

Introduction of a Dialogue Group in a Contemporary, Conservative Jewish Synagogue

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Working the Soul of the World

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Abstract

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This project brought a dialogue group to a large conservative Jewish synagogue in Miami, Florida. The dialogue group grew out of a concern for how things were handled in the temple and the author's attempt to share her voice with leadership and other members. The initial phase of the project entailed involvement on one of the synagogue's committees where an observation of temple practices as well as a listening in to the multiplicity of voices was called for.

The main focus of the project was a group of 12 people who met weekly to hold dialogue in the way of council. The theme of the dialogue group was Jewish values centering on a celebration of Judaism and a consciousness of the workings of the temple.

The paper reveals the process and depth of experiences that evolved during the project. The relevance and importance of depth psychological dimensions to this work, such as dialogue and restoration of the world, the idea of resacralization and participation/soul in this world as well as other dimensions that grew out of this experience are explored in this paper.

*“Dialogue with the people is neither a concession nor a gift...Dialogue, as the encounter among men to ‘name’ the world, is a fundamental precondition for their true humanization. In dialogue...”each individual wins back the right to say his or her own word, to name the world”.*

Paulo Freire (1993, pp. 15, 118)

*“...It has become urgent that we communicate...We have to share our consciousness and to be able to think together, in order to do intelligently whatever is necessary. If we begin to confront what’s going on in a dialogue group, we sort of have the nucleus for what’s going on in all society.”*

*“In a dialogue... nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it.”*

David Bohm (1996, pp. 7, 15)

*“God’s dream is to be not alone, but to have humanity as a partner in the drama of continuous creation. By whatever we do, by every act we carry out, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption.”*

Abraham Joshua Heschel (in Lerner, 1994)

Introduction and Dedication

In 1935, my grandmother who had recently emigrated to Calgary, Canada from Radom, Poland wrote in her broken Yiddish-English script to the prime minister of Canada asking him to help her get papers so that the family's niece could leave Radom and come to Canada. She wrote: "...as you know how Poland is now, we must get this girl out of there, and if you dont help us there is no chence... (Davidman in Paris, 1980, p.65). The prime minister's office responded that they were unable to allow her niece entry into Canada and the correspondence ended on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1937. In 1939 Hitler invaded Poland and before the war's end 90% of the 30,000 Jews in Radom had been exterminated at Auschwitz, Treblinka and Maidanek (Paris 1980, p.66).

My late grandfather also lost most of his family in the Holocaust. In writing up my project I would like to remain in the way of council (as my project involved a council group), in dedicating my summer project to the courage of my grandparents, particularly my grandmother who, although her request was not fulfilled, let her voice be heard.

In this paper, I will describe my community fieldwork project and how it developed. I will describe the site, a synagogue that I am a member of, the Cantor Selection Committee that I participated on, the development of my dialogue group in the temple and the observations and experiences that arose through involvement with the group. I will discuss depth psychological dimensions that evolved as a result of my involvement with this project and how this group attended to soul in the world.

The Site

My project took place at a large conservative, contemporary Jewish synagogue in the community of Miami, Florida. The temple began in 1941 with about 40 members. Current membership is approximately 900 families who, in addition to traditional worship services on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, can choose from a wide range of programs that the temple offers, including an early childhood education program, a Hebrew day and after school program, a camp for 3-14 year olds, an adult educational series and a Sisterhood and Men's Club.

My summer fieldwork project began in December of '99 when I received a letter from the president of the temple informing all the members that the board had decided not to renew the cantor's contract. (The word Cantor or Hazzan in Hebrew means visionary and he is one who chants the religious hymns during the services). I was angry about this decision as I felt the cantor brought so much warmth to the temple, especially in his sharing his musical talents with the children. Upon investigation, I was told that this non-renewal was happening because the temple was looking for someone with a better voice.

I wrote a passionate call to action letter in response to this assertion and sent it over the rabbi's e-mail list of about 200 people so as to reach as many members as possible. I was delighted and surprised to receive in turn several e-mails from people who also felt unheard and passionate about the loss of the cantor. I sensed a feeling of liberation in myself and in the words of the others as I believe that ours were the marginalized voices now being heard. There seemed to be a mutual desire here to connect with one another, a sense of eros. For me, this feeling of liberation, desire and connection became the heart and soul of my involvement with this issue

As a result of the above circumstances and other difficulties that were being experienced by my three year old son in the educational program at the temple, I felt called to be in ‘this place’. Hillman, in referring to the Platonic myth of growing down, says that one of the modes in which the soul descends is via place and there is a need to be in a place that ties you down with duties and customs (1996, p. 62). I remember sitting in the parking lot of the temple, writing in my journal about the situation with my son and that with the cantor and inquiring to myself about how I could get involved and what I could offer to this place.

I attended a board meeting to bring up the issue of the cantor’s contract and was struck by the lack of dialogue and respectful listening among many of the people that I witnessed in that room. I sensed a strong patriarchal order in this room, honoring the voice of rationality and logic. In this context, I have often “given up my voice to keep the peace” and maintain harmony and relationship within a group, as Carol Gilligan has written about the women in her research (Gilligan, 1993, p. x). When I spoke about the cantor issue, my voice was trembling and I did not get the same passionate message across that had come through in my letter. I resonated with what Claire Kahane wrote about the female disembodied voice in the written word becoming a ‘phallic mask’ for the woman’s voice and allowing some form of equality that the female body in a phallogentric order disallows. Without being subject to the gaze one can speak through the disguise of language (Kahane, 1995, p.59).

Although I observed polarization of opinions and a predominantly hostile, patriarchal, power-oriented board meeting, I also sensed a marginalized desire to connect, to dialogue with each other and to form community. I felt this desire in some of the

board members' interest in what I had to say and their interest in including me on the board. Although I saw a dissonance in the stated and actual practice of Jewish values (as in the handling of the cantor's contract), I thought that maybe there was just an ignorance about dialogue and a calling out for re-membrance and re-connection to relate and form community. Hence I decided to form a dialogue group about Jewish values in the temple for my summer project. I sent out a letter to inform people about the idea of dialogue and to invite them to join the group. I began the project though in becoming a member of the Cantor Selection Committee, as I had become involved in this issue and I wanted to remain engaged.

#### Cantor Selection Committee

My membership on the Cantor Selection Committee became my first experience in being a participant in and observer of the way of leadership in the temple and the process by which decisions were made. The committee was comprised of a group of about 15 people selected by the president of the temple. We interviewed six candidates, after their music tape and resume was approved by a sub-committee, in a period of about five months. There were periodic committee meetings as well to review applicants. The job description for the cantor was all encompassing and the interview schedule for each cantor was fairly intensive, as it began on a Friday morning and went through the weekend. During these times the candidate was interviewed and/or observed chanting various prayers. I was asked to host the Friday morning interview in showing the applicants around to the classrooms of the pre-school, as my son was in the nursery, as well as hosting the cantor at the Friday morning Sabbath celebration for the children.

I felt uncomfortable with the interview process due to the environment and the attitude in which it was conducted. The main interview was on Sunday morning. The applicant stood at the front of the sanctuary holding a microphone while the committee members sat in the pews, like an audience. We would listen to the cantorial applicants' chanting and then have an opportunity to ask any questions. I experienced this setting of the audience sitting in rows at a distance from the performer as removed and hierarchical. In addition, I empathized with the applicant who I thought must feel like he was being interrogated as he fielded questions from the crowd. As a result of the seating arrangement and the candidate's removal from us as he stood at the front, there seemed to be no connection or warmth among the group of people in that room. I believe that there can be connectedness and dialogue even (or especially) in an interview situation, as a receptive environment has the potential of bringing out one's soul. This I believe is crucial in choosing a man/woman whose vocation it is to sing, for him/herself and the congregation, the prayers to God. I originally thought that we were going to talk to each applicant individually or in small groups to really get to know more about or to get a feel for the candidate rather than the predominantly rationalistic type questions that were thrown out, like, "What are your 5 year goals?" Although the soulful questions were rarely asked, I was surprised and delighted to hear committee members ask the candidate about working with the children as I originally thought that this endeavor was all about finding a better voice.

I did enjoy getting to meet some of the people on the committee and the cantorial candidates. However, I became disturbed when I would hear people speaking in a domineering, ridiculing or exclusive voice. This voice of exclusion came up at a

cantorial selection committee meeting that took place immediately following a congregational meeting. This meeting was organized by our committee to receive input from members of the congregation regarding their choice for cantor (as the cantorial candidates were heard by the attending congregation at each Sabbath Service on the weekend that that particular cantor interviewed). After the congregational meeting, the cantorial committee met privately to discuss and vote on our choice of cantor.

I was surprised to see that throughout the meeting not one person referred to the choices or ideas that had been mentioned by the congregation just minutes before. Toward the end of the meeting I asked, “What about the congregants’ opinions, most of whom liked so-and-so”? This old man who was handicapped (I mention this because I was taken aback to hear this from him) looked at me sternly and said, “They don’t write the checks!” Nobody, including me, said anything; it was as if everyone was either in agreement with this thought or didn’t dare challenge it. I was shocked to hear this so directly and I didn’t experience the impact it had on me until I got home. It was then that I felt my anger and imagined seeing this man as a skeleton talking to me like that with those words. I felt disgusted and wanted to turn away from the temple which, as when I wrote my initial letter, I sensed was about power, money and prestige; that is, if one finds a great voice, the money and prestige will come (as my three year old son would say: “yech!!!”).

Although a voice in my head kept reminding me that the temple is a business entity that needs funds to run, I knew that this was about something else. I heard another voice tell me that this man as well as others in the larger culture must be suffering in their need to replace money and prestige (having the best cantor followed by a influx of

money) with relationship. Lerner who interviewed 357 Jews in the U.S , Canada and England found that many of these interviewees distanced themselves from the Jewish community not because Judaism was too different from the materialistic and self-serving ethos of American culture, but because Judaism was too similar to the larger society. The Jewish community that they met with was obsessed with money and power and with the historical product of Judaism's adaptations and accommodations to a world of spiritual and moral vacuity (Lerner, 1994, pp. 2, 13). Similar findings were cited by Sheskin in researching 46 Jewish communities in terms of synagogue membership and reasons given for (the lack of) affiliation, which he currently estimates at about 18% in Miami, a figure that he says is fairly typical nationwide (Sheskin, 8/2/2000, pp. 4-5).

In feeling disgusted and turned-off by what I can now see as suffering (in taking some distance from it) in the Judaic culture, I turned to the following theorists and depth psychological ideas. Thomas Mann wrote that, "our capacity for disgust is in proportion to the intensity of our attachment to the things of this world" (Mann, 1958 in Samuels, 1993, p. 13). Andrew Samuels writes about our culture's growing collective sense of disgust with the political world and the shallowness and cruelty of much of modern life. He claims that disgust with our present politics leads us to aspire to a resacralized and reformed politics leading to openness and hope rather than to fear and disgust. Samuels says that involvement in the mess of the external world is just as psychologically valuable as an interior perspective or an intimate 'I-thou' relationship (Samuels, 1993, p.13). Speaking of the 'I and thou', I defer to Martin Buber, as he concurs in writing that "by no means can it be our true task in the world into which we have been set, to turn away from the things and beings that we meet on our way ..." (Buber, 1950/1998, p.19). Buber

claims that the task of every man is to affirm, for God's sake, the world and himself and to transform both (1950/1998, p.6). The dialogue group that I was later to initiate, I now knew was critically needed in this synagogue and I knew that I could not turn away from this congregation as I felt (impulsively) inclined to.

### My Counsel Training Experience At the Ojai Foundation

In order to facilitate the dialogue group at this synagogue I decided to acquire some formal training in the way of council and I attended a course entitled, "Introduction to Council" in July at the Ojai Foundation. Please see appendix 7 for a full description of this training experience.

One of the most valuable experiences at Ojai for me was when I had a conversation with one of the council facilitators, Joe Provisor, about my project at the temple. I expressed my concerns about the anger (the energy field) that I was receiving from some of the temple members and we had a discussion about how to begin a council group in this setting. I had planned to start the group with a problem-solving orientation. Joe explained to me that council was not about conflict resolution but rather it was about a weaving of stories, as story and council are inseparable (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 72).

Joe recommended that we begin our group as a confirmation or celebration of our Judaism. He explained how the center and talking pieces could represent the entity of the temple, a third presence, a living thing outside of ourselves (the members of the group). Joe suggested that I envision all of our stories and experiences about being Jewish that will be expressed in the circle as streaming toward the center, the heart of the circle. This center which is the heart of the temple, perhaps the Torah, connects all of us together. I liked this idea of using the Torah as the center to both emanate and receive the circle's

Judaic stories. Gershom Scholem claims that to all Jewish mystics the Torah is “a living organism animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning...that it does not consist merely of ... words; rather it is to be regarded as the living incarnation of the divine wisdom which eternally sends out new rays of light (Scholem, 1941/1995, p. 14).

When Joe spoke of the third entity I immediately thought of the transcendent function. Jung said that the transcendent function, as a result of the tension created by the confrontation of opposites, creates a living, third thing, “a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation” (Jung, 1916/1971, p.298). Andrew Samuels in his book, the Political Psyche, expands on the idea of the transcendent function (as did my council facilitator) and through imagery brings it into the world of the socio-political by bridging the gap between the individual and the collective: “This reworking of the transcendent function onto a sociopolitical level provides the beginnings of a model for tracking moves between individual and collective realms and a means of studying conflicts and harmonies between culture and individual” (Samuels, 1993, pp.63-64). The tension of opposites within myself (see appendix 7) as well as the tension that I was picking up from some of the temple members collectively, were ripe for creating this third thing. I felt a longing for wholeness present as much as there was a one-sided rigid, rational stance. I left Ojai with a renewed sense of what was needed from me and how I would initiate the dialogue group. “HO!!” (as we exclaimed in the council when we resonated with what someone had just said).

The Dialogue Group

The Place

The dialogue group was held in one of the old chapel rooms at the synagogue located in the temple's educational building. There was a small arc (to hold the torah) with the eternal light hanging above it at the front of the room which I felt gave the room an atmosphere of holiness, making it conducive to our dialogue about Judaism. Also, I thought it was important that we meet on the temple grounds rather than at another location, as to experience the physical, embodied connection to the place that we were reflecting on. Again, I would like to emphasize the importance of place to the themes that can possibly arise, as Hillman commented on in his April '00 lecture at Pacifica Graduate Institute (see in appendix 7). Jack Zimmerman claims that "attention to *place* is an important part of setting a council, particularly when the location of the gathering is directly related to the group's focus...*place* exerts its influence on participants, even when they are not aware of it..."(1996, p. 15).

I brought in a center table to house flowers, the various talking pieces and a candle which was lit for the dedication each meeting. This center represented a place of beauty. The talking pieces included an old prayer book (Siddur) and miniature Torah scroll which belonged to my late grandfather, a cherry red wooden heart, an oriental stone with the letters of 'wisdom' inscribed on it, and two small rectangular rattles. These talking pieces I believe were symbolic of the temple, our religious faith, the heart of what we were there for, 'the living organism'- the Torah, a connection to nature and listening in. I brought in a CD and tape player to play music before the session started .

### The Method

I began the dialogue group as a celebration or confirmation of our Judaism. This idea worked beautifully. I began each session with a time for silence, where everyone would close their eyes and breathe deeply for a few moments to let the events of the day go in order to be fully present. Then one of the group members would dedicate the council to something of their choosing and light a candle in the center. After that I would ask for any clearings that had to be made and review logistics of meeting dates and times. I would then explain or review the ways of council which included the four intentions of council, particularly speaking and listening from the heart, and the importance of confidentiality (Zimmerman, 1996, pp. 27-46). I reviewed what council was not, as in Mary Watkins' handout; i.e. not a place to prove oneself, to negotiate, to persuade or convince others, etc. (Watkins, 2000, winter class handout, Pacifica Graduate Institute).

I expressed to the group that we need to tell stories because in our culture we usually just move directly from opinion to solution. However, I commented that an opinion is just a story robbed of its narrative (Joe Provisor, Palms Council Project, Los Angeles). Bohm writes that "truth does not emerge from opinions ... sharing of mind, of consciousness, is more important than the content of the opinions" (1996, p. 35). I explained that in council, we begin by sharing experience. The root of experience, which is the ground of council, is the process of emerging from our peril; it is what we bring back.

At each council we had anywhere from 5 to 12 people; five of these people held leadership positions on the temple board. Before we began each council and especially during the first few councils, we began by dialoguing in dyads. That is, I would have the

members pair up, face each other and for one minute one person would speak while the other just listened and then they would reverse roles.

The topics I gave them to speak about included such things as: a trait that your mother/father/a mentor has passed down to you that you like/dislike, the first neighborhood you lived in, a close friend, an experience of death in your life and what brought you here (topic ideas from Jack Zimmerman at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Spring, '00). It was a wonderful beginning for people to start to learn to speak from the heart and to listen without saying anything as the speaker spoke. I, as well as the others, found it helpful as a way to slow down, to just 'sit with' another and focus on that particular person in order to facilitate the transition into council which entails a certain way of sending and receiving messages.

We began our first council with my request for the group to talk about an experience of being Jewish and we passed the talking piece around the circle (to the left) that we were sitting in. For the first few councils this was the opening request that I made and then I let the group's stories lead us further. As we got further practice in the traditional council circle, I asked people to speak of what resonated with them as they listened to the other members.

I introduced what is called 'the web' at a later council meeting, which is where the talking piece is in the middle and the speaker picks up the piece when moved to speak and returns it to the center after talking. This format, which is helpful in discovering themes and weaving images (Ojai Foundation), enabled us to go deeper into a specific issue. It was not until the fourth council meeting that I posed the question, "What is your edge with this synagogue". At this point I felt that we had created a strong enough

container to bring in the shadow. We went deeper into these themes by developing a council question. In the last session, we utilized the centerpiece as a third entity and two members let the voice of the temple speak through them while the others witnessed and commented on this process.

### Transferral Dimensions of the Experience

As the dialogue group sat in the circle and the talking piece traveled from person to person, people revealed their experiences of being Jewish, the room became quiet and still. I could sense a light in the room; not a light that we think of in the traditional sense, but a light of transcendence, similar to the experience of light one feels from the light of the Sabbath candles or the Chanuka candles. This sense of divine light is described by Gershom Scholem in referring to the benevolence of God as experienced by the mystic as “a whole sphere of divine light in which God manifests Himself”, this sphere being “a stage in the revelation of God’s creative power”(Scholem, 1941/1995, p. 13).

The content of the stories in the council group were so full and embodied as each person revealed their own Jewish experience; as the stories unfolded I began to have the feeling of being lifted beyond myself, it was like a transcendental experience. People were truly speaking from the heart as I sensed many of the stories to be deeply moving not only to me but to the other council members. William Isaacs in his book, “Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together” writes about the honesty and courageousness in telling a heartfelt story and how “in moments like these the promise of dialogue shows itself...and can lift us out of ourselves” (1999, p.28). I felt ‘lifted’ in listening to everyone’s Jewish experience.

In one woman in particular I noticed that as she spoke her body and eyes revealed an inner light and I experienced this and her words as angelic; it was as if an angel was speaking through her and delivering a divine message to all of us. On further reflection I was reminded of Romanyshyn writings regarding angels in medieval paintings and how they announce by their presence the continuity between the divine and the human realms; they are messengers who impregnate us with the word and connect us with the glory and wisdom of another order of reality (2000, pp. 4-5). I felt that I got a glimpse that night of the divine spark that lives in every being and that is liberated through holy converse (Buber, 1950/1998, p.5). I really surprised myself as I never expected to experience these feelings.

As the talking piece continued to travel around the circle and came to the last person who had not yet spoken, a theme had emerged as the next three people were quick to receive the piece and they continued to speak about this one topic. Everyone was pretty much in agreement with the one who spoke before and spoke about their experience as it related to this topic. The last speaker before we closed council, however, was quite emphatic about this subject and at the end of her story she said, “You must insist that this is the way it is...you must tell this to your children...” She seemed to direct her comments particularly to one participant who in turn quietly defended himself.

I started feeling very uncomfortable at this point knowing that this way of speaking was not the way of council and that I was not in agreement with everyone else. However, I remained quiet and closed the council right after that, as it was late and I was at a loss for a way in which to articulate what I needed to say, this being my first council, I did not want to embarrass anyone by telling them that this was not the way to speak. Again, in

trying to 'keep the peace' within my own culture which so often speaks in this way, I silenced my own voice as a facilitator and as a participant with a different idea and story to tell.

When I feel anxious, the clarity of the situation and the way to address it escapes me until later when I can reflect upon it in peace. I felt disappointed in myself and accountable to the group for what I had ignored. I decided that the next session I would bring this up, apologize to the group as to why I did not intervene and explain that I too was in the process of learning this way of speaking. At the next session, I emphatically spoke of the importance of not proscribing in council and that we all do not need to agree with one another, that the voice of difference is welcome here.

The comment this woman made disturbed me not only because I knew that that is not the way one speaks in dialogue but because this way of speaking is embedded in the Jewish culture. It is a way of being spoken at rather than being spoken to. It robs others (particularly children and those vulnerable) of their own unique voice and way of being in the world.

Martin Buber writes that "mankind's great chance lies precisely in the unlikeness of men, in the unlikeness of their qualities and inclinations. God's all-inclusiveness manifests itself in the infinite multiplicity of the ways that lead to him, each of which is open to one man"(Buber, 1950/1998, p. 17). Jung claimed that the capacity to 'let the other man's argument count is a fundamental and indispensable condition for human community. He said that "to the degree that he (one) does not admit the validity of the other person, he denies the "other' within himself the right to exist - and vice versa"

(Jung, 1916/1971, p.297). Please see appendix 11 for discussion of suspension and the voice of difference.

The council deepened at each meeting as we progressed from the basic circle of dialogue to an exercise of having the participants comment on what they resonated with after each person in the circle spoke. Here I saw how the group began to think together as many people resonated with others' experiences and as insights and suggestions were spoken and received. Bohm writes that thinking together is part of collective thought; it is where people share opinions without hostility or an attempt to convince or persuade others. This leads to a flow of ideas and thoughts (Bohm, 1996, p. 26), a flow which was happening in this dialogue group. When we had gone around the circle twice, people started talking without the talking piece and resorting back to the typical way of discussion. I let this go and for the next session realized that I needed to say something about this and that the group should expect a process intervention if I see something going on that needs comment.

In the following council, we used the format of the web after going around the circle once. I mentioned at the beginning of the session that it would be beneficial for people to pause after someone has spoken and before someone else speaks in order to allow the group to digest what was just said and to allow for one's own reflection before speaking, as I noticed people speaking without pause either way.

There was a little more pausing between speakers but the talking piece did not stay in the center for longer than a moment before someone picked it up and spoke; people felt moved to speak without much reflection time. I noticed also that the women in the group spoke more often and were quick to pick up the piece whereas the men

seemed more reluctant, perhaps they needed more time to digest and reflect or perhaps they had nothing to say. As our dialogue unfolded I saw how this web format allowed us to go deeper into one of the participants' personal issues around family and Judaic observance that she had brought up.

At the council meeting that I introduced the idea of the shadow in asking the question, "What is your edge with this synagogue?", I spoke and heard various rich experiences as to why people were not satisfied with this temple. Ideas such as, "we have lost or forgotten the real reason that we are here, i.e. to pray to God, the temple is too conventional and does not welcome the 'other', such as singles and gays, there is just something missing here that makes people not want to come to services and there is a disrespectful attitude toward our hired professionals". People gave accounts of their own experience to support their statements. We got deeper into some of these issues as we went around the circle again and spoke of resonating feelings in response to stories that were told. Again I sensed that people were thinking together. Isaacs writes that "...dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in relationship ... that you no longer take your own position as final" (1999, p.19).

I continued with the theme of the shadow for the next meeting as I wanted to go even deeper into the issues and since some people had been absent at the prior meeting, I wanted them to have the opportunity to participate in this theme. Some people were uncomfortable saying anything 'bad' about the temple so I explained that this was not a grievance or conflict resolution group but that in addition to the light and celebration of community, it is important to address the shadow side. I explained that this shadow energy could be turned into creative energy and that sometimes one just knows what

needs to be done in speaking of these things. I quoted from Andrew Samuels who writes, “a sense of community that does not address the shadow of community ... will be thin, dessicated, morally elevated classroom civics, and socially useless” (Samuels, 1993, p.16).

What was interesting about this meeting was that new and different ideas emerged, even from those who were reluctant to say anything negative about the temple, and what seemed to be an important issue was the idea of money and power. Some people said that the temple community is materialistic and that if you don't fit into that monetary bracket or hold materialistic values then you are excluded. Others spoke of feeling that they could contribute monetarily only so much to the temple while others talked about the power arrangement and indebtedness set up when certain people pay for things that a select group or committee wants and that the temple's budget cannot afford. These feelings of distaste and alienation in connection with the materialistic and power-oriented aspects of the temple was what I had felt and mentioned earlier in this paper and I quoted Lerner and Sheshkin, above, who had found this to be largely the cause for the lack of Jewish affiliation among Jews in the U.S. and other countries. What I felt and I mentioned that night in the group was that this ethos of materialism and power is predominant in our larger culture and that I believed that the temple is just a micro-culture of our larger culture in this regard.

What I found interesting from a dialogic point of view was that once one person started talking about money issues almost everyone in the circle spoke about their experience or feelings about money and the temple. In speaking about resonating

feelings, anger, hurt and accountability came up. We came out of council to discuss these themes in order to go back into council with a deeper question.

Our question, which was developed through the input of the whole group revolved around anger and healing; i.e. “to talk about a time that you were angry and experienced or did not experience healing”. Therefore, the content of dialogue went from money and power to what I would consider deeper feelings of anger and the question of how to heal. This led us into a very deep and emotional experience as people revealed their anger as a result of experiencing deaths, divorce, not being acknowledged by what one is providing to the temple, etc. What struck me the most was how compassionate the group members were to each other in offering support after listening to one another’s stories of anger, sadness and some remarkable stories of healing. I felt as Lerner does when he writes that the world can be transformed from its current focus on selfishness to a focus on caring if we share in ethical and spiritual values that transcend the power dynamics of the contemporary world, which draws on the legacy of transcendence and compassion that emerges from Judaism (Lerner, 1994, pp. 272-3).

At our final council meeting I introduced the idea of imagining the centerpiece, that is, the table holding the talking pieces and the candle, to represent the organization (the temple) as its own separate being. I then asked two members to come into the center of the circle to first meditate, thinking of this entity as separate from themselves and then to let the voice of the third, or independent being representing the synagogue speak through them. I stressed that although we are involved with and participate in this place, the temple is a thing unto itself with needs, desires, wounds, etc. and that we need to remove our own personal agendas and let the organization speak for itself.

At first I think the group was confused about this exercise, but as we started and moved through it they began to understand the significance and value of doing this. The balance of the group remained in the circle as witnesses who I had instructed to watch the process and then comment on what they saw and what they might like to add when the center dialogue was complete. Then, since only one member volunteered, he and I came into the center, meditated and began to speak the voice of the synagogue. I spoke about imagining several people flocking to the temple with the desire to be there, the ambiance of a joyful atmosphere and that the temple would welcome the many and the different. My partner in the center spoke of the large size of the synagogue and the difficulty it has in accommodating the interests of the diverse membership, but by forming various groups, the organization has tried to reach out. The witness circle added depth to our voices as people commented on what we had said and spoke of what was important as well as troubling to them in the temple, for example, Sabbath services, the minyan (a religious quorum usually comprised of 10 men), the formality and size of the service, etc. Stories were told which I believe helped all of us become more focused on what it is we long for, individually and collectively, in a synagogue and what the temple needs from us.

When this process was complete I said that we were going to pass the piece around the circle once more and I asked each member to speak thinking of the themes that had been brought up during the summer or anything that moved them now as they received the piece. I was touched and honored by the words that I heard: one person said how this group had helped her with her transitions in her career and in the temple (as she had just resigned from the board), another spoke of how the council had facilitated

connections and bonds that the group has made, another spoke of continuing the group as her interest was in ethical practices and she wanted to go further.

I was quite moved when one of the women, the last one to speak, told us that she is normally a very private person and does not discuss personal things even with her family. However, in this group, she felt very comfortable revealing personal feelings as at the last council she spoke emotionally about her son's death and at her anger with God. The group, the container, I believe had been present to hold her grief and listen to it compassionately. She looked at me with a face I have never seen her portray before; she was looking directly at me, smiling, her face full of color and life; as I think of it now it was like a blossoming flower. I could sense her warmth and love as she said that I did a wonderful job and that my gentleness and sweetness helped make the group what it was. For much of the time I had experienced this woman as angry and challenging but at that moment I realized that she was angry with God and her religious and personal life had not allowed her anger and grief to be heard or more importantly to be 'sat with' (see next section) and listened to.

I felt immensely moved thinking that the group had given her a space to be heard. Again, I felt the presence of the divine in this woman, in this group, and in this place. I believe that our group had done a small piece of the work of *tikkun olam*, restoration of the world (see next section). (Please see appendix 9 for a council experience that incorporated the nomination of Joseph Lieberman for Vice President.)

#### Depth Psychological Dimensions

The following is an expansion of some of the depth psychological concepts that I believe intertwine with my experience and ideas that emerged from my involvement with

this project. Please see appendix 10 for a brief cultural and historical review of Judaism and appendix 11 for a discussion of suspension and the voice of difference.

### Sitting With

The idea of ‘sitting with’ originally came to me as we were sitting in pairs at Pacifica Graduate Institute practicing speaking and listening from the heart with Jack Zimmerman leading our class. We did this exercise before we went into council and I found it to be most helpful in terms of slowing down, really looking at the person opposite oneself, hearing on a deeper level, and also accessing one’s own truth in an environment that allowed for this.

I found this practice invaluable and hence I started the first month of the dialogue group at the temple with this exercise. As we did with Jack Zimmerman, I had the group members rotate so that everyone had a chance to speak and to listen to everyone else, in pairs (for topics, see above). The group responded well to these exercises and even asked me to include the exercise at the beginning of each council meeting as they felt it prepared them to go into council. Also, many people discovered some basic things about each other that they had not known before even though as one pair claimed, “we have been sitting next to each other in board meetings for years and never knew this”.

I took this practice home and started ‘sitting with’ my three year old son, not allowing any other distractions to interfere and enabling a slowing down to enter our space. He responded as did the dialogue group, with warm affection and a new openness. This idea of ‘sitting with’ is similar to what Isaacs refers to as ‘standing still’. He says that, “perhaps the simplest and most potent practice for listening is simply to be still...in

quieting the inner chatter of our minds, we can open up to a way of being present and listening that cuts through everything...we can listen *from silence* within ourselves ...listening for and receiving the meanings that well up from deep within us. Stand still.” (Isaacs, 1999, pp.101-102).

Hillman writes about the hyperactivism, or life-fanaticism and the inflated manic mood disorder (disguised as “growth”) prevalent in our Western culture, a consciousness that has lost its relation with death, unable “to go down” and find its depth or soul (Hillman, 1983, pp. 31, 51). In counsel, we begin by ‘sitting with’, slowing down and as the session proceeds, the mood becomes solemn and people tend to ‘go down’; they are quiet, pensive and reflective. As the dialogue deepens, I believe that we enter our depths and that together we find soul.

### Aesthetics and Story

What came to me in the first dialogue group at the temple as we were going around the circle and it was the first time that everyone was telling a story of one of their Jewish experiences was the idea of a weaving together of story and aesthetics. As the stories came forth so did the *aisthesis* (a Greek term), a feeling or sense perception from the speaker as well as from the receivers of the story. Hillman writes that aesthetics in Greek is *aisthesis* which means ‘breathing in’, ‘a gasp’, that primary aesthetic response. He says that this ‘taking in’ means taking to the heart, “not only *my* confession of my soul, but hearing the confession of the *anima mundi* in the speaking of things” (Hillman, 1997, pp.47-48). I personally felt those stories being taken into my heart and from the energy of the room I could feel that others were also sensing a soul of the world.

The primacy of *aisthesis* or breathing in brings to mind the creation myth of Isaac Luria, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish kabbalist, who claimed that in order to create, God had to contract himself (*tsimtsum* in Hebrew) or inhale in order to make room for man (Mary Watkins handout on Tikkun Olam, 2000, Lerner, 1994, p. 177, Scholem, 1941/1995, pp. 268-9); another indication that aesthetics is primary. Hillman claims that “psyche is the life of our aesthetic responses, that sense of taste in relation with things...those primordial aesthetic reactions of the heart are soul itself speaking”(1997, p. 39). Hillman continues in claiming that if we are to recover our soul that we must recover our lost aesthetic reactions (1997, p. 41). Luria’s thought was that salvation occurs in the restoration of the scattered lights of God, as there was a shattering explosion of divine light in the divine contraction, to their right place, the divine source (Lerner, 1994, p. 177, Scholem, 1941/1995, pp. 268-9). In our dialogue group I sensed the recovery of those lost aesthetic reactions, those sparks of light being elevated, through the telling of story.

Nietzsche, one whom I consider an ancestor of depth psychology, wrote that “it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” and that the aesthetic approach justifies the ugly along with the beautiful (1872/1993, pp.32, 115). Even Jung, who makes more sense when read as aesthetics, regarded his psychological types, ‘intuitive’ and ‘sensation’ as aesthetic functions coming prior to the functions of thinking and feeling (Bishop, 1999, pp. 236-7).

Aesthetics and story are primary and I believe intimately intertwined in a depth psychology that sees sensation and story as coming first in life, as opposed to objectivity and rationalism. Robert Romanyshyn wrote that “factualness is not antithetical to

psychological life, but it is secondary to the dimension of story” (1982, p.86), and to that of aesthetics. Mary Watkins writes about the connection of story and image (2000, winter handout, Pacifica Graduate Institute); I believe that images and aesthetics lead to our stories and telling of story leads to aesthetics.

### Dialogue and Tikkun Olam

A weaving or connectedness of dialogue and *tikkun olam* was another idea that grew out of my dialogue group experience. *Tikkun* is the Hebrew term for mending or restitution of a defect (Scholem, 1941/1995, p.265), *olam* is Hebrew for world; hence, *tikkun olam* is a restitution or redemption of the world. Isaac Luria’s idea of the restoration of the scattered lights to their proper place in order to restore the spiritual nature of man to its original form in the creation myth as mentioned above is the process of *tikkun* (Scholem, 1941/1995, pp. 269, 278). *Tikkun*, a healing, repair and transformation (Lerner, 1994, p. 33) of the world is thought to be accomplished through the acts of *mitzvot* or commandments of the Torah, for example, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Scholem, 1946/1961, p. 279, Lerner, 1994, p.177). Lerner writes that the commandments of the Torah are about social relations and that in addition to individual healing that “the health of the soul requires involvement in a community that is itself deeply committed to healing and transforming the social and political world...”(Lerner, 1994, p. xxiv).

There were several instances in the dialogue group (as mentioned above) when stories were spoken and listened to from the heart that I sensed this movement of *tikkun olam*, a transformation, healing and restoration of this community, a small piece of the world. Authentic dialogue I believe can aid in the transformation and restoration of the

world in enabling us to sense otherness in the other and in ourselves. In doing so, we host the presence of the divine. Lerner claims that in Judaism one understands God as the Force that pulls us toward healing, repairing and transforming the world and that part of the goal of Jewish renewal is to learn how to turn collectively toward God's energy which is always present (1994, pp. 181, 267).

### Participation/Soul in this World

As a result of my involvement in my summer project which included conversations with professionals at the temple, attendance of temple services, participation in the dialogue group and my reading and research for the project, I realized that a critical element of Judaism is to be engaged in and to respond to the needs of community (*tzibbur*) and to take responsibility (*aharut*) for ourselves and our neighbors. It is interesting that the root word for responsibility in Hebrew is *ahare* which means 'the other'; Jewish tradition teaches us that we do not live alone and that we strive to work as parts of our communities and our world, thinking about and showing concern for others (Summers, 1978, p.1). Jewish renewal, claims Lerner, insists that our inner, soul work "be intrinsically linked to our participation in a community that is as fully involved in revolutionary transformative, political activity as it is in spiritual growth..."(Lerner, 1994, p. xxvii). I was impressed with a study and action program utilized by BTAY which covers the ways in which to become involved and to contribute *tzedakah*, charity or acts of kindness, to the community such as honoring the poor, visiting the sick, hospitality, redeeming captives, etc. (Summers, 1978).

This idea of engagement and setting the soul in this world has been addressed by philosophers and depth psychologists alike. Martin Buber in teaching Hasidism, tells a

story about God calling to every man: “Where are you in your world?” Buber continues to say that man should *begin* with oneself, but not end with oneself ... that one should apply one’s soul power to active relationship with the world that one has been destined for. He writes that the place of the great treasure, the fulfillment of existence, “is the place on which one stands” (Buber, 1950/1998, pp. 10, 31-2, 37). Nietzsche writes about the necessity of the courage to repeat this life in this world and the triumphant Yes to life (Nietzsche, 1889/1982, pp. 561-563). Hillman writes in referring to the vision of soul-making as the underlying aspiration of archetypal psychology that “for all its emphasis upon the individualized soul, archetypal psychology sets this soul, and its making, squarely in the midst of the world and, it does not seek a way out of or beyond the world ...”(1983, p. 35) because “the way through the world is more difficult to find than the way beyond it” (Wallace Stevens, “Reply to Papini” in Hillman, 1983, p.35).

In my engagement with my community I experienced a soulful feeling of doing work that I believe I was meant to bring to this temple and I also felt a divine presence that permeated not only the work but other areas of my life. Much of this feeling developed as a result of my reading Abraham Heschel who writes that God is in need of man to complete His vision of our task; he claims that the essence of Judaism is the awareness of the *reciprocity* of God and man, the awareness of a *covenant* and mutual responsibility, that life is a *partnership* of God and man and that there is a breath of God in every man. (Heschel, 1959, pp. 140-5). I had never known Judaism in this light and I feel that Heschel’s ideas are synonymous with the idea of *tikkun olam* and they dovetail beautifully with the depth psychological vision of soul-making in the midst of this world.

Resacralization

The dialogue group, a novelty in the temple, was introduced as my research project but I think it also grew out of a desire of people to connect on an spiritual or authentic level that was not being addressed in the temple; one probably not addressed in our larger culture as well. I believe that people joined the group in search of this spiritual longing or perhaps as a result of their anger or disgust for the way that things were currently being handled. As time progressed, I felt that within the dialogue group and perhaps through the group something politically and spiritually transformative was occurring. We had found a new way to find meaning in our affiliation with the temple and with others, something that many of us had felt before (at the temple or at other places) and had lost. We had created our own sacred place and process for recovering what was lost and re-membering.

Andrew Samuels calls this attempt to reconnect at a feeling level that has vanished from our modern world, a *resacralization* (1993, p. 12). Samuels claims that “amidst the dreadful conformism of ‘international’ architecture, telecommunications...the sense of oppression... there is an equally fragmented, fractured and complex attempt at a *resacralization of the culture* going on (1993, p. 11). He sees the phenomenon of resacralization as held together by aspirational rather than by socioeconomic ties (Samuels, 1993, p. 11). I saw in myself and in the development of this dialogue group the spiritual longings and collective feeling of disgust which motivated the formation of the group; a group which functioned in the spirit of resacralization in terms of honoring experience, feelings, difference and authenticity. Just as Lerner sees a movement of Jewish renewal emerging out of similar aspirations (1994, pp. 265-306), Samuels sees a political renewal emerging in the form of

resacralization and he claims that depth psychology, with its focus on the irrational, the emotional and the imaginal, is critical in a politics of transformation (1993, p. 21-2). In order to succeed in political or Jewish renewal and restoration we cannot afford now to marginalize these elements that the field of depth psychology brings back.

### The Call of Music

In attending Sabbath services as a member of the Cantor Selection Committee, I realized one day how much the music in temple moved me; while in the sanctuary, I would feel the singing of the prayers fill my heart, particularly when young voices (usually adolescent girls) were invited to sing on the *bima* (raised platform). I had grown up in this environment, attending Hebrew school and synagogue and I felt at (or a return to) home with these melodies. I wondered, perhaps this was one of the reasons that I was so drawn to the temple and the fight for the cantor who not only included but promoted the interests of young people wishing to chant the hymns in services.

The importance of music to the soul has been noted by depth psychologists, philosophers and theologians. Abraham Heschel claims that the primary purpose of prayer in the Jewish tradition is to sing and that the essence of prayer is a song, and man cannot live without a song (Heschel, 1996, p.397). Nietzsche felt that music was the actual idea of the world (1872/1993, p.103) and that “without music, life would be an error” (1889/1982, p. 471). Hillman stated at his April '00 lecture at Pacifica that the first manifestation of psyche is as image, which could be poetic, musical or dream. Soul-making or ‘psychological poiesis’, Hillman claims, comes through this process of imagination (Hillman, 1983, pp.48-9). I know that for myself music can place me in a state of reverie which in turn leads to a stream of images. By following this path of

revert to an irreality function opens up, as Bachelard refers to it (1971, pp. 5-15), and I feel a sense of soul in myself and the world.

Sri Chinmoy writes that the self expands through music and that this self is not the individual self but the unlimited Self. Chinmoy says that God, the Supreme Musician is playing with us, on us and in us. “Through music, God is offering the message of unity in multiplicity and also the message of multiplicity in unity” (Chinmoy, 1999, pp. 4, 107).

### Conclusion

I felt that my summer project was an invaluable and transformative experience for me. In answering a call to be at the temple in the way of council, I felt as though I was re-claiming my Judaic roots, as well as completing or adding back to these roots aspects that had been cut-off. I had never truly experienced the soulful side of my culture and my involvement with this group in addition to my reading and research opened up a whole new area of experiencing rather than just practicing Judaism (see appendix 12). Also, in re-searching the depth psychological dimensions of the project, I began to look at and re-value things in a new and meaningful way.

The members of my group, from their comments and the sense that I had from them, also gained a lot from their participation in the council. Some members said that they had utilized council techniques in other areas of their lives and some asked me to bring council to another group in the temple. Some members (including me) want to continue the dialogue group and we will be meeting next month to discuss this possibility. Through the telling of heartfelt stories and the presence, listening and

compassion of the members I think that we all felt a connection to one another and something deeper beyond ourselves.

As Paulo Freire wrote, our dialogue group was founded upon love, humility and faith which led us into closer partnership in the naming of the world (1993, p.72). Behind our words there was a desire to form authentic connection, promote ethical practices and the practice of Judaic values within and outside the temple; there was a feeling of transcendence and a tending of soul in the world. We created a sacred space for respectful listening and speaking and I think that we all participated in some way in restoring and transforming a part of ourselves, the temple and the world (*tikkun olam*). I am confident that this change and these people will carry their experience of dialogue with them and even without knowing it, they will spread the idea (Bohm, 1996, p.18). Hence, I believe that it will reach others in the temple who will take notice and be intrigued to take further steps toward healing and restoration (see appendix 14). As Hertzberg wrote, “to be a Jew is to believe in *tikkun olam*, that the world can be redeemed (1998, p. 286).

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## Appendix 7

### Training Experience at the Ojai Foundation

My experience at Ojai was soulful and enlightening as well as difficult for me. When I arrived in Ojai, I was delighted to be once again in the mountains of Northern California (since I live in Florida, I relish being in the mountains when I'm in Carpinteria as well) and to enjoy the warm, dry summer air of Northern California. Being born and raised on the west coast of Canada, I always feel so much at home in the mountains and in this climate. This environment was a welcoming embrace and I knew that it was right for me, being in this place. Hillman, in his most recent lecture at Pacifica Graduate Institute in April, 2000 spoke about the importance of place, the terrain being crucial in evoking different themes and how the Gods are different in each place. He suggested that we substitute the word pagan for polytheism; a word which describes the people of the hills, a peasant way of looking at the world, worshipping nature. When I am in the mountains, like those of Ojai, I feel soul, the divine and I connect to and feel held by nature.

The various exercises that we participated in in the council group provided a good overview of how council works, how to work and think together, how to speak with lean expression and spontaneously from the heart and how to listen from the heart (the

intentions of council). We learned about creating the container, opening and closing council, the role of the center piece and the talking piece, the role of the facilitator(s) and witness(es). We were taught and practiced how to read the field in order to develop awareness of what is going on in the group in terms of verbal and non-verbal content and in terms of the energy field. We learned and practiced different council formats and we were taught to formulate the council question.

As a result of the above, I learned a tremendous amount about facilitating and being a member of a council circle. I felt deeply in participating in the exercises and I concentrated on listening devoutly to others and speaking from the heart, from my truth when the talking piece came to me. This was difficult for me as there were a lot of people in the group (approximately 23) and I am often distracted, pulled away from myself, wondering what the others' reaction will be to me. Hence, for me it was an exercise in staying with myself and what was coming up for me at that moment. I felt good in that I was more than ever before able to 'speak my voice when I had something to say and remain silent when I felt that the group needed me to be silent' (Mary Watkins, 2000, winter class handout, Pacifica Graduate Institute).

I had traveled a long way to get to Ojai (from Florida) and since we began the sessions the night that I arrived and we remained in session until 10:00 p.m., I was jet lagged from the 3 hour time difference. Unfortunately, this feeling of exhaustion stayed with me throughout the weekend as my body couldn't seem to catch up in the time that I was there. I mention this because I believe it impacted my ability to be present during the council sessions. At least one time during our exercises I heard a voice in my head asking myself what I was doing here. I heard these 'strangers' in the group sharing

personal life stories and I thought, “I don’t want to be here or listen to this, I want to go back to my old way of being where the rational and the empirical is brought forth and respected -the ‘important’ stuff rather than this touchy-feely stuff”. I asked myself who this voice was and where it came from.

Carl Jung called this a Faustian question which can bring forth an illuminating answer if the answer is direct and natural (Jung, 1916/1971, p.297). Jung said that some people hear their ‘other’ voice, that many people are well aware that they possess an inner critic or judge who immediately comments on everything they say or do” (Jung, 1916/1971, p.290). Mary Watkins writes that as we listen in our thought to the critiques of ourselves we hear the voices not only of the mother or father but the teacher and the style of pedagogy that we were taught in; that the intrapsychic does not exist in isolation, but is a “distillation of history, culture, religion and nature” (Watkins, 1999, p. 255).

In listening to this interior voice I remembered that up until four years ago I lived my life primarily in that individualistic, goal-oriented, competitive style, honoring the rational and marginalizing the feminine, the emotions and experience, as if they were unimportant. The fact that I felt tired (i.e. weaker in mind and body) I believe led me to fall back on that old defensive regime as it had always rescued me and at least superficially allowed me to feel strong and tough. Paradoxically, as I was hearing this old voice in my head critiquing this environment, I was touched by some of the stories that I heard from people in the council circle. This feeling I believe was a breakthrough from another, albeit marginalized, voice; a voice which welcomes sharing and evokes compassion.

Mary Watkins wrote in her work on “Invisible Guests’ that “the complexity of thought can begin to be grasped as we discern the nature of the various voices who are speaking and become aware of the manner of relation between them and between our ‘observing ego’ and each of them”. She stresses the importance of promoting dialogue among the multiplicity to achieve psychological awareness (Watkins, 1986 in Watkins, 1999, p.255). My experience was a strange combination of rejecting the present environment, cutting myself off while at the next moment embracing the experience.

## Appendix 9

### Council Meeting that Incorporated Nomination of Joseph Lieberman for Vice President

One of our council meetings occurred on August 8<sup>th</sup>, the day we read in the newspaper that Senator Joseph Lieberman would be Al Gore's running mate for Vice President. When I read this I became tearful not only because it is the first time in history that a Jew has been on a major party ticket (and an Orthodox Jew at that) but I felt so proud that our larger culture was able to break a religious barrier and to choose a person for his proficiency and his morality regardless of his religious beliefs. Our rabbi commented in his sermon on the Sabbath morning after the news broke that, "this not only makes Jewish history but American history".

Of course there had to be some political intention in choosing this man and the one most discussed in the paper that day was that Lieberman will defray the bad publicity attributed to the Democratic Party as a result of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. It is because of his *independent voice of difference*, as the idea of dialogue stresses and the idea that I would bring up at each council meeting, in criticizing Clinton, a colleague that he had worked with before he became president, that contributed to Gore's selection of this man. Lieberman himself was quoted in the Miami Herald Newspaper, August 8<sup>th</sup>,

2000 as saying, “miracles happen”; to me the miracle is that this choice is an example of and now an opening for difference and otherness (in race, religion, gender, social class, sexual preference, etc.) in this country.

I was wondering how I could work this news about Lieberman into the dialogue group that evening, knowing that one of the rules of council is that there can be no pre-planning of what one will say in advance of receiving the talking stick. It turned out that I didn't need to have a way to bring this in as a member in our dialogue group, in a moving dedication to the council that night, talked about her father who was denied entry into this country and as a result his wife and child were killed in the Holocaust. When he later sought re-entry he was allowed to emigrate but she felt that because of his prior experience he never really felt like an American. She was sorry that he did not live to see in his lifetime this momentous occasion when a Jewish person was chosen to run for Vice President of the United States.

This occurrence brought again to my mind the idea of thinking together, as I mentioned previously in the paper in quoting Bohm and Isaacs. My 93 year old grandmother in Canada who suffered similarly from Holocaust tragedy (as I previously mentioned) was also emotionally moved to hear this news as I shared with her this reality and the idea that hope cannot be lost as the world can transform. When I told her the news she kept asking me to repeat his name as she could not believe it.

## Appendix 10

### Brief Cultural and Historical Review of Judaism (as relevant to my project)

The essence to understanding Jewish identity begins with the first Jew, Abraham, the archetypal Jewish character and his wife Sarah who lived (during Ca. 2000 BCE) on the margins of society, leading a dissenting minority group, converting people from paganism to monotheism. “The recurring themes of Jewish history- otherness, defiance, fragility and morality - are all present in his (Abraham’s) life (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, p.46). The Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, the record of eight centuries of commentary and redefinition of the meaning of the Scriptures are also important to understanding the basis of Jewish identity (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, p. 4).

The doctrine of chosenness, that God chose the Jews and that they have a special destiny and task to lead the way in completing God’s task and bringing order to the world has remained at the core of the Jewish self-image. This chosenness has been a burden as well as a blessing as the Jews were commanded to act morally, with justice and compassion. Abraham and Sarah went out into the world to help the unfortunate as Jews are forbidden to walk away from society, from the rest of the world and focus on themselves (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, pp. 16, 17, 21-23).

For much of their history, Jews have lived in the Diaspora (dispersion outside of the homeland) having little or no power but holding onto their faith and hope for a better world and a Jewish state. There was tremendous courage and tenacity in those who even through and after the Holocaust struggled to remain Jewish, to accept their otherness and to continue their religious beliefs, practices and culture. Hertzberg writes that “Jews have deep within them the determination to remain other and to live, often precariously, as a minority, on the margins of alien cultures. The Jews are self-created and continue to exist by choice” (1998, p. 5). Perhaps what has led to this Jewish continuity and kept the Jewish people together was their belief that they are the descendants of great ancestors. Many, however, in the face of centuries of anti-Semitism, pogroms, persecutions, and repeated exiles as well as a feeling of Jewish self-contempt that may have started in the Enlightenment era, have chosen to leave the faith and assimilate into the gentile culture (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, pp. 5, 28, 63-4, 165).

Today, although anti-Semitism still exists, Jews in this country have more freedom and power than ever before. The threat to the Jewish people now largely comes from the factionalism from within rather than from outside the Jewish culture, not only among the different religious groups within the faith such as orthodox, conservative and reform, but within these particular groups. This conflict was what I experienced at the temple in observing a board meeting conducted in a patriarchal order in the absence of any form of real dialogue or respect for the person speaking. People would stand up to voice an opinion and begin speaking loudly and defensively just waiting to be criticized or discounted.

I thought that perhaps this phenomenon has to do with the Jews being oppressed, exiled and marginalized throughout history and as a result internalizing the image of their oppressors. As Paulo Freire writes: “In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (1993, p. 44). I think that there remains a memory and fear in the Jewish soul of once again being powerless and oppressed. This memory and knowing of oppression (which seems almost like a biological inheritance) however, has led many Jews to political activism to fight for social justice in this country (examples include Chief Justice Brandeis, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, etc.)

Although these internal struggles remain, throughout Europe and the United States there is a process of rebirth of Judaism occurring. After the Holocaust and up until today people have been motivated to rebuild communities that were literally destroyed by the war. Hertzberg believes that this is an example of the age-old capacity of Jews to rise from the ashes.

There is also a revival in the interest of traditional religious texts as people strive to understand their Judaism (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, pp. 273, 286). Lerner claims that this Jewish renewal movement is “part of a worldwide religious and spiritual revival, a product of the failure of secular modernism to shape a world that would satisfy human needs” (1994, p. 265). I witnessed this revival in the temple as many of the members of my dialogue group were also members of a Sabbath study group that reviewed portions of the Torah each Saturday after services with the rabbi and the ritual director.

Whether it is the yearning to have a relationship with God, to experience the mystery of Judaism or the longing to form community and work together in following the

commandments and taking action in the world...”to be a Jew is to believe in *tikkun olam*, that the world can be redeemed” (Hertzberg, Hirt-Manheimer, 1998, p. 286).

## Appendix 11

### Suspension and the Voice of Difference

In participating in this dialogue group, I realized the importance of suspension in dialogue. Both Boehm and Issacs address this idea at length. I noticed, as evidenced in the paper that a few times people in the group, including myself, had a propensity to proscribe or to express an opinion in such a way that we should all agree. I explained to the group how crucial it was to hold their opinions to the side and to just listen to the experience of the other, which may be different from their own.

Boehm talks about suspending assumptions and opinions that one may bring to the group so that one neither carries them out nor suppresses them. Boehm calls a true dialogue one in which each member is suspending and looking at what all the opinions mean without judging them; this leads to one mind, to truth, a “sharing of common content” and a “participatory consciousness” where everyone is partaking of the whole meaning of the group. Difference is then secondary and we realize that we are all the same (Boehm, 1996, pp. 20, 21, 26, 32, 33).

Isaacs defines suspension as changing directions, stopping, stepping back, seeing with new eyes. He says that “suspension requires that we relax our grip on certainty” and start to observe our thoughts and feelings and to inquire into what we observe in ourselves and others (Isaacs, 1999, pp. 66,135, 141, 147). In our dialogue group I sensed

the temptation in myself and sometimes in others to hold onto a position or to try and problem-solve as we are socialized to do in our culture at large. Also, at times I sensed the impulse among us to react quickly to what was just said. Suspension requires that we put on hold these temptations in order to release creative energy, to transform our thoughts and to begin to see multiple points of view (Isaacs, 1999, pp. 66, 135, 141, 156). Practicing suspension, which is quite difficult to do, is a way of slowing down our own thoughts and reactions and in doing so allowing time for reflection.

Mary Watkins writes that in “dialogue” we appreciate the person with the courage to voice difference as this is not an easy role; the voice of difference needs to be seen as an opportunity rather than a rupture (2000, winter class handout, Pacifica Graduate Institute). I find in the Jewish culture and in our culture at large, an emphasis on agreeing in order to be included; those voicing difference are so often marginalized. As Roth (1993) wrote in her experience of working with a group where secrecy relationships exist, “commonality is viewed as central; issues of difference are relegated to the periphery or even rendered unspeakable”, which can foster the formation of subgroups and secrecy relationships (p. 269). This I sensed also was present in the temple.

## Appendix 12

### A Historical and Cultural Context is Added to Sabbath Prayer

In speaking with the ritual director in the temple I came to learn about the significance of some of the prayers that are sung during services. One of these prayers called *Lecha Dodi* which is chanted in welcoming the Sabbath and translates in English to: “Come to the beloved, to welcome the Sabbath bride, the face of the Sabbath, we now will receive”, was explained to me in terms of its cultural and ritualistic history. The story is that the kabbalists (probably as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century) before sunset on the Sabbath used to bathe in the *mikvah* (a body of natural water), dress in white and then descend down the hill from Safad, in the Galilee in Isreal. They would walk in the direction of the Mediterranean to the west, toward the sunset. As the sun set further, they would turn and go back up the hill to accompany the Sabbath bride, singing verses of this prayer. On the last verse, at the crest of the hill, they would turn and face west again to give one last greeting to the one who wears the crown of the Sabbath - the bride.

In services on Friday evening (beginning of the Sabbath) we chant this prayer and we turn and bow to the back, facing west, and then turn forward and bow to the east as the bride passes. This is done in respect for and to welcome the Sabbath bride. After learning the story behind this prayer, I felt enriched and realized that this was an example of how I and others have honored the practice of Judaism, in singing the prayer and

making the appropriate gestures, but never really knowing the meaning or historical significance behind what is practiced. In much of modern Judaism the spiritual or mystical has been cut-off or marginalized as it is seen by some as magical, non-rational thinking which many believe has no place in our religion. I see this element however as adding back a significant piece to my experience of Judaism in giving meaning and depth to the prayer and in knowing more about the stories behind the practice of rituals.

