jewish New Mexico landscapes, I maintain that these two communities, while at the margins of the more established mainstream communities, were created in response to needs expressed by Jews who were dissatisfied with or uncomfortable in their perceived restrictions in other Jewish congregations. I examined the rabbis’ publicly performed and published life
stories to understand the role of the rabbis and their significance in the formation and
cultivation of these new spaces for Jewish experience, comparing messages
communicated by the women to understand the vision and direction each rabbi offered to
meet the distinct needs of the Jews in their communities who evidenced complex notions
of identity, religious pluralism, community, and spiritual practice. I reasoned that these
performances (i.e. live, mediated, and printed), though autobiographical in nature,
extended beyond the tenure of the storyteller. I discovered that as the rabbis’ told
personal stories that extended beyond the tales of the individual storyteller becoming
shared stories as audience, and even anthropologist, engaged in the active process of
speaking and listening. Through spoken performance, publications, and even electronic
communications, the rabbis’ stories invited others to relate to the storytellers’ own
experiences, and those experiences become models for others negotiating challenging life
events, exploring the process of spiritual living, reflecting on issues of personal
leadership, as well as for those redefining categories of Jew, Judaism, and community.

Through ethnographic observation, community member interviews, and ritual
participation, I came to understand the social and/or interactive processes of leadership.
While the rabbis’ positions as spiritual leaders were realized through performances as
their bodies, voices and experiences occupied the sacred spaces of synagogue and bimah,
their authority was legitimized through the responses of their congregants and the
expansion of their communities. For those who built ‘imagined’ communities of members
who met metaphorically at a distance or in cyber space, the continued presence of the
rabbis’ stories, and the interactive responses of their community members made possible
through social media, served much the same function.
The new communities that the rabbis have created exist at the intersection of tradition and invention. By telling personal stories about how they have discovered their own spiritual centers, they reference their own upbringings and experiences as adults inviting their audiences to bridge their own nostalgic pasts with present local and global issues allowing for a mutual, creative, self-conscious, politically and socially aware storying of contemporary American Judaism made resilient through participation of multiple people seeking meaning in a changing system. As members of these Jewish communities and American Jews more broadly seek privatized and personal religious experiences as sovereign agents making conscious choices from a variety of spiritual options and potential community affiliations, such an ability to convey meaningful information to an array of diverse and complex people in flexible and varied ways is important.

In this dissertation, I demonstrated that Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Malka Drucker, Shefa Gold, Deborah Brin and Min Kantrowitz are such rabbis, modeling innovative approaches to religious leadership, spiritual practice, and Jewish community by expanding notions of Jewish identity and belonging by becoming approachable leaders who tell personal stories about how they have both negotiated and instigated transformations in Jewish and American societies, overcoming challenges and discovering new opportunities to write in the expanding margins of forward-thinking and fluid Jewish society.
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