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# Mazel Tov : a systems exploration of Bar Mitzvah as a multigenerational ritual of change and continuity.

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MAZEL TOV:  
A SYSTEMS EXPLORATION OF  
BAR MITZVAH AS A  
A MULTIGENERATIONAL RITUAL OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

Judith Davis

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1987

Education

Judith Davis

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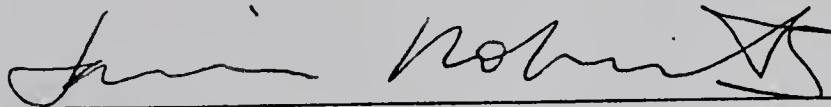
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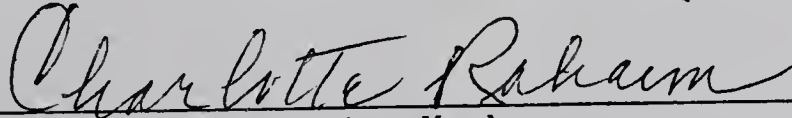
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JUDITH DAVIS

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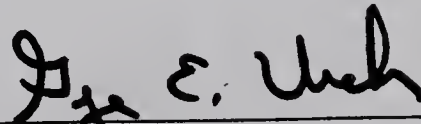
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DEDICATION

In memory of my father  
who taught me how to work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have a lot of families to thank and its hard to know with which to begin--the families in the study, my "family" at work, my family at home, my committee members who feel like family...

The families in this study, of course, come to mind first. To them I owe enormous gratitude. That they could have allowed me and my research into their lives at so stressful a time is a tribute to their generosity and their strength. I tried very hard to convey at least some of the richness and complexity of their experience, to avoid reducing them to disembodied case studies, to let their voices come through. I hope that as they read about themselves and about my interpretation of them (and us) they will sense my respect and my appreciation. To the extent that this research can be useful for future families approaching a life cycle ritual, these four families deserve credit.

My committee members come next and to say that they feel like family is not merely glib. As individuals and as a group they have nurtured and supported me over many years. To each I am uniquely indebted:

To Charlotte Rahaim for literally handing me the application to Graduate School and commanding that I "fill it out!" I'm very glad I listened to her.

To Ted Slovin for his unconditional encouragement and mantras for getting through. Yes, Ted, "I deserve to finish."

To Janine Roberts for her knowledgeable, thorough, and prompt responses that guided me through many drafts and many doubts. With her exceptional competence and professional dedication, Janine continues the tradition of excellence in teaching and advising begun by our former teacher, Evan Imber Black. I feel extremely fortunate to have learned from both of these women.

That I consider the people I work with in the Office of Human Relations family needs no explanation. The help and support I derive from them--not to mention the number of years we've been together--more than qualifies them as family. No one could ask for better colleagues than Grant Ingle and Cindy Hardy.

Without Grant I could not have finished this dissertation and have maintained my position at the University simultaneously. For many months Grant did my work as well as his own, and he did it with characteristic intelligence, spirit, and generosity. I am sincerely grateful.

Without Cindy, I could not have done this dissertation period. The patience, energy, and skill that she brought to the hundreds of hours of typing and retyping this manuscript cannot be described. Neither can the pieces of chicken scratch and arrows connecting them that she deciphered be described. Cindy's effort on my behalf was phenomenal. This is her dissertation almost as much as it is mine.

And finally my family at home (where I have not been much lately). To Louie, whose Bar Mitzvah so many years ago began my own rite of passage, to Eric whose words of youthful wisdom encouraged me at the end, and to Allen whose love has seen me through this dangerous journey, my deepest appreciation. With you I have pushed beyond some old boundaries and I feel a little stronger and a little wiser for having taken the risk. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

Mazel Tov: A Systems Exploration of Bar Mitzvah  
as a Multigenerational Ritual of Change and Continuity

September 1987

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Informed by the literature on ritual and on healthy family functioning, it was the researcher's premise that life cycle rituals facilitate developmental change in families interacting with them. In order to explore this premise, the researcher observed four families (a blended Conservative family, an intact Reform family, a Russian immigrant family, and a Hasidic family) over a six-month period during which they planned, participated in, and reflected on their first child's Bar Mitzvah. Observation was conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews beginning approximately three months prior to and ending three months after the ceremony, and through the use of participant observation of the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies/weekends.

The result of the study is a series of detailed ethnographic portraits that reveal the way in which the families used the ritual process to negotiate idiosyncratic developmental change. Secondly, the portraits and embedded analyses reveal the way in which the researcher, as one element in the process of cybernetic research, "constructed" the findings.



The basic conclusion drawn from the study is that the Bar Mitzvah process is a natural coping mechanism for contemporary Jewish families facing the normative crisis of adolescent transition. The concrete, logistical tasks involved in preparing for the event are analogically related to the family's emotional tasks, and work on the latter is achieved through work on the former. The public ceremony is the symbolic enactment of this private effort. The Bar Mitzvah process both intensifies stress in the system and provides a way for dealing with the stress such that it potentiates the family's inherent resources for achieving change and continuity simultaneously.

Specifically, it was found that in one family, the Bar Mitzvah enabled the adjustment of interpersonal boundaries while, in another, it primarily allowed for the renegotiation of intergenerational boundaries. In one family, the Bar Mitzvah served to intensify pressure for increased differentiation, while in another it had anachronistic, transformational power. In all four cases, the process paradoxically enabled the child's increasing autonomy while at the same time it heightened his connectedness to the family and the larger system in which it was embedded.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION . . . . . iv  
 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . . v  
 ABSTRACT . . . . . viii  
 LIST OF FIGURES . . . . . xiv  
 LIST OF TABLES . . . . . xv

Chapter

I. THE PROBLEM . . . . . 1

Introduction . . . . . 1  
 Statement of the Problem . . . . . 2  
     Some Clarification of Terminology and Concepts . . . . . 4  
 Statement of Hypothesis . . . . . 5  
 Overview of Methodology . . . . . 9  
     Process Over Time . . . . . 10  
     Research Strategy . . . . . 11  
 Significance of the Study . . . . . 11  
 Delimitations . . . . . 13  
     Only Bar, Not Bat Mitzvah . . . . . 13  
     First Child . . . . . 14  
     Healthy Systems . . . . . 14  
 Limitations . . . . . 15  
     Size of Population . . . . . 15  
     Self Selection of Sample Population . . . . . 15  
 Ethical Considerations . . . . . 16  
 Definition of Terms . . . . . 17

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE . . . . . 23

Organization of Chapter . . . . . 23  
 Families and Life Cycle Change . . . . . 23  
     Healthy Family Functioning . . . . . 24  
     Life Cycle Transitions . . . . . 29  
     Of Sweatboxes and Other Tortures: Some Ideas  
         About Discontinuous Change . . . . . 35  
 Rituals and Ritual Process . . . . . 43  
     On Defining Ritual . . . . . 43  
     Classification of Rituals . . . . . 51  
     The Functions of Ritual . . . . . 55  
     How Ritual Works . . . . . 61  
     Summary: The Relationship Between Ritual  
         and Healthy Family Functioning . . . . . 70



Adolescence and the Need for Ritual . . . . .	76
Organization . . . . .	76
Introduction . . . . .	76
Changing Boundaries . . . . .	77
Hurry Up and Wait: Contemporary Confusion . . . . .	78
The Need for Ritual . . . . .	80
Ritual and Developmental Tasks . . . . .	83
Summary . . . . .	84
III. METHODOLOGY . . . . .	86
Organization of Chapter . . . . .	86
Methodology Part I . . . . .	86
Introduction: A "Constructivist" Case Study . . . . .	86
Purpose of Study . . . . .	87
Synopsis of Method . . . . .	87
Rationale for Case Study . . . . .	89
Rationale for Constructivist Approach to Case Study . . . . .	90
Summary . . . . .	92
Operationalizing the Constructivist/Dialogical Approach: Implications for the Conceptualization and Presentation of the Data . . . . .	93
Sequence of Research Steps . . . . .	97
Nature of the Research Questions . . . . .	99
Goals and Assumptions Informing Questions for Each Stage . . . . .	102
Recursivity of Observational Levels . . . . .	106
Nature of Ethnographic Description . . . . .	110
Validation . . . . .	111
Conclusion: On the Personal Nature of Research . . . . .	112
Methodology Part II . . . . .	114
Introduction . . . . .	114
Beyond the Caricatures: The Researcher's Goals Upon Entering the Field Study . . . . .	114
The Research Question and the Way It Gets Answered . . . . .	116
Research Issues: Conceptual, Moral, and Mechanical . . . . .	118
In the Field . . . . .	123
IV. RESULTS STAGE I: PRE BAR MITZVAH PLANNING . . . . .	133
Organization of Chapter . . . . .	133
Presentation of Families and Analyses Over Time . . . . .	133
The Steinberg Family: "The Hospitality Suite" . . . . .	133

Analysis of Dynamics of the Steinberg-Lerner System in the Planning Period . . . . .	176
The Goldstein Family: "The Family Project" . . . . .	183
Analysis of the Dynamics of the Goldstein System in the Planning Period . . . . .	208
The Sheinman Family: "Baruch Hashem" . . . . .	211
Analysis of the Dynamics of the Sheinman System in the Planning Period . . . . .	248
The Gordovsky Family: "Grow Up But Stay Close" . . . . .	254
Analysis of the Dynamics of the Gordovsky System in the Planning Period . . . . .	284
Comparative Analysis of Four Families Over the Three Months Prior to the Bar Mitzvah of Their First Child . . . . .	290
Introduction and Organization . . . . .	290
Synopsis of Individual Families in Stage I, the Perliminal, Planning Stage . . . . .	291
Similarities Among the Families in Reference to Escalating Tensions and Meaning of Action . . . . .	299
Similarities in Terms of Interpersonal Dynamics and Developmental Change . . . . .	306
Postscript: The Coevolution of the Observed and Observing Systems in the Preliminal Stage . . . . .	310
V. RESULTS STAGE II: THE BAR MITZVAH CEREMONY/WEEKEND . . . . .	311
Introduction and Organization . . . . .	311
Presentation of the Four Events . . . . .	313
The Steinberg Bar Mitzvah . . . . .	313
The Goldstein Bar Mitzvah . . . . .	327
The Sheinman Bar Mitzvah . . . . .	339
The Gordovsky Bar Mitzvah . . . . .	350
Comparative Analysis of the Four Bar Mitzvahs . . . . .	363
A Cautionary Prologue: The Researcher as Participant; The Participant as Researcher . . . . .	363
The Bar Mitzvah as Drama: Plots and Subplots . . . . .	364
Differences Within Similarities . . . . .	366
Similarities Despite Differences . . . . .	368
The Language of Ritual . . . . .	376
Transformation and Preservation . . . . .	378
Conclusion: Ritual of Elevation and of Consecration . . . . .	385
VI. RESULTS STAGE III: POST BAR MITZVAH AFTERMATH . . . . .	387
Introduction and Organization of Section . . . . .	387
Presentation of Post Bar Mitzvah Families/Interviews . . . . .	387

The Steinberg Family . . . . .	387
The Goldstein Family . . . . .	407
The Sheinman Family . . . . .	415
The Gordovsky Family . . . . .	415
Comparative Analysis of Post Bar Mitzvah	
Interviews/Aftermath . . . . .	435
Introduction . . . . .	435
Events Following the Bar Mitzvah Weekend . . . . .	437
Similarities Across Systems . . . . .	438
Bar Mitzvah Pictures: Worth a Thousand Words . . . . .	444
Change Over Time . . . . .	445
Postscript: Differences in Perception . . . . .	454
VII. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, CRITIQUE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	455
Summary . . . . .	455
Introduction and Organization of Chapter . . . . .	455
Synopsis of Major Theoretical Assumptions That Informed the Case Study . . . . .	456
Synopsis of the Four Families Over the Six Month Period . . . . .	460
Conclusions . . . . .	478
Introduction: On Drawing Conclusions . . . . .	478
Major Conclusions . . . . .	479
Critique of the Research . . . . .	500
Methodological Problems . . . . .	500
Effect of Research on Families . . . . .	503
Effect of Research on Researcher: A Personal Exploration . . . . .	505
Recommendations for Future Research and Development . . . . .	508
Research Suggestions . . . . .	508
Development Suggestions . . . . .	510
FOOTNOTES . . . . .	513
APPENDICES	
A. Structural Assessment Form . . . . .	520
B. Key to Family Maps . . . . .	522
C. Stage I - Examples of Questions About Bar Mitzvah Planning . . . . .	524
D. Examples of Questions about Decision-Making Process . . . . .	526
E. Stage II - Examples of Questions to be Answered During the Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend . . . . .	527
F. Stage III - Examples of Questions for Post Bar Mitzvah Interview . . . . .	528
G. Letter to Rabbi Requesting Families . . . . .	529
H. Participation Consent Form . . . . .	531
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	532

LIST OF TABLES

1. Overview of Research Design . . . . .	107
2. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Steinberg Family . . . . .	450
3. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Goldstein Family . . . . .	451
4. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Sheinman Family . . . . .	452
5. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Gordovsky Family . . . . .	453
6. Overview of Families During the Three Stages of the Ritual Process . . . . .	464

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1.1	Constantly Evolving Coupled Systems . . . . .	10
2.1	Horizontal and Vertical Life Cycle Stressors . . . . .	33
2.2	The Process of Discontinuous Change . . . . .	41
2.3	Tripartite Structure of Transition Rituals . . . . .	48
2.4	Types of Ritual . . . . .	52
2.5	Redressive Social Drama . . . . .	69
2.6	A Coupling of Systems . . . . .	75
3.1	Coinfluencing Elements Over Time . . . . .	92
3.2	System Distinguished for Observation . . . . .	101
3.3	Observing System Distinguished for Observation . . . . .	101
3.4	Levels of Observation . . . . .	109
4.1	Steinberg Family Map . . . . .	133
4.2	Goldstein Family Map . . . . .	183
4.3	Sheinman Family Map . . . . .	211
4.4	Gordovsky Family Map . . . . .	254
5.1	Review of Four Family Maps . . . . .	312
5.2	Bar Mitzvah Family's Interlocking Domains of Emotional Life . . . . .	386
5.3	Multivocal Rites and Symbols . . . . .	386
7.1	The Research Process . . . . .	479
7.2	Change and the Bar Mitzvah Ritual . . . . .	497



Mazel tov is a Yiddish phrase spoken by an individual (both as an individual and as one implicitly representing the community) which acknowledges that the one spoken to has done something hard or has gone through something dangerous. "It is translated as "congratulations!" or "Thank G-d" rather than its literal meaning: "Good Luck." The distinction is as important as it is subtle....At all Jewish celebrations--a brith [circumcision], wedding, graduation, Bar Mitzvah--you will hear "mazel tovs" resounding like buckshot in a tin shed [emphasis added].

Rosten, 1970, p. 227

In a simple community when a family crisis occurs, people run into the street and the community gathers to meditate, nourish and absorb. As a community becomes larger and less integrated, the capacity of the family to generate drama does not change, but it can no longer be shared. The community becomes privatized, the family isolated, the streets empty...Referral agencies, mental hospitals, prisons and nursing homes are a few of the tardy, impersonal, inhumane, and generally rather dilapidated mechanisms we have evolved to replace this naive responsivity [emphasis added].

Slater, 1974, p. 36

## C H A P T E R I

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The family whose first child is entering adolescence is, by definition, beginning to struggle with profound transitional issues involved in "letting go." Eventually most families get through this struggle, some more easily than others.

For Jewish families, there is a natural tool to assist with this letting go; it is the ritual known as "Bar Mitzvah," a ceremonial rite of passage evolved over centuries which marks the child's thirteenth birthday.

For the most part, the facilitative potential of this ritual in contemporary Western society has been ignored and unexamined if not explicitly denied. To the extent that they consider it at all, sociologists dismiss the Bar Mitzvah (among other rituals) as a useless if not regressive remnant of an earlier age (e.g., Agena, 1983; Barron, 1984), novelists mock it (e.g., Richler, 1959; Roth, 1983; Wouck, 1915), and most lay people see it as hollow performance at best, and as hypocritical farce at worst. Psychoanalytic theorists see it as an expression of the Oedipal conflict (e.g., Arlow, 1965), and few if any anthropologists examine at all. Even professional Jewish educators are conflicted about its value (Feuer, 1980; Sherwin, 1973; Shoenfield, 1985; Siskin, 1981; Snyder, 1980).

In contrast, this systemic exploration of the Bar Mitzvah, informed by the literature on healthy family functioning and on classic ritual process, assumes the ritual's developmental potential and approaches it as a "condensed enactment" (Turner, 1982) of the ongoing process of change that occurs as families "move along the life cycle." Given that the Bar Mitzvah is one of the few, if not the only, remaining cultural/religious rituals available to contemporary Western families marking the transition into adolescence, and given the volume of writing on the need for ritual (e.g., d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979; Gelcher, 1983; Foressen, 1980; Kimbali, 1960; Schwartzman, 1982) and on the particular needs of adolescents in this regard (e.g., Arlow, 1965; Haley, 1973; Stevens, 1981; Quinn et al., 1985), this study of the Bar Mitzvah and normative family development is pertinent to both those interested in the phenomenon of ritual and those interested in the phenomenon of adolescence.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although a great deal of interest in the therapeutic value of ritual has recently emerged (e.g., Culler, 1982a, 1982b, 1987; Coppersmith, 1982, 1986; Palazzoli, 1986; Palazzoli et al., 1977; Quinn et al., 1985; Reiss, 1981; Schwartzman, 1986; Wolin & Bennet, 1984) there is very little psychological literature on the Bar Mitzvah per sé. With one important exception (Friedman 1980, 1981, 1985), what literature there is on this ritual (e.g., Arlow, 1965; Zegans & Zegans, 1979), is written from a psychoanalytic perspective



and focuses on the Bar Mitzvah child alone. Such literature contributes little to our understanding of family systems and their interaction with the process of ritual.

Popular sociological literature (e.g., Kahn, 1986; Levy, 1972), is equally unhelpful. To the extent that it focuses on the difference between the stated purpose of the Bar Mitzvah (initiating the boy into manhood) and the common reality (of lavish parties, the end of religious education, and the continuation of childhood) in most upper middle-class, "non-observant" Jewish families, it fuels the prevailing attitude that Bar Mitzvahs are empty, hypocritical performances that have little lasting value, and discourages serious examination of the phenomenon.

Obviously, the Bar Mitzvah does not change the boy into a man (as it did historically, at the religious level, when the event actually marked the moment after which the boy assumed all of the religious obligations and privileges of adulthood in the Jewish community). But it is this researcher's contention that to look only at what happens to the child, either intrapsychically or sociologically, is to miss the point entirely. In terms of the ritual's developmental potential, the focus of investigation must be the entire family system where the event has--at least in our contemporary, secular world--its greatest impact and potential. The child's role is only one element in a rich and complex performance through which the entire family is moving. According to E. Friedman (1980), rabbi, family therapist, and seminal theorist, in terms of "systems and ceremonies," the family, "far from

being an intermediary, is the primary force operating at such moments" (1980, p. 429), and switching the focus of observation to the family, allows one to see the "enormous therapeutic [i.e., developmental] potential" (p. 430) of life cycle rituals.

This research project is an exploration of how the entire family interacts with the Bar Mitzvah process to negotiate the changes necessary for allowing movement into the adolescence of its development. The review of the literature establishes the theoretical relationship between ritual and developmental change, and the case studies provide indepth portraits of this relationship at work.

#### Some Clarification of Terminology and Concepts

##### Terminology

Before proceeding further, it is crucial to emphasize that in this study, "ritual" refers not simply to the public ceremony (or the "ritual trance" that may occur within that ceremony), but to the entire process of preparation for the ceremony, execution of the ceremony, and aftermath of the ceremony.

To make this distinction clear, the terms ritual ceremony and ritual trance are used deliberately when reference is being made to only one or the other of these aspects. Otherwise, when the word ritual is used, the entire process/phenomenon, with all levels of intensity and recursivity are implied.

##### Ritual: Abstract and Actual

Distinction is also important in reference to the difference

between the abstract potential of "pure" ritual and the reality of the ritual experience once modified by the here-and-now context of the particular family in its particular setting. Discussion of the ritual phenomenon as an abstract concept is entirely different from discussion of the phenomenon as it is transformed by application. To allow this distinction to remain unclear is to contribute to the confusion about ritual when claims for its "universal" potency are unsupported by local experience. Detailed exploration of "pure/abstract" ritual process appears in Chapter II. Detailed observation of how a number of families experience and modify this process appears in Chapters IV, V, and VI.

#### Continuity and Transition

Finally, it is useful to point out the distinction between rituals of continuity and rituals of transition. Rituals of continuity include, among others, interpersonal rituals of greeting and farewell; calendrical, group-focused, holiday celebrations; and daily "family customs." These rituals primarily promote stability in systems. Rituals of transition, on the other hand, primarily promote change. Life cycle rituals (e.g. the Bar Mitzvah), are rituals of transition.

#### Statement of Hypothesis

It is the researcher's hypothesis that families who are engaged in the process of planning a child's Bar Mitzvah (no matter how much

or how little they relate to the religious aspects of the event) are in some way using the process to negotiate developmental change. Although this is generally not something they are doing consciously or explicitly, it is the work they are doing. Both because the biological clock is requiring developmental change and because the ritual is fundamentally about change (in the context of continuity), the Bar Mitzvah family, in effect, has no choice but to be dealing with family process through this cultural/religious event.

Although the developmental issues manifest themselves differently in each family, these issues all relate, at some level, to the family's primary task for this stage: increasing the amount of distance between the child and the parents while at the same time retaining enough closeness so that the interaction between them is age-appropriate. As all parts of the system are connected, any change in the amount of distance between these two subsystems will effect and be affected by change in other parts of the system. Whether they know it or not, all members of the entire three generational system (and their "intercogwheeled tasks" [Golan, 1981, p. 6]) are involved in this process. Naturally, the intensity of the involvement varies greatly from person to person and from family to family, but at some level, this child's rite of passage is a passage for the entire system.

It is really a matter of punctuation. It is not simply that change between parent and child results in change between parents and grandparents, but it might as likely be a change between Father and



his father that allows for change between Father and Bar Mitzvah son or a change between Mother and Father that allows them to move as parents in relation to their child.

It is the researcher's premise that through interaction with the ritual process, every family is working on the task of managing change in its emotional system. The word managing is emphasized here because the family's task is not simply to change randomly, but to change in a way that allows for continuity and stability at the same time. The Bar Mitzvah ritual, like all life cycle rituals, is specifically designed, i.e., literally "formatted" to facilitate this kind of managed change. In addition, the way in which ritual functions on multiple levels further insures this management of change: while the Bar Mitzvah is primarily a ritual of transition, it also functions as a ritual of continuity. Again, it depends on the punctuation or the level of analysis. At the level of the nuclear family, it is primarily (though not exclusively) a ritual of change; at the level of the larger community, however, it is primarily a ritual of continuity. And it is precisely this interplay between these two logical levels that permits, in fact encourages, developmental change among members of the family.

Families entering the Bar Mitzvah process are in a way, systems that have "agreed to have a crisis." The ritual process (much like the process of therapy), intensifies or "heats up" the emotional issues inherent in the system. This intensification is what potentiates the system's "leap" to a new organizational level

appropriate to the new stage it is entering (Hoffman, 1981). This is not to say, however, that all families make this leap through the experience of the Bar Mitzvah. It is to say, however, that the ritual process intensifies pressure for change. For some families, the process creates sufficient pressure for second order/discontinuous change. For other families, it creates sufficient pressure for only first order adjustments that allow the system to find new ways of staying the same a bit longer as the pressure to change continues to mount.

It is further hypothesized that each family uses the Bar Mitzvah to work on different issues depending on its unique construction and history. The Bar Mitzvah--like all life cycle rituals--has enough rigidly defined elements to structure the transition experience, but enough flexibility to allow each family to work idiosyncratically on the issues most critical to its development at that time. In other words, each family molds the experience to fit its features. Each family stamps the performance with its own "systemic signature" (Campbell, Reder, Draper & Pollard, 1984, p. 10).

Unlike typical social science descriptions of rites of passage which focus either on the culture out of which the rites evolve, or on the individual(s) making the passage, this description focuses on the family dynamics which determine not only which rites will be followed, but ultimately how and to what extent the process will be useful.

## Overview of Methodology

Given that this is an initial exploration of a system interacting with a process, the method is that of case study (see Rationale, Chapter III). Specifically, it is a study of four families experiencing their first child's Bar Mitzvah. In order to better understand the relationship between ritual and family emotional process, the researcher followed the families as they planned, participated in, and reflected on the Bar Mitzvah process. The researcher observed the interactions of the family through the use of semi-structured interviews beginning approximately three months prior to the ceremony and ending approximately three months after the ceremony, and through participant observation of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony/weekend. These assessment techniques produced detailed, ethnographic descriptions, structural maps, and family genograms which were used to hypothesize about the families' use of the ritual process in negotiating developmental change.

The six month period was divided into three phases that theoretically parallel the traditional tripartite ritual process of preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states of being [Van Gennep, 1908/1960]: I. Pre Bar Mitzvah planning; II. the Bar Mitzvah ceremony/weekend; III. Post Bar Mitzvah aftermath. Investigation in phase I focused on decisions and decision making in preparation for the ceremony and on themes that emerged as central to the family system. The focus in phase II was on the emotional climate and observed impact of the ceremony, and phase III explored the family's

self interpretation of the process.

### Process Over Time

It is important to emphasize here what the researcher was not doing. This research was not a study of an isolated event and its impact on the environment with the traditional pre and post testing to "measure" change. This was, instead, a study of constantly evolving systems moving through time and interacting with a complex change process which included a number of different experiential levels that the family effected and was affected by. Figure 1.1 portrays this interacting system.

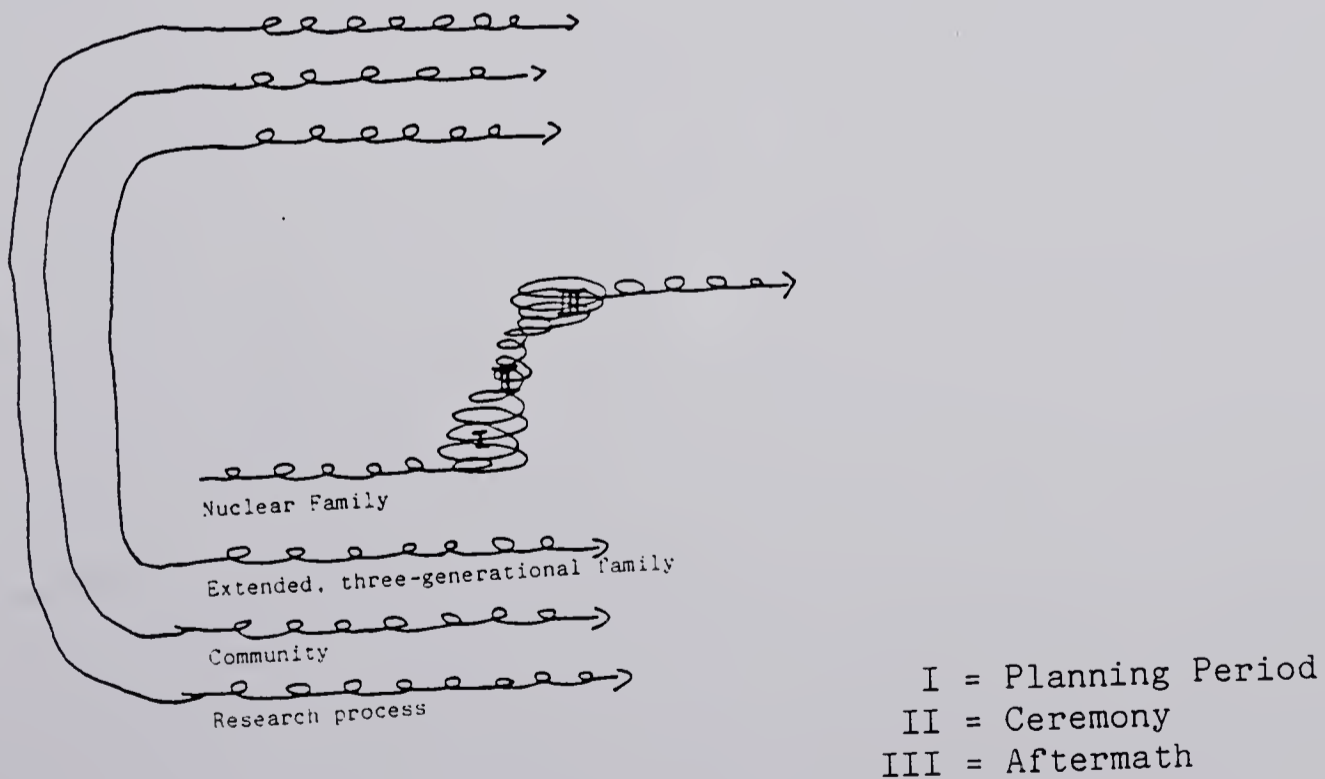


Figure 1.1 Constantly Evolving Coupled Systems



### Research Strategy

The research strategy was designed to first scan the entire terrain (of system and process interaction) and then focus on the issues/areas that were important (in terms of change) in each family. The strategy was also designed to accommodate the interactive nature of the observed and observing systems and to allow the reader access to the way in which the researcher was "drawing distinctions" and "constructing" hypotheses (see Rational for "Constructivist Case Study," Chapter III).

### Significance of the Study

...We are lacking the empirical studies of ritual behavior and its consequences for life cycle crises upon which we might assess the relationship between crises and ritual in its current setting (Kimbali in introduction to Van Gennep's Rites of Passage, p. xvii, 1960).

This exploratory study provides here to fore unavailable description, from a family systems perspective, of contemporary families' use of an available life cycle ritual to deal with developmental crises. Such description is valuable from a number of perspectives: that of ritual, that of family systems, and that of research methodology.

In terms of understanding the elusive concept of ritual, the actual descriptions of the families interacting with the process might well be this study's most significant contribution. As Lorentz (in Wolin and Bennet [1984, pp. 401-02]) states, "ritual is an injunctive

concept. We understand it more through examples than through narrow definition."

In reference to family systems, description from a systemic perspective is valuable in that understanding the way in which a family interacts with a particular ritual provides information about much more than just how the family interacts with that particular episode in its life. According to Friedman (1980, 1985), the way in which the family lives through/uses this nodal event will be consistent with the way it lives through/uses other life cycle events. Changes resulting from the event, and changes in the way the family deals with the event will result in changes in the way it deals with future life cycle crises and potentially with all subsequent interactions within the system. This work therefore has direct implications for natural helpers (clergy and educators) coaching pre-ritual families, and for therapists developing rituals for client families.

These descriptions (and the patterns they reveal) are additionally significant in terms of family theory in that the families being described are non-clinical, i.e., "healthy" families. This approach from the point of view of healthy family functioning is relatively unusual. Most psychological literature is written from the perspective of pathology and even the most current writing on ritual is from the perspective of clinical families (e.g., Coppersmith, 1982, 1986; Quinn, 1985; Reiss, 1981; Wolin & Bennet, 1984) or dysfunctional organizations (Schwartzman, 1986). Indeed, even in a recently

published work on family resources (Karpel, 1986), a work which might well have explored cultural ritual as a natural resource within the system, there is no mention of ritual except as a therapeutic technique.

This research complements these recent publications and contributes to an initial database on functioning families. This database has broad implications for researchers and theorists attempting to understand more about how families make use of available resources in coping with normative crises (Reiss, 1982).

And finally, in the domain of research methodology, these ethnographic descriptions (and interspersed analyses) which include explicit information about the interactive nature of the research process are significant in that they represent an initial attempt to deal with the reality that the research process is "as circular and recursive as the system it is studying" (Pearce & Freeman, 1984, p. 7). In recent writings on this issue of systemic research, it is suggested that the processes by which data are gathered are themselves data of interest (Steirer, 1985, p. 33), and that researchers may benefit from showing each other how they have drawn distinctions in organizing the world of experience (Atkinson, 1987, p. 13).

#### Delimitations

##### Only Bar, not Bat Mitzvah

Although it is the child's place in the system rather than its sex that is critical in terms of family development (Friedman 1981, p.

55), this investigation is restricted to Bar Mitzvah and deliberately does not include Bat Mitzvah. Two major reasons inform this restriction: (1) To simply include girls and Bat Mitzvah as if there had been no gender differences in Jewish tradition (and in society as a whole) would be to further shortchange women; and (2) Given the relatively recent advent of Bat Mitzvah, it would be more difficult to find families in which generational similarities and differences could be explored.

#### First Child

...of all children, to be sure, the oldest child's development is the most significant for the shift in role content in the parents' positions, since his [sic] experiences present new and different problems which as yet the family has not encountered and brings about the most modification of role content in all other positions in the family (Hill, 1964, p. 191).

Given that it is generally the first child's development that takes the family over the "growing edge" (Duvall in Golan, 1981, p. 33), this study is delimited to families in which the first living child is a son and this is the family's first Bar Mitzvah.

#### Healthy Systems

This study is also delimited to families who are not (during the research) in family therapy. No matter how unintended or mild, this research is inevitably an intervention into the family and the researcher must avoid either adding undue stress to an already over-



stressed system or interfering with the work being done in the therapy. Even more fundamental to this delimitation, however, is the fact that this research is meant to explore how "healthy" (rather than clinical) families make use of an available ritual to deal with life crises.

### Limitations

#### Size of Population

Although an "n" of four might appear to be an excessively small sample, it is an appropriate number of systems to observe given the depth of the investigation and the mode of study which is initial observation of a phenomenon. The goal here is not to describe in general what happens when family systems interact with ritual process, but to describe in particular what happens when specific families interact with a specific process. This is done with the understanding that it is "the particulars that illuminate universals" (Friedman, 1982, p. 519), and that such descriptions will allow for increasingly refined hypotheses. Indeed, Patton (1980, p. 103) goes so far as to say that "logical generalizations can be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single, critical case."

#### Self Selection of Sample Population

In this study, the researcher is limited to families who choose to participate. Given the intrusiveness of the process at a time that is already stressful for families, those who agree to participate in

this study are highly self selected.

#### Ethical Considerations

Although the research is not intended as therapeutic intervention, its interventive potential must be acknowledged. Overall the researcher feels comfortable with this potential as she believes (with Friedman, 1980, 1981) that the more the family participates in the ritual, the more it benefits from it. Participation in this research project necessarily increases the family's talking and thinking about the process and thereby increases family members' participation. In addition, the very act of talking about themselves and their experience is (according to Riskin and McCorkle in their findings on non-therapy family research, 1979) beneficial to families.

### Definition of Terms

Definitions are a kind of scratching and generally leave a sore place more sore than it was before.

(Samuel Butler quoted in Patton, 1982, p. 35)

Bar Mitzvah: In modern usage, the term denotes the religious ceremony in the synagogue which marks a 13-year-old boy's attainment of religious majority. More accurately, the word describes the person's adulthood. The word is half Aramaic, half Hebrew. Bar is the Aramaic word for son, and mitzvah in this combination means, roughly, the commandments of the Torah. The Bar Mitzvah child is therefore a "son of the commandments." From the point of view of Jewish law, a Bar Mitzvah is a person who is now permitted (or required, as the case may be) to perform those commandments which his age and capacity permit him to fulfill. He is now responsible for his own wrongdoings, able to give witness in court, and able to be counted as one of the ten men (minyan) needed to hold a public service.

The actual ceremony varies from congregation to congregation depending on the branch of Judaism with which it is associated and according to local customs. Most contemporary ceremonies, however, include the boy's being called up to bless the Torah (his aliyah), his chanting of the prophetic portion of the week (his "haftorah"), and his speech (explicating the Torah reading or the haftorah and thanking his family and guests). The ceremony is followed by a feast/party celebrating the event.

Bat Mitzvah: The female equivalent of the above with bat meaning daughter.

Boundaries: Rules in a family defining who participates and in what manner. They are also the separating "lines" between generations, between people, and between subgroups (Minuchin, 1974).

Change, first and second order: A system is able to change in two ways: (1) Individual parameters change in a continuous manner but the structure of the system does not alter; this is known as "first-order change;" (2) The system changes qualitatively and in a discontinuous manner; this is known as "second-order change"...(or) change of change (Simon, Stierlin, & Wynne, 1985).

Circular questions: Questions designed to explore differences between persons and relationships; between actions on different occasions; and between belief systems and the ways they operate in the family system (Pearce & Freeman, 1984).

Cultural ritual: Public ritual that is prescribed by the family's ethnic or religious heritage.

Cybernetics: The study of the process of organization in observed and observing systems and its inherent circularities (Steier, 1985).

Developmental change (growth): A function of the interplay of change and continuity across different contexts which facilitates adjustments in the balance of autonomy and cohesiveness. This rebalancing



potentiates new structures/relationships which are more appropriate to the life stage the system is entering.

Epistemology: The discipline or study that concerns itself with the nature of knowledge. In the current vernacular of family systems theory, the term refers more accurately to "what it is we know." That is, the way one makes distinctions, the way one punctuates experience is one's epistemology (Held & Pols, 1985).

Evolutionary feedback: The idea that random oscillations in self regulating systems can go beyond the limits of self correction and suddenly, unpredictably become part of a deviation-amplifying process, radically restructuring the system and creating increased...complexity in the system (Schwartzman, 1984).

Family: An open system that functions in relation to its broader socio-cultural context and evolves over the life cycle. It comprises the entire emotional system of at least three generations and reacts to past, present, and anticipated future relations with that three-generational system and with the larger ecosystem of which it is a part (Walsh, 1982, and Carter & McGoldrick, 1980).

Family development: Refers to the process by which new organizational patterns emerge as the family provokes or responds to changes in itself and its environment over time (Bloomfield et al. in Kaplan, 1984, p. 116).

Family life cycle: The "predictable" stages and transitions through which the family system evolves.

Family systems theory: An orientation which conceptualizes the members of a family as elements in a circuit of interaction. It abandons the causal-mechanistic view of phenomenon and replaces it with the view that every family member influences the others and is in turn influenced by those same members (Palazzoli et al., 1978).

Genogram: A format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationships over at least three generations (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

"Healthy" family systems: Ones which maintain a balance between autonomy and cohesiveness that is appropriate to its current life cycle stage. The system makes adjustments in this balance as it moves through developmental and transgenerational time. This adjusting is done through a process which involves yet another balancing act: the balancing of (the simultaneous and reflexive forces for) change and continuity.

Hypotheses: Starting points for ways of investigating connections which are more (rather than less) holistic...(Pearce & Freeman, 1984, p. 6); Hypotheses about a family are "temporary explanations" of why the family is the way it is, based on information available at the moment. Hypotheses are always changing (Campbell, Reder, Draper & Pollard, 1984).

Life cycle rituals: Complex, usually prolonged, group performances which accompany major developmental transitions such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. They are "observances of ceremonial acts which have evolved in accordance with the prescribed rules or customs of a cultural group or subgroup and are repeated generation after generation...Imbued...with [an element of]...magical powers...they give form to celebration and mourning and dramatically mark changes of status" (Culler, 1982, 2b, p. 7). All such rituals, despite enormous variations in purpose, place, time, and amount of elaboration, follow the tripartite pattern of separation, transition, and reintegration.

Mazel Tov: Yiddish phrase spoken by an individual (both as an individual and as one implicitly representing the community) which acknowledges that the one spoken to has done something hard or has gone through something dangerous. "It is translated as 'congratulations!' or 'Thank G-d' rather than its literal meaning: 'Good Luck.' The distinction is as important as it is subtle" (Rosten, 1970).

Metaphor: The "analogous relationship of one thing to another" (Haley, 1976)--as in a symptom being a metaphor for the system of which it is a part.

Rite of passage: The period or process of transition marked (i.e., celebrated) by rituals appropriate to the particular passage being attempted. Although the term "rite of passage" is most often used to

denote passage from childhood to adolescence, it is a term that has come to be applied to the ordeals that accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age.

Ritual: Symbolic behavior which is prescribed, rigid, repetitive, and accompanied by a sense of rightness or fit (Yeats, 1979).

Ritual ceremony: The public event which marks and celebrates the transition process. It is not to be confused with the transition itself or with the overall ritual process that includes preparation for the ceremony, and the aftermath of the ceremony as well as the event itself.

Ritual trance: The emotional apex of the ritual ceremony.

Structural assessment: An analysis or diagnosis of a family's interaction in its current context (Minuchin, 1974) (See Appendix A).

Sub system: Divisions in families determined by tasks, interests, functions, or generations of the family or its members. Generic subsystems within the family include marital, parental, and sibling subsystems (Harkaway, 1982).

Therapeutic ritual: An action or series of actions (prescribed by a therapist), that are usually accompanied by verbal formulas or expressions, which are to be carried out by all members of the family (Palazzoli et al., 1977).

## C H A P T E R   I I

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Organization of Chapter

The following literature review is presented as the theoretical basis for this research on the relationship of ritual process to developmental change in functioning families. The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first is on the family, how healthy family functioning is defined and how change in the family is understood. The second section is on ritual, its definition, function, and process. This section concludes with a subsection entitled "Ritual and Healthy Family Functioning" which attempts a synthesis of the earlier elements. Section three focuses on adolescence and, in particular, the need for ritual during this developmental phase.

#### Families and Life Cycle Change

As context for the discussion of ritual's role in facilitating normative developmental transitions in healthy families, part one of this chapter reviews the relevant literature on definitions of health; examines the concept of developmental crises; and finally, explores current thinking on discontinuous change in open systems.



### Healthy Family Functioning

A normal family is one that has not yet been clinically assessed.

Walsh, 1982, p. 36

### On Defining Health

Any attempt to define health is fraught with difficulty. Not only are there no consensually agreed upon definitions<sup>1</sup> but, in fact, there has been relatively little study of the concept at all. As Ziff (1983, p. 31) notes: In the history of psychology, "which has focused primarily on sickness, a psychology of health is a relatively new idea." R. D. Laing (quoted in an interview by Simon, 1983, p. 26), characteristically put it this way when asked to distinguish between normal and pathological families:

(It is)...difficult to say what was different between the...normal families and those with schizophrenics...except that in the normal family, nobody had cracked up.

It is only recently that clinicians and researchers alike have begun to acknowledge the need to know more about what constitutes health-- both in order to cure illness and in order to prevent it (e.g., Golan 1981; Hoffman 1981; Reiss 1983; Walsh 1982; Ziff 1983). F. Walsh, in Normal Family Functioning (1982, p.9) speaks directly to this need. After thoroughly surveying the literature on health and the multitude of overlapping (and competing) conceptualizations of family functioning and dysfunctioning, she challenges the field to move

towards a more integrated definition of normal family functioning. Stressing that 'normal' "varies with the different internal and external demands that require adaptation over the course of the family life cycle," and that "...family processes are more important (in determining normalcy) than family forms," the guiding question she poses is, "How do families, with variant forms and requisites, organize their resources and function to accomplish their objectives?"

#### Cohesion and Adaptability: Critical Elements in Normal Family Functioning

In answer to Walsh's question, a number of integrative models of normal family functioning are being developed. In terms of this study, one model in particular stands out: In their work on the "Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems," Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell ([1979] in Walsh, p. 35) propose that "a balanced level of cohesion and adaptability is the most functional to mental and family development." These concepts of cohesion and adaptability are critical in reference to systems health and change. This conclusion is supported in Stress and the Family: Vol. 1, Coping with Normative Transitions (McCubbin & Figley, 1983). In a chapter on family transitions, McCubbin and Patterson (1983, p. 17) state that "cohesion (or integration) and adaptability appear to be two of the most important resources in the management of crises..." They go on to say that "families functioning moderately along the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability are likely to make a more successful adaptation to crises. Too much cohesion can create enmeshment and too much

adaptability is chaotic for the family system" (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Conversely, too little cohesion leads to disengagement of family members and too little adaptability results in a rigid family system." Stated more succinctly, a healthy family provides "a context in which members experience the creative tension between individuation and belongingness" (Whitaker, 1979, p. 113).

In a related view, D. Reiss (1971), studying family paradigms, specifically identifies flexibility about the degree of both internal and external connectedness as the distinguishing mark of the family that does best (in the problem-solving tasks in his study). This theme is repeated in B. Keeney's, The Aesthetics of Change (1983). He says that "...healthy families facilitate both diversification and connection of their members" (p. 127). For Keeney, health does not automatically imply freedom from symptoms. Instead, he sees health and pathology as sides of "a cybernetic complementarity," as part of a more encompassing whole called "health" (pp. 126-127).

#### The Etymology of the Word Health and its Link to Concepts of Wholeness, Hallowness, and Coherence

In an earlier article foreshadowing his later work, Keeney (with Sprenkle, 1982) explored the etymology of the word health and demonstrated its connection to the concept of "holy."

The etymology of the word health

...demonstrates that it is connected to a family of words including whole, wholesome, hallow, and holy. Healthy family...ecologies...can be discussed in terms of the wholeness of relationship systems...The family is...a system within a system within a system... The ways in which these

cascades of chinese boxlike systems are connected to one another represent what cyberneticians call "coupling of systems." ...The parts...are healthy insofar as they are joined harmoniously to the whole (p. 9).<sup>2</sup>

These connections between health, the process of hallowing, and the need for harmonious joining are fundamental in terms of ritual's ability to facilitate health. A few more words, therefore, on the element of connectedness: Keeney and Sprenkle go on to explore the way in which individuals and families become harmoniously connected to the larger ecosystem; they focus first on Bateson's aesthetic notion of the sacramental experience and then on Berry's concept of the "oneness in the Creation:"

For Bateson [1972]...sacrament is a technical [!!] matter referring to a combination of conscious thought and primary process that provides a way through which we enact a part of our ecosystem, or what Berry [1977] metaphorically calls our "oneness in the Creation." Sacramental experiences can therefore be described as characterizing a complementary relationship between "self" and the larger system subsuming it [emphasis added] (1982, p. 10).

From their discussion of health, the authors draw some contrasting conclusions about dysfunctional family systems. These families, they say, are "descriptions of rigid systems in which the coupled subsystems are linked through...enmeshed and disengaged boundaries. Such families apparently "do not provide opportunities for the sacramental experience of being connected to their role functions, subsystems, and larger ecosystem" (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p. 10). Such families are unable, at the organizational level, to be appropriately connected to the larger "systems of extended family,



neighborhood, and community." These are families who, in Slater's words (1974, p.36), are capable of generating drama, but not capable of sharing it "in the street."

In Passing Through Transitions: A Guide for Practitioners (1981), N. Golan highlights another highly related aspect of health. She cites a study by A. Antonovsky [1979], a medical sociologist who wondered why some people "faced with tremendous difficulties and obstacles at certain periods in their lives, were able to survive and even thrive against all rational prognosis." Antonovsky isolated the "sense of coherence" as the critical determinant of health. Elaborating, Golan states that "persons who possess this sense of coherence tend to perceive their inner and outer environment as foreseeable and comprehensible...(they have) faith that by and large things will work out well..." (p. 21). Golan goes on to say that this sense of coherence "may well become the key in determining why some make it to a new stable situation while others founder and become stuck" (p. 21).

### Summary

The critical elements of health described above are connected, and the pattern emphasizes both that connectedness and its functional flip side, differentiation. The etymological idea of "wholeness," the concept of "coupled systems," and the "sense of coherence," all point to the family's need to be appropriately connected both within its ecology and within the larger ecology of which it is a part. A definition of health demands that the pieces of the system (and the



system within the system) fit. Dell's concept of coherence (1982, p. 31) makes absolute sense here:

"Coherence...implies a congruent interdependence in functioning whereby all the aspects of the system fit together." The healthy family is a system in which all of the members are appropriately connected to themselves, to each other, and to the larger context. This concept of connectedness, by definition, implies an appropriate balance between closeness (cohesion) and distance (individuation). In order to stay healthy, the family must be capable of allowing for adjustments in this delicate balance (or "creative tension") as the needs of the system change over the course of its life cycle.

As will be seen, ritual facilitates both this sense of coherence, with its dual aspects of cohesion and differentiation, and this ability to adjust to changing needs. Thus ritual has a role in sustaining health, a role that is undervalued or at least underutilized in contemporary Western society. In the next section we will further examine the functioning family, this time as it progresses from one developmental stage to the next.

### Life Cycle Transitions

What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs at evening? (Ancient Egyptian Riddle)

...from...a fixed, placental placement within... [the] womb, to...death and the ultimate fixed point of...[the] tombstone...punctuated by a number of critical moments of transition... (Warren, 1959)

## Introduction

From the Sphinx's riddle to Warren's dramatic description, to the most systemically-oriented family life cycle models that have yet to be published, theoreticians throughout the ages and across the disciplines have been thinking about how normal/healthy people and families change over time. Most currently, extensive studies of family life cycles and models that explain them are found in Carter & McGoldrick, 1980; Combrick-Graham, 1985; Hoffman, 1980; Neilsen, 1981; and van der Hart, 1983.

In order to understand ritual's function in reference to developmental change, this section focuses particularly on life cycle transitions and the stress that accompanies them.

## Definitions

For the purpose of this research, the family is defined as an open system that functions in relation to its broader sociocultural context and evolves over the life cycle. It comprises the entire emotional system of at least three generations and reacts to past, present, and anticipated future relations with that three generational system and with the larger ecosystem of which it is a part (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, p. 168; Walsh, 1982, p. 9).

The concept of family life cycle refers to the consecutive stages through which the family system, as described above, moves. Although life cycle theorists differ as to the number of stages, the focus of each stage, the specific characteristics of each stage, etc., all agree that there are normative, scheduled events and transitions that

most people can expect will occur at certain points in their (family's) lives (Walsh, 1982, p. 31).

O. van der Hart (1983) describes the stages and the transitions between them by emphasizing the degree of change.<sup>3</sup> Within a stage, he says, there is relative stability; during a transition, however, "more or less drastic," changes are taking place in the internal structure of the family, changes that require much adjustment" (p. xiv).

4

Transitional Crises: Potential for Growth and for Trouble

5

Of the two "different" periods, i.e., stability and transition, it is the period of transition with which most writers are absorbed--not because the idea of change might be inherently more interesting than the idea of stability, but because it is during these periods that the potential for growth and for trouble is greatest (Gramsi, 1971; Haley, 1973; Kimbali, 1960; Solomon, 1973). These transition periods, no matter how normal and predictable, are experienced by the family as periods of crisis. They stress the system and cause disruption. In most families, this disruption results in growth. It results in the family's transformation to the next developmental stage--there to wait, as it were, for the next transition. But often, too, this disruption results in dysfunction, in the family's developing problems (of varying intensity and for varying amounts of time). Hoffman (1981, p. 161) cites a number of clinicians and theorists have studied this phenomenon: Rubin Hill who "speculates about the factors that predispose a family to treat a normal life

stage as a crisis;" Michael Solomon who notes that "psychosomatic and medical symptoms tend to cluster magnetically" about these times; and Thomas Eliot who points out that a crisis in a family often follows a "revision of membership," i.e., a period in which a member leaves or a new member is added. These events, of course, often herald a new stage in the family's life (e.g., when a baby is born, a child gets married, etc.). Eliot calls these "crises of dismemberment" and "crises of accession"--rather vivid terms that are not excessively dramatic given the intensity of the effect on the family.

#### Developmental and Transgenerational Stressors

In attempting to understand the nature of transitional crisis, the concept of stressors emerges. "Stressors are defined as those life cycle events and related hardships that are of sufficient magnitude to bring about change in the family system" (Walsh, 1982, pp. 30-31). Carter and McGoldrick (1980) developed the concept of stressors most fully by collecting all of the stresses that operate on families and arranging them along two perpendicular axes (see Figure 2.1):

The vertical flow in the system includes patterns of relating and functioning that are transmitted down the generations...[and] includes all of the family attitudes, taboos, expectations, labels, and loaded issues with which we grow up...The horizontal flow...includes the anxiety produced by the stresses on the family as it moves forward through time, coping with the changes and transitions of the family life cycle. It includes both the predictable developmental stresses and those unpredictable events...(pp. 9-10).



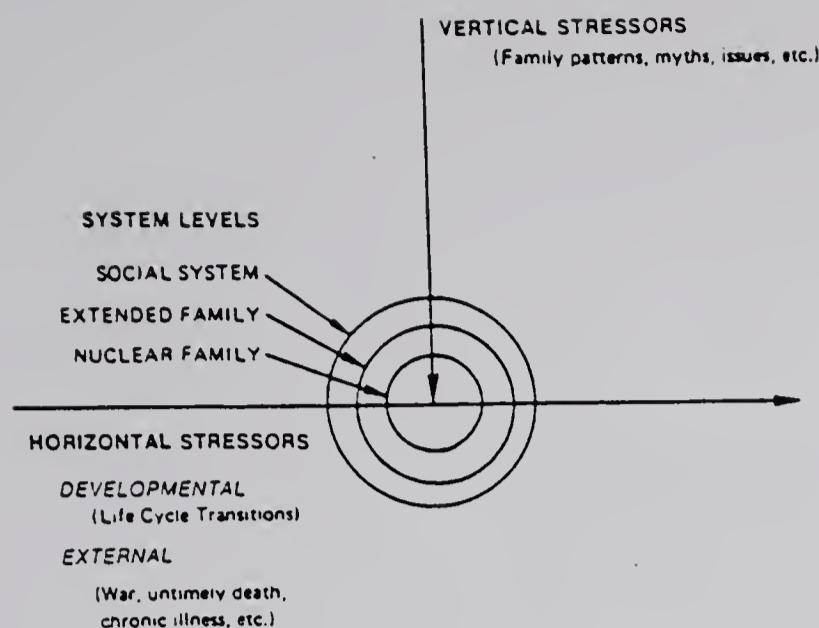


Figure 2.1 Horizontal and Vertical Life Cycle Stressors  
(Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, p.10)

According to Carter and McGoldrick, the key to determining how well a family will manage its transitions through life is the degree of anxiety that is produced by the stress on the vertical and horizontal axes at the points where they converge. "Although all normative change is to some degree stressful...when the horizontal [developmental] stress intersects with the vertical [transgenerational] stress, [there is a]...quantum leap in anxiety in the system" (pp. 10-11). An example of such an intersection would be a family preparing for its first daughter's wedding while at the same time the maternal grandmother is threatening not to attend because members of her ex-husband's family with whom she'd been feuding for years, are being invited. The horizontal stress of the developmental transition is being compounded by the vertical transgenerational conflicts that have not been resolved.

Crisis, not Emergency; Resolution, not Relief

In discussing life cycle crises and the stresses that accompany



them, it is important to differentiate between the concept of crisis and the concept of emergency. A. Fors sen (1980) does this in her article on the Zamaros, a traditional African tribe whose culture is being westernized and whose rituals are being lost. Emergency, she points out, is a subjective state, "generally accompanied by a sense of need for outside help."

Crisis...[on the other hand] is a more complex and perhaps more "profound" concept. It may occur with none of the emotional upheavals that are characteristic of the...emergency state...[Crisis] always demands or forces outright change in the system....A crisis is not a state to be relieved, it must always be resolved [emphasis added]. (p. 47).

#### Resolution in the Transitional Period

The resolution discussed by Fors sen happens in the period between one life stage and the next, the transition period. What happens here is of fundamental importance in determining how the crisis is resolved and whether the system leaps to an "achievement" (Rabkin in Hoffman, 1981, p. 168) or gets "stuck" and dysfunctional. Different authors have different names for this period and the differences reflect their varying perspectives. D. Levinson (1978) refers to them as "boundary zones." Golan (1981) calls them "bridging periods" ("often marked by feelings of anxiety, loss, upset, which sometimes erupt into states of active disequilibrium" [p. 4]). Rapoport (1962), a family sociologist and one of the first to study normal stress, calls them "points of no return"--leading either to resolution or to maladaptation; Hoffman's word is "sweatbox" (1981, p. 171).

### Summary

The process of transition from one stage to the next presents a crisis. As Marxist scholar Gramsci (1971) puts it, "the old is dying but the new cannot yet be born" (p. 71). He calls this period of transition "the interregnum." In this interregnum, many symptoms "spring up." Gramsci understands these symptoms to be necessary compromises between simultaneous pressures for and against change-- they act both to protect against change that would be too fast and at the same time to keep the pressure for change alive. What results, according to Hoffman (1981, p. 166), is "a turmoil of behaviors that spiral...around the possibility of a leap."<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to understand what actually happens in this "interregnum," this period of transition from one developmental stage to the next, and to explore the potential role of ritual in facilitating change during these periods, we move now to an examination of how discontinuous change occurs in open systems.

#### Of Sweatboxes and Other Tortures: Some Ideas About Discontinuous Change

All our lives, every day and every hour, we are engaged in the process of accommodating our changed and unchanged selves to changed and unchanged surroundings; living, in fact, is nothing else than this process of accommodating. When we fail in it a little we are stupid; when we fail flagrantly we are mad; when we suspend it temporarily we sleep; when we give up the attempt altogether, we die.  
(Samuel Butler in Golan, 1981, p. 11)

Change as a Constant: From Homeostasis to Coherence

With this powerful reminder that change is an ongoing reality in the process of living, we focus now on one particular kind of change that seems to occur at particular points in the family life cycle. This change, in the language of systems, is called second order change or change of the system itself (McGoldrick & Carter 1982, pp. 175-76). As families move from one developmental stage to the next, such change is not only necessary but, in fact, it appears that the very "strength of the system" (Walsh, 1982, p. 14) depends on its ability to make this kind of change.

Before going on to discuss second order change in family systems, however, the concept of constant change bears some explication. It is a very important concept that is much easier to state than to grasp.

Until recently, most discussions about change assumed a context of stability. Homeostasis was the term used to refer to "no change." Homeorhesis was its opposite. In the current literature, there is increasing recognition that living systems function in a permanent state of flux (e.g., Dell, 1982; Elkaim, 1982; Hoffman, 1981; Stengers, 1982; Tomm, 1984a). Psychiatrist M. Elkaim (1982, p. 58) comments on the irony of this belated recognition: "Our work...geared to change, took place in a theoretical context that was based essentially on an assumption of stability." Therapist and theoretician, Tomm (1980) puts it this way: "The system is always changing; we should think not of how to change it but why it appears to be stable."

Dell, in an article entitled "Beyond Homeostasis: Toward a Concept of Coherence" (1982), calls homeostasis a "compelling but erroneous scientific idea." He attempts a new conceptualization of homeostasis:

System change can be easily explained if homeostasis is considered to be a tendency to seek a steady state, any steady state (as opposed to a specific steady state). Thus when a system is perturbed, as all systems are, it tends to seek a steady state that is always slightly different from the preceding steady state. In short, homeostasis evolves (p. 27).

Dell goes on to offer a substitute term that he feels describes open systems more accurately. The term is "coherence." As stated earlier in the discussion of health, coherence refers to the "convergent interdependence in functioning whereby all the aspects of the system fit together" (p. 31). When the coherence of an interactional system is disrupted (for instance, when a family is in transition from one developmental stage to the next), that system will die, "but almost certainly, there will ensue a knitting together that forms a new system with a truly new coherence" (p. 34).

Stenger's (1982) discussion is helpful here as we attempt to visualize a constantly evolving steady state:

...living beings function in a permanent state of flux; there is no fixed part...only different rates of flux, now faster, now slower. Everything is constantly in a process of renewal--the system is "open"... (but) this openness does not preclude a certain stability of the system. The open system thus has... (a) predictable, reproducible, stable behavior that is clearly characterizable (p. 68).



Given this context then, that systems are in a constant state of change, the question about how normal families evolve through the life cycle becomes a question about a specific kind of change. It is about the kind of change that transforms the system into a new organization appropriate to its new place along the life cycle continuum, while at the same time allowing it to remain the same, i.e., to continue functioning normally--within the constraints of its own coherence.

#### Second Order Evolutionary Shifts at Transition Points

Hoffman's work (as it appeared first in Carter & McGoldrick's Family Life Cycle, [1980], and then as part of her own comprehensive Foundations of Family Therapy [1981]), presents a most lucid attempt to distinguish between the different kinds of change and to understand how living systems make sudden evolutionary shifts at natural transition points in the family life cycle. Referring to Ashby, Hoffman (1981, p. 197) talks about the family as a bimodal mechanism which has two types of corrective action: The first type of action is first order changes, which are "minor fluctuations from state to state within the limits for behavior that are already set." The second type of action is second order changes. These changes involve a resetting of the rules for these limits, which usually requires a  
8  
"transformation," a discontinuous change.

Hoffman, like Dell, emphasizes not stability and homeostasis but the idea of constant change. For her "the conceptual emphasis is not on the processes that tend toward equilibrium; but rather on self-organizing processes that reach toward new evolutionary stages" (1981,



p. 157). She describes families as complex systems that "do not change in smooth unbroken lines but in discontinuous leaps" (p. 158). Families are structures which...

maintain a steady state while matter, energy, and information continually flow through them....When a system is conflicted or dysfunctional [as in a stressful transition period], this may not necessarily portend disaster but may indicate that pressure toward a new and more complex integration is mounting (p. 158).<sup>9</sup>

When the system is driven far from its equilibrium, any small instability can amplify, causing the system to pass beyond its limits and in an almost magical way reappear in quite a different state. The form that results from this process of evolutionary feedback is unpredictable...(p. 341). Family systems are capable of evolving to new and more functionally organized patterns that did not exist before and, like a kaleidoscope, the system, once changed, can never return to its earlier pattern (p. 159).

The system shifts to a new setting in order to meet the demands of a changing field. The change in the setting creates a discontinuity because the range of behaviors, the "grammar" for allowable activities has changed. A set of completely different patterns, options, and possibilities emerges (p. 159).

Hoffman outlines the "natural history of a leap or a transformation." It is a vivid and helpful description:

First, the patterns that have kept the system in a steady state relative to its environment begin to work badly. New conditions arise for which these patterns were not designed.

Ad hoc solutions are tried and sometimes work, but usually have to be abandoned. Irritation grows over small but persisting difficulties. The accumulation of dissonance eventually forces the entire system over an edge, into a state of crisis, as the stabilizing tendency brings on ever-intensifying corrective sweeps that get out of control. The end point of what cybernetic engineers call a runaway is that the system breaks down or creates a new way to monitor the same homeostasis, or spontaneously leaps to an integration that will deal better with the changed field [emphasis added] (1981, pp. 159-160).

Earlier in her book (p. 41), Hoffman calls this new integration "a transcendent synthesis," an escalation that passes beyond the limits of the previous arrangement, apparently rushing toward ineluctable doom, and then emerges with a "transcendent synthesis" that nobody had foreseen. "Before this 'creative leap' can occur," she goes on, "...all previous pathways must be blocked. It is only from the accumulated intensity of the stress that pressure to take the leap will occur" (1981, p. 168).

The Sweatbox and its Paradox: Harbinger of a Leap

10

According to Hoffman (1981), the paradoxical injunction is the communication form most likely to create sufficient pressure for (such) change. Hoffman's example of this linguistic bind is the parent saying to the adolescent child: I want you to be independent, but I want you to want that independently of my wanting that" (p. 168). The receiver of the message is directed to remain simultaneously in a symmetrical and a complementary relationship with the communicant. This being impossible, a leap must be taken to what Rabkin [1976] in Hoffman, 1981, p. 168) calls an "achievement," and Platt [1970] in

Hoffman, 1981, p. 168) labels a "transformation." The paradoxical injunction or simple bind is "the confusing directive that often appears as harbinger of a leap" (p. 168).

A prerequisite for creative leaps in complex systems is a period of confusion accompanied by self-contradictory messages, inconsistencies, and above all, paradoxical injunctions...These messages, with their threatening implications that the relationship between the communicants may be endangered if the change does not take place can be called the "sweatbox." The "sweatbox"<sup>11</sup> in mild or severe form, often seems to be necessary before morphogenetic or basic structural changes can take place in a person, in a family, or in larger systems like tribes or nations [emphasis added] (1981, p. 171).

This process of discontinuous change can be represented schematically as in Figure 2.2.

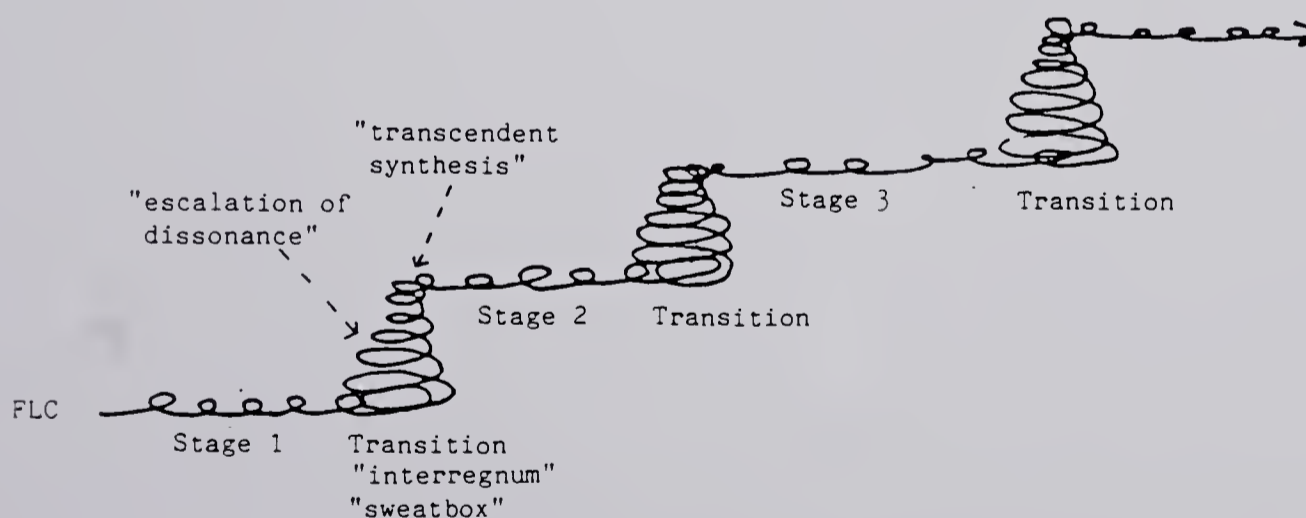


Figure 2.2 The Process of Discontinuous Change

### Summary

Healthy families are those which promote an appropriate sense of connectedness among their members and between their members and the larger community. By definition, an appropriate sense of connectedness

assumes an equally appropriate sense of individuation among its members and an appropriate boundary around all of them.

As healthy families evolve through the normal life cycle, the optimum balance between connectedness and individuation shifts according to the needs of the particular stage being entered. The transition from one stage to the next represents the crisis period in which major shifts in balance are occurring. These transitional periods are characterized by stress and they "lead either to resolution and growth or to maladaptation and destruction" (Rapoport, 1962). In general, most families are capable of coping--i.e., of recalibrating the balance between cohesion and separation such that it is appropriate for the stage they are entering. But the process is necessarily confusing and painful. The danger of not making the leap, of not "achieving" the change is great. The terms "point of no return" and "sweatbox" are accurately ominous.

Throughout the ages, families were assisted through these treacherous periods. They were assisted through the mechanism of ritual, public ceremonies that prescribed, contained, and celebrated the change (Culler, 1982a, 1982b). These were mechanisms that facilitated the family's second order, discontinuous shifting of balances, in that they dealt powerfully with the inherently contradictory messages that accompany all major shifts of this kind. Furthermore, they dealt with them in ways that were harmonious with the larger society in which the family fit.

Section two of this chapter focuses on the mechanism of ritual



and its relationship to the kind of change and the kind of functioning system being described.

### Rituals and Ritual Process

This section is divided into five parts. The first attempts to define the term ritual while the second offers suggestions as to how rituals can be categorized. Part three is a discussion of the functions rituals serve, and part four is an attempt to describe how these functions are accomplished--that is, how ritual actually works. Part five is an attempt to draw theoretical conclusions about the relationship between ritual and healthy family functioning.

#### On Defining Ritual

To this point, the way in which the term ritual has been used is characteristic of the way in which the term is used in general--i.e., freely and imprecisely. Yeats (1979, p. 44) in his excellent review of the literature, likens the use of the term ritual in anthropology to use of the term "anxiety" in psychology. "It is a fundamental concept frequently referred to but without a consensually agreed upon definition." The term is often used interchangeably with a number of different words (such as custom, ceremony, habit, display, rite, rite of passage) which refer to a wide range of behaviors, and evoke a wide range of images and emotional responses. Much has been written about the issues involved in defining this rich and complex concept (e.g., Culler, 1982b; d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979; Rappoport, 1971; Smith,



1979; van der Hart, 1983; Yeats, 1979). Indeed, van der Hart devotes an entire section of his book to the "Problems of Definition." It is not surprising then, that in the course of this review, the researcher amassed reams of material under the heading of "definition." The nuances of, and debates about definition are fascinating and instructive but to include them at this point, would be a distraction. Instead, what follows is a brief discussion of the basic issues in reference to definition, a specific definition of what ritual is (and is not) for the purpose of this research, and, finally some common elements usually associated with the phenomenon.

#### The Element of Sanctity

The basic debate concerning definition of "ritual" has to do with the element of magic, sanctity, or religion. Some theorists insist that as a criterion of definition, there must be some reference (no matter how vague) to mystical powers. Van Gennep, in his seminal monograph, Rites de Passage (1909), emphatically distinguished the profane from the holy, and specifically put the rites of passage that accompany individuals' progress from one well defined stage of life to the next in the category of holy or "sacred." Similarly, Durkheim (1915) insisted on defining ritual as "action directed toward obtaining a blessing from some mystical power." Also Turner (1967, p. 53), says distinctly that ritual has not to do with "technical routine" but with mystical powers.

Other theorists such as Rappaport (1971) require no such element of sacredness. For them, the criteria have more to do with the

rigidity of the behavioral pattern rather than with its content.

Rappaport says that ritual is not restricted to religious practices; as an example, he cites Freud's (1907) use of the related or even synonymous term "ceremony" with the behavior of some neurotics.

Rappaport also cites Webster's (1965) definition of ritual as "any practice...regularly repeated in a set, precise manner so as to satisfy one's sense of 'fitness'."<sup>13</sup>

Theorists on this side of the debate, contend that "although ritual is the primary phenomenon of religion, the ritual process itself requires no supernatural belief" (Wallace 1966, p. 233). S. F. Nadel (1954) is another who emphasizes the element of rigidity by suggesting that indeed, every behavior is a ritual when it is sufficiently formalized and repeated in a specific form.

To some extent this debate is academic. Most anthropologists and sociologists do acknowledge that some aspect of "the sacred" is involved in ritual no matter how removed from that realm they seem at first glance. Even the social scientist, Goffman (1971), who writes about "interpersonal rites" such as handholding, admits the connection to the sacred by explaining that the ritual of holding hands connotes the "sacredness of certain individuals."<sup>14</sup>

In summary, it is sufficient to say that although the term originally referred exclusively to ceremonies "meant to control (pacify or enhance) supernatural forces" (Yeats, 1979, p. 44), there has been a gradual de-emphasis on this aspect of the phenomenon and an increasing emphasis on the types and pattern of behavior involved. In

general, most contemporary theorists would agree with the definition of ritual as "symbolic behavior which is prescribed, rigid, repetitive, and accompanied by a sense of rightness or 'fit'" (Yeats 1979, p. 44).

#### Working Definition

For the purpose of this research, life cycle rituals are complex, usually prolonged, group performances which accompany major developmental transitions such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. They are "observances of ceremonial acts which have evolved in accordance with the prescribed rules or customs of a cultural group or subgroup and are repeated generation after generation...Imbued...with [an element of]...magical powers...they give form to celebration and mourning and dramatically mark changes of status" (Culler 1982b, p. 7).

The term ritual, in this study, refers specifically to public, symbolic behavior which accompanies life cycle transitions. It does not refer to individual habits (e.g., compulsive handwashing), family traditions (e.g., Saturday night baths), or holiday customs (e.g., Thanksgiving dinners). Although these habits, traditions, and customs are legitimately classified as rituals, they are rituals of continuity rather than of transition (see section on "Classification of Rituals").

It is extremely important to reiterate here another caution alluded to in Chapter I: The ritual event or ceremony is not to be

confused with the rite of passage that it marks and celebrates. It is during the entire year surrounding the actual ceremony in which the extended process of transition occurs.

The distinction between the terms ceremony and ritual is of less concern. Most often they are used synonymously. However, it probably makes sense to define the ceremony as the public event (the "outward presentation of the solemn moments" [van der Hart 1983, p. 5]) that is preceded by, filled with, and followed by many rituals.

In addition, the term "ritual" can be distinguished from the term "rite" by suggesting that rites are smaller parts of rituals and that rituals can include many rites (e.g., rites of reversal). The term "rite of passage" however, is special. This is the period or process of transition. It is marked (i.e., celebrated) by rituals appropriate to the particular passage being attempted. Although the term "rite of passage" is most often used to denote passage from childhood to adolescence (and that is certainly how it is used here), it is a term that has come to be applied to the ordeals that accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age. And finally, the term "cultural ritual" in this study, refers to public ceremonies that are prescribed by the family's ethnic or religious heritage (e.g., christenings, brits [circumcision ceremonies], Bar Mitzvahs, wakes).

#### Universal Pattern of Performance

One of the most fascinating features of definition has to do with that fact that, throughout the ages, all rituals of transition--no matter what the specific purpose, place, or time--adhere (with varying



degrees of emphasis) to the same tripartite pattern. As first described by van Gennep (1908), and subsequently probed in great depth by anthropologists who followed him, the three stages are: 1) Separation: where the individual (or group) is taken out of his/her/their natural, ordinary condition, away from that which is known; 2) Transition or margin: where he/she/they are unordinary, i.e., neither one thing nor another; and 3) Reincorporation: where he/she/they are returned to the ordinary but in a new, "reborn" state.

It is the second stage of marginality or "liminality" which is most relevant in terms of how ritual actually facilitates change and it will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Figure 2.3 portrays the tripartite structure of ritual.

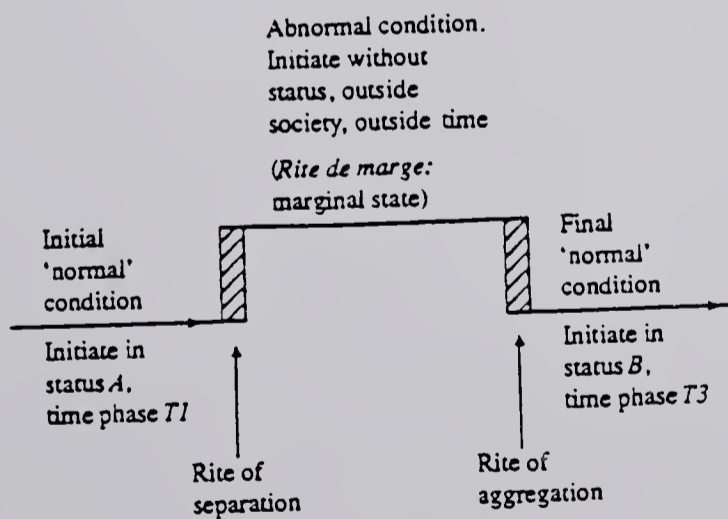


Figure 2.3 Tripartite Structure of Transition Rituals  
(from Leach 1976 in van der Hart, 1983, p. 39)



### Typical Elements of Ritual

In order to give some detail to the definition of ritual, the following typical elements of ritual have been culled from three other academic papers in this area (Culler, 1982a; Steadman, 1978; Yeats, 1979). B. Culler's (p. 8) scan of the literature discovers a number of ceremonial elements that seem to be present in rituals from widely different cultures. Among the most common are: processions; oaths; ordeals; symbolic battles or struggles; mourning or casting off; symbolic joining or separating of people, objects, qualities; passing on of secrets, skills; acquisition of new names or identity; exclusiveness in which the group is delineated from outsiders.

M. Steadman (1978), enumerates common characteristics which seem to enhance the ceremonial quality of ritual:

- A distinct time frame during which ordinary concerns and activities are put aside.
- Actions executed with formal, deliberate behavior.
- A sense of tradition or continuity with the past.
- Intense concern over rendition of symbols but little discussion of meaning of these symbols.
- Evocation of a range of deep-seated emotions.
- Behavior which orders and channels the powerful affect aroused.

Culler (1982a, p. 9) adds to Steadman's list by emphasizing that ritual (1) is built on a condensation of myth, metaphor, and the use of objects invested with religious or magical significance; (2) contains action that is often repetitive...and often involves a quality of intention (the intention to mark an event or proclaim some change); and (3) differentiates roles through the ways in which

members participate in the ceremony.

And finally, Yeats (1979, p. 44 [citing Wallace, 1966]) presents a list of categories which specifically enhance the supernatural quality of the ceremony:

- prayer: addressing the supernatural
- music: dancing, singing, playing instruments
- physical exercise: the physical manipulation of psychological state
- exhortation: addressing another human being
- reciting the code: mythology, morality, belief system
- simulation: imitation of animals or things
- mana: touching things
- taboo: not touching things
- feasts: eating and drinking
- sacrifice: immolation, offerings, fees
- congregation: processions, meetings, convocations
- inspiration and symbolism: manufacture and use of symbolic objects

To what degree all or some of these elements are incorporated into the performance, of course, depends on the particular type of ritual being enacted. Before moving on to discuss how these "types" are classified, however, it is useful to reiterate our working definition: Transition rituals are culturally prescribed, symbolic enactments which are performed publicly in order to mark life cycle transitions. All such rituals, despite enormous variations in purpose, place, time, and amount of elaboration, follow the tripartite pattern of separation, transition, and reintegration.

## Classification of Rituals

### Schema

Just as theorists differ in their definition of the term ritual, so they differ in the way they categorize the many forms ritual takes. The number of categories that various theorists have devised appears endless. To name just a few, there are prophylactic rituals and therapeutic rituals, rituals of status elevation and rituals of degradation. There are seasonal rituals, and life crisis rituals, rituals of technology, and rituals of ideology, rituals of salvation, and rituals of revitalization.

Van der Hart (1983) presents a most useful schema for classification with two major categories: "Rituals of Transition" and "Rituals of Continuity." (Yeats, 1979, refers to them respectively as "Life Cycle Rituals", and "Family Binding Rituals.")

Transition rituals, as first described by Van Gennep (1909), include all those rituals that mark a change from one defined stage, state, position, or age, to another equally defined stage, state, position, or age. As these transitions are often experienced as crises, they are sometimes called "rituals for life crises." Weddings, christenings, Bar Mitzvahs, and funerals are all obvious examples of this kind of ritual. Healing rituals, rituals of affliction, and rituals of misfortune all fall within this category also. They refer specifically to "ordinary transitions in the individual or family life cycle that are improperly made or not made at all" (van der Hart, 1983, p. 8).

Rituals of continuity or binding rituals which enhance group cohesion, include two subcategories: "telectic rites" and "rites of intensification." Telectic rites, from the Greek word for taking off the old and putting on the new, refer to interpersonal rituals of greeting and farewell.

Intensification rituals are the "collective ritualistic activities of a group that coincide with the changes in the natural surroundings of the group" (van der Hart, 1983, p. 9), e.g., seasonal, calendrical rituals such as holiday celebrations. These events influence the entire group directly rather than indirectly via changes in one group member. Figure 2.4 summarizes these classifications.

RITUALS OF TRANSITION (PRIMARY FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL)

Life Cycle Rituals  
Rites of Passage

RITUALS OF CONTINUITY (PRIMARY FOCUS ON GROUP)

Family Rites  
Family Binding Rituals  
Telectic Rites  
Intensification Rituals

Figure 2.4 Types of Rituals

Categories of Change and no Change

The way in which the myriad rituals come to be categorized along these two themes of transition and continuity further reflects the unique nature of ritual as a vehicle for facilitating change and stability simultaneously. Although the rituals in each category



predominately facilitate either change or no change, they are, of course, not exclusively either homeorhetic or homeostatic. They each contain elements of the other. Another way of describing these categories is to say that rituals of continuity facilitate first order change (i.e., change within the system) whereas rituals of transition facilitate second order change (i.e., change of the system itself). However, this division is also not to be understood in absolute terms since the scope of the change is a function of the level at which the system is being considered. For example, the Bar Mitzvah family is experiencing a second order change as it makes the transition from being a family with a child, to being a family with an adolescent, but within the context of the larger Jewish community, the Bar Mitzvah is a ritual of continuity, a ritual that promotes stability within the culture.

Further reflecting this aspect of change and no change are "rites of reversal." These rites are unique in that they occur within both transition and continuity categories. They are not considered a separate type of ritual per sé, but are regarded as a form of ritual (or a smaller "rite") that, according to van der Hart (p. 9), allows for role reversals "in states of exception," and in doing so, confirms normal relations in everyday life. As all rituals are, by definition, states of exception, rites of reversal both allow for new roles and confirm the status quo whether they appear in rituals of continuity or transition.



### Levels of Complexity

Van der Hart further classifies rituals according to their level of complexity. Rituals range from one symbolic act (e.g., the holding of hands) to very complex procedures which include many activities and many symbols over a long period of time (e.g., puberty rites). Van der Hart (p. 11) refers to Turner (1977) in discussing the use of symbols in rituals:

A tribal ritual of any length and complexity is in fact an orchestration of many genres, styles, moods, atmosphere, tempi, and so on ranging from prescribed formal, stereotyped action to a free "play" of inventiveness, and including symbols in all of the sensory codes. The essence of ritual is in its multidimensionality, [the essence] of its symbols, their multivocality [emphasis added] (p. 11).

This multivocality of condensed symbols, this ability of symbols to contain more than one meaning at any one time, is what gives ritual its unique duality.

### Closed and Open Parts

Related to the aspect of complexity is what van der Hart (citing Myerhoff, 1977, 1978, and Moore & Myerhoff, 1977) calls ritual's "closed and open parts." The closed parts are those that are tightly prescribed and rigid. The open parts, on the other hand, are "where improvisation is possible and personal or local circumstances can play a role" (p. 11).

### The Functions of Ritual

The explanations regarding ritual's functions are as varied as the theorists who write them and the disciplines from which they write. This section begins by presenting a "taste" of this variety and then moves on to review the major functions on which most theorists would agree.

#### Point of View: Change or Stability

The way in which theorists understand ritual's function depends, for the most part, on how they view this phenomenon in reference to change. Some (e.g., Culler, 1982; Schwartzman, 1982; van der Hart, 1983; van Gennap, 1908; Watzlawick, 1978; Yeats, 1979) focus on ritual's capacity to promote change, while others (e.g., Grainger, 1974; Girard, 1977; McMannus, 1979; Rappaport, 1971) understand it primarily as a vehicle for maintaining the status quo. The following is a brief sample of the differences in emphasis: R. A. Rappaport (1971) is a prominent anthropologist who emphasizes ritual's function as a homeostatic device. He speaks about ritual as a form of communication and understands it as "a source of man's [sic] power" over the environment. "It helps him maintain biotic communities...redistributing land among people and people over land, limiting the frequency of fighting, facilitating trade, etc." ( in Burns & Laughlin, 1979, p. 253). Girard, in Violence and the Sacred (1977, p. 49) presents a more extreme position. He contends that ritual protects the community from disorder by deflecting violence

onto sacrificial victims or symbolic acts. By perpetuating differences within the society, ritual reinforces the social fabric. For these theorists, the function of ritual is to restore equilibrium in systems disturbed by the changes...which accompany the growth and development of its members (Yeats, 1979, p. 7).

In contrast to this point of view, Schwartzman (1982) examines the relationship between ritual and symptoms, and deliberately emphasizes the property of change. He says that rituals facilitate change in direct contrast to symptoms which condone "no change." "They...function to aid individuals in making...universal (life cycle) transitions successfully" (p. 21).

Even Schwartzman, however, acknowledges that while the individuals are changing their relationships to one another, the structure and basic premises of the group are maintained. In fact, those who discuss ritual in terms most relevant to this research (i.e., in terms of the family) do so in ways which allow for ritual's ability to operate both for and against change simultaneously.

#### Functions of Ritual

The following are some of the basic functions of ritual upon which most theorists agree. They are based on the premise that ritual is fundamentally a form of communication; it provides a way for human beings to understand their existential existence, and regulate themselves and their environment.

1. Ritual is a mechanism which helps human beings explain their existential existence. 'It is a mechanism, generated by the

16

structure of the brain in response to the need to understand and thus master the environment. The problems of existence are framed in terms of myths and the solutions are achieved through motor action, i.e., ritual. "Ritual behavior is one of the few mechanisms at man's [sic] disposal that can possibly solve the ultimate problems and paradoxes of human existence" (d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979, p. 179). These ultimate problems and paradoxes have to do, of course, with questions of good and evil, G-d and mortals, life and death. Rituals incorporate the contradictory elements in such a way as to make them simultaneously manageable. A simple example is the way in which the wedding ceremony incorporates aspects of both loss and mourning as well as aspects of joy and celebration. The emotions are diametrically opposed but, through the ceremony, expressed simultaneously. Rituals resolve contradictions.

2. Ritual facilitates social coordination. Ritual facilitates the cybernetic flow of information between individuals and thus "synchronizes individual and corporate action" (Laughlin, McManus, & d'Aquili, 1979, pp. 29-30). In other words, rituals regulate social behavior by promoting cooperation and connectedness. Rituals unite people with themselves and join them to other people and the rest of their environment (van der Hart, 1983, p. 55). Ritual enhances one's sense of internal coherence and one's sense of connectedness with family, with ancestors, neighbors, the universe. By reinforcing and upholding social customs, ritual connects the present with the past and thus "sanctifies the past" (van der Hart, p. 6). Ritual "makes



individuals and system whole" (van der Hart p. 73).

Although not explicitly stated, this discussion of connectedness implies the discussion of individuation. It is simply a matter of punctuation as any discussion of connection is also a discussion of distance. Rituals are in fact, very effective formats for balancing Whitaker's "creative tension" between individualism and belongingness.

3) Ritual is a mechanism for managing existential crises, for facing anxiety. Rituals have the power to transform personal crises into something understandable and socially acceptable. They are a means, to use Wicker's (1973) terminology, "by which social and psychological crises are turned to positive creative use" (cited in Culler, 1982a, p. 15). Ritual makes crisis manageable in that it defines or structures the crisis and provides a format for living through it. (It is important to remember that we are talking here about predictable, normative crises. There are no rituals for emergencies!)

4) Ritual facilitates transitions. Ritual helps ensure the "safe journey" (Waters, 1984) of individuals (and groups) passing from one well-defined position to another equally well-defined position. This "condensed enactment of transition" (Turner, 1982) is the mechanism cultures have traditionally provided for "making and marking developmental changes" (Culler, 1982b). The passenger is classified as having no classification and it is precisely this paradoxical condition which allows for unexpected novelty and transformation. In a sense, rites of passage, "formalize the process of instability and



make it a tolerable condition" (Waters, 1984). Ritual makes change manageable by allowing it to be incorporated into the system, and made a product of the system rather than a threat to it (Culler, 1982a).

17

5) Ritual maintains social structures. By providing for the public display of "correct" behaviors, rituals function as a means of social control. To repeat Rappaport, 1971, rituals help "maintain biotic communities," they protect the group from internal violence and restore equilibrium in systems disturbed by change.

Rituals provide a means for resolving conflict. The opportunity for "acting out social disputes or dysfunctions" allows for the "draining off" of tensions and provides a means for reunification (Burns & Laughlin, 1979).

Rituals promote social solidarity and group identity. They define membership and work to keep the group united. The marriage ceremony, as described by Slater (in Culler, 1982b, p. 8) is an interesting example here. Rather than allow the young lovers to go off by themselves [and thereby diminish the group], the wedding ceremony serves to embrace the union and define the couple as legitimate members within the boundaries of the community.

And finally, rituals serve to maintain the levels of stratification within the society. Rituals model or mirror status hierarchies and provide the context in which transitions from one status to the next are allowed and accomplished.

Within the social structure of the family, the functions of ritual echo the functions in the larger system. As listed by Yeats

(1979), they are 1) the enrichment of family life; 2) the maintenance of family structure; 3) the socialization of the young; and 4) the facilitation of developmental change. Given that the family is a subset of the larger social structure, these functions are no surprise. As with any group, "rituals facilitate issues of identity, structure, hierarchy, and change. Rituals are opportunities for the whole family...to participate in a highly charged and condensed drama in which old relationship patterns are reorganized" (Culler, 1982a, p. 11).

6) Ritual promotes healing. Here, the literature talks about rituals of transition as cultural products that provide systemic "protection" against supernatural dangers...or ill health (Burns & Laughlin, p. 251), and as natural healing times "when ghosts, spirits, and dybbuks enter and leave" (Personal Communication, Friedman, 1983).

7) Ritual promotes transformation while preserving sameness. Rituals promote "change without destroying the homeostasis of the system. Composed of powerful symbols and metaphors, rituals combine contradictory feelings (and/or events) into a compelling whole or gestalt that is the vehicle for the expression of what is, and also allows for something new" (Culler, 1982b, p. 13).

In a sense, this last function operates at a meta-level relative to those that preceded it in that it talks more about the process which enables all of the functions, than about any one particular function. This function is a prelude to the next section of this chapter in which we explore how ritual is able to do what, on the

surface, appears impossible.

### How Ritual Works

#### Introduction

In this section, an attempt is made to describe how rituals work. The section will focus first on the inter-organismic level (i.e., on the level of the group) and then on the intra-organismic level (i.e., the level of the central nervous system) of ritual functioning. This is not to say, of course, that these two levels are distinct and separate from each other. On the contrary, they are in a recursive relationship with one another and it is hoped that by the end of this section, that recursivity will be demonstrated.

To begin this discussion, we need to go back to the premise stated under "The Functions of Ritual:" Ritual is a form of communication which provides a way for human beings to understand and regulate themselves and their environment. Human beings, as a species, are "programmed or wired to seek explanations" (Turner, 1979, p. 2). It is what Rappaport (in d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979, p. 161) calls our "cognitive imperative" to try to make sense of the "booming buzzing confusion" (James, 1890, in McManus, 1979, p. 184).

Ritual is a form of communication that provides answers, promotes order, and facilitates control. According to Smith ("Ritual and the Ethology of Communicating," 1979, p. 51),

...ritual is a specific class of formal behavior that is specialized to make information available. Ritual facilitates interaction because it makes available

information about the nature of events and about the participants in them that each participating individual must have in order to interact without generating chaos.

Ritual provides what Douglas (1966) calls "frameworks for expectancy," mechanisms to help people anticipate appropriate behavior.

### The Language of Ritual

Ritual is a form of communication--a language, if you will, that is special. It is special because it is non-verbal and communicates on the analogic rather than digital level. "Rituals speak at the most primitive and profound levels, directly to the unconscious" (Papp, introduction to van der Hart, 1983, p. vii). Through the use of condensed (multi-vocal) symbols, metaphor, and rhythmic action, rituals speak to the right hemisphere. They speak not about roles and relationships but in roles and relationships. Myths present questions or problems at the cognitive, verbalizing level. Through motor behavior, rituals solve problems at the emotional nonverbal level. "Rituals are existential solutions...which the left hemisphere...finds itself intellectually unable to resolve" (Turner, 1982, p. 3). Through ritual, meanings are "digested unconsciously" and people are incited to action (van der Hart, 1983, p. 13).

Watzlawick, in The Language of Change (1978, p. 22), talks about the language of ritual as "the language of second order change." Rituals are, in a sense, "commanded" by the society and, "Commands," he says, "are man's [sic] most archaic form of language." They are



behavioral prescriptions that have the potential of conveying meanings that could not be communicated through the digital mode (pp. 131-132). Commands have direct access to the right hemisphere and thus "influence the world view of all who witness and participate" (Culler, 1982a, p. 17).

Ritual speaks in the language of performance. Ritual is enactment, and as such "carries the power of persuasion that by-passes the upper regions of the brain and goes directly to the sensorium. The doing is the believing...(and) rituals allow us to enter the arena of our shared beliefs" (Myerhoff, 1984).

#### Ritual and Inter-organismic Coordination

The primary purpose of ritual is to help human beings understand their environment so as to give order to the people and events in it. "The belief in and performance of ritual imposes an order for man [sic] that is at once both adaptively efficacious and phenomenologically satisfying" (McManus, 1979, p. 184).

There are many ways in which ritual functions to promote interpersonal order. Indeed, most of what has already been discussed under the previous section, "Functions of Ritual," is really about what ritual does vis-a-vis social relationships. In that section it was seen that ritual functions to resolve conflict, to facilitate transitions, to manage developmental crises, to protect the group from dissolution and violence, etc. In "The Neurobiology of Myth and Ritual," d'Aquili and Laughlin (1979) speak directly to the heart of this matter:



A major problem for any organism whose adaptation depends on cooperation with one or more conspecifics is to decrease the distance between itself and others so that some form of cooperation can be achieved. Ritual behavior is one way of achieving necessary proximity [Referencing Lorentz, 1966]"... ritual behavior appears to be the trigger for much of the cooperative behavior within species for which cooperation is essential for survival [emphasis added] (pp. 155-156).

In other words, rituals are interventions that regulate the amount of distance between people. They are interventions evolved over generations that help people adjust their distance and closeness to one another as their needs change over time.

To actually understand how ritual performs this function for the group, one must look not to the anthropological literature on group relations, but to the biogenetic literature on the neurophysiology of myth and ritual. It is here, paradoxically, in the discussion of how ritual impacts on the individual's central nervous system, that the way in which ritual effects relationships between people is actually explained.  
18

#### Ritual and Intra-organismic Coordination

Before moving to this discussion of ritual and the central nervous system, however, it is necessary to review the phases of ritual and explore that phase during which the central nervous system is most likely to be stimulated.

Anthropologist van Gennep (1908) was the first to analyze ritual behavior in its relationship to the dynamics of individual and group life. He talked, not in terms of life cycle stages, but in terms of

"regeneration." He postulated that as energy (in any system) is spent, it must be renewed. For van Gennep, this renewal or regeneration was accomplished in the social world through activity that he termed "rites de passage." These rituals accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age. They include three phases that he termed "preliminal, liminal, and postliminal." These phases are marked by three different kinds of rites, rites of separation, rites of margin (or threshold rites), and rites of incorporation. Van Gennep focused on the rites of margin in the liminal phase, as this is where he believed the ritual subject became "sacred"--where the passenger leaves the "profane" everyday world and enters a special state, "a status at variance" (p. ix) with the one previously held. In that status the passenger becomes sacred to the others who have remained in the ordinary (profane) state. In that status he is experiencing changes that may be dangerous or at least upsetting. The rituals in this period work to "cushion the disturbance" (p. ix).

### The Power of Liminality

Turner, in The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (1969), develops the concept of the liminal period further:

During the liminal period the characteristics of the ritual subjects are ambiguous; they pass through a cultural realm that has few of the attributes of the past or coming state....Liminal entities are betwixt and between...<sup>19</sup> and this ambiguous state is expressed through an array of symbols that liken it to death, being in the womb, to invisibility, bisexuality, to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun or moon [emphasis added] (pp. 94-95).

Turner talks about the liminal period as a "moment in and out of time," a moment when lowliness and sacredness blend (p. 96). He talks about the ritual subjects as if they were being "ground down" in order to be "refashioned...and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (1969, p. 95). The limin, or threshold, is a structureless "no man's land" (1982, p. 28) between the structural past and the structural future.

Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating post liminal existence [emphasis added] (1982, p. 29).

It is during this "fructile chaos" that the pivotal event occurs. In an unpublished paper delivered at Smith College, Turner (1982) discusses the way in which ritual works on the individual brain and on the collective group. Drawing heavily on Lex ("The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance," 1979) and d'Aquili and Laughlin, ("The Neurobiology of Myth and Ritual" 1979), he talks about ritual as our attempt to master the environment by means of motor behavior. He explains that under the right conditions, the repetitive motor, visual, and auditory driving stimuli, kinetic rhythms, repeated prayers, mantras, and chanting, stimulate the central nervous system in such a way as to produce brief ecstatic states where logical paradoxes or the awareness of polar opposites (as presented in myths) appear simultaneously both as antinomies and as a unified whole. "The problems are not resolved, as in cold blood, at the cognitive left hemispheric level,

but directly in that noetic mode known as ritual knowledge"<sup>21</sup>  
 [emphasis added] (pp. 22-23).

This explanation requires a bit more detail. Under normal  
 conditions, either the sympathetic or the parasympathetic system  
 predominates and the excitation of one system inhibits the other. In  
 the special case of prolonged rhythmic stimulation (as in ritual), one  
 side eventually becomes maximally stimulated and leads to what the  
 researchers call a spill over (d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979, p. 175) into  
 the opposite complementary system. At that point, both systems are  
 simultaneously stimulated. This simultaneous stimulation generally  
 lasts only a few seconds (experienced almost like "a shiver down the  
 back"), but the effect it produces on the individual is extraordinary.  
 The simultaneous intense discharges from both parts of the nervous  
 system generate not only an intensely pleasurable sensation, but, in  
 fact, "a sense of union or oneness" with other people (d'Aquili &  
 Laughlin, 1979, pp. 157-58). According to d'Aquili and Laughlin there  
 is

...increasing evidence that rhythmic or repetitive behavior  
 coordinates the limbic discharges (i.e., affective states)  
 of a group of conspecifics. It can generate a level of  
 arousal that is both pleasurable and reasonably uniform  
 among individuals so that necessary group action is  
 facilitated....The rhythmic quality in and of itself  
 produces positive limbic discharges that result in decreased  
distancing and social cohesion [emphasis added] (pp. 158-  
 159).

What we see here is how ritual's effect on the individual is  
 transcended such that it impacts on the individual's relationship to  
 others.



Recursivity Between the Intra and Inter-organismic Levels

The more the ritual impacts on the individual, the more connected s/he is to the group, the more connected s/he is to the group, the more fully s/he participates in and is open to the driving technique of the ritual. The more open to the ritual, the more connected to the participants and so on. We can understand now "how rituals transcend their original function of communication and become able to perform...the task of controlling aggression and of forming a bond between certain individuals" (d'Aquili & Laughlin, 1979, p. 158).

We can understand also how ritual works to solve paradoxical problems:

With both hemispheres of the brain functioning simultaneously when a problem is presented (as in myth), its resolution is experienced both on the digital level and the analogic level. This explains the often reported experience of individuals solving paradoxical problems during certain states of meditation or ritual [emphasis added] (p. 175).

And, finally, we can understand what Turner (1969) means when he talks about communitas. In the liminal state, he contends, the passengers are released from structure into anti-structure or "communitas" where they are revitalized before returning to structure. Communitas is a modality of social relationships where "opposites...constitute one another and are mutually indispensable" (p. 129). "The passage is through a limbo of statuslessness" (p. 97). It is here, according to Turner, that "A sense of harmony with the universe is made evident and the whole planet is felt to be communitas" [emphasis added] (1982, p. 33).



### Redressive Public Action

In further discussing how ritual operates to facilitate communitas, Turner (1982, p. 24) talks in terms of "social dramas" which occur in the liminal period and make use of the powers inherent in this period. These dramas have four stages. Ritual falls within the third stage which he calls "redressive public action." The four stages are:

- 1) Breach - a person or subgroup breaks a rule deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting.
- 2) Crisis - conflicts between individual sections and factions follow...revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, ambition. These move towards a crisis of the group's unity and very continuity unless rapidly sealed off by some redressive public action.
- 3) Redressive Public Action - consensually undertaken by the group's leaders, elders, etc. This action is often ritualized and may be taken in the name of law or religion.
- 4) Consummation - a) either restoration of peace and normality, or b) social recognition of irremedial breach.

Figure 2.5 represents Turner's (1982, p. 25) diagram of this process.

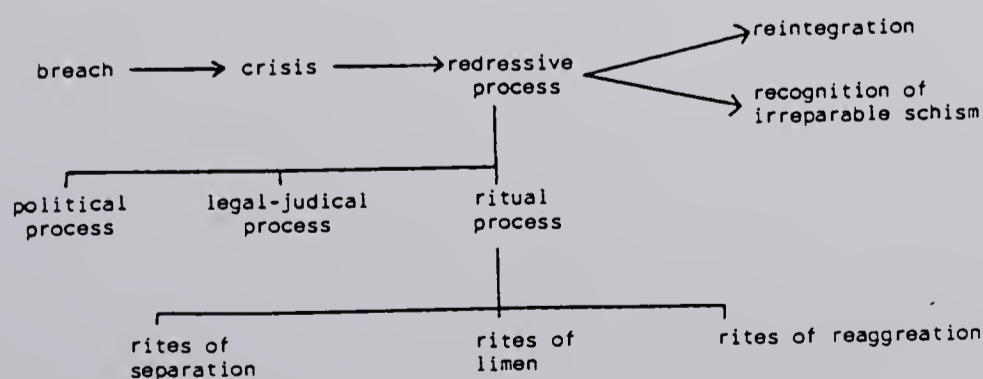


Figure 2.5 Redressive Social Drama

The relationship of this schema to family life cycle development and the ritual process is obvious. In the social drama of family life, the crisis is the developmental change (e.g., the move from childhood to adolescence) and the ritual ceremony (e.g., the Bar Mitzvah) is the redressive process. Ritual is a form of redressive public action while redressive public action follows precisely the form of ritual. Essentially, the two are the same, but operating at different logical levels. Occurring as it does (as it must) during the liminal phase, the redressive public action (a.k.a. ritual) has the power to influence both the individual actors and the entire cast of characters simultaneously.

The dramatic stage, where conflict is "portrayed and symbolically resolved" (Turner, 1982, p. 28), is special. It is deliberately set apart from the ordinary day-to-day life but also deliberately very much within the context of that ordinary day-to-day life. In that way, the change is contained and made manageable. Change and stability, the polar opposites, are merged, so to speak, in the service of health.

Summary: The Relationship Between Ritual and  
Healthy Family Functioning

As a basis for exploring the function of ritual in the normative life cycle of the contemporary family, we have examined the literature on health and healthy families, on life cycle transition, on systems change, and on the ritual process itself. This academic search leads to the conclusion that indeed, rituals have the potential to

facilitate developmental change. Specifically, rituals work to promote healthy family functioning because of 1) their synchronizing effect on the individual and the group; 2) because of their isomorphic relationship to the process of change in systems; and 3) because of their tripartite structure which enables them to promote change and stability simultaneously. The following elaborates on these three points:

#### Synchronizing Effect on the Individual and Group

Ritual's recursive impact on the individual and the group results, physiologically, in a recalibration of the amount of distance and connectedness in the system and thereby enables the system to cope more effectively with changing demands. When families, for example, move from one developmental stage to the next, the balance of proximity and distance necessarily needs to be adjusted (see Wood & Talmon, 1983, on boundary changes). The technique of ritual works to synchronize individual and corporate action such that new relationships (appropriate to the new life cycle stage) can be negotiated (e.g., the Bar Mitzvah helps the parents and child distance from each other while at the same time allows all of the family members to feel closer to each other and to the larger family/community/system of which they are a part).

The experience of communitas, the special condition of the ritual participants, is one of harmony and connectedness, concepts that figured heavily in our earlier discussion of health. It is here, in this period of "structurelessness" (Turner, 1969), or what Friedman

(1980, p. 450) calls "hinges of time" that the system is most malleable, most open to the biological and environmental changes being demanded of it. It is here that ritual helps absorb the shock of change, helps contain it, and finally, helps nourish it in the system. The drama of Slater's family (1974, p. 36) has been brought into the street and the neighbors have all gathered to share in it. In *communitas*, the family "feels good"--about the child's development, about its relationship to the child, and about its relationship to the community and the universe.

#### Isomorphic Relationship Between the Ritual Process and the Process of Change

The process of ritual at the neurophysiological level and the process of change at the systems level have an isomorphic relationship such that ritual "fits" the needs of, and can be most useful to, the system experiencing a discontinuous change (i.e., the kind of change that occurs at transition points in the family life cycle).

Reading d'Aquili and Laughlin's (1979, p. 175) description of "accumulated stimulation resulting in a spillover," one can not help but recall Hoffman's (1981, pp. 159-60) description of "accumulated dissonance forcing the entire system over an edge." While one set of authors is describing how ritual works on the central nervous system, and the other author is describing how discontinuous change occurs in systems, both authors are describing "escalations that pass beyond previous limits" and result in "transcendent syntheses" (Hoffman, 1981, p. 41) during which polar opposites (d'Aquili & Laughlin) or



paradoxical injunctions (Hoffman) are resolved at a new or higher level of integration. The similarities between Hoffman's "sweatbox" and Turner's "condensed enactment" are unmistakable. They are complementary precursors of change, each amplifying the momentum of the other.

### Tripartite Structure

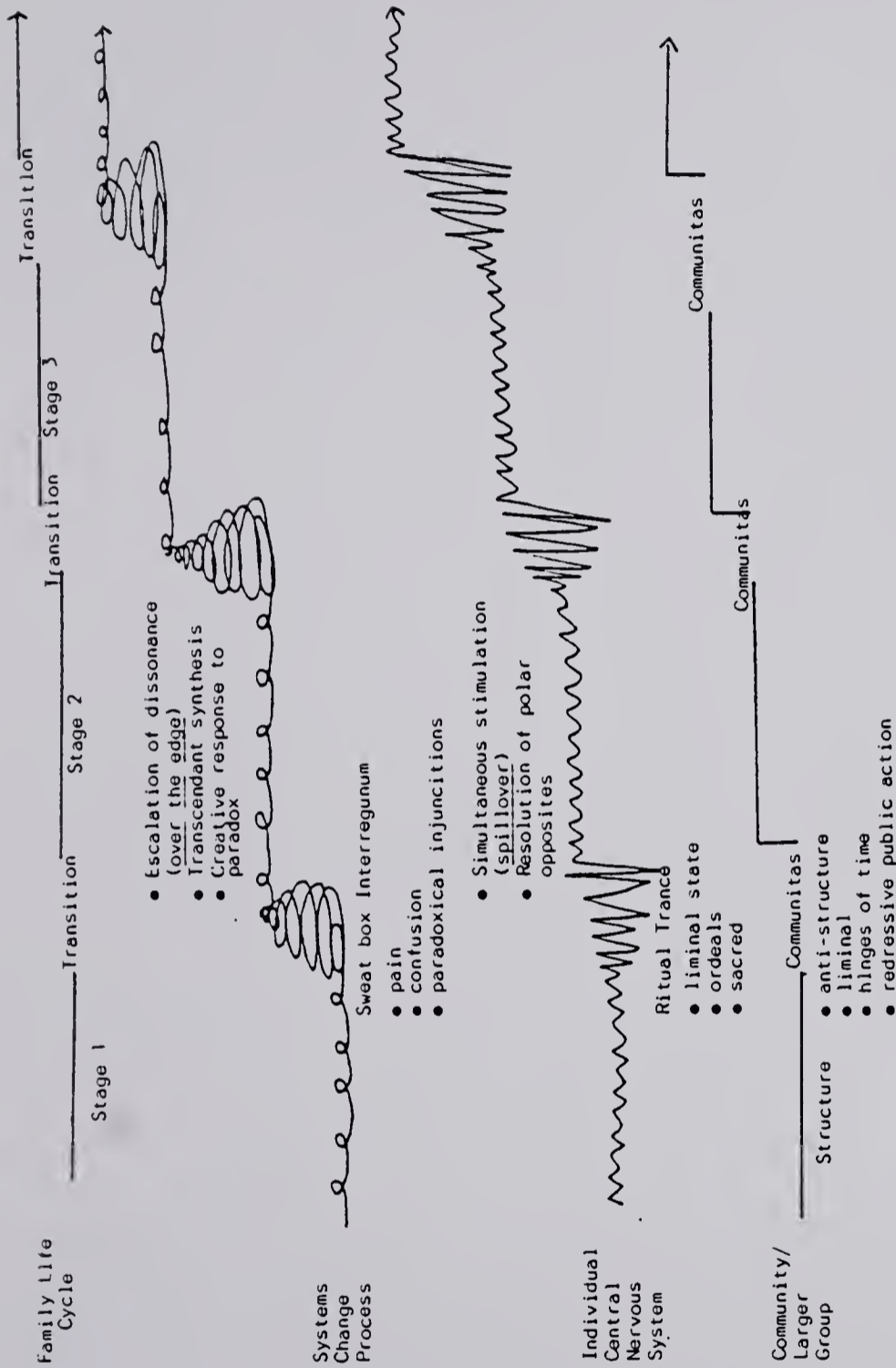
The structure of ritual is such that the logical levels of action and context are kept separate, thereby allowing change to be encouraged while stability can be simultaneously insured.

Ritual always moves from the known context to the unknown context and back again to the known; from the ordinary, to the sacred, and back to the ordinary; from structure, to anti-structure, to structure. It is this unending pattern which insures a return to safety and stability that enables the participants to give themselves over to the ritual action (and the task of change) while trusting always that order and stability are somehow being maintained. Thus the seeming "magic of ritual" where change and no change are simultaneously possible, where polar opposites are merged, and logical paradoxes "suddenly understood." Thus, ritual helps the family coping with normative crises to "know" that even though they feel as if their world is coming apart, their chaos is really part of a larger order. It helps the initiate undergoing the transition "from childhood to adulthood" to feel enveloped by the family/society at the same time that s/he is feeling most alone.



The crisis of transition, like any crisis, demands resolution-- and the "resolution in a rite of a passage is inevitably paradoxical" (Myerhoff, 1983, p. 9). The balance between announcing to the child-adult (adolescent) that "You are an individual and unique," and at the same time announcing "You are part of this group," is difficult and delicate (Myerhoff, p. 9). So, too, is conveying the message to the parents that they are no longer parenting a child, but not yet free of the responsibility for this individual who is now neither child nor adult. The ritual process, by its very structure, allows the participants to enact the paradoxical messages and in doing so respond creatively to them. This creative response, is the "discontinuous leap," the "transformational achievement" that must occur at each life cycle transition point in order for the family to stay healthy. Figure 2.6 on the following page diagrams these coupled processes.

In the following section we move from this general discussion of how ritual works to facilitate transition to how it works in one particular stage of the life cycle, that of adolescence. This stage is particularly appropriate for such examination given that it is itself a "transitional state" (Golan, 1981, p. 49).



The processes are isomorphic, thus enabling and amplifying each other. To the extent that members of the larger system (extended family, neighbors, congregation) are included in the family's drama, they experience the escalation of dissonance and the resolution of contradictions and are able to cushion, nourish, and celebrate the family's developmental change.

Figure 2.6 A Coupling of Systems

## Adolescence and the Need for Ritual

### Organization

This section begins with an introduction to the life stage known as adolescence and to the difficult requirements for change inherent in this stage. It then focuses on the confusion that characterizes contemporary society's relationship to this period, and moves on to the need for ritual which speaks to that confusion. The final section looks at the specific developmental tasks the family must accomplish during this stage and the way in which rites of passage facilitate this accomplishment.

### Introduction

To say that adolescence is a difficult time is an understatement. Everyone who writes about this stage of life, whether from an individual perspective (e.g., Arlow, 1965; Elkind, 1981; Stevens, 1981; Zegans & Zegans, 1979) or from a family perspective (e.g., Ackerman, 1980; Carter & McGoldrick, 1980; Culler, 1987; Haley, 1973; Quinn et al. 1985) stresses the dramatic changes that are involved and the inherent confusion that necessarily accompanies these changes in contemporary Western society.

Ackerman (1980, p. 155) talks about how "special" this nodal point is in family life and concludes that..."it is impossible to raise teenagers. In the end they must use whatever they have to meet the world on their own as best they can" (p. 155). Whitaker (in

Hoffman, 1981, p. 101) says that as each child becomes an adolescent they "rotate" into the role of "family scapegoat," they become "temporarily impossible" (and in this way, enable the family's letting go of them). As Carter and McGoldrick (1980, p. 14) state, "adolescence is something that happens to a family, not just an individual child" [emphasis added].

#### Changing Boundaries

McGoldrick and Carter (1982, p. 183) emphasize the fact that shifts in the stages of families with young children are gradual and incremental until adolescence. The onset of adolescence however, "ushers in a new era." It marks a new definition of the child within the family and of the parents' roles in relation to their child. "Families with adolescents must establish qualitatively different boundaries than families with younger children." Families are suddenly required to develop "the elasticity necessary to alternately let the adolescents go, shelter their retreats, and encompass the barrage of people and ideas they bring in from the outside" (1980, p. 14). "This puts a special strain on all family members in their new status with one another" (1982, p. 183).

Wood and Talmon (1983) echo and expand on this need for flexible boundaries. Their "health-oriented view" of boundary permeability delineates two aspects of boundary patterns: those that relate to issues of proximity (interpersonal boundaries) and those that relate to issues of hierarchy (generational boundaries). "The family must adapt and change as family members move through the developmental

stages of their life cycles. The hierarchy must be clear enough to protect the territory of the individuals and family subsystems, but flexible enough to facilitate change and growth" (p. 354).

According to McGoldrick and Carter (1982), families that get "derailed" at the adolescent stage are frequently stuck in an earlier view of their children.

Parents of adolescents often get stuck in attempting to get their children to do what parents want at a time when this can no longer be done successfully, or they let the children do whatever they want and fail to exert the needed authority (p. 183).

The authors go on to say that with this kind of behavior on the part of the parents, the children either become overly independent and adultlike, or they remain immature and fail to develop sufficient independence in order to move on.

#### Hurry Up and Wait: Contemporary Confusion

Two very different works, one from a sociological and the other from a psychoanalytic perspective relate to these two behavioral patterns identified by McGoldrick and Carter, and are worth noting here briefly. The first is D. Elkind's book, The Hurried Child (1981), and the second is A. Steven's article, "Attenuation of the Mother-Child Bond and Male Initiation Into Adult Life" (1981). In The Hurried Child, Elkind describes the extraordinary pressures under which contemporary parents live and the way in which many parents attempt to relieve some of the stress of those pressures by rushing



their children's development.

If child-rearing necessarily entails stress, then by hurrying children to grow up, or by treating them as adults, we hope to remove a portion of our burden of worry and anxiety and to enlist our children's aid in carrying life's loads."...We do our children harm when we hurry them through childhood [emphasis added] (p. 3).

He explains that when we ask children "to dress, act and think as adults," we are asking them to play act, to pretend. Because "all of the trappings of adulthood do not in any way make them adults in the true sense of lieben and arbeiten" (p. 20).

In part, Elkind understands this rushing of children as a confused expression of "our egalitarian movement toward equality." Children, he says, need to be treated differently from adults, not as a way to discriminate against them, but rather as a way to recognize their "special estate" (p. 21). In this context of valuing equality, we tend to obscure the divisions between childhood and adulthood; the differences become blurred. Elkind goes on to talk about "the sleeper effect" (p. 112) of this lack of demarcation, and contends that the more negative effects of hurrying usually don't become evident until the child reaches adolescence when "pressures to grow up fast collide with institutional prohibitions. Many adolescents feel betrayed by a society that tells them to grow up fast but also to remain a child" (pp. 11-12).

Stevens, on the other hand, talks about what he sees as the increasingly common phenomenon of children not growing up at all. He

focuses on male children and describes a form of protracted adolescence in which chronologically adult individuals display characteristics appropriate to seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. These are "narcissistic eternal youths, (puer aeternus)" (p. 132) whose development is arrested. He contends that these men have been unable to loosen the ties of attachment to their mothers. <sup>24</sup> Two reasons he sees for this failure are (1) the "decline of salience of the father in our society" and (2) the "failure of contemporary culture to provide rites of passage for the initiation of male adolescents into adult life" (p. 131).

### The Need for Ritual

#### Pacing and Demarcation

Although this reference to Elkind and Stevens, authors writing from other perspectives than the systemic formulation of Carter and McGoldrick may appear a diversion, they are included here not only because they reinforce the systemic conceptualization of what happens when families become stuck at the adolescent stage of the life cycle, but also because they both refer (the first indirectly and the second most directly) to the need for rites of passage at this particular developmental stage. <sup>25</sup> Elkind emphasizes the need for "pacing" the child's development and for ways of demarcating difference and change. Stevens refers to this need explicitly by actually talking about initiation rituals:

Although our culture has allowed initiation rituals to atrophy with disuse, there persists in all of us an archetypal need to be initiated (p. 144)...He who is uninitiated is lost [emphasis added] (p. 147).

Returning to the family systems literature and focusing further on ritual in relation to adolescence, two recent works are particularly relevant. Quinn et al.'s (1985), "Rites of Passage in Families with Adolescents," and Culler (1987) Change in the Context of Stability: Design of Therapeutic Rituals for Families. Both discuss the developmental needs of the family with adolescents and the ways in which ritual facilitates these needs. Although these authors, like others in the family field (e.g., Imber Coppersmith, 1982, 1986; Wolin & Bennet, 1984; Wood & Talmon, 1983) who have very recently been exploring the value of ritual, write in reference to clinical families, their understanding of ritual's particular effectiveness at the adolescent stage is most useful in reference to non-clinical families as well.

#### Negotiating Rights and Privileges

Quinn et al. (1985) begin by discussing the way in which contemporary families struggle with the demands for change that accompany this stage in the life cycle. The struggle emerges as "negotiations" over rights and privileges (re: drinking, smoking, driving, etc.). The authors contend that these negotiations are impeded and increasingly become arguments that influence family dynamics because families increasingly lack clarity regarding the relationship between the adolescent and the family. Echoing Carter

and McGoldrick, Elkind, and Stevens, Quinn et al. say that on the one hand, parents and children have difficulty developing the flexibility that signifies age appropriateness and this leads to prolonged dependence [i.e., "eternal youth"]. On the other hand, they say, the child's accelerating physical development and pseudo-emotional maturity have tempted parents [and children] to expect more autonomy in the children at a dangerously early age [i.e., Elkind's "hurried child"]. "In the face of uncertainty, adolescents request/demand to be treated as adults while they live in a social world of children" (Quinn et al., p. 102).

Whereas such confusion was reduced in the past when families could rely on social and cultural rituals for normative decisions about developmental change, this is no longer the case. "Adolescents live in families with few clearly marked, uniform, or inevitable transition points" (Quinn et al., p. 103). This "lack of meaningful rites of passage help in conceptualizing family rigidity and stuckness...Adolescents and their families lack expectations and conditions that signify movement toward adulthood" (pp. 101-102).

Given this lack of naturally occurring rites of passage, Quinn et al. go on to discuss how therapists can develop such rites in clinical settings to help families "reorganize boundaries and act out new role agreements" (Schwartzman, 1986). Such rituals, they say, have the following advantages (p. 106):

- 1) confirming the successful achievement of the adolescent;



- 2) instilling confidence in the adolescent and a sense of security with their own development;
- 3) providing a vehicle for resolving an impasse around progression of the family life cycle;
- 4) decreasing the likelihood of the adolescent's reversion to previous behaviors; and
- 5) freeing the parents from being victims of the family consequences of social change.

#### Ritual and Developmental Tasks

Culler's (1987) exploration of this need for ritual in families with adolescents follows similar lines. Her conceptualization of the family's developmental tasks at this stage and what rites of passage provide in terms of these tasks is a most useful capsulization of the literature in this area. Put very succinctly, Culler (p. 85) lists four major tasks: Families need to (1) help the adolescent develop autonomy; (2) help the whole system deal with the increasing separation between adolescent and parents; (3) help parents refocus on midlife marital and career issues; and (4) help parents in their shift toward concern for the older generation. In reference to these tasks, rituals provide (pp. 88-89):

- 1) A time, place and format for acknowledging and expressing the dramatic emotional impact of developmental change.
- 2) A way to mourn the loss experienced by the parents as a child grows up....Mourning encourages reminiscences about the positive aspects of the lost relationship and also involves some re-examination of one's own life. This re-examination is important for the parents who are also entering a new phase of their adulthood and must find ways to re-direct their energy.



- 3) A period of isolation or defined distance between the adolescent and their family members. This separation breaks old patterns and enhances the possibility of the family reorganizing into new ways of behaving after they are reunited.
- 4) A way for parents to transmit skills and knowledge and for adolescents to accept these.
- 5) A tangible way for the adolescent to demonstrate competence at surviving in the world...the opportunity to succeed at recognized challenges meets a need for an accepted measure of change of status.
- 6) A formalized re-entry or re-integration of the adolescent into the family after the status change or reorganization of the system has been accomplished.

#### Summary

In effect, these developmental tasks and the rituals that speak to them bring us back to our earlier conceptualization of health where the system's need to balance autonomy and connectedness over time is critical. Families need to negotiate change in interpersonal and intergenerational boundaries as their child's adolescence emerges and the system "moves along the life cycle." For this stage, where changes are most unclear and confusing, in a society which is ambivalent about these changes in the first place, life cycle rituals can be particularly facilitative. As "declarations against indeterminacy, they celebrate the regulated, the named and the explained" (Moore & Myerhoff in Wolin & Bennett, 1984, p. 412).

With this as context, the following chapter presents a methodology for beginning to examine the Bar Mitzvah, one culturally prescribed rite of passage for adolescence that has been maintained in

contemporary Western culture, and how this ritual facilitates the developmental tasks of the families who participate in it.

## C H A P T E R   I I I

### METHODOLOGY

#### Organization of Chapter

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first (Part I) is a traditional discussion of the methodology. The second (Part II) is a less traditional, more personal approach to that methodology. It includes some amplification of earlier ethical considerations, and moves on to the way in which the families were identified and the first interview was conducted.

#### Methodology Part I

It is syntactically and semantically correct to say that subjective statements are made by subjects. Thus correspondingly, we may say that objective statements are made by objects. It is only too bad these damned things don't make any statements. (Von Foerster, 1981)

#### Introduction: A "Constructivist" Case Study

This research involves a nontraditional application of a traditional methodology. It is a traditional case study informed by (currently) non-traditional ideas about the interactive nature of the observed and the observer, and presented in a format which attempts to address some of the methodological implications of those ideas.

As the researcher assumes the cybernetic premise that the observer is always part of the system being observed and is, by definition therefore, interpreting or "constructing" the reality being

described, this methodology might well be understood as a "constructivist case study." The following presents first a rationale for the use of case study, and then a rationale for the constructivist approach to that study. Before going further, however, a restatement of the purpose and a brief synopsis of the method are in order.

#### Purpose of Study

This research is a case study of four families experiencing a first child's Bar Mitzvah. The purpose is to observe families planning, participating in, and reflecting on the Bar Mitzvah process in order to better understand the relationship between ritual process and developmental change.

#### Synopsis of Method

The investigator observed the family interacting with the ritual process through (1) the use of semi-structured interviews beginning approximately three months prior to, and ending three months after the ceremony; and (2) the use of participant observation of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony/weekend. This method of "tapping the process" at multiple points (Anderson, 1985) allows the researcher to observe interactional behaviors, patterns over time, and the family's interpretation of its experience.

#### Three stages

The six month period was divided into three stages: I. Pre Bar Mitzvah planning; II. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony/weekend; III. Post Bar

Mitzvah aftermath. These stages parallel the traditional tripartite ritual process of preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states of being, and the researcher observed for elements characteristic of these states as described anthropologically (Van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner 1969, 1982).

Investigation in Stage I focused on decisions and decision-making in preparation for the ceremony and attempted to identify major themes that seemed to characterize the system. The focus in Stage II was on the emotional climate and observed impact of the ceremony. Stage III explored the family's self interpretation of the process and highlighted issues of change and continuity. As anticipated, exploration of the planning decisions led to the identification of themes which had analogic or metaphorical meaning in the family. Also as anticipated, those themes appeared across the three stages of the process.

Throughout the entire period, the investigator was hypothesizing about how the Bar Mitzvah family was dealing with developmental pressures for change in its emotional life. (Hypothesizing here refers to the building of a temporary, evolving explanation of why the system is as it is at this point in time. Tomm [1980], calls it a "guess about meaning.") Specifically, the investigator was looking for change in the system as expressed over time. Such change could be manifested as change in content of discussion (i.e., in major themes); change in punctuations (i.e., in understanding, empathy); change in patterns of interaction; change in boundaries, hierarchy, myths, self



perception, perception of others; and/or major life-cycle crises in the nuclear or extended family.

### Rationale for Case Study

Case study is the method of choice for exploration of new areas in which salient variables have not yet been identified (Good, 1959; Nisbet & Entwistle, 1970; Van Dalen, 1973). It is the method best suited to producing the descriptive data considered essential in studies that seek to "examine the general nature of phenomena" (Van Dalen, 1973, p. 195). In addition, it is felt to be the method most capable of producing complex syntheses of collected information and inferences (Barr, Davis, & Johnson, 1953) and of indicating areas for future research (Good, 1963; McAshan 1973; Van Dalen, 1973).

The case study, as modified and described below, speaks not only to the three basic criteria for systems research, i.e., that it focus on observable behaviors, provide sequential descriptions of those behaviors, and describe system-level structurings which represent relational patterns (Rogers, Millar, & Beavin, 1985, p. 177), but implicitly reflects agreement with Colapinto's (1979, pp. 427-428) point that "the value of empirical evidence is relative to the epistemological context in which it is gathered...There is no such thing as neutral or uncontaminated grasping of reality." The case study method allows for Colapinto's "context" to be made explicit.

Given the intensity of this investigation, the fact that no research has yet been done in this area, and the goal of the study

which is to explore generally the nature of the family's interaction with the ritual process, this "choice of method" is hardly a choice at all. Where choice is involved, however, is in the conceptual approach being applied to the method.

#### Rationale for Constructivist Approach to Case Study

Observing and observed systems in biology are so intertwined that it is, in the last analysis, impossible to dissociate one from the other (Sterlin, 1983, p. 416).

#### Extension of Cybernetic Principles to Encompass Metasystem of Observer and Observed

By definition, this systemic investigation of families interacting with a ritual process presupposes such cybernetic principles as circular connections, feedback patterns, self regulation, etc. (Hoffman, 1981; Stanitis, 1985), and the researcher "distinguishes" (Maturana, 1984) the phenomenon under investigation with these principles in mind. It is only logical, therefore, that these principles be extended to the larger system of family and researcher interaction. This extension acknowledges the fact that the observer is joined with the system being observed in a circular, self-regulating process similar to the process acknowledged to be operating within the observed system.

Despite this logic, however, the family research field has been slow to operationalize this extension and to match its methodology with its epistemology. A number of theorists have recently been drawing attention to this disjuncture and calling for a rethinking of

how research in family systems and family therapy is conducted. Keeney, a prominent figure in what has been called "new wave research" (Gurman, 1983), describes this rethinking as "a shift from a monological paradigm in which the observer is not allowed to enter his or her descriptions, to a dialogical paradigm, in which descriptions reveal the nature of the observer" [emphasis added] (Keeney & Morris, 1985, p. 101).

This "constructivist" case study is an attempt to move with that shift. In this dialogic paradigm, it is acknowledged that observers are always part of the system they observe and that all observations involve self reference (Keeney, 1983). Atkinson and Heath, (1987, p. 9) discussing the implications of this shift to a dialogical paradigm, quote Glasserfeld (1984, p. 19), a leading proponent of radical constructivism (a philosophical tradition that predates cybernetics by centuries): "all communication and all understanding are a matter of interpretive construction on the part of the subject."

Steier (1985, pp. 29-30), also exploring what a cybernetic methodology would entail, states that

The world as we know it is constructed by us; we can not separate the phenomenon we attempt to know from our system of knowing...(thus) interviewers must be aware of their role in the data gathering process....The issue is not one of unobtrusive objective interviewing, but of the interviewers' awareness of their distinctions that guide the interview process and their own stated or unstated intentions.

Kantor and Andreozzi (1985, p. 37) in a related piece, discuss the therapist as the interviewer, and state that the parts of the

therapeutic [and by extension, the research] system can not be separated. They view the interviewer/interviewee experience as "an interactive process set in motion by the systematic interrelating of several co-influencing elements."

In terms of this study, these co-influencing elements include (among others) the family, the researcher, the Bar Mitzvah process, and the research process. Figure 3.1 is a schematic representation of this system of co-influencing elements over time.

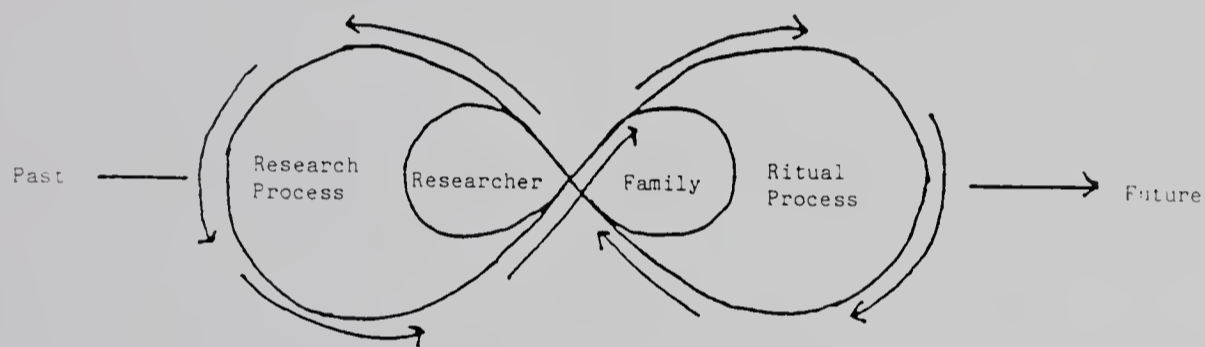


Figure 3.1 Coinfluencing Elements Over Time

#### Summary

Inasmuch as this researcher had been acutely aware of the fact that she and the research families were "co-influencing" each other over the course of the six-month study, a methodology which acknowledges and accounts for this phenomenon was attempted. Thus, this unorthodox approach to the standard case study method, an approach which acknowledges the observer's role in constructing the realities being described, which deliberately allows "dialogical" descriptions that reveal the nature of the observer, and which



accounts for the coevolution of the observer and observing systems over time.

Operationalizing the Constructivist/Dialogical Approach: Implications for the Conceptualization and Presentation of the Data

Conceptual and Pragmatic Problems

Given this conceptual framework, the researcher is faced with a number of conceptual and pragmatic problems. Among them: (1) How to present the data on the family, the data on the researcher, and the data on the interaction of the two systems in a way that is not only comprehensible, but appropriately balanced given that the purpose of the research is to observe families interacting with a ritual process, and that the observation of the family interacting with the research process is very much secondary to that purpose; (2) How to present the data "as objectively as possible" given that objectivity is impossible; and (3) How to present the data as it evolved over time and not as a study of a system before and after a particular nodal event.

Presentation of data

In an attempt to address these problems, the data are presented chronologically in the form of ethnographic description punctuated regularly by explicit reflection and analysis. The descriptions are divided into the three sequential stages described earlier. Each of the encounters with each of the families is described in detail as they occurred during the six months of the study. The first set of



descriptions are of the (approximately) two to four interviews and experiences with each family that occurred over the three months prior to the Bar Mitzvah. A discussion of the individual family dynamics follows the description of each set of encounters. The second set of descriptions are of the four Bar Mitzvahs themselves (as the "researcher as guest" experienced them), and the third set of descriptions are of the post Bar Mitzvah interviews which were conducted with each of the families approximately three months after the event.

Following each of the three sets of descriptions, there is a comparative analysis of the phenomena described. The analysis focuses on similarities and differences across the families, and on emerging insights based on those findings.

#### Alternating Voices

In contrast to the first person prose of the descriptions, the analytical sections are written in the third person. This alternation of description and analysis, of first person and third person perspectives reflects the researcher's attempt to capture the dual nature of the observer as one who is both part of the system and meta to it at the same time.

#### Direct Quotes

Throughout the descriptions, there is heavy use of direct quotes. This use reflects the researcher's attempt to allow the data to "speak for itself" (Acker, 1983, p. 429) and thus minimize the distortions

that are inevitable in any such description. It also represents the researcher's attempt to ensure that the voices of those described are heard. This use of quotations not only reflects respect for the people in the study, but a methodological strategy as well. By "hearing" the voices, the reader is in a better position to judge the validity of the researcher's analysis. This is consistent with the constructivist approach to validation as described further in this chapter.

### Chronological Presentation

The chronological nature of the descriptions allows for the presentation of "ongoing sequences of interaction rather than decontextualized pieces of data...selectively edited" (Atkinson & Heath, 1987, p. 13). This allows the reader to see how the data emerged and how the researcher's hypotheses developed over time in relation to the data. This chronological presentation also reflects the importance of time as an interactive element in both the process of family development and the process of research.

### Multiple Forms of Analysis

In addition to the purely analytical sections, analysis of the events being described occur in a number of other ways as well: the first is the researcher's explicit and deliberate "thinking out loud" that is interspersed throughout the descriptive sections. Here the researcher shares with the reader her thoughts as they occur either during the interaction with the family or in retrospect during the

researcher's interaction with transcriptions and notes.

The second form this additional analysis takes is the researcher's conscious use of particular descriptors that, for instance, might frame a quote, describe a physical position or stance, comment on a behavior. This form of analysis is so integrated into the description as to be almost inseparable from it.

The third form of analysis is that which is outside of the researcher's awareness and "simply" reflects who the researcher is and how she perceives and interacts with her world. This embedded analysis is at the heart of the constructivist contention that "we can not separate the phenomenon we attempt to know from our system of knowing" (Steier, 1985, p. 29).

#### A Cautionary Note

Lest it appear from the way in which this conceptualization of the process is stated so emphatically that the researcher completely accepts the impossibility of objectivity and has completely integrated the implications of the epistemological shift, it must be stated that this is not the case. Throughout the course of the research and reflected in the descriptions, the researcher struggles not only with the philosophical implications of this conceptualization but with the pragmatic problem of "fairness" inherent in it.

In addition, the danger of overstating the interactive nature of the research process must also be noted. Although "the effect of the presence of an observer at a family dinner cannot be ignored or dismissed either by wise cynicism or resigned references to infinite

regress" (Bavelas, 1984, p. 338), neither can it be denied that family patterns exist and can be discerned separate from the patterns involving the researcher. "Family life is not entirely random and ordered only by the observer...families are indeed patterned and...a model [for describing the pattern] is useful insofar as it affords a useful mapping of that pattern" (Breunlin & Schwartz, 1986, p. 70).

### Sequence of Research Steps

Based on a study of the literature (Chapter II), the researcher began with a set of assumptions regarding life cycle development and ritual process (see Chapters I and III). Based on those assumptions and using a family assessment model (Appendix A), the researcher prepared a series of general questions (Appendices A, B, C, D) that formed the basis of the first of the semi-structured interviews to be conducted with each family.

Beginning with the initial phone calls and during the initial interviews, the researcher began developing hypotheses about the families and their interaction with the process of ritual (and secondarily with the process of research).

Immediately following each taped interview, the researcher wrote anecdotal, impressionistic notes regarding the family and her experience with them. She then transcribed the tapes. With the notes and the transcriptions, she continued to develop her hypotheses, sketched structural maps (Appendix B) and prepared the next set of questions based on what the family had presented and on what she had



hypothesized. This sequence continued through the first three months of the research. Immediately after phone conversations and contacts with the families where tape recording was not possible, the researcher wrote copious notes including as much of the dialogue as could be recalled.

Towards the end of this period of data collection, the researcher "experimented" with the use of a peer rater. Suspecting the inappropriateness of this method of validation (see discussion of validity further in chapter), she none the less shared the first few transcriptions of the first family's interviews and asked that the rater complete the family assessment form (Appendix A) from which the researcher was developing questions for and hypotheses about the family. In discussions with the rater after she had attempted the assignment, it was concluded that given the conceptualization of this research, analysis based on such partial information was not only not useful but counterproductive, and an analysis based on "complete" information was not feasible. This method of validation, therefore, was abandoned. (An alternative method for validating this form of research is discussed ahead.)

During the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies and parties, the researcher taped what she could (cognizant of relevant religious restrictions and settings where a tape recorder would have been intrusive) but relied most heavily on intensive observation and notation immediately after the experience. These notes included impressions, ideas, images, questions, and, again, as much dialogue as possible. (See Appendix E



for the objectives of the researcher's observation.)

During the post Bar Mitzvah interviews approximately three months after the event, the researcher continued the method of data collection used during the first stage, asking both about issues particular to the family and about issues assumed relevant to all post ceremonial families (Appendix F).

Throughout the experience, the researcher's hypotheses were continually evolving as she sifted and resifted the "nuggets" of information and attempted to capture the themes as they emerged according to the theoretical and experiential premises she brought into the "dialogue."

This sequence continued until all of the interviews were completed and the data collection phase (which involved the active participation of the families) was over. (Given the above discussion of the researcher's processing of data as data in and of itself, it would be epistemologically incorrect to neglect this distinction.)

#### Nature of the Research Questions

As the purpose of this research was to observe the family and ritual interaction, i.e., to see what was happening in the family going through this process and what circular connections existed between who the people were, what they were doing, and what it meant to them, the questions developed for the interview were naturally broad ranging and the interview process open ended.

The questions fell into two basic content categories, those about

the family and those about the Bar Mitzvah plans. The researcher moved back and forth between the two content areas according to the family's responses and the ways in which the categories overlapped in each family.

Beyond the initial set of questions which were designed to scan the entire terrain (Appendices A, C, D), and within the goals established for each of the three stages of investigation (see below), the specific questions and the patterns of questions were different for each family. This is consistent with Steier's (1985, p. 33) sense that "instead of trying to see how a group of families change on a common set of measures...researchers should consider the relevance of that group of measures for each family according to a family's self description and the observer's description."

Over the course of the six months, the researcher asked questions about the family's history, its present circumstances, and its future; about people in the room and those not present; about those who were alive and those who were not. Some of the questions were about feelings and others about "facts." Some were direct (i.e., when, where, who, etc. [e.g., Where will the Bar Mitzvah be held?]), and others were more deliberately circular<sup>1</sup> (i.e., questions about difference [e.g., Who's most nervous about...?]). Some were centripetal, drawing finer and finer distinctions, and others were centrifugal, enlarging the field of observation and identifying connections between thoughts, feelings, and actions. According to K. Tomm, on systemic interviewing (1984, p. 10), "To understand a system

is to understand the coherence of its circular organization. Thus it is the circular connectedness of ideas, feelings, actions, persons, relationships, groups, events, traditions, etc. that is of interest..." (in this research).

The questions were developed primarily to study the system comprising the family and ritual process. Schematically, that system can be portrayed as in Figure 3.2.

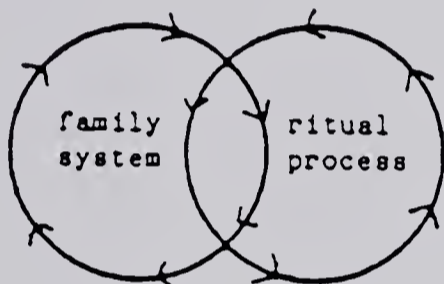


Figure 3.2 System Distinguished for Observation

At a secondary level, questions also addressed (most often indirectly) the larger system comprising the family, the ritual, and the research (as portrayed schematically in Figure 3.3).

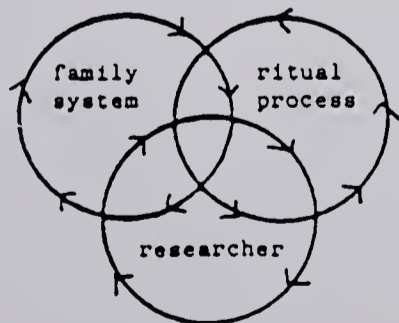


Figure 3.3 Observing System Distinguished for Observation

Goals and Assumptions Informing Questions for Each Stage

Stage I (Pre Bar Mitzvah Planning)

In Stage I, the researcher's goals were to join the family, scan the field, and begin to hypothesize about relationships and major themes in the system. The researcher was looking particularly for those decisions that seemed most significant or difficult for the family. In addition she was observing for demonstrations (verbal and nonverbal) of characteristics associated with the preliminal phase of ritual. This phase is associated with such words as "breach," "crisis," "separation." It is described as a period where the old patterns are beginning to be unworkable, where tension is escalating, where participants/passengers are preparing to move from a state of ordinariness to a state of specialness, from the profane to the sacred. As tools for analysis, the researcher developed family genograms (Appendix B) and structural maps (presented in Chapter IV as part of the descriptions).

In reference to this stage, the researcher made two basic assumptions. The first involved planning decisions and family emotional process. In planning a Bar Mitzvah, all families (no matter how different from each other) must make certain basic decisions such as whether to have it, when to have it, where to have it, who to invite, how (much) other family members will participate, etc. Different decision points will be important and/or difficult for each family depending on its unique construction and history.

The researcher's assumption was that, on the conscious, explicit



level, the family would be planning the details of the upcoming event, but on another level (primarily out of consciousness) it would be working on changing some important pattern(s) of relationship somewhere in the family system (Culler, 1982; Friedman, 1980).

What decision the family makes (and/or how they make it), effects (and is affected by) the emotional/developmental issues involved. It was the researcher's assumption that the family's decisions would be a response to internal developmental pressures for change.

The second assumption related to major themes and family metaphors: Despite the necessary rigidities in the process, no two Bar Mitzvahs are alike. Each family puts its own "signature" (Cambell, et al., 1984) on the process. Just as each client family leads into therapy with a different edge or aspect of itself, it was the researcher's expectation that each Bar Mitzvah family, in planning for the event, would highlight different emotional themes or issues as central to its organization.

It was the researcher's further assumption that the issue/theme the family "chose" would not be random; it would, in fact, be a metaphor (Madanes, 1981) for family process issues idiosyncratic to that system (i.e., what/where/how pressure for change was escalating in the family). Indeed, as ritual is primarily communication at the analogic level, this metaphor would speak directly to the ritual's "meaning" for this system.



Stage II (Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend)

During this stage (which began at sundown on the Friday evening and ended on the Sunday evening of the Bar Mitzvah weekend), the researcher's goal was to attend the public ceremonies (the Friday night service, the Saturday morning service, the parties), participate in the family gatherings surrounding the ceremony (as much as the family would allow and as unobtrusively as possible), and informally interview significant people as appropriate.

Specifically, the researcher was attending to (1) the emotional climate of the event, the affect in the nuclear family, the extended family, and the congregation/guests (including the researcher); (2) the outcome of the important/difficult decisions; and (3) the way in which the pressures for developmental change (as captured by the family's "theme") were expressed through the ceremony.

The researcher's purpose at this stage was to enrich the description; to gather observational data (both external and internal) to add to and compare with the family's self report; and to generally further the hypotheses which would inform interview questions asked in Stage III. In addition, the researcher was observing for characteristics associated with the liminal phases of ritual. Concepts associated with this period include "extraordinariness," "outside society and time," "holy," "valuable," "dangerous," "marginality," "paradox," "betwixt and between."

The assumption in reference to this stage regarded participant observation: As "participant observer," the researcher would be both

experiencing the event(s) and observing the experience of others. This dual role would allow the researcher not only to see what was happening but to feel it as well (Patton, 1980, p. 127).

### Stage III (Post Bar Mitzvah Aftermath)

The goal of the interview conducted approximately three months after the Bar Mitzvah was to gather information about (1) the family's interpretation of the experience; and (2) what (if any) changes (in the nuclear and the extended family) had occurred (as they and or the researcher saw it) over the past six months. In addition, the researcher's goal was to bring closure to the research-researched relationship.

The researcher was also observing for features characteristic of the post liminal phase which includes concepts such as "achievement," "transformation," "reintegration" (into the ordinary, profane world).

In this stage the assumptions were about self report and change: Interviewing the family about its perception of the event is important because, at a fundamental level, how people understand what happened to them, is what happened to them; it is their "truth" (Bogdan, 1984; Maturana, 1984), their framing. It is important also in that it provides a structured opportunity for the family to reflect on the experience and (with the researcher) confirm its achievement. This confirmation would simply enhance whatever the positive impact of the ritual process had been.

In terms of change, it was the researcher's assumption that the process will have intensified the pressure such that first order

change (temporary, reversible, adjustments or fluctuations within the system) and second order change (non-reversible, discontinuous leaps that change the system itself) are increasingly likely. Whatever form the change will have taken, it was this researcher's premise that functional, adaptive systems require both types of change as they maintain "order through fluctuation" in the process of their evolution (Schwartzman, 1984, p. 231). Table 1 on the following page presents an overview of the research design described above.

#### The Recursivity of Observational Levels

Lest the reader assume from the preceding pages that there is an absolute correlation between the stages of Bar Mitzvah (planning, experience, aftermath) and the three stages of ritual process, and that the researcher, entering the family system three months prior to the event was entering a system clearly in a preliminal state of being, the view needs to be made more complicated.

The three-month time periods prior to and following the ceremony are arbitrary demarcations having more to do with the researcher's time frame than the family's. According to Friedman (1980), the family is "in passage" during the entire year surrounding the event (six months prior and post). Given Friedman's perspective, then, the researcher entering a system three months prior to the event is entering a system already in the liminal phase of its process and not, as described above, in the preliminal phase. Despite appearances, however, these two conceptualizations are not in conflict.

STAGE	PHASE	FOCUS	ASSUMPTIONS	THEORETICAL REFERENCES	METHOD & TIMING
I. PRE BAR MITZVAH PLANNING	PRE LIMINAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• breach/crisis/separation</li> <li>• ordinary</li> <li>• preparatory</li> <li>• profane</li> </ul>	(1) Difficult/significant decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision connected to hidden relationship issues in system.</li> <li>- Decision (&amp; decision-making process) = response to developmental pressure for change.</li> </ul>	Culler (1982) Friedman (1980, 81) Schwartzman (1982)	Audio and/or video taped interviews with nuclear family-- during three-month period prior to Bar Mitzvah
		(2) Central theme(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each system leads with a different edge/expresses a different theme; this theme is not random, but an analogy or metaphor for important issues/relationships in system.</li> </ul>	Madanes (1981)	Phone calls-- Spaced throughout as necessary
II. BAR MITZVAH CEREMONY/WEEKEND	LIMINAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• abnormal condition</li> <li>• betwixt &amp; between</li> <li>• moment in &amp; out of time</li> <li>• sacred</li> </ul>	Observed emotional climate and impact of ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No matter what the process, ceremony has impact in its own right (effect on CNS; affect in group).</li> <li>"Ceremony has natural healing capacity."</li> <li>• How family does ceremony will be consistent with and affected by planning process.</li> <li>• The theme in Phase I will be carried through in Stage II (and Stage III).</li> </ul>	Lex (1979) Friedman (1980, 81) Friedman (1985)	Participant Observation--  Bar Mitzvah Weekend
III. POST BAR MITZVAH AFTERMATH	POST LIMINAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consummation</li> <li>• achievement</li> <li>• transformation</li> <li>• reintegration</li> <li>• profane</li> </ul>	(1) Family's self interpretation of event/process (2) (Family's perception of) changes in nuclear and/or extended family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On one level, how people understand what happened to them <u>is</u> what happened to them, it is <u>their</u> truth, their framing.</li> <li>• It is one of many truths.</li> <li>• Process will have pressured for change in emotional closeness &amp; distance among members; change can be expressed through change in content, interactional patterns, self/other perception.</li> <li>• "To understand a system is to understand the coherence of its circular organization...the circular connectedness of ideas, feelings, actions, persons, relationships, groups, events, traditions, etc."</li> </ul>	Maturana (1984) Bogdan (1984) Quinn (1985) Pearce & Freeman (1984) Schwartzman (1984) Tonn (1985)	Audio and/or video taped interview with nuclear family--  Approximately three months after Bar Mitzvah

Table 1. Overview: Research Design



The naming of these stages according to the liminality sequence depends on the level at which the process is being observed, i.e., the field of observation. Figure 3.4 on the following page illustrates the various levels of observation.

At level I, the entire year surrounding the event (six months before and six months after) is seen as the liminal period, the rite of passage. At level II (the level of this study), the observation is limited to a six month period (three months prior to and after the event) and only the Bar Mitzvah event/weekend is described in terms of liminality. The planning period and the immediate aftermath are considered pre and post liminal respectively.

At level III, the observational lens is further reduced so that only the ceremonial day itself is considered the liminal arena with the preceding Friday and following Sunday understood to be pre and post liminal respectively.

To intensify the lens yet one more notch (level IV) is to look only at the actual ceremony and to understand the introductory and closing rites as preliminal and postliminal respectively. Only the ritual trance or emotional highlight of the ceremony is liminal.

Although the field of observation in this study is primarily Level II (with Level I, III, and IV discussed only as they relate to Level II), it is understood that this Chinese box-like coupling of systems reflects the interrelationship and recursivity of all of these levels.



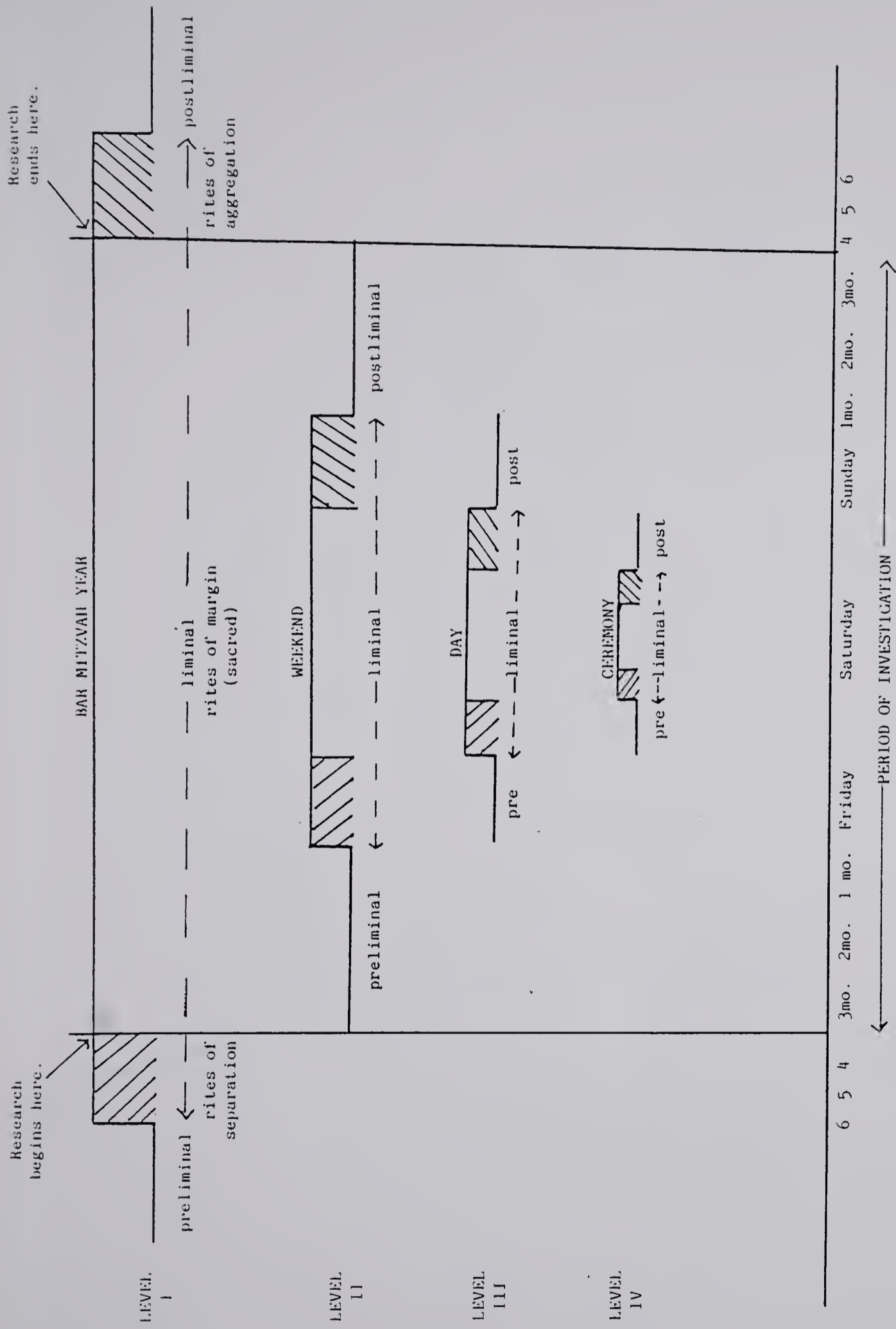


Figure 3.4 Levels of Observation

## Nature of Ethnographic Description

### Differences Among Descriptions

Given that the research was less about verification or prediction and more about discovery (see discussion of these concepts ahead), and that the same questions were consequently not asked in every case, the descriptions that the research produced, and what was highlighted in them, were as different from one another as the families were different.

In one, the focus seemed to be on interpersonal relationships, and in another it was extended family dynamics, in one it was the family's world view, and in another, its political meaning. In some, key figures were sharply drawn and in others they were vague. Who was directly or indirectly involved in the research was determined by each family and reflected their different needs and circumstances. In some, the researcher was permitted to observe from up close and in others only from a distance. Boundaries were drawn for different reasons and with different degrees of permeability in each system.

That the descriptions are as different as they are is consistent with both the methodological theory (that the observer and observed systems are co-influencing) and with research assumptions that each family puts its own "systemic signature" on the ritual it is enacting. It was through the detailed analysis of the differences (and commonalities) among the families that the research conclusions were drawn.

### Validation

There is room in science for multiple methods of exploration [referring to Keeney & Morris, 1985)...we must recognize alternative strategies of research--each with its own rules and ideas about discovery and verification.

Atkinson & Heath, 1987, p. 10

Although the researcher entered the study with a general set of theoretical assumptions, her goal (as stated earlier) was not to verify specific hypotheses. Instead it was to put flesh and blood on the theoretical assumptions, to "discover" (Gurman & Kniskern [1981], in Keeney & Morris, p. 101) how "real life" families lived out (or didn't) the abstract ideas. From both a symbolic and an interactional perspective (Steier, 1985, p. 31), what did the ritual do for the family within its own context and within its own definition of itself?

The goal of the research was not prediction or verification, but adequate "reconstruction" of the family's experience. Given that goal, and the fact that the methodology explicitly assumed the impossibility of objectivity, usual strategies for validating the data were inappropriate.

Beyond the obvious inappropriateness of any attempt to quantify<sup>2</sup> the data, the inappropriateness of the standard use of peer raters can also be seen. Short of having the peer raters examine all of the transcriptions and case notes and then develop their own analysis (based on their interaction with the material), presenting them with partial "pieces" of data on which to draw conclusions (in order to verify the researcher's assessments) would do violence to the

conceptual framework in which the research has been understood, would be unfair to the families, and would be an unproductive use of time and energy. Instead, it is each reader who will validate or refute the researcher's assessments based on the "totality" of the material presented (understanding, of course, that, in reality, this is still only a part of what was collected). Given that the descriptions and analyses "show the process of how the data was [sic] organized, (the researcher is) allowing the readers to decide for themselves the legitimacy of...(her) particular way of organizing the experience" (Atkinson & Heath, 1987, p.13).

#### Reader as Team

In a sense, this model of verification likens the reader to the "team behind the mirror" (Roberts, 1982). Presented with the detailed, chronological description of the researcher and the families, the reader is in a meta position to the researcher and able to assess not only the family, but the researcher and the interaction of the two.

#### Conclusion: On the Personal Nature of the Research

Consistent with the fact that this methodology is an attempt to better match the cybernetics of the research to the cybernetics of the system being observed, it is an unusually personal methodology. Beyond the inevitable exposure that any researcher risks (given that "all descriptions say as much if not more about the observer than the observed" (Atkinson & Heath on Keeney [1983], p. 9), this methodology

deliberately exposes the researcher (in terms of both her feelings and her level of competence).

### Objectifying the "Other"

This deliberateness is informed by both personal style and by ethical considerations. The problem of objectifying and using other people's experience for one's own purpose (as "academically pure" as that may be), is a deep and abiding one for this researcher. The act of "serving up" one's own experience at the same time that one "serves up" the experience of others, is an attempt to rehumanize the essentially dehumanizing experience of turning people's lives into a research project. It is an attempt at "reciprocity" (Acker et al. 1983, p. 427), an attempt to see the researcher as much the object as the subjects she is researching. As Acher states, "Neither the subjectivity of the researcher nor the subjectivity of the researched can be eliminated."



## Methodology Part II

### Introduction

In keeping with the researcher's intention to be deliberately self disclosing, and in keeping with the strategy of "alternating voices," the second half of this chapter on methodology is written in the first person and moves the chapter forward first by restating the goals of the research, then by amplifying some of the ethical and conceptual issues raised earlier, and finally by describing the process by which the families were identified and the way in which the first interview was conducted.

### Beyond the Caricatures: The Researcher's Goals Upon Entering the Field Study

There are few life cycle rituals subjected to as much ridicule as the Bar Mitzvah, and the reactions I encountered when I answered questions about my research plans, reflect this fact.

"Now they're giving doctorates in Bar Mitzvah? ha, ha, ha. What'll they think of next?"

"Next thing you know, Judy...you'll be a consultant. Just hook up with a caterer and a band and you'll be in business."

"I remember mine and my friends'. It was all to do with showing off, with competition."

"Yeh, it's a marker all right, for the last time I set foot in the synagogue."

"Even the most motivated kid stops [his Jewish studies] once his hormones start racing" [said by a religious educator who trains boys and girls for Bar and Bat Mitzvah].

What was most interesting about these comments, beside the fact that they forced me to be clearer in my own mind about what I was doing, was that almost invariably, they would (with just the slightest encouragement on my part) be followed by long and vivid stories about past Bar Mitzvahs, most often the speaker's own or that of a relative. And almost always, the reminiscences had to do with families. Despite the fact that the intention of most of the speakers was to point out the disjuncture between the ritual's stated purpose and its outcome, most often they were commenting (quite unintentionally) about the dynamics in their families of origin--about which they had some very strong feelings.

These stories confirmed my sense that, during the Bar Mitzvah period, at least as much if not more is going on in the domain of family process as in the domain of religion. To the extent that they can be separated, my purpose was to focus on the first domain. To put it bluntly, this was not a study of whether or not the Bar Mitzvah makes a boy "a better Jew," but how the family (with its first child entering adolescence) uses the ritual to deal with the developmental pressures for change that it is inevitably and idiosyncratically experiencing. It was my intention to use the case study method to look beyond the caricatured relatives, marzipan torahs, and fountain pen jokes in order to explore the complexities and potential of this event in the family's life.

### The Research Question and the Way it Gets Answered

The research question was necessarily a broad one: What is happening in this family going through this process? "What," to paraphrase Tomm (1985), "are the circular connections between who the people are, what they are doing, and what it means to them?" Behind the question, of course, is a partial answer: Given both the literature and my experience, I entered this field study expecting to see "Bar Mitzvah families" dealing with developmental issues as much as with religion. Given that the transition into adolescence is not as dramatic as other life cycle transitions such as birth, death, and marriage, through which entirely new identities are conferred (e.g., mother, father, widow, widower, husband, wife), I did not expect to see dramatic changes. But I did expect to see movement in terms of family relationships.

### Verification and Discovery

It is important to acknowledge this expectation not only as it necessarily "biased my objectivity" (see earlier discussion of objectivity in Part I of this chapter) but in order to understand the way in which the modes of verification and of discovery interact. According to Patton (1980, p. 185) they operate simultaneously. This is not to say, however, that they operate within the same logical level. For the purpose of this study, the mode of verification was understood as occurring within the larger context of discovery. My purpose was not to "prove" but to "discover" and describe my

discovery. The hypotheses I confirmed became part of the larger picture I was describing. Patton goes on to say that "In naturalistic case studies, the researcher, by definition is moving back and forth between confirming hypotheses and creating new ones," and quoting Gubba (1978), describes this ebb and flow as a "wave." In retrospect, this image was appropriate in more ways than one.

### The Researcher as Passenger

The process of following families over time was much like going on a journey. In a sense, I was becoming a passenger on a ship belonging to strangers and not knowing where they (or I) were going. Neither did I know if I'd be able to stay on board until the end. To say there were ups and downs is an understatement. It was a journey full of undulating emotions and shifting perceptions.

By the time I "reached the shore," I understood a little more about the strangers, a little more about myself, and a lot more about the experience of participant observation. I was now beginning to understand the concept of the observer as "research instrument." At times I felt as if I were "waiting to see" what would emerge as the data passed through me and out of my pen. As I began the process of "writing up the data," I felt as if only part of the journey were behind me. The task of integrating and making sense of the experience for the owners of the boat and for their passenger was still ahead.



### Research Issues: Conceptual, Moral, and Mechanical

When I began this research, I conceptualized the case study method as I knew it from books. By the time I began the process of describing my findings, I understood the case study with a knowledge more intimate than academic.

#### The Value of Trivia

When I began the research, I hypothesized that an exploration of "mundane" details regarding the Bar Mitzvah would reveal major developmental issues in the family. Such details included: what kinds of invitations the families would be sending, who they were inviting, who kept the lists, who accepted, who did not, and where they would seat those who had accepted; what kind of party they were planning, who would cook the food, and who would make the music. After having followed four families over an intense six-month period, and having explored all of the "trivia" these questions entailed, I not only understood but felt what J. Henry (1965) wrote about the observation of trivia.

I do not believe in the "commonplace." If a woman peels an onion; if a man reads a newspaper or watches television; if there is dust or no dust on the furniture; if a parent kisses or does not kiss his child when he comes home; if the family has eggs or cereal for breakfast, orange juice or no orange juice, and so on through all the "trivia" of everyday life--this is significant to me....I proceed on the basis that science advances by relentless examination of the commonplace; that some of its greatest discoveries have been made through fascination with what other men [sic] have regarded as not worthy of note (p. xix).



I also understood with considerably more feeling, a number of other research issues endemic to case study observation. Some had to do with ability, some with ethics, and some with both. Although it would be inappropriate (and redundant) to dwell on these issues, I feel compelled to mention a few:

The Need to Separate Description From Interpretation (and the Understanding That Such a Dichotomy is, at its Center, False)

According to Patton (1980, p. 159), such separation is "the basis of rigor." Although my intention was to separate and balance the two as much as possible, I was keenly aware of the limitations of these categorizations and of the ethical implications of those limitations. It was not until discovering recent exploration of cybernetic research (e.g., Atkinson & Heath, 1987; Keeney & Morris, 1985; Steier, 1985) that I began to feel more comfortable with my role as researcher, the task of interpretation, and the fact that what I was presenting was as much a description of my patterns of punctuation as it was a description of the families' patterns of behavior.

The Need to Keep Things in Context

Again according to Patton (1980, p. 333), "this is the cardinal principle of quality analysis." To this I would add the importance of managing the multitude of collected details so as to avoid being overwhelmed by them and at the same time to avoid reducing their complexity to meaningless if not misleading simplifications. Connected to these issues was the problem of deciding at what level the interactions should be analyzed. A microanalysis of the transcription

of one single interview could easily be the basis for an entire study. The process of deciding where to draw the line was an ongoing one. And for each interview, the decision was different.

Related to this difficulty is what Patton (p. 342) calls "the agony of omitting." Whether leaving out pieces that were unimportant or redundant (no matter how "interesting") or selecting out material as potentially damaging to the family, the process of omitting was, at times, excruciating.

The Need to Do Justice to the Richness of the Families While Contending With the Poverty of the Language, the Constraints of the Dissertation Format, and the Limitations of the Researcher's Ability to Write (Even if There Were Words to Describe What was Observed)

J. Henry's (1965, p. 5) discussion of linguistic poverty and the need to describe "'amalgams of feelings' that have no names," came to mind often. So, too, did Patton's (1980) admonition:

Because you can name something doesn't mean you understand it. Because you understand it, does not mean it can be named (p. 265).

Would that I were a writer capable of portraying the families with the thick detail they deserve, rather than a researcher assessing functional systems.

The Need to Keep the Goals of the Research and the Roles of the Participants in Perspective

The goal is research, not therapy, and the task is to collect information, not to put information into the system. Throughout the process, the ease with which the boundaries between research and

therapy become blurred was apparent. Constant vigilance was required in order to maintain at least the more active/deliberate distinctions. To say that research is an intervention is an understatement. Although I believed that participation in this research would have a (mildly) beneficial effect, this was not the primary purpose of the effort.

My ability to stay "in role" was especially difficult when either my need to be helpful or a family's need for help became especially pronounced. In one family, the need was explicit, and in another it was implied and even joked about. In all cases, however, I was acutely aware of my automatic (if not anxious) impulse to be a helper rather than an observer whenever I felt there was a choice. At times I restrained myself, at others, I succumbed. In one unusual situation, the roles reversed and I was the recipient of "spiritual" advice that was, in fact, therapeutic.

The Need to Be True to the Data Without Betraying the Trust of the Families Who Exposed Themselves So Trustingly

The morality of a covert agenda, and the complexity of multiple agendas are twin issues with which the researcher must grapple constantly. Despite my openness with the families about my interest in family dynamics as expressed through the Bar Mitzvah process, I am worried by the thought that they will feel betrayed by my interpretations of their experience that I deliberately did not express during the interviews and which they wouldn't or couldn't share.

Although this is a moral dilemma for all who write about real people in their real lives (and an explicit one for feminists like Acker, p. 428), it is particularly difficult when one knows that the subjects will be reading what the researcher has written about them. These are not clinical case reports to be seen only by professional colleagues and never by the "clients," but descriptions to be part of a public document that is open to the scrutiny of not only the subjects, but of all other interested parties. Despite the fact that the names and identifying details have been changed enough so that the general public can not recognize the individuals, each of the families told enough other people that they were part of this study, that many of their friends, relatives, and colleagues are likely to be among those "interested others." Many agendas beyond my own were involved here. To some extent, they were all my responsibility.

It is my hope that these descriptions can be recognized by the families as accurate and respectful, and are full enough to allow them and all readers the opportunity to deduce alternate interpretations that they believe are more accurate or useful. It is my hope that their individual "voices" (a la Gilligan, 1982) have come through, and that their vitality and generosity are apparent to all.

The evaluator's scientific observation is some person's real life experience. Respect for the latter must precede respect for the former (Patton, 1980, p. 119).



## In the Field

### Finding Families

Given my involvement with the local Jewish community, I did not expect any difficulty in locating research subjects. I was wrong. When I went to the local synagogues to inquire about upcoming Bar Mitzvahs, I discovered that there were only two families planning the Bar Mitzvah of a first son. I had once been in a class with the father of one of the families, so I rejected them as somehow "contaminated." When I approached the second family, they rejected me. "We're sorry we can't help out a graduate student, but this is too private an experience to subject to research," said the father, a professor of science. I said that I understood completely, and I did. But I was terribly disappointed. I should have predicted a scientist's reluctance to be "studied." In retrospect, I felt I had frightened the family away by having written a long letter explaining my project before calling to talk with them on the phone. I had felt that it was only fair to give the families information about my request before making it directly. I learned from that mistake, and decided that I would talk with the families instead of writing to them before requesting their participation. Speaking with them directly, I would be in a better position to alleviate their predictable reservations before they could reject the idea out of hand.

Failing to find families in the local area, I began researching the names of synagogues and rabbis in surrounding communities. Having developed a list of 8-10 contacts, I sent a letter of introduction

with a promise to call within the week (Appendix G). As these were referral sources, not potential subjects, I felt that the first lesson did not apply, and in fact this letter was even more detailed. Again the letter was a mistake. One Rabbi lost it; one sent it to all of the potential families in his congregation, two were constantly out of their office or unavailable to speak to me, etc., etc. Only one seemed immediately interested in this project, but his congregation was so small that there were no Bar Mitzvahs (only two Bat Mitzvahs) scheduled for that year. I was beginning to panic. I hounded the secretaries of the rabbis who hadn't returned my calls, I began inquiring about other possible leads, and I reconsidered using the family I'd rejected.

Although not entirely convinced by my committee's assurance that there were no negative research implications as long as I included my relationship with the family as data, I called and asked if I could "use them"--at least as a test case before locating "real subjects." I would include them in the actual study only if I continued to have difficulty in finding families. The Steinbergs, once graduate students themselves, generously agreed to help out a struggling student in any way they could--either as "guinea pigs" or as actual subjects. It was not until I was driving home after my first meeting with them and marvelling at how well the interview had gone, that I realized that they were perfect subjects and that I had, indeed, begun the research!

Just as I had decided that I would "ease" (if not trick) families into working with me, I found that I had tricked myself into the process. Not only was this a "creative" way of dealing with both my own and the families' anxiety, but it was to be the first of many examples of how the researcher and the researched become mirrored.

Immediately following this "breakthrough," I was able to reach two more rabbis. One gave me the names of potential families and indicated that he had written to them asking their cooperation in this study. From this list I recruited a second family (the first on his chronological list) by calling and asking if I could come and talk with them about this research. The other rabbi gave me the name of another family and the name of a Jewish day school that I could call for other possible names. Both of these leads proved fruitful. The family he told me about agreed unhesitantly to meet with me, and when I called the school and explained that I was looking for families planning a first child's Bar Mitzvah, the person who answered said, "You've found one! or at least part of one. Our son will be a Bar Mitzvah this spring."

#### The Families and Design Changes

Suddenly I'd gone from having none of the three subjects (projected number) I needed, to having four wonderfully diverse families:

- 1) The Steinbergs, a divorced family in which the parents share custody of their only son, and Father is remarried to a woman who is not Jewish.

2) The Goldsteins, an intact Reformed family for whom this is the first Bar Mitzvah in at least three generations.

3) The Gordovskys, a single parent Russian immigrant family in which the child's bris [ritual circumcision] in Russia had been held in secret.

4) The Sheinmans, a Hasidic (ultra orthodox) family.

Given the richness of this diversity and the concern that I could easily "lose one along the way," I decided to include them all. This was the first change in my proposed research design. The second, concerned family makeup. Although it was not a precondition, I had hoped to find families in which the grandparents were available to be interviewed during the planning and follow-up periods as well as during the Bar Mitzvah weekend. Given the difficulty in finding families at all, this was clearly not a characteristic I could require. Only one family had grandparents in the area. The others were much more representative of the typical young Jewish family in this generally non-Jewish region who moved here leaving parents in larger urban centers.

The necessity of searching beyond the local area in order to find a large enough pool of potential subjects, turned out to be "a blessing" disguised as an obstacle. This larger pool yielded a group of families more diverse than any I might have found in the small town where I live.

The one kind of family predictably not included here is the one



who would be likely to have the grotesquely lavish affair that the media ridicule and portray as the norm. Such events are more characteristic of extremely wealthy families (or families attempting to appear wealthier than they are) and of families living in more cosmopolitan areas where glitz is more valued than it is in Western Massachusetts.

But despite their diversity, these families were all similar in regard to the last precondition for inclusion in the sample: They were all functioning, non-clinical families. This is not to say that they (as families or individuals) had never sought or will never seek therapy, but it is to say that these were all families capable of dealing not only with the normative stresses of their lives and the additional stress of the impending Bar Mitzvah, but who were also able to take on the unpredictable stress of being subjects in a research project. That they could handle these multiple and confounding pressures with the grace they exhibited to me was testimony to their health and their generosity. It was with this view in mind that I approached both the pains and the pleasures they allowed me to observe and those that they did not.

#### When and How I Saw the Families

Over an eight-month period, I conducted a total of nineteen semi-structured interviews, each lasting an average of two or two and a half hours. Fourteen of them took place over the three month period prior to the Bar Mitzvahs and five took place approximately three months after the event. (As one of the sets of parents was divorced,

I conducted separate interviews with each of the parents [and the child]. This essentially doubled the number of interviews I conducted with that family and accounts for the fact that the pre Bar Mitzvah description of that family is much longer than that of the others, and for the fact that there were five rather than four post Bar Mitzvah sessions.)

All of the interviews were held in the participants' homes. Two additional, less structured meetings were held with one of the families. The first was in their synagogue on the occasion of the child's first pre Bar Mitzvah opportunity to lead the congregation in its closing prayers, and the second was in a restaurant after attending this same child's piano recital. The family invited me to join them at both of these occasions. And, finally, one additional interaction with one of the families took place as I helped prepare food in their kitchen a couple of days prior to the event.

Of the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies, I was invited to and attended all four. Of the Bar Mitzvah parties, I was invited to and attended three. My husband was also invited to these parties and was able to attend two of them with me.

A combination of circumstances and the parents' choices determined who I would see and when I would see them. The parents also determined what I would see--or at least what they would consciously expose to me.

### Boundaries

Depending on their characteristic boundaries and styles, each of the families was cautious and protective in ways that were appropriate given the situation. I was neither a personal friend who exposed myself and my family reciprocally, nor was I a therapist to whom they were bringing their problems. These were healthy families seeing and showing the positive aspects of their lives to a researcher who was asking questions about a joyous event they were planning. To be certain, each family had issues that were off-limits as topics of conversation. Some had more than others, and some were better than others at keeping the boundaries. Each had their own style of letting me know what was available for comment and what was not. In some cases, the rules were explicit, in others very implicit. Rarely did I deliberately attempt to step into territory that was clearly marked "toxic." Often, though, I pushed the boundaries a little further than might have been completely comfortable for them (and sometimes for me). Although I was not surprised by how naturally and necessarily I became a partner in their dance (sometimes leading, sometimes following), I was dismayed whenever I saw myself (in retrospect) stepping back from something uncomfortable more quickly than the family needed me to.

### Creating Heat and Circular Questions

This pushing of the boundaries is a delicate matter. Not only did I need to be respectful of what the family chose to keep private, but I needed to be careful about creating heat rather than watching

it. What the family did with the pressure generated naturally by the ritual process, is what I was there to observe, not what they would do with additional pressure imposed by the research. The ease with which I could raise the temperature in the system was increasingly apparent to me and for that reason, I deliberately chose not to ask as many circular and/or reflexive questions as I had originally imagined I would. Again, my purpose was to gather information, not to put information into the system.

### Neutrality

For this reason as well, I occasionally chose to see family members alone. In those settings, certain topics could be discussed that were too sensitive to be discussed in the larger setting. I was also not "neutral" in the Milan sense of the term (Palazzoli, et al., 1980). Rather than not aligning with anyone, I attempted to align with everyone. I constantly saw and commented on the positive aspects of what was happening. Only once or twice did I "positively connote" (Soper & L'Abate, 1980) something that was presented as a problem. These were occasions in which I deliberately chose to intervene actively rather than passively.

### Videotape and Food

In addition to having audio taped all of the interviews, a total of four of the interviews were also videotaped. Two were of one family in the planning stage (one of these included the paternal grandmother), one was with a second family during the post Bar Mitzvah



interview, and the last, was with the family and maternal grandparents during the post session. One family was not videotaped at all.

As an expression of my appreciation for their time and cooperation, and as a way of joining and promoting a relaxed atmosphere, I brought "refreshments"--home baked cakes or breads, fruit, nuts, etc.--to each of the interviews. What I brought depended on the season, what I'd had time to prepare, and on the dietary restrictions of the particular family.

#### The First Interview

The first interview with each family was begun with a short introduction in which I talked about my background, my interest in Bar Mitzvah, and my orientation to the ritual as meaningful on the level of family interaction as much as religion. I emphasized that I was interested in observing how a variety of healthy families experienced the event, and that I had no preconceptions about a right way or a wrong way "to do a Bar Mitzvah." I also reiterated the fact that their confidentiality would be protected, that they were free not only to refuse to answer any questions but to withdraw from the project at any time. And finally, I explained the projected time frame of the research and the use of audio and video tapes. At the conclusion of the first interview, the families signed the standard consent form (Appendix H).

Which parts of this introduction I emphasized depended on what I knew about the family from my initial phone contact. For example with

the Goldsteins who'd specified that their names never be used, I stressed confidentiality, and with the Sheinmans for whom religion was synonymous with family, I stressed my own background and my positive regard for Jewish tradition. With the Steinbergs I emphasized my inexperience as a researcher relative to their experience, and with the Gordovskys, who seemed to have no need for any particular assurances but seemed genuinely intrigued by the project, I emphasized my own excitement.

Needless to say, my introduction was both shaped by the families and that which would help shape their subsequent responses to me. The coevolution of the observed and observing systems had begun.

The following chapter presents detailed descriptions of these first interviews and of all of the subsequent contacts with the families prior to the Bar Mitzvahs. Chapter V and VI describe the Bar Mitzvahs and the follow up interviews respectively; each chapter begins with a discussion of the researcher's intent and methods specific to that phase of the research.

C H A P T E R   I V

RESULTS STAGE 1: PRE BAR MITZVAH PLANNING

Organization of Chapter

This chapter presents detailed descriptions of the researcher's interviews and contacts with each of the four families prior to their Bar Mitzvahs. It is organized on a case-by-case basis and arranged chronologically. Each set of descriptions is followed by a brief analysis of the family's dynamics prior to the Bar Mitzvah. The set of four sections on the individual families is followed by a comparative analysis which identifies emerging themes and concepts across the systems.

Presentation of Families and Analyses Over Time

The Steinberg Family: "The Hospitality Suite"

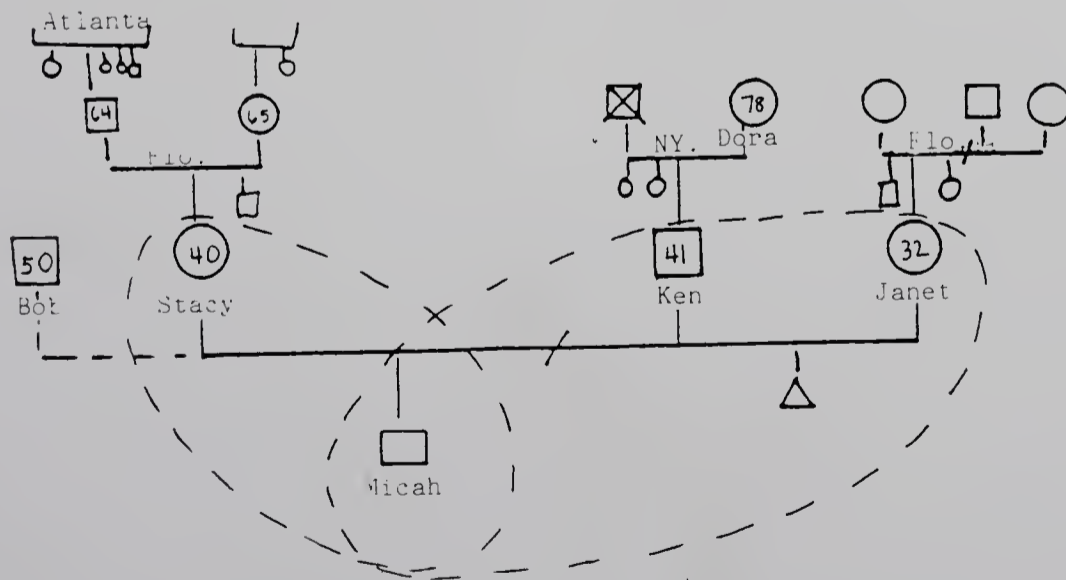


Figure 4.1 Steinberg Family Map  
(See Appendix B for key)

Interview #1 - 3 1/2 Months Prior to the Bar Mitzvah:  
Father, Stepmother, and Bar Mitzvah Boy

The Steinberg family consists of Father (Ken, 41), Stepmother (Janet, 32), Son (Micah, 12 3/4), and Mother (Stacy, 40) with whom Father has had joint custody informally since their separation six years ago and formally since their divorce four years ago. Micah spends alternate months with each of his parents who deliberately live in the same school district. Until a year or so ago, Micah alternated homes on a weekly basis. This new schedule has reduced the frequency of transition Sundays which were difficult for everyone. Ken and Janet, who have been married for two years, are both professional educators. Stacy has a part-time administrative position in a local hospital and is also a graduate student (Environmental Studies). Ken and Stacy are both Jewish. Janet is not. She is Protestant although her father was Jewish until he converted at the age of nineteen.

As my initial contact with the family was through Ken who had been a classmate several years before, my first interview with the family was with Ken, Janet, and Micah.

From the beginning, the family was friendly, informal, and eager to help out a struggling graduate student. Ken, in slippers and old jeans greeted me at the door and motioned me to a seat in the living room. This was a room furnished with a wood stove, two sofas facing each other and a wing-backed chair between them. In front of the chair was a hassock piled high and surrounded by newspapers and books. Although this was the most formal room in the house, it had an informal, lived-in appearance. Janet, who joined us immediately,



commented about her lack of domesticity in a voice that was both self mocking and proud as she offered me coffee or tea that Ken ("who's the cook around here") would make.

As I sat in the chair facing Janet who was curled up on one sofa and Ken who was sitting across from her on the other, I explained my difficulty in finding appropriate families and asked if they'd be willing to participate either as a rehearsal family or as one of the actual case studies if I continued to be "desperate." We also discussed the problem of "contamination" given our prior relationship and they dismissed my concerns as unfounded; they were agreeable to either scenario. When I asked if they wanted to start now or set up a future appointment, they said "now," and called Micah down from upstairs. Micah greeted me with a big smile and extended hand as I fumbled nervously with the plug to the tape recorder. With his tall, slim body and dark curls, Micah resembles his father. This resemblance extends, I soon discover, to their characteristic joking which they both use as defense as well as for comic effect. A major difference between them is in their speech patterns. Micah talks quickly, clearly, and with animation. Ken talks more slowly, more softly, and much less. He tends to mumble and it was often difficult to hear him clearly.

Janet's slightly Texan drawl seems to fit her generally easy going persona and sets her apart from Ken and Micah in a way that her physical appearance does not. Also dark and attractive, Janet laughs easily and with gusto. The laughter is most often a response to

something she finds funny but is also used to release tension. She has an unusually direct and forthright style which sometimes gives the impression of her being "tougher" than she actually is.

Over the next two hours, Ken, Janet, and Micah answered a variety of questions about their families, and about their plans for the Bar Mitzvah. The discussion was relaxed and easy. I gathered the following information:

Father's family. Ken, born to Lower East Side Jews whose parents were both from Eastern Europe, was not only the baby of the family but also "the" son for whom his parents had always longed. His two sisters were ten and eleven years old when he was born. As both of his parents worked in their Bronx drygoods store (his mother "in front with the customers" and his father "in the back, with the stock"), Ken and his sisters spent much of their early lives in the Yiddish-speaking Coney Island home of their maternal grandmother. With uncharacteristic animation, Ken told loving stories about this grandmother who used her four year old grandson "as an excuse to have fun," and as an excuse to buy ham (forbidden in their kosher home) which she emphatically pointed out to the delicatessen clerk as "that cornbeef over there."

Ken's father who had been sickly all his life and who had, in fact, stopped being able to to work when his son was in Junior High School, died when Ken was twenty-two. All three of his grandsons are named after him. Ken's reminiscences about his family included reference to his paternal great grandfather and to his grandfather who

died before Ken was born but whose safe Ken has. He and Micah had recently been looking through its contents which included (according to Micah) "all kinds of neat things," rings, and jewelry, an old prayer book, coins, and bullets. Ken's mother (78) lives with her oldest daughter and her family in Long Island, one block away from her younger daughter and her family. All references to Grandma Dora whom I would meet when she came a week or two before the Bar Mitzvah, led me to expect a character much in the tradition of her colorful mother. "Ask Dora about that," Janet kept saying, "she has great stories, and they're always different!" Ken was most close to his cousin Hank, the son of his mother's favorite brother. Hank's mother died when he was young, and Hank moved into Grandmother's extended household as well. Although both sets of grandparents were kosher [observed Jewish dietary laws], his father's family was most "strictly kosher." In fact a number of Ken's cousins on his father's side are orthodox Jews.

Stepmother's family. Janet is the middle child of parents who divorced when she was 24. Janet's father (62), born to wealthy and religious Jewish parents, converted to Protestantism when he was in the army at age 19. His parents seemed not to take that conversion too seriously until he married an Protestant woman. None of the family attended that wedding. When he divorced her after 28 years of marriage and married another woman who was also Protestant his family did attend ("...even though it was held during Passover! But the food was kosher and also my grandfather was dead by then"). Father and his second wife live in Florida. Janet's mother (60) also in Florida, is

a "staunch Protestant," the church organist, and is studying to become a priest. Janet's mother and father generally have little to do with each other except to the extent that the marriages of their three children within the last two years have brought them into contact a number of times.

For the most part, Janet identifies with her mother, but jokes about having rebalanced something in her father's family by marrying a Jew. "When Ken and I got married, my father's mother called me and recognized sort of that I exist. More than she used to since I grew up. Ken thinks (laugh) that I made an even trade. Sort of my father converted and Ken came into the family."

Janet's description of an orthodox cousin's Bat Mitzvah which she (and Ken, and her father) attended two years ago, speaks to such movement as well. "It was weird...my father doesn't say that many intimate things to me, but he said 'It's real important for you to be here and to know about this.' And it was one of the few times that he...acknowledged that he was Jewish. And that he had also gone through this. It was a rather touching moment."

But despite this reference to increased identification with Father's Jewishness, Janet identifies strongly as "a goy" [gentile] and repeatedly emphasizes her outsidership, her discomfort with the religious ritual being planned, and the fact that she doesn't know where she fits. "It's all so foreign to me." Interestingly, the comment about not fitting was repeated later in the interview in reference to not expecting her mother to attend the Bar Mitzvah



because she (Mother) "wouldn't know where she fits."

The relationship between Ken and Janet appears balanced and close. There seems to be shared leadership and a negotiated division of labor. Their differences in style, while at times a source of friction, seem to be more complementary than problematic. A kind of comic bantering characterizes a lot of their interaction, at least with a third party present. Of the two, Janet is the keeper of facts. "I'm the family person." She is also the one who explains things for and to others. With a comic reference to Ken's being "a man of few words," Janet would often elaborate on one of Ken's short (and cryptic?) answers about his family of origin. Ken countered this by joking (when the focus of questioning was later on Janet's family), "OK good, now I get to talk about your family. You gave her all the information about mine."

Janet's elaborations were often deliberate attempts to be helpful--at times to me and at other times to Micah. Occasionally she seemed to function as co-interviewer most often aware of my needs as researcher. She was also aware of Micah's needs and frequently tried to explain things to him or to be encouraging.

Micah's initial smile and hand shake characterized his friendliness and seeming maturity. Comfortable in conversing with adults, Micah engaged eagerly and was clearly enjoying the opportunity to talk about his Bar Mitzvah and to hear stories about his family.

Sitting on the floor in front of Janet, Micah talked of being nervous about his Bar Mitzvah but showed more excitement than fear.

"Do you want to hear me sing what I know so far [referring to the haftorah, the prophetic portion of the week which is the major piece that the Bar Mitzvah boy chants]?" Micah was also the spokesperson for his mother whenever I raised questions about where she lived and what she did. Even though Ken and Janet might answer first, Micah often provided additional (often supportive) detail. "(She has) too many classes....She has a fellowship so she has to take four classes, too many books, each week a paper....It's really hard. But she's getting used to it." Although both Ken and Janet thought Stacy would agree to being part of the research, everyone stressed how overwhelmed she was with her end-of-the-semester work. "You'll have to ask her. We don't know."

In general, decision making in this family seemed appropriate. Although Micah voiced his opinions, and preferences freely, the prerogatives (and boundaries) of the parental system were clear. Ken and Janet made the rules that Micah could negotiate but ultimately had to follow. Of the two, Janet was the rule setter (in reference to bedtimes, chores, etc.) and Ken supported her decisions. While Janet tended to explain the rationale behind her child-rearing and house-keeping requirements, Ken tended to state his decisions more autocratically but often with humor. The following exchange is typical of the bantering within which father-son negotiations took place.

(Key to abbreviations: M = Micah; Fa = Father; SM = Stepmother; Mo = Mother; J = Judy [researcher].)

M. (to Judy) I'm gonna wear a tux. I just decided without asking them

J. Boy!

Fa. No you're not.

M. A red tux.

Fa. No you're not.

M. No, a red sash.

Fa. (In a mock whisper) Shut up before Judy figures out how we make decisions in the family.

Bar Mitzvah plans. But if the decision-making process within this part of the family was clear, the decision making about the Bar Mitzvah plans was not. In fact, it was the source of considerable tension. For here, the executive system involved Father and Mother directly and Stepmother only indirectly. Although all three adults agreed both implicitly and explicitly that Ken and Stacy were the decision makers, Janet's relationship to them and their decisions was ambiguous. Janet was both pulled to and repulsed by the decision making regarding the Bar Mitzvah.

As one who would have had all of the details decided by now, she was frustrated by how few decisions had as yet been made. (For instance the hall for the party, only three months away, had still not been reserved.) "Ken and Stacy are doing the planning. That's why it's not getting done." On one level, Janet, the "goy [outsider]," wants nothing to do with the religious details being planned. "I wouldn't be caught dead doing a thing like that [blessing the Torah]. I don't think it's appropriate anyway." But as Ken's wife with whom

he shares a bank account (not to mention a life and part-time child rearing responsibilities), she definitely feels she should have a voice in the decision-making process. For example, whether the celebration is a luncheon after the service or a party at night makes a big difference in terms of cost. Ken and Stacy had decided on the party. Ken had to justify that decision to Janet. "Because of religious reasons. You can't have music on the Sabbath." As Janet was in no position to challenge a religious decision, the matter was closed.

Janet also wanted a role for herself and her family in the event. In reference to the candle lighting ceremony at the party: "I wanted my brother to be part of that and I was really embarrassed and kind of nervous when I suggested it, but I wanted him to be included in some way..." Throughout the interview and during the following months, Janet made reference to her ambivalence. She talked often about feeling "peripheral," and about how hard it was to stay that way. "I am more involved than she (Stacy) knows." And at another time: "The party stuff drives me nuts. All the planning, the expense, and trying to do it with a divorce...(but) as soon as he started practicing and everything, it's been much more enjoyable to me. Because he's really involved."

Although I'm not to discover until I meet with Stacy, just how strongly she feels that Janet have no role in making decisions about her child's Bar Mitzvah, Ken's position in reference to Stacy and Janet was immediately clear. He was in the middle between two strong



and determined women, each with their different demands for his loyalty. Ken (joking to Judy): "You want to be the therapist when all of us meet?"

The planning detail that focalized this tension was the invitation (which had, at this point, not yet been written let alone printed or mailed out). Whose names will appear? Who is inviting the guests-to-be? Janet feels strongly that her name be on the invitation. "After all, I'm paying for part of this shindig." Stacy feels even more adamantly that Janet's name not appear. "After all, she's not his mother." At this juncture, Ken's position is not an enviable one.

Whereas the conflicting pulls on Ken were overt and explicit, those on Micah were less clear and certainly not overt. Indeed, on the content level, it is noteworthy that all of the adults were careful not to speak badly of each other in his presence (or at all, for the most part). But despite the explicit effort to make the inevitable tensions more manageable for Micah, they were none the less there.

SM. I think Micah's held up pretty well considering. He just busies himself with his lessons.

J. Is that pretty typical?

SM. With us. We don't know what he does with Stacy. With us, he gets involved in what he's doing. He frets a little bit but whenever Micah frets, we just tell him what he has to do and it kind of releases him of the burden. Like when he fretted about inviting my family, Ken just said "You don't have a choice," and that ended it.

Although most details had not yet even been discussed, let alone decided upon, what was known about the Bar Mitzvah was the date and

the fact that it would be held in the local synagogue. When I asked how this date had been chosen (since Micah's thirteenth birthday would occur a month earlier), there was at first silence and then Micah chirped up: "Oh I know. Because my grandmother has bad feet." As a surprised silence greeted this statement, Micah went on to explain. "She has to wear open shoes. So we can't have it in the snow time."

SM. Interesting

J. Your father's mother?

M. Yeah.

SM. to hear different versions of how the day got chosen.

M. That's one of the reasons. We had to have it later. We couldn't have it on my birthday because of that.

Fa. That's one reason.

M. I don't know why else. That's the only reason I know.

Fa. It's on the school break.

M. Oh yeah. It's my mother's vacation. College break...

Also known was that the service will be the modified conservative service characteristic of the congregation to which they belong. It is one which uses lay leaders as rabbis and Bar Mitzvah tutors as cantors. Micah had already learned the first few lines of his haftorah under the guidance of a popular tutor in whom they had confidence.

The guest list would probably number between 100 and 150. While Ken has a small family and Janet is expecting only her brother and sister-in-law and possibly her father (although the rest of the immediate family will also have been invited), Stacy has a huge family (mostly in Tennessee) whose tradition is for everyone to attend such ceremonies no matter how much travelling is involved.

Their tradition also is to expect many events surrounding the ceremony and the party (such as a Friday night dinner, a Saturday morning luncheon, and a Sunday morning brunch) so that these mini events also needed to be planned.

As it was now after 10:30 (Micah had gone up to bed an hour ago) and there was still much to discuss, and I needed to videotape a session, we agreed to meet again in two weeks. We also agreed that Ken would mention this research to Stacy and ask if it was OK for me to call (and if she would participate). By the end of the evening, Ken was sitting next to Janet on the couch. He'd moved there after having been upstairs saying goodnight to Micah. The two looked close and loving.

Interview #2 - Two Weeks Later:  
Father, Stepmother, and Bar Mitzvah Boy

A few hours before my second appointment with the Steinbergs I called to ask if I could come a little early to set up the camera before we began. The call was also a way of relieving my anxiety that perhaps they'd forgotten I was coming. Janet answered and said I could come early but that the interview could only last an hour or so (because she had something else to do). That something else, I discovered later, was to go Christmas caroling, but as I drove to the house I worried that perhaps this time limit was a message that the family had lost interest in the research or had had a change of heart.

What I encountered as I entered (loaded down with camera equipment, notes, and salmon mousse) increased my anxiety. Unshaven

and shuffling in huge leather slippers, Ken looked much less welcoming than last time. In fact he looked sullen as he snapped at Micah, "Go get Janet!" The heat was on and it wasn't coming only from the wood stove roaring in the livingroom. Already I was sweating profusely. What I was to learn, only after the interview, was that immediately before my arrival, Micah and Ken had been fighting, and in addition, that Ken had something else "completely unrelated" on his mind and was feeling preoccupied.

Of the three, Ken was the most upset and he allowed me to see it. Two or three times during the interview, he seemed impatient with the pace of the questioning and asked what else I needed to know. Micah was also upset but worked hard, acting as if everything was OK, and trying to get back into his father's good graces. He sat on the floor close to Ken's feet and often tried to engage him in conversation. Janet was least upset. After all, the fight was between Micah and Ken and she was looking forward to the caroling.

As Ken and I were standing in the kitchen getting coffee, Ken volunteered that he'd called Stacy that morning and "She'd be happy to talk with you."

J. Oh great. [I was very much relieved.]  
Fa. I didn't tell her much. [I was not surprised.]

By the time we all took our places, this time on the two sofas in the den next to the living room (because there was less sun to interfere with the camera here), Ken and Micah and I had already spent a considerable amount of time crawling around on the floor finding



outlets and setting up the video equipment. That activity seemed to have reduced the level of tension somewhat and we were all able to joke about "being relaxed" in front of the camera.

Given how little time had elapsed between interviews, there was little news to report about Bar Mitzvah plans. When I asked Ken and Janet if there had been any more decisions, Ken said, "no, not really," and Janet wondered out loud if they'd even discussed it since last time.

SM. Actually, I don't even know if we've even mentioned it.

Fa. The Bar Mitzvah?

SM. Me and you. You and Stacy might have...

Fa. Nothing new.

SM. We make jokes with our friends about how we haven't done anything.

As it was obviously best not to push this line of questioning, I turned to gathering more details about the extended family and filling in missing pieces of the genogram I had begun during the first interview. As we talked about aunts and uncles and cousins, Janet pointed the people out in the wedding album that she had brought down for me to see. Most of the information I gathered reinforced the family sketches they'd drawn two weeks ago, and confirmed my sense of their communication and decision-making patterns. I got more of a sense of Ken's childhood in a close extended family, of his father's illness, and of his own Bar Mitzvah (in an orthodox shule [synagogue] "where men and women sat separately"). I learned more about the intensity of Janet's feelings about her parents' divorce and saw again

her efforts to interpret for Ken and explain things to Micah. Again, too, the difference in Ken's and Janet's styles was made explicit:

Fa. I don't know. Maybe I have a different way of dealing with this stuff [tension about details].

SM. You do...darling.

I also heard about the most recent Bat Mitzvah in the family--of Ken's niece three years ago. It was a lavish event in New York and their description led us into a conversation about Bar and Bat Mitzvahs that were as elaborate as weddings. Janet had strongly negative feelings about this. At this point I commented that Micah's would be the last Bar Mitzvah in the family (in this generation). Here Janet revealed a line of tension not previously made explicit. (It is also a comment on Janet's and Ken's way of making decisions. And finally it is an example of the way I found myself handling or rather avoiding tension.)

SM. We already started this little discussion Friday. I told Micah that his would be the last. I thought that Ken and I had decided that our children wouldn't have Bar Mitzvahs. Ken thought we'd decided they would (Janet laughs loudly and alone).

M. Bat Mitzvahs.

SM. (Laughing) So I don't know.

J. So that's how you agreed. Alright...

SM. (laughs)

J. You have some time to decide.

Fa. The decision is at least 14 years away, right?

SM. Well I think it's closer than that.

Fa. If we had a child tomorrow, it's still 14 years away.

SM. Right, but you still don't say OK, you're 13 years old. Now you'll have a Bar Mitzvah. Micah knew from ground zero.

M. No I didn't, did I?

SM. Of course. It was written in the cards [a bit sarcastically], so to speak.

Fa. (Laughing)

J. So you went to Susie's Bat Mitzvah?

Their lack of agreement about the religion of future children, felt to me at that moment like a potential time bomb, but it didn't seem surprising. Ken and Janet had been married under a chupah [Jewish marriage canopy], by a female Episcopalian priest who was herself married to a Jew. Ken's friend, a Hebrew teacher, chanted Hebrew blessings.

Also revealed explicitly in this interview was the tension that characterized Janet and Micah's relationship. In recounting her experience with a clairvoyant, Janet said she was told that she and Ken had known each other in a past life but that she and Micah had never met before. She thought this part was true as she said (very quietly) "It's been hard for us. Micah and I don't get along very well." After some discussion about belief or disbelief in past lives, I asked another question about what (in this planning period) made them each most nervous and what gave them most pleasure.

Micah jumped right in: "The haftorah--far and away. That takes the cake."

SM. (As co-interviewer) What about it?

M. That I'm not gonna do it right. Anxiety. That's what I got about it. And most pleasure? Thinking about the party (rubbing his hands together). I like the party. But you know, the whole thing. It's making me think more about being Jewish and everything like that.

J. (Looks toward Ken)

Fa. Most anxious? Just the stress in organizing, putting it together, figuring out all the steps that have to be done. Just that..

J. Most pleasure?

- Fa. Just the continuity of tradition, Bar Mitzvah after Bar Mitzvah--something that relates back to past generations.
- SM. [looking intently at Ken] Yeh, I would agree with that. We get pleasure seeing Micah get into it. I think we've been lucky cause Micah is into it.
- J. [to Micah who has his face in his hands as if he is crying] What are you doing?
- M. Nothing just thinking.
- J. (laughing) It looked like you'd [to Janet] moved him to tears.
- SM. (laughing) It looked like it (laugh). I think for me, the most anxious stuff is where I fit in.
- J. Uh, huh.
- SM. Cause it's really Micah, Ken, and Stacy's kind of thing although since Ken and I are married, I'm definitely involved and everybody's a little bit nervous.

By now, this seemed like an understatement. And my next question didn't help. Although its content was a change of topic, it's form exacerbated the tension and if I had been more conscious of my choices, I might have reworded my predetermined last question: "Who in the family is most excited?"

- M. I guess out of everybody, I'm the first, but I don't know. Well, I'm always complaining about how much I have to do but they have twice as much work to do as me.
- Fa. That's true.
- M. Finding which place to go, getting all the people together. Do the invitations. Right Dad?
- Fa. Yep, that's right.
- M. So you see, I think I'm looking forward to it, the time before much more than they are.
- J. That's very insightful.
- M. A couple of weeks before, I'm gonna be like...I'm not going to be able to sleep. Jittery. It's going to be like I drank five cups of coffee a day and I won't be able to sleep. That's what I'm most worried about. I won't be able to sleep the night before my Bar Mitzvah. And I'm not going to be able to do it because I'm going to be exhausted.



SM. (trying to help) Sometimes if you get real tired, then you're more relaxed.

M. I think everybody's excited--a little at least?

Silence greeted this statement/question and when I looked around, everyone had their hands up close to their faces and their bodies looked tight. It was a vision of tension not excitement.

J. (vainly trying to lower the heat) Well, there's a lot to think about.

M. And we're not even near done.

With that, I changed the subject entirely and asked them to switch hats and help me critique the process so far. In their roles now as consultants, everyone was more relaxed. And in the context of something else, Ken mentioned that he'd put deposits on three places. Securing a location for the party had been a major source of tension two weeks ago. Some progress had been made, but Janet hadn't known about it.

Fa. So it's not an issue of if there will be a place, but which one.

SM. I didn't know that.

J. You didn't know that?

SM. No, but that's the thing. I've got to let go of a lot of stuff. If it were my party I would be much more driving Ken crazy (laugh).

After a few suggestions about how I might tighten up the interview, we ended the session with agreement that I'd see them again in a couple of months when Ken's mother was here.

Interview #3 - 2 1/2 Months Prior to the Bar Mitzvah:  
Mother and Bar Mitzvah Boy

Three weeks later, I knocked on Stacy's door cautiously. Even though she sounded friendly on the phone when I'd called to arrange the appointment, I expected her to be at least cool if not defensive. After all I was a stranger to her, but "a friend" of her ex-husband, and I'd already spent time with him and Micah and his new wife. And besides, did she really have a choice about this research since I'd already begun?

My cautiousness dissipated rapidly in the face of Stacy's gregariousness, informality, and eagerness to make me feel welcome. A slim woman with lots of quick, nervous energy, Stacy was dressed in an earthy colored sweater and jeans. Her fast, articulate, almost stream-of-consciousness-like speech was interrupted by frequent drags on a cigarette and punctuated by a smoker's cough.. She laughs easily and presents herself proudly as a strong feminist. The apartment was small and decorated with antiques and old fashioned bric-a-brac which she had collected.

Micah, in the sweat suit he'd just been skiing in, greeted me happily and we all three settled in around the table in the dining area. Stacy pushed aside the piles of papers, pamphlets, and Bar Mitzvah lists that were on the table and served tea with the sweet rolls I had brought.

What followed was a very long, free-flowing conversation that moved back and forth between the past and the present, between family description and Bar Mitzvah plans, between direct answers and long

digressions. Until he kissed his mother goodnight, about an hour after we'd begun, Micah interacted easily and warmly with me and with Stacy.

Although the parent-child relationship was clearly defined, there was a hint of the companionship role that children of single parents commonly play, as Stacy and Micah talked about the possibility of his not being in town during her upcoming birthday.

Early in the interview, Stacy excused herself to talk with her brother who was calling from Vermont about some Bar Mitzvah details. In her absence, Micah and I talked about his having fallen behind in his practicing due to a combination of illness (he'd had a cold) and the holiday (Christmas break) traveling he and his mother had been doing together. He was nervous about having to face his tutor the next night. At my suggestion, he brought out his haftorah and we practiced together. When Stacy returned, Micah went into the bedroom to continue practicing and Stacy and I began the interview in earnest.

Mother's family. (See Figure 4.1) Stacy is the first of two children (her brother is three years younger) born (in New York) to Robert (64) and Lillian (65) who now live in Florida. Father was the second of six children and the oldest son "when things like that mattered." Father's parents were Eastern European Jews who settled in Tennessee as peddlers. All of their children except Robert are still in the Tennessee area. Stacy spoke proudly and lovingly of her grandparents who struggled to keep a Jewish way of life in a very alien environment, and of her Tennessee family who have an "incredible

Jewish spirit." Stacy spoke lovingly of her maternal grandparents as well, but emphasized the difference between the two families. Also immigrants from Eastern Europe, these grandparents stressed a progressive, socialist ideology and rejected religious practice. Stacy's mother and her mother's sister were like their parents in this regard. Interestingly, Stacy's maternal grandmother and her paternal grandfather were first cousins. When she married Ken, Stacy retained her maiden name which connected her to both sets of grandparents and this name also became Micah's middle name.

Bar Mitzvah plans. In reference to Bar Mitzvah plans and planning, a number of very strong themes emerged. Foremost among them, was Stacy's desire that this event be gracious and harmonious. Stacy's seeming preoccupation with the decision about which hotel to use for out-of-town relatives focalized this desire. Despite her need to keep costs down as money was a concern (for most family members as well as for Stacy and Ken), the hotel had to have adequate accommodations for a "hospitality suite." This was to be the central space in which all of the relatives would gather informally for dinner Friday night, in between the ceremony and the party on Saturday, and for brunch on Sunday. Having a hospitality suite was a tradition with the Tennessee family who had, over the years, hosted many weddings and Bar Mitzvahs with elegance and "absolute graciousness." So despite the fact that other hotels were less expensive, Stacy ultimately chose the hotel with the best hospitality suite. But this space was important not only for the Tennessee family; Stacy was planning that



Ken's relatives would stay at this hotel as well: It was of paramount importance to her that both families "stay in the same place so that no one pulls Micah apart."

Another theme that emerged strongly was Stacy's disappointment at not being able to do all of the things she had always planned she would do for the Bar Mitzvah. Until recently she had planned to prepare most of the food herself. Originally she was going to do all of the cooking for the party as well as the luncheon. All last year, she had been experimenting with recipes to see which could be frozen ahead of time. A combination of her inability to find an adequate reception hall where she could bring the food, and her lack of time now that she was in graduate school, prevented her from implementing this plan. Reluctantly, she accepted the fact that all she could do was the luncheon and that she'd have to have the party catered. Throughout the planning period, she had to give up expectations of doing things herself. For instance, she'd planned to do much more than choose a few prayers for the service. She had hoped to write much of the ceremony herself. Her expectation was based on the fact that she had completely written and "choreographed" her wedding to Ken. Despite the enormous amount of work in cooking for the luncheon that she was taking on, she was disappointed in herself for not doing more.

One thing she was doing as planned, however, was the invitations. Stacy was in the midst of choosing graphics and of composing the text

which she would script in calligraphy. Not only was she ruminating about how to word it, but to whose house the response cards would go.

Decision making. Although she knew after six years of sharing custody, that the decision-making process would involve each of them "giving in a little," Stacy commented on how different this planning had been so far. Of the two of them, she had always been the organizer, but now it was Ken who was coming with the lists (that he'd generated on his computer!). She laughed nervously, that despite the lists, nothing had yet gotten done. "You see, I'm not on the level I'd expected to be."

How many people would receive invitations was also an issue. In earlier discussions, Ken had agreed to pay for the Bar Mitzvah but no actual sum had been stated. Given the large number of Stacy's relatives compared to Ken's small family, and the fact that the events surrounding the ceremony and party (which of course entailed additional expense) were a tradition in Stacy's family but not in Ken's, there was inevitable tension about costs. Although Stacy's brother had volunteered to pay for the Friday night dinner, and her father for the Sunday morning brunch, Stacy was prepared for conflict. She was torn between understanding for Ken's position, and her desire to do her only child's Bar Mitzvah the way she felt was right. "I partly understand it...I don't know. If they're planning to start a family and maybe that's close to happening, I don't know, they might be thinking 'We have to limit this.' But that would aggravate me...because this is my child, and I'm not likely to have another one."

It was interesting that when she discussed the issue of money, Stacy pointed nervously to the tape recorder and indicated her concern that Micah not become aware of this as an issue. Here and at other points throughout the interviews, Stacy indicated her desire to protect Micah from overt conflict between the two families. This desire was mirrored by Ken and Janet who also were careful not to say anything negative in Micah's presence. As might be expected, Micah was probably more aware of all that was going on than any of the adults suspected. At one point while his mother was on the phone, Micah made reference to problems resulting from the difference in size between the two families. "That's what the conflict was about before. I think, I'm not sure. I'm not positive. I can't say (looking at the tape recorder as if he was sorry he started talking about this). But I think it's because my Dad has a real small family and my Mom has a huge family. I'm not positive though, you know. You can't quote me on that."

As the interview was coming to an end, Stacy, on her own initiative, compared herself with Ken in terms of emotional responses to the upcoming event. She saw herself as being involved primarily at the level of details whereas he was worrying more about the "emotional impact." "To me, you get a hotel, you get a restaurant (laugh). It will be hard work, but I don't think about the emotional impact level...But Ken is talking about how heavy this is for everybody...maybe because I never went through it. But he's going through a lot of stuff right now. I don't know if he'll want to share

it and don't want to go into it (alluding to something about Ken's father)."

Stacy's concern for Ken seemed heartfelt and made sense, but her characterization of herself as dealing only on the level of details did not fit. Just a couple of minutes earlier, in response to my having spoken a bit about my own experience with a son's Bar Mitzvah, she had revealed in an almost off-handed way, a great deal about the depth of her feelings: "I could imagine, especially as a single parent, certain kinds of changes like the ending of a certain kind of parenting especially with not having another child behind him. And at my age I might feel like a certain stage of my life is passed." Stacy changed the subject at this point, and as it was late, I did not pursue the theme. Not surprisingly, it came up again at our next session.

#### Interview #4 - Two Weeks Before the Bar Mitzvah: Mother Alone

When I called to set up the appointment, I complimented Stacy on the invitations. I had received one in the mail some time before and was impressed with the wording which had successfully avoided the tension between Stacy and Janet and emphasized the harmony for which she had been striving: "The family of Micah Lerner Steinberg fondly invites you to worship and celebrate with us...." (By using the child's middle name which was Mother's maiden name that she had kept, the invitations succeeded in naming the mother and father without excluding the stepmother. It was a very creative resolution. [For a more detailed analysis of the invitation see the Comparative Analysis



Section of this Chapter])). Stacy thanked me for the acknowledgement and agreed that the wording had accomplished her goal.

In terms of a time to meet, Stacy said she was not too busy. "Everything is under control. I only lose sleep when I think of all that has to be done during the last two days." When I arrived for the interview, Stacy had a bad cough and looked exhausted. She had been working late many nights--cooking and freezing food for the luncheon, making long distance arrangements with relatives, and organizing long lists of hundreds of "things to do." It was her third cold in the last few months. She said she'd considered cancelling the interview, but decided she could talk to me for a short time anyway. The conversation lasted hours. Stacy had a lot to talk about.

If Stacy's characterization of Ken as the one who was dealing with "the heavy stuff" and herself as the one dealing only on the level of detail was suspect during the first interview, it was even more so during this session. As Stacy talked about all of the last-minute details she and Ken (with whom she had been meeting and talking frequently) had been dealing with, underlying issues came up repeatedly. Foremost among them was what this event signified in terms of endings. At one point, Stacy referred directly to this issue but then softened it and changed the subject: "I have a sense that if I'm going to have any reactions, it's going to be way after. Because I do think in a very unemotional way, this is the end of our (her and Ken) having to relate in this way....(But) It's not really true, Micah will still be going back and forth, but this is the last thing we'll

have to do with all of these details." The theme of endings came up again more indirectly but very clearly however as she showed me the photo album of the early years of their marriage. She reminisced fondly about those early days when Micah was young. She also talked about how many years it had taken them to actually get divorced, and she spoke about her sense of Micah's having wished that his parents had gotten together again. Eyes filled with tears, she talked of his "deep down longing" for his old home and his old friends. It was clear that on some level, she was speaking for herself as well.

Stacy also alluded to "hard things" (having to do with potential changes in Micah's schedule) that she was deliberately not discussing with Ken until after the Bar Mitzvah. Implying that she was no longer satisfied with the alternating schedule and saying that he was now "getting more mature" and able to take the school bus to either parent's house, "It may be time to incorporate some loosening up."

The need to change Micah's schedule was being exacerbated by another change. Janet was pregnant. Stacy mentioned this fact as if I'd already known it and then talked about having decided not to apply for an internship next year that would require her to move out of the area. She felt she had to be close and available for Micah at a time when he might be feeling shut out by the inevitable "boundaries that will be formed around Ken and Janet and the new baby." In this conversation, Stacy also revealed that she and Micah had been fighting more. Although they can "often be very close and loving," they have some very "emotional fights." She understands these as Micah's

"taking more out on her than his father" because he feels safer with her (as in "one against one, instead of one against two").

On a more positive note, Stacy talked about two sources of support. Most significant, in her mind, was the support and encouragement she had been receiving from her Tennessee family. She was very surprised and very touched that all of her aunts and uncles and cousins were planning to attend. "They are really putting themselves out." Although there had been years in which Stacy had not been very involved with them, it was clear that this occasion was one around which they were all rallying. "I've always known that this family was meaningful to me, but this reinforces it... They love Micah, but it is for me (that they are coming)." Even the aunt who'd had a stroke was coming and the aunt and uncle who'd gone bankrupt not too long ago were coming and paying for all of their children to come too. The idea of picking them all up at the airport was very exciting to Stacy.

The other source of support was Stacy's "manfriend" with whom she has been involved in an on-again-off-again relationship for many years. At one point soon after her separation from Ken, Stacy had lived with Bob (who is not Jewish) and his three children from his previous marriage. Although they had not been very close this past year, Bob had decided to postpone a serious operation until after the Bar Mitzvah so that he could be sure to be available for Stacy. In fact, the night before this interview, he had been up all night with her frying fish cakes for the luncheon. Acknowledging his "level of

commitment," Stacy had, at one point, wanted Bob to have a part in the service that would parallel Janet's part. But as Bob didn't feel ready (to be up on the stage) Stacy hadn't pursued the matter.

The last piece of good news had to do with money. Originally, Stacy had worried that she and Ken would fight over how much the Bar Mitzvah would be costing. This turned out not to be the case, however. "Ken's been fine about how many we could invite." As a general comment on their ability to get along with each other, Stacy said: "We're proud of us. We're doing damned good. When I see how other people handle this stuff. Even if we swallow a lot and get some ulcers out of it, we want it to work. We want it to be nice for Micah. We want the families to have nachas [pleasure]."

Stacy's goal was that the event be one of "total grace." "Just like my Tennessee family have always shown me." Her main worry in this regard was her mother. Stacy and her mother do not generally get along and during the planning period, not only had she not been helpful, but had contributed to Stacy's anxiety by worrying about the expense of the hotel, etc. Another element here was the fact that this would be the first time Stacy's mother would meet Janet--and a pregnant Janet at that. "If there's any blow up, it's going to be between me and my mother."

Interview #5 - Four Days Before Bar Mitzvah:  
Father, Stepmother, Grandmother, and Bar Mitzvah Boy

When I called to arrange this interview and spoke with Janet, I felt the tension growing. Unthinkingly, I complimented the



invitations and she responded, "Stacy did all of that. I'm peripheral." When I asked how Micah was doing, she answered that in general he was OK, but at the moment, he was obnoxious. Obviously, I hadn't called at a good time. We ended the conversation quickly by arranging the interview which would include Ken's mother, Dora.

When I arrived for the interview, the tension I'd heard on the phone was much in evidence. Ken was coughing and had a bad cold. He was just leaving for a few minutes to pick up Micah who was at a friend's birthday party. A short, tense exchange with Janet about the keys to the car preceded his going out the door. "Ken is a wreck," said Janet. Although it became clear later (and indeed she even commented on it) that most of the conflict was between Ken and herself (rather than between Ken and Micah or between Ken and Stacy), this initial comment seemed all encompassing. We quickly changed subjects first as Janet introduced me to Dora and then as she asked happily, "Do you know that I'm pregnant?" "Mazel tov!" I said. And as we sat and waited for Ken and Micah, the three of us--Janet, Grandmother, and I, talked about pregnancies, deliveries, and due dates. Janet was very happy and excited about this baby, scheduled to arrive in less than six months.

Dora joined us easily in the discussion. Her happiness about another grandchild was evident in her big smile that resembled Micah's. Friendly, good natured, and talkative, white-haired Dora was funny without meaning to be. With a deep voice, a thick New York accent, and stockings rolled down to her knees, she was the Jewish

grandmother about whom the lovingly humorous caricatures were created. I was drawn to her like a magnet.

Although there was mention later about Ken and his mother fighting on the phone, and she complained about how little Ken showed his love for her "in return for all the love she showed him," Ken's love and affection for his mother was obvious. The way he (and Janet) kidded Dora was a clear expression of the tenderness they felt for this 78 year old woman who'd had a difficult life and was more and more showing her age. "I'm not what I used to be," she said talking about not being able to travel by herself anymore. When she told me (sadly) that her brothers weren't coming because they were dead, Ken and Janet reminded her with a chuckle, that one was alive. She'd been referring to the fact that her favorite brother, the "apple of her eye", was dead. As the brother who was alive had not yet responded to the invitation (although they knew he wouldn't be coming up from Florida), Ken joked: "Oh, so that's why we haven't received a response. Now that I know he's dead, I won't wait." Everyone, including Dora, laughed.

From Dora, I heard more about Ken's father, his constant and multiple illnesses, and his "devotion" to his children. "He was a wonderful father. He gave his life for them." As an example, she explained that although he'd gotten very sick at his daughter's wedding, he'd insisted that she leave for her honeymoon as planned. "He was tops." Ken coughed frequently during Dora's stories about his father and his relationship to his children. It seemed to me that

more than his cold was causing the sensations in his throat.

With a story that typified her style and spoke to the intensity of the father's feeling for his son, she talked about his elation over at last having a son. "When I gave birth to the king, my husband went in-sane. He called back three times. He called the doctor. 'Did she really have a boy?' 'Yeh, she had a boy.' He went out and got [himself] two suits....And he was never that liberal with himself. I said 'two suits, whatja get two suits for?' He was so excited."

While Dora was telling this story, Ken was whispering to Micah. Micah laughed as Ken said something funny that only he could hear and then in a louder whisper that was audible for everyone:

Fa. Nobody knows. Just you.

M. And you.

Fa. Just you and me.

J. I'm missing something here.

SM. You're driving Judy crazy over here.

Fa. I just told Micah a secret.

J. You've passed on a family secret.

Fa. A Bar Mitzvah secret.

J. A Bar Mitzvah secret?

Fa. And he's the only other person in the world who knows.

M. And I'm going to keep it.

Ken and Micah seemed closer at this moment than I had ever seen them. In retrospect, I knew it was significant that this moment should emerge as Grandmother was talking about Ken's father's love for his son. But as Ken's feelings about his father which were clearly more complicated than Dora implied, were not offered up for discussion, I did not pursue the topic. This closeness between Ken and Micah was also apparent during other parts of the session when

they were joking about their escapades while shopping for Micah's Bar Mitzvah clothes and when Micah said proudly that (because Janet was pregnant), it would be he and his Dad doing all of the packing (to move to their new home a few months after the Bar Mitzvah).

If conflict between Ken and his father was not available for discussion, conflict in the immediate family was. It was Janet who volunteered, "I think there are fewer fights between Ken and Micah but more between me and Ken." With that she described a "huge fight" she had had with Ken (and then with Micah) about hemming pants for the Bar Mitzvah. She had offered to do them but "instead of saying geeze thanks, he (Ken) screamed at me that I wouldn't have them done in time." Then Micah said: "I said the same thing and got my head bitten off." Describing another fight with Micah (about the laundry) a couple of days later, Janet said it was "sort of connected. Riding on the ungratefulness of the two of them..." It was clear that as the Bar Mitzvah date approached, Ken and Micah (and Ken and Stacy) had moved closer to each other and Janet (despite her increased approval of the Bar Mitzvah), was more distant from all of them.

Despite the tension between them, however, Janet was very able to be positive about what she perceived as Micah's growth. In response to Dora's saying to her that she seemed to have "more interest now,"

SM. Yeh, I think so. And part of it is seeing how Micah has gotten involved in being Jewish. He even wanted to join the Israeli army for a while...I think that seeing Micah get involved in the religious part is real important to me. If it were just the party, I wouldn't. And it's more real now.



- M. That's how I thought of it (at first). Oh, a great party. Fine. I'll have a Bar Mitzvah...(But now) It's all because of the Bar Mitzvah. I want to go to Israel and I want to do all this stuff I want to go to Israel next summer.
- J. How do you see it as part of the Bar Mitzvah?
- M. Because it all has to do with Judaism. Fighting for Israel...And I went to services (with his tutor) and they weren't as boring as they were when I was a little kid. I like them now, and I have friends there...From this whole thing, I came in not knowing much...but I really came out learning a lot, a real lot of things.

When I asked Ken if he perceived any changes in Micah--or himself, he started to give a short answer having to do with anxiety about details and Janet interrupted:

- SM. I always interpret for you, but Ken...kind of does these things...he had plans for things and he kind of expects things to go a certain way. But he never says what that is but just makes sure it happens. And I think that he and Stacy both worked so that Micah really did sense the religious part of the Bar Mitzvah. And so it went the way that they both thought it would. I mean Stacy did it in her own way and Ken did it his own way. So I don't think that you're (to Ken) surprised about the way that Micah responded. As far as the Bar Mitzvah goes anyway. But I never realized how much...gets carried on, it's sort of archetypal, the rituals get carried on forever.
- Fa. Yeh, I think that's right.

When they talked about Micah's behavior in general, Janet conceded that he'd grown up a lot. His behavior had matured, although it fluctuated. "Like sometimes he checks out fifth grade behavior while in the seventh grade."

At another point, Micah talked about his anxiety (that Janet reframed as excitement): "One of my aunts said when her son was Bar Mitzvah, they had to give him sleeping pills to calm him down. But

for me, I still don't believe it's happening. The shock hasn't hit me yet."

SM. He's been saying, "I wish it wasn't happening yet... It came too fast."

M. Yeh, it came so fast. I don't know how it happened. I can remember the first time Richie (tutor) came here. "Oh we have plenty of time." But all of a sudden, boom. It's here. This is the fastest...It helped my school go fast too. There's probably not much time that it's off my mind. Even when I'm doing something else, I'm thinking about it.

When I pressed Ken for his experience of the past few months, he allowed that he'd worried about all of the details--but they had all "fallen into place." And Janet added: "Everything that could have been a problem just wasn't." Grandmother summed it up: "The three of them worked it out wonderful. I really mean it. For a divorced couple and a new wife. It really worked out remarkable."

All three agreed also that Stacy had done an incredible amount of work. And then Ken said, "I guess what's made me happiest is Micah's real interest in learning and how well he's doing. I remember how much difficulty I had in learning the haftorah. It was horrible." (He'd had a teacher who could speak no English and Ken remembered never knowing what he was doing right or doing wrong.)

As the interview drew to a close, I commented on all of the stresses they were dealing with at once--the Bar Mitzvah, a pregnancy, selling a house, buying a new one.

J. You're off the scale (of stress).

SM. We always are. Ken and I historically have never done one thing at a time...Our transitions seem to occur at the same time. It's not like you go first and then I will, but OK, let's both go now (laugh).

Their ability to cope with a lot at once was clearly a source of pride. In answer to a question about what had been the hardest decision, Ken surprised me by talking about his difficulty in deciding whether or not to invite an old friend with whom he had had a falling out. "Going through that was very hard for me. Our relationship had changed...and the fact that there was a Bar Mitzvah, an event, made me really feel I should resolve (it)."

When I asked Micah who was most excited about the upcoming Bar Mitzvah, Micah started his answer by saying: "Oh, I'm going to get in trouble (with this)." And then talking very fast: "I think, I may be wrong, but it's between my mother and my grandmother (Steinberg)...I don't know...It's the weirdest thing. The women show excitement. Dad doesn't."

J. And who's the most nervous?

M. I don't think I am, but people say I am.

In the last few minutes as Micah was going up to bed, I said to him that the earring in his ear (which had never been there before) looked nice. In retrospect, I realized that I offered this compliment (that was really not sincere) in order to find out what accounted for its appearance--so soon before the Bar Mitzvah. Once Micah had gone upstairs, Janet volunteered that she hated the earring, and Ken

explained that Micah had had his ear pierced while he was with his mother last Saturday. "He called from the mall (to ask if it was OK) and I had no choice by then." He then made some comment that if this was the only acting out, it wasn't so bad.

The one "detail" that remained to be settled at this point was the seating arrangement. They were waiting until Saturday afternoon "after the service and before the party" to do it.

- J. (with shock apparent) How did you decide to wait til then?
- M. So we can see how people are getting along, probably.
- Fa. Stacy and I are going to sit down for an hour and do it. How did we decide? Because it's been impossible to figure out.
- SM. It is. You can't please anybody.
- Fa. ...We (Stacy and I) knew if we did it today or tomorrow, there would be too many last minute changes so...And also we'll find out from some people who they absolutely can't stand to sit with.
- J. It's interesting that there are some people who can't stand each other and you don't know it.
- Fa. Right.
- J. Usually, when people can't stand each other, everyone in the family knows it.
- Fa. (joking) We're going to ask...Is there anybody you can't stand?...And you'll see Saturday night if anybody is happy (chuckle)
- SM. You'll have to bring a map.
- J. What were the choices?
- SM. Should we put whole families together? Should we put families together who haven't seen each other, families together who see each other all the time?
- Fa. By age?
- SM. Right. And should we mix families?
- Fa. And then once you've decided at what tables, then you have to decide where to put the tables.

This plan to wait sounded terrible to me. The pressure of doing the seating arrangements on the day of the Bar Mitzvah and just hours before the guests were to be seated, sounded like a nightmare. I



didn't say anything but I felt very anxious for them. I had never heard of anyone doing it this way and it felt like their inability to do it earlier was very significant if not ominous--but I wasn't sure why. Was there that much animosity in the family that they hadn't told me about?

Interview #6 - Two Days Before the Bar Mitzvah:  
Father, his Son, and Father's Mother

The purpose of this interview was to videotape a session with three generations discussing pictures of Father's Bar Mitzvah. To make the camera more effective than it was last time (when it was just set up and left unattended), my son, Eric, came along to operate it.

The interview took place in the late afternoon. Janet was at work. Ken had taken the afternoon off, Micah had stayed home from school to nurse a cold, and Grandmother had been busy all morning preparing tuna and egg salads for the luncheon.

We all sat in the den as Dora turned the pages of Ken's Bar Mitzvah album and talked about the people and the scenes we were looking at. The pictures were almost all posed scenes that were popular with photographers in the late 50's. The poses were strikingly similar to those in wedding albums. In one picture, Dora was walking her son down the isle to the altar (to read his haftorah). In another, the Bar Mitzvah boy was handing out cigars. The party had been held at night in a kosher catering hall owned by a rabbi. It was equipped with a mini chapel where scenes of the boy blessing the Torah

could be reenacted for the cameras (which were, of course, prohibited during the actual ceremony on the Sabbath).

In one picture, Dora is dancing with her son and in another with her husband. "With my son! My favorite son. My only son! (And) this is my husband. He never danced in his life and there he is (dancing)."

Dora talked a great deal about what a good child Ken had been and at one point, beaming at the picture of her 13-year-old son in tallis (prayer shawl) and yarmulke (skull cap) and demanded to know, "Isn't that gorgeous? The truth!" She also emphasized again how close Ken was to his father. "They all say Ken looks like me but he got his father's brains...I read movie magazines. I was a jitterbug. My husband was book learned.. Always had books. They have the same personality, quiet, very smart...Ken was always with his Dad, right Kenny? They were together like this (holding up two crossed fingers)."

When I asked about Micah in relation to Ken, she emphasized their differences by saying "(Micah) talks in a minute more than Ken says in a month." This was meant as a compliment to Micah as Ken's brevity with her on the phone, for instance, drives Dora crazy.

As we finished with the album, talk turned to the Bar Mitzvah ahead and Micah offered to read me the draft of the speech that he had written and that his father had just typed (and edited slightly) for him.

- M. To me being Bar Mitzvah is a very high and special honor. Having this ceremony is like an initiation into the adult world. In many other cultures they have the same type of exiting childhood and entering adulthood. Throughout my preparation I was reminded of a movie I saw with my Mom: The Emerald Forest. The line in that movie that best fits how I feel now is when the boy's father says "The boy must die." When I just heard the line I thought it meant the boy would literally die. Probably the way my Dad feels when I bug him. (All laugh) He wrote that! Not me. But as I watched I realized it was a symbol of a people and their culture. A ceremony of torture followed. Afterwards the boy was considered a man. It really meant that he died as a boy because he was becoming a man. He will lose some things and gain others. Judaism has a similar torture! Learning the haftorah. To me Judaism is a feeling and a way of life rather than anything tangible. The process of becoming a Bar Mitzvah has taught me to understand and appreciate and like my religion...Being a Bar Mitzvah means taking on more responsibilities. Not only in the Jewish community but in the home also--(you see, my Dad added too many things). My new responsibilities in the community will be to attend more services and trying to understand them more by being a par par
- Fa. participant
- M. At home I will take on more chores and in house jobs (Really?)
- GM. (Laugh)
- M. My family will expect more of me and I will expect more of myself as a student and a friend and a young man. I want to thank you all for coming. I'd like to add special thanks to my mother for cooking so much of the oneg lunch and to Bob for helping her. And my father and Janet for organizing my preparation and for their support and encouragement and Richard, my tutor, and Mr. Glazer for leading the service.

The speech ended with Micah thanking his relatives for coming and he listed all of the different places in the country from which they'd come.

Micah then talked about still having to study a few more prayers and to write out some things to say for each person who comes up to

light a candle. Reminiscent of my first interview with them, Micah said he was nervous but seemed to me much more excited than scared.

The last conversation was primarily between Ken and myself as I was complimenting him on how well he and Stacy and Janet seemed to have negotiated a very difficult period.

Fa. Yeh, sometimes it's taken a while [big sigh] (But) for the most part, the stuff around Micah has worked out pretty well. [implying somewhat that other things might work out less easily?]

J. It seems you both have such a commitment to Micah's welfare...It had the potential to be...

Fa. No chance. You see, I just didn't think...I thought from the beginning it would work out. And it did.

J. But of course one can't take that for granted...

Fa. Oh yeh. I guess, but I don't know. Janet's real respectful of Stacy's role and Stacy's real respectful of Janet's role...Janet was uncertain whether she would have a part in the Temple. The way it turned out was that Stacy suggested that Janet do one of the opening psalms...and Janet agreed...

And later...

Fa. In general there's some tension. Janet is not Micah's mother but she's a major adult influence on his life so sometimes there's some hassles about that. But I don't think there's anything not resolvable. I knew that Janet would get more involved as we went along.

J. Well, the potential for hurt feelings is always there.

Fa. But you work at it. You don't let it happen. And I also think that people have to eat some of that sometimes. And just not be so sensitive to hurt feelings...Everybody wanted it to be a Bar Mitzvah for Micah. And everything is just a series of compromises. It's just a matter of when you're not going to compromise and when you are. It'll (all) happen after the Bar Mitzvah.

With that explanation of the process so far and the forecasting of issues in the future, we talked about the last minute schedule of



who would be going where and when. Micah would be staying with his mother that night (Thursday), sleeping at his father's after Friday night services, and then in the hospitality suite (with his mother) after the party on Saturday night. Tonight, after his lesson, Micah would be going with his mother to the airport to pick up her parents and bring them to the hotel.

Thursday night. The big weekend was beginning. And that night I was home in my kitchen baking furiously for the Oneg Shabbat [refreshments after Friday night service] with which I had volunteered to help. I found myself baking more kinds of cakes than I'd originally planned. I wanted Stacy to be pleased with the Oneg and I was invested in making it good. I felt very excited and nervous--for the Steinbergs and for me.

Analysis of the Dynamics of the Steinberg-Lerner System  
in the Planning Period

A number of dramatic themes emerged clearly as this family planned for the Bar Mitzvah of their first child. The most striking was that in reality, it was two very different families jointly planning this one event. As my interviews took me--much like the child--back and forth between them, my sense of the multiple differences and of the difficulty inherent in negotiating those differences grew. So, too, did my respect for the members of this complex system who were trying to balance the difficult and often competing demands with which they live.

The two systems were different in structure, developmental issues, and tone. In one, the single-parent with typically permeable boundaries was dealing with issues of endings and letting go. In the other, a newly joined pair, with necessarily less permeable boundaries, was attempting to delineate its structure and was dealing with issues of consolidation and new life. In one, the value was on alternative life styles and flexibility. In the other, a more traditional life style and orientation was fostered. In one, the 13-year-old was seen more as an emerging adolescent and in the other, the more child-like aspects were highlighted. Micah who looked like his father and talked like his mother, carried the names of both of their families and as he alternated between them, he worked hard to stay equally loyal to each of his parents. The strength of the competing pulls was epitomized for me as I found myself assuming, in my first

interview with Ken and Janet, that Micah would be with them during the Bar Mitzvah weekend and then assuming just the opposite arrangement in my first interview with Stacy.

Although we never discussed this directly, it was evident that Micah understood these pulls more than any of the adults knew or admitted. His difficulty in answering my question about who was most excited ("Oh, oh, I'm gonna get in trouble with this one"), and his comments such as "Don't quote me on this, I'm not sure" indicated a great deal of awareness that was just below the surface.

But if Micah had to work hard to remain loyal, he was working in a system in which the adults worked equally hard to allow him that dual loyalty. This points to the second outstanding feature of this system: its emphasis on harmony. The "hospitality suite," for this family, was much more than a convenience or "a nice touch." It was, as Stacy understood it, an absolute necessity in insuring that Micah "would not be pulled apart." It was a physical space in which all of the members of the two families could, in Stacy's words, "be integrated" for the sake of the child. And it was a symbol of the emotional space that Stacy and Ken had tried to establish through years of shared custody. For me, it was becoming a metaphor for what they were trying to achieve through this Bar Mitzvah.

Throughout the planning process, there were constant references to "give and take," to "concessions," "mutual respect," and "swallowing hurts." In addition to the artfully worded invitation, there were numerous examples of negotiated decisions--about who did

what on the list (each took the items they cared about most), with whom Micah would stay during the weekend, and fifteen candles on the cake instead of thirteen so that all whom they wanted to honor in both families could light one.

There were deliberate attempts to include everyone and, in this context, I think their inability to decide the seating arrangement was more a function of their intense concern about not offending anyone than an indication of deep-seated animosities within the families. It was also an expression not only of the relational ambivalence between the two families, but of the vague anticipation of future changes between the two systems that could only be sensed but not yet articulated. Most striking of all in this regard was the attempt in both households not only not to speak badly of the other--in Micah's (or the interviewer's) presence at least--but also not to allow extended family members to speak badly either. An instance in the past where that had happened had caused a major falling out and the adults involved made deliberate efforts at reconciliation before the weekend arrived. Also striking was their deliberate attempt to protect Micah from having to choose between families. When Micah "fretted" about whether or not to invite Janet's family, he was told he had no choice and that was sufficient to relieve him of any burden.

Another major theme in this family was that of Stepmother's outsidersness. As they began planning for the Bar Mitzvah, Janet as "goy" felt very peripheral to the upcoming Jewish ritual. Despite her father's background and his family's movement towards her when she



married a Jew, Janet felt ambivalent about Judaism. In addition, her past experience with lavish Bat Mitzvahs was a negative one. Ken had to work hard to keep his new wife from feeling alienated at the same time that he moved closer to his ex-wife, the mother of his child whom he was about to help launch into adolescence.

Ken had to negotiate between two strong women who were different in everything from the way they plan parties to the way they rear children. They were different also in terms of the life cycle stages they (and he with them) were entering. At some level, the Bar Mitzvah signified an end to his life with Stacy as they had lived it over the last six to eight years of intense interaction regarding their young child. On the analogic level, the Bar Mitzvah was announcing and forcing the break that they had never completed. It was no accident that Janet should become pregnant at precisely the time they began in earnest to plan the Bar Mitzvah. As Ken disengages from his former family, he is freed to move more fully into his new family.

Another theme in this family was the connectedness both parents felt to their Jewish heritage and the obvious movement towards and intensification of feeling about that heritage that the Bar Mitzvah planning was enabling. Although their connections to past generations (with which Jewish culture is, of course, inextricably linked) were not without complexity and ambivalence, both were very strongly and emotionally identified with Judaism.

For Stacy, the growing closeness between herself and her father's family (with their "incredible Jewish spirit") was already in evidence

during the planning stage. She was terribly moved by the encouragement and enthusiasm they were demonstrating and it was from them that she derived the most support. It seems to me no wonder that as Stacy faces a future less connected to a nuclear family, this increased connectedness to the extended family should feel so important.

For Ken, the movement towards past generations was less articulated but no less obvious. His discussing with Micah the contents of his grandfather's safe, and his telling him "a Bar Mitzvah secret" that somehow involved his father, speaks directly to this movement. Also linked to this movement towards his father was the movement between Ken and his son. By the end of the planning period, Ken and Micah were unmistakably closer to each other. Not only did Ken talk about being pleased with how Micah had come through the training period, but their increased rapport was evident in their joking about their shopping trips for the Bar Mitzvah clothes, in their joking about the speech, and in their non-verbal connections that were very visible as they sat with grandmother and looked at Father's Bar Mitzvah pictures.

It was also clear that if Micah was fighting less with his father, he was fighting more with his mother and his stepmother. Given the developmental tasks of a 13-year-old boy, the attempt to move away from female authority and closer to the male role model seems perfectly appropriate. Increased conflict with both of the

females was also a way of remaining equidistant from the two systems at the same time that he is moving closer to his father.

The fighting is also a precursor of future changes. As Micah grows older (and as circumstances change in both households), the alternating monthly schedule is becoming less acceptable (and less necessary) for everyone. Both Stacy and Ken allude to impending change in this regard but both indicate that the inevitably difficult discussions about this change are to wait until sometime after the Bar Mitzvah. It is as if both have intuitively agreed to keep the Bar Mitzvah period sacred. Neither will defile it with conflict. It is also as if they know they must allow the child (and themselves) to make the passage before they begin to rearrange the structure. That they were able to postpone this conflict is consistent with the experience of the entire planning process. In this complex family system, where the potential for conflict is built into the structure, it is remarkable how well all of the members came through the difficult process of planning the Bar Mitzvah. The tensions that remained (and were expressed through such details as the earring, the postponing of the seating decisions, the increased tension between father and stepmother, and the worrying about potential confrontations in mother's family), appear minor compared to the level of conflict and animosity that seemed so potential (if not inevitable) to the researcher at the beginning of the planning period.

Mother and Father were united in their desire to make this a positive event for their child and for their families. Stepmother

shared this desire and supported the outcome. By the end of the planning period, both Mother and Father (and even Stepmother) had moved closer to their families of origin, and Father and Son were visibly closer to each other as well.



The Goldstein Family: "The Family Project"

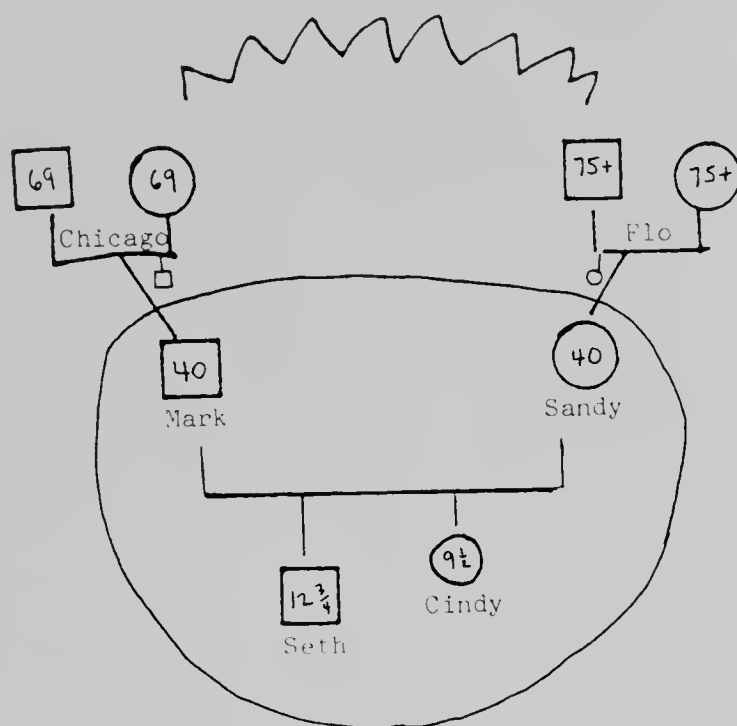


Figure 4.2 Goldstein Family Map  
(See Appendix B for key)

Interview #1 - Three Months Before the Bar Mitzvah  
Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter

The Goldstein family consists of Father (Mark, 40), Mother (Sandy, 40), Son (Seth, 12  $\frac{3}{4}$ ), and Daughter (Cindy 9  $\frac{1}{2}$ ). With Mark's income as a partner in a successful accounting firm and Sandy's as a teacher, the family is very comfortable economically and their large, well-furnished suburban home reflects this reality.

When I called to ask about meeting with them, Sandy indicated that they'd received a letter from the Rabbi about me and that they'd been expecting my call. After ten minutes of easy small talk (about Bar Mitzvahs and hometowns), I asked if they would be willing to talk with me about their plans for their son's Bar Mitzvah. After

consulting briefly with her husband, Sandy cautiously agreed but emphasized that they could do it only if it wasn't too time consuming as they were heading into "a very hectic few months." She also made a point of telling me that her husband had never had a Bar Mitzvah-- "just a confirmation"--and was I sure I still wanted to use them? I assured her that that made no difference to me and that what I was looking for was a variety of family experiences. Two days later Sandy called me to say that she and her husband had been discussing my upcoming visit, and they wanted to make sure that I understood--before I made the trip--that "under no circumstances" could I use their names, and further that there were some questions they would probably not answer. I assured her about the confidentiality of the reporting process and of their ability to refuse questions or to withdraw at anytime. We reconfirmed the appointment.

Whether or not their anxiety about meeting me was allayed, my anxiety about going to meet them was not. Not only was I nervous about meeting my first "stranger family," one who'd already expressed resistance (What would I do if they were silent or hostile?), but I was extremely nervous about driving an hour at night into an unfamiliar area.

To say that I'm a reluctant driver with a terrible sense of direction and deteriorating night vision, is an understatement. By the time I'd reached their street, I was shaking. In the course of the trip I'd made a wrong turn off the highway and had two near misses trying to get back on track. Luckily I'd given myself a great deal of

extra time (for just this probability) and so I had 15 minutes to calm down before pulling into their driveway. As I sat in the car beginning to relax, I was struck by how "cleverly" I was preparing myself to join with the family by mirroring the nervousness I was expecting to encounter. With that "reframing," I knocked on their door, which opened into their family room.

Everyone was there waiting for me. They were as anxious and reserved as I'd expected. As we took seats on the two large, matched sofas at a right angle to each other, the family all sat stiffly and close together on one, and I sat facing them, decidedly alone on the other. Mother and Father were polite and the kids were silent (but openly curious). Mother, who was furthest from me, sat on the edge of the seat and was obviously checking me out. Father, leaning back in a slightly less anxious pose, was equally examining ("What had they gotten themselves into?"). It was much later that I learned that they'd thought I was a friend of the Rabbi's and that he had specifically asked them to take part in this project. Had they known that the Rabbi didn't know me--or my project--and was writing to all Bar Mitzvah parents, they would probably have never agreed to see me.

With much to tell about my highway adventure, I was immediately chatty and familiar. As I joked about my driving and then talked more seriously about who I was and why I was interested in families and Bar Mitzvahs, I could actually see their resistance melting. By the time it was clear that they were willing to participate and I pulled out my tape recorder (and the apricot nut bread I had brought) they almost

tripped over each other trying to help figure out how to make the plug reach the outlet. As the cord was too short, Father suggested that we move into the kitchen where the outlet was close to the table. As we settled in around the table in their spacious and immaculately clean kitchen, it seemed that they were not only no longer anxious, but, in fact, eager to talk about themselves and their plans.

Decision making. In appearance and style, Sandy and Mark seem well matched. Both of them are 40, and very similar in their medium height, compact build, and dark coloring. Both wearing corduroy jeans and crewneck sweaters, they appear very close and at ease with each other. Their pattern of interrupting, repeating each other's phrases, and finishing each other's sentences seems mutual and comfortable rather than intrusive or competing. They appear to be in basic agreement on most matters, to be confident of each other's abilities, to take pleasure in each other's company, and pride in each other's accomplishments. There seems to be a shared and complementary division of labor and an egalitarian reciprocity. Each had given the other a surprise 40th birthday party and they spoke about these events with genuine pleasure. Their executive functions were handled easily and the generational boundaries seemed appropriately permeable but strikingly well defined. This was true not only between the parents and the children, (but as I soon discovered) between the parents and their parents as well.

Although the children were also matched to each other in terms of activities (both were on track teams, took piano lessons, and went to



Hebrew school) they were different somewhat in appearance and even more so in style. Dark, good looking, and resembling his mother, Seth was very quiet, rarely initiated any response and was eager to leave the interview and return to his homework. Lanky Cindy, with big glasses that dominated her face, looked more like her father, and was as talkative as Seth was quiet. She participated as actively as she could (given that relatively few questions were directed towards her) and seemed to be picking up her parents' style of interrupting. Whereas Seth left the interview early, Cindy stayed long after and left only reluctantly when her parents made it clear that it was late and she had to go to bed.

Father's family. Mark, the elder of two sons, is a third-generation American born in the midwest to highly assimilated parents strongly identified with Reform Judaism. Neither he, nor his father, nor his grandfather had had a Bar Mitzvah. Instead, Mark had had a confirmation when he was fifteen in his parents' huge Reform Temple "that filled up on the high holy days like symphony hall."

Of his grandparents, only his maternal grandmother was alive. She was 95 years old and living rather independently in a Jewish senior center near his parents. Until Mark was a senior in college, grandmother lived with her daughter and her family. Mark speaks proudly and fondly of his grandmother who still writes to them. Although everyone wants her to attend the Bar Mitzvah, it is unlikely that she will because her daughter is reluctant to take on the burden

of bringing her. This is a "sensitive subject" that Mark and Sandy do not go into in front of the children.

Mother's family. Sandy, the elder of two daughters, is a second generation American born in New York to parents who have since moved to Florida. Although they are not at all religious, Sandy's parents identify with Conservative Judaism and are more parochial in relation to Mark's more worldly parents. Sandy remembers her father talking often about his Bar Mitzvah. "When he was Bar Mitzvahed [sic], it was a very important part of his life--of his family. I think Bar Mitzvah was a very big deal. He talks about his Bar Mitzvah suit, and his Bar Mitzvah watch. These are the things I remember growing up and hearing about." Everyone agrees that it is to this grandfather that Seth's Bar Mitzvah is most important. This is especially true as Sandy's sister is married to a Gentile and it is unlikely that their daughter will have a Bat Mitzvah. Although they "won't tell their age," Sandy's parents are considerably older than Mark's and not in good health. Sandy worries about them and will be going down shortly to visit them in order to see for herself how they are doing.

Both Sandy's and Mark's families are small and getting smaller. Preparing the invitation list has brought this fact home painfully. As Sandy says, "...one of the most upsetting things is going over the list and seeing how many people aren't coming (due to ill health) and how small the family has gotten (a number of relatively recent deaths in grandparents' generation). It's been very disturbing."

In response to my question about how the two sets of parents get along with each other, Marcia and Mark reveal a very interesting situation:

Mo. Our parents have only met twice.

Fa. Yeh, at our wedding, our wedding was

Mo. First at our wedding, and then again last year.

J. Is that right?

Mo. After 15 years of our marriage, they've finally met. We thought the next time was going to be at the Bar Mitzvah. And we were very concerned about that. So Mark went down (to his parents) and really talked them into going and seeing my parents (the next time they were in Florida) because we didn't want the strain that was at the wedding.

Fa. They (the four parents) came two nights before the wedding. They all met at the hotel. One side here. One side there. Clash. It was an experience I never want to relive again (laugh).

Mo. And we thought we'd have to

Fa. Yeh, and I got worried about it. In fact, that was my biggest concern at some point in time last year. Not because they didn't get along, but because of the strain.

As he'd requested, Mark's parents did go to visit Sandy's. They all got along quite well. Sandy's parents "who'd always dreamed of being close to machatunim [in-laws]" were thrilled and spent lots of time showing Mark's parents family pictures of Marcia as a child. Mark's parents, who go to Florida regularly, will probably be visiting Sandy's parents again before the Bar Mitzvah. Although the two sets of parents are very different and will never be close friends, everyone in the family is relieved by this reduction in strain.

Before asking about the actual plans for the Bar Mitzvah, I asked how they'd decided to have it in the first place. Their answer had two parts. The first was Sandy's sense that she'd always known that

her son would "be Bar Mitzvahed [sic]...It was just, to me, a natural thing. Even though Mark wasn't Bar Mitzvahed, and I wasn't Bat Mitzvahed [sic] and I didn't have any or very little religious training, we always knew, I always knew, I wanted it (for him)."

The second part was the fact that all of their friends were having Bar Mitzvahs for their children.

- C. But now it's sort of popular for everybody to have
- Fa. their Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah.
- Mo. It's more (that) everybody around us...all our friends...(are having them).

Mark summed it up later in the interview when he was talking about a newspaper article he'd read about orthodox Jews planning their child's Bar Mitzvah:

I can't say that when my son was born I started planning for his Bar Mitzvah (like the woman in the article)...I don't have that tremendous feeling for the ritual. And I don't have this tremendous emotional outpouring about my son becoming a man as in Jewish law, because I don't have any background for it. I think I can see it through the eyes, in that regard, of Sandy's father more than anyone else. He's the only one who's expressed it to me in those terms." Later, when I asked what in the planning period was giving them most pleasure, Mark answered: "The whole thing is giving us pleasure. It hasn't really been a nervous thing and we really haven't had many disputes about it...I mean a lot of this is just like throwing a big party, frankly.

Bar Mitzvah plans. As with the first family I'd interviewed, the date for the Bar Mitzvah was chosen with the comfort of grandparents in mind. Sandy wanted it late enough in the spring so that the weather would not be too harsh for her mother who suffered badly from arthritis. The service would take place in the Reform Temple to which



they belonged and the dinner party that night would be held in its banquet hall. A "semi-luncheon" would follow the service and the guests would be on their own (at the hotel) between the luncheon and the dinner. The grandparents would be arriving Thursday in order to have time to "rehearse their parts" (grandfathers' aliyahs [blessing of the Torah]) and on Friday night before the service, Mark and Sandy's best friends in the neighborhood were preparing a dinner in their home for all of the thirty or so out-of-town relatives. Approximately 125 people were being invited to the party; twenty-five to thirty of them children. This was to be a party for Seth to enjoy. It was also one to which many old and dear friends from childhood and college days were coming. Although she discussed all of the details with Mark and with the children, Sandy was in charge of the organizing. All of the arrangements had already been made. Everyone from the caterer and band leader to the flower and linen people had been hired and instructed.

For the most part, Sandy felt the plans were under control, but she worried that she was overlooking something because all of her friends kept expecting her to be hysterically busy by now. "There are probably things I should be doing but I'm not. I don't know. The caterer says I've done it all."

If anything about the Bar Mitzvah worried them, it was how well prepared Seth would be. His Hebrew education had started late and the teaching, as far as Mark and Sandy were concerned, had been much less than satisfactory. Seth was practically beginning from zero when he

started his training and not only was he studying with the Cantor but had to have a tutor as well. They were sure that this was a function of the Temple's educational system and not of Seth's ability, but they were nervous none the less.

When I asked if there was Hebrew School after Bar Mitzvah, they answered that there was a confirmation class, but that Seth probably wouldn't be in it. At this point in the training, Seth had learned the blessings but was just beginning to study the haftorah and (as was the custom in this Temple), a portion of the Torah reading as well. Understandably, Seth was having a hard time fitting Bar Mitzvah practice into his already busy schedule of junior high school homework, track meets, and piano practice. He was managing recently only by staying up until 11:00pm--long after his mother was already asleep. When I asked if he'd be doing a speech, Sandy answered that he'd chosen not to take on that extra burden and Seth emphasized that decision by volunteering, "It would be too much for me." The pressure of the event was most explicit at this point. Here Sandy went into some detail explaining that the Rabbi did not particularly encourage the boys to do speeches and absolutely discouraged the parents from giving any either. Despite this lack of encouragement however, Sandy was determined that all of them, including Cindy, would participate in some way. Recent Bar Mitzvahs that she and Seth had been attending in order to see what they were like, struck her as "sterile" when none of the family members participated. They had definitely decided that all

of them would take some part in the ceremony and the Rabbi had already sent them some readings.

Of most immediate concern, however was Sandy's parents. In a few days, she would be going to visit them. She wanted to see for herself if, in fact, her parents were still able to get along without more help and she had to break the news to them that they would be staying at the hotel like the other guests--and not in their daughter's home as they were expecting. "No one is staying here. But my parents don't know that yet. They can stay here after. As long as they like. Two weeks, whatever. But the weekend of the Bar Mitzvah, how do you choose? Why should my parents stay and not Mark's? They won't be happy about it, but it's just the way it (is)."

Sandy's clarity of boundaries (despite the discomfort) was striking. And what was fascinating was Mark's parallel (though inverse?) clarity in reference to his parents. No matter how much he wanted his grandmother to attend, he was clear about his mother's prerogative. "I talked to my parents about it, but they won't budge. (And I'm) not going to start fighting about it."

With that discussion, the interview came to an end and as I joked about trying to make sense of all of the data I was collecting, both Mark and Sandy encouraged me to come back next time with any questions. We then spent a few more minutes talking informally as they showed me the baby pictures Mark's mother had sent Sandy for her to use at Mark's birthday party, and as they asked me more questions about myself and my family. As I left the house, Mark walked me to my

car and painstakingly gave me directions for a short cut to the highway.

Interview #2 - Two Weeks Before the Bar Mitzvah:  
Mother, Father, Bar Mitzvah Boy and Sister

The rapport established in our first interview carried over the intervening two months and when the family greeted me this time they and I were considerably more relaxed. All of them dressed in shorts and summer shirts, the Goldsteins were openly friendly and easier with each other and with me. We took seats again in the family room (I had an extension cord this time), but rather than the stiff line-up of the first encounter, the arrangement was much more relaxed. Mother and Father, with Cindy most often between them, sat comfortably on one sofa (Mother closest to me) and Seth lounged on the floor on the opposite side of the large square coffee table.

Easy affection between Sandy and Mark was evident as his hand occasionally brushed her knee or rested on her shoulder across the sofa. Mark's affection for his daughter was also evident as he and she cuddled frequently. From his distance across the room, Seth appeared somewhat more differentiated from the other members of the family and definitely more engaged in this interview than he had been in the first.

During this session, the parents' pattern of answering for Seth even when questions were clearly directed to him, became very evident. Although such a pattern might be dysfunctional in some systems, it (in combination with Cindy's tendency to interject herself



into her parents' conversations) seemed to me to balance out earlier indications of intergenerational boundaries that may have tended towards inflexibility.

We began the interview by talking about the invitations (which I had not seen) and the responses to them. Mark was happy to report that their estimated number was turning out to be exactly correct as some people they had expected weren't able to come (an aunt and uncle who were sick) and some they thought couldn't come, were. And, as Sandy pointed out, they'd "heard from everyone." Happily showing me a sample invitation (clean cut, contemporary print on maroon and grey stationary) she said, "They're simple but we like them." Then she and Mark related their experience with the calligrapher who was to address the envelopes: He'd had a heart attack and they found out only by accident--in time to have them done elsewhere. A near problem averted. I complimented Sandy and Mark on the invitations and asked if they had an extra I could keep. As Sandy handed one to me, I wondered silently if my not having received one in the mail was significant.

They reported next about the seating arrangement that they'd done with ease. They'd simply made two tables for family--one for the older members and one for the younger. The only changes in their original plans involved some minor modifications in the color scheme for the party and the fact that Sandy was hiring people to do some things (like make fruit baskets for the hotel rooms) that she had originally planned to do herself. This was a way of "relieving the

pressure." In general, Sandy was surprised to find herself much less nervous than she'd expected to be.

When I inquired about her trip to Florida, Sandy explained that her parents seemed to be doing better than she'd expected. "I realized that it (sounds) worse when we talk to them on the phone..." This was the first time she'd been to visit her parents alone since she'd married Mark. "...It was quality time. I spent the time with them. I didn't go to the pool. It was very interesting." In terms of their response to the news that they would not be staying in their daughter's home: "No problem at all." Her mother can't walk stairs; in the hotel there's an elevator while in Sandy's house she'd have to walk upstairs to the guest room. "Her arthritis is so bad that she's more concerned about not having to climb stairs (than about staying with us)."

Switching from Sandy's family to Mark's, I learned that Mark's uncle (his mother's brother) who had been sick, died suddenly two months earlier. Mark went to the funeral in Virginia and it seemed that his aunt and his cousins were all doing OK. All of them were still planning to attend the Bar Mitzvah.

In terms of Mark's grandmother, an interesting dynamic was revealed. Although Mark had given up trying to convince his mother to bring his grandmother ("We pushed it as far as we could."), Mark's younger brother whom Mark had always protected (as Sandy put it, "definitely the first born syndrome"), took up the battle for him. Not only did he try to convince his mother to bring Grandmother to the

Bar Mitzvah, but he also got them to stay in Massachusetts a day or two longer than they'd originally planned. "I let my brother (do it)...It keeps the pressure off of us." In response to my questioning, Mark allowed that this was the first time his brother had stepped in on his behalf in this way; it was more common that he (Mark) would intercede with the parents on his brother's behalf. The resolution with Grandmother was that they would bring the video of the Bar Mitzvah party for her to see when they made their annual Thanksgiving visit--and that the Rabbi would say something about her from the pulpit.

In passing, Mark also mentioned that his parents had visited Sandy's parents a second time and again the visit went well. This time though, the parents went on their own initiative. Sandy: "So that's something we don't have to worry about (anymore)."

The subject which elicited the most intensity in this interview was that of how much or how little of the haftorah Seth was going to do. Although studying for the Bar Mitzvah had, at first, been an ordeal for Seth (at one point he'd thrown his hands up in the air and said "That's it, I just can't do it."), things had gotten much better. The first change was that they'd set up a schedule for him--when to study Hebrew, when to do homework, when to practice piano, etc. The second change was that Mark was helping his son with his studying. Sandy explained, "We told you at one point that neither of us could help Seth with his Hebrew, but (when) he (Mark) looked it over, he realized that he could."

- S. He catches me, you know.
- Mo. He can recognize errors. Whereas I can't since I never had any Hebrew. It really has made a big difference. And now he's up on the bimah [stage] practicing and he really is good.
- Fa. ...If he says it helped, it helped, but...
- S. Also every time she (the Cantor) puts me down (was critical of him)...
- Fa. We propped him up again. Reassured him (that he'll) do fine...
- Mo. She does it (criticizes) so the kids don't let up.
- Fa. I said to him last night. "You got to make sure you practice every night, like an athlete. If you let up, you'll lose the edge and you can't lose the edge." (to Seth) Right?

If the first two factors that made the difference in Seth's readiness were sources of pride, the third was not. Against Sandy's better judgement, Seth (and his tutor) had decided that Seth would read less of the haftorah in Hebrew than was originally planned. He would still do the original Torah piece and would lead more of the prayers, but he would do less of the haftorah.

- Mo. ...Seth had to decide "how to handle the service." I had a difference of opinion with him. He chose to do it the way he's doing it--to read less of the haftorah. I wanted him to read more...He chose not to.
- S. To me it feels like, you know, who's gonna know how short my haftorah is because they won't have it in front of them. But if I do a lot in the prayer book that's right in front of them, they'll see how much I'm doing.
- Fa. Well, I think that was part of the pressure on Seth...Does it make any difference if he does 8 lines of something or 15 lines of something? Sandy goes by comparison. (to Sandy) Am I right? Maybe he's not doing enough.
- Mo. I didn't want him to short change himself. I didn't want him to hear from anyone that he wasn't doing enough.
- Fa. Well I think he's doing (OK). But it was his decision.
- Mo. An important decision.
- J. (Attempting a reframe that emphasized growth) Well,



he's getting to a point where he's going to be making more and more decisions by himself.

Mo. Well he made it. I certainly didn't force my (opinion) on him.

We left this topic as I asked: "If you had to worry about one thing what are you most worried about?" Both parents agreed that they were most concerned that the service go well. (Since they had confidence in the caterers and band leaders they'd hired, they felt that the party was out of their control.)

Mo. I just want the service to be nice and memorable. That everybody will know what to do, where to go. I know Seth will be OK. I've already heard him, but coordination.

S. What do you mean about coordination?

Mo. Oh I mean when to step back and when to go to the ark.

Fa. (Don't worry). They'll tell you.

At this point, in the most extended statement he'd yet made, Seth revealed to Sandy that one thing he didn't like about their Temple was the emphasis placed on such details as where to stand and when to move.

S. Mom, you know, a little thing about our Temple that I don't like so much as other Temples is that (in the others) it's not a big deal if you step down wrong or if you say something wrong. I don't know. I just noticed at other people's Bar Mitzvahs that a lot of people (make mistakes) and it's not like a big deal.

Mo. Well it probably isn't at ours either but when you're practicing for it, it's a big deal because they don't want you to make mistakes.

It was soon after this exchange that I realized the amount of coordination Sandy and Seth were referring to. The parents were not

simply going to be called up to do a reading and then return to their seats in the congregation. Instead they and Cindy would be sitting up on the stage with Seth for the entire service. This was an arrangement I had never seen before.

Mo. Yes, we'll be up there for the (entire) Bar Mitzvah.

J. Oh, is that right? Every synagogue does it so differently.

Mo. We'll be there. The whole time. Cindy is reading a prayer and Cindy and I open and close the ark and Mark undresses and dresses the Torah [removes and replaces the velvet cover that encases the scrolls]. And we just stay there. This is different. We went to a friend's child's Bar Mitzvah recently and he just came up to do his haftorah. He and his parents did none of the service.

From discussing the service we returned to discussing the party-- and Sandy's preparations. Recently she had been waking up at 5 am and making lists and writing poems. Proudly, Mark told Sandy to show me the poems she'd written for the candlelighting ceremony. Sandy modestly called them "little ditties." They were short limericks that Seth would read as he called each person up to light a candle. They were written from Seth's perspective--as if he'd written them, but it was assumed that everyone would know that Sandy had done them, especially as she had done something similar for a friend's birthday.

More than anything, Mark and Sandy wanted the party to be fun (for both the children and the adults). One "extra" they were doing to ensure the fun was hiring a special photographer from Boston who came to such parties with a case of rock star costumes that people could dress up in and be photographed wearing. The Goldsteins had

seen this at a Bar Mitzvah they'd attended last year and were excited about having this feature for their party.

When I asked who in the family was most excited about the upcoming Bar Mitzvah, Seth volunteered that he was really looking forward to it, but then Sandy added "My father is one of the most excited. It's very important to him. I sent him his aliyah and he laughed. 'Do you think I don't know it? I've known it since I'm 10.'" In contrast, Mark recounted how he and his brother were talking (on the phone) just the other day about how little feeling their parents have for this.

Fa. They will also not totally approve of the party.

J. Why?

Fa. Because they'll think we over did it...(spent too much)  
Oh, I'm not saying they won't like it. They'll enjoy themselves, that's not what I'm concerned about. I just know they won't totally approve of it. But you live your own life.

In talking about disapproval, Mark indicated that there was one area of "contention"--how much time Sandy was spending finding clothes for the various parts of the weekend. "It's not the spending of money, because G-d knows we're spending money, but I just consider it an overemphasis on dressing up for it. I can't relate to it." Although Sandy dismissed Mark's complaint by saying that this was his attitude about shopping for clothes in general, not just for the Bar Mitzvah, it seemed to me that this really had been a major point of friction between them. On a lighter note, Sandy said that Seth's suit had almost been a major problem as the tailor had done a "horrendous"

job. But they waited "in case Seth would grow anymore" and then had it refitted and it came out fine. When I asked Seth if it was special, he answered that it was "an accountant's suit" and everyone laughed at the image of the little accountant. I think the identification with his father's profession was not completely accidental.

As a prelude to asking directly if I was expected at the party, I commented that it sounded as if they were really all set. Sandy agreed and pre-empted my question by saying, "So you'll be joining us for the service Saturday morning?"

J. Oh yes.

Mo. And the kiddish after?

J. Oh yes, as much as I can.

Fa. You'll see the whole family in action.

J. I'm looking forward to it. As much as I can come. Will there be time for me to talk to your parents?

Fa. Oh yes. My mother will talk to anyone. (Strangers) in the supermarket. Yes at the kiddish, I'm sure.

My premonition about not having received an invitation in the mail had been correct. Very graciously but clearly, Sandy and Mark were telling me that I was welcomed at the service, but I was not invited to the party. Surprised and disappointed, I accepted their invitation to the service, but with care pushed a little for "as much as I can come." With deliberate graciousness I commented that I'd be looking forward to seeing the video of the party. It was an awkward moment. It ended quickly, however, as Mark began a very long statement summarizing the experience so far.



Fa. I can see that it's been educational to the whole family. The first time the kids learned anything about what a Bar Mitzvah is about, what you do...But it does tend to focus on doing something as a family. We consider it a family project [emphasis added]. Everybody's had some involvement in it. From Cindy to everyone. And then it goes beyond because we're drawing in everybody from the rest of our family--all the cousins and everyone so it does put a tremendous focus on family that you tend to forget about. So if you think about ritual and family dynamics, it's just focused on bringing the family a little more together--for an event. It's a milestone in Seth's life. I can't say I have a depth of religious feeling that some other people might have about it. I don't think anybody in our family does. But we do have some. As a family even, for us that's the biggest event...you (Judy) made an interesting point that I've been thinking about and I agree with you. That people do tend to go about this process the same way they do other things in their lives. And I've been thinking about it. When we do anything like planning a trip, essentially we do it the same way we did this. It really hasn't been any different. Maybe that's why we haven't really felt any tremendous panic about the whole thing. Because it's just an extended doing of what we always do. (To Sandy who looks like she wants to speak) Go ahead.

Mo. We've had big parties in the house.

Fa. And we work on it together.

It was as if he'd wanted to give me a gift, to say something that he thought I'd like to hear after having somehow taken something away. I felt this even more strongly when I reminded them a few minutes later that in the beginning of the process they had said that there might be questions they wouldn't answer.

J. What had you been expecting?

Mo. I didn't know what kinds of questions you'd be asking and I just wanted to cover myself.

J. It seems that there is so little to cover up.

Fa. (to Mo.) There haven't been any questions you didn't want to answer (were there)?

Mo. No.

- Fa. Well, I don't know. It all depends on who you talk to. Some other person asking the same questions as you asked, might not have gotten as forthcoming answers...We didn't have trouble answering your questions, possibly because of the way you presented them, so that's a compliment to you.
- J. Thank you. My worry now is what to do with all I'm gathering. I hope a pattern will emerge.
- Fa. Oh, it will, after you sit down and start analyzing-- you'll see.

Sandy too, tried to give me something in return for what she'd taken: "We are very excited...This is a very special time. Very different than any we've experienced."

As the interview ended, Sandy and Mark shared one last worry with me. They were worried about the "let down" after the excitement. Sandy explained: "This is something that will be difficult for everybody. This is a very big concern of mine."

To allay that feeling and to keep the excitement "going a little while longer," they were planning to go (as a family) to New York for the following weekend.

Trying to comfort them, I reminded them that then they'll have all of the pictures and the video to pore over. Sandy wouldn't be comforted. "But I've talked to friends who've been very depressed. It hadn't lasted long, just a few days, but almost like a post-partum depression. So (even though) I'm aware of it...that doesn't mean it's not going to happen."

#### Postscript to Interview #2

If Sandy was worried about a future depression, I had a more immediate depression to worry about--my own. "What would it mean for

my research not to attend the family's celebration?" How could I have not made my needs known? I had mentioned my attending the Bar Mitzvah as part of the research when I first spoke with them. But I should have been more clear, more direct. The further away from the house I drove, the more my agitation grew. I had allowed my need to reduce the awkwardness they (and I) were feeling to overtake my need to "collect data" at the party. By the time I reached home, I was determined to correct my error. Although I had "never in my life" gone (or even wanted to go) where I was not invited, for the sake of my identity as researcher, I would chance further discomfort (theirs and mine) and risk further rejection. I would call them back and ask directly if they had meant for me not to come or had merely surmised that I was interested only in the "religious ceremony." Sandy answered the phone and I began by saying that I had two questions, one straightforward and the other, a bit awkward:

- J. Would it be OK if I came to the Friday night service?  
 Mo. Of course it would. It's just the regular Friday night service.  
 J. That's fine. I like to see what the synagogue is like before the Bar Mitzvah. The second question has to do with Saturday night. I was wondering if you and Mark hadn't included me deliberately or did you think I wasn't interested? Either way is fine, but I felt I had to ask. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."  
 Mo. (Gasp.) Oh, you've taken me off guard.  
 J. Please don't feel bad, I just felt I had to ask. But I can understand perfectly if you decided not to have me there.  
 Mo. Do you want an honest answer?  
 J. Please, yes.  
 Mo. It's very expensive.  
 J. I realize that. I am perfectly prepared to pay for what it would cost. My research shouldn't cost you money!

That would be no trouble for me at all.  
 Mo. Let me call you back. What's your number?

10-15 minutes later.

Mo. I'm really sorry, but it's not just the money. Mark and I really didn't think you were interested in the party. The service you are welcome to, but we really don't want our guests to be...[exposed to your scrutiny]. You can see the video. [Recalling the way out that I had given them.]  
 J. Please, you don't need to say anymore. I understand completely. Please don't feel bad.  
 Mo. It's just that some parts are private.  
 J. Sandy, I really do understand. I just needed to make sure, but I really do understand.

I hung up with a new understanding of the cliché "smarting with embarrassment." I was sorry I'd asked, and sorry I'd been rejected, and sorry I'd made them feel bad. My only solace was my mantra: "It's all information."

It was information not only about the system I was observing, but about the observer and her interacting with the observed. On one level, this was simply another example of this family's clarity of boundaries. Sandy and Mark were capable of going on vacations without the children, of saying no to their parents, and of saying no to me!

On another level, their decision spoke to what about the upcoming event was most sacred to them: not the religious service, but the gathering of their friends and family in celebration. It was that part of the experience that they would keep private and unexposed.

In reference to the researcher-researched interaction, I think this experience speaks to the mistaken notion that the researcher is



somehow removed from (or above) the experiences she is observing and therefore exempt from the rules that define social exchanges between equal partners in an evolving experience. In the interview, I intuitively followed the rules that govern "mature and polite" behavior among equals in a social setting. By the time I got home, I had convinced myself that the rules for the researcher were sufficiently different such that I had not only the right, but the obligation to push the system even if it caused discomfort to the very people who were allowing me into their lives (with no expectation of gain). Although it would be naive, if not dishonest, to pretend that there are no differences between the interactional rules governing social exchanges among peers and those governing participant observer research, it is a mistake to assume that they are so different that violating codes of politeness will gain the researcher more data.

Prior to this phone call, I had succeeded in winning the trust of an initially distrusting family. I had, by my behavior, convinced them that interacting with me would not be hurtful or even uncomfortable. In fact, they were beginning to enjoy the experience. This phone call and my request that came out of a voice that was not my own, set me back with this family a great deal. Not only could they no longer trust me as much as they had before, but my behavior with them and my thoughts about them could not now be unaffected by my feelings of rejection and embarrassment. I didn't know how all of this would play itself out, but I knew it would have an effect.

Analysis of the Dynamics of the Goldstein System  
in the Planning Period

In this family where the religious intensity of the Bar Mitzvah was minimal and the developmental pressures within the nuclear system were similarly mild, the major axis of tension was between the adult subsystem and their parental subsystem. For almost fifteen years, Sandy and Mark lived with the unaddressed tension between their two sets of parents. Not only did Sandy feel sad about her parents' ongoing disappointment in not having "close in-laws," but the memory of intense discomfort at their wedding was vivid for both of them. Neither wanted to repeat the experience at the Bar Mitzvah, but both thought it was inevitable. With the event still/only a year away, the pressure had escalated to the point where it was no longer tolerable. Uncharacteristically Mark intervened with his parents and convinced them to visit Sandy's parents. The pressure of the upcoming ritual during which the two sets of parents would necessarily be brought together again, enabled him to move beyond his normal range in relationship to his parents and allowed for movement within that generational level that reduced tension throughout the entire three generational system.

It is interesting that although his parents were ready for movement in relation to their peers, they were not ready to move in relation to their parental generation. Despite Mark's requests, Mother would not capitulate and bring her mother to her great grandchild's Bar Mitzvah. It is interesting, too, that this sequence

resulted in sufficient pressure such that Mark's younger brother also moved beyond his normal range in relation to both his parents and his older brother. He, too, intervened with his parents, but on behalf of his brother. And what's more, Mark let him take the pressure and appreciated the fact that he had. In addition, the Bar Mitzvah further enhanced the closeness between these brothers as it allowed yet another (special) opportunity for their children to be together with their cousins. This increased closeness is a valued and an explicit outcome of the event.

Although less explicitly in preparation for the Bar Mitzvah, Sandy's visiting her parents alone for the first time in fifteen years was clearly connected to the upcoming rite of passage. Sandy, as daughter (not as wife or mother), went home to see if her parents were still capable of functioning on their own or if she (and her sister) would have to initiate a different arrangement. On one level, the timing of the visit was pragmatic. Although she was worried about her parents health in general, she was particularly worried about their being well enough to travel to the Bar Mitzvah. If increased assistance was necessary to maintaining their health, now was the time to look into it. But on a more primal level, the ritual marking her first child's coming of age was also marking her own. Alone in Florida, Sandy spent "quality time" with her aging parents and at some intuitive level was preparing to deal with a future that would inevitably involve some painful caretaking reversals.

The Bar Mitzvah, more than anything else, was an event to

celebrate the family. Blessed with emotional, financial, and situational good fortune, Sandy and Mark were bringing together all of their family and all of their many friends to have a good time, to enjoy the party, and to celebrate their good fortune, not only as a wholesome and loving family, but one whose first born had reached a "milestone" and deserved to be commended for it. As Mark put it: "It's a family project and it's being done the way they do all such projects--together."



The Sheinman Family: "Baruch Hashem"

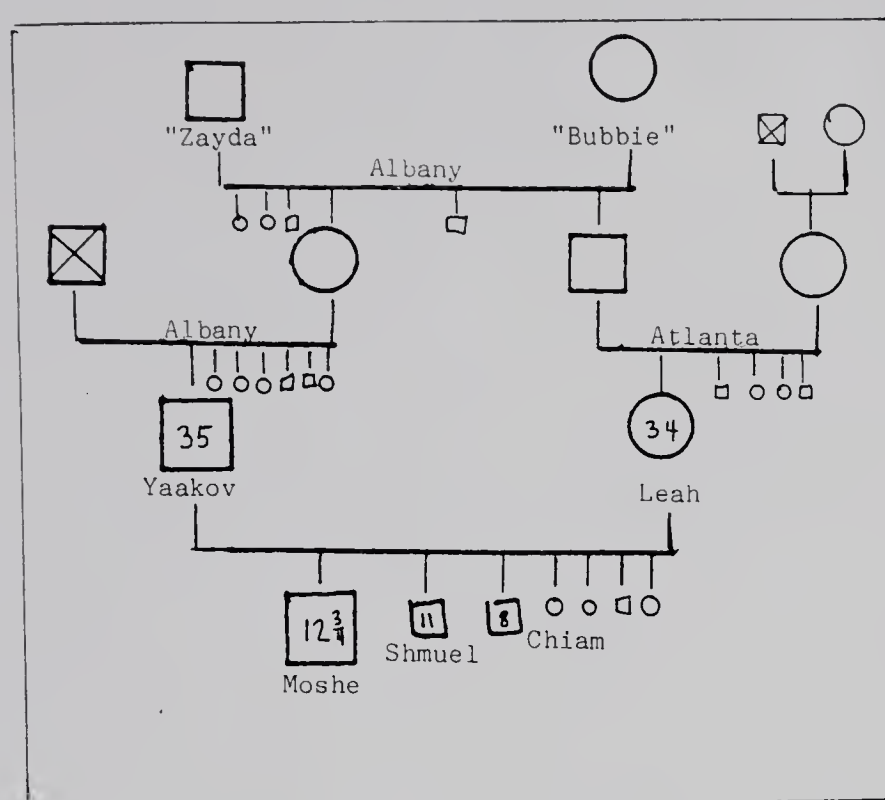


Figure 4.3 Sheiman Family Map  
(See Appendix B for key)

Interview #1 - 2 1/2 Months Prior to the Bar Mitzvah:  
Mother, Father, and Bar Mitzvah Boy

I was very nervous and very excited as I knocked, for the first  
<sup>1</sup>  
time, on this family's door. They were Lubavitcher Hasidim and I was  
about to enter not just another family, but another world. It was a  
world that I knew nothing and everything about. Having grown up as a  
first-generation Jew in a relatively observant home, my connection to  
orthodox Judaism was early and deep. Having become, by now, almost  
totally secularized, that connection had been severely severed. What  
remains is an inchoate attachment to, and affinity for, Jewish

tradition. On a purely emotional level, I felt close to the people I was about to meet. In every other way, we were absolute strangers.

The bumper sticker slogan on the Sheinman's front door announced the foreignness of the territory I was about to enter: "We want (the) Moshiach [Messiah] now." The Sheinmans believe that the Messianic era is imminent and that the Messiah could well appear within their lifetime. He will bring with him, a world of peace and holiness. The Sheinman's devote their lives to preparing the world for such a transformation. Every single mitzvah [good deed, commandment] they perform brings his coming that much closer.

A young boy with big, soft eyes and horn-rimmed glasses peered out from behind the curtain before opening the door. A yarmulke [skull cap] covered his closely cropped hair and longer sideburns. Tzitzes [fringes] hung out from beneath his striped polo shirt. [These fringes attached to an undergarment are likened to a string wrapped around one's finger as a reminder--in this case, a reminder to follow the commandments.] Behind him on the stairs sat a younger boy identically dressed and identically reticent. Before he could say a word, a young, heavy-set woman appeared and both boys vanished. At first I thought she was the mother. "Leah?" I asked. "No, I'm Devorah." "Are you her daughter?" "No, she'll be down in a minute. Have a seat." She pointed to the living room and then vanished as quickly as had the boys. (I was later to discover that she was from the Midwest and was here teaching at the Hasidic school and living for a short time with the Sheinmans.)

The big living room was sparsely furnished with an old sofa, a tattered recliner chair, and a coffee table covered with Hebrew books and newspapers. Thread-bare carpeting covered the floor. A few pictures hung on the walls, all of them of Jewish subjects. The most striking feature of the room was the mantel over the fireplace. Every inch of this shelf was covered with family snapshots displayed in frames of varying sizes and shapes. There were portraits of individuals and of various family gatherings. My first impression was that they were overwhelmingly of old men with big beards and of lots and lots of young children and babies. Hanging directly above these little pictures crowded on the mantle piece, was a large oil portrait of an old, very distinguished looking Rabbi with a long white beard and black hat. It was a portrait of "der Rebbe," world leader of the Lubavitchers. And it was the focal point of the room.

From upstairs came sounds of a mother bathing any number of children. She was telling one to get dry and another to get into the tub. A baby was crying and a couple of other children were chattering to each other. I felt that I had come at a terrible time and that I was another headache that this woman just didn't need. As I stood looking at the pictures, Father, a tall man, with a full beard, deep voice, and wire rimmed glasses, appeared from another room. He was dressed in black trousers, a rumpled white shirt, tzitzes, and black hat partly covering his yarmulke. As he'd just come in from working late, he'd taken off his jacket, but had forgotten to remove his hat. "My wife will be with you in a minute," he said, and then left the

room. I knew enough about Hasidic protocol not to extend my hand in greeting or to begin a conversation. I would not have expected him to stay with me alone in the livingroom. As he left, though, the younger of the two boys returned. He sat down silently on the floor and began playing with little gold squares that he threw up in the air and caught as if they were jacks. I engaged him easily. Chaim is 7 1/2 years old, friendly and outgoing. When I asked him about the pictures, he pulled a hassock over to the mantel, climbed up on it and began telling me who the people were and on what occasions the pictures had been taken. I was impressed with his knowledge of extended family relationships and his explanation of the ceremonial occasions represented.

"Is Chaim giving you a good tour?" Mother had appeared behind us. As she came forward to greet me, I was struck not only by her warmth, but by her composure. The chaos of children and bathtubs was no where in evidence. Dressed in a wrap-around skirt and cardigan sweater, Leah looked relaxed and rested. Her stylishly cut wig [all married Hasidic woman wear wigs] flattered her full, sweet face. She wore no makeup but had on a necklace of flattened wooden beads. I immediately apologized for imposing when she surely had her hands full, but she quickly and convincingly dismissed the idea of my visit being an imposition. Taking care of six children was something she was obviously used to, and (as I was later to learn) so was she used to answering questions about her life. The Sheinmans were missionaries sent by the Rebbe to promote Hasidism. They often spoke to



individuals and to large audiences. Father is a Rabbi and Mother is a teacher.

We spent some more time with the pictures as Mother added detail to Chaim's descriptions, and I used the opportunity to indicate that the bride in one of the pictures was someone I'd met once at a conference on feminism and anti-Semitism. She was a friend of the family and a baalah teshuvah [a Jewish convert to Hasidism]. I made a point of this acquaintance in order to gain credibility and establish myself as a researcher friendly to, rather than critical of, the Hasidic way of life.

As Leah went into the kitchen to prepare the tea she'd offered me, I gave her the pineapple and can of cashews (with its label marked "kosher") that I had brought for them. I used this offering to further join with her as I explained that I would have brought something home-baked but that my kitchen wasn't kosher enough. She was surprised by the gift and graciously thanked me saying that "As hosts, we should provide." She returned for a minute to say that I would probably be more comfortable (taking notes) if we sat in the dining room. Before she returned to the kitchen, she handed me a couple of books from the coffee table. She said that they would give me "a sense of where we're coming from." She pointed to one of the books and said she'd written an article in it. A minute after she left the room, Devorah brought three or four little children in pajamas down from upstairs. They were all shining clean with wet hair combed smooth. I could only catch a glimpse of them as they passed on

their way to the kitchen. The littlest girl was clutching a cabbage patch doll. As I listened to the sounds of goodnight kisses and easy laughter with the baby, I went into the dining room and set up my tape recorder on the large table covered with a white linen tablecloth and decorated by a small vase with a few carnations. Leaning against the vase was a snapshot of a young woman holding a new baby. A toddler stood next to her. (It was Leah's sister, and her son resembled his cousins remarkably.) Besides the six chairs, a side board with several sets of ornate Sabbath candelabras was the only other piece of furniture crowded into the relatively small room. On the grate covering the radiator were several piles of large Hebrew texts. Another picture of the Rebbe--this time with the sparkle in his eyes most pronounced--hung on one of the walls. On another, was a framed photograph of a younger rabbi with black hat and full beard. (It was a picture of Father's father who'd passed away six years ago.) And on the third wall, was an artist's rendition of a handsome brick building in a city. (It was 770, Parkway in New York, the home of the Rebbe and the world center of Lubavitcher life.)

As I sat waiting for the family to join me, I saw the children go up again with Devorah and heard them from upstairs singing their bedtime prayers. I used the time to look through the books Leah had given me. The one with her article talked about the meaning of marriage in Hasidic thought and practice. The word comes from the root Kaddush [to sanctify] and within this sancity are two kinds of love--the physical and the platonic. In Hasidic marriage, the

pleasures of friendship and the pleasures of the body are equally important.

Carrying in a tray with tea cups and sliced pineapple, Leah joined me and sat down at last. Her husband and son (Moshe--the one who'd opened the door) followed shortly. My introductory speech was interrupted briefly as another small but older boy, whom I hadn't yet seen, worriedly brought his mother's pocketbook to her in order for her to write a check that he needed to bring to school the next day. Everyone watched as Mother wrote the check, handed it to Shmuel and told him--as if for the fifth time--to go up and take his bath. "No, it is too late to do anymore homework tonight. You'll have to finish it in the morning." There was no question about who was in charge of the household and child-rearing matters.

As we began the interview, there was equally no question about who was in charge of explaining Jewish law and the family's adherence to it. Seated at the head of the table (with me on his left) his wife on his right and his son next to her, Father began talking to me with more ease and directness than I had expected. What he wanted to make clear for me from the beginning was that in the life of the Hasidic Jew, the Bar Mitzvah was "not the same kind of trauma" it is for other people.

Fa. It is simply another stage of life. It is not the apex of religious experience that it is for other people...In an observant family, it's...part of a continuum. On a graph it would be (just) a little blip...nothing more... A lot of it in truth, how should I say, really doesn't have substantial educational value. It's important...that he learn to read from the

Torah, but not only for the day of his Bar Mitzvah, but because he has to know how to read Torah as part of being a well rounded, educated Jew...So this is as good a time as any to teach him the skill.

Decision-making. From the beginning, Father assumed the role of teacher and I, that of student. Implicitly, they were not only appropriate but useful persona that allowed me to be simultaneously respectful and inquisitive and allowed him to interact with me easily. Mother's role in the triad was that of co-teacher or substitute teacher. Extremely knowledgeable and equally articulate, Mother not only supplemented her husband's lessons, but carried on effortlessly in his absence. As the Rabbi was called to the phone quite often, the Rebitzn [Rabbi's wife] would pick up and complete his interrupted thought without hesitation. Although she generally deferred to her husband in initiating an explanation, there was no sense that she felt inhibited in any way. The affection and camaraderie between them was palpable as they referred with obvious pride to each other as "my husband" or "my wife." Obvious, too, was their pride in their son, in their family, and in their way of life. They felt extremely and completely blessed by G-d and at every possible occasion thanked Him for their blessings. (They do this through scores of ritual acts and prayers throughout the day; from the time they wake up until the moment they go to sleep, there is a prayer for everything.)

One phrase that epitomizes this thankfulness is Baruch Hashem [Blessed is the Name (of God)]. It can often appear three or four times in one sentence. No ounce of good fortune is taken for granted.



Everything that is good comes from G-d and every Hasid knows it. From the time they can speak, the Hasidic child answers the question/greeting "How are you?" with Baruch Hashem. Meaning: "I am well--thanks to G-d." Having learned as a child, a shtetl version of that phrase (we were never allowed to talk about any of our good fortune unless we said "Thank G-d" or said some prophylactic Yiddish phrase to ward off the "evil eye)," I found myself--by the end of my interviews with the Sheinmans--almost saying Baruch Hashem myself. My attraction to this family was strong and it had to do with more than just the usual pull of "client families" or "research subjects."

With Father's warning that I might be disappointed in finding that it was not the monumental event that he thought I was expecting, I began asking questions about Moshe's Bar Mitzvah and about the family.

The families. Leah and Yaakov Sheinman have been married fourteen years. They have seven children ranging in age from twelve and three-quarters to two. Since last year, their oldest son had been living at the Yeshiva [school] in Albany which Father's parents founded. He was home now for the winter break. Leah and Yaakov are both the eldest of six or seven siblings. Both are the children and grandchildren of distinguished Rabbis--and Leah and Yaakov are first cousins. Leah's father and Yaakov's mother were brother and sister. Leah and Yaakov were married in Atlanta where Leah's parents live and where such marriages are legal. Like Leah and Yaakov, many of their siblings are Lubavitcher missionaries and are living all over the

world, sent by the Rebbe to spread Hasidic teachings. All of the aunts and uncles and all of their cousins and second cousins and third cousins who are able, will be coming to the Bar Mitzvah. So too, will their shared Bubbe and Zayda (grandmother and grandfather), Moshe's great grandparents. The only living grandparent not coming is Leah's maternal grandmother. As she is too frail to travel, they will "bring the Bar Mitzvah to her" in New York when Moshe has his first aliyah [blessing of the Torah] at the Rebbe's minyan [congregation] on the morning after his thirteenth birthday, a week before the more elaborate celebration in Massachusetts. Emphasizing his insistence that the Bar Mitzvah is not a religious or educational pinnacle, Father elaborated on Moshe's education. "...If at the age of 12 3/4...he doesn't know yet how to read a haftorah flawlessly, then we have been terribly deficient in our (responsibilities as parents)." And then somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "I think the most intense thing about it (this Bar Mitzvah) is arranging for the sixty or seventy odd members of the family who will be coming for the weekend (and will have to be housed and fed from sundown Friday to Sunday afternoon). So as a religious experience per sé, I hope you won't be disappointed."

Before I could respond, Mother was telling me what upcoming event, in her opinion, was going to be a religious highlight: On the following Wednesday morning, her son was going to start putting on tefillin [phylacteries, the small leather box and strap device that religious men affix to their heads and left arms respectively for weekday morning prayers]. "As a religious experience this Wednesday,

I wouldn't say heavier, but even more of a milestone. For two months he'll do it as practice so when he actually does it as a Bar Mitzvah, he'll know what he's doing. He doesn't say the barrucha [prayer] so it doesn't actually count. But on the other hand, he is putting on tefillin, so...(voice trailing off as she looks proudly and lovingly at her first child who will so soon be donning the symbol of adult manhood)." I pushed down the lump in my throat as I said something to indicate that I understood some of what she was feeling, and our eyes connected knowingly as mothers of maturing young sons. Leah went on to explain that they were keeping Moshe home from school an extra few days "so that his father can show him (how to put on the tefillin)." She was very much looking forward to seeing her son in tefillin for the first time. When I asked Moshe if he had his tefillin yet, Father answered that his brother in Israel was putting a set into the mail and "supposedly" it would arrive on time. If not, they would make other arrangements. "He's that kind of brother, I mean I love him very, very much, but logistically..." With good humor, Father wasn't counting on his brother's getting them out on time.

As Mother left to answer the phone, Father went on to explain that there was yet another reason for keeping Moshe home from school a few extra days.

Fa. In addition to (reading) the Torah and the haftorah and of course acting as the Chazen [cantor leading the entire service], Moshe will have to recite two discourses. One, a talmudic discourse on a subject in the laws of tefillin and (the other) a Hasidic discourse on the spiritual element of tefillin. And both are rather heavy. ...I would anticipate that 90-

95% of the people at the Bar Mitzvah will not be able to follow everything he's going to be saying, but it's the other 5 or 10% that it's important for. And for him.

J. For him.

Fa. For him it's important that he's able to learn it and to display a level of knowledge that is important in terms of setting a standard for what he has to be able to do in the future [emphasis added].

Moshe is staying home so that his father can help him begin learning the Hasidic discourse and can begin writing for him the Talmudic discourse.

Not being familiar with any of this tradition, I had to ask many questions in order to understand that unlike the usual "Bar Mitzvah speeches," these discourses were decidedly not written by the boy himself. Instead, they are discourses developed by previous generations and the boy has to "learn it, study it, understand it, and deliver it"--in Yiddish, of course. The ability to memorize and recite these complex philosophical discourses is indication in itself of knowledge and accomplishment. The Hasidic discourse was written by the previous Rebbe at least eighty years ago and "because it was a Rebbe who said it, it's repeated word for word." Moshe's father and his father before him recited this same discourse at their Bar Mitzvahs. The Talmudic discourse is different however. It is, as Leah (who'd returned from the phone) explained, "an idea" that gets developed, not recited word for word. And rarely is it the boy who develops the idea. Instead that is the father's responsibility. And so Moshe's father would be writing this pilpul for his son. He would base his writing on the pilpul that his own father had, in fact,



written at the age of thirteen. "But this," said Father, "was something extraordinary. They hadn't realized that he (my father) was a prodigy." Moshe would probably be delivering the Hasidic discourse, referred to as the mimer, first at his grandmother's house on the day of his birthday and then at the luncheon after the Bar Mitzvah service. The pilpul, he would recite at the party on Sunday afternoon.

Bar Mitzvah plans. These details had not yet been worked out. Neither had many of the others. What they did know was that the Bar Mitzvah ceremony would be held in the Hasidic school where they could put up all of the Hasidic guests. As orthodox Jews are prohibited from riding on the Sabbath, and as many of the guests were unable to walk the distance from the Sheinman's house to the school, Leah and Yaakov had to find a way of housing them so that they wouldn't have to travel. Renting cots and using classrooms as bedrooms for the weekend was the solution they had recently come up with. The younger men and the older boys would walk to and sleep at the Sheinman's house. The school's kosher kitchen would also be available for preparing the Friday night meal, the Saturday breakfast, luncheon, and dinner. By Saturday night, the guests could move to various Hasidic houses and then drive to the party which was to be held in the social hall of a larger orthodox synagogue on Sunday afternoon. Between 200 and 250 guests were expected at the party. Many of them will not have come to the service on Saturday because they were not able to give up the entire weekend and of course could not travel just for the service.

When I asked about catering for this large group, Father laughed and said "that's a whole other story."

Mo. We're catering the Bar Mitzvah ourselves.

J. You are?!

Mo. Yeh, we (with a big smile at her husband) are doing the cooking.

J. (to Father) You cook?

Mo. Yes. His cholen (a traditional Sabbath stew) is much better than mine.

Fa. Well, it was a decision we made purely based on economics.

Mo. Not sentimental value.

When I lamented all of the work involved, they (unconvincingly) minimized the effort by explaining that they were used to organizing large holiday and educational events and they'd also have help from family and friends. But when I commiserated with Moshe about having to perform even at the party, Father did not minimize the effort. He explained that in fact, "There has to be some spiritual content to the party. Oh, there's no question, he will be the star. That's what the party is for, to provide a setting for him to deliver the pilpul." When I made some comment about the difference between this party and the more typical Bar Mitzvah parties, Father and Mother both smiled knowingly and proudly.

With the plans for the Bar Mitzvah explained, we went on to talk about the family. As I struggled to include all of their many relatives on one small page of genogram, Mother and Father pointed to each of the family members in their wedding album that Moshe had brought down at their request. With a mixture of love, humor, and reverence, they each told me detailed stories about past generations.

Leah was clearly the keeper of the facts. When I commented on how much she seemed to know about their history, she said she was hoping to become the family archivist. I was surprised to discover that she was not a first generation Jew. Her parents had been born in America. They live in Atlanta where Leah was born. Between the ages of ten and nineteen, she lived with her grandmother in New York where she attended and then taught at the Hasidic School for girls. At her grandmother's house she learned to speak Yiddish, the first language of most Hasidic homes.

Father's parents came from Poland. Grandfather's Bar Mitzvah was "right before the war."

J. (to Father) You knew a lot about your father's Bar Mitzvah?

Fa. No, my mother told me about it. I never heard it from my father. My father never talked about...I mean my father just wasn't a talker. Period (chuckle).

Mother corroborated this as she pointed out that she had originally known her husband's father as her uncle. This led me to ask about how they decided to marry. Father joked about arranged marriages and Mother chided him saying that if he wasn't careful I might take him seriously. As I was later to learn, there was more truth in his joking than I was led to believe. It was the Rebbe who had suggested the match and it seemed like a good idea to everyone.

Here Moshe (with deadpan humor) said "I'm a second cousin to myself." As we all laughed, Mother and Father went on to point out that they were both first children and that Moshe was the first

grandchild and great grandchild in this enormous and very close family.

- J. Who was Moshe named after?  
 Fa. The previous Rebbe.  
 J. Is that the tradition to name the first child after the Rebbe?  
 Fa. No, I wasn't named Moshe and he had already passed away. My younger brother's name is Moshe.  
 Mo. It's not always the first child, but there is a tradition in general to name children after great zaddikim [righteous men]. Especially one you've had personal contact with.  
 J. More so than after a relative?  
 Fa. No, not more than a close relative. But there was no need (at the time).  
 Mo. We were fortunate, we had our parents.  
 Fa. And grandparents.

We continued with the genogram and talked about who they expected would come and who could not--because of distance or ill health. At this point, we were interrupted by Shmuel (still not bathed) who had another urgent question for his mother. The Bar Mitzvah's delineating function was apparent as Father admonished his eleven year old second son: "When your Bar Mitzvah comes, then you can sit at the table too." "Right," said mother, "and now you'll get into bed this minute."

In talking about how so many of the family were in different countries, I asked how the Rebbe chose people to go and for how long they stayed.

- J. Do you stay indefinitely?  
 Fa. If things work out. You don't have to. But one hopes that one can stay indefinitely.  
 Mo. You go with the expectation that it'll work.  
 Fa. Right. You go with the expectation that this is where you'll be. ...There's no corporate ladder that one



climbs...There's (only) an internal climbing...There's no moving higher by moving to a more prestigious place. That's not the way it works.

J. Does the Rebbe send only Rabbis?

Fa. Whoever wants to be sent. You have to want it. (Some people find their own places and the Rebbe just approves, but our family has been fortunate in that most of us have been sent by the Rebbe. 'I want you to go (here or there).' For us this is very important. He feels confident enough with us...

In talking about the size of the family, Father chuckled as he described Greatgrandmother's reluctance to say out loud how many there are and explained that his grandfather does do a count each year and on Simchat Torah [a joyous holiday commemorating the completion of the reading of the Torah] donates \$18.00 [the numerical symbol for "life"] to charity for each of his offspring. (Laughing proudly) "It's a lot of money! For the next few minutes, we talked about Father's Bar Mitzvah which he said he remembered quite well. Mother joked that she remembered it too (as one of the cousins who'd attended) and (to Moshe) "He did very well!"

A knock on the front door reminded me of how late it was. The Hasidic man who entered looked mildly surprised as he saw us around the table with the tape recorder in front of us. Father urged him to make himself comfortable for a few minutes until we were through. The last few minutes were spent describing the rest of the wedding pictures. As Leah pointed to her young husband reciting "the wedding mimer" [the traditional discourse delivered by the groom], I asked father if he was nervous in that picture.

Fa. If you ask me if I can remember my wedding, then I can tell you unequivocally, no.

J. (laughing) You do look a little pale (in the picture)

Fa. Well, I was fasting.

J. Fasting?

Fa. On the day of the wedding, the groom fasts...to insure sobriety...so there's no question whether the contract is valid.

Father went on to describe Jewish thought on marriage and mentioned that each of the many Rabbis in the family said a different blessing. This reminded me to ask about aliyas, "Is it going to be difficult to decide who gets an aliya?" "No. Not really. Everyone knows that there are only seven aliyas and the Bar Mitzvah boy has to get one and of course the grandfather gets one, and...with the rest, we go by the oldest to the youngest." Looking for possible points of tension, I asked further if the tradition in the family was for everyone to try to make the event pleasant or were there some relatives who were likely to get upset if something wasn't done according to their wishes. Their answer was a playful bantering back and forth about their respective families that caused me to think that perhaps there were a couple of relatives who might add tension to the event, but that in general they were not worried. And besides, it wasn't something they wanted to talk about. Leah: "My (only) concern about keeping people happy...is because I want my mother to be happy...and she wants everybody to be happy." What makes them most anxious now? Mother: "The logistics! I have to make sure there will be enough beds, blankets, cribs...I want there to be enough of

everything that's needed so no one will feel uncomfortable in any way."

My last question to everyone was what was giving them most pleasure during this planning period.

Mo. It's not (so much) a question of pleasure. At this point I mean I am very grateful, very grateful for everything that's been so...I'm very prayerful that it doesn't discontinue...That, in itself, is a certain kind of pleasure.

Fa. I have nothing more to say. It's like you're almost afraid. We have so much to be thankful for that we're almost afraid to vocalize it.

And finally, I asked Moshe the same question. His answer in reference to pleasure was "That the whole family is coming together." And in reference to anxiety, something about "learning the parts." Here Mother volunteered that she thought she might have spoiled some of the pleasure for Moshe because she wasn't buying him the traditional Hasidic black hat that he'd wanted. "It's becoming the American custom to start wearing it at the Bar Mitzvah...It used to be that they weren't worn until much later (at the wedding?) but now it's become 'the thing' to wear black hats earlier...I'm a hold out...I personally don't care for that so I think I ruined Moshe's pleasure. Here Mother, Father, and Son had an animated discussion in which Moshe spoke more than he had all evening. It was interactive and good humored with Father saying that he hadn't had any kind of black hat when he was a Bar Mitzvah, and the one he finally got was green! Everyone laughed as father went on. "There's nothing important about the hat and all the fuss is silly. (And besides) they look like

little old men in them." The interview ended as I thanked the family profusely and they insisted that I was sincerely welcome.

Interview #2 - Two Weeks Before the Bar Mitzvah - Mother Alone

As Moshe was away at school and Father was out at a meeting, this was to be an interview with Mother alone. If things weren't "too crazy" next week, I'd be able to meet with the three of them once more before the Bar Mitzvah.

Shmuel opened the door for me and the sounds of bathing children and crying babies were reminiscent of my first visit. I called up to Leah to take her time and used the opportunity to engage Shmuel who was happy to help me find a vase for the daffodils I'd brought. In the large but dilapidated kitchen, where we filled the vase and washed the grapes I'd also brought, the remnants of the tuna fish and baked bean dinner were still on the table. The sink was filled with dishes and the well-used electric mixer was surrounded by cake making ingredients. My heart went out to Leah who was handling so much at once. When she came down in an old jumper and slippers, with a scarf covering her head, she looked tired but as welcoming as ever. Again I was all apologies and again she assured me this was not an imposition. As she mentioned that she had some last minute calls to make, I encouraged her to do what she had to and not let me interfere. She saw that I meant what I said, and she went to the phone and began calling various aunts and cousins to invite them to Grandmother's house on Sunday for Moshe's birthday and to talk about details of



their coming to Massachusetts. The conversations are all cheerful and congratulatory. It seems that she was congratulating everyone she talked to for either being pregnant, or just having had a baby, or a new grandchild. There was absolutely no complaining about the amount of work or complexities she was handling. She was relaxed and sincere about the invitations. "We would love to have them." "There's plenty of room." "I rented plenty of cots." "It would mean so much to Yaakov." And punctuating each sentence, Baruch Hashem. "No, she didn't know the exact numbers," but it seemed not to matter. She was incredibly relaxed about it all. While Leah talked, I began doing the dishes. She tried to stop me but I insisted that it made me feel useful. She said she understood and I assured her I knew what I was doing (in her assiduously kosher kitchen) by asking if everything (that had to be washed) was milchik [dairy -- and therefore to be kept separate from the dishes and utensils for meat].

When she finished her phone calls and motioned for us to go into the dining room, I suggested that we talk in the kitchen while she continued baking the cakes she was working on. She agreed, and we began as she started measuring the ingredients for the 24th chocolate cake she'd made so far. As we talked, Father, looking exhausted, came in the door. The meeting had been difficult. With a brief "hello" in my direction, Father went up to the baby who was still crying in his crib. When he came down he asked his wife to wake him after he'd napped for an hour. (She let him sleep the rest of the evening.) During our conversation, Shmuel appeared repeatedly. One time to

complain about a grade his teacher had given his science project, and another time to inform his mother about a cut on his toe, etc. etc. Each time Leah was helpful, comforting, and firm. And each time she told him to go up and bathe. This time he couldn't do as she said because "Chaim was still in the tub." With glee, Shmuel described his younger brother shriveling up as he soaked, half asleep in the warm water. As we talked, I learned that Leah did not have full time help with the children, but had a babysitter only when she went out to teach. Most of her work she did at home. For instance, last week they'd stayed up all night preparing charity boxes and instruction manuals for mailing to hundreds of local Jewish families. And speaking of charity boxes, the window sill above the sink was filled with them--brightly decorated boxes each with a different child's name. In the Hasidic home the value of giving charity is instilled from infancy. I also learned that she'd already cooked and frozen 240 chicken quarters and dozens of kugels [noodle puddings]. Last week she "took in" a sitter and she and her husband spent the entire day cooking.

When I asked if the tefillin had arrived in time, she said they had not so they borrowed someone's extra pair. When I asked how she felt when she saw Moshe put them on for the first time, she hesitantly and sadly said she'd not been home that day. After a long pause, she explained that there'd been "a family crisis, of sorts." Her brother and his wife were separating. And Leah flew down to Atlanta to "try and please put on the brakes." Things "had snowballed faster than

anyone had expected" and after a short time, Leah knew her efforts were useless (but she wanted him to know that she cared). Although her parents knew about the breakup, her grandparents did not. And no one was going to tell them, at least not before the Bar Mitzvah. Her brother's absence would be attributed to his having started a new job and so being unable to get away. Fortunately (in this case) the couple had had no children. Leah was very upset about this loss in her brother's life but she clearly let me know that she didn't want to talk to me about it anymore.

Another visit by Shmuel who now wanted to know what number cake she was working on, broke the tension and we went on to happier topics. One such topic was the news that a group of old friends from ten years ago were planning to attend. She was very much looking forward to seeing them. Leah then went on to tell me about plans for the upcoming weekend. Tomorrow they were going to New York to pick Moshe up at the airport and then they'd be staying with Grandmother for the birthday Sunday and the Rebbe's minyan on Monday morning. When I asked her why they hadn't just held the whole thing in New York, Leah explained that that there were a number of reasons. One is that "This is where we live and we wanted to share it with people we're part of." The other had to do with their mission--"to help people tune into Yiddiskite [the Jewish way of life] and we feel (that a) simcha [a joyous event] is one of the best ways to do that...This gives alot of people in this area a chance to be part of it. The idea of not doing it here never even entered our minds."

Turning to what she's heard from Moshe, I asked how he was doing. "I spoke to him the other night and he sounded a little--shaky. I think once he's together with us and he feels...you know, to him, everything is abstract. The (other) kids in the house see the invitations going out and the response cards coming back; they see the cakes being made, and the presents coming in. So they feel it (but) to him, 'are you sure you are remembering?' He hasn't said that, and he knows it's real but..."

J. How does he show his nervousness?

Mo. By asking the same question five times.

J. Does he show his emotions more to you or to his father?

Mo. (quickly) Both. We're both very close to him.

As I felt no permission to probe, I went on to ask about Moshe's studying. Moshe had learned the mimer, but he hadn't even been given the pilpul yet. "My husband has it (in his head) but he still hasn't written it up. That's been a source of contention in this house. 'When are you going to give him the pilpul?' " When I commented that in every family, there's always something that gets put off for the last minute, Leah said that she's become "very philosophical about it all. This should be our worst problem."

At this point Chaim came down from his long bath smiling, happy, and "shriveled like a raisin." He wanted to lick the batter. At first Mother said no, but finally he humored her into allowing him a taste before he scampered up to bed. "He's the family comedian, from the day he was born." Leah went on to talk about her other children and described how they all "idolize" Moshe. To them "he's not a kid, but



more like a grown up." In contrast, Shmuel is not as mature for his age, and he especially misses the companionship of his older brother. In any case, Shmuel is excited about the Bar Mitzvah because he'd gotten the shoes and the suit he'd been "lobbying for" for a long time. When I asked about the "black hat," Leah admitted that "He got it (but) the first thing, after you left last time, Moshe asked me why I'd made such a big deal about the hat. He thought the fuss was silly and (I'd embarrassed him)." When I asked if she'd seen any changes in Moshe,

Mo. He's growing up. Getting older. It probably is the Bar Mitzvah. Not the celebration but the line (he is crossing of not being a child)...I don't think it's such an ordeal for him. Not something he'll shake out of his sleeve (either) but just something he knows he has to do...He takes it very seriously. When you were a kid, if you missed something, it wasn't so bad, but now, saying the prayers on time in the morning, etc., it's important. Most things [rituals] he takes for granted like saying the blessing before eating or praying three times a day. But (now) things are more specific, more detailed. It's like the difference between a...piano student and a concert pianist. The refinements become important. ...It's not like he's going from not counting at all to someone who counts. You just count in a different way.

At that moment, Moshe called on the phone and Leah gave him instructions and comfort. "Don't forget to get a haircut and don't forget to pack your shoes and don't worry, bubbela [sweetie], Tatti [Daddy] will sit with you all Shabbos [Saturday] (and teach you the pilpul). Then she says, "yes" she's making the cakes--40 of them and she laughs and tells me that "he says 'G-d bless you.'" As the hour

grows late, we end the interview with Leah telling me more about her grandparents and great grandparents and then she shows me the book her father had written about Contemporary Judaism from a Hasidic perspective. To me, the dedication was emblematic of the entire system's roles and rules:

My wife and I dedicate this volume  
to our parents  
Rabbi and Mrs. Menachem Trachtman  
Rabbi and Mrs. Avram Plotkin  
who live lives to inspire their children. May they be  
blessed with years of health and nachas [pleasure]  
from their children and children's children occupied  
with the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos [the  
commandments].

Interview #3 - Three Days Before Bar Mitzvah:  
Mother and Bar Mitzvah Boy Joined Later by Father

The scenes and sequences I had come to expect in this household were much in evidence this night but even more so. The level of activity, the number of phone calls, the number of times Shmuel came down and was told to go up--all were increased and intensified and in the middle of it all, as usual, Leah remained calm and good humored.

The large piles of response cards that covered the dining room table symbolized the pace and content of activity in this last-minute stage of preparation. "One pile is for those who can come Sunday but not Saturday, another for those who can come for all of Shabbos [Friday night and Saturday], another for those who can't come." And picking up one of the cards with a chuckle, "Oh, oh, this guy can't come and he's in the wrong pile. How did that happen?"

A little less reserved with me than he'd been a couple of months ago, Moshe looked equally calm (and a little heavier than the last time we'd met). As mother went into the kitchen to answer the first of the phone calls, Moshe answered my questions about his preparations and his flight to New York last week. I asked him about how time seemed to pass and his answer echoed the literature's description of the celebrant as being both "in and out of time" (Turner, 1969).

- J. When you were in school, did it seem that the time was going fast or slow?  
 M. Fast.  
 J. Fast?  
 M. Too fast.  
 J. Why too fast?  
 M. Because there was alot I was doing those weeks. Purim [holiday] was coming up and it was just going fast. There was nothing to do so every day seemed like the same thing like the day before. Before I knew it, I was here.

His answer about the flight led into a long explanation that he and Leah gave of a very special session with the Rebbe they had to rush to from the airport. This was the bimonthly audience that the Rebbe holds for boys (and their families) whose Bar Mitzvahs were being celebrated within the next two months. Before the recent increase in the number of Lubavitcher Hasids, this audience with the Rebbe was held individually, "one-on-one." Now it was done in groups (about twenty families at a time)--but the impact and significance of the encounter with the Rebbe was as if it had been completely private and individualized. Relishing the memory, Mother and Son described in detail what the Rebbe said, where the people stood, and what the

younger children did (Shmuel cried because he couldn't get a clear view of the Rebbe, and the baby yelled out that he wanted a lollypop and Mother promised him "anything" if he'd just be quiet and put out his "mitzvah hand" to accept the dollar that the Rebbe distributed to all of the children [for them to keep and give another one to charity]). The basic point of the audience is that as the Bar Mitzvah boys and their families reach this important moment in their lives, they go to the Rebbe to receive his blessings "so that it (the Bar Mitzvah) has the right effect on you." There are similarly regular audiences for those about to be married.

What most impressed Moshe (who'd fasted that day in preparation for seeing the Rebbe) about the Rebbe's speech was that everytime he said Bar Mitzvah, he also said Bas Mitzvah [Askenazie pronunciation of Bat Mitzvah].

- M. Through the whole speech, the Rebbe didn't say Bar Mitzvah alone, he said Bas Mitzvah too...
- J. Did people comment on this?
- M. My father talked to everyone about it...

This led Leah into a long discourse on the difference between Bar and Bat Mitzvah and the importance of creating a Bat Mitzvah ceremony that highlights the fact that the girl is fulfilling the commandment to study Torah, and not that she is trying to "copy" what boys do.

Moshe and Mother also described the birthday gathering at the maternal great-grandmother's house. There, in front of many relatives mostly from that side of the family, Moshe recited the mimer for the first time. What stood out for both of them was the scene of Moshe



reciting the memorized piece (that went on for 15 minutes!) with his cousin sitting behind him prompting him from Moshe's text that he (the cousin) was holding: "My cousin, a very close friend of mine, was sitting right behind me, so everytime I stopped, he said the next word, and I continued." Here Mother added the piece that gave this scene its intergenerational significance. When Leah and Yaakov got married, this cousin's father sat behind his cousin--Moshe's father, and prompted him as he recited the wedding mimer. Leah reminded me of the picture of that scene she'd shown me in the album. "It was exactly the same thing. It was so striking."

Then they described Moshe's first aliyah in the Rebbe's minyan the next morning. After blessing the Torah, Moshe had to recite the mimer again--this time for the "toughest of audiences. He was very good. He did super well," said Leah happily as she popped another grape into her mouth and talked about that moment--and the "perfect view" of it that she had from the doorway behind the Rebbe's stand. (On weekdays, the service is held in the smaller chapel of 770 where there is no balcony for women. Instead they can stand by the door and watch as the Torah is read and blessed.) For this recitation, it was Father who held the mimer text--"just in case."

J. Was he (your father) nervous?

M. No. I was nervous. But he told me everything would be OK.

And what about the pilpul? Had Father finished it yet? To this question came a number of answers. From Moshe:

- M. Yeh, my father just finished.  
 J. So you've studied it with him?  
 M. No, not yet, but he wrote it up and now he has to take a million siffarim [books] and look at each one and take from this book and that book and (then) put it together.  
 J. When's he going to give it to you?  
 M. Tonight. And then I'll have to know it by Sunday. But it's very easy (compared to the mimer).

From Leah: "The plan is for him to be closeted up in some quiet corner for the next two days. Ostensibly it's supposed to be finished tonight."

This led to a discussion of how busy her husband had been and some of the pressures he'd been under. "...the tension of getting this done, and that done, there's all of that but I think also, (pause) how should I put it? I think not having my father-in-law around now is particularly hard. He hasn't said a word, but I suspect."

While Mother was again on the phone, I asked Moshe what he was looking forward to the most. Without hesitation he answered "Friday night."

- J. How come?  
 M. Because all of the families are coming.

Here we went on to name more of the relatives in the genogram and he and Shmuel (who'd managed to be with us for quite a few minutes by now) explained the family relationships and the complicated plans for who would be sleeping where and when during the weekend. At one

point, Shmuel wanted to say something, but Moshe was speaking. He waited until Moshe paused and then began his comment with "Excuse me Moshe." The younger son's respect for his older brother was as striking as the amount of detailed knowledge the two boys had about their extended families. With Leah back again, we talked more about the weekend details and she asked if I'd like to "stay for Shabbos." My mumbled thanks revealed my ambivalence. Although I'd been feeling awkward about the thought of driving on the Sabbath to their Bar Mitzvah, I did not feel ready to commit myself to being with them for the entire weekend. It felt too intrusive, too scary, and too complicated as they'd also invited my husband. But I did feel tempted and warmed by her welcome. Sensing my discomfort, Leah quickly added, "That's OK. Either Saturday or Sunday, or both. Shabbos is Shabbos, that'll be ceremonial. Mainly davening [praying] and kiddush [blessing of wine and refreshments]. But Sunday, the big thing (that there will be) music.

J. Well, I'd like him (Allen) to see both parts...if he'll come

Mo. (making it clear that their religious restrictions were not ours) We're very laid back...no one is going to ask any embarrassing questions.

We changed the subject as I offered to help.

J. If I help with the cooking, I feel more a part of what's happening.

Mo. I really understand that and I appreciate your offer.

We made plans for me to return the next day to help cut vegetables before Leah would be going to the airport to pick up her parents.

Then at my request, Leah read and translated the Hebrew part of the invitations. They were printed on one side in English and the other in Hebrew and although the facts were the same, the texts were different. The language was formal, and based on the standard Lubavitcher (wedding) invitation:

We give thanks to G-d for all of the good which He bestows on us. In His great kindness, He has merited us with the celebration of the Bar Mitzvah of our son...(It goes on with the details of where and when and especially what portion of the Torah will be read, and concludes with:) With joy and happiness of heart, we call our friends and those we know, to please celebrate together with us in the day of the happiness of our heart and G-d willing, when you have simchas [joyous occasions] we will pay you back. (The invitation is "signed by") The Cohen [of the priestly lineage] Sheinman and his very good friend.

Laughing, Leah explained that "'very good friend' of course, has the meaning of 'wife,' but this is how it was originally written." Leah went on to reveal that at first, she had wanted to have her name on the invitation but her husband wanted it this way "because that's how his parents did it for his Bar Mitzvah." As it was important to him, she agreed..."It's [the invitation] not such a personal thing. The emphasis is on the sense of thankfulness. Thank you, G-d, for allowing us to get to this point in our lives."

Here Father returned home. It was late and he looked tired.

J. I never leave here early.

Fa. It's a nice place to be.

J. It certainly is, and nobody kicks me out.



Fa. Stay, stay.

J. I learn so much each time. Like tonight I learned about yichidus [the audience with the Rebbe].

Fa. We have a tape of it. (to Mo.) Where's the Yichidus tape? (to Judy) Do you want to hear it?

J. Yes!

Fa. I'll give you a simultaneous translation.

(All of the Rebbe's talks are taped for broadcast. His talks on the Sabbath and on holidays, however, are memorized by his assistants and written down after sunset when writing is permitted again.) While we were waiting for Moshe to get the tape, I asked Father about the pilpul. He answered (with only a weak chuckle) that "It's the cause of much dissention in this house." He then changed the subject and went on to translate the Rebbe's words. (I asked that he use their own tape recorder so that I could have a copy of the Rebe's speech on my tape recorder as well. To be able to capture the words of this Hasidic father translating the words of the Rebbe who was talking about his son's Bar Mitzvah... I couldn't believe my good fortune. Some excerpts (translated at first by Father and then continued by Mother as Father was called to the phone):

For the whole family to merit raising a child to this point brings blessing and success to the Bar Mitzvah and the Bas Mitzvah and on all the relatives connected to them and to their education and also as part of the entire Jewish nation. Even though we are spread apart among the nations...we are one...The whole family and the whole community are blessed for participating in this event and for having brought up their children in this way...Participating in the happiness of the Bar Mitzvah and the Bas Mitzvah prepares us for the coming of the Messiah and the world of peace that will come with him.

I was struck by how ritual's classic functions (of connecting individual and corporate action, of uniting all of the participants, of prescribing appropriate roles, and of linking the people and the behavior to harmony in the universe) could not have been more explicit.

By now it was very late and the Bar Mitzvah boy was reminded that he was still a boy:

Mo. Now I know you're a Bar Mitzvah boy and I know you're  
 M. But it's 10:30 and I have to go to bed.  
 Mo. You should. It's too late (to start) learning (the pilpul) with Tattie [Daddy] now.

At this point Father returns from the phone.

Mo. We were discussing the pilpul.  
 Fa. (Big sigh.)  
 Mo. Censored. It's all censored.  
 Fa. Moshe, you're going to have a tough night tonight, Yingele [affectionate term for little boy].  
 Mo. You want him to start now?!  
 J. (humorously) I'm getting out of here!  
 Fa. Yeh, I'll learn [study] with him.  
 Mo. You finished it?  
 Fa. These are not things for ladies to know.  
 Mo.&J. (Laugh)  
 Mo. (Playfully) Especially not mothers, right?  
 Fa. (Playfully) Especially not mothers.

The issue of Father's finishing the piece that his son had to learn was off limits for discussion--but not off limits for pressuring the system. The Sheinmans had a lot left to do in a very short time. As I drove home, I felt the pressure but I wasn't worried for them.

Informal Session #1 - Two Days Before the Bar Mitzvah.  
Researcher Helping in the Kitchen - Mother, Father, Bar Mitzvah Boy,  
All Wandering In and Out on Their Way to and From Their Last Minute  
Tasks. Baby Sitter and Baby Also Present.

The late morning was sunny and warm as I arrived with my apron and dishwashing gloves. The baby was outside with the sitter, a friendly middle-aged Russian woman who spoke Yiddish but very little English. A local handyman was raking the lawn. The children were in school. Mother had just returned from the grocery. Before that she'd taken Shmuel, who'd had an ear ache, to the doctor. While there, Mother tripped on the stairs and twisted her ankle. She was hoping it wouldn't swell. Despite the events of her morning, Leah was playful with the baby and as gracious as ever to me. Moshe dressed in black slacks and striped polo shirt, black hat ("the" black hat) , sneakers and tefillin(!) with suit jacket over his shoulders, was (proudly) pacing around the dining room silently reciting his morning prayers. In the kitchen, Leah explained the day's itinerary and began giving me instructions about how to dice the eggplant. These instructions were interrupted first by the handyman who was ready for Mother to pay him and then by Father who was rushing to leave for New York where he'd be picking up all kinds of food for the Bar Mitzvah. He was in a frenzy looking for his keys, his pen, his list of things to do. He was also anxiously reminding his wife to remember to call the phone company (to say a check is on its way) and telling her to call a particular grocer and ask if he has some item or another.

Fa. Tell him you're my wife.

Mo. (chuckling) I know.

Fa. I'm glad.

Despite the pressure, they maintained their playfulness.

Mo. Don't come back too late.

Fa. Oh, I was only up til 5:00am. I'd like a night out on the town.

Soon after Father leaves, Mother also goes (to another market and then to the airport) and I'm left alone in the kitchen cutting and frying mounds of eggplant--and marveling at how my academic work should have brought me into this Hasidic kitchen (that my own Jewishness could never have done). Moshe, who by now had finished his prayers, was sitting at the book-covered dining room table and beginning to study the completed pilpul. He was reciting out loud to himself in the traditional sing-song of the talmudic scholar. His body was swaying slightly to the rhythm of the words. Hesitantly I snuck occasional glances as his back was towards the kitchen. Just as I was thinking about how old his mannerisms were, he stopped his studying and absentmindedly picked up the vase on the table and started playing with it as if it were a toy. The old man and child were simultaneously and poignantly visible.

After a while Moshe began wandering into the kitchen, worldlessly looking into cupboards and refrigerator for something to eat. As nothing to nibble on was available, he finally decided to make himself some spaghetti with butter. He accepted my help easily as we tried to determine when the noodles were sufficiently cooked. He handed me a



fork with which to check the noodles and then took it back in alarm because he thought he'd made a mistake and had given me a meat fork when he meant to give me a dairy fork. He quickly put the suspect fork on the windowsill for his mother to (re)kosher (in case it had been defiled) by my having put it into the dairy pot with the noodles.

M. That was my fault. I'm sorry.

Trying to relieve his anxiety, I jokingly said something that revealed not only my insensitivity, but the depth of the ritual's capacity to transform. "Oh, it's OK. It doesn't matter (yet)."

"What do you mean?" he said angrily. "Of course it does! I'm a Bar Mitzvah."

I had forgotten that he had already had his first aliyah last week and that in fact he was, according to the law, an adult responsible for his actions. I apologized for having forgotten and the moment passed quickly. But the lesson I learned didn't. The intensity of Moshe's new identity was powerful.

As I finished all of the eggplant and cleaned up the kitchen as well as I could, I decided not to wait for Leah to come back with her parents. As much as I was eager to meet her mother whom she described as an artist and a perfectionist, and her father whose book she had given me, I felt that I had been allowed in enough. For the researcher to be there waiting for the grandparents when they arrived felt too intrusive--even for this family whose public role and private mission allowed such infiltration.

Analysis of the Dynamics of the Sheinman System in the Planning Period

A mantelpiece crowded with little snapshots of many family scenes situated directly below a large portrait of the revered Rebbe: A "family sculpture" if ever there was one. It was no accident that this was the first thing on which I focused in the Sheinman's home. It was a still-life representation of the system I had entered. For very much, this was a family that actively included not only all of its previous generations and all of their descendants, but all of their leaders as well. As members of the Hasidic community, the Sheinmans possess a complete, absolute, and uncompromised belief in G-d and in His laws. These laws proscribe in detail all of the roles, rules, and structures that create and maintain Hasidic family life. They produce rituals such that ritual is a way of life rather than one aspect of it. Like all Hasidim, the Sheinmans believe that they are instruments in a divine plan and they adhere to the instructions with a depth of feeling that those outside this community cannot comprehend. For them every daily act is sacred, infused with meaning. Perhaps to some extent in fact, Leah and Yaakov Sheinman are even more passionate than most Hasidim because they are direct descendents of very long and distinguished lines of Hasidic Rabbis and scholars, and they (like many members of their family) were specifically chosen by the Rebbe to spread Jewish orthodoxy and yiddishkite. Baruch Hashem, the often repeated phrase with which they all thank G-d for their blessings and invoke continued and future blessings--is, for this researcher, the metaphor which captures the essence of not only the

family's attitude towards the upcoming Bar Mitzvah, but of their world view in general.

Given the intensity with which their religious beliefs and interpersonal dynamics are fused (the family is the center of Jewish life, and Jewish life is the center of the family), it is difficult--if not impossible--to separate what Friedman (1982) calls the "cultural stain" from what he calls "family emotional process." It is also difficult for the secular researcher to believe what she sees. Surely they cannot be as content and secure as they appear. Surely they must be hiding--from me and maybe even from themselves--a darker, more troubled aspect of their lives. Surely, the disdain that many modern and even orthodox Jews feel for this "antiquated," "repressive" way of life must have some basis that will become visible under my microscope.

Within the limits imposed by the research and my own good manners, if not diffidence, I looked for that darker side. I probed for chinks in their armor, for indications of cover up. Surely popular culture and contemporary problems had to have seeped into even so insulated a system. (They didn't have a television, but they did have a cabbage patch doll. Wasn't that a clue?) But my attempts were futile. Somehow they managed to deflect or diminish potential problems such that they didn't have a chance to develop into crises. Even the full-blown crisis of a divorce in the extended family--which could easily have escalated into a major disruption--was somehow kept in perspective. Leah was sufficiently caught up in the dynamics to

fly to Atlanta even when it meant missing the first time her son would put on tefillin, but she was not so enmeshed that she could not come back and resume her life when she realized that she could do nothing to save the marriage. Nor was there worry that her parents could not handle the strain. Only the grandparents had to be sheltered from the news--and perhaps (it was not clear) only until after the Bar Mitzvah--a simcha they wanted not to spoil for anyone.

It seemed to me that a number of tactics were used to prevent problems (be they personal, interpersonal, financial, or health related) from becoming crises. The first was not to dwell on the problem; repeatedly they changed the subject immediately after a problem was referred to. Instead they dwell on the positive aspects of their lives. According to M. Buber (in Harris, 1985), Hasidim deliberately look for and find joy in the world as it is (and) in life as it is. In addition, they use humor and philosophy to diminish stress. When her frustration with her husband's procrastinating on the pilpul threatens to become anger, Leah becomes "philosophical:" "This should be our biggest problem." When Yaakov wants his wife (and her allied researcher) not to bother him any more about the pilpul, he jokes that "This is not for ladies." When the stress and fatigue of last-minute logistics threatens to make them short-tempered, they tease.

But beyond these strategies for de-escalating tension, it is the Sheinman's fundamental belief that everything happens according to G-d's will and their absolute and unquestioning acceptance of that



will, which prevents individual "quirks" and weaknesses" (Harris, p. 80) from assuming too much importance. G-d's will, and the structure and tradition that emanate from it, help the Sheinmans negotiate such would-be problems as whose name will appear on the invitation. The modern, egalitarian Leah wants her name written along side her husband's, but she defers easily--and without bitterness--to the greater needs (as she sees it) of her husband and of his attachment to his deceased father and the tradition that he'd established.

It is also of no little consequence that with lives full of daily ritual, the system's need for rigidity and structure is completely satisfied. Leah, unlike other Bar Mitzvah mothers, can afford to be relatively relaxed about such details as "exact" numbers and exact seating plans. Despite the enormous amount of work she has to do and the overwhelming number of details she has to oversee, she remains remarkably calm and focused on the religious meaning of the event.

If the relationship between husband and wife is divinely prescribed, so too is the relationship between parents and children. The intergenerational boundaries are profoundly clear and the respect each generation has for its parents and grandparents seems to border on reverence. The intergenerational personality conflicts and differences of opinion and style that are as inevitable in Hasidic families as they are in all families, are minimized because the basic values of every generation (hard as it is for outsiders to believe) are identical. "There are no generation gaps" (Harris, 1985, p. 167).

Although there are clear differences among their individual children and the parents respond according to their distinctive personalities, the Sheinman children, like all Hasidic children, "know their place" in the nuclear family, the extended family, the larger community and indeed the universe. As described by Harris (p. 162),

(Hasidic children are) well loved and nourished but not viewed as small adventurers on their way to some special, as yet undisclosed private destiny. They (are) little Jewish men and women en route to the same destiny as their parents.

No wonder it never struck me as odd that Moshe spoke with such reticence and so infrequently--or that his father often answered for him. Yes, this is a family entering the adolescence of a first child, but it is not likely to be a family struggling with the terrible ambivalences and problems of pacing (Elkind, 1981) that are characteristic of the contemporary Western family in this stage of its development. In the Hasidic family, the changes that must be accomplished in this stage, are profoundly, pragmatically, and visibly facilitated by ritual thought and practice. The transition into adolescence/adulthood is cushioned by the ritual and infused with higher meaning. Again according to Harris,

Hasidic children rarely rebel against their parents; they rebel against secular society [consequently bringing them closer to their parents]. The modern goals of innovativeness, independence, and originality that play a role in most adolescent rebellions have no place in this milieu. There is no way of being just a little rebellious either. You are not just offending your parents if you stray from the fold, you are offending your entire family, your teachers, your friends, your neighbors, the Rebbe, and G-d. Few are willing or able to take on that kind of burden (p. 167).

Despite this relative lack of ambiguity as the child passes into Jewish adulthood, I couldn't help but wonder if Father's inability to complete the adaptation of his father's pilpul for his own son's rite of passage wasn't a reflection of some hesitancy on his part. Not only did the pilpul remind him of the loss of his father, but at some level it was also the symbol of the upcoming loss of his first son's childhood.

The effectiveness of the Bar Mitzvah as demarcator of change, and the symbols of the celebrant's new status, are remarkably clear. The younger son, Shmuel, is aching to be part of the adult action, but he can't ("sit at the table"), until he is grown up enough, i.e., until he is a Bar Mitzvah like his older brother whom he adores. The lessons are taught at every opportunity. And the tangible symbols of manhood, the little black tefillin boxes with their leather straps could not be more dramatic. As he binds them to his head and to his heart, he binds himself in mind and in spirit to all those who came before him and all those who will come after him. It is no wonder that his mother wanted to watch that first binding. On all levels, the ritual "worked" as it was intended to work. Caught up as I was with the parents' preparations for the local, more public celebration of his Bar Mitzvah, I had forgotten the significance of Moshe's first aliyah at the Rebbe's minyan a few days earlier. But he hadn't. "What do you mean, it doesn't count? I am a Bar Mitzvah!"

The Gordovsky Family: "Grow Up But Stay Close"

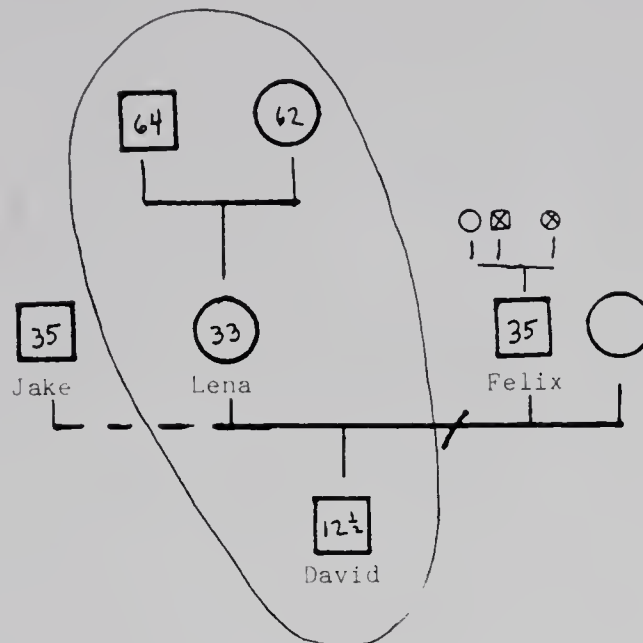


Figure 4.4 Gordovsky Family Map  
(See Appendix B for key)

Interview #1 - 3 1/2 Months Before the Bar Mitzvah:  
Mother and Bar Mitzvah Boy

Lena Gordovsky and her son, David, came to American from Russia six years ago. They came with Lena's sister and parents, her husband, his father and stepmother. A year and a half later, Lena divorced her husband and has since--with the help of her parents who live only a few blocks away--been raising her son as a single parent. Of all the families in this research, I approached my first interview with this family with the most ease. This ease was more than simply a function of the fact that by now I had had some experience in meeting Bar Mitzvah families; it was a direct reflection of the openness and ease with which Lena immediately responded to my request to meet with them. "Sure. It's no problem with me." Her only hesitation had to with their appropriateness. "Do you know I'm not religious?" "That



doesn't matter at all," I said. "And do you know that I'm a single?" "That doesn't matter either." This openness was further underscored in the beginning of our first session together when I explained about the confidentiality of the research. Turning to her son and shrugging her shoulders "It doesn't matter. We have nothing to hide." Although I didn't know if this comfort reflected something special about the family or something special about their experience of American openness as opposed to Soviet secrecy, it was a very appealing quality. Indeed, they seemed to me a very appealing pair altogether.

Thirty-three year old Lena was warm and outgoing. With long black hair, big dark eyes dramatized by makeup that was almost theatrical, and creamy complexion, her Russian beauty had an almost exotic quality. She was dressed youthfully in tight jeans, highheeled boots, fashionable sweater, and matching hair clip with a bright pink flower. Lena works as a program analyst for a large insurance company. She is studying at night for a second master's degree. The first was in business administration. This degree will be in computer science. David also looks Russian. Small boned with fine features and fair complexion, he is soft-spoken, articulate, and polite. He appears thoughtful, good natured, and mature. The comfort and camaraderie between Mother and Son is immediately apparent. Their relationship seems to fluctuate between one in which Mother is clearly the authority figure and one in which the two are more like peers. Lena makes all of the decisions regarding school, camp, piano lessons, etc. But it is David who corrects Mother's pronunciation, explains

Jewish ritual, remembers details about family events (for example how many years had passed since grandfather's surgery), and accompanies Mother to the theater in New York. The two of them eating from the same piece of cake graphically illustrates this closeness.

Mother and son seem comfortable in and satisfied with their small, modestly furnished apartment. While Mother was in the kitchen preparing thick Russian coffee, David explained that they had recently painted the living room and that the white el-shaped sectional sofa on which we were sitting was new. So, too, was the matching coffee table that Lena was now setting with placements as she served the coffee with the cake I had brought. The only other furniture in the room was a TV and small stereo with a menorah [Jewish candelabra] on top of it. A variety of pictures hung on the walls. One was a large contemporary illustration of the popular harlequin clown. The others were paintings done (I learned later) by a Russian artist who was an old friend who immigrated shortly after Lena and her family. With coffee and cake served, we got down to my questions and their story emerged.

Mother's family. Lena is the eldest of two daughters born to Rifka (62) and Elosha (64). Sister Petra lives in New York with her young son and husband who owns a shoe store with his brothers. The sisters see each other about once a month. In Russia, Grandmother had taught college English. Grandfather had taught Russian literature. The son of famous Yiddish actors, Grandfather had recently published a book about his parents and was now working on another about the Yiddish theater that once flourished in Russia but now no longer

exists. He had to smuggle his parents' journals, play bills, and pictures out of Russia when he immigrated. As a young man, Grandfather was also an actor and a musician. In the army, he directed the Officer's Club and conducted its orchestra. Of the two, Grandmother (who was born in Rumania), had more connection to the Jewish religion. By the time Grandfather was growing up, Russia had already become secularized.

When David was born, Lena named him after her father's father whom she loved and wanted to honor. She used the name in spite of the fact that a Jewish name might be a handicap in Russia. David's bris [circumcision] was held "underground." In Russia, this Jewish ritual had to be held in secret. It was Lena who insisted on the bris--even against the wishes of her husband's parents--who, out of fear, did not attend. The pediatrician was a personal friend of Lena's and when he had to submit to the government a list of those who had been circumcized, he did not include David's name. "It was my choice. My ex-husband (went along with it), he was the kind...that followed." When I asked her why she felt so strongly about David's having a bris when most of her contemporaries had abandoned the ritual, she answered: "Well, I'm not religious, but I just believe in tradition. You see, my mother lived in Rumania before 1940 when it became Russian territory so she was exposed to Jewish religion a little bit. They weren't religious but she had a Hebrew teacher like all Jews there. My father, he came from more the Russian side. He's a Jew but from people who were never exposed..."

Although they were already contemplating emigration at the time of the bris, it was not until a few years later, that Lena and her family filed for a visa. "My parents lost their jobs immediately (and) my father, he started having heart problems the day he first talked to his boss." (Once in America, Elosha had two heart attacks and three years ago, underwent open heart surgery. He is "much better" now.) When the family arrived in America, Lena enrolled David not in the local public school, but in a Jewish day school. "When I came here, I decided to put him in Hebrew school, because I want to give him a chance. Because I was never given the chance (to be a knowledgeable Jew)." Unlike his bris, David's Bar Mitzvah will be very publicly celebrated and not only is Lena planning to invite all of her relatives (even those in Israel), but her parents are also planning to invite many life-long friends and their children who also now live in America.

Bar Mitzvah plans. Besides knowing about the guests, when and where the ceremony will be held (in the Orthodox Synagogue where David's teacher is the cantor), little else has been decided as yet. Lena jokes about being "a last minute person" and seems confident that everything (invitations, party, food, etc.) will work out. One friend has already offered Lena the use of her finished basement for the party and another friend has offered yet another location. The major constraint is "how much I can afford." David's father has not been helping to pay for David's education and will not be helping with the Bar Mitzvah. Neither does he have any part in the planning. Felix,



whose own father died two years ago, has recently remarried. His new wife is Spanish. (With a raised eyebrow and a deliberate glance in my direction, Lena let me know that she could say more but was choosing not to in David's presence.) It is Lena's father who is David's surrogate Father. "My father, he put a lot of time, effort, you know. He was father for him all this time."

When David was younger, he often slept at his grandparent's apartment during the week and at his mother's on the weekends. When he got older and was able to stay alone for short periods of time, Lena refurbished his room and he began sleeping there except when Mother was out of town. Each day after school, David goes to his grandparent's house. From there, Grandfather drives David wherever he has to go--to piano lessons, karate lessons, Hebrew lessons. It is at his grandparents' that he does his homework, practices for his lessons, eats dinner and waits for his mother to pick him up when she returns from work. Often Lena will eat dinner there also. This was not always the arrangement, however. There was a time when David had been coming home after school, but Grandmother did not like his being left alone. Lena capitulated to her mother's wishes especially as her increased responsibility at work and night classes kept her away from home later than usual. Although David and Lena generally speak English to each other, in the grandparent's home, they all speak Russian. The grandparents are explicit in wanting David not to forget the Russian language.

When I asked Mother and Son what, in this planning period, was giving them the most pleasure, Lena put her arm around David's shoulder and said with laughter and pride: "He'll be the man in the family now." When I pressed David for an answer, he said: "Right now I'm not thinking too much about it, I just have to learn my part."

On the topic of learning, David informed me and his mother that in a few weeks, he was scheduled to be leading the congregation in its concluding prayers--"as a way of giving the Bar Mitzvah boy practice in front of the congregation." "I didn't know about that," said Lena and with obvious pride turned and invited me to "come if you'd like." "Yes, I'd like to. I've never been in that synagogue before."

As the interview ended and we waited for my husband to pick me up (--he had had some business in the area and dropped me off for the interview--), Lena and David showed me pictures of Lena's youth in Russia and of her parents and their friends--many of whom had also immigrated and whose children and grandchildren were Lena and David's "inherited friends... Like a third generation friendship." Lena also showed me her father's book with pictures of her great grandparents on stage in various classic roles and of her father as a child held lovingly between his two famous parents. The book was titled, "A Son's Heart." When we heard the car pull up, Lena graciously insisted that I invite my husband in. It was as if she and I had become friends and she was curious to meet him. We spent a few pleasant minutes together as Allen looked through her father's book and tried

to remember the Russian he'd studied in college. When we left, Lena and I agreed that I would see them again at the synagogue.

Informal Meeting #1 Three Months Prior to Bar Mitzvah in Synagogue:  
Mother and Bar Mitzvah Boy

Mother and Son were already in their places when I arrived at the synagogue. The huge chapel of this large orthodox synagogue is divided into three sections. The center section is the largest and reserved for men only. Women sit in the two side sections. These sections are divided by isles each framed on one side by a three foot high wall edging the women's pews. The walls do not block vision but do keep the men and women separate. Lena was sitting alone towards the back of the section to the right of the stage. She greeted me with a warm smile as I quietly slipped into the seat next to her. David, who looked very small in that setting, was sitting alone in the middle towards the front of the men's section. The Rabbi and several older men sat on the stage. The Cantor was chanting a traditional melody in the old European style that sounded as if he were crying. Whispering, I asked Lena where her parents were. I'd somehow expected them to be there. Elegantly dressed and made up, Lena explained that her parents were entertaining old friends whom they hadn't seen for years. She did not seem at all disappointed by their absence. I was. As the service proceeded, I was struck by how little Lena actually knew about synagogue ritual as I noticed that she was holding the wrong prayer book and didn't seem to know any of the prayers. This morning's haftorah was being read by a middle aged man who was

celebrating his "belated" Bar Mitzvah. When he finished struggling through the piece, the Rabbi led the congregation in singing a traditional song of congratulations.

Towards the end of the service when David went up to the pulpit, Lena told me that he'd been nervous. Only the speed of his singing revealed that nervousness. Otherwise his performance was flawless and his voice--as many later commented--was unusually sweet. As the Rabbi was making announcements before dismissing the congregation, Lena indicated that she was "having a little trouble" with David. "His mind is not on his work." How did she know? The teacher called her and the principal had spoken to her father.

With a big smile, David came up to his mother after the service and asked "How'd I do?" Lena smiled but didn't say much. She also didn't kiss him, but as we walked into the synagogue's social hall where an elaborate luncheon-like kiddish was being sponsored by the Bar Mitzvah family, Lena and David were holding hands. Once inside, we helped ourselves to food and sat down together at a table in the corner. During the meal, Lena pointed out (wistfully, I thought) a number of different women who had recently become engaged, or pregnant, or remarried--to very wealthy men. After David ate a few bites, he went off to play with friends, and Lena and I talked at some length. Here she elaborated on her problem with David. She talked about his recently increased clinging to her. "I say I need time for myself and he says I want to be with you." Lena suggested that the increased clinging was a result of his father's having gotten



remarried. "Maybe he's afraid of losing me (like he's lost his father)."

Although David's father was never very involved in raising David, he'd recently become much less involved and in fact wouldn't even give David his telephone number. In order to reach his father, David had to call his stepgrandmother to convey a message. Lena seemed more sad than angry, "(I told him) I couldn't care less, but you're hurting your son." She contrasted this with her friend's experience where her ex-husband had made a room in his new house for their son so that he would feel welcome when he visited. "David sees that."

Not only does David's father contribute very little financially (if Lena complains, he resentfully reminds her that the divorce was her idea), but lately his visitations have been very irregular and David sits waiting for his call. "He was never much of a father but David didn't seem to mind. Lately he seems to care more."

In elaborating on her problem with David's school work, she explained that lately he was forgetting his homework and she had to remind him all the time. She even brought him a special assignment book and was now regularly checking on his assignments with his teachers. Trying to de-escalate the school problem, I suggested to Lena that perhaps his forgetting his homework was just another way of keeping her close and in fact that it might be a precursor to his adolescent letting go. When she said she was "actually thinking about going to a professional therapist," I suggesting that the adolescents' pulling closer at the same time that they seem to be acting out (with

school work for instance) is very common and part of the normal developmental process. I felt very much that Lena was pulling on me "as therapist" and I was both trying to retain my distance and role as researcher, and at the same time wanting to help her not create a problem by applying wrong solutions. As we were leaving the synagogue, Lena pointedly asked me to "call again soon." It was obvious that she wanted to talk more.

Phone call two months later. For both reasons of methodology and circumstance, I did not call again soon. When I did call, it was almost two months later. "Judy, how are you? I thought you forgot about us!" I explained that they'd been very much on my mind, but that work and family illness had prevented my calling sooner, and we set a date for a second interview.

Interview #2 - One Month Prior to the Bar Mitzvah: Mother and Son

When I arrived at 7:00 pm, Lena had just gotten home from work and David was still with his grandparents. About 20 minutes after we'd begun, Grandfather, a big, attractive, white-haired man, arrived with David. Grandfather joined us for just a few minutes. He greeted me politely and nodded yes that the Bar Mitzvah was exciting. It seemed as if he were eager not to intrude on our conversation, but happily agreed that he and his wife would talk with me sometime in the future.

From Lena and David, I learned that much had been accomplished since the last time we'd met. Lena proudly showed me a sample invitation (formal, traditional style, decorated with a Star of David

on a background of gold filigree) and said that 120 people were being invited. Her uncle from Israel was coming after all, and the dinner--for 60 family and close friends--was to be held in the reception suite of a local condominium complex owned by a wealthy American friend. Set up like a living room, this space was ample and cozy. Lena was quite pleased with it.

David volunteered happily that he had finished his haftorah, and not so happily that he was just starting to learn the mussaf [the entire second half of the service] that he would be leading. He had waited til the last minute to study this part and he was now under a lot of pressure to learn a great deal of material quickly. At this point David explained the different parts of the service to his mother and I was struck by how--in matters of Jewish ritual--he was definitely her teacher. In talking about how they had determined who would receive aliyahs [the honor of blessing the Torah], David indicated with some sadness that he didn't know if he was a "Levy" or an "Israeli" [two of three categories of Jews created during the time of the Temple in Jerusalem]. Since one's identity is determined by one's father and David's father didn't know what his father had been, David said "I don't know what I am. (But) I'm going to find out (by asking his (step)grandmother to try and remember what his deceased grandfather had been called when he went to the synagogue in America)." When David left the room to answer the phone, Lena whispered, "David is disappointed that he's not a Cohen [the highest of the categories]. Everybody' in my family is a Cohen."

While David worried about the mussaf and his formal Jewish identity, Lena worried most about food for the kiddish--after the service. This would be lunch for all of the congregants and her guests after the three hour service. Despite assurances from the caterer who regularly sets up the kiddish at the synagogue, Lena was afraid there would not be enough food. She went into great detail about ordering more than this caterer had advised. "I told him that this is the first Bar Mitzvah in our family and I want it to be nice. I'm really doing more than I can afford, but I don't want people to go away hungry." As all of the food in the synagogue had to be kosher, she had to work through this caterer and could not bring in additional food of her own. In the end, Lena ordered extra rolls and the caterer agreed to leave "an extra jar of herring in the refrigerator."

Food for the dinner at night was not a problem. Lena's mother and aunts were preparing this feast and there was no doubt that they'd make enough for twice as many as they were feeding. With pride, Lena went into considerable, mouth-watering detail about the Russian menu Grandmother was planning. When I asked if anyone was helping with the cost of all of this, Lena hesitantly explained that they had decided to borrow money (from her sister and brother-in-law) and then use some of David's gifts to repay the loan. David jokingly corrected her saying that it was "she," not "we," who'd made this decision. "I had no choice." Lena: "Well, he had a choice. To do it very small without anything. But if he wants to invite his friends and relatives and we want to make something more significant..." (Authoritatively)



I assured them that this was a very common practice given how expensive everything was these days and we went on to talk about David's layen teffilin [putting on phylacteries every morning according to ritual law]. David informed me proudly that he'd been "putting them on every single morning (since he began the two month practice period before the Bar Mitzvah). I haven't missed a morning yet." David's grandfather had bought these teffilin for him as a gift when he began practicing for the Bar Mitzvah. Lena described the velvet and silver bag in which they are kept and the tallis they also bought. Lena's friend was making David a matching Yarmulke. David indicated that he was planning to continue layen teffilin after his Bar Mitzvah.

When I asked about school work, the news was not so bright. David said that his work there was "not so hot." Revealing her frustration, Lena said "It's his attitude, he doesn't care really...He doesn't take pride in his school work." As an example of the potential David had (but was not fulfilling), Lena insisted that David show me the poem he had written in honor of the Statue of Liberty's hundredth anniversary. His teacher was sending it in to a contest. While he was looking for the poem, Lena went on: "Things he likes to do, he does. Comes easy. But things he doesn't (like, he doesn't do). Everybody tells me if he goes to average high school class, he will be a good student. But they want him to go to high level class. If he puts in more work, he can be in class with honor. But he's not

mature enough." When I asked Lena if she's seen any changes in David or their interactions over the last few months:

Mo. He got more lazy (laugh, then silence and then to David [who had returned]) What do you say?

D. I don't know.

Mo. (to Judy) He's still a baby.

D. (moans)

Mo. Oh yeah.

J. (Characteristically attempting to reduce tension) Well, nobody changes over night.

D. (Mirroring his mother's concerns) Sometimes I feel that I will be this short all my life.

Mo. (Reversing her position) No, you will not be.

With this assurance, Lena went to answer the phone. While she was gone, I asked David who was the most excited. He said he was excited but he could not tell who was most excited. When Lena returned, she also couldn't decide. "Everybody is excited. I can not tell who is most. How can you determine that?" But Lena could say that it was her mother who was "kind of pushing (her)" to get things (like the invitations) done. In fact, it was Grandmother who was now addressing the invitations herself as she didn't like Lena's plan of doing labels quickly on the computer.

When I asked about seating arrangements, Lena said she was not doing any because it was mostly just an informal dinner for family and besides, people "sit where that want to anyway." In general, Lena was not at all concerned with the dinner or accommodating out-of-town guests. Their family was used to hosting 25-30 people at a time just for birthday parties, so this kind of planning was not a trauma.

Also not a trauma for this family was the fact that on the Sunday morning after the Bar Mitzvah party, David was going to be competing in a karate tournament in Boston! Lena, whom he called "his good luck charm," was going to be driving him there. They'd have to leave at 7:00 am. Lena was allowing David to do this only because he'd (readily) agreed to leave the party early and be in bed by 10:00 pm. Both of them were very excited about this tournament. As karate lessons had been her idea and as she was obviously very proud of David's accomplishments in this area--he had "already won a trophy!", she was not at all reluctant about doing this during the Bar Mitzvah weekend. As her mother would be hosting brunch for the out of town family in her own apartment, Lena didn't have to worry about entertaining them. For Lena, karate was a way of preparing her son to take care of himself "like a man." In describing a previous competition where David was hit hard in the stomach and she had to hold herself back from running to his side on the mat, she explained, "This is what happens. It's fights. If something like this happens on the street, I will not be around so he has to learn not only to defend and to attack, but to take the pain. This is what I tell him. This is the course for a man."

As if the karate tournament were not enough, David had yet another performance coming up. Three days before his Bar Mitzvah, David was scheduled to perform in the recital his piano teacher arranges each year. Although at first he thought he would not do it

this year because of the Bar Mitzvah, Lena had insisted, and so he was practicing for that performance as well.

In the course of talking about how everything was happening in the same month, Lena began telling about a special management training course she had been selected for in which she had learned a great deal about personality types. She explained that she was an "expressive and driving personality." Like her, David was expressive also but more "amiable." Using this as a lead, I asked David in what ways he was like his father. His answer: "I think in looks."

Mo. In looks, Oh G-d (no) (laugh) No, I don't know.  
D. (to Mo.) That was mean.

Embarrassed, Lena tried to change the subject and began describing how personalities were categorized. She then contrasted herself to her ex-husband who was not an initiator and needed specific direction (from her). Here David likened himself to his father in this need to be told what to do ("like clean up your room and wash your face"). He then told an entertaining story he'd heard a comedian tell and as we all laughed, the tension dissipated. When I asked Lena in what ways she was like her mother and father, she said that her mother was very amiable, friendly, and calm. With some humor, David contradicted her by saying "It depends on with who."

Mo. (to D.) Did you ever see your mother, I mean your grandmother overreact to anything?  
D. Well, yes, sometimes, but most of the time it's over me.



In terms of similarities, Lena said she was most like her father. They had shared interests (especially in theater) and similarly expressive personalities. "I always knew that I am my father's daughter 'down to the bones.' Everyone says that."

As the interview ended, David commented that he, too, had been in plays. Last summer at camp he'd acted in a play about a haunted house. He was the lawyer--and the ghost's lover and they were talking about killing the former husband. He chuckled slightly with the word "lover" and tried to catch his mother's eye but she was making an amused face to me about the idea of her little boy as someone's lover--or even someone who knew what the word meant. David went on to tell a very funny story about how he'd forgotten his lines and the interview ended with all of us laughing. As I left, Lena invited me to the piano recital. I said I'd be there.

Interview #3 - 1 1/2 Weeks Before the Bar Mitzvah: Mother Alone

I had requested an interview with Mother alone because I wanted to talk about issues having to do with her divorce and current relationships--topics she (and I) preferred not to discuss in David's presence. As I felt I needed this information but did not need to be putting it into their system, I felt comfortable interviewing her this way.

When I arrived, Lena was in her bathrobe. She had just finished painting the bathroom. David was with his grandparents. He had been sick with a virus for the last few days. Lena was treating him with medicine the doctor had prescribed and with steam treatments. When he

first became ill, he left school early and when Lena came to pick him up at her parents, he was lying on the sofa in tears. Not only did he feel ill, but he was worried about not being able to practice for the Bar Mitzvah or for the karate tournament. The Bar Mitzvah practice was down to the wire and the Cantor was pushing David to study 45 minutes, three times a day. David was pushing himself as well. Lena told me proudly, "(the) Cantor gave him up to a certain line and he (David) decided to do one extra paragraph!"

As I'd known that the next day was David's birthday, I'd brought him a little gift--a book about karate. This seemed like a good time to show it to Lena and ask her to pass it on to David when she saw him after the interview. She accepted the gift with genuine surprise and appreciation. "Oh, he will be thrilled." At this point Lena reminded me of the upcoming piano recital and said she was hoping I could come. I assured her that I was planning to.

With these preliminaries out of the way, I began with the questions I'd prepared and learned a great deal more about Lena and her son. As she'd indicated before, she and David "had always had a very close relationship" and she didn't think that the Bar Mitzvah had increased his clinging to her. She understood the clinging to be a reflection of the fact that "I am both. His mother and his father." She dated the increase in the clinging to his feeling abandoned by his father when he had become involved with and eventually married another woman. "...and he starts to understand...kind of afraid that if I

will get involved with anybody, he may lose me. Because he lost his father." And although they are "not close...David loves his father."

At this point Lena described a potential problem that involved her ex-husband, Felix, and his widowed stepmother: Felix's father and stepmother came to America a little more than a year after he and Lena had arrived and they lived with their son and his family for seven or eight months. Lena was "like a daughter" to them, "doing everything for them." When Lena filed for divorce, they were furious, "called her names," and blamed her for destroying the family. Despite Lena's telling them that she still wanted to stay close and continue helping them, and despite Lena's parents saying that they too wanted to remain close "no matter what our children do," Felix's father and stepmother refused to have anything more to do with Lena and her family. David continued to see them only occasionally when his father came to visit and took him to their apartment. Although Lena attended her ex-father-in-law's funeral two years ago, she and her ex-mother-in-law have not spoken to each other for years. But when David said to his mother that he wanted to invite his grandmother, she agreed that it would be OK. "So I decided. Because of the event, if David wanted to invite her, I will not mind her to come to his Bar Mitzvah." Two weeks ago, David sent the invitation and grandmother accepted. A few days later, however, she called to say she would not be coming-- because her stepson was bringing his Christian wife "and Christians were not allowed in the synagogue." Here Lena explained that she'd invited Felix's new wife because "they are married and I don't have

anything against it." David was very upset about his grandmother not coming, and called her begging that she come. "No Grandma, you're not right. I talked to the Rabbi, and Christians are allowed (to come)." He went on: "But Grandma, this is your only grandson's Bar Mitzvah. It is probably the only opportunity in your life to be at a Bar Mitzvah. If you don't come to my Bar Mitzvah, to whose Bar Mitzvah will you come?" Despite this appeal, Grandmother continued to refuse. The next day, David called his father who assured him that he'd get her to come--essentially by telling her that his new wife would not be coming. When Lena heard this, she was very upset. She was afraid that Grandmother would come and discover that Felix's wife was there and make a terrible scene in the synagogue. Lena was planning to call Felix the next day and tell him "You can bring your wife, you can bring your mother, you can bring them both but I don't want there to be any surprises." When I asked about Felix's coming to the dinner, Lena said that at first she wasn't going to invite him since it was only for "close friends and family." When David reminded her that "...my father is my family," she agreed to invite him. But she would not invite his wife to the party. "She's welcome to the synagogue, but not at the party." And with an embarrassed laugh, "It's my party." Then she went on to say that in any case, Felix would probably not come to the party with or without his wife. Even David knew that, and had said to his mother "I want to invite him, but I don't think he will come."



In answer to my next question, Lena made it clear that the Bar Mitzvah had not caused David and his father to move closer to each other. She then went on to describe Felix's resistance to the divorce and his having told David that the man Lena had begun seeing after the divorce had taken her away from him (Felix) and "now he wants to take your mother from you." When David told Lena what his father had said, she assured him that "Nobody, never, ever will take me from you or you from me." With this, Lena described her complicated relationship with the man Felix had referred to and with whom she was again becoming involved after almost a year's hiatus. She and Jake, a Russian immigrant who lives with his dependent and controlling parents, had been seeing each other for five years. Jake's parents disapproved of Lena because she was divorced and had a child. Eventually Lena and Jake stopped seeing each other and Jake began seeing another young woman to whom his parents had introduced him. Eventually his parents began telling everyone that they were engaged. Jake didn't deny it, but kept postponing the wedding and at this point in time, was trying to extricate himself from the relationship. He'd begun calling Lena again and they were talking to each other regularly. Although he was probably not going to come to the Bar Mitzvah--because he was "not ready to make such a public announcement," he was increasingly wanting to help Lena with it. In fact, he had offered to buy her the expensive suit she'd wanted for the occasion. Although she refused his offer, they were planning to go to New York together to shop for something less expensive. Lena was very fond of Jake but worried

about his inability to separate from his parents and his lack of closeness to David. Although he and David got along when they were together, there was no warmth between them. And even Lena's parents, who were anxious for her to remarry, were not pleased with Jake's lack of closeness to David. In any case, said Lena, "I'm not ready yet (to remarry)."

Although David likes Jake better than the man Lena had been seeing when she and Jake were separated (David had told her that if she married that man he would run away), David was clearly not eager for Lena to marry anyone. At one point, Lena had tried to explain things to David: "It doesn't matter. It's a different kind of love. It's not like I'm taking something from you. It's totally different." Conversation about this part of her life ended as Lena sighed deeply and I commiserated with how complicated and difficult it all was.

The remainder of the session dealt with Bar Mitzvah details. When I asked how she handled differences of opinion with her mother who was organizing the dinner, she indicated that there was very little disagreement and when there was, "we usually come to agreement." For example, when Lena questioned her mother's wanting to invite some people with whom she (Lena) had little in common, her Mother explained "'But they're my friends.' So I said 'alright.'"

J. It sounds like you're very flexible.

Mo. Yes, and she is flexible, too.

As the interview ended, and Lena made it clear that she was hoping that I (and my husband) would be coming to the dinner, I

happily offered to help her and her mother with the preparations in the afternoon. Although she insisted that that wasn't necessary, that she wanted me to come as a guest, she finally agreed that if I wanted to, I could help. She also indicated that she was a little nervous about the "mixed company." "I. very seldom mix Russian and American guests."

My final question to Lena had to do with the multiple events that David was facing.

J. He's got a lot of things coming up. The recital, the Bar Mitzvah, the tournament.

Lena's answer of assurance was a very proud one:

Mo. He's very artistic. Very talented. He likes to perform. He's not afraid of people. He's not afraid of the stage.

J. Well, he comes by that honestly.

Lena laughed warmly at this connection to David's theatrical heritage, and we ended with an agreement that I would call her for specific directions to the recital.

Phone call - four days before the Bar Mitzvah. When I called for the directions, David answered the phone and thanked me with genuine appreciation for the karate book. He was feeling much better by now. When Lena got on the phone, however, it was she who sounded sick. She said she was very tired and had had a bad stomach ache that was "all nerves." Her father was also sick. He had a fever and a bad cold. On top of all that, the suit she had found was sold before she could

bring her mother back to the store to see it. She would have to wear "some old shamate [rag]" after all.

Informal Meeting #2 - Three Days Before the Bar Mitzvah at a Recital Hall: Mother, Bar Mitzvah boy, and Grandmother

The recital hall, a long, large room in a stately, ivy-covered old building, was formal and brightly lit by a huge chandelier. A grand piano sat at one end, and chairs for about 100 filled the rest of the space. I arrived early and watched little girls in starched dresses and little boys in suits and ties waiting nervously to perform. Many in the gathering audience were Russian. So was the teacher, a friend of the family's. Lena, David, and Grandmother arrived just before the program was to begin. Lena was dressed in the suit and high heels she'd worn to work. David, in a jacket and tie, looked pale and serious. Grandmother, a large, buxom, woman dressed plainly but wearing lipstick, smiled warmly at me as Lena quickly introduced us and the performance began. Lena whispered to me that she did not like one of the pieces that the teacher had assigned to David. "It's too technical. He's better with romantic pieces." Lena was also critical of the way in which the teacher had not scheduled another child in between the two pieces that David was to do. One was a duet and the other a solo piece. As David was one of the older students, his turn came toward the end of the program. During his solo, David lost his place and had to repeat one measure three or four times before getting back into the piece. It was a tense few minutes in which everyone in the audience was holding their breath. Lena was



visibly upset and annoyed. David, reluctantly taking his bow, looked very unhappy. The two other students who followed, performed perfectly and the concert was over.

In the reception area where punch and cakes were being served, there was lots of animated congratulations and exchanges in Russian among various sets of parents who for the most part see each other only at these annual events. While Lena was talking with some of these parents, I spoke with her mother who was quite open and friendly. It was as if we were not really strangers to each other. Grandmother explained that her husband was sick with a sore throat "because he ate ice and he's not used to cold." She presented her opinion as fact. She didn't seem to be too worried about him. When I commented that she must be very busy now, she acknowledged that she was, but did not indicate in any way that she was overwhelmed by the task. From what she said she'd already prepared and frozen, she sounded extremely competent and well organized. But she did not seem as excited as I somehow expected her to be. When Lena and I caught up with each other, Lena said she was feeling much better today, but had been nauseated all week. She also told me (happily) that she and Jake were definitely getting back together again and that he had taken her and David out to dinner the other night. After the reception, Lena invited me to join them at a local luncheonette where they were going for a bite to eat. I accepted the invitation eagerly as I wanted a chance to speak more with Grandmother.

After the recital. In the restaurant. In the restaurant, David asked if either Mother or Grandmother would share a particular platter with him. He wanted it, but knew it was too large for him alone. At first, neither his mother nor his grandmother wanted it, but after considerable discussion, Grandmother agreed. Said David who was clearly used to things working out this way, "That's what I wanted in the first place." During the meal, Grandmother revealed her disappointment with David's performance and said very seriously, "Oh, David, how could you have messed up the Chopin like that? Your grandfather will be so disappointed. You did it so well this morning."

D. I guess I was nervous.  
Mo. Mom, stop it.

But Grandmother continued to question David, and Lena had to intervene on his behalf again. Shortly after this exchange, both Grandmother and Lena chided David for not using his fork. At one point, Mother slapped her son's hand lightly and said "You are embarrassing me. I will not take you to a restaurant again." David continued to act childishly but this behavior was interspered with comments in which he chided his mother (about not having finished decorating the bathroom, about not gaving gone to Boston for his citizenship papers, etc.) as if he were the parent and she the child. When she said she couldn't do the bathroom tomorrow because she had other plans, David cross-examined her about where she was going, with whom, and why. Half mockingly and half seriously, Lena asked me "What

am I going to do? He wants to be not only my son but my mother and father too!"

The complicated dynamics between Lena and David were dramatic. One minute she was stroking his face lovingly and the next minute she was telling him to move over so she could have room to eat (and breathe). One minute he was acting like a tired young child with his head on her shoulder, and the next he was giving her instructions about what she had to do the next day and where she had to take him (since grandfather was sick and couldn't drive him to his various lessons). Grandmother alternated also. One minute she was joined with Mother chiding David about his behavior and the next she was joined with David, chiding Lena about getting things done. It was almost as if Lena and David took turns being the child--with Grandmother as parent to both of them.

Seeing David and Lena with Grandmother, I had a better understanding of the shifting boundaries between Lena and her son. Lena had to work hard to keep the "proper" hierarchical order between herself and her son, and in her own mother's presence, this took even greater effort. With Grandmother, Mother and Son were more like siblings and the seeming coalition between a strong-willed mother and a demanding child, functioned to keep Lena close to both of them by preventing her from developing a relationship outside of that system. At some level, Lena knew this as she said to me after David has asked her a series of prying questions, "I taught my mother not to ask me such questions so now my son does."

The meal ended as David asked his mother if he could have ice cream for dessert. Grandmother warned against his "eating cold" because he [like grandfather] was "not used to it." David said he was used to it and Lena agreed. Asserting herself, she told her mother firmly that he could have it if he wanted it. With resignation, Grandmother said to her daughter, "It's up to you." The message behind the words: "I know he's your son and it's your decision, but I think you're making a mistake."

Over the course of the evening, it seemed to me that Grandmother had become somewhat tense. My questions and opening lines about the Bar Mitzvah and her excitement did not elicit much response. I continued to be surprised about her lack of affect. As Grandmother was anxious to leave ("I have a lot to do yet tonight and I have to make sure your father has taken his medication."), we headed quickly for the parking lot. There, the family talked more about the chauffering complications for the next day and Lena explained to me again that it was because "our grandfather is sick and he is our usual chauffeur. We depend on him." (As she talked, I couldn't help but wonder how else they depend on him.)

When we reached our cars, Lena asked me (half jokingly) "What do you think of my family (and what you saw tonight)?" My answer came easily and sincerely, "I see that there's a lot of love in your family." They all smiled broadly (and gratefully?). I really did feel their love for each other and I did understand their complicated



interaction as an expression of that love. We hugged goodnight, looking forward to the big event in just three more days.

As I drove home, I felt worried for them. I tried to understand what I had seen and what it was that worried me. Perhaps Lena had been right about wanting to see a therapist. Maybe I should have encouraged her instead of trying to reduce her anxiety. Maintaining my role as researcher and my place outside the system was becoming a real challenge with this family.

Analysis of the Dynamics of the Gordovsky System  
in the Planning Period

A number of very strong features characterize this system and my interaction with it during the three months prior to its first Bar Mitzvah in many generations.

The first is its charm. The Gordovsky family is personally and conceptually appealing. As individuals, I found them warm, interesting, and compelling. As a family unit living in a foreign culture and at the same time attempting to reconnect with an almost lost heritage, they were intellectually intriguing. Throughout my experience with them, I felt personally and academically fortunate to have met them. In the synagogue, the Rabbi referred to David as "the boy with the sweet voice." For me, there was a sweetness about them all.

The second feature has to do with the membership and structure of the significant system and my interpretation of that system. Although most of my interaction was with Mother and Son, it was clear from the beginning that the nuclear family in this case included the grandparents. The two households were separate only physically; emotionally they were one unit. The multiple roles played by each of the members in this family reflected this reality, but not only this reality. At least three other forces need to be taken into account. The first is the increasingly well-documented reality of single parenthood and the flexible boundaries that this family structure elicits. Adolescent children, by necessity, often become "parentified" companions to single parents. And contrary to old

axioms, this "extreme proximity and hierarchy reversal" can be adaptive rather than dysfunctional. It depends on the intensity, timing, and context (Wood & Talmon, 1983).

The second force is the nature of the immigrant experience and the role of children as interpreters and boundary spanners for the adults. David's correcting his mother's pronunciation, or explaining the synagogue service, or the meaning of the holidays, was not simply an example of confused boundaries, but an adaptive response to a new world. In this family, the immigrant context serves to intensify the role reversals that often characterize single parent systems.

The third reality is that of the family's cultural expectations for closeness and for the role of grandparents in reference not only to grandchildren but to unmarried daughters (and sons?) as well. Lena's reference in the parking lot to her father as "our grandfather" and her "slip of the tongue" in referring to David's grandmother as his mother, were not necessarily indications of "pathology" but, more likely, reflections of cultural norms that support family functioning.

It is all too easy for the researcher to impose Western standards where they don't apply and to misinterpret the observed interactions. In retrospect, I think I was falling into that trap as I sat with the Bar Mitzvah boy, his mother, and his grandmother in the restaurant that night before his Bar Mitzvah. I think that, to some extent, what I was actually seeing was the system's dynamics heated up by the pressure of the upcoming ritual. What, for the most part was a functional set of relationships, appeared in this intensified form as

potentially dysfunctional. At least it appeared that way to me from the perspective of one who had become inducted into the system and was perhaps being pulled like the mother, towards applying wrong solutions.

To the extent that adolescence is a time of ambivalence and the Bar Mitzvah is a ritual to help the family negotiate that ambivalence, it is no wonder that seemingly contradictory expectations and behaviors should be so manifest after months of preparation leading up to this ritual. Clearly David is ambivalent about growing up. He acts uncharacteristically childlike in the restaurant at the same time that he appears almost tyrannically adult-like in his scolding of his mother. He wants to remain mother's baby and her protector at the same time.

In addition, David is trying to remain loyal to two very different role models and the balancing act here, too, is difficult. David says he looks like his father (who had also taken karate lessons), and like him, needs to be told what to do. But also Grandfather is a very powerful force, and David identifies with him even more strongly. Grandfather is big, hard working, intellectual, and accomplished. He is also a Cohen, a member of the most prestigious of the Jewish denominations. David is disappointed that he is not like his grandfather in this regard, but in every other way, he seems to be aligning himself with him--as a musician, an actor, a writer, and as one who is adored by Lena.



Mother is as ambivalent about her son's growing up as he is. When David worries about being short all his life, she assures him that he will grow taller. When asked about the significance of the Bar Mitzvah, she says proudly, that her son will "become a man." When questioned about her enthusiasm for David's karate lessons, she talks about his training for manhood. But at the same time that she talks of his maturing, she begins overseeing his homework, disciplining him in public, and complaining that he is "a baby" in reference to his studies.

In both deed and word, she pushes him away from her and pulls him closer simultaneously. David's flip-flopping behavior is an attempt to respond to both messages in a tight and reflexive interaction.

Mother's ambivalence about her own development and its effect on her relationship with her son, with her parents, and with her boyfriend is also clear. As long as David remains young and clinging, Lena remains responsible for a child who needs her time and attention. Responding to this need allows little energy for developing a serious relationship with a man. By not developing this extra-familial attachment, Lena not only remains close to her son, but remains herself childlike and close to her parents. When Lena does become involved with a man, it is one who is equally ambivalent about growing up and leaving his parents. As Lena finds this lack of strength and maturity distasteful, this man is less of a threat to her relationship with her son and parents than he might be otherwise. Similarly, Lena's closeness to her son and her parents allows her not to get so

involved with this man that he would actually choose her over his parents.

Consistent with this pattern of ambivalence, Lena teaches her mother not to intrude in her private life, but then allows her son to do it for her. The coalition between David and his grandmother which keeps Lena close is powerful and powerfully maintained.

Two interlocking myths in this family also serve to maintain the status quo: The first is that the divorce was entirely Lena's "fault." She is therefore totally responsible for having deprived her son of his father and now she must fill both parental roles. The second myth is that sons and stepfathers can never be close to each other and the resulting tension is living hell for the woman in between them. For the time being, Lena needs David to be both child and man, and David, approaching adolescence, has a need for both of those identities as well. The co-developmental needs of Mother and Son are a perfect example of Golan's (1981) notion of the "intercogwheeling" of the generations.

The upcoming ritual which will proclaim David's "readiness for manhood" (van Gennep, 1908, p. 67) pushes for change in this system, and the intensification of the ambivalence is understandable. The old balances and pathways are working less well, the mixed messages are increasing, and the tension is building. Hoffman's (1980) precursors for systems change are in full view and the "sweatbox" is stressful.

More than with any other family, the pull to act as therapist with the Gordovsky's was strong. Not only did Lena practically ask

for such help, but I was invested in their being healthy. At first, this investment moved me to try and reframe David's behavior as common adolescent behavior (and thus dissuade Lena from making him/them into patients), and later this investment resulted in my anxiety about their behavior and the direction in which it seemed to be moving.

Was this hierarchy reversal and extreme proximity still adaptive or was it becoming dysfunctional? I was too close to tell. As Wood and Talmon (1983, p. 355) point out, the challenge (to the family) is to maintain the family's needs and the child's developmental needs (simultaneously). There are "no hard and fast rules" (p. 356). Was this family still in balance? I didn't know and I felt worried.

The final striking feature about this family, was the number of arenas in which David was expected to perform and achieve. Within the space of one week, David was being tested in the artistic, spiritual, and physical realms. He was performing in not one, but three public rituals: The formal piano concert, the ceremonial rite of passage, and the stylized karate tournament. The ethic of hard work and achievement is strong in this family. This ethic helped motivate them to risk applying for a visa and it reinforces their determination to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in America. In Russia, there were political limits to what Jews could achieve. In America there are none. In a sense, David, the first of this new generation in America, is taking advantage of the opportunities on behalf of the past generations to whom they were denied.

Comparative Analysis of Four Families Over the Three Months  
Prior to the Bar Mitzvah of Their First Child

Introduction and Organization

Four families in Western Massachusetts each planning the Bar Mitzvah of their first child. From a developmental point of view, these families are at similar stages in the life cycle: they are all beginning to deal for the first time with an emerging adolescent in the system. From a cultural perspective, these families are similar in that they have all chosen to perform a Bar Mitzvah ritual in order to mark this child's coming of age according to Jewish tradition. From the point of view of planning the event, they are similar in that they all have to deal with a thousand details that require a thousand decisions.

What these decisions are and how they make them, however, is what distinguishes these families from one another in terms of emotional process and ritual performance. The preceding portraits that emerged over the three months prior to the individual Bar Mitzvahs are a result of the researcher's attempt to explore these decisions and the issues that informed them. Obviously, the portraits reflect vast differences among the systems in terms of membership, structure, history, stressors, and level of religious identification. But they reflect not only differences; the portraits also reveal broad similarities in the way family systems interact with ritual process to facilitate developmental change.



This comparative analysis of the four families prior to the Bar Mitzvah begins with a brief synopsis of each of the families, emphasizing their unique issues and dynamics. It then highlights the similarities among the systems in reference to the pressures with which they were contending, the ways in which they managed those pressures, and the kinds of inter- and intrapersonal connections that seemed to evolve. A brief postscript on the coevolution of the observed and observing systems is also included.

Synopses of Individual Families in Stage I,  
the Preliminal, Planning Stage

Synopsis of Family 1 ("The Hospitality Suite")

The Steinbergs are a second generation divorced family in which Father and Mother share custody of their only child. Father is remarried to a woman who is not Jewish and who is feeling very much the outsider. Early in the observed planning period she becomes pregnant. On a monthly schedule, the child alternates between these two households which, through the pivotal ex/husband, are both equally involved in planning the upcoming event. The families differ dramatically in structure, life style, and developmental stage. For the single Jewish mother, the Bar Mitzvah marks the end of her childrearing life. For the newly married couple, it marks the beginning of their preparations for a new family. Remaining equally loyal to these two systems while preparing himself for the ritual ahead is the task of the emerging adolescent.

Given the dynamics, this could have been an extremely painful if not destructive period in the life of this family. Its emphasis on harmony, however, and its determination to make the event a positive experience, allowed the process to be used for growth and positive movement rather than pain.

The importance of the hospitality suite speaks, from the beginning, of the family's intention and need to keep the Bar Mitzvah period a sacred space, both pragmatically and metaphorically. Their goal was for the Bar Mitzvah to be an occasion for celebrating the child's accomplishment, not for competing for his loyalty. In keeping with this goal, it became a period in which the discussion of difficult/conflictual issues were postponed. It was as if everyone had implicitly agreed to use the time for consolidating and nurturing the system's strengths before tackling the next set of difficult developmental changes that the child's increasing maturity and the sub systems' evolutions were necessitating. In this context, planning for the Bar Mitzvah became an opportunity for the adults, with their histories of ambivalence regarding both Jewish ritual and their families of origin to intensify their connections to both. Mother became increasingly involved with and supported by her Tennessee family (and their "incredible Jewish spirit"), and Father's increasing emotional connection to his parents was equally visible. It became, as well, an opportunity for the child to begin realigning himself both in terms of his parents and in terms of the larger culture of which

they and he were a part (e.g., increased interest in Judaism, in Israel, in synagogue attendance, etc.).

Synopsis of Family 2 ("The Family Project")

The Goldsteins, consisting of Mother, Father, Bar Mitzvah boy, and younger Sister, are a financially comfortable, intact, Reform family with exceptionally clear boundaries around the nuclear system. On Father's side, this is the first Bar Mitzvah in many generations of Reformed men. On Mother's side, only Grandfather has strong feelings about the religious event.

For the Goldsteins, the upcoming event is "a family project" and like all such projects, they are planning it "together as a family." Although Mother is in charge of the details (and Father is paying for them), both parents are equally involved in making the major decisions and the children are appropriately involved in the decisions that effect them directly. Although they worry somewhat about the deficiencies in the child's Hebrew education and his subsequent ability to learn his part, they are, ultimately, confident that he will do well and that all of the plans they've made with the caterers, the photographers, the florists, and the musicians will go smoothly.

The major focus of planning and excitement is on the dinner party to be held Saturday night. At some level, it is the party itself that takes on the aura of sacredness and the family's refusal to allow the researcher into this space speaks to both its importance and to the family's tendency to protect its boundaries.

In this family, the major areas of tension are not within the nuclear unit but at the level of the grandparents' generation. In addition to the sadness of realizing that their extended families were small and getting smaller as aunts and uncles were aging and dying, three issues predominated: The first was the fact that during their fifteen years of marriage, their two sets of parents (living in different states) had met only once--at their wedding. This had been a very stressful meeting, one that both Mother and Father were dreading would be repeated at the Bar Mitzvah. The second area of stress was the fact that although everyone in the family wanted Father's 95-year-old grandmother to attend her great grandson's Bar Mitzvah, her daughter (Father's mother), refused to bring her. The final source of intergenerational stress was the fact that the health of Mother's mother (and to a lesser extent, her father) was deteriorating rapidly and there was some worry about her being able to attend.

As pressure in reference to these issues escalated with the approaching ceremony, Mother and Father both took action in ways that were new for them. Father, whose sense of intergenerational boundaries was particularly strong, intervened with his parents in ways that pushed those boundaries beyond their usual limits. First, he convinced his parents to visit his wife's parents so that the tense situation they were dreading for the Bar Mitzvah could be avoided. This intervention was highly successful and relieved that source of tension almost entirely by the time the research had begun. Second,



he urged his mother to change her mind and bring his grandmother. When this appeal failed, he allowed and appreciated his younger brother's uncharacteristic efforts to intervene for him. Although this action did not result in his grandmother's attendance, it did strengthen the bond between him and his brother. For her part, Mother--for the first time in fifteen years--visited her parents alone, without her husband or children. Although her stated purpose was to assess her mother's health needs, this was, in fact an opportunity for the daughter (and parents) to begin preparing psychologically for the impending shift in caretaking roles that the parents' age and failing health were necessitating.

#### Synopsis of Family 3 ("Baruch Hashem" [Thanks be to G-d])

The Sheinmans, with their seven children and huge interlocking families of origin, are an ultra orthodox Hasidic family. Both Mother and Father come from many generations of Hasidic rabbis. The couple was sent as missionaries to Western Massachusetts by der Rebbe, the world leader of the Lubavitcher Hasidim.

For this family, faith in G-d and belief in Jewish law is absolute and all encompassing. For them, Jewish life and family life are synonymous and completely prescribed by divine decree. Within this law and the world it creates, all roles and rules are prescribed in detail and with great clarity. There is little room for ambiguity about such things as interpersonal boundaries, generational hierarchies, or developmental transitions. Expectations for behavior

are explicit, shared both across and through the generations, and reinforced by the enactment of ritual.

Unlike the other families in this study where the Bar Mitzvah stands out as one of the few religious rites the family enacts, this is a family for whom the Bar Mitzvah is only one among thousands of rituals it performs ("a mere blip on a graph"). For Hasidic Jews, there are rites and rituals that structure every aspect of existence. Not only do these rituals function to maintain the prescribed behaviors, but the behaviors, in turn, maintain the rituals' effectiveness. For Hasidic Jews, ritual is a way of life rather than one aspect of it.

Within this Hasidic context, the emergence of a first child's adolescence is generally much less stressful than it is within secularized families. Expectations for the child's behavior and the behavior of family and community members in relation to him are clear and uncontested. The rules for his transition into Jewish adulthood are concrete, and the markings of his new status are dramatic and unmistakable. It is no wonder that for Mother, the most poignant moment in the preparation period was the first time her son (instructed by his father) put on tefillin, the symbol of male adulthood.

The Bar Mitzvah in the Hasidic family system seems to be different from those in the other families, both in terms of emotional focus and effect. In secular families, the Bar Mitzvah essentially announces the fact that the child is "getting ready" to become an

adult, i.e., he is becoming a teenager. And the locus of energy during the preparation period is generally less on the boy's change in status, than on other dynamics in the family's emotional system.

In this family as in all the Hasidic families, the Bar Mitzvah actually does mark the child's change in terms of his relationship to G-d, to Jewish law, and to the community. Here the emotional energy isn't diverted by other issues. The ritual (and preparation for it) works primarily (though not exclusively) for the celebrant's passage rather than for developmental issues elsewhere in the system. In the Hasidic world where ritual is so powerful and where there are other rituals for the needs of the other members at that time, the Bar Mitzvah ritual works directly rather than indirectly, to facilitate the child's change of status. For this Hasidic child whose fundamental beliefs and values are identical to those of his parents and their parents before them, the effect of the passage is indisputable. "What do you mean (I'm not responsible for the defiling of the fork)? I'm a Bar Mitzvah!!"

Synopsis of Family 4 ("Grow Up [and Accomplish] But Stay Close")

The Gordovskys are a single parent immigrant family in which the child's bris in Russia was held clandestinely. As with the Steinbergs, there are really two parts to this system, but the blending is intergenerational rather than intragenerational. Mother's parents, with whom she and her then husband and son immigrated, live just a few blocks away and have always had an active role in raising their grandson. The two systems are separate only geographically.

Emotionally, they are one unit. And emotionally, the roles the members play in this unit are complex and often confusing.

At times the grandparents function as parents to both Mother and Son, and Mother and Son relate to each other as siblings. At times, Mother is clearly in charge of her son hierarchically but at other times, the roles reverse and he acts as her parent often aligning with Grandmother to chide and/or protect his mother.

Although these multiple roles may be more the norm in Russian culture, and more functional than dysfunctional in single parent systems, there is in this family, a great deal of multigenerational ambivalence about both Mother and Son's growing up. The messages about holding on and letting go are extremely mixed and confusing. As the Bar Mitzvah approaches, the ambiguous messages increase in frequency and intensity. Such an increase is not surprising. To the extent that the event symbolizes initiation into adulthood, it makes sense that the system's stress would manifest itself in this way.

But if the system is unclear about growing up, it is absolutely clear about both its Jewish identity and about the value of accomplishment and performance. Both in Russia and in America, the family acted to maintain the threads of its Jewish heritage. In Russia, the underground bris and the application for a visa (because "What Jews can do was limited in Russia."), were two dramatic statements. In America the child was immediately enrolled in a Jewish day school ("To give him the opportunity that I didn't have [to be a knowledgeable Jew]").



That opportunity worked. Not only had the child become the most knowledgeable in the family about Jewish culture and religion, but the tradition had become even more important to him than to his mother and grandparents. His desire to be a Cohen like his mother's father was an expression not only of his identification with his grandfather, but his identification with the Jewish tradition that the family, through this child, was reclaiming.

Both in Russia and America also, the family's valuing of hard work, achievement, and public performance was equally clear. Grandfather's history on the Yiddish stage, both grandparents' intellectual achievements, and Mother's striving for academic degrees are all consistent with this value. Not only is the child expected to star at his Bar Mitzvah, but is expected to perform flawlessly at his piano recital a few days earlier, and to win a trophy at his karate tournament a day after. In America there are no limits to what a Jew can accomplish.

#### Similarities Among the Families in Reference to Escalating Tensions and Meaning of Action

The preceding synopses highlighted the differences among the four families in terms of their makeup and major issues. The following highlights some of the common dynamics that are apparent as these preliminal systems prepare for the ritual. The commonalities have to do with 1) the accumulation of stress, 2) the function of details, and 3) the multiple meanings of action.

### Accumulation of Stress

Foremost was the increase in stress and accumulation of tension in all of the systems. Without exception, preparing for the first Bar Mitzvah placed unprecedented demands on the family both pragmatically and emotionally. This was the first time the adults were responsible for planning, organizing, and paying for an event that would bring together into one setting, all of the segments of their lives--Friedman's (1981, p. 55) "original encounter marathon." No matter how experienced they were in managing complex tasks, or how protected they were by faith, or how comfortable they were financially, this would be an event like no other before it. For the child, it was the first time that he was responsible (all by himself) for learning something extremely difficult (when he already had so much to handle anyway) and for demonstrating that he'd learned it in front of all of his friends, all of his parents' friends, all of his family whom he knew, and even those he didn't. No matter what his level of Hebrew proficiency, it was to be the hardest test he had ever taken. No matter how willingly and how joyfully they had entered the process, the Bar Mitzvah became an ordeal that the whole family had to get through.

It is no wonder that so many of the members in these four families got sick or hurt in some way just prior to the event. In the Steinberg family, Mother, Father and Bar Mitzvah boy all had bad colds. In the Gordovsky family, David lost his (sweet) voice, Grandfather had the flu, and Mother had a stomach ache and nausea for days. In the Sheinman family, younger son Shmuel, who'd wanted to be

part of the action all along, got an ear ache the day before the Bar Mitzvah, and Mother fell and twisted her ankle while taking him to the doctor. Not surprisingly, no one in the Goldstein system got sick prior to the Bar Mitzvah except the Rabbi who threw his back out, and the Cantor who got a cold and was afraid she'd have no voice. Somehow, somatic expressions of tension were kept outside the boundaries of this nuclear unit.

#### Attention to Detail

Both as a strategy for managing the tasks at hand, and as a strategy for managing the stress, all of the families made lists of things to do and all of the families focused on details that had to be taken care of. What details were most important and who attended to them was different in each family depending on their issues and their values. But the importance of details was a theme common to all.

In part, this focus on details speaks to the need that families in transition have for order. As the chaos inherent in developmental change increases, systems reach out for structure and safety (Golan, 1981). Exerting order on the potentially overwhelming details involved in planning the Bar Mitzvah satisfies, to some extent, the family's need for the order and control that it cannot exert over impending changes in its emotional system. Writing down instructions about how to lay out food for the luncheon, hiring someone to make the fruit baskets for the hotel rooms, practicing where to stand on the stage, and making lists of who will sleep where and when, are all strategies for creating order and for managing stress as well as for

managing the event. Attention to details not only allows the families to externalize their anxiety, but allows them a way of working it out as well. As Culler (1982b) states, it is a way for the families to take their minds off of what is really happening (in terms of change).

### Symbolic Meaning of Action

As the family makes decisions and acts on the details these decisions entail, what they are doing has meaning on two different but interconnected levels. On the explicit and concrete level, dates and contracts are being arranged, people being hired, invitations being sent, etc., etc. On the implicit, emotional level, family members are dealing not only with all that this child's emerging adolescence means to them, but with all of the unfinished business they have with all of the extended family and community members with whom they are, or will be (re)connecting once they've decided to invite them to the Bar Mitzvah.

Which logistical tasks and details are difficult or important is related directly to what is important in the emotional life of the system. The public and concrete tasks of preparation that drive the system on a conscious level are isomorphic with and symbolic of the nonconscious, metaphoric tasks that must be performed in order for the family's private passage to be successful. This explains the seemingly inappropriate level of tension and anxiety associated with what appears, on the surface, to be trivial details and mundane decisions.



When seen in this light, the importance of the dimensions and accoutrements of the hospitality suite (for a family where competing loyalties are an issue), makes sense; the anxiety about not having enough blankets and pillows and coleslaw (for a family where not traveling on the Sabbath is paramount), becomes more understandable; the question of whether or not Mother's boyfriend will come to the Bar Mitzvah, or if Father's new wife will attend (in a family where the relationship between Mother and Son and the men in Mother's life are at best confused), also takes on new meaning.

Mother's need to do more. Another similarity across systems in terms of tension, details, and multiple meanings was the mothers' intention to do more than they were physically capable of doing. In all cases, the mothers pushed themselves beyond their usual limits of industry and productivity. And in all cases they were both pleased with the results and disappointed in not having done more. Stacy had originally planned to cater the dinner as well as the luncheon and she'd wanted to design the service herself also.

Sandy reluctantly had to hire someone to do the fruit baskets. She didn't have time. Grandmother didn't get to make the gefilte fish and Lena didn't finish decorating the bathroom; neither was she able to find the new suit she was looking for. For her part, Leah was having nightmares about running out of coleslaw for Saturday morning. That these women should have been concerned about these "failings" in light of the enormous amount each had, in fact, accomplished, is further evidence both of the fact that the Bar Mitzvah is not simply a

test for the child, but that what all of the participants do in preparation for the ritual has meaning beyond that which is obvious.

The invitation. From this perspective, the invitation also takes on more meaning. If the Bar Mitzvah is the family's first public portrayal of its faith and form at this point in its development, the invitation is the preview of the performance. It is not merely an announcement of where and when the event will be held, but an announcement of the event's meaning in the life of the family and the relationship the family wants those being invited to have to that meaning. The quality of the paper, the effect of the graphics, the choice of language, and the address to which the response card is returned all have significance.

The Steinberg's homemade invitation was not only an expression of Mother's creativity and feminist values, and an indication of the financial constraints within which the family was operating, but it was a brilliant resolution of a major and potentially destructive conflict. Given the dynamics, the family approached the wording of the invitation with great trepidation. Mother's name could not appear without Father's and Father's name could not appear without his new wife's, and Mother wouldn't hear of that. How they dealt with this detail would set precedence for the way they would handle all future details, and set the tone for the event itself. The compromise was a perfect resolution: "The family of Micah Lerner Steinberg fondly invites you ..." Given that the child's middle name was Mother's maiden name (which she had never relinquished) and his last name was

father's surname, the biological parents were named without being named, and Stepmother was neither named nor excluded. This kind of delicate balance of appropriate involvement among the adults is what the family worked so hard to maintain throughout.

If the child did not have to choose between the two parts of his family, neither did the guests. Implicitly, the invitations informed those who received them about the family's commitment to cooperation and instructed them with "fondness" about supporting that commitment.

In the Sheinman's case, names were also important--but for different reasons. The decision to not include Mother's name in the Hebrew text, but to follow the traditional Lubavitcher custom of referring to Mother as Father's "very good friend," was completely consistent with this family's attachment to tradition. And it was also a way of helping Father deal with the pain of not having his father with him for this milestone in his life. Repeating the traditional wording that his father had used for invitations was a way of honoring his father and of keeping the past alive in the present.

From this perspective, the Goldstein's tastefully contemporary and completely secular invitation also makes sense. For them, it was the color of the paper and the neatness of the script that were important. With no tradition of Bar Mitzvahs in their past, they took the wording from the printer's sample book, and with no deep attachment to the religious significance of the event, the use of Hebrew or of Jewish symbols was not important. When Mother and Son

disagreed about the colors, Mother, with characteristic clarity about generational prerogatives, made the decision.

For the Gordovskys, who in Russia could not perform Jewish rituals in public, and for whom the tradition had been fading, the invitation was a loud and proud proclamation of their reconnection to their heritage. An ornate Jewish star in gold filigree dominated the page and the wording was traditionally formal. The opening phrase, "Please share my joy," is additionally significant. Not only is it a heart-felt expression of Mother's pride, but it is an important statement of the individuation for which she is striving. Despite her parents' close involvement in this child's life, it is Mother alone who is issuing the invitation. Predictably, this individuating move meets with a counter move as it was Grandmother who actually addressed and mailed the invitations.

#### Similarities in Terms of Interpersonal Dynamics and Developmental Change

What we have seen so far in this analysis of commonalities across families is that stress (resulting from an unprecedented increase in both concrete and emotional tasks) increases exponentially during the planning period of a first child's Bar Mitzvah, and that attention to logistical details is a way families manage the stress at both the concrete and emotional levels.



### The Sweatbox and Discontinuous Change

What can also be observed across the systems are similarities in terms of intensified interpersonal dynamics. No matter how well and with what resources the family manages its tasks, the "heat" intensifies as the event approaches and Hoffman's (1981) sweatbox, though shaped differently by each family becomes apparent none-the-less. The accumulated dissonance which acts to force the system "over the edge" and on to a new more functional level of organization (Hoffman, 1981) is clearly in operation and the confusion and paradoxical messages that are precursors to change in these sweatboxes are also quite clear.

With the Steinbergs, the emphasis is on harmony, but the amount of fighting seems to increase. With the Goldsteins, the emphasis is on the party, but the anxiety is about the service and whether or not the child has learned enough. In the Gordovsky family, the normally confused messages about growing up and staying close intensify visibly. And even with the Sheinmans, where the belief system mitigates against ambivalence, Father's inability to complete the pilpul until the very last minute hints not only at his issues with his own father who wrote the speech originally, but at the inevitably ambivalent feelings he must, like all fathers, experience as his son becomes "a man." In all cases, the son behaves in ways that not only demonstrate his growing maturity, but in ways that reveal his still childish characteristics as well.

### Systemic Connections and Affirmations

What seems to have resulted from this accumulation of heat and emotional intensity in these families are the systemic connections and affirmations that the literature on ritual anticipates (e.g., d'Aquila, 1979a; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982; Turner, 1969, 1982). In all four cases, the process of preparing for the Bar Mitzvah had (to varying degrees) increased the family members' sense of connectedness with each other, with extended family, with past generations, and with Jewish tradition. It also provided the opportunity for them to feel and express pride in the child and to feel good about themselves as individuals, and about the family as a whole. By the end of the planning period, parents and children were visibly closer to each other and not only did members of the extended families become active participants in the nuclear family's drama, but even the ghosts of past generations were being awakened for the occasion (e.g., deceased grandfathers). The intensity of preparing for the Bar Mitzvah (and for the developmental changes it was to celebrate), was such that the entire system both across and through the generations was stimulated (Friedman, 1980). Relationships throughout the system were silently and subtly being renegotiated.

By the time the event was upon them, all of the families (despite last minute tasks and last minute jitters), were already beginning to experience a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. They had managed to get it all organized, the child had managed to learn what he'd had to, and friends and family were rallying from all over to be

there for them. The forces for transformation and preservation which were to be enacted during the upcoming ceremony had already been activated. Even before the weekend began, something had been "achieved" (Rabkin in Hoffman, 1980, p. 168).

This observation of systemic movement prior to the ceremony is most significant in that all of the literature (with the exception of E. Friedman's work) focuses on the ceremony itself. Although the ceremony is the visible and dramatic culmination of the process, what we have seen through these families is that much important work is happening months before the family or any of its guests arrive at the synagogue. This phenomenon relates directly to the fact that although prior to the ceremony the family is theoretically considered preliminal, it is in fact already in the liminal stage of the ritual process. And in this stage, the task of preparing for the ceremony provides a vehicle through which the family can negotiate development change.

In their work on family boundaries in transition, Wood and Talon (1983, p. 353) state that in order to create a new equilibrium, there must be time for reaffirmation and for "practicing" new patterns of proximity and hierarchy. What has become clear through this detailed examination of four families over the three months prior to their first child's Bar Mitzvah, is that the period of preparation provides a unique opportunity for such "practice."

Postscript: The Coevolution of the Observed  
and Observing Systems in the Preliminal Stage

Throughout the descriptions of the families and the researcher's interaction with them, examples of the way in which the two systems coinfluenced each other were both explicit and implicit. From the first phone calls, where the families' initial response influenced the researcher's introductions in the first interviews, to the way in which the researcher was simultaneously easing herself into the research while she thought she was easing the first family into it, to the way in which she was ultimately drawn into the action, baking cakes and worrying about the families, etc., the inseparability of the descriptions from the describer is striking. It must be understood as context for all of the description and analysis presented.



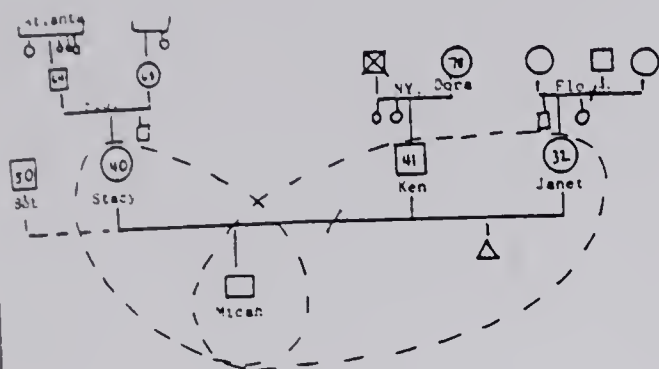
## C H A P T E R   V

### RESULTS STAGE II: THE BAR MITZVAH CEREMONY/WEEKEND

#### Introduction and Organization

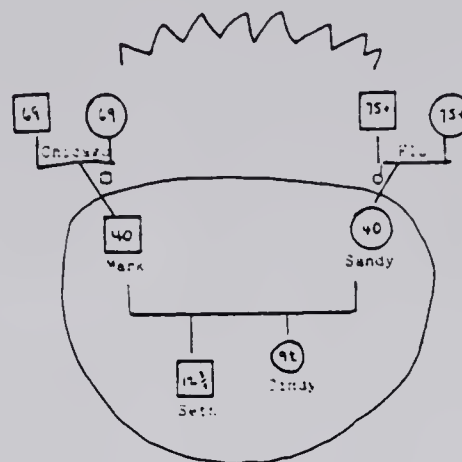
This chapter presents descriptions of the four Bar Mitzvahs as the researcher-as-guest experienced them. The focus of observation was on the emotional climate and perceived impact of the ceremonies. A comparative analysis of the four events follows the descriptions. For the reader's convenience, a review of the four family maps is included here in Figure 5.1

1. Steinberg  
("The Hospitality Suite")



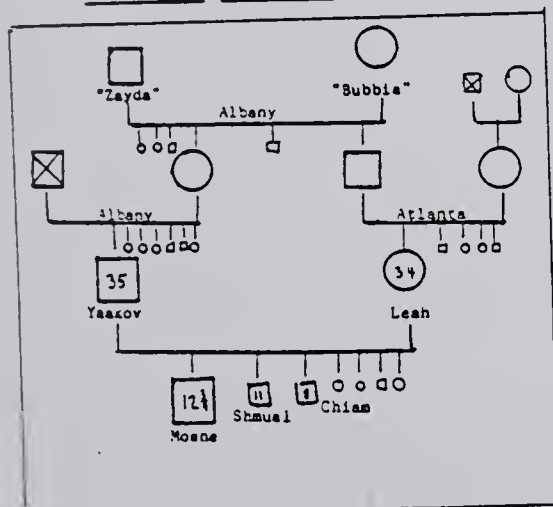
Divorced, second generation parents sharing custody of only child. Father remarries to non Jewish woman who becomes pregnant early in planning period.

2. Goldstein  
("The Family Project")



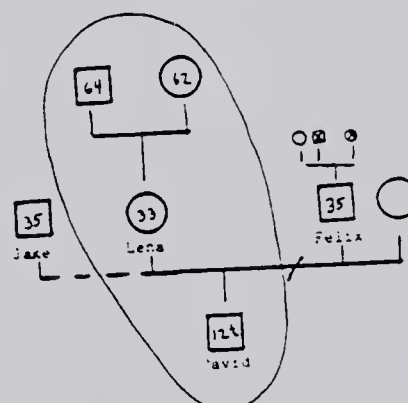
Intact, professional, Reform family with exceptionally clear boundaries. First Bar Mitzvah in generations.

3. Sheinman  
("Baruch Hashem")



Hasidic (ultra orthodox) family. Sent as missionaries by der Rebbe. Parents are first cousins in huge interlocking family system with long lineage of Hasidic rabbis.

4. Gordovsky  
("Grow Up [and Accomplish] But Stay Close")



Single parent, Russian immigrant family in which child's bris [circumcision] in Russia was held in secret. Father remarries a few months before planning period and Mother reconnects with old boyfriend. Grandparents very involved in raising child.

Figure 5.1 Review of the Four Family Maps  
(See Appendix B for key)

## Presentation of the Four Events

The Steinberg Bar MitzvahFriday Night

Arriving early with the cakes and brownies I had baked for the Oneg Shabbot, I was excited and nervous--both for the family and for me. After months of preparation, the event was upon them. After months of hypotheses and speculation, the event was upon me too: The first Bar Mitzvah of my research project. As I was slicing the cakes and arranging them (artfully) on the trays (attention to detail--strategy for stress?), Ken and Micah arrived. They were coming from the hospitality suite where all of the out-of-town guests from both families had just had dinner together. They were smiling. It had gone well. Due to some misunderstanding, Ken explained, the delicatessen had sent the food all wrapped up in packages rather than laid out on trays. "It was wonderful. Everyone started pitching in to help. 'Get the mustard. Find the mayonnaise.' Everyone was working together."

In most congregations, the Bar Mitzvah family's only responsibility in reference to the Friday night service is to attend. As this was the case here, the service reflected the synagogue more than the family. In this congregation where services are led by lay leaders, there is usually a guest speaker rather than a sermon. This night it was a local professor giving a long, esoteric lecture on 17th century Spanish Jews. The content had nothing to do with the event

everyone was there to take part in, but one aspect of the text was ironically disconcerting. In medieval times, the professor explained, Jews who "consorted" with non-Jews were either stoned to death or excommunicated. Given the number of mixed relationships in this family and the issues those mixes evoked, everyone was relieved when the lecture was over.

Back in the social hall, after the service, I felt surprisingly shy and uncertain about how to proceed. It was unclear if family members had been told that there was someone in their midst "doing research." I hadn't thought to check with Ken or Stacy and wasn't sure about how to introduce myself to these people who were busy greeting each other and helping themselves to refreshments.

After a few awkward minutes (in which I decided definitely to leave my tape recorder in the cloak room with my coat), I eased over to Micah who was momentarily alone. Ken joined us a moment later and when I told him that I'd like to meet his relatives, he didn't hesitate. The first person he introduced me to was his cousin Hank, who'd come from California. As we talked, Ken's sisters and their teenage children joined us also. The conversation was relaxed and informal as we discussed hair lengths, teen fashions, and the excitement of Bar Mitzvahs.

Stacy's family was equally easy to talk with. Stacy introduced me to her mother (whom she strongly resembled) and, without prompting from me (though in retrospect, Stacy must have told her family what I was doing), Mother talked to me about "how much credit Stacy deserved"



for having kept in contact with so much of the family "even though they hadn't always approved of everything she did. She was so loving; she kept the doors open." Stacy's Tennessee aunts turned out to be as gracious and as excited about the Bar Mitzvah as she'd said they were. Aunt Kathy, whose son was soon to be married, bubbled that "Bar Mitzvahs are much better than weddings. You get to do them your own way. With weddings, you have grown children and in-laws to contend with." Another aunt, who reinforced my sense that Stacy hadn't always been on the best of terms with the family, said "Bar Mitzvahs bring families together. That's what they're all about. Micah hasn't seen us much, but he's close to us." Stacy's cousin, Bill (his mother is Stacy's mother's sister) also talked to me about the value of the event. Living in Oregon, he'd been feeling sadly cut off from his family. This Bar Mitzvah, he said, was a reason for coming East and a way of reconnecting.

The reception ended as Ken and Micah began bringing supplies for the next day's luncheon in from the car, and all of the uncles and cousins began setting up tables while Stacy gave instructions. The sense of anticipation and camaraderie was palpable as Ken and Stacy co-directed preparations for the next day's events. As they left for the hotel, Stacy's aunts made a special point of saying good night to me, and one of Ken's sisters actually kissed me goodbye. The extended family had taken me in.

In the parking lot, as she was locking the doors, I asked Stacy if I could be of help to her in the morning. As Micah, Ken, and Janet

were leaving the hall together, I was acutely aware of Stacy being alone. As it turned out, shw was not going to be alone. Cousin Bill would be staying with her and would be helping in the morning. But since an "extra pair of hands wouldn't hurt," she accepted my offer.

### Saturday Morning

When I arrived the next morning, Stacy was "running a little late." She and Bill had been up talking until 3 a.m. As we waited while Stacy finished dressing, Bill talked about himself and his increasing need to be closer to his family. Recently, he and his wife had decided that their 11-year-old son would have a Bar Mitzvah "in order to help him identify."

When Stacy returned to the living room, she looked radiant in a new suit and matching shoes. She had had her hair done and was wearing makeup. "Well," she said with a grin, "do I look like the mother of a Bar Mitzvah?" She did.

Together, the three of us carried the bags and boxes and packages to the cars. The refrigerator and freezer and cupboards that Stacy had been filling for months were finally being emptied.

In the synagogue's kitchen, we laid out the packages and the instruction cards Stacy had for each of them. The person she'd hired to heat and serve the food hadn't arrived yet. He was supposed to have been there fifteen minutes earlier. Stacy didn't seem nervous. But I was. I couldn't imagine how he was going to get everything set up in time, especially if he were starting late. At last, he arrived. As Stacy was giving him final instructions, I left to go into the

synagogue. I wanted to watch the congregation assembling. Ken and Micah were there greeting the guests. They looked rested and happy. Janet was also there looking happy and quite pregnant in a new maternity dress. It was a beautiful day and the sun was beaming through the stained glass windows. The chapel was bright and warm and very inviting.

The special yarmulkes inscribed with Micah's name and Bar Mitzvah date that Ken had ordered were on the table by the door. The men put them on as they entered. Stacked next to the yarmulkes were the booklets that Stacy had compiled. Decorated with the graphics and Jewish symbols that matched the invitation, they contained the supplemental poems and prayers that different family members would read as part of the service. Everyone carried one to their seat.

Soon the room was filled. Micah in his new clothes, tallis, and yarmulke sat grinning on the stage and gesturing greetings as last minute guests trickled in. Janet and Ken sat together towards the left of the middle section of pews. Ken's mother sat a few rows in front of them with her daughters and sons-in-law. Stacy sat more towards the front of the chapel on the right side of the middle section. Her friend Bob, was on her left and her uncle was on her right. I sat towards the back of the middle section. In front of me, a row of adolescent girls sat whispering and giggling. In front of them were a cluster of Ken and Janet's friends. One couple had recently celebrated their son's Bar Mitzvah and at various times in the service I could tell they were reminiscing. Another of the

couples had recently been married. What they were whispering in each other's ears was anybody's guess. A third couple, who had decided not have a Bar Mitzvah for their son when he was 13, was also there. Families with small children were sitting near the back of the chapel so that they could leave easily if the children became too restless.

The service began as first Janet and then Stacy's sister-in-law (the two non-Jewish members of the family) each read one of the supplementary psalms. The traditional morning prayers followed and took up the next half hour. By the time these prayers were completed, the congregation had settled into the rhythm of the service. That rhythm quickened as the leader announced that the ark containing the Torah was about to be opened. Building the drama, he eloquently reminded the congregation of the Torah's centrality to the Jewish people throughout its long history. He also explained the synagogue's custom of having the Bar Mitzvah family participate in this part of the service. As the congregation rose for the opening of the ark, the energy in the room rose with it. As everyone watched, the Bar Mitzvah boy's parents and grandparents joined him on the stage. As they stood in a row from the oldest generation to the youngest, the leader took the Torah out of the ark and handed it to the grandparents. They each held it for a few seconds and then handed it to Ken and Stacy who, in turned, handed it to Micah. Holding the Torah in his arms, Micah led the congregation in singing the Sh'ma, the central prayer of Jewish faith. He continued singing loudly and clearly as he led the traditional procession around the synagogue. With the leader, his



parents, and grandparents following behind him, Micah carried the Torah down and around the isles as congregants reached out to touch the Torah (and kiss the tallis, prayer book, or hand with which they touched it). It was a powerful scene and I was crying. In addition to the emotions the Torah processional always evokes in me, I was moved by all that I knew about this family and all that they had come through to arrive at this moment.

As Micah returned with the Torah to the stage and the leader began to prepare for the Torah reading, the family members returned to their seats. Everyone returned to their original places except Ken. Instead of going back to sit with his new wife, he sat down next to his mother. On the surface, sitting closer to the front of the chapel was practical since he'd soon be called up to the Torah (and Janet, sitting next to her brother and sister-in-law, didn't seem to mind), but on the level of symbol, the move was meaningful. It was as if the rite in which he had just participated had temporarily drawn him back to his old family (and away from his new one).

The period during which the Torah was read, with its familiar sequencing and hypnotic cadence, seemed to provide an emotional respite after the intensity of the processional. The respite ended, however, as the last portion was about to be read and the Bar Mitzvah boy was summoned to the Torah. Everyone knew that this was Micah's big test and everyone's attention was fixed on him. He passed the test beautifully. Micah sang loudly and clearly and got through the entire haftorah without a hitch. When he came to the last note, he

announced his accomplishment with a loud sigh of relief. Everyone laughed and called out mazel tov. He then went on to read his speech with a sense of timing and showmanship that was impressive. People laughed when he likened Bar Mitzvah to ancient tortures, felt his sincerity as he thanked each of the people in his family, and shared in his relief that he'd come through the ordeal. Following his speech, the president of the synagogue presented Micah with a gift from the membership and "officially" and sincerely "welcomed him into the Jewish community."

At this point, the leader announced that Micah's parents would like to speak as well. The congregation grew very attentive as Stacy and Ken both walked up on the stage. Who would talk first had clearly not been prearranged and everyone watched as Mother and Father nonverbally decided that Father would go first.

Ken took out his notes and with Micah standing in front of him, began hesitantly, his voice cracking. He began by talking about both the stress and the pleasure of watching Micah prepare for his Bar Mitzvah and of watching him change and mature. He talked about things they had done together, about discussions they had had, and about the Bar Mitzvah secret they had shared. Then Ken said there were some things he wanted Micah to have. The first was the tallis that Micah was wearing. It had been Ken's when he was a Bar Mitzvah. The second was something that he and Micah had found in Great grandfather's safe. Reaching under the podium, Ken brought out an old velvet bag containing his father's tallis and tefillin. "I was given these when

my father died." The third, was a prayer book that Ken's grandfather had given his father on his Bar Mitzvah, and he had given Ken on his. "It came with the mandate to pass it on. Micah and I both signed it this morning so now it contains four generations of my family." Ken went on to say how fortunate Micah was to have three of his grandparents alive, "but the fourth..." Ken paused to hold back the tears. He concluded by saying that he'd tried to think of what his father would have said to Micah had he lived. "What I think he would say is that you should...live your life to the fullest, that you should respect yourself and your family and other people, and always do what you think is right...And what my father gave me above all else, was a feeling that I was always loved, that I was always good and the world was a safe place. And if I could give you anything, it would be that." With those words, Ken kissed Micah and left the stage. Few eyes were dry by now and lots of people were blowing their noses.

Stacy had not prepared a speech and spoke without notes. Referring to how long the service had already gone on and how long she'd talk if she let herself get started, Stacy said she wouldn't make a speech. She just wanted to emphasize not only her pride in Micah but the joy she felt in having "all of these people come to share this day with us." She also wanted to pass on to Micah her thoughts about past generations whom she considered "survivors of another type." As Stacy named her grandparents "who as young children had come over in steerage," she also had to fight back tears. "Their

strength is part of my feelings about Judaism that I want to pass on to Micah, to pass on my awe and love and admiration for these people even though he didn't really know them." Despite their differences, Mother and Father had passed on the same message about the connections with the past. He did it with relics and she with stories, but the intentions were the same.

The service ended shortly after the speeches and after the leader's announcements of the next week's events. Everyone poured into the reception hall happy and hungry. It had been a long and intense and successful morning. Everyone was full of compliments and congratulations. Micah was beaming and so were all of the adults.

#### The Luncheon

Despite my earlier doubts, the food was not only ready in time but it was beautifully displayed as well as delicious. Stacy had outdone herself and everyone told her as much. I mingled in the crowd talking with various members of the family and with mutual friends. Everyone talked about how moving the ceremony had been and how well the whole family had done. That Stacy and Ken had been able to work so well together for this Bar Mitzvah was a point no one seemed to underestimate. When I asked what was the most moving moment in the ceremony, most people talked about the parents' speeches--and especially Ken's talking about his father.

I spoke at some length with the couple whose son had not had a Bar Mitzvah. They agreed that the speeches were most moving but said



that the husband who hadn't been in a synagogue for years "cried the whole two hours." They explained further that it had been a hard year for them. The wife's father had died and their son had gone off to college. "He had a lot to let out and the service brought up all kinds of feelings."

As the guests left, I stayed to help clean up. Stacy and Ken were visibly pleased with how things had gone so far, but the party was ahead of them and so was the meeting to determine the seating arrangements. As they left to work on that detail, I went home to rest. I was exhausted.

#### Saturday Night

When I reached the hotel where the party was being held, most of the guests had already arrived and were eating the hors d'oeuvres. Everyone was dressed up and looked rested. On a table in the corner, the small seating cards were all lined up. They'd done it; they'd made seating decisions. I felt relieved. But later when I went to the table I'd been assigned, I found myself feeling disappointed. I'd been seated with neither family nor friends but with people who seemed not to fit in either category: Micah's swimming teacher and some of his other students, and Micah's old babysitter and her mother who'd been Stacy's neighbor. It was an awkward mix of people, and I found myself working to keep conversation going between the various subgroups. Later, both Stacy and Ken apologized for having put me at that table. "We were counting on you to make all of them comfortable." Eagerly, I assured them that the seating was fine and

that we'd all done quite well together. How ironic that they had to worry about where they seated me in addition to all the other seating issues they'd been dealing with. In retrospect, of course, it made sense for me to have been seated there. After all, I wasn't invited as a member of the family or as a friend. I was invited because I was doing research on Bar Mitzvahs and my being at a table of neither friends nor family was fitting. My disappointment was an indication how much I had been drawn into the system. Without thinking, I'd come to the party expecting to have a good time. Without a doubt, I would have had more fun sitting either with family members or with mutual friends.

But if I was having less of a good time at the dinner table than I'd expected, people at other tables were not. From all that I could see and hear, people were unquestionably enjoying themselves. The energy and enthusiasm were high and the dance floor was full. For some tunes the floor was filled with teenagers and young people, for others it was with the oldies but goodies generation, and for others it was a happy mix. The disc jockey knew what he was doing and by the time he'd started the hora [the traditional circle dance], everyone from grandparents to toddlers was willingly drawn in. Even I was dancing. And by the middle of the evening (when dinner is over and people generally move away from their assigned tables), I was as involved in the festivities as anyone. At one point I was posing for a snapshot with Ken's mother, at another, talking like an old friend with Aunt Kathy, and at another, enjoying with Janet, the antics of

Micah and his friends as they alternated between sophisticated dance steps and child-like clowning. Janet shared her enthusiasm for how well it had all turned out and commented that even cousins who, in New York, hadn't been getting along, had spent the afternoon shopping together and had "had a ball."

It was late when the party ended. Everyone was exhausted but still high. As we hugged goodbye, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the party had been great and that the day had been a huge success. On my way out, Stacy reminded me that I was welcome to the family brunch in the hospitality suite the next morning.

#### Sunday Morning

The next morning I was too tired to go to the brunch and too depressed. What had happened to me last night? I'd forgotten to interview people. I'd been planning to ask specific questions and talk to more of the relatives, but I didn't do anything except have a good time. I didn't even have a conversation with Stacy's father. How could I have overlooked him? The more I thought about it, the more depressed I became. I'd lost my critical distance (even given what I knew were limitations on that distance to begin with) and had become part of the scene. Although I was prepared theoretically for the researcher's inevitable transformation from observer to participant, and knew that that had been happening all along, I was not prepared for its having this debilitating an effect. How could I have forgotten to talk with Stacy's father? It was not until some days later that I began to feel better about what had happened. A

chance discussion with a psychology professor gave me a new perspective. As I lamented about what had happened to me, his face brightened. "It's great that you became so involved. It means that you weren't intrusive and that your presence didn't change the dynamics you were observing (any more than was necessary)." I hadn't thought of it that way. Also he advised me to take note of how similarly or differently I would get involved in the other Bar Mitzvahs. "How much of what happens is a function of the ritual, and how much a function of the family and your interaction with them?"

Of course he was right. It is important that the participant observer not be disruptive, and of course my experience would be different with each case, and it would be these differences that would provide the data. With this in mind, my talking with Stacy's aunts and not with her father made sense. It was her extended family more than her parents with whom she was becoming increasingly close. It was they who were most involved in the event and my involvement with them mirrored this movement.

From this perspective, too, it made sense that I would be so drawn into the festivities. The act of celebration is what is most important at this time in the ritual sequence. The system needed to celebrate--not only what the child had accomplished but how his parents had, together, helped him through that accomplishment. To have intruded with the questions I had been planning to ask would have been inappropriate and counterproductive. Given the power of this ritual need to celebrate, it was no wonder I partied.



The Goldstein Bar MitzvahFriday Night

I approached the Goldstein Bar Mitzvah with hesitation. Not only was I still feeling bad about having put the family in an awkward position and feeling embarrassed by their rejection, but I was keenly aware also of my long-standing prejudice against Reform practice in general. Reformed services, conducted more in English than Hebrew, incorporate elements I associate with churches (e.g., organs and choirs), and eliminate certain rites and customs that are pivotal in more traditional Jewish practice. Such services generally have little emotional impact for me.

The decor of the chapel fueled my negative expectations. It looked as though it had been designed for House Beautiful. The walls and wall-to-wall carpeting were off-white. The Torah ark, set into the wall on the stage, was shaped in an oriental motif and painted in shades of pinks, purples, and fuchsias. The pews were cream color and accented by purple cushions. The podiums for the Rabbi and Cantor were made of glass and light oak. The traditional light hanging over the Torah ark shone from sculptured pieces of gold and brass. The Torahs were dressed in peach colored velvet, and rather than resting in the ark, they seemed to be floating in it. (Plexiglass shelves of various heights created this effect.) The space was not at all unattractive. In fact, it was beautiful. But it was so unlike any synagogue I'd ever been in that the effect was disconcerting and I

felt like an outsider--a feeling that only reinforced the distance between me and the family.

I took a seat towards the back of the chapel on the opposite side from where I surmised the family would sit. I positioned myself where I thought I'd have the best view. In retrospect, my decision to sit so far from the family was not accidental. As the congregants (generally older, wealthy looking people) began arriving, I was surprised at how well-attended the service was. I discovered later, however, that this was a special musical service and drew a larger than usual crowd. The Cantor and choir would be performing a special program.

When the family arrived, they were accompanied by both sets of grandparents, Mark's brother and his family, and Sandy's sister and hers. Everyone was dressed up and Sandy looked especially attractive in one of the new outfits she had bought for the occasion. Mother and Father sat next to each other, with their parents and siblings next to them. The children sat with their cousins a couple of rows behind them. I could see them clearly but they didn't notice that I was there.

Sandy was called up to lead the opening prayer and the service began. Both the Rabbi and Cantor (who was female) wore black robes with tallises that looked to me more decorative than functional given the fact that neither wore the traditional head covering. Most of the prayers were recited responsively in English by the Rabbi and congregation. The Hebrew prayers were performed by the black-robed,

eight member choir on stage behind the Cantor. When they were to sing, they would rise and the cantor would turn to conduct them. To me, it felt much more like a concert for an audience than a religious ceremony, with a congregation. Despite this seemingly negative description, the music was very beautiful. The Cantor had a trained operatic voice and her performance was wonderful. Once I stopped resisting, I enjoyed the experience.

In fact, I was surprised to find myself actually in tears at one point in the service. It was the kaddish, the memorial prayer for the dead, that had this effect. And it was actually the English translation that did it. The distinctive (Aramaic) prayer was read by the Rabbi in sections interspersed with English that the congregation read out loud. It was the most unusual and moving translation I had ever heard. Rather than translating the words literally with their emphasis on praising the G-d who had just taken one's loved one, this translation acknowledged the pain of the loss and of having only memories in place of the person. As one who had lost a parent the year before, the words spoke to me directly and I cried about my father despite how alien this service was to me and would have been to him. Once more I was reminded of the power of ritual performance even in its altered form.

The service ended as Seth was called up to recite the traditional blessing over the wine. The Rabbi's playful invitation to Seth to "go to it" as he began to sip the wine after the blessing, was an implicit reference to the Bar Mitzvah boy's approaching "age of majority" and a

happy comment with which to end the evening. The congregants responded with chuckles of recognition and approval, as they turned to wish each other a good Sabbath. Those around me included me in their greetings. They seemed sincerely welcoming as they shook my hand warmly and enthusiastically. It was obvious that they had enjoyed the service, and that they were sharing in the Bar Mitzvah family's excitement (even though most of them didn't really know the family and wouldn't be there for service the next day).

As we filed out of the chapel towards the reception hall, Sandy who was still at the front of the chapel surrounded by family, noticed me for the first time. We greeted each other nonverbally. I smiled broadly to indicate enjoyment of the service and to get us past the awkwardness I was anticipating. As she smiled back, I sensed (or projected?) an element of surprise as if "Oh, you came after all." Mark and I caught up with each other in the reception line where the Rabbi and Cantor were greeting the congregants. Mark looked red-eyed and tired. At first I felt a coolness from him but it disappeared quickly as I asked him how things were going and if everyone had arrived safely. Everyone who'd been expected to arrive for the Friday night service had, and dinner at their friends' house had gone well. Their only concern since the rehearsal earlier in the week, was the health of the Rabbi and the Cantor. The Cantor had had a cold and was afraid she wouldn't be able to sing, and the Rabbi had hurt his back and they were afraid they'd "have neither of them at the service." His relief was obvious. "Let me introduce you to the Rabbi," he said



as we came up to him together. "This is the person doing the study on us. Do you know each other?" "We talked by phone," the Rabbi said as we shook hands and I thanked him sincerely for having "put me in touch with such a lovely family." At this point Sandy joined us and when I asked her how things were going, she too talked about the Rabbi and Cantor's health.

Mark and Sandy introduced me to their parents. Though very different in appearance and mannerisms, both sets of parents were polite and friendly to me. It was striking how much Sandy resembled her mother and Mark his father. Sandy's parents were much older than Mark's and her mother's arthritis was painfully visible as she walked slowly and with difficulty on very swollen feet that seemed especially uncomfortable squeezed into in the dressy shoes she was wearing. As she went off to greet other guests, Sandy told her parents that I was the one doing the study and "might want to ask some questions." Although they seemed willing to cooperate, our conversation was short. Both parents agreed that they were very happy about the Bar Mitzvah and Grandfather acknowledged that it was very meaningful to him.

My conversation with Mark's parents was longer. As Mark had indicated, his mother was "a conversationalist" and she eagerly told me about her family's long history in the Reform movement and about their involvement in the founding of their Temple at home. But juxtaposed with her pride in the Reform movement, [which generally downplays the importance of Bar Mitzvah], was her pride in the fact that Mark's son was having a Bar Mitzvah. No one in three or four

generations of either of their families had had a Bar Mitzvah and they were clearly pleased with this "coming back." Anecdotally, Mark's mother talked about having asked her ninety-five-year-old mother whether or not her father had had a Bar Mitzvah, and about telling the Rabbi who had officiated at Mark's confirmation, that her son was going to have a Bar Mitzvah. "The Rabbi was very pleased." She then went on to talk about what this meant to her in terms of her son's maturity. "You know it's a surprise how Mark has come back. He had abandoned religion entirely in the 60s."

Towards the end of the evening, I went over to say goodnight to Sandy. Cindy, who'd been busy running around with her cousins, joined us. After a few minutes, she asked me if I was coming the next day. "Of course I am," I answered enthusiastically. "And tomorrow night?" she asked. "No, but you'll show me the pictures and the video tape. That will be fun." With that I quickly changed the subject to the New York trip they were planning for the following weekend. The child's naive question allowed me to reassure Sandy that I wasn't still feeling bad about not having been invited to the party.

### Saturday Morning

Despite the fact that this time I was prepared for the setting (and had had a surprisingly pleasing experience in it the night before), I found myself still unprepared for how different this Saturday morning service would be from the traditional services I was accustomed to and how difficult I would find that difference. Not only was the Torah not carried down from the stage so congregants

could touch it and kiss it, and not only were people called to the Torah by their English names (which dramatically diminished the effect of the call), but the Pentateuchs from which congregants were reading contained no Hebrew. No one in the congregation, therefore, was able to follow along with the Rabbi or with Seth as they read the Torah and as Seth read the haftorah. The effect of the leader and the congregation each reading different things was disconcerting. The synchronizing effect of everyone following along with the leader's rhythmic chanting was missing in this experience. Worse yet (to me) was the Rabbi's announcement that he had decided to read a different section of the Torah than the one prescribed for that day.

Traditionally, the entire Torah is read section by section over the course of the year with every congregation in the world beginning and ending the cycle at the same time. The Rabbi's choosing to disregard what, to me, was fundamental, had a chilling effect that I was unable to overcome no matter how much I tried to "get into" the service.

It is impossible to know how much my own lack of fit with this service influenced my observations of the ceremony and of the Goldstein family for whom the service did, in fact, fit. These were the customs and rites with which they were familiar and comfortable. As such, they had the power to be effective for this family even though they weren't effective for me.

With this in mind, I watched as the service progressed. What stood out most dramatically in this ceremony was the fact that Mother, Father, and Sister all sat with Seth on the stage throughout the

entire service. This was in stark contrast to the usual arrangement where the family sits with the congregants (albeit in the very front row), and the child sits either on the stage the entire time or with his family in the congregation until he is called up by the Rabbi. Although they had mentioned that this would be the arrangement, I had forgotten it. And I did not know if this arrangement was standard practice in the Reform tradition, if it reflected a more local custom of this synagogue, or if it was something that the family had initiated. In any case, I wondered about the wisdom of it. To me, it seemed an opportunity lost. Given that the Bar Mitzvah is meant to mark the boy's increasing autonomy from his parents, actions which symbolize this distancing are appropriate. The physical separation of the child from his parents is an important piece of the drama. Equally important is the need to highlight the fact that the child is able to pass the test and get through the ordeal by himself--not as a child assisted by parents, but as "a man" on his own. To the extent that these opportunities for symbolic enactment of the child's development were missed, the potential power of the drama was diminished. In addition, it seemed to me that the positioning of the adults in front of the congregation had the effect of infantilizing them. On stage the entire time, they were being subjected to the same intense scrutiny as was the child.

Although this was my interpretation at the time, I have since come to understand that another set of punctuations was equally plausible, and not necessarily in contradiction with the first.



During the post Bar Mitzvah interview, I learned from the family that their having been together on the stage was one of the most positive features of the ceremony because "It made it feel less sterile,...and more like the family event that it was."

From their perspective, I have come to understand the seating arrangement as functional rather than dysfunctional. For the Goldsteins, the Bar Mitzvah was as much a celebration of the family's accomplishment as a unit, as it was a demonstration of the child's accomplishment as an individual. For them, the religious aspects of the event were less significant than what it meant for the family to have planned and held an event where so many of their friends and family could come together and have a good time. Again, it should be noted that in the Reform tradition, it is the confirmation more than the Bar Mitzvah that has significance in terms of the child's maturing. Until recently, many Reform congregations did not celebrate Bar Mitzvahs at all. It was no accident, then, that the Rabbi made several references during the service to his expectation that Seth would go on with his Hebrew education and become confirmed. Although the family's perception of the event will be discussed more fully in the description of the post Bar Mitzvah interviews, it is important to present the reader with this alternate or rather additional interpretation given the researcher's bias and the predictable differences in the way she and the family would experience the ceremony.

Although his haftorah piece had been shortened and many of the prayers were in English, Seth did have a lot to do in the ceremony and he did it well. He read from the Torah, he chanted the haftorah without hesitancy, and he led the congregation during most of the service. However, since his parts were interspersed throughout the ceremony and as no one part was particularly long or obviously grueling, there was no one point at which the congregation knew that he had passed the test. At no point was there a collective sigh of relief and outburst of congratulations. The one point at which Seth's transition was acknowledged and commented on explicitly was when the Cantor told him that his hard work had paid off. She had seen him grow not only in height but in maturity. "I'm proud of you," she said and kissed him on the cheek. Seth's blush was visible in the back of the synagogue. As everyone laughed, there was an obvious outpouring of warmth and affection. From my perspective, it was the emotional highlight of the ceremony. At only one earlier point did I sense a rise in the level of emotional intensity. This was when the Rabbi, in speaking to Seth, referred to the regret he must feel at not having had his great-grandmother here with him. "No doubt she is thinking of you now."

Given the dynamics regarding her not being present, this comment understandably evoked some emotion. Although I couldn't see her, I learned later that Mark's mother had been crying at this point. The Rabbi "only hoped that someone had taped the service so that she could at least hear it." When I checked later with Sandy about the taping,

she said no one had thought to tape the service but they were planning to show Great-grandmother the video of the party. Without belaboring the point further, it was a plan consistent with the family's history and values.

### The Luncheon

In the reception hall, the energy was high and everyone was festive. The catered buffet was attractive, delicious, and plentiful. As the guests ate and mingled with each other, I tried to talk with the grandparents. Although they were all still friendly and very happy, I was not able to move the conversations beyond what we had discussed the night before. Both sets of grandparents were obviously very proud and very pleased with the ceremony. Sandy's father, for whom everyone agreed the event was most important, said to me, "This is the best day in my life." When I expressed the traditional hope "next time at his wedding," Grandfather indicated that he didn't expect to be alive for that occasion.

Beyond my interaction with the grandparents, I found it difficult to strike up extended conversations with other family members or friends. Although Mark introduced me to his brother, and Sandy to her sister, I was not able to engage either of them in any meaningful dialogue. Members of the extended family seemed preoccupied with each other and I was unable to penetrate into their circle. My only extended conversation was with one of Mark and Sandy's neighborhood friends. An attractive, friendly woman who had recently celebrated her daughter's Bat Mitzvah, she was full of praise for the way in

which Bar and Bat Mitzvahs were performed in this congregation and full of praise for the Goldsteins. "They are a wonderful couple, really special people." From what I could see as I watched them interacting with various friends and neighbors, this assessment of the Goldsteins was widely shared. They had, over the years, accumulated an unusual number of good friends and all of them were here to celebrate those friendships as well as this landmark in the family's life.

As I left the hall, I said goodbye to Sandy and Mark, wished them a wonderful evening, and reminded them that I'd see them again in a few months. As I drove home reflecting on what I had just seen and felt, I knew that the sorting out of this "data" would be difficult. Despite my determination to comment on the families' religious affiliation only as it related to their emotional process, I was acutely aware that my personal prejudice and preconceptions had affected what I was able to feel and to observe. Being fair to this family would be a real test of the participant observer method of research and of my ability to deal with this method.



The Sheinman Bar MitzvahSaturday Morning

I approached this Bar Mitzvah feeling both excited and uncomfortable. I felt very awkward about having driven on the Sabbath to this religious event. Maybe I should have accepted Leah's invitation to come Friday evening and spend the night in the school with the family. But that still didn't feel right either.

Having parked the car a few blocks away--so that the offending vehicle would not be in sight--I approached the building hesitantly. When I open the door, Leah was the first person I saw. "You made it!" she said with a big smile. "Come in, come in. Right this way." My hesitancy evaporated as she led me into the auditorium where the service had already begun. With a portable ark and a movable room divider, they had transformed the school's auditorium into a synagogue. Handing me a prayer book, Leah led me to the right of the divider, the side reserved for the women. "Sit anywhere," she said. "Sit where you can see." As it was still early and most of the women were busy attending to children and getting themselves ready, this side of the room was almost empty. I chose a seat in one of the middle rows, right next to the divider which was a lattice-like wooden screen through which I could peer and watch all that was happening on the men's side.

This side was already full of bearded men draped in large prayer shawls individually reciting the preliminary prayers, talking with

each other, and interacting with young children who ran around playing freely among the adults.

In the middle of this side was a tall square table on a riser. This is where the leader of the congregation stood and where the Torah would later be read. In the front of the auditorium, the ark sat on the stage. Just in front of it was one long table. At this table sat the men of the family: Father, Grandfather, and Great-grandfather. They were all wearing black silk jackets traditional for Sabbath and festivals, and they all had their tallises [prayer shawls] over their heads. Moshe (who in reality had already had his first aliyah last week at the Rebbe's), sat and prayed with them. Dressed in a black suit and hat, he was a miniature version of the men around him. It seemed to me, a scene from a different world.

Leah, in a pink dress and curly new wig, sat in the first row of the women's section with her grandmother next to her. Leah's mother and mother-in-law spent most of the morning in the kitchen preparing for the luncheon which would be served on the tables that were already set and lining the walls of the room. The women emerged from the kitchen whenever something special was happening in the service. Leah left her seat frequently to supervise in the kitchen and to check on the younger children who, in the care of older siblings and cousins, were roaming in and out of the auditorium and back and forth between parents.

By the time the Torah was to be taken out of the ark, the women's side had filled, and the place was buzzing with the sound of prayers

and babies. A brief hush came over it all, however, when Moshe began reading the Torah. As he began chanting the first few notes, his father covered him with a large tallis. Moshe's voice was not loud but it was very steady and confident. He read the entire Torah section and chanted his haftorah flawlessly. Neither task seemed to take much effort. Standing with him around the table were his father, his grandfather, and the various men as they were called to bless the Torah. Also crowding around the table were a number of eight-, nine-, ten-year-old boys who were jostling each other to get up close to the Torah. Around them, were younger children seated on the edge of the riser also jostling each other and also eager to get close to the action. It was as if the youngsters had been drawn in from all parts of the auditorium by the magnetic pull of the Torah which was surrounded by their fathers and uncles. The scene was so lacking in conventional decorum and very striking.

While Moshe chanted his haftorah, everyone was quiet and listened carefully. With the sound of the last note, chaos ensued. Father reached over and took Moshe's face in his hands and kissed him on both cheeks. On the women's side, everyone around her was kissing Mother and each other. A barrage of candy and mazel tovs was being showered on Moshe, and the children were all scrambling to collect the candy from the floor. In the middle of all this, Moshe smiled serenely and playfully threw a piece of candy back at his cousin who was sitting close by.

When the commotion subsided, Father made a speech. Standing in front of the room where he could be seen equally well by the men and the women, he talked about the importance of raising children "perfectly" according to G-d's teaching. As human beings, we can't be perfect. We have to keep trying to improve all the time, but "the only thing you have to do perfectly is raise children...They are G-d's most precious gift and He allows us to do more than we deserve...Your children reflect you, and even more importantly, your parents who gave you so much." With this reference to his parents, and particularly his father "standing in heaven" and sending his blessings, Father paused to control his tears. As he went on to talk about watching precious children grow from infancy into adulthood, and about the prayer of riddance he'd recited a few days earlier when Moshe had his first aliyah, tears were streaming down his cheeks and into his beard. [The father's prayer of riddance thanks G-d for making him "no longer responsible" for the child's sins.]<sup>1</sup>

By now lots of people in the congregation (including the researcher) were crying too. Father ended the speech by wishing that "each and every one in the room should have such nachas [pleasure] from their children."

The service then continued with the concluding prayers. When they were over, Father invited everyone to stay for the luncheon which would begin as soon as the room was set up. With that, everyone went into action converting the space into a dining hall.



The Luncheon

The men and boys moved tables and chairs, and the women started bringing out trays of food. Although the dividing screen had been removed, the men sat at tables on one side of the room and the women at tables on the other. Moshe, his father, his grandfather, and great grandfather sat at the head table. Cold cuts and kugels, gefilte fish and herring, and all kinds of vegetable salads came pouring out of the kitchen. (There was the eggplant I'd fried.) The food was abundant and delicious.

I sat at a table with an assorted group of women, some of whom were neighbors, others, friends. The conversation was relaxed and easy. We chatted about Bar Mitzvahs, about food, and about babies. One young woman sitting next to me with her baby on her lap, talked enthusiastically about how she and her husband had recently become observant Jews.

As coffee and cake were being served, Father called for the group's attention and introduced Moshe who would now deliver the mimer. Everyone listened attentively as Moshe recited the long discourse in Yiddish. When it was over, Father made another speech. This one was shorter than the one in the service and directed more to family members. Speaking as the eldest son and first in his generation to be the father of a Bar Mitzvah, he instructed his siblings and cousins to learn from the way he and his wife had done it so that they too could raise such fine children and have such pleasure.

With the end of the speech, the singing began and soon the men were on their feet circling around Moshe and his great-grandfather who were dancing together in the middle of the room. It was a scene out of a Sholom Aleichem story. The ancient old man, with long beard and stooped shoulders, holding hands and dancing with his rosy-cheeked great grandson to celebrate the child's coming of age. The image of the two males so remarkably alike despite the vast difference in age (not only were they dressed identically, but they were almost the same height), was visual verification of the connectedness of the generations. And all of the men dancing around them with little boys on their shoulders and babies in their arms, were celebrating and reinforcing those connections. I could hardly believe my good fortune at having stumbled on to this family. I felt as though I'd accidentally discovered a civilization thought to be extinct.

Later, as I said goodbye to Leah and told her how wonderful the day had been, she thanked me modestly and said that the "real" party was the next day and she hoped my husband would be able to come with me. On the one hand I also hoped Allen would come. I wanted him to see what I had been talking about ever since I'd met this family. On the other hand, I wasn't sure I wanted him to come because I didn't want to be responsible for his feeling comfortable and having a good time. My husband's orientation to orthodoxy and religious ritual is very different from mine, and it was entirely possible that he would react negatively to the experience. When he decided that he did want to come with me, I made it clear that he'd be on his own--physically

and psychologically: "I'm not going to be responsible for your having a good time." He accepted the responsibility.

### The Party Sunday Afternoon

When we entered the building (an orthodox synagogue housing a reception hall large enough for the crowd, which had doubled with the addition of all those who could not come on Saturday or for the entire weekend), Mother and Father were in the foyer greeting their guests. Leah looking excited but remarkably relaxed, saw us first and rushed over to welcome Allen. Without thinking, Allen extended his hand in greeting and then pulled it back as he realized his faux pas. Not a good start. But the awkward moment passed quickly as Leah thanked Allen for coming and told him how much they'd enjoyed getting to know me. "Judy's spoken highly of you, too," Allen replied. Father joined us at this point and repeated his wife's welcome and compliment. "We've enjoyed getting to know your wife. She's gotten things out of us that we didn't know we had." "She does that to me all the time," Allen answered. Relief. It was going to be OK.

As we mingled among the guests, many of whom were, like us, secular Jews, conversations developed easily. Leaving Allen on his own, I went off looking for family members with whom I could talk. Leah's father, a handsome, gregarious man and erudite scholar spoke with me at some length. We talked about Bar Mitzvahs in general and about this one in particular. What he was most proud of was the fact that there were "no generation gaps" in his family. Everyone spoke the "same language," he said. When I asked him what was, for him, the

most emotional moment in the Bar Mitzvah, he answered, as had his daughter, that seeing Moshe in teffilin last week (at the Rebbe's minyan) for the first time was the most moving moment of all.

Following the cocktail hour, guests were ushered into the dining room to take their seats at assigned tables. The group of women with whom I was seated was a mixture of Hasidic and secular Jews. On one side was the young woman I'd talked with at length the day before, and on the other, was a young woman who was an Orthodox Jew but not a Hasid. She talked to me about how she and her husband were able to integrate Jewish practice and a contemporary lifestyle.

Allen, on the men's side of the room, was seated with a similarly mixed group and I could see, despite the room divider (there more for form than function), that he was engaged in animated discussion and looked like he was enjoying it.

Once again the food was delicious and plentiful. And once again there was dancing. But this time there was a five piece Hasidic band from New York playing on the stage while the men danced with each other on one side of the room, and the women (many of whom were quite beautiful and surprisingly elegant in designer dresses and incredibly natural looking wigs), danced on the other. It had been a long time since I danced to some of the Israeli folk songs and Yiddish freilachs [joyful dance tunes] that they were playing. I was having a wonderful time. At one point I was dancing next to Leah who was flushed and beaming with happiness. As we joined hands in the circle, she whispered to me, "I feel so overwhelmed by all of these people here."



From time to time, I'd look over to watch the men dancing. Like the day before, the Bar Mitzvah boy and great grandfather were dancing encircled by black suited men with children on their shoulders and babies in frilly pink dresses in their arms. At one point, all of Moshe's younger brothers were up on their uncles' shoulders as Father and his cousin wildly danced the kazatska [Russian dance on bended knee] and the pitch of festivities heightened.

But also like the day before, the eating and dancing were interspersed with speeches. At the microphone near the head table where Moshe and all of the male elders were seated, Father called for everyone's attention. Once the adults were quiet and the mothers had gathered up their children who'd been running around with each other all afternoon, Father announced that Moshe would now deliver the pilpul. Moshe went up to the microphone. He looked nervous as he swallowed hard and began the recitation. On a couple of occasions, he forgot the next word and Father, following along with the text, supplied it. Mother, standing near her table so she could see and hear clearly, watched the scene tensely and was visibly relieved when it was over. Although all the rest had seemed easy for Moshe, this part had been an ordeal. And he'd gotten through it. Again, Father kissed his son and again there were sounds of approval among those who could judge the performance.

Following the pilpul, Father introduced his father-in-law, "an experienced public speaker." Grandfather talked about the inadequacy of words to express the depth of his emotion on the occasion of his

first grandson's Bar Mitzvah. What he could express, though, was the intense gratitude he felt towards his own parents and grandparents who had bravely resisted the secularization of the new world and went to great lengths to preserve yiddishkite [Jewish culture and tradition] for their children and their children's children. "The people who thought that they had to adapt and to change themselves in order to fit into the [secular] world around them gave up their ideals and found that they were left with nothing that they had come with and that they had nothing else to substitute for what they'd lost."

Grandfather went on to wish that every Jew could have the blessing that G-d had given his family--and that "the children of your children and the children of those children should walk in the same path, the same direction. Everybody having the same ideals and principles so that no matter where the grandparents came from, there is no language barrier between them and their great grandchildren. There is no generation gap that separates one from the other. That they are as united and close to one another as any human beings can be." The speech ended as grandfather evoked G-d's help for all who came to this Bar Mitzvah "out of love and affection for our children and their children. May G-d give you the blessings he gave us."

Applause and then singing followed his speech. The singing was interrupted after a few minutes by Father who was again calling for attention. "While you are eating your dessert, I'd like to call upon my zayda [grandfather] and Leah's zayda to say a couple of words. You heard that Moshe can speak Yiddish. Now you'll hear how Zayda speaks

English." Although it was heard to hear, Great grandfather's speech was short and funny. He told little stories and used parables to reinforce the value of the pilpul, and he ended his comments wishing everyone the joy of being able to dance at the Bar Mitzvahs (and weddings, he added optimistically) of their great-grandchildren. With that, the dancing resumed and continued until the end of the afternoon.

At one point when I looked over at the men's dancing, I saw that Allen had left his table and was standing with a few other men just outside the ring of dancers. He had been drawn in by the energy and excitement and had become part of the celebration.

The Gordovsky Bar MitzvahSaturday Morning

Having been to this large orthodox synagogue a couple of months earlier when David was leading the congregation in its concluding prayers, I knew that the men would be sitting in the large middle section of the spacious chapel, and the women, in the two smaller slightly elevated side sections.

As the service had just begun by the time I arrived, all of the family members were already seated. As before, Mother was sitting in the section to the right of the stage but this time towards the front. She was surrounded by her sister, mother, aunts, and cousins. Wearing a dressy white suit, matching veiled hat, and particularly dramatic eye make-up, she was strikingly beautiful. I sat a few rows in back of her near an old woman who was sitting next to the isle separating this section from the men's. The woman studiously avoided making contact with me as I sat down and tried to catch her eye in greeting. When Lena turned and noticed that I'd arrived, she smiled a warm hello.

David was sitting facing the congregation, on the stage next to one of the synagogue's elders. The Rabbi was conducting the service from a podium on the left of the stage and the Cantor was leading the congregation in prayer from a podium on the right. The ark, built into the stage wall, was large and imposing. David, in a light tan suit, new silver-threaded tallis and yarmulke, looked young and very small to me. He was smiling and interacting non-verbally with guests



in the congregation. When he saw me, he smiled broadly. The men of the family sat together in the front row of the middle section: Grandfather, a great uncle, two old friends, and David's father. Although I'd never even seen a picture of him, I knew it was David's father not only by process of elimination but because of his resemblance to David. Small bones, fair skin, and fine features, the relationship was obvious. Father wore a light sport jacket and white shirt opened at the neck. He was the only man not wearing a tie. He looked somewhat out of place and slightly uncomfortable.

Neither the men nor the women in the family seemed particularly attentive to the service. Although I could not see exactly what the men were doing, I could see that the women were not following the service and most weren't even holding prayer books. They were whispering to each other and passing a set of snapshots among themselves. Lena had one of her cousins' young daughters on her lap, and was alternating between playing with her and interacting with some teenage cousins behind her. There was generally much touching and affection among all of the women.

As the Rabbi motioned that the ark was about to be opened, and the congregation rose to its feet, the energy in the room changed and the tension began to build. Those on the stage were joined by three or four other men from the congregation. When the ark was opened, it revealed five or six Torahs dressed in stately brown-gold velvet and decorated with elaborate silver crowns and front pieces. All of the men stood facing the Torahs with their backs to the congregation.

They had all pulled their tallises over their heads. Standing between this row of men and the ark full of Torahs, was David. From this position, he could not be seen by the congregants. It was as if the Bar Mitzvah child had been encircled and taken in by the tribal elders and in that space not visible to the rest of the community, was being initiated into the secrets of the tradition. My anthropological musings notwithstanding, the symbolism was dramatic.

When it was time to read the Torah, Grandfather was called up first. As a Cohen [member of the priestly lineage] he was afforded this honor. He read the blessings haltingly--not from the Hebrew text but from an English transliteration. I had not realized that he'd not studied any Hebrew even as a child, and I was amazed to learn later that this was actually the first time in his life that he'd been called to the Torah. I knew that this was a special moment, but I hadn't realized just how special. For all of the other men in the family also (except for the brother-in-law who'd been living in Israel), this was their first aliyah. In a way, then, this was their rite of passage as well as David's.

When it was David's turn to recite the blessing and to chant the haftorah, the congregation became silent and completely attentive. The women were actually leaning forward in their seats and so were Grandfather and Great uncle. David's voice rang out sweetly and unhesitatingly. Unlike the previous generations, he had become a literate Jew. Among the women, there was an audible sigh of admiration and everyone was nodding their approval. David was "doing

good." When it was over, the congregation burst into singing the traditional song of congratulations. The rendition was spirited and heartfelt. I was in tears and so was the old woman near me. Still looking neither to the right nor the left, she was crying profusely. Lena was also wiping tears away. But not Grandmother; I wondered at her composure.

Following the haftorah, David marched with the Rabbi and the elders around the synagogue as the Torah was carried back into the congregation before being returned to the ark. As he came down the isle and approached the place where the old woman near me was standing, David grinned and reached up to touch her hand. By now I'd figured it out. She was his father's stepmother whom he'd convinced to come. Her behavior made more sense to me now. By the time he got further down the isle where his mother was standing, David's face was beaming. As he lifted it and puckered his lips, mother leaned down and kissed her son proudly. It was a triumphant moment.

Once the Torah had been returned to the ark, it was time for the Rabbi's sermon. The topic was the "miracle" of David's Bar Mitzvah-- and its relevance to the survival of the Jewish people. He began by pointing out that in each age, the Jew faced tragedies and possible annihilation, but in each age, the Jew survived. "David and his family and friends here today are living testimony to the durability of the Jews and the fact that we must not be kept in countries that deprive us of our religious freedom...Had this young man been raised in the Soviet Union, there would be no Bar Mitzvah, there would be no

tallises, there would be no teffilin, and there would be no siddurim [prayer books]. Therefore we must not take our freedom for granted or forget to whom we owe our thanks... Make no mistake. Those who are sitting here today are not here because of the benevolence of the Soviet Government. They are here today because of the will of the Almighty." In a hostile world, he went on, the real challenge is for Jews to maintain their tradition and not become "assimiated out of existence." He told a parable in which each of the leading anti-Semites throughout the ages were talking to each about their failed attempts to eliminate the Jews. After Pharaoh, and Hamen, and Breshnev, and Hitler had all spoken, the American anti-Semite said to them, "You did it all wrong. In America we do not kill the Jews or take away their synagogues and schools. We give them everything they could possibly want: synagogues, schools, tallises, teffilin...and you know what? They don't even use them. Leave the Jew alone and he will destroy himself." With that general warning, the Rabbi turned to David and made the lesson even more explicit. He told David that unlike his parents, he had been able to attend a yeshiva [Jewish school] and become learned. "Your family says, 'We don't know anything but David is the one who knows.' David, don't become like the rest of the American students. There is no reason for a Jew to come out of the Soviet Union to merely follow the Great American Dream. Life is more than making money, and buying cars. You are here to teach us a lesson. You are here to lead those who came out of the Soviet Union and the future generations who come from them."



With that responsibility assigned, the Rabbi turned to David's family and spoke to them in Yiddish. This short speech was one of blessing and congratulations. "You should have much pleasure from this young man. He should be a good and strong Jew. He should be learned and good to everyone. Mazel tov to the bubbies [grandmothers] and the zayda [grandfather] and to the whole mishpocha [family]." The response to the Yiddish was warm and intense. The Rabbi had delivered his message on multiple levels. In English, he appealed to their intellect and made explicit the international and intergenerational significance of the miracle of David's Bar Mitzvah. In Yiddish, the Rabbi appealed to their hearts and it seemed as though the message had been brought home.

#### The Luncheon

At the luncheon in the reception hall, the power of the Rabbi's words was confirmed for me. Everyone I asked, answered the question "What was most moving for you during the service?" with something about the Rabbi's speech. For people who had had so little personal experience with the Sabbath service, its rites and artifacts, the ceremony was not in and of itself personal enough or powerful enough. It took the Rabbi's explicit explanation to potentiate the ritual's effect.

David's father was one for whom this was true. Lena introduced him to me by saying that "Judy is doing some research" and left us suggesting that I might want to ask him some questions. Our

conversation was awkward and short. At first he thought I was from Chicago because he'd received a call from a group there wanting to do research on Russian immigrants. I explained what I was doing and then asked him my question. He answered unhesitatingly. "The Rabbi's talk. He is a brilliant man. He really understands." When I asked him if anything had surprised him during the ceremony, he said no, nothing did. He had never been to a Bar Mitzvah before and so he had no experience with which to compare it. After we parted, I watched as Father interacted with the other guests. He was clearly not an outcast, but neither did he seem to "fit in" with the expressiveness and dramatic style of his ex-wife and her family. When I caught up with Lena's father, he looked tired. He told me that he still had a fever "but I had to come! This is a simcha [joyous event]."

At a couple of points in the reception, one when it was just starting and another a bit later, Grandmother approached me and either put her arm around me or took my hand as if to make me feel comfortable, as if to lead me to someone she wanted me to meet, or as if she wanted to tell me something. Both times the contact was broken with one distraction or another and I never did get to know what she was trying to communicate.

#### Speculations Saturday Afternoon

When the reception was over, Lena agreed that I could help with the dinner preparations, but not until 5:00pm. With the afternoon free, I went into the local luncheonette where I had eaten with the family a few nights earlier and ordered a sandwich. I'd been so busy

talking, that the food at the luncheon was gone before I'd gotten to it. As I was eating and writing notes about the morning's events, I felt vaguely disappointed. Somehow I felt that I had been more moved by the ceremony than had the family. It was as if the event was more symbolic than emotional for them. In retrospect, I understood it as an extension of why the Rabbi's speech was so important. For no one in this family was Bar Mitzvah a part of their personal history. It was only something in their collective, cultural memory that they had held on to enough so that when they had the opportunity to enact the ritual, they did. But it had been lost to them enough so that the Rabbi's words were required to convert vague sensations into thoughts they could identify and hold on to. It was not that the family had left Russia because they couldn't practice their religion, but because they they had been restricted in all kinds of ways--including the ability to be prosperous--simply because they were Jews. The Rabbi's speech emphasized the religious perspective and forced that focus onto the event. In a sense he was reframing the meaning of their immigration. It was important that they not pursue just the American way of life (and money) but that they pursue a Jewish way of life now that they were free to do so. It was important not simply to be accomplished in the new land, but to be accomplished in terms of Judaism. Yes, David's piano recital and karate tournament were important accomplishments, but the Bar Mitzvah was the most important.

As I sat in the restaurant hypothesizing these connections, I wondered if I was perceiving the family's experience accurately or if

I was simply rationalizing what I'd seen? There was no way of knowing.

### Saturday Night

I was ready to work when I got to the hall where the dinner was to be held, and I did. Tables, already set, had been placed end to end in a long row filling the dining area and spilling over into the L-shaped living room/dancing area. The setting was unpretentious but functional. There was a sofa, fireplace, stereo system, and bar in the living room area and a sliding glass door which opened on to a tennis court surrounded by woods. On the bar were enormous cakes and mountains of pastries. On the coffee table near the sofa were mounds of fresh fruit. Mother and Grandmother, a sister-in-law, a niece, and a friend were all in the kitchen working furiously to prepare the platters of appetizers that would be placed on all the tables. While Lena was making coleslaw, and someone else was washing the strawberries, I was put to work filling the coffee urn, bringing the platters out to the tables, and stirring the potted beef so that it wouldn't burn. Grandmother was clearly in charge and everyone was working under her direction. The talk was all in Russian. I just did as I was instructed and tried to absorb the experience. Grandfather was in the living room setting up his tapes and records. Grandmother and I talked a little as she iced the cakes and I stirred the beef. She worked quickly and was obviously comfortable cooking for crowds. But still she wasn't smiling or as excited as I would have expected her to be.



Lena left to change her clothes as we completed the preparations and guests started arriving. Everyone was excited and very animated. When Allen arrived I joined him and we mingled easily with the other guests. This time I had no worries about Allen's participation. With his interest in Russian culture, not to mention Russian food, I knew he would have a good time. When Lena returned, she was wearing a light pink chiffon dress with top layers in front and in back that seemed to float around her. It was a perfect dress as she floated through the evening, a happy, gracious, unburdened host. With her mother in charge of the kitchen, she was free to float and to entertain.

After the social hour, when she invited guests to take seats at the tables, I asked Lena if she had any particular arrangement in mind. "No", she said, "people would sit wherever they'd want anyway, so I let them." Allen and I sat at one section of a table with the two other American couples who were there. Lena's sister and her cousin and their husbands sat on one side of us and some of the grandparents' old friends sat on the other. Everyone was very friendly and gracious. Further down the table, one family friend, a beautiful buxom woman, kept making loud and boisterous toasts in which everyone joined.

As we were beginning the first course of every kind of appetizer imaginable (white fish, smoked fish, caviar, salads, pickels, breads) I noticed that Lena and her mother had gone outside. They were standing with a couple of other family members and everyone looked

worried. A few minutes later, they came in looking quite relieved. David and a cousin were with them. I asked Lena's sister what had happened. She explained that David and his cousin had been lost. Earlier in the evening, they had been playing together outside and then they disappeared. They had apparently gone into the adjacent forest even though they knew they weren't supposed to. When they didn't return in time for the party, everyone (who knew about it) became very worried. Grandfather and the girl's father who had gone in looking for them, finally found them. The children had taken a wrong turn and could not find their way back. Now that they'd been found, the party could begin in earnest. "Later", she said, "they'll get punished."

Dinner lasted from 7:00 pm to 11:00 pm with people getting up and taking walks between courses. The food was incredibly abundant and delicious with every Eastern European delicacy imaginable. Grandmother, her sister-in-law, and friend did most of the serving while Lena and her sister and cousins also helped. There seemed to be a good balance between time spent serving and time spent sitting and eating with guests. Throughout the evening people were dancing to Grandfather's music--a noisy, hodge-podge of Russian folk tunes, Country Western numbers, polkas, and top 10 rock. At one point David and Lena were "boogie-ing" together. David, a surprisingly good dancer, looked to me quite mature at that moment. His mother, also a good dancer, continued to float.

People ate heavily and drank robustly. Vodka and whiskey flowed freely. There were many toasts among small groups. But there were three major toasts. The first was Grandfather's. Standing in the middle of the room so that he could be seen and heard by all, he raised his glass high and spoke dramatically. Lena, crouching down next to me and whispering loudly so all of the Americans could hear, translated her father's speech. "There is a love one has for one's son, a love for a daughter, a love for a wife, but there is no love like that for one's grandchild." From there he went on to talk about his pride in David and the pleasure he'd given him. He also mentioned his second grandchild "who is still little" but from whom Grandfather clearly expects to get much pleasure also. When the speech was over, everyone cheered and clinked glasses. I was very moved.

Later a close old friend of the family--from the same town in Russia--stood to make a toast. It was directed to David. He told him to "remember this day forever. All the love that is gathered around you on this day of your Bar Mitzvah and the Bar Mitzvah itself will give you power. Never forget this day." This speech, emphasizing the effect of the ritual, seemed to me somehow connected to the Rabbi's sermon. This old friend had understood what the Rabbi had been talking about, and he was reinforcing that message in his own way.

The last toast was made by David. Standing on a chair, wine glass held high, David spoke easily and maturely to his guests. The words were extemporaneous and completely his own. "I want to thank you all for coming to my Bar Mitzvah. Especially I want to thank that

lady over there (pointing to his mother on the far side of the room). If not for her I would never have had this Bar Mitzvah and this wonderful party. If not for her, I would never have come to America. If not for her I would never have been born. And also that lady and that man, my grandparents, for helping me so much. And I want to thank my best friend for coming from New Jersey. He had been my best friend since I came to America. I hope I can go to his Bar Mitzvah next year and that his will be as good as mine." He ended his toast on a comic note that spoke precisely to the ambivalence of his development. After so grown up a performance, he ended his speech by asking his mother if he could stay up past 10:00. Everyone laughed as the young man became a little boy again and the party continued.

At 10:30 as Mother was herding David out the door, he turned and waved happily to his family and friends. "Goodnight everybody, and thank you. I have to go to bed now because I have a karate tournament tomorrow morning."

Soon after Lena returned to the party, we began our leave-taking. Some with young children had already left but it looked like others would be staying long into the night. As we kissed goodbye, we told Lena how much we'd enjoyed ourselves and how grateful we felt to have been invited. It was true. We really did feel that we'd been part of something wonderful.



## Comparative Analysis of the Four Bar Mitzvahs

A Cautionary Prologue: The Researcher as Participant;  
The Participant as Researcher

Predictably, the Bar Mitzvahs just described were as rich and as different from one another as the families who planned and lived through them. The researcher's approach and response to each of the Bar Mitzvahs was also predictably different. This difference reflected not only the families' differences, but the researcher's cultural biases and the way she (with her biases) had coevolved with the families during the previous three months. Despite how obvious this fact may be by now, it is important to emphasize it at this point because it is data that must be considered as the Bar Mitzvahs are analyzed.

Predictably, the researcher was pulled into the worlds she was studying and issues in each of those worlds "hooked into" issues in her own: The distance she felt from the Goldsteins can not be interpreted as simply a measure of the permeability or impermeability of their boundaries. That distance must be understood as a result of the family's boundary system interacting with the disdain for Reform tradition that the researcher had learned as a child. Similarly, the researcher's discomfort in driving to the Hasidic Bar Mitzvah must not be understood simply as a reflection of the strength of the family's injunctions, but as those injunctions interacted with the researcher's personal history regarding Sabbath observance.

To the extent that it is impossible for the researcher to be a "neutral instrument," so it is impossible to measure the effect of that lack of neutrality. With both the overly critical analysis of the Goldstein's Bar Mitzvah and the romanticizing of the Sheinman's for instance, the distortions of personal bias must be kept in mind. Equally impossible to measure is what effect the researcher's bias (both cultural and academic) had on the families, the way they did their Bar Mitzvahs, and the way they understood what they were doing.

With these cautions in mind, this section will examine how these Bar Mitzvah ceremonies/weekends reflected the families' emotional processes and facilitated their development. The section will begin with a brief discussion of the ceremony as drama. It will then go on to explore the four Bar Mitzvahs, looking first at "differences within similarities" and then at "similarities despite differences." Here the focus will be on the major characteristics of traditional ritual process and on the use of ritual language. The section will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which the ceremonies were seen to facilitate change and continuity in each of the families.

#### The Bar Mitzvah as Drama: Plots and Subplots

Throughout the planning period, each of the families worked on the developmental issues most salient for them. Through the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, the families continue to work on these same issues, no longer via the private process of planning but via the public process of performance. Recalling the image of ritual as "condensed

enactment," we see the family members "acting out" their parts in their unique dramas surrounded by (and inter-"acting" with) all of their extended family, neighbors, friends, (and researcher).

Despite the variations in the casts, the overriding plot is the same in all four script; they are all dramas about the marking and celebrating of a first child's coming of age in the Jewish tradition. They are all dramas about families working to adjust themselves to the changes inherent in their child's emerging adolescence. But because of the variations in the casts, the subplots of each of these dramas are all quite different. That is, which issues are most salient for each family is different and the difference reflects the family's idiosyncratic make-up and history. Correspondingly, the way in which each family/cast makes use of the ritual stage and its traditional props will be different. For instance, the pull between cooperation and competition in the Steinberg drama was poignantly portrayed as Mother and Father silently negotiated on stage for who would speak first. That both had to speak because neither could speak for the two of them, that they had not discussed this detail of sequence before the ceremony, that Father ultimately spoke first and Mother cut short her remarks--none of this was accidental; it was all reflective of the way in which the family was struggling with developmental issues through the use of the Bar Mitzvah process. That the Goldsteins sat together, that the Gordovsky grandmother was in charge of the dinner party, that the Sheinman father didn't complete the pilpul until the very last minute--all consistent with the themes that had emerged

months earlier, and all examples of how the performances, similar in overall structure and plot, reflected the uniqueness of the actors performing in them.

#### Differences Within Similarities

Without belaboring the point, the families in this study were as different from each other religiously as they could have been--and still have had a Bar Mitzvah. Except for Reconstructionism, these families represented every major Jewish denomination in America: Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Hasidic. As would be predicted, these differences in orientation were reflected in everything from the rigidity with which the event was performed to the intensity of the emotion it evoked.

#### The Bar Mitzvah Tradition

Even where there were similarities, there were differences. While, for two of the families, the Bar Mitzvah was one in a long unbroken tradition of Bar Mitzvahs, and for the other two, it was the first in many generations, it is the differences that are significant: For the Steinbergs, the ritual reflected a history of religious ambivalence and included new rites and behaviors to deal with that ambivalence; for the Sheinmans, where there was absolutely no religious ambivalence, the ritual was performed exactly as it had always been performed, with no amendments or changes. For the Goldsteins, not having Bar Mitzvahs in previous generations was a choice that came with the family's Reform affiliation; for the



Gordovskys in Russia, there were no Bar Mitzvahs because they simply were not possible.

### The "Thank You" Speech

Another example of differences within similarities is the way in which the proverbial "thank you" speech was enacted in each of the performances: Micah's prepared speech reflected his need to remain equally loyal to both of his parents and their need for support from the extended family. Micah incorporated into his speech the suggestions that both parents had offered, he thanked both of them and their respective mates individually for the different ways each had helped him, and he made much of the fact that so many family members had come from so far to be there with him and his parents. Moshe's word-for-word recitation of the Yiddish discourses delivered by his father and his father's father, reflected his family's reverence for the past, and the fact that it would be inconceivable that the child would write different words. Repeating their words was his metaphoric demonstration of thanks. David's impromptu toast reflected his Russian heritage rather than the religious tradition that had almost been lost to him. It also reflected his contrasting persona as adult and child in his family system ("Mom, Can I stay up past 10?"). That Seth chose not to make a speech at all, was likewise reflective of his family's values and issues. How much or how little he performed was his decision, not a matter of divine law or tradition. In place of a speech from Seth, however, Mother and Father made speeches at the

party (seen on video tape during post Bar Mitzvah interview). Father talked about the value of hard work, and Mother talked about what a good son Seth had been--and then Father thanked Seth for having shared his Bar Mitzvah with his parents who had never had Bar/Bat Mitzvahs of their own [emphasis added]. These speeches articulated explicitly what the family's sitting together on stage had demonstrated implicitly.

### Similarities Despite Differences

In contrast to the preceding discussion of differences within similarities, we will now focus on similarities despite differences. These similarities are examined in reference to three major characteristics of transition rituals: (1) the tripartite structure; (2) the use of symbols and symbolic action; (3) the synchronization of individual and group affect (See Chapter II).

#### Tripartite Structure

Despite their varying interpretations and emphases (and within the coupled, larger tripartite framework that includes both the ceremony itself and the months preceding and following the ceremony [see Figure 3.4]), all of the Bar Mitzvahs reflected the tripartite structure characteristic of transitional rituals. All of them proceeded from the stage of separation, to the stage of transition (or margin), to the stage of reintegration. Each of the stages was accomplished through the use of rites and symbols appropriate to that

stage, and each evoked the affect associated with their corresponding preliminal, liminal, and postliminal states of being (Chapter II).

Preliminal stage. Costumed appropriately for their parts (Mother and Father as well as Bar Mitzvah boy), all of the actors took their places at the center of the ceremonial space surrounded by their community of family and friends. The initial rites and prayers marked the separation between the period prior to the ceremony and the ceremony itself, and functioned to prepare the participants (celebrant and congregation) for the increasing intensity to follow by "setting the stage" visually, rhythmically, and emotionally. The child sitting (or called up) separately from his parents, portrayed both the sacredness and the isolation characteristic of the one who is "in transition" and the increasing distance from parents that is appropriate to the age. The preliminal stage had been set.

Liminal stage. The mid section of the ceremony, with its concentrated use of sacred objects, processions, oaths, intensified rhythms, hypnotic chants, and the central symbolic ordeal, evoked maximum emotional intensity and synchronized effect among the participants. In that phase of the ritual, the liminal passenger ("neither here nor there") completed his journey safely and the community ("in harmony" with him--Turner, 1969) demonstrated its approval of his accomplishment.

Postliminal stage. The final part of the ceremony, with its less intense rhythms, reduced use of sacred objects, and its references to future events, eased the participants into a post

liminal, less emotional state of being similar to that with which they had entered, and prepared them for their return to world of the profane. As the congregants left the service in the chapel and moved toward lunch in the reception hall, everything was back to normal--at the same time that everything had been changed. The celebrant (and his family) would never again be exactly as they had been when the ceremony began.

Obviously, these stages, flowing one into the other, were of varying lengths, and in each ceremony, different aspects were more apparent than others. But the underlying ritual structure was very much in evidence in all of the ceremonies. As with all rituals of transition, it was that structure which gave shape to the family's public display of its private journey.

#### Symbols and Symbolic Action

Given that the entire ceremony is a symbolic enactment, it makes sense that the second feature associated with ritual, the use of sacred objects, symbols, and symbolic action, should also be in great evidence across all of the Bar Mitzvahs. All of the ceremonies revolved around the "dominant symbol" (Culler, 1987, p. 87 [referencing Turner, 1967]) of the child blessing the Torah for the first time in his life (and in performing this adult act, marking his ascendance into adulthood). Similarly, all of the ceremonies made use of the traditional sacred objects associated with the Sabbath service (the format in which the act of blessing the Torah is embedded), and



employed the prescribed rites and behaviors associated with those objects.

Congregational variations. For the most part, the variations in the way the sacred objects were manipulated, and the way in which the ritual participants moved with and around those objects, were primarily a function of the location of the ceremony. The details of performance held in a Reform Temple are predictably very different than those in an Orthodox synagogue or a Hasidic house of study. However, since the location of the ceremony is a function of the family's religious orientation, the variations among the ceremonies ultimately reflected differences among the families. Whether the Torah was taken into the center of the room and surrounded by congregants pushing to get close to it, or was kept decorously on the stage, distant from the congregants, was a clear, albeit indirect, reflection of the family's level of connectedness to Jewish tradition.

Family variations. Other variations in the use of traditional symbols and symbolic action, however, were more directly a function of the family and its emotional life. These variations were specifically created by the performers and were symbolic both in ways that were deliberate and ways that were out of the innovators' awareness: In the Steinberg Bar Mitzvah, Father's presenting his son with his own father's treasures was a unique improvization on the ritual act of "passing on the sacra." His telling his son "the Bar Mitzvah secret" that his father had told him, was similarly a variation of a ritual tradition, that of the elders passing on to the initiates the secrets

of ancestral knowlege. But for this father, these symbolic gestures were at the same time also a comment on himself as a son as well as a father. The Goldsteins, sitting together on the stage was a behavior dictated neither by ritual prescription nor Temple custom. It was a ritual act that they'd chosen to perform because of what was important to them at this point in their lives as a unit. It reflected both issues they were aware of and issues that were out of their awareness.

Patterns of variations. These few examples give life to the concept of multivocality; to the notion that rituals have closed and open parts, and to the idea that it is in the open parts where "personal and local circumstances" (Myerhoff in van der Hart, 1983) make a difference (Chapter II). One observation in reference to these concepts has to do with which families tend to make use of the malleable aspect of the ritual. It seems to this researcher, that to the degree that families are disconnected from their culture and the multiple meanings of its rites and symbols, they create new rites and symbols or at least modify old ones. One example is the candle lighting ceremony.

Candle lighting ceremony. This modern-day rite, held during the party, centers around the Bar Mitzvah/birthday cake. Here, selected family members and friends are each called (with considerable fanfare from the bandleader and musicians) to light one of the thirteen candles. Based on the traditional ritual of lighting the eight canded candelabra (having nothing at all to do with Bar Mitzvahs), this honor of lighting a (birthday) candle has come to be accorded

almost as much (if not more) attention as the honor of blessing the Torah. For the Goldsteins who have little connection to the intensity of the Torah honor (and whose Temple tradition fittingly enough allows for only four rather than the usual seven Torah honors), the candle lighting ceremony was a very big event. Indeed, Mother wrote little poems for each of the recipients of the honor. For the Steinbergs, the candle lighting ceremony was another occasion for cooperation and compromise. In order not to slight anyone whom they'd wanted to honor, they added five extra candles to the usual thirteen! The Gordovsky family, having had no experience with Bar Mitzvahs, didn't even know about this American practice. And for the Sheinmans, of course, such an irrelevant performance would be unthinkable and unnecessary. Bar Mitzvah families need rites to structure their performance. As long as the old rites work, there is no need to change them or to create new ones.

Symbols, tangible, and intangible. Similarly, for the family highly connected to its traditional rituals, the mere allusion to a symbol is enough to evoke appropriate emotional responses. But for the family disconnected from its rituals, more dramatic behavior and tangible objects are required. In the Sheinman Bar Mitzvah, it was enough for Father simply to talk about his father. Everyone in the room knew what he meant by his "father's blessings." In the Steinberg Bar Mitzvah, such knowledge was not shared (by the family or the congregants) and so the dramatic presentation and tangible artifacts were necessary to provoke recognition and emotion.

Chaos and choreography. And finally, the issue of decorum. It appears to this researcher that the contrast between the seeming chaos at the Hasidic service and the precise movements (where to stand, when to step forward, how to fold the Torah cover) at the Reform Temple also reflects a pattern connected to the (transition) family's need for structure. Given the extent to which the rituals are integrated into their daily lives, and the prescribed rules are known by all, the Hasidic family and community can afford to be loose and relaxed throughout the performance. They all know which behaviors and symbols are "important" and which are not. (On the other hand) given the extent to which the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is their only religious ritual, and they are unfamiliar with the prescribed parts of the ceremony, the Reform family and congregants need "created" rules and structure. They need a rigid choreography (and associated decorum) to replace the relaxed steps and known symbols of a more integrated performance.

### Synchronization

The third basic feature of ritual in evidence across all four Bar Mitzvahs was the heightened affect evoked in the participants and the synchronizing effect of that affect. All of the elements that comprise ritual performance function to stimulate emotion (both in the individual participants and in the group as a whole), to coordinate participants' responses, and to move them "beyond separateness" (Quinn, et al., 1985) and towards emotional climax or release (Chapter II).



Limbic arousal. All of the symbols and symbolic actions, both those that were simply performed and those that were explained, both those that were deliberate and those that were out of awareness, functioned (with varying degrees of effectiveness) to move the participants towards increased limbic arousal (and Turner's state of "communitas," [1969], Chapter II). They worked by evoking shared memories associated to those symbols and actions such that the event's emotions and meanings for the family "spill over" into the emotions and meanings in the congregants' lives as well (e.g., the tears of the father whose son did not have a Bar Mitzvah).

In the Hasidic ceremony where the participants' connections to the Torah were direct and strong, and its multiple references were known by all, the mere act of opening the Holy Ark was enough to begin magnetizing the participants. In the Conservative ceremony, on the other hand, where the connections were significantly weaker and the symbolic meanings much less shared, the ritual action had to be more explicit. Here the Torah was taken out of the ark and literally passed from generation to generation before it was handed to the Bar Mitzvah child who then proclaimed his acceptance of the Torah (and all that it stands for) by leading the congregation in singing the traditional oath of faith. The performance demonstrated explicitly the meaning of the event (in terms of both culture and family process), and in doing so evoked the appropriate emotions that a less concrete performance could not.

To varying degrees, there were numerous indications of synchrony

and coordinated experience in all of the Bar Mitzvahs: The nuclear and extended family members all leaning forward in their seats as David began the blessings; the silence among even the children as Moshe began his recitation; the murmuring of approval as David performed the ordeal; the collective sigh of relief when Micah completed his; the laughter at Seth's blush; the congregants' tears of recognition and loss; the celebratory mood of participants leaving the chapel--all expressions of shared feelings stimulated by the ritual experience.

#### The Language of Ritual

Just as the visual images of the ritual spoke analogically and evocatively to the participants in all four ceremonies, so, too, did the auditory components. The sounds of the ritual supported and interacted with its visual "language" to intensify the participants' experience. The familiar rhythms, the responsive readings, the hypnotic chanting, the celebratory songs, all functioned to stimulate emotion and coordinate behavior and feelings within the four congregations.

Which spoken language was used, was also relevant. To the extent that the prayers were in Hebrew, they had the effect of "washing over" the congregants and of connecting them in what might be called a "collective bath" of sounds. Even for those who were literate in Hebrew, the prayers had a metaphoric rather than literal meaning. And for those who were illiterate, the sound of the language functioned to

connect them to a collective memory of literacy. In either case, it was clear that the use of Hebrew served to heighten the level of affect and to join the participants to each other and to their shared past.

This is not to say, however, that the prayers in English were totally ineffective. To the extent that the prayers in English were recited in unison and in a rote, sing-song cadence, they too had a coordinating effect, but one that was generally less evocative (at least from the researcher's perspective).

In contrast, one particular variation in language was especially evocative. It occurred in the Gordovsky Bar Mitzvah. Here, the Rabbi, concerned about the effect of the family's cultural deprivation in Russia, used his sermon to explain the Bar Mitzvah's larger significance in terms of the Jewish people as a whole, and he warned the family (and all of the congregants as well) of the importance of acting on the values it symbolized. This part of his speech was in English and was primarily directed (despite the use of parable) to the rational intellect of the people to whom he spoke. The next part was congratulatory, directed specifically to the family, and spoken in Yiddish. In this, the language of all Jews in exile, the Rabbi spoke not to the intellect, but to the heart. And it was through this ("right brain") route that the first message was able to be heard (Turner, 1982; van der Hart, 1983; Watzlawick, 1978). In the context of ritual performance, the simple words of congratulations spoken in Yiddish had profound emotional impact. That everyone referred to the

Rabbi's speech as the most moving aspect of the service, attests to the power of ritual language.

What has been seen to this point is how all four of these contemporary ceremonies followed the age-old structure of ritual performance and made use of the age-old elements that have always been used to enhance the spiritual quality and emotional impact of that performance. What can also be seen is the way in which these four ceremonies all functioned to promote change and continuity in the families who performed them.

#### Transformation and Preservation

Despite vast differences, three themes seem to have emerged in all four cases:

- (1) all of the families seem to have used the event to get closer to past generations, both living and dead;
- (2) all of the families seem to have used the event to consolidate and celebrate strengths (in preparation for the new life cycle stage they are entering);
- (3) all of the families seem to have used the event to encourage and demonstrate their child's mastery and accomplishment.

Appropriately enough, these three themes reflect the multigenerational aspect of the family systems that are interacting with the ritual process. While the first theme refers primarily to the grandparental generation, the second to the parental subsystem, and the third to the child, they are, of course, all interconnected. The developmental



tasks, to use Golan's (1981, p. 6) phrase, are "intercogwheeled," and what we are observing is how the process of Bar Mitzvah facilitates the family's work on these multiple tasks.

#### Connections to Past Generations

That the major emotional highlight in each of the Bar Mitzvahs had to do with past generations is not accidental. Given the particularly strong interconnection between cultural and family identity in Jewish family systems (Dashefsky & Shapiro, 1974; Friedman, 1971; Hertz & Rosen, 1982; Sklare, 1982), it makes sense that the Bar Mitzvah (generally the most public and elaborate demonstration of the family's cultural identity) would provoke issues related to the past generations through whom the culture was transmitted.

This phenomenon was evident both in ways that were explicit and dramatic and in ways that were less obvious: In both the Steinberg and Sheinman Bar Mitzvahs, the emotional highlight was when the Bar Mitzvah boy's father talked about his own father whom he'd lost. Although the two fathers used very different languages and images (the Sheinman grandfather was "standing in heaven" giving his blessing, while the Steinberg grandfather was bequeathing heirlooms and giving his love), both fathers were using the occasion of their son's coming of age to mourn the loss of their own fathers.

In a sense, they were mourning the loss of their fathers at the same time that they were mourning the loss of their sons. Paradoxically, they were coming to terms with the loss of their own

childhoods in order to come to terms with the loss of their sons' childhoods. And through that mourning they were connecting both themselves and their sons to the past. Metaphorically, Father was enacting his role as conduit between the generations. In order for him to launch his son, he first had to connect him securely to his own past and to the treasures that derive from that past.

In the Gordovsky Bar Mitzvah, where Father was religiously and structurally cut off from the family, and Grandfather, the surrogate father, was equally uninformed in this regard, it was the Rabbi who drew the connections between past and future generations. Using language that was both direct ("You must not forget the Jewish values you are now free to pursue.") and indirect (parable about anti-Semitism, and Yiddish words of congratulations), the Rabbi reframed the Bar Mitzvah (it was not just another accomplishment in a series of accomplishments, but a Jewish accomplishment that had profound implications for future generations), and used it to draw the family closer to its cultural past.

For the Goldsteins, the family whose Jewish identity and family identity were least interwoven, the increased connections with past generations were not dramatized during the religious ceremony. Prompted by the upcoming ceremony, changes involving the parents and their parents were negotiated in the months prior to the ceremony-- when Father moved beyond his customary boundaries and persuaded his parents to contact his wife's parents (and thereby reduce the tension

of fourteen years), and when Mother went alone to visit her parents in preparation for the caretaking reversals that were approaching.

Paradoxical resolutions. To varying degrees and in very different ways, it appears that in all cases, the ceremonies had provided the vehicle through which the distance between the parents and their parents was reduced at the very same time that the distance between the parents and the child was about to be increased. Connections had to be built in order to make breaks possible; continuity had to be insured in order that autonomy could be allowed. This seeming paradox and others mentioned earlier are consistent with the theoretical literature best summarized by Myerhoff (1984): "The crisis of transition demands resolution...and resolution in rites of passage are invariably paradoxical."

#### Consolidating and Celebrating Strengths

The task of planning and executing a Bar Mitzvah requires the family to make use of all of its strengths and resources. No matter how experienced the family may have been with coordinating large events, how much money it may have to pay for assistance, how unambivalent it may be about the value and purpose of the event, etc., etc., having a Bar Mitzvah is a tremendous strain. At all levels, physical, psychological, logistical, and financial, the effort is enormous and requires the family to tap into, and make use of, all of the resources inherent in its system. In effect, it seems to make them identify strengths that perhaps they (and the extended family) did not know they had. It is no wonder that all of the families felt

an enormous sense of accomplishment by the time they had gotten through their rite of passage.

At some level, they had become more in touch with the strength within their system and also in touch with the support that was available to them through their extended families and friends. Physically and emotionally surrounded (in the synagogue and throughout the weekend) by all the people in their lives who had come together to celebrate with them, the families (despite all of the strains associated with such gatherings) could not help but feel strengthened. And while such strengthening is valuable at any point in the life cycle, it is particularly valuable for the family approaching a developmental stage that has become, at least in the contemporary Western world, synonymous with danger.

Through the Bar Mitzvah, Stacy worked hard to prove herself gracious and hospitable, and the Tennessee relatives demonstrated their approval and acceptance. For Stacy facing major mid-life issues, the increased support from and involvement with the extended family will be crucial. For Ken facing the inevitable issues of raising a new child whose mother is not Jewish and around whom questions of religious upbringing have not been settled, an increased sense of connection to his own heritage seems vital. For these two parents who are facing the task of renegotiating the details of shared custody for their child who is becoming increasingly independent, the Bar Mitzvah process provided a platform on which they were able to demonstrate and reinforce their ability to cooperate. It was also an



opportunity for them to come together publicly one last time (to assure their child's connection to their pasts, and to affirm their joint accomplishment) before they completed the separation process they had begun with each other years earlier.

For the Goldsteins, the opportunity to demonstrate and affirm their boundaries as a special unit seemed to be important as preparation for the inevitable loosening of those boundaries that will allow their son the increased distance he will soon need.

Even for the Sheinmans, whose world view leaves so little of the developmental transition to chance, the Bar Mitzvah provided an opportunity for the expression of emotions that were previously unexpressed, and for the public affirmation of a way of life that is often challenged.

And for the Gordovskys, the Bar Mitzvah confirmed the wisdom of their having left a country in which they were not free, and attached a new level of significance to their accomplishments in the new country. For all of the families, it seemed that the process of planning for and living through the Bar Mitzvah provided a vehicle through which they could identify, demonstrate, and consolidate all of their strengths and positive features. And the vehicle was timely. It came just as the biological clock was pushing them forward into new territory where they would probably need all of the strength and resources they could muster.

### The Child's Mastery

No matter how good a Jewish education the child had had in his previous twelve years of life, preparation for the Bar Mitzvah was an ordeal. No matter what his level of competence, the Bar Mitzvah pushed him beyond that level. The tests were different for each child, but for each child it was a test. And each one of them rose to the occasion. First the family pushed him to take the risk, then they supported and encouraged him when he foundered and got scared, and then they congratulated him publicly when he succeeded. For families whose first born would be increasingly taking risks (Elkind, 1981), this practice was timely, and perhaps more than just symbolically useful.

In every case, the child demonstrated (both concretely and symbolically) behavior more adult-like than any he'd ever before demonstrated. Standing up at the pulpit and leading the congregation, he had performed a rite of reversal (child leading the elders) and in that reversed state was announcing and practicing a new way of being.

Lest that reversal happen too quickly, the Bar Mitzvah event also allowed the child to show himself as child. The running around with cousins, the getting lost in the forest, the cavorting with friends, the throwing of candy, all were demonstrations that after all, the Bar Mitzvah boy wasn't yet really a man. And everyone needed to see that, too.

The head table. It occurs to the researcher that this need in some way may explain the relatively recent development of the head

table as the children's table. Whereas in the past (and in the Hasidic celebration), the Bar Mitzvah boy sits for the first time at the head table with the family elders, the contemporary version is to seat the celebrant with his friends, not with the adults. Perhaps this is a reflection of the system's need not to change too fast--as well as a reflection of our contemporary ambivalence about adolescence, and the pace at which children should mature (Elkind, 1981; Stevens, 1981).

Conclusion: Ritual of Elevation and of Consecration

The Bar Mitzvah process is a religious ritual of elevation which marks the child's coming of age in the Jewish tradition. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a condensed enactment of the celebrant's passage and contains all of the characteristic elements associated with classic initiation rituals, e.g., tripartite structure and the use of symbols; the passing on of secrets and skills; the aspect of torture; the evocation of emotion; the welcoming by the community.

At the same time, the Bar Mitzvah is also a ritual of consecration, reinforcing the celebrant's connection to his cultural/religious identity (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). To the extent that this cultural or religious identity is linked to and transmitted through the family, the Bar Mitzvah is also a condensed enactment of the family's passage. As such, the religious rites and symbols are imbued with a second level of meaning and are used to mark and facilitate the family's drama as much as the child's. These multiple,

interlocking domains of emotional life can be visualized as in Figure 5.2.

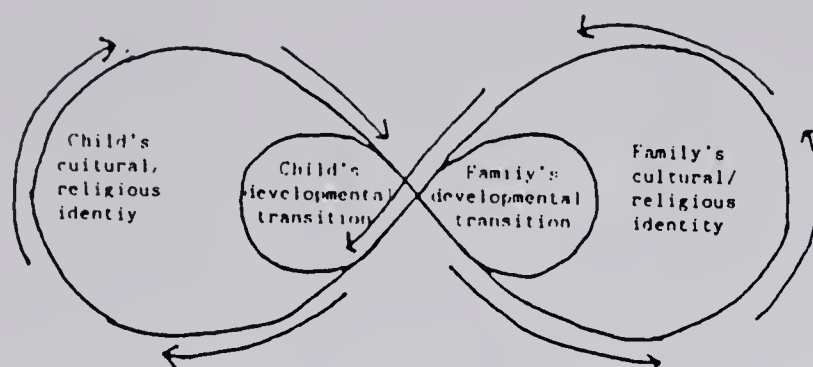


Figure 5.2 Bar Mitzvah Family's Interlocking Domains of Emotional Life

The Bar Mitzvah ceremony with its multivocal rites and symbols impacts on all of these domains simultaneously, and of course the impact is recursive. See Figure 5.3.

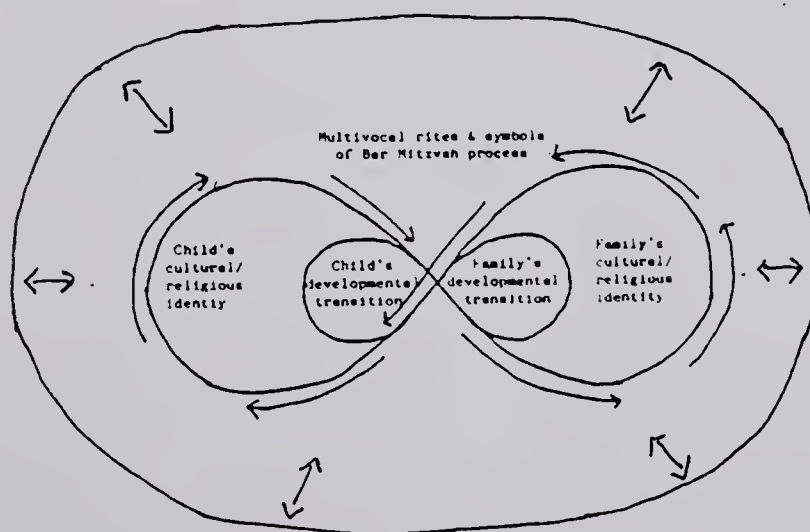


Figure 5.3 Multi-vocal Rites and Symbols

The Bar Mitzvah ritual "works" to promote change as all rituals do by coordinating inter- and intra-organismic behavior (Chapter II) and by allowing for the celebrants' enactment of their new status while at the same time reinforcing the larger status quo.



## C H A P T E R   V I

## RESULTS STAGE III: POST BAR MITZVAH AFTERMATH

## Introduction and Organization of Section

Post Bar Mitzvah interviews were conducted with each of the families approximately three months after their Bar Mitzvahs. The researcher's focus during these interviews was on events immediately following the ceremony/weekend, the family's perception of the ceremony/weekend and following events, and their awareness of any changes that had been occurring over the last six months to a year. Additionally, the researcher asked about perceived effects of having participated in the research.

This chapter presents descriptions of these interviews as the researcher conducted them. A comparative analysis of the families in the aftermath of their Bar Mitzvahs follows the descriptions.

## Presentation of Post Bar Mitzvah Families/Interviews

The Steinberg Family

In all cases but one, I waited to call the families until a few weeks before I wanted to schedule the interview. Prior to that time I had sent a note to each of the families congratulating them on the success of the Bar Mitzvah and thanking them for having allowed me to share the experience with them. The only exception to this sequence involved the Steinberg mother: A week after sending my thank you note,

I received a return note from Stacy. In it, she thanked me for having been so helpful during the weekend and then told me of a tragedy that had taken over her life.

On the Monday after the Bar Mitzvah, two hours after she had returned from taking her parents to the airport, Stacy received a call from Bob. His twenty year old son John, had been in a diving accident while on vacation in Florida and was permanently paralyzed from the neck down. Stacy went immediately with Bob to be with his son in the hospital and remained in Florida for five days. The note talked about how wonderful her parents (who live in Florida) were being to Bob whom they'd felt "bonded to" through the Bar Mitzvah, how devastated she felt by the tragedy and by the way in which it had "ripped" from her the experience of the Bar Mitzvah. Although she could not share this "selfish" feeling with Bob, she thought I'd understand. I waited a few days before calling Stacy to express my sympathy and to see how she was doing. I felt terrible for her.

On the phone, she shared the details of the events and mentioned that (prior to receiving the news of the accident) she, Ken, Janet, and Micah had been planning to get together for dinner that night "to come to closure and to share what was nice" about the Bar Mitzvah. Instead, Ken rushed over to give her a credit card and to pick up Micah who would be staying with him while Stacy was in Florida.

Micah, she said, was doing terribly. He was misbehaving in school and she and Ken had been called by the principal. It was her sense that Micah (who had been close to John in the past when she and

Bob had been together) had taken the news of John's condition very hard--especially as it followed so closely on the heels of his own triumph. From Stacy's perspective, Micah had been "robbed of the Bar Mitzvah's afterglow." By the time Stacy had returned from Florida, Micah didn't even want to talk about the Bar Mitzvah. He said "It was in the past." Stacy wasn't able to talk with Ken either because he and Janet were leaving that day for Janet's grandmother's funeral! All that was left, she said, when she returned to her apartment was the stench of the food left over from the Bar Mitzvah. In her rush to the airport, she hadn't had time to put the food into the refrigerator or freezer. "It had all rotted."

As I thought about the interview that I would be scheduling in a couple of months, it occurred to me that perhaps it could be a joint interview with Stacy and with Ken and Janet together. This would replace the dinner that they hadn't had and would be (a structured) and therefore safe opportunity to recapture some of the highlights of the event.

When I called Stacy a few weeks later, I suggested the joint meeting. At first she hesitated, but after I pointed out that this was something they had originally wanted to do anyway, she conceded that she'd be open to it if Ken were. "Maybe it would be good for Micah," she said.

In retrospect, I think the idea of the joint meeting was a reflection of my desire to be helpful and my fantasies about the "power" of the Bar Mitzvah. Beyond neutrally wanting to test for

movement in the system, I wanted to see the system move in a particular direction. Despite what I knew about their complex realities, I wanted a happy-ever-after ending (--and a dramatic story for my dissertation committee?). Despite what I knew about "crossing the line" between observation and intervention, I talked Stacy into agreeing to the meeting. It didn't take much persuasion, but it was persuasion none the less.

When I called Ken at work the next day to ask him about the idea of a joint meeting, I told him that Stacy was open to the idea if he was, but I did not try to persuade him in any way. Not only was I already regretting my error with Stacy, but I think that I felt less permission to try and influence Ken than I had felt with Stacy.

Noncommittally, he said he'd check with Janet and that I should call again in a few days. When I got back to him, Ken told me that Janet preferred not to meet jointly. "It was too long after the fact." And implicitly he was agreeing. I responded neutrally and said I'd call again in a few weeks.

I felt bad telling Stacy that Ken and Janet had chosen not to meet jointly. She didn't say anything on the phone, but I could sense her disappointment. Not only had I erred in trying to intervene, but I had erred by asking Stacy first. I should have checked the idea out first with Ken as he and Janet were less vulnerable to a rejection from Stacy than she from them. The researcher's intervention was clumsy as well as inappropriate.



When I called each of them a few weeks later to set the interview date, Stacy seemed eager to meet with me and her schedule was flexible. Ken and Janet, on the other hand, seemed less eager. They were extremely busy with the upcoming move and the anticipated birth, but we did find a time.

#### Interview with Mother

This meeting was loose and rambling and long. Over a dinner of Chinese take-out that I had brought for the two of us, Stacy and I talked for over three hours about the Bar Mitzvah, her family, her relationship with Micah and Ken, her experience with Bob and John's tragedy, and how all of those parts of her life connected. As I'd expected, the overall tone of the session was one of sadness and loss. The image of rotting leftovers was apt. Even little things were going badly. The mail house had lost all of the rolls of film Stacy had sent, and the few snapshots she had that had been taken by various relatives, were all blurred and off centered. Another apt metaphor.

Trying to refocus on earlier, more positive images, I told Stacy again how wonderful I thought the Bar Mitzvah had been and how much I had enjoyed myself at the party. "I felt like a member of your family." Stacy agreed that the Bar Mitzvah had been wonderful and said that I should have joined them for brunch on Sunday in the hospitality suite. "Both families were there and it was really nice also." Her only regret about the party was that she hadn't had time to talk personally to all of the guests. Her experience of herself

was that she'd been "floating off someplace in outer space..."

Talk of the Bar Mitzvah inevitably led to talk of what happened immediately after it and how that experience had effected Micah. Although she'd expected that even under normal conditions he'd have had a hard time after all of the "hoopla and stardom" were over, the shock of John's tragedy the very next day compounded the inevitable letdown immeasurably. "It's like your first experience in life with how fast these things end." Almost as if to bring that message home more clearly, Micah had had his own little accident. That same Monday morning, as they were leaving the hotel, Micah opened the car door and it hit him in the face, "almost knocking out a front tooth." The tooth was ultimately OK, but it was "like a slap in the face."

Stacy talked at length about the details of her experience in Florida and of the nightmare battles with the hospital and insurance bureaucracies that she was currently fighting for Bob. But she also talked about the experience with her family who had been waiting for them at the airport. Not only her parents, but her mother's sister (whose son, Bill, had been at the Bar Mitzvah) embraced Bob as one of their own. Stacy attributed this outpouring of affection and help to the experience of the Bar Mitzvah. "The Bar Mitzvah did make people-- even those not there--feel connected....Through her son who had such strong feelings about the Bar Mitzvah, my aunt had strong feelings for Bob without even having met him before."

With this theme of affection, we returned to the Bar Mitzvah as I asked about emotional highlights. Stacy talked about feeling

surprised at the level of emotion she had experienced. "I could swear that I did not know I would feel that way [emotional when talking about her grandparents]. I kept saying that I was just doing the food. It's not about Micah, and it's not about religion. It's just about family and I take that in the real extended sense which includes for me people I don't see much but who are friends."

Stacy then gave examples of "crying for no reason...kind of silly" when she saw certain old friends walking into the synagogue. She also talked about feeling especially close to Ken's mother. "When she left the hospitalitiy room crying, it really did me in."

Returning to her love for friends, Stacy said that when she returned from Florida, she could only bear to talk to friends who had been at the Bar Mitzvah. "The two things are so close in my mind...I think I will always feel much more attached in my heart to the people who shared (the Bar Mitzvah) with me."

Stacy also talked about being moved to tears by some of the gifts. "It was not the amount, but who it came from. People were overwhelmingly generous...They stretched themselves above and beyond what might have been expected," with expressions of love as well as with money.

When I asked what she thought were the highlights for Micah and Ken, she answered unhesitantly that for Micah it was the party and being with his cousins, and for Ken it was "the synagogue and his speech about his father." In all, she agreed the Bar Mitzvah had been a great success and even with all of the planning, she hadn't expected

it to be as warm and wonderful as it was. "It all came together perfectly...Even Ken's sister commented. She said it was a testimonial to the loving way, despite hard times, that we had brought Micah up. And it all showed in this. And she was teary-eyed."

Again Stacy laughingly referred to her sense of herself as floating, "I can't believe how flaky I felt...I was on another planet. I don't know which planet, but then I woke up when it was all over and I said, 'No, no, no, I don't want the music to end.'"

In terms of present relationships, Stacy talked about Ken and Janet's deciding against a joint meeting and what that signified for her. Whereas she felt she could have used the Bar Mitzvah as an opportunity for relating "more warmly and comfortably" to Ken and Janet, they could not. This, she felt was a loss for all of them, especially Micah for whom the growing differences between the two households would be an increasing problem. Although she felt that she and Ken had done an exceptionally good job at joint custody when Micah was small, the arrangement was becoming increasingly more difficult as he was becoming older. Although they had postponed discussion of any changes until after the Bar Mitzvah, those discussions were increasingly inevitable.

Here we talked about her perception of the ways in which Micah was changing. She talked about his adolescent moodiness and hypersensitivity (much like hers as an adolescent) and about his needing to "create more distance" (he no longer wanted to be seen at the movies with his mother, he was "more resistant" to her authority,



and he was spending more time with his friends). We talked about allowance, chores, summer jobs, the choice of friends and how the issue of distance and responsibility were reflected in these areas. Stacy also mentioned her sense that Micah had grown closer to his father. "Things are much better between them now than they had been in the fall."

As she discussed these changes, I was unclear about Stacy's image of the future. I didn't know what resolution of the difficulties she had in mind, and I deliberately did not push for clarification. Stacy was under a great deal of stress and very vulnerable, I felt, to unintended effects of my questions. Her stress, in combination with Micah's development, and with the changes occurring in Ken's life made for a very volatile system. It was a system that I wanted to perturb as little as possible.

In moving the interview to a close, I asked Stacy some of the standard questions I had prepared--about learnings from the Bar Mitzvah, about any changes she would have made if she could have done it over, about advice she would give to other pre Bar Mitzvah families, and about the effect of participating in the research.

In reference to what she'd learned about herself, Stacy's answer was most positive. "...it just underlines how important family is to me. I felt real good about myself in terms of all that warmth flowing from family and friends. I felt responsible for having created the space in which that warmth could have happened...I'm happy it happened for Micah. I don't know what he may feel, but I think it was

important that all of these people did show up for him and that, should I die tomorrow, I think it will be important for him to keep up with the family."

What she would have changed was a minor point. She would have changed the date so that the haftorah would not have been one about violence ("one tribe murdering another"). As for advice, she emphasized the importance of the hospitality suite, of getting everyone to stay in the same hotel so as "not to tear the child apart."

And finally in terms of the effect of my questions, she felt that they had made her think a little more about the significance of different aspects of the process, "but even if you hadn't, the importance of the extended family and warmth and roots would have been just as clear." For Ken, she felt that my questions, especially in the beginning, "pushed him a little further," that they had made him expect more problems in planning than there turned out to be.

As the session finally drew to a close and we were saying goodbye, Stacy's thoughts returned to her present reality. She talked again about how terrible the situation was with John and Bob and how little she felt she could look forward to. I left feeling great sadness.

Interview with the Father, Son, and Stepmother

Predictably, the tone of this interview was much brighter than with Stacy. And despite the impatience with further research interviews that I thought I'd detected on the phone, the family was very welcoming and seemed eager to reminisce. Ken looked very relaxed and Janet looked very pregnant. One of Micah's friends who was spending the night with him, sat in on the interview but did not participate directly. It did not seem to me that his presence had any particular impact on the family or the interview.

I began by telling them how much I'd enjoyed myself and how much I'd felt like a part of their family. They agreed that the Bar Mitzvah had been wonderful and agreed with me also that many difficult things had happened since that occasion. I began by mentioning the death of Janet's grandmother and Ken picked up the list by adding that Micah's friend had been in a bad accident and Micah had broken his tooth. At first I didn't realize that "Micah's friend" was Bob's son. I thought Ken was talking about yet another accident. I hadn't thought of John as Micah's friend but as the son of Stacy's companion. At that moment, I had forgotten that Micah and John had spent a lot of time together and in fact, could have been step-brothers if Stacy and Bob had married. But if I was struck by the way in which Ken referred to John, I was even more struck by how little the accident was discussed in this interview. Although I referred to it as a tragedy and tried to open space for its discussion, the accident and its effect on Micah (or on anyone else for that matter) was not discussed.

And neither did I feel permission to raise specific questions. In retrospect, I cannot tell how much the avoidance was a result of the family's need or of the ease with which I colluded in their need. For whatever reasons, I did not push for more information in this area and none was forthcoming.

Neither was there much discussion of Micah's behavior in school. Although it was referred to by all of them at various points in the discussion, it did not receive the kind of attention it did in the interview with Stacy. In retrospect, it occurs to me that the extreme difference in tone and focus between the two interviews was simply another reflection of the basic difference between the two households that Micah was continuing to straddle. Whereas with Stacy the focus was on loss and the tone one of sadness, the focus here was on gains and the tone, one of expectation. In his mother's house, Micah didn't talk about the Bar Mitzvah and in his father's house, he didn't talk about the accident. The symmetrical silences, I felt, were not accidental. Even discussion of death in this interview was not heavy. Grandmother was in her nineties, "so it was sort of a natural thing."

It was the impending birth rather than past losses that the family was eager to discuss. Naming the baby, conflicting family superstitions around that naming, the size of the baby's room, Micah's role as big brother--all were discussed with pleasure.

So, too, was their recent experience with Ken's mother. The week before, they had taken her out to dinner for her 89th birthday. Grandmother's adventures with Chinese food were described with humor



and great warmth. Ken was clearly feeling closer to his mother as he talked about that dinner and as he talked about having recently taken Micah to the races--the way his Uncle Sammy (his mother's favorite brother) had taken him when he was Micah's age.

Indeed, it seemed that all of the family members were feeling closer to each other. In addition to what they said about positive feelings, and in addition to the way they looked (Ken and Janet were relaxed and close as their bare feet touched across the sofa, and at times Micah was practically sitting in Ken's lap), I was struck throughout the interview by what appeared to be an increased and positive pattern of communication between Micah and his father and Micah and his stepmother.

On many occasions during the interview, Micah and Ken kibitzed like buddies and often Micah spoke in a reflective, adult-like manner that indicated both a rapport with his father and a surprising level of understanding (e.g., when he talked about his grandmother). At one point he defended Janet's superstitions with a comment that was sensitive as well as approving. "She just wants the baby to be good. She did all of the (right) eating, so why not all of the superstitions?" Janet's chuckle of approval indicated her appreciation of his support.

To get the conversation back to the Bar Mitzvah, I asked about an old detail: How did they think the seating arrangements had worked out? Although they agreed that they had worked out wonderfully, Ken allowed that it had been difficult. It hadn't been "simply" a matter

of running out of time (as he'd been claiming); it had been a difficult task. In their desire to bring the two families together, they had tried to seat different parts of their families together (e.g., his sisters with some of Stacy's aunts) and this made the seating decisions more difficult than if they had simply put all of his family at one table and hers at others.

As they talked, Ken and Janet inadvertently mentioned the wrong date for the Bar Mitzvah and, with mock horror, Micah corrected them: "It was the 22nd, not the 24th. God, that's the biggest day of my life so far and...you don't even remember!"

With that as introduction, I asked the family what had been the most moving moment in the Bar Mitzvah for each of them. As I'd expected, they all mentioned Ken's speech. Micah said it had made him "happy and sad" at the same time. And then he went on to talk about how "weird" it all was: "That morning was so weird. It's like I got up like it was a normal day but it's my Bar Mitzvah. It's like it was so casual. I was acting casual. That's the weird thing...But when I got there, I started jumping all over the place. Please help, please, please."

Returning to the speech, Ken allowed that he had been nervous when he was speaking, and Micah said that he could see his grandmother crying a lot during the speech. Here I asked what they thought grandmother would say was the most emotional moment. Their exchange exemplified my sense of Micah's growing insightfulness and his maturing relationship with adults:

- J. If grandmother were here, what would she say?  
 M. She'd probably say Dad's speech.  
 SM. (to Ken) Do you think so?  
 Fa. No, I think she'd probably say Micah's haftorah.  
 M. Yeh. But she would mean that speech  
 SM. (laughing with everyone) Micah's learning Jewish double speak.  
 M. It's true.  
 SM. I think you're right.  
 M. You're right. She would say my haftorah.  
 J. Why would she say that?  
 M. She's supposed to...she'd say one thing (to you) but she'd mean something else to us.

When I asked for whom the Bar Mitzvah was most significant, Grandmother was again a focus of discussion. Although Ken and Janet both agreed that the Bar Mitzvah was very significant for Ken and for Stacy as well as for Micah, Micah interjected that he thought it was especially significant for his grandmother "because mine was the last. You know. No more. I don't think she'll be alive for..." Ken interrupted the negative thought with a "maybe," and Janet changed the focus entirely: "The question is will there be another Bar Mitzvah." Again the issue of the new baby's upbringing was being discussed and again Ken put the decision off. "We have thirteen years to decide," and (turning to me) indicated that he wanted to change the subject by repeating that the Bar Mitzvah had been real significant for him. I asked him if he could say more about that.

- Fa. Yeh, I felt real close to Micah and I felt real close to past generations of men in my family.  
 J. mmmm.  
 Fa. And it ah, a lot of Jewish rituals make me feel like that, but my son's Bar Mitzvah made me feel that most of all. I don't know, four or five thousand years of people doing this and it was done again (sniff).

Turning to Micah, I asked how it was significant for him. "I don't know...It made me like, in the Jewish community, an adult and I'm supposed to go more and stuff like that...You know, it's not that much different, but inside my head, it's a little bit different, you know? People in the community think about you differently. You understand things a little more."

When I asked what had happened during the Bar Mitzvah that they hadn't expected, Ken, Janet, and Micah all talked about how well everyone had gotten along. Ken talked about the fact that both families and all the friends had such a good time, and Janet commented in particular on Stacy's family. Although she'd expected them to be polite, she was "surprised and pleased at just how cordial and welcoming they were." Micah echoed these answers by saying that not only was he surprised but he was "moved" by how well the families had gotten along. "Yeh," said Janet, "I think we did a good job."

When I asked what didn't happen that they'd expected, Ken's answer was a variation on this theme: "(I thought) that people would be tenser." And Micah repeated his surprise that he wasn't more tense himself. "I thought I would be slow and dragged out and you know real tense but it was pretty casual. I felt really casual when I woke up, just took a shower like a normal shower, put on a suit like I was going to somebody else's Bar Mitzvah. I just sat up there and I didn't even, boom, boom, boom, just like that everybody had their aliyahs and all of a sudden, I'm in my haftorah. It just happened."



Another area of surprise had to do with gifts. Everyone was surprised by the level of generosity that the gifts expressed.

Janet's father's gift was a particular surprise.

SM. I was shocked. I don't know where it came from...I'm pleased and he [Micah] deserves it..., but it just really surprised me.

M. Me. too.

SM. But you know, also, my father knows what you're supposed to do for Bar Mitzvahs. I don't think he did it because he had to, but...

Fa. It was very generous.

When I asked what the family would have done differently if they could have changed anything, Ken answered that he would have hired a professional photographer. Micah and Janet said they would have changed nothing. "I thought it turned out perfect," said Janet.

In terms of what they had learned about themselves and each other over the past six months, Ken answered that Micah had learned that he could be disciplined if he tried, that he'd learned something about the family's history, and most importantly he learned about "how many people from different parts of the family care about him. The number of people who came from all over." Micah's answer to this question was a variation on his father's and went on to talk about what he learned others could do: "What did I learn about myself? I learned that if I set my mind to something, I can do it. If I really want to do something I can do it (and I learned) that people can get along with other people if they want to get along. This one wants to get along with this one for me, so they do. That's how it goes, I learned that. That people can if they want it. You know?"

- J. What do you think your father learned about himself?
- M. That he can be supportive. And he can do it without teasing all the time. And...I don't know. (to Ken) What do you think you learned, Dad?
- Fa. Well I learned how close I feel to Micah and, ah, also how close I felt, a lot of link between generations. More responsibility.
- J. Responsibility? In what way?
- Fa. I felt more responsible. I think a lot of the ritual of Bar Mitzvah for Micah and for me, was that as he grows up, then I need to grow up...and part of that is to maintain more history and tradition and ritual. Things like that...I also just learned that Micah thinks I tease him too much.
- M. (to father) You know I was just kidding.
- Fa. (to son) No, that's OK. It's alright.

Micah, thinking he might have hurt his father's feelings in some way, tried to explain what he meant saying that after he thinks about what Ken has told him, he usually agrees.

Turning to Janet, I asked her opinion of the learnings. She agreed with Ken that Micah had learned something about self discipline but she qualified the learning by saying: "The seed of maturity was planted and when he's ready, it'll sort of take hold. He knows the Bar Mitzvah was a symbol of his manhood and it's there. So he learned that."

- J. And Ken?
- SM. What did Ken learn? That's a hard one (looking at Ken). I don't know that you learned anything new. It just seems (to me) that part of yourself was reawakened. But that wasn't new to me. The importance of your father and your family.
- J. What about you?
- SM. About me? It was so long ago. (pause) Well I learned something about Micah. He comes across as this rough, tough, I-don't-care-about-anything kind of kid, but there's really a part of him that's softer and more sensitive and can do things so it was helpful for me to

learn that cause I can give him a break now and then. Look at him getting all red. [Micah is blushing with Janet's compliment.]

The next round of questions had to do with changes. Here, discussion among the three revealed disagreements between the child and the adults about how much increased maturity there actually was and what amount of independence was appropriate. Discussion focused on conflicting expectations regarding chores, jobs, behavior at school, etc. and how some of those conflicts resulted in "blow-ups." Janet summarized the conflict by saying that it was "a hard age," that sometimes she and Ken felt Micah was capable of what he wanted to do and at other times that he was not. "It's part of being thirteen...it's difficult because it's unpredictable."

Moving towards closure, I asked Micah what, in the future, he thought he might want to pass on to his child at his Bar Mitzvah. Micah said he'd tell him the secret and also give him all of the things his father had given him. But he thought that a lot of the Hebrew he'd learned would become a blur. Ken assured him however, that it wouldn't: "It'll come back...when you have your own children. It's funny how that happens."

My last question had to do with the effect of the research. Ken answered that it had made him more thoughtful about what he was experiencing, and Janet agreed adding that this last interview was particularly "nice, because...so much has happened since the Bar Mitzvah, it's kind of fading (and the pictures were already all packed

away)." She also said that it was "nice" for her to hear from Micah about his feelings. "He never talks much about how he feels."

When the interview was over and Micah had left the room, I expressed my hope that I hadn't made anyone uncomfortable by having suggested a joint meeting. They assured me that I hadn't but did not go into their reasons for deciding against it.

As I was leaving, Ken was rummaging around the house for an antacid tablet and Micah was complaining about a cramp in his leg. Janet laughed and explained that they were having "sympathy symptoms." They were all very much into this pregnancy. I left wishing them good luck with the new house and the new baby.



The Goldstein FamilyInterviews with Mother, Father, and Daughter

This interview was held without the Bar Mitzvah boy. Seth was already at camp for the summer. Neither Mother nor Father had thought to mention his departure date when I called for the appointment. It hadn't occurred to them that his presence would be important. They thought what I really wanted was to talk with them. Perhaps I hadn't made my needs clear enough when we talked months earlier about the overall research design. On the other hand, perhaps it was simply another reflection of the importance in this system of the family relative to the importance of the Bar Mitzvah boy. In any case, we'd have to do the interview without him.

When I arrived, the family seemed very relaxed, happy to see me, and eager to talk about the Bar Mitzvah and show me the video they had already set up on the VCR. In addition, they seemed especially warm with each other. There was a good deal of closeness and caressing.

I began by asking about their trip to New York the weekend after the Bar Mitzvah and the "letdown" that they had been fearing. Mother answered that although she hadn't experienced the depression her friends had warned her about, she was still having a hard time believing that it was over. "A lot of my friends are planning their children's right now and they're constantly talking about it and I'm talking too like it's still happening. Like it's still gonna happen. It's hard to realize that it's really over." Sunday, they said, was hard as friends were leaving for the airport. Mark's brother, in

fact, couldn't leave. He changed his plans so that he and his family could stay over an extra day.

So New York was fun but not as necessary as they'd imagined it would be. While in New York, however, they received some bad news: Sandy's father (for whom the Bar Mitzvah was most emotional) had taken ill and had been hospitalized. "Apparently they traced it back to the Bar Mitzvah. He had eaten all of the wrong foods [for his congestive heart condition] and fluid had accumulated around his heart." By the time Sandy learned of this, her father's condition had been corrected and he was on his way home. She did not seem unduly worried. But Mark added that Grandfather's condition had only recently been labeled and since then he'd been feeling depressed.

When I asked about Father's grandmother who hadn't come but about whom the Rabbi had spoken from the pulpit, Mark said they hadn't heard from her since the Bar Mitzvah, but would be showing her the video when they went to visit at Thanksgiving. Mark went on to say that his mother had been crying while the Rabbi talked about her mother. "She felt guilty...I told her 'we didn't do it (have the Rabbi mention her) to make you feel bad, but we didn't want to ignore her either...' I think she understood."

This led to a conversation about emotional highlights for all of them. Sandy said she was most moved at the end of the service when Seth "got up and read a statement about being Bar Mitzvahed." It was apparently a reading that all Bar Mitzvah boys did as part of the service. "Even though he hadn't written it, it was sort of coming

from him." Mark said that for him, the most moving part was Seth's reading from the Torah: "(It was) the way he was doing it. He was just so poised...It was the most moving because it really did represent, I think, a milestone in his maturity because it was a real hurdle to him." A few minutes later, Mark went on again about what was moving: "I think another moving thing for me was when Cindy got up and said her part."

J. mmmm.

Fa. Because it was another thing about the kids growing up [reaching over to put his hand on Cindy's shoulder] She did a nice job.

In terms of what they thought was most moving for Seth, the parents agreed that they didn't know what he would have said. "He doesn't give much vent to his feelings so it's hard to...try to figure it out sometimes." "But," said Mark, "he did say to me afterwards, 'Thank you for the greatest weekend of my life.' He did say that."

In reference to emotionality, both parents referred again to Sandy's father and Mark explained it this way to his daughter:

Fa. ...of our four parents, he was the most emotional about it. He had the most genuine feeling of the four.

C. That's because he had a Bar Mitzvah himself, right?

Fa. You're right, honey, but that isn't the reason why it was emotional for him...You see it's important for somebody like him to have a grandson go through that.

For whom was the Bar Mitzvah most significant? The parents were in total agreement: Seth. "Becuase for him it represented a passing...a milestone." When I asked if he'd ever mentioned anything

about this, Mother answered with a chuckle that "he talks about being a man now!"

We then talked about the contradictions inherent in adolescence and Cindy summed it up: "Yeh, it doesn't mean like in school he's a man."

Who enjoyed the Bar Mitzvah the most? Again agreement: "Seth."

Although both parents had known that Seth liked to perform (he'd sing into a mock microphone in his room all the time), they'd never realized how much of a public performer he had become. During the party, Seth "surprised them all" by singing with the female bandleader much of the night and acting almost like a master of ceremonies himself. Seth "had a ball" and so did all of his friends. After this party, "he was like a king" at school. His was the first Bar Mitzvah among his friends and they were all quite impressed at what a great party it was. Seth was "in his glory."

With the entire event there was only one regret. It had to do with the shortening of Seth's haftorah. Mother seemed to feel this more acutely than father. "...We were sort of misled. I don't know, I didn't know much about the ritual, about Bar Mitzvah and I didn't know how important the haftorah was. I always thought it was reading from the Torah that was so important and Seth and the Cantor worked something out and they kept shortening his haftorah portion and now knowing how important that is (she'd talked with some friends), I would never have let that happen." She felt that the Cantor had not given Seth "enough credit," that he could have learned more of the



haftorah if she had expected him to. Mother would know better for Cindy's Bat Mitzvah. With the mention of her Bat Mitzvah, still years away, Cindy wanted to know when they'd start planning for it. Both parents chuckled lovingly and told her that she (and they) still had plenty of time for that.

In terms of what they would definitely repeat (and advise other families also), it was their sitting together on the stage as a family that they emphasized. "Some people like to watch their son being Bar Mitzvahed and not sit behind him...(But) we wanted the whole family...(to be together)." Having the whole family part of the ceremony, they believed, made the service "warm" and people really liked it that way.

In terms of the ceremony's impact, both parents talked about how everyone loved being together as a family. "...I (Father) think it did some more to bring the extended family closer together...It was another bringing of all the cousins and aunts together which we'd started doing more of in the last couple of years...a little bit more of a chain for continued family relations. That probably was the biggest thing. The kids got to know a sense of the family outside just the immediate first cousins." And Mother added: "As far as our immediate family, it was a very special time. And it was a different time. All of us all working together for this special event. All of the different roles working to pull it together. And we're happy with the results. We did something!"

In answer to my question about what each had learned, Mother thought that Seth had learned that he could cope with a lot of things going on in his life at one time which he didn't think he was going to be able to do...He thought it (would be) overwhelming, but he realized he could do it...At times he would throw up his hands and say "I just can't do it all," but then he learned to pace his day (and he was able to fit in all that he had to do).

Mother's answer about her own learning was strikingly similar. "I learned that I was able to handle things much more calmly than I ever thought I would. It was really not a traumatic, overwhelming experience...I was able to just pace myself." Father said his learning had more to do with emotions: "I guess I kind of learned a little bit about my emotions about my kids growing older. How I felt about it. The pluses and the minuses. I felt good about seeing them become more mature and to a certain extent more self-sufficient. On the other hand, I guess it bothered me a little bit that they're getting close to leaving the nest."

Here we talked about any changes that they had observed in Seth. Both parents agreed that he'd gotten more independent and Father added: "Besides becoming more self-assured, he's become more independent in his thinking." The parents disagreed, however, when I asked it if was easier or harder to be with Seth as he got older. Mother said it was easier because when he was little, he was very (too?) attached to her. Father said that the middle years were good, but "It's harder with him being more independent now." Mother then

seemed to have second thoughts and agreed with Father: "I have a hard time letting go." At this point, both parents reached over and mockingly grabbed for Cindy who was sitting on the sofa between them. "But we're never letting you go!" said Father.

As everyone laughed, Father turned on the VCR and we watched the party together. Despite how many times they had seen it, they all enjoyed reliving it again, pointing out who was who, what they were doing, what they were saying, etc.

A number of things struck me as I watched. The first was the way Seth appeared on the screen. Singing and dancing with the sexy lead singer, he looked so unlike the quiet young boy I had met in previous interviews. He looked so much older and more grown up. Somehow the baby face had become more handsome, and the child's body had become that of a young man's. Later, when the camera caught him running around with his cousins and friends, the child-like Seth reappeared, but the image of the emerging adolescent could not be dismissed.

The second striking feature captured on film was the warmth and camaraderie of the parents' friends. As the microphone was passed from table to table and each guest spoke a few words "for the record," their admiration for the family was clear. People really were feeling that this was "a special family" and they really were pleased to be part of the celebration.

The last event captured on film was the candle lighting ceremony followed by Sandy and Mark's speeches. Mark began by thanking all of the guests for having come to help celebrate and then he talked

directly to Seth. He talked about all of Seth's hard work and how that hard work had paid off. "You deserve all the congratulations that you are getting for doing the job you did today." And he hoped that Seth would use this as "a lesson for life--Nothing comes easy but if you work hard, you see what you can do." Then father told his son that his Bar Mitzvah was unique in another way: "This is the first Bar or Bat Mitzvah that your mother or I participated in because neither of us was Bar or Bat Mitzvahed. So we take a small part of this for ourselves. I hope you don't mind. In a way, this is our Bar Mitzvah and our Bat Mitzvah also. We are really proud of you and you know we love you."

Mother's speech was in rhyme and on a lighter note. She talked about what a good son Seth had been (despite what his room looked like etc., etc.) and how proud they were of him.

When the tape was over, I told the family how much I'd enjoyed seeing it and as a final question asked how my questioning had effected them. Sandy answered that it had "brought out things" that they would never have discussed, and Mark added that some of the questions I asked (and some of the ways I had asked them) "Made us answer in new ways. To us, it's been interesting just participating."

As I kissed them goodybye, I felt closer to the family than I had felt since I met them.



The Sheinman FamilyInterviews with Mother, Father, and Bar Mitzvah Boy

The house was quieter and neater than I'd ever seen it. When I arrived, Mother was alone. Father had not yet returned from an appointment and all of the children were out playing in the neighborhood playground with Mother's sister and her six children who were visiting. While my son set up the camera, Mother looked around the house and found a few snapshots of the Bar Mitzvah that she had. Her mother had taken the bulk of the film and was making copies to send to the family. As we reminisced over the photos, I told Leah how much Allen and I had enjoyed ourselves--and I told her that it was the first Bar Mitzvah (or wedding) in twenty years at which Allen and I hadn't fought. "I always want to dance and he doesn't. At this party, I danced 'to my heart's content' and whether he wanted to dance or not was totally irrelevant." Leah laughed appreciatively. Imposed segregation between the sexes is not always so well received.

I also told her how much I'd enjoyed the women I'd met at my table. Here, Leah talked about what it felt like to have so many people come together at their invitation:

We were very surprised, well, I can't say surprised, because if you invite people and they say they're coming, you're not surprised when they show up, but at the same time, it was a very...humbling feeling...all of these people came here because we asked them to come! So what did we do to deserve this? They all came [reaching over to pinch Moshe's cheek--he had just joined us back from the playground] to say nothing of this one...(laugh). It was a very touching thing...They gave up their whole Sunday afternoon to join us in our simcha. It was a very humbling

feeling...but I think there was a very mutual kind of feeling. We were very happy that everybody was there and I think everybody felt good to be part of it.

In response, I talked about the idea that those who participate share in the blessings of the mitzvah [commandment]. "Rituals don't belong only to the celebrant...they belong to the entire congregation as well." With my mention of the word "ritual," Mother talked about her sense of their lives in relation to this concept.

Mo. ...I guess ritual is not a word I think of at all in context of the Bar Mitzvah. I never think in terms of (ritual). It's not a word that's part of my vocabulary. (pause) Although to look at our lives, this is a ritual, and this is a ritual, and this is a ritual, but it's not...this is what we do. "Ritual" sounds so formal.

J. Yes, it's so integrated.

Mo. This is just the way we live.

Leah then talked about the seating arrangement and how she had deliberately tried to mix family and friends. Although she kept her new cousins (those who'd recently married into the family) together "to give them a chance to feel more a part of the family," she spread her sisters and sister-in-laws among the guests. She was very pleased with the way that had worked out.

By now Father had come home and joined us at the dining room table. He seemed a bit distracted and Leah instinctively moved to engage him in the conversation by repeating what I'd said about dancing. I joined in by adding that if the party had gone on much longer, Allen himself would have begun dancing. "I'm sorry it stopped so fast," Father laughed. "At Shmuel's we'll get him to dance."

When I asked if they'd seen the videotape yet, Mother answered that two days after the Bar Mitzvah they'd watched it for hours on the school's VCR.

J. It will be a treasure for you in years to come.  
Fa. (caressing Moshe) He's our treasure here.

Clearly, Father was engaged, and I used the opportunity to ask a question about Hasidic belief that I'd long wondered about. It had to do with the issue of superstition and the need to say either Barach Hashem [Thank G-d] or khana hora [no evil eye] whenever a compliment was given or something good was referred to. Building on each other's explanations, Mother and Father talked about the idea of "a balance in the world" and when you have a moment of extra or more intense holiness (e.g., at a child's birth or Bar Mitzvah) there is a "potential for the opposite." In a certain sense it's "a more vulnerable time" and therefore there is a need for an extra measure of guardedness." "So whenever you have a simcha [joyous event] there is almost an instinctive sense of going out of your way to be careful, of being especially sensitive to other people's feelings...not doing things that will arouse jealousy or cause feelings of envy...The event should not be one in which the family shows off how far we've come in life, but an event in which everyone feels that they are benefiting from it, getting something out of it."

With this explanation, the idea of the ritual's effect "spilling over" onto the congregants, took on an added meaning.

Returning to the event itself, I remarked at how exhausted they must have been when it was over and asked what they'd done to unwind afterwards. "Sleep" was Mother's answer. Father joked that after the last Bar Mitzvah they'd "go to the Riviera for a week," and Mother added that she now had a new appreciation for friends who "go off to a hotel" for a few days after a Bar Mitzvah. "I didn't do it, but I could understand why somebody would." Here, Father said they actually did go somewhere afterwards. Two weeks after the Bar Mitzvah, instead of "making Pesach [preparing the house for Passover]" at home, they went to Leah's parents' home and spent the week there. They were just too exhausted to undertake the arduous preparations that this holiday required.

Introducing the next set of questions by saying that they were questions I was asking all of the families and that probably some would seem inappropriate for them, I began my questions about emotional impact, learning, change, etc.

What was the most emotional moment? Moshe's answer revealed that he couldn't identify a highlight. At first he said Friday night--when all of his family was together at the Shabbos table. But when I asked what he had been feeling at the time, he said "I couldn't feel anything." Then he changed his mind and said the highlight was at the "end, no, at the beginning." Both Mother and Father tried to help him clarify his answer but he couldn't. Mother's answer was clearer but she also named more than one "moment." "Well, not in order of importance, but when I think of the images that come to mind, I think



of my husband's speech. (And also) I think of Moshe's layening [reading the Torah] and the mimer [Moshe's discourse] on Shabbos. Sunday I was too worried about the food and the details to really concentrate on what he (Moshe) was saying (in the pilpul, the second discourse). On Shabbos there was no pressure and I could concentrate."

Father answered the question without hesitation, "Watching him layen!...That was an eye opener." Neither Mother nor Father had listened to Moshe practice the Torah reading. They'd just taken his word that he was prepared. So when they heard him for the first time at his Bar Mitzvah, they were surprised at what an exceptionally good Torah reader he was. "The whole city was talking about it!" Father said proudly. "All of the connoisseurs (of Torah reading) said they'd never heard a Bar Mitzvah like that." Then pointing to Moshe, Father said "He shouldn't be hearing this." "You mean he hadn't heard this til now?" I asked incredulously. "I hope he's not listening now," Father replied with a smile.

When I asked what he thought his mother would answer was the highlight for her, Father turned the question over to his wife, "She knows my mother better than I do." Here Leah talked about how excited her mother-in-law had been and how "she can't stop talking about it from beginning to end." "One of the things she mentioned to us right away was that she was very touched by the atmosphere Sunday afternoon. She was impressed with our guests and their sense of involvement with us and that meant a lot to her...It was interesting because I think in

a certain sense, she was dreading it. It was not an easy weekend for her to anticipate (without her husband's sharing in it)." Not only was it something that turned out OK, but it was actually something that was...(wonderful)."

For whom was the Bar Mitzvah most significant? Father had two answers to this question. The first was: "Moshe, it's his Bar Mitzvah. I'll, Baruch Hashem, make other Bar Mitzvahs, but this one was his." The second answer was a story about his great grandparents coming to this country where it was assumed that people could not really raise children as Jews. "For my grandmother to see her great grandchild raised precisely as her brothers had been raised...for her to see this, she'd say 'There is nothing more she can ask out of life than to be able to see what she's seen.'"

What surprised them? "Well," said Mother, "Sunday surprised me because it went so fast...I thought we were just getting started...and the first thing I knew, it...was over." Moshe's answer to this question was that he was surprised that he wasn't nervous when he got up to begin leading the prayers. "But maybe I was and didn't know it." Despite himself, Father indicated that he was surprised at how well Moshe had done. "I wasn't surprised by him. We sort of operate on the assumption that he will do perfectly. (But) when it exceeds that (implying that it did)..." And then he allowed that he had surprised himself: "I was surprised that my speech came out as well as it did." Mother agreed saying that "it took everybody by surprise...I had expected him to make a nice, good speech that

everyone would feel good, but nothing like that. A lot of people were touched. It wasn't just a personal thing. It was something that a lot of people could relate to." Moshe interjected here that what else surprised him was that "Sunday wasn't boring." He'd expected everyone to be "just sitting around and listening to speeches." When I asked if some were like that, Moshe said he didn't know. "I've never been to another Bar Mitzvah." Of course, Moshe's was the first Bar Mitzvah of his generation.

What would you do differently? Here Moshe quipped "I'd like a second Bar Mitzvah." As everyone laughed, Mother said the one thing they'd do differently next time was to not have the grace-after-meals booklet on the tables at the beginning of dinner, but wait to distribute them until the end of the meal. She also said she was pleased to think that was their biggest mistake.

The talk of doing things differently led into the fact that they'd already begun thinking about the next Bar Mitzvah. In a year and a half, Shmuel's Bar Mitzvah would fall on a Jewish holiday and so they'd need to find an alternative time--perhaps on a weekday. Here we talked about Moshe's relationship to Shmuel and to the other children. As the first born, he was more like another parent to them than like a peer. "The others all adore Moshe and miss him when he's away at school."

As for regrets, the only thing Mother and Father could say was that they'd wished the family could have stayed longer. "That was the worst," said Father. "It would have been nice to sit and relax with

everybody. On Sunday we didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. Straight from the hall to the airport." Added mother: "That was very hard. I'm very grateful to my sister for having stayed over til Tuesday. At least...I didn't feel like the Bar Mitzvah completely disappeared."

Trying to learn more about the family, I asked from where in the family did any criticism about the Bar Mitzvah come? "None" said Mother, "sometimes people won't tell you directly and you'll hear about it through others, but here, none. Not a word."

In answer to the question about what they'd learned about themselves and each other, Mother volunteered that what she'd learned was not something she hadn't known before. The Bar Mitzvah planning had served to crystallize her conception of herself as the one with the details and her husband as the one with the creative ideas. Father mocked a look of shock, but I think he was genuinely surprised. I was struck by Mother's compliment as one which both reinforced the traditional hierarchy at the same time (since it was she who was commenting on the pattern) that it reinforced my sense of their egalitarianism. Mother went on to say that although she'd never been so organized in her life (and was pleased with her performance), it was her husband who had the "grand picture." Father returned the compliment by saying that his wife was more concerned about the details because she cared more about other people's feelings than he did. In addition, he said, he felt that while the Bar Mitzvah was indeed a milestone, it did not represent a fundamental change in their



lives. "It was not the public statement that it was for other families (and so he could see it in its larger context)."

In terms of changes, Moshe said that he felt he wasn't being treated any differently now than before, and Mother joked that no, they hadn't given him the keys to the car. Father said that he felt that perhaps he should "be on Moshe more about learning," but hadn't been because "we sort of stole the summer from him so I figure I'll leave him alone for two weeks." Instead of going to summer camp as he had in years past, this summer, Moshe would be going to a summer school, spending his time "sitting and learning--instead of playing baseball and swimming," something no one even thought to mention as a change.

Approaching the end of the interview, I asked Father how Moshe's Bar Mitzvah was similar to or different from his own. After mentioning the difference in size (the party was in his parents home) and after saying, yes, he'd also had his first aliyah at the Rebbe's minyan in New York, Father started reflecting on the contrast between how he'd felt as a child when his parents were planning his Bar Mitzvah and how he felt as the parent planning his own son's Bar Mitzvah: "I was in awe of the fact that my parents were...planning something that...centered around me...It made me feel like how can I possibly live up to it. How can I possibly be worthy of my parents actually doing things specifically because of me?...Not just as one of their kids, but because of me. I'm not worthy of that!...(But)...when I relate that back to here, I'm obviously looking with different eyes.

As parent or child. That is the major difference...Here I was doing what was perfectly natural. I didn't think he (Moshe) wasn't worth it. He's very well worth it!"

Here I asked Moshe if he'd been aware of his parents talking about and planning for him. "Yeh," he said. "It was the first time."

In reference to the effect of the research, Father only joked: "We got somebody to cut the eggplant." But Mother answered more seriously. She'd "learned a lot more about what the two of them (Father and Son) were thinking" and the questions made her focus her thoughts in order to articulate her answers.

The interview ended with Father "turning the table" and asking me a question--about similarities and differences between their Bar Mitzvah and the others I was studying. I answered by talking about what I was coming to understand about the use of symbols and the need for some families to create new ones. Father indicated his understanding by recounting how "at one point someone asked me why we weren't having a candle lighting ceremony!" As everyone laughed at such a preposterous thought, I thanked them all for their generous participation and we agreed that we would see each other at future simchas.

As we drove away, Moshe and Shmuel were outside in the street riding their bikes. Except for their skull caps, side locks, and fringes, they looked like any two little boys enjoying the sunshine, each other, and the thrill of riding fast.

The Gordovsky Family

Interview with Mother, Son, Grandparents and Nephew

When I called Lena to schedule the post Bar Mitzvah interview, the mystery of Grandmother's demeanor was solved. Two weeks before the Bar Mitzvah, the doctor had discovered a cyst on her breast. She kept this information from her daughter until after the Bar Mitzvah (and even from her husband until shortly before the event). It was the burden of that secret that had kept Grandmother from being as happy and animated as I had been expecting her to be. The cyst and surrounding tissues had since been removed, and subsequent mammograms showed that "everything was OK." The crisis was over.

Through this phone call, I also learned that David's possessiveness was as difficult as ever and despite the fact that Mother, her sister, and her parents had all spoken with him about it, David continued to resent his mother's social time away from him. Although Mother's boyfriend was as ambivalent as ever about moving out of his parents' home, and she herself wasn't sure she was ready for any more commitment, the situation with David was increasingly troublesome. Again she brought up the idea of "taking him to see someone." And again I felt as though she were asking for my advice. The pull to intervene was intense.

I responded as neutrally as I could and quickly changed the subject by commenting on how wonderful the Bar Mitzvah had been and how much Allen and I had enjoyed the dinner party. She agreed that it had been wonderful and added that the Cantor had told her he'd never

had a student who learned as much as David had in the last two weeks. "He works well under pressure," I suggested. "Like me," she commented.

The interview took place on a hot Sunday morning. That afternoon, David would be leaving for a week's vacation with his father and then returning to pack for two weeks at a summer camp. While he'd be at camp, Mother would be in Texas on a special work assignment. The job would be difficult, but it was a career opportunity and she was excited about it.

While we waited for the grandparents to arrive, we talked about the upcoming trip, about the Bar Mitzvah dinner (Lena was still unconvinced that the Americans hadn't been bored with all of the talk in Russian), and about how David and his cousin had gotten lost (and rescued) in the forest. David described how his cousin had worried about being "in big trouble" for having gone into the forest. "And all you got was a lecture?" I asked. "What could they do to me?" he grinned. "It was my Bar Mitzvah!"

And speaking of the Bar Mitzvah, I asked were there any pictures. Lena said some people had taken snapshots but she hadn't seen them yet, and her Father was still working on the movie film that he'd taken. No one had seen it yet either.

At that point, the grandparents arrived. With them was their four year old grandson, Joshua, who was spending the summer with them (during his parents' busy season in their New York store). Both Grandmother and Grandfather looked better than they had at the Bar



Mitzvah. Grandfather looked healthier (at the Bar Mitzvah he was still recuperating from a flu) and Grandmother looked much more relaxed and seemed much more animated.

I began by commenting on how much Joshua had grown since I'd seen him at the Bar Mitzvah. Grandmother responded immediately by reminding me that the Bar Mitzvah had been a few months ago, and besides, "He's with his grandmother and grandfather!" and therefore thriving, she implied with a laugh.

When I asked if the Bar Mitzvah seemed as though it had been just yesterday or a long time ago, everyone agreed that it had been a long time ago, and Grandmother explained that "so much had happened" in the meantime. As I indicated that I knew what had happened ("Yes, you really had your hands full!"), Grandmother (with running commentary from her husband and daughter) told me the details of her ordeal. She began by saying "I didn't tell anyone...I didn't want to spoil it (the Bar Mitzvah)." Even immediately after the Bar Mitzvah, she and her husband kept the secret until Lena drew it out of her when she began suspecting that something was wrong. "She kept saying 'I don't want to make any plans' (about some weekend trip) and wouldn't tell me why," said Lena. Grandfather interjected that he'd wanted his wife to tell her daughters. "Why shouldn't we tell the daughters?...The daughters have a right to know about their mother."

J. But you carried the secret around with her?

GF. (big sigh) Yeh.

When Lena and her sister did find out, they both rushed to be with their mother for the biopsy and subsequent tests. According to the doctors, everything was OK now. Grandmother wouldn't need to be tested again for some months.

With a sigh of relief, we went on to talk about the Bar Mitzvah, and I told them that Allen was still raving about the food. "He starts by listing all of the things that were on the table and then he says 'That was just the appetizers!'" As everyone laughed with pleasure, Grandmother commented sadly, "You know, I was planning to make more." "Who could have eaten anymore?" I asked. With that, Grandfather talked proudly about his wife's prowess in the kitchen and how many people she fed again the next day. "I have lots of friends and they (are) all good cooks, but I can't eat. Only my wife, she is the best cook."

I then commented on Grandfather's speech and how beautiful I thought it was. I asked if he'd written it out first. "No," he answered proudly, "it was exprompt [sic]...I didn't have time to think."

Here Grandfather shifted the focus of compliments and, pointing to David, said "This guy had a good speech (too)." Grandmother qualified the compliment by pointing out that David had referred to his mother and his grandmother as "this lady and this lady" when he should have used their names, but she was obviously also proud of his performance.

When I asked what was the most moving part of the experience for them, Grandfather said "When David was in the synagogue" and Grandmother said "The same for me." "Any particular part?" I asked. "No," said Grandfather, "I didn't understand what he said, but his voice, his song, was very emotional."

Here Grandmother pointed out that although she really couldn't remember it, this Bar Mitzvah brought back vague memories of her older brother's Bar Mitzvah in Rumania. Grandfather commented that in his life, this was the first Bar Mitzvah he had ever seen. The only thing he had to compare it to was the "red tie ceremony" during which the young boys in the school where he was a teacher in Russia formally joined the Communist party. "They just memorized the pledge and said the words...They (the words) didn't come from the heart [as did the sentiments in the Bar Mitzvah]."

J. So, this was the first time you were called up to the Torah? Your first aliyah?

GM&GF. (nodding and smiling happily) Sure!

J. So it was like your Bar Mitzvah, too?

Everyone laughed as we went on to talk about the other men who had also been called up for the first time in their lives. When I asked David what was most moving for him, he said he didn't know. All he knew was what was most "hard." And that was all of the studying he did during the last week or so. When I asked who cried the most, everyone said they cried, but Grandfather claimed the honor of crying the most. After I volunteered that I was moved when David disappeared between the synagogue's elders and the ark, Mother recalled the scene

of David walking with the Torah. "...everybody shaking hands and he went by with the Torah and kissed me." Interjected Grandmother, "I think he will remember this all his life." "Do you think so?" Mother asked David. "Yeh!" he answered emphatically.

What happened that they didn't expect? Besides David getting lost in the forest, "everything else was exactly according to plans." What would they have done differently? Here Grandmother started to comment on her state of mind ("I would try to be more [pause] you know I was [pause]"). Grandfather interrupted by saying he'd have taken more pictures.

When I asked about their advice for other families, the grandparents expressed their pride in how much they had contributed to David's success. "First of all," began Grandmother, "They have to have a grandmother and grandfather like us!" Grandfather then talked about how he had taken David to lessons in the synagogue and encouraged him to study. In fact he drove him to all of his lessons (karate and music, too). "Yes," said Lena. "He is the driver." "No," her father corrected her, "I'm not the driver. I'm consultant...(all laugh). I sit and I consult...I don't just leave him (at the lessons). I sit and listen and then tell him what is wrong and what is good."

When I asked if they thought that preparing for the Bar Mitzvah had had any particular effect on them as a family, Grandmother and Lena agreed that "nothing had changed." Said Lena, "Our family is a close family so we didn't communicate more or less. Nothing really



changed our relationships or life." Grandmother emphasized the closeness by pointing out that indeed most of the people (at the dinner) were their relatives and old, close friends from many years. And all of them knew David since he was born. Only Grandfather answered differently. It was not clear how serious he meant to be, and it seemed as though neither his wife nor his daughter took him seriously, but he said (in terms of changes), "I look at him (David) like a man. Not like a child. He's for me, a man."

What did David learn about himself? "When I need to, I can work real hard." And Mother about David? "That if he really wants to do something, he can do it."

Neither Lena nor her mother thought they had learned anything new about themselves. But when Grandfather said that he'd use his experience with David's Bar Mitzvah to help his other grandson nine years from now, Grandmother agreed that she'd also use the experience and tell her next grandson "to start to study earlier and not leave so much for the end." I asked Grandmother if she'd always known that she could keep the kind of secret she'd kept. "No, usually I don't keep such a secret. Usually I tell my daughters and my husband if something happens but this time I didn't want to...Because I was sure that everything would be spoiled. So it's not a sacrifice but I would say that from one point of view it would be easier for me if my daughters knew. But I didn't want. So I carried it myself and had to show people that everything is OK."

In terms of changes in David, Mother and Grandparents all talked about the upcoming change in schools. The Jewish day school David attended didn't have an eighth grade and so David would be going into public school in the fall. They were all worried about how he would do in a situation where he'd be so much less sheltered. "It's a big difference," said Grandfather, "and I'm afraid that this year will be, for him, very difficult. He will (have to) be a man, not a boy, but a man." "Yes," added Grandmother, "he will have to be more serious."

Trying to relieve their apprehensions somewhat, I said that in my experience, students from private day schools were generally better prepared academically than their public school counterparts, and that David would probably do very well. They didn't buy it. "We'll see, we'll see," they all said pessimistically. And Grandfather added, "We are afraid. This changing for him." At this moment he turned and called angrily to David to stop cavorting with Joshua. (The two had been playing roughly in the other room and all of the adults had intervened at various points during the interview.) Grandfather reprimanded David for acting like a child: "David has to change. He is acting like Joshua. He is not a man." Here Lena added that David was becoming "more stubborn, more difficult." I responded by saying "He's becoming an adolescent." But again, I don't think the reframe was heard as Grandfather went on to complain about David's taste in music. David was not as serious about classical music as Grandfather wanted him to be. When Grandfather was a boy, traveling with his parents who were itinerant actors, he did not have the luxury of

studying music. "I want my grandson to do what I couldn't."

Trying to move the conversation to something more positive, I asked Grandfather what he thought about David's karate accomplishments. "It's good...In this wild world, a man needs...self defense." "Yes," said Grandmother, he can defend his mother." "What do you mean 'can'?" interrupted David. "I do!" As everyone laughed (and as I thought about the multiple truths of this remark), we talked briefly about chores, allowance, and thank-you notes. What with the distraction of her mother's condition, Lena had not gotten around to buying thank you notes and now felt it was too late. Here, Mother was chided by her mother who said, sarcastically that she hadn't done it because her "personal secretary" (her mother) couldn't do it for her.

Moving towards closure, I asked David to imagine what he might want to tell his own son about his Bar Mitzvah when his son was his age. "I know I'd help him with his studying, (and) I'll make sure that he has a good Jewish background because without that, it's sort of hard. If I hadn't gone to Akibba [name of Jewish day school] I wouldn't know anything." "So," I asked, "you would send your son to a Jewish day school?" "Yes!" he answered. I then asked Lena if she'd known that about her son. "No," she hadn't. Everyone was smiling happily. It was good news; David had heard the Rabbi's message.

When I asked if they thought when David was born, that he'd have a Bar Mitzvah, Lena answered: "Not in Russia, because we were not allowed to do it. But the moment when we decided to leave Russia, we were sure that he would have a Bar Mitzvah here." "Do most Jews who

leave Russia leave in order to practice Judaism?" I asked. In response, Lena and her parents tried to explain the difference they felt between "practicing Judaism" and being a Jew. They don't practice Judaism, they are not observant Jews, but in America they are able to "feel like Jews" without having to apologize.

GF. In Russia, there is very big anti-Semitism. To be a Jew in Russia is very difficult. 'Excuse me, I am a Jew.'

GM. You don't say (it), but (that is what) you mean.

GF. And my boss (would say). 'You are not like all Jews. You are a good Jew...' And also when you want to find a job, they look to see

GM. If you are a Jew or not. If you are a Jew, you can't get the job you want. So this is also reason. Because we had two daughters and they had a future...

GF. And for the grandchildren.

The grandparents went on to say that even though they both did have very good jobs in Russia, they wanted this change for their future generations.

In answer to my last question about the effect of the research, Lena answered as all the of the families had answered: It made her more aware of what was happening. "I realized more. Sometimes, if it's not spoken, you don't realize what is happening."

As I left, Lena urged me to "stay in touch" even though the research was over. I said that I would. I really did feel drawn to this family and I did want to maintain our relationship. But, over time, I realized that that would be unwise. Writing up my findings was going to be hard enough--even without continued contact. And this research had to end somewhere,



## Comparative Analysis of Post Bar Mitzvah Interviews/Aftermath

This section begins with an introduction that discusses the researcher's goals for the post Bar Mitzvah interview, and the rationale for the questions used. It then continues with a discussion of the events following each of the Bar Mitzvahs and with an analysis of the similarities and differences within the context of the different life events. The section concludes with a discussion of perceived change over time with specific reference to the process of reintegration from multiple theoretical perspectives. A brief postscript highlights the difference in perception between the researcher and the families.

### Introduction

#### Goals

The researcher had three major agendas in conducting the post Bar Mitzvah interview. The first was to collect more information from the system (in order to correct and extend her developing hypotheses); the second was to put information into the system, i.e., to feed back to the families her positive assessment of their shared experience; and finally, to bring closure to their coevolved relationship as researcher and subjects.

Specifically, the researcher was collecting information about events immediately following the ceremonial weekend and about the family's perception of both the Bar Mitzvah and those events. She was

observing for movement in the system that was perceived by the family, by the researcher, or by both.

In reference to the second agenda item, the researcher's goal was to reinforce the family's perception of their success and, where necessary, help reframe that success in the context of ongoing developmental difficulties. Given that the research "was over" and the need to limit its interventionary effects was no longer as relevant, and given the researcher's desire that the experience of participating in the research would ultimately be helpful to the families, her contributions to their positive self image were consistent with the overall methodology.

### Questions

The central questions in this interview were deliberately general and similar across all four families. In contrast to earlier questions which probed for specific details, the questions in this interview (about emotional highlights, learnings, impact, etc.) were reaching for the family's general impressions and for the connections they made between who they were, what they did, and how all of that was perceived. The questions were designed not to open new areas for investigation, but to move the researcher and family towards conclusion.

A specifically future-oriented question about what the child would tell his son at the son's Bar Mitzvah, served to move the family's thoughts forward, while the final question about the

researcher's effect functioned to put the research into the past and allow the family to comment on it.

#### Events Following the Bar Mitzvah Weekend

That different events (both planned and unplanned) occurred in each of the families following the Bar Mitzvahs was, of course, expected. Expected, too, was that the families would interact with the events in ways that reflected their unique characteristics and issues.

In the category of planned events: The Steinberg family was going to have dinner together (to savor their success), the Gordovsky mother was taking her son to a karate tournament, the Goldsteins were going on a weekend vacation, and the Sheinmans were going to begin ritual preparations for the approaching Jewish holiday. In the unplanned category: The Steinbergs were shaken by a terrible tragedy, the Gordovskys dealt with a potential tragedy, the Goldsteins learned of a grandfather's hospitalization, and the Sheinmans left town for the holiday.

For the Steinbergs, the tragedy not only prevented the family's congratulatory meeting, but effectively shattered the "sacred space" they had so painstakingly created, and brought the liminal period to an abrupt and premature end. A gradual transition into the profane, post liminal world of decisions and visitation changes had become impossible. For the Gordovskys, news of Grandmother's secret also

shifted the family's focus dramatically, and abruptly relegated the Bar Mitzvah to an event in the distant past.

For the Goldsteins, knowledge of Grandfather's hospitalization was not nearly as disruptive. Given that he was already improved by the time they'd learned of his condition, and given the fact that his ailments were part of a pattern that they'd already begun coming to terms with, the event did not prevent them from continuing to focus on the success of the Bar Mitzvah.

For the Sheinmans, the change of plans was not at all dramatic and did not impact on the experience of the Bar Mitzvah. Given that the Bar Mitzvah was only one in an ongoing series of religious rituals, and given that, for them, all day-to-day acts are infused with holiness, the transition from the sanctity of the Bar Mitzvah period to the (only somewhat) less sacred period following it, was much less noticeable.

#### Similarities Across Systems

In the context of these very different life events, two major similarities were noted across all of the families during the post Bar Mitzvah interviews; they had to do with (1) the family's overall positive assessment of the experience, and (2) the researcher's sense of the family's increased closeness and heightened interaction.

Two similarities of lesser importance had to do with 1) the passage of time; and 2) the perceived effect of the research.



Positive Assessment Regarding Themes of Transformation and Preservation

Without exception, the families were pleased with their performances and the products of their performances. The Bar Mitzvahs had all gone "according to plan" and the results were better than any of them had imagined they'd be. When asked what they would have changed if they could have done it differently, only the most minor changes (when to distribute the grace-after-meals booklets, what kind of photographs to take, what haftorah portion to read) could be imagined.

During the course of these interviews, the researcher's hypothesis about how the families had used the Bar Mitzvah in reference to themes of transformation and preservation (Chapter V Comparative Analysis) was reinforced. They all talked with satisfaction about interactions with past generations, they all talked about what it meant to them to have so many friends and family sharing in the experience, and they all talked with great pride about their child's accomplishments.

Uniqueness of accomplishment. One particular observation stands out in reference to this last item. It is how differently each child's accomplishment was demonstrated and noticed, and how those differences fit with what was important in the system. Moshe Sheinman excelled through reading the Torah. And even his parents, with their normally high expectations for what their son should do, were surprised ("It was an eye opener...and everyone in the city was talking about it."). Micah Lerner Steinberg impressed his parents

with the maturity and poise with which he delivered his speech. For them, his articulate performance indicated a new level of sophistication and graciousness. David Gordovsky, with his sweet voice, sang flawlessly all that he had learned in a short two weeks. Neither his family nor his teacher had expected him to have mastered so much material so quickly. ("No student had ever accomplished so much.") Fittingly, Seth Goldstein demonstrated his maturity and accomplishment more during the party than the service (where his haftorah had been shortened). Although his parents knew that he liked to sing in his room, they were quite taken with his ability to entertain publicly. They hadn't realized what self-confidence and style he had developed.

Through the Bar Mitzvah, each child was not only able to excel, but to excel in ways that were uniquely valued in their systems. It is appropriate to note here also that the ritual's effectness as a vehicle through which the child's increasing maturity is demonstrated is not dependent on how "religious" or "traditional" the Bar Mitzvah is. It is the researcher's impression that in both the Sheinman and Goldstein systems (the two systems on opposite ends of the religiosity spectrum), the Bar Mitzvah boys were seen in equally (albeit very different) new ways by their families. In the family with a high level of ritual, the manifestation of the child's new status is concrete--he sits at the head table with the other adult men in his family, he is counted in the minyan [the quorum necessary for holding a service], and he is responsible for his own sins. In the family

without such ritual, the status shift is demonstrated less concretely but is apparent none the less in the way in which the parents talk about their son and the maturity he has shown. In this light, Seth's absence from the interview is not only a statement about the Bar Mitzvah belonging as much to the parents (and their need to celebrate their unit) as to the child, but can be reframed as a demonstration of his already having begun to move outside of the family's boundaries, outside of its "nest." In other words, the Bar Mitzvah functioned to strengthen the family's boundaries at the same time that it allowed the child to move beyond them.

#### Increased Closeness and Intensified Interaction

The second feature noted across all of the families during the post Bar Mitzvah interview was an increased feeling of closeness and intensity. Although the amount and manifestation of the increase varied in each situation, it was the researcher's perception that these increases were evidenced through both physical and verbal communications: All of the married couples touched each other either physically or verbally (e.g., the Sheinman's mutual compliments, the Gordovsky grandfather's talk about his wife's cooking), and all of the parents touched their children (Father stroked Micah's head as his son sat almost in his lap, Mother pinched Moshe's cheek and Father stroked it as he called him their "treasure," the Goldsteins practically took turns caressing their daughter who sat between them on the sofa, and both mockingly held on to her as they joked about never letting her

leave the nest; and David actually kissed his mother vigorously at the end of the interview).

In addition, all of the adults and children seemed more verbally interactive with each other. (This perception is purely impressionistic as the researcher did not study the transcripts such that she could compare patterns of interactional episodes across time.) Although David and the Goldstein daughter had always interacted rather freely with their parents, it appeared that the quality of the interaction had intensified. Cindy asked a question that provoked an unusually reflective response from her father, David answered a question in a way that was intensely meaningful for his mother, and on a number of occasions, the Sheinmans tried to help their son answer a question because they were eager to hear what he had to say. This shift was most clear in the Steinberg interview where it seemed that Micah's exchanges with his father and stepmother had become more adult-like: Micah answered a question and then posed it to his father, he insightfully defended his stepmother's superstitions, he worked hard to assure his father he was "only kidding" when he thought he might have hurt his feelings, and his father heard him (on the matter of "teasing") in a way that he never had before.

In addition to the patterns of communication, the content of the discussion was also somewhat more intense. In all of the families there was some indication of heaviness, sadness, or worry having to do with the child's increasing maturity and the implications for the



parents. The Goldstein father talked about his feelings about children "leaving the nest," the Sheinman father sighed as he talked about "stealing" his child's summer from him, the Steinberg father talked about his growing sense of responsibility regarding family connections, and the Gordovskys worried actively about David's upcoming transition from the security of his Jewish day school into the "wild world" of the public school.

#### In and Out of Time

Another interesting though less important theme that emerged in most of the interviews was a sense of strangeness regarding time. Stacy felt as though she had been "on another planet" during the Bar Mitzvah weekend and woke up to find that it was over; Micah couldn't believe how abnormally normal he felt the morning of his Bar Mitzvah ("I took a shower like a normal shower"), and how "all of a sudden," he was "boom, boom, boom, into the haftorah." Leah thought the party was just beginning when it was already ending.

These expressions bring to mind Turner's (1969) description of the liminal period as one which is both "in and out of time (p. 96)." The fact that the families encouraged extended family members to remain after the Bar Mitzvah weekend itself reflected their desire to prolong the pleasurable sense of communitas (Turner, 1969) they had experienced in the altered state of liminality.

### Perceived Effect of Research

As a final note on similarities, all of the families indicated that participation in the research had been helpful. The researcher's questions made them give more thought to what they were doing, made them articulate their feelings, and helped them know what others in the family were thinking and feeling.

### Bar Mitzvah Pictures: Worth a Thousand Words

In contrast to the above focus on similarities, one minor observation of a difference is worth noting here. It reinforces earlier findings regarding the way in which seemingly insignificant details reflect fundamental issues in the families: All of the families took pictures of the Bar Mitzvah. Fittingly, the Goldstein's had hired a professional photographer, and at the time of the interview, were in the process of selecting prints to include in a formal "Bar Mitzvah album." The Sheinmans had a few snapshots scattered about the house but were still waiting for Grandmother (the "perfectionist") to send copies of all of the pictures that she had had developed. The pictures would come in good time. No one seemed particularly anxious about them. In the Gordovsky family, Grandfather was in charge of the picture taking. He had used a 16mm camera and was not yet finished (artistically) editing the film. Neither his daughter nor his grandson had as yet seen it. And finally, the pictures in the Steinberg family. Predictably there were two different sets of pictures, one taken by mother and members of her

family, and the other by father and his family. Where the two sets of pictures were at the time of the interview was a metaphor for where the families themselves were. Ken and Janet's pictures were already packed away in boxes ready for the movers to take to their new home. Stacy's pictures had gotten lost (in the mail order house) and she was fighting to recapture them.

### Change Over Time

#### Developmental Issues Continue

Throughout the research period, the families negotiated the developmental issues salient to their systems. In the final period of observation, the three months following the Bar Mitzvah itself, the families were continuing their negotiations. In each of the interviews it was evident that despite the universally positive experience of the Bar Mitzvah, the families were continuing to struggle with the issues that were difficult for them before the event. The Bar Mitzvah doesn't turn the boy into a man, and it doesn't make family problems disappear. The Bar Mitzvah serves to facilitate various aspects of the negotiation and to varying degrees helps prepare and/or fortify the families for their continuing developmental tasks, but that the tasks continue is unquestionable.

In the Steinberg family, the drama between cooperation and competition continued; in the Goldstein family, the issue of children moving beyond the nuclear boundary was beginning to emerge; and in the Gordovsky family, the complicated task of individuation for both

Mother and Son continued to loom large. Even in the Sheinman family, where developmental transitions were so prescribed as to appear relatively unproblematic, Father was continuing to work on his relationship to his own Father. His insight into how different he felt as a child (having his Bar Mitzvah planned for him) and how he felt as a father (planning the Bar Mitzvah of his son), was an expression of that work. "I am obviously looking with different eyes. As parent or child. That is the major difference..."

#### The Process of Reintegration

At the specific level of this research (see Figure 3.4), the post Bar Mitzvah family is a family in the third phase of the ritual process, the phase of reintegration. Although each family moves at its own pace (and each uses different strategies for buffering the transition), they all eventually enter the post liminal period where the excitement and intensity of the experience is behind them.

The process from varying theoretical perspectives. These families and their experiences can be described from a variety of perspectives: the perspective of ritual, the perspective of cybernetics, and the perspective of family process. As ritual celebrants, they are moving from the sacred and special to the profane and the ordinary. Here, with their new statuses, they are trying to reincorporate themselves into their everyday life and into the everyday life of the community. As cybernetic systems, they are attempting to reorganize themselves at a new level of coherence (Dell, 1982), one which accounts for the perturbations they have just



experienced and one which will better meet "the demands of their changing fields" (Hoffman, 1981). As family systems emerging from a period of "unhinged" intensity, where emotional processes were unlocked and changes in emotional closeness and distance were being experienced, the family is struggling to adjust to these changes.

These adjustments are often difficult. To the degree that the changes are complex or dramatic, the family struggles with the multiple implications of the changes. In the Steinberg and Gordovsky family where developmental struggles are most evident, there is even the appearance of regression. The Steinberg subsystems can no longer meet jointly, and the Gordovsky system demonstrates more enmeshment and more contradictory messages than ever. But, given the fact that systems don't change in smooth unbroken lines (Hoffman, 1981), and that oscillating movement is to be expected, it is not surprising to see evidence of the system trying to self-correct in response to increasing pressures for change. This is especially appropriate given the fact that at a different logical level (the year surrounding the rite of passage rather than the more limited six month context of the research), the family is still very much in its liminal period.

The seeming regression is part of the process of "moving forward." In the context of ritual process which moves from the known to the unknown and back again to the known (Chapter II), the desire of the postliminal family to return to behavior that is more familiar (and safe) makes sense. But, despite appearances, it would be a

mistake to assume that they have moved back to exactly the place where they were when the process began.

Mapping the changes. The following charts portray the structural and systemic changes over time for each of the families. In the Steinberg system (Table 2), the temporary realignment of the adults (during the planning and ceremony periods) and the corresponding movement in the system is highlighted. In the Goldstein system (Table 3), the movement in the parental and grandparental subsystems (during the planning period) is highlighted. In the Sheinman system (Table 4), the movement is less dramatic as Father moves closer to his father through the process of differentiating from him. And in the Gordovsky family (Table 5), the ambiguity and conflicting messages increase as the pressure for change intensifies. In all of the ceremonies, the son's increasing maturity and subsequent distancing is reflected and where that change continues most clearly (with the Sheinmans and Goldsteins) in the post ceremony period, that change is also reflected.

In addition, the charts indicate changes in life events, self perception, patterns of communication, etc. They also indicate corresponding changes in the researcher.

No attempt is made to identify the changes as first order changes which can be seen as systemic attempts to maintain the organization as is, or as second order changes which alter the basic structure of the system. Given the study's arbitrary six month time frame (in the context of a process which spans a time period at least twice as

long), it is impossible to predict the future permutations of these changes. The breadth (and depth) of the research lens is simply too limited.



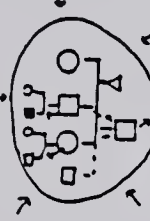

Period Prior to Research	Planning Period	Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend	Post Bar Mitzvah Period
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two separate subsystems tied together by child they share actively through joint custody.</li> <li>• History of conflict: difficult/protracted separation &amp; divorce.</li> <li>• Child, who looks like Father and talks like Mother, works to be equally loyal.</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father moves closer to Mother, distances from new wife.</li> <li>• Stepmother feels like "outsider."</li> <li>• Stepmother becomes pregnant.</li> <li>• Mother returns to school.</li> <li>• Son moving closer to Father; fighting more with both Mother and Step-mother.</li> <li>• Father moving closer to his deceased father</li> <li>• Mother moving closer to her extended family.</li> <li>• Son indicates increasing identification with Judaism.</li> <li>• Impending schedule change for son.</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Integration of subsystems:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All adults cooperate; move closer together.</li> <li>• Child closer to all.</li> <li>• Father closer to his father.</li> <li>• Mother closer to her grandparents.</li> <li>• Entire unit supported by extended family.</li> <li>• Stepmother feels and acts like participant.</li> <li>• Family plans joint dinner.</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tragedy.</li> <li>• Car door accident.</li> <li>• Death of Stepmother's grandmother.</li> </ul> <p><u>Movement</u></p> <p><u>Integration ends abruptly</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father distant from Mother; closer to new wife (and unborn child).</li> <li>• Father closer to his parents.</li> <li>• Father closer to son.</li> <li>• Mother closer to her extended family.</li> <li>• Son closer to Father and more distant from Mother.</li> <li>• Son perceives self as different ("change in my head").</li> <li>• Son demonstrates change in level of empathy and awareness.</li> <li>• Families unable to meet jointly.</li> </ul>
	<p>Researcher conducts separate interviews; maintains 2 separate files.</p>	<p>Researcher combines two files into one; becomes "member of the family."</p>	<p>Researcher returns to separate interviews and separate files.</p>

Table 2. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Steinberg Family  
(See Appendix B for key)



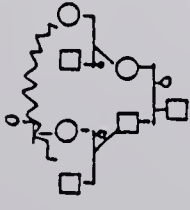
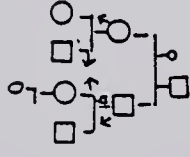
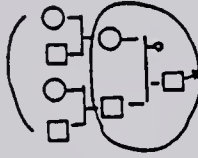
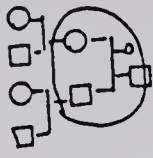
Period Prior to Research	Planning Period	Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend	Post Bar Mitzvah Period
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fourteen year history of tension between two sets of in-laws.</li> <li>● Paternal Grandmother refuses to bring Great Grandmother.</li> <li>● Maternal grand-parents' health deteriorating.</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Father moves beyond usual boundaries               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- convinces parents to visit in-laws (and reduces tension in 3 generations).</li> <li>- tries to convince Mother to bring her mother.</li> <li>- allows younger brother to move closer.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Mother visits parents alone for first time               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- begins caretaking reversal.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Two sets of grandparents closer to each other.</li> <li>● Nuclear family on stage together               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- affirms strength of boundaries and specialness of unit.</li> <li>- allows parents vicarious Bar and Bat Mitzvah.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Son surprises family with his poise and self-confidence at party.</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vacation weekend.</li> <li>● Maternal Grandfather (who is most emotionally involved with Bar Mitzvah) is hospitalized               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- illness "labeled" and he becomes depressed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Father expresses ambivalent feelings about children "leaving the nest."</li> <li>● Parents closer to daughter.</li> <li>● Parents more distant from son.</li> <li>● Son "calls himself a man."</li> <li>● Son "gone for the summer."</li> </ul>
	<p>Researcher senses parents' distance, rigidity of boundaries.</p>	<p>Researcher not invited to party. Initially researcher perceives negative implication of family on stage during ceremony.</p>	<p>Researcher drawn to family; accepts family's positive punctuation of sitting together on stage as additional "truth."</p>

Table 3. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Goldstein Family  
(See Appendix B for key)

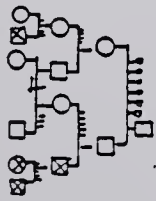
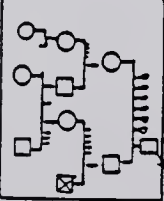
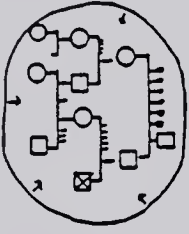
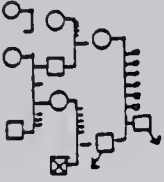
<p>Period Prior to Research</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents first cousins in huge interlocking rabbinical family.</li> <li>• Sent by the Rebbe as missionaries.</li> <li>• Ritual as way of life rather than as one aspect of it.</li> <li>• Jewish identity and family identity fused.</li> </ul>	<p>Planning Period</p>  <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marriage of an uncle dissolves; first divorce in family.</li> <li>• Mother attempts to help but returns home realizing that she can not.</li> </ul> <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father has difficulty finishing son's <u>pilpul</u> (that his father had written).</li> <li>• Son begins wearing <u>teffilin</u>.</li> <li>• Son has first <u>aliyah</u> at Rebbe's <u>minyán</u>.</li> <li>- internalizes new responsibility/status: "What do you mean I'm not responsible?"</li> </ul>	<p>Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father talks emotionally about his father.</li> <li>• Son surprises everyone with the excellence of his Torah reading.</li> <li>• Extended family and community gather to reinforce tradition and intergenerational communication.</li> </ul>	<p>Post Bar Mitzvah Period</p>  <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare for next ritual holiday.</li> <li>• Go to Maternal Grandparents.</li> </ul> <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Son accorded all rights and responsibilities of adult in religious context (sits with men, wears <u>teffilin</u>, responsible for sins).</li> <li>• Father moves closer to his father while expressing sense of differentiation from him.</li> <li>• Parents move on to preparing for next ritual holiday and for next son's Bar Mitzvah.</li> </ul>
	<p>Researcher drawn to religious family.</p>	<p>Researcher feels as if she's discovered "a lost civilization."</p>	<p>Researcher continues to feel close, but wary of having romanticized the picture.</p>

Table 4. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Sheinman Family  
(See Appendix B for key)

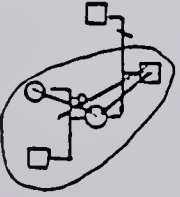
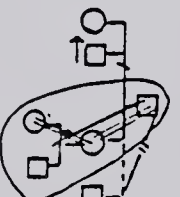
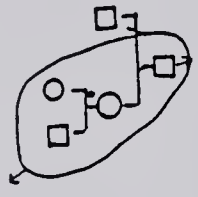
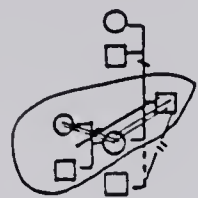
Period Prior to Research	Planning Period	Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend	Post Bar Mitzvah Period
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, child, and grandparents immigrate from Russia and parents divorce.</li> <li>• Grandparents share in upbringing of child.</li> <li>• Mother and child very close (almost like siblings).</li> </ul>	 <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father remarries (to non-Jewish woman).</li> <li>• Mother reconnects with old boyfriend.</li> </ul> <p><u>Movement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father increases distance from son.</li> <li>• Son becomes more possessive of mother</li> <li>- begins doing badly in school.</li> <li>• Messages about growing up and out very confused.</li> </ul> <p>Researcher pulled to intervene; wary of applying Western boundary standards.</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandmother keeps ominous secret..</li> <li>• Mother's boyfriend does not attend.</li> <li>• Father's new wife does not attend.</li> <li>• Mother and son very close.</li> <li>• Son impresses everyone with accomplishment and maturity.</li> <li>• Son's rite of reversal (child leading adults) is literal as well as symbolic re: Jewish literacy.</li> <li>• Rabbi intensifies connection to Jewish past directly and symbolically.</li> </ul> <p>Researcher moved by ceremony and party.</p>	 <p><u>Events</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Karate tournament.</li> <li>• Grandmother reveals secret - family rallies around; medical crisis passes.</li> </ul> <p><u>Intensified ambivalence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother and boyfriend continue ambivalent relationship.</li> <li>• Son more possessive and chiding.</li> <li>• Mixed messages continue</li> </ul> <p>To son:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be a man and protect Mother; be a man and let her go.</li> <li>- You are a man; you are a babe in the "wild world."</li> </ul> <p>To mother:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time to remarry; you are a child and dependent on your parents.</li> </ul> <p>Researcher mirrors family's ambivalence: attracted to maintaining relationship with family and resistant to maintaining relationship (with its pull for intervention).</p>

Table 5. Structural and Systemic Change Over Time: Gordovsky Family (See Appendix B for key)

Postscript: Differences in Perception

In only one of the four cases was the researcher's perception of the family's experience substantively different from that of the family's. How the Goldstein family saw itself on the stage and how the researcher perceived them there, was sharply different. As discussed earlier, this difference was in part a reflection of the researcher's inability to transcend her emotional bias against Reform practice. It was also a reflection of her sense of what needed to be dramatized through the ceremony. What the researcher saw as dysfunctional, the family experienced as highly functional. For the researcher, the family's sitting together on stage represented a lost opportunity for enacting the child's differentiation from the family. For the family, sitting together represented the taking of a different opportunity: It made the ceremony less sterile and more meaningful; it allowed the parents the vicarious experience of having Bat and Bar Mitzvahs themselves, and it reinforced the strength and specialness of their family as a unit.



## C H A P T E R   V I I

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, CRITIQUE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Summary

Introduction and Organization of Chapter

This was a case study of four families planning, participating in, and reflecting on the Bar Mitzvah of their first child. Most broadly, the purpose of the study was to explore the relationship of life cycle rituals to developmental transitions. More specifically, the purpose was to explore in depth the way in which a number of very different families entering the adolescent stage of development, interacted with the process of Bar Mitzvah to facilitate developmental tasks particular to this life stage.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews beginning three months prior to and ending three months after the event, and through the use of participant observation of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony/weekend, the researcher explored the "circular connections (both interactional and symbolic [Steier, 1985, p. 31]) between who the families were, what they were doing, and what it all meant to them" (Tomm, 1985).

This exploration, informed by the theoretical literature on healthy family functioning and on classic ritual process (Chapter II), resulted in a series of detailed portraits (Chapters IV, V, VI) through which the researcher described the families and their

experiences as they evolved and as she came to know them over time. The portraits were developed chronologically and divided along the three time periods (the planning stage, the ceremony/weekend, and the aftermath) theoretically corresponding to the tripartite structure of ritual process (preliminal, liminal, and postliminal phases). In addition to describing the families and their interaction with the ritual process as richly as feasible, the portraits (and the various forms of analysis interspersed throughout them) were designed to acknowledge the researcher's role in constructing the phenomenon being observed, to demonstrate the interactive, coevolutionary process of cybernetic research, and to allow the families' voices to be heard such that the reader would be able to judge the validity of the researcher's interpretation.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first, in two parts, provides a synopsis of the theoretical assumptions that informed the case study, and a synopsis of the four families over the six month period. In the second part, the researcher's conclusions are stated. Part three includes a critique of the method's major difficulties, recommendations for future research, and discussion of the research's effect on the families and on the researcher.

#### Synopsis of the Major Theoretical Assumptions That Informed the Case Study

The following summarizes most simply and briefly the major theoretical concepts that informed the case study:

Healthy families are systems in which all members are properly connected to themselves, to each other, and to the larger context (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982; Olson, et al., 1979 [in Walsh, 1982]; Whitaker, 1979). This concept of connectedness implies an appropriate balance between closeness and distance, between cohesion and individuation. In order to remain healthy, families must be able to manage change in this balance over time such that the change is both allowed and controlled simultaneously. This change is both achieved through and reflected in changes in behavior and communication patterns, self perceptions, world view, etc. And these changes are both achieved through and reflected in changes in interpersonal and intergenerational boundaries (Wood & Talmon, 1983) according to the needs of the particular life stage.

The developmental life cycle through which the system spirals, is crudely understood to include a series of clearly defined stages alternating with less clearly defined transition periods which link the stages. In contrast to the stages where the required changes are relatively small (first order adaptations within the system), changes required during transition periods are much more dramatic (second order) discontinuous changes that alter the system itself.

Transition periods are difficult if not dangerous times for families. It is no accident that they are referred to as developmental "crises." The amount of difficulty experienced at these times depends on such factors as the predictability of the change, the amount of change required, and the make up of the family's resources.

These factors are a function of and expressed through the dynamics that occur on both the horizontal (developmental) and the vertical (intergenerational) axes of the system (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980). While much of the literature emphasizes the danger, the potential for the stress in these periods to act as motors for growth (Hoffman, 1981, p. 168) is also acknowledged (Haley, 1973; Schwartzman, 1982). What happens in the transition period, i.e., how these crises get resolved, has profound implications for the health of the system (Forssen, 1980; Hoffman, 1981).

Throughout the ages, rituals evolved to assist families through transitional crises. These life cycle rituals are public ceremonies that prescribe, contain, and celebrate change (Culler, 1982a, 1982b). They are unique pacing devices for helping systems facilitate change and maintain control simultaneously. Life cycle rituals work because of (1) their synchronizing effect on the individual and the group; (2) their isomorphic relationship to the process of change in systems; and (3) their tripartite structure which allows for change in the context of stability.

In terms of transition periods, adolescence is acknowledged to be one of the most difficult (e.g., Ackerman, 1980; Elkind, 1981; McGoldrick & Carter, 1982). The relative invisibility of this transition combined with (Western) society's confusion regarding expectations for adolescents, result in making this an increasingly difficult period for contemporary families. Children in this culture are both rushed into and held back from maturing with no appropriate



pacing or demarcation of change. As a consequence, they grow up too fast (e.g., Elkind's [1981] "hurried child") or not at all (e.g., Steven's [1981], "eternal youth").

For many reasons, life cycle rituals are generally less available to contemporary western families. This is especially true in reference to rituals of initiation into young adulthood. To some extent, therapy has replaced ritual as the contemporary rite of passage. The therapist as secular priest has become a familiar concept and it is a logical extension of this phenomenon that family therapists have recently begun to explore the relationship between ritual and therapy (e.g., Friedman, 1980; Haley, 1973; Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982; Kobak & Waters, 1984; Tomm, 1984a, 1984b; Wolin & Bennet, 1984) and to develop therapeutic rituals for client families (e.g., Culler, 1981; Imber-Coppersmith, 1982, 1986; Palazzoli, et al., 1977) who are "stuck" and unable to make the transition from one stage of development to the next.

Out of the literature on therapeutic ritual produced by these therapists/theorists, a number of developmental tasks for families with adolescents have been summarized (Culler 1987, p. 85): Families need to help the adolescent develop autonomy, help the entire system deal with the increasing separation between the adolescent and the parents that results from this autonomy, help parents to focus on their midlife marital issues and careers, and to shift toward concern for the older generation.

Rituals facilitate accomplishment of these tasks (Culler, 1987, p. 88) by providing (1) a time, place, and format for acknowledging and expressing the dramatic emotional impact of the developmental change; (2) a way to mourn the loss (inherent in the change); (3) a period of isolation between the adolescent and the family which allows old patterns to be broken and enhances the possibility of reorganization into new patterns of behavior; (4) a way for parents to transmit skills; (5) a tangible way for adolescents to demonstrate competence; and (6) a formalized reentry (of the adolescent and family with their new statuses).

These developmental tasks and the rituals that facilitate their accomplishment bring us full circle to the earlier discussion of healthy family functioning in which the family's need to provide simultaneously for autonomy and cohesion is paramount. They speak, as well, to the need for adjustments in the relationship between these two simultaneous forces as the needs of the system change over time. With this theoretical material as context, the researcher studied four "healthy" families as they enacted a cultural rite of passage still available to them.

### Synopsis of the Four Families Over the Six Month Period

#### Overview

The four families in this study differed dramatically from one another in terms of structure, emotional makeup, and level of cultural identification. Predictably, the ceremonies they experienced, the

needs and issues they brought to the experience, and the particular effects of the experience were also dramatically different from one family to the next (see individual family synopses). Despite these differences however, similarities across these systems relative to the three stages of the Bar Mitzvah process were pronounced and important in terms of understanding the way in which the Bar Mitzvah facilitates developmental change.

During the preparation period, all of the families were dealing with an unprecedented amount of stress. Not only were they dealing with the stress of the child's changing needs and what that meant for everyone in the system, but they were dealing as well with the stress of organizing a major "public" event that would bring together in one place, all of the parts of their lives ("the original encounter marathon" [Friedman, 1981]).

Making lists and attending to logistical details was the way in which all of the families seemed to manage the stress not only at the pragmatic level, but at the emotional level as well. Which details were important differed from family to family and it was clear that these details related symbolically to the emotional tasks the families were attempting to address (at a level that was generally outside of their awareness). It was clear also that through this process of planning and organizing details, the family members (to different degrees, of course) were moving closer to each other, to their extended families, to past generations, and to the larger culture. All of the families were working in some way on boundary issues that

were salient for them at the time. Through this process, too, they were experiencing a growing sense of pride in their child and in themselves as a unit. By the end of the planning period, well before any of the guests had arrived or any of the events had begun, all of the families were already experiencing a genuine sense of accomplishment and achievement.

In all cases, the ceremony/weekend (towards which all of the preparation had been directed) seemed not only to affirm the family's positive feelings but also to culminate and amplify the emotional work it had already begun. Through the ceremony, not only was the child's increasing mastery and maturity demonstrated publicly and concretely, but his and his parents' connectedness to past generations were highlighted and intensified as well. At a purely symbolic level, the family was proclaiming both its transformation and its constancy, and all who were present affirmed and celebrated these dynamics. The process had forced them beyond previous personal and interpersonal limits and resulted in the family's identifying natural strengths within themselves and in their larger systems that had previously been untapped or undeveloped.

During the period following the ceremony/weekend, all of the families felt extremely positive about their accomplishment and their interactions reflected an increased sense of closeness. Dealing with the predictable let down after the excitement, they were attempting to reenter the everyday world of post ceremonial normalcy and attempting to integrate the tangible and intangible effects of what they had



experienced. And in the context of those effects, they were now beginning, as well, to deal with the normative developmental issues and concerns that had occupied them as they'd entered the process and would be continuing to unfold as the family continued to move along its life cycle. Exactly how each of the families would make use of the experience and the strength that it seemed to tap is obviously beyond the scope of this research. From this limited perspective one can not speculate on the degree of developmental change facilitated by the experience. All that can be noted is the way in which the change process was catalyzed by the ritual experience.

#### Family Synopses

With that overview, the following is a thumbnail sketch of each of the families over the six month period of study. This material is capsulized in Table 6 on the next page.

The Steinbergs. The first family was a divorced, second generation family in which Father and Mother shared custody of their only child. Father was remarried to a woman who was not Jewish and who was feeling very much an outsider in terms of planning for the Bar Mitzvah. Early in the observed period, she became pregnant. On a monthly basis, the child alternated between these two households which, through the pivotal Father, were equally involved in planning the event. The two households differed greatly in structure, life style, and developmental stage. For the single Jewish mother, the Bar Mitzvah was marking the end of her childrearing years. For the newly married couple, it was marking the beginning of their preparation for

	Makeup, Structure and Cultural Identification	Major Developmental Issues and Axes of Tension	Primary Theme/ Metaphor	Invitation	Comparison with Past Nodal Event	Expressions of Change/Movement Prior to Bar Mitzvah	Bar Mitzvah Image	Post Bar Mitzvah
Steinberg	Divorced, 2nd generation parents sharing custody of only child. Father remarried to non-Jewish woman who becomes pregnant in planning period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child alternating between two very distinct families differing in structure, developmental stage, and tone.</li> <li>Both parts of system equally involved (through pivotal father) in making plans.</li> <li>Potential for conflict high.</li> </ul>	Hospitality Suite ("sacred" space)	"The family of"-- names parents without excluding Stepmother. Precedent setting compromise: Informs and instructs.	Contrast with wedding (Mother in charge, "choreographed alternative ceremony.")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father moving closer to Mother; distancing from new wife.</li> <li>Stepmother becomes pregnant.</li> <li>Mother returns to school.</li> <li>Mother moving closer to her extended family.</li> <li>Son moving closer to Father, fighting more with Mother and Stepmother.</li> <li>Father moving closer to his deceased father.</li> <li>Son indicates increasing identification with Judaism.</li> <li>Impending schedule changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father passing on the <u>secre</u>.</li> <li>Rallying of families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tragedy abruptly ends sacred space.</li> </ul>
Goldstein	Intact, professional, Reform family with exceptionally clear boundaries. First Bar Mitzvah in at least three generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fourteen year history of tension between two sets of in-laws.</li> <li>Paternal Grandmother refuses to bring Great Grandmother.</li> <li>Maternal grandparents' health deteriorating.</li> </ul>	Family Project (party "sacred")	Contemporary, stylish, tasteful. No Hebrew words or graphics.	Contrast with wedding (tension of inlaws)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father moves beyond customary limits; urges parents to visit wife's parents (results in movement in grandparental generation and reduction of tension in three generations); urges Mother to bring Grandmother; (results in younger brother's movement).</li> <li>Brothers and their children closer.</li> <li>Mother visits parents alone for first time in fifteen years; prepares for upcoming role reversals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nuclear family on stage together throughout the service.</li> <li>Bar Mitzvah boy as entertainer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family vacation weekend.</li> <li>Grandfather's hospitalization.</li> </ul>
Shelmen	Hesidic (ultra orthodox) family. Parents are first cousins in huge interlocking family system with long lineage of Hesidic rabbis. Sent as missionaries by <u>der Rebbe</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification with Jewish law absolute and complete. All roles, rules, and transitions prescribed by law and rituals it provides.</li> <li>Family emotional issues tend not to escalate into crises as everything is accepted as G-d's will and all focus on positive aspects of life.</li> </ul>	<u>Baruch Hashem</u> [Thanks be to G-d]	Prescribed format: "Husband's very good friend."	Similarity with wedding (repeat of cousins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The marriage of an uncle dissolves (first divorce in family).</li> <li>Son wears <u>teffilin</u>.</li> <li>Son has first <u>aliyan</u> at Rebbe's; internalizes new status/responsibility. (apologizes for defiling of fork).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeming chaos of service; ritual provides the structure.</li> <li>Children gravitating to Torah.</li> <li>Father's speech.</li> <li>Great Grandfather and Bar Mitzvah boy dancing together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ritual preparation for the next holiday.</li> </ul>
Gordovsky	Single Mother, Russian immigrant family in which child's bris (in Russia) held in secret. Mother's parents live close by and help raise child. Father remarries a few months prior to planning period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mother, Son, and Grandparents live in two households but constitute one emotional unit.</li> <li>Multigenerational ambivalence about both Mother and Son's growing up.</li> <li>Single parent dynamics, immigrant experience, cultural norms, and family myths all interact to maintain ambivalence and continue mixed messages.</li> <li>Values clear about reconnecting with fading tradition, and importance of performance and accomplishment.</li> </ul>	Grow up and Accomplish But Stay Close	Ornate Jewish star. Public pride. Differentiating move by Mother: "I invite." Countermove: Grandmother sends.	Contrast with secret <u>bris</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father remarries (to non-Jewish woman and distances from Son).</li> <li>Mother reconnects with old boyfriend.</li> <li>Son becomes more possessive of Mother; begins doing badly in school.</li> <li>Messages about growing up and out very confused.</li> <li>Son prepares for three performances in one week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child "taken in" by elders (lost to view between <u>tallis</u>-covered men and Torahs).</li> <li>Rabbi's speech in Yiddish to Russian immigrants.</li> <li>Toasts at party.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karate tournament.</li> <li>Grandmother's crisis.</li> <li>Intensified ambivalence.</li> </ul>

Table 6. Overview of Families During the Three Stages of the Ritual Process

a new family. Remaining equally loyal to these two systems while preparing himself for the ritual was the major task of the emerging adolescent.

Given the structure, this could have been an extremely difficult if not destructive period in the life of this family. Instead, it was a period in which the adults with their histories of ambivalence regarding both Jewish ritual and families of origin ultimately drew closer to their extended families, and a period in which the child not only demonstrated his growing maturity, but was beginning to realign himself differently in terms of his mother and father and in terms of the larger culture of which they and he were a part. Enabling this productive effect was the parents' determination to make the Bar Mitzvah a positive experience for the child and for the entire family. With that determination, they were able to create around the planning and execution of the event a "sacred space" in which difficult issues (having to do with future child rearing and scheduling concerns) were postponed.

A metaphor for this space was the "hospitality suite" that figured so importantly in this family's preparations. This was the hotel room in which the extended families of both subsystems ate and socialized together throughout the weekend so that the child "would not be pulled apart" by the demands of separate families in separate places. Reflecting this "detail" and the emotional work that went into it, an aura of hospitality, cooperation, and mutual good-will permeated the weekend.



The emotional highlight of the ceremony was the father's speech to his son during which he passed on the tangible and emotional treasures of his deceased father and in that act symbolically mourned both the loss of his father and the loss of his son's childhood.

As a way of bringing closure to the successful event (and symbolically celebrating the way in which they had moved in relation to each other for the good of the system), the three adults with the son planned to meet for dinner together on the Monday following the weekend after all of the guests had left. This dinner was cancelled and the sacred and celebratory space it was marking was abruptly cut short by tragedy. The son of Mother's manfriend had been critically injured in an accident that day and Mother flew with his father to join him in the hospital. By the time Mother returned five days later, the Bar Mitzvah had become a thing of the past and there was deep sadness surrounding its loss.

Three months later, Mother was still mourning the tragedy and the loss of the Bar Mitzvah "afterglow," but feeling comforted by the way in which her parents and extended family had rallied around her and her manfriend during the trauma. She attributed this support to their having experienced the Bar Mitzvah together.

In the other household, Father and Stepmother were busy moving to a new home and preparing for the birth that was imminent. A suggestion by the researcher that the three-month interview be a joint session (replacing the cancelled dinner) was accepted by Mother who still wanted to recapture some of what she'd lost, but rejected by



Father and Stepmother who were more clearly ready to move on. All had begun tentatively dealing with the difficult child-rearing issues that had been postponed and it was clear that a return to the liminal euphoria of the weekend was impossible.

By the time of the interview, discussion in both households focused on issues regarding the child's behavior, plans for summer work, and potential scheduling changes.

The Goldsteins. This was a financially comfortable, intact, Reform family with exceptionally clear boundaries around the nuclear system. It consisted of Mother, Father, Bar Mitzvah boy, and younger Sister. On Father's side, this was the first Bar Mitzvah in many generations and on Mother's side only Grandfather had strong feelings about the religious event. For this family, largely disconnected from the culture's emotional pull, the Bar Mitzvah was a "family project" that they planned together "like they planned a vacation." The major focus of excitement was on the Saturday night party. At some level, this party took on an aura of sacredness such that the researcher was not permitted to attend.

The axis of tension in this family was not within the nuclear system but at the level of the grandparents' generation. As the Bar Mitzvah drew closer and pressure escalated, both Mother and Father acted in uncharacteristic ways that pushed the intergenerational boundaries beyond their previous limits. Father convinced his parents to visit Mother's parents and thus break a fifteen year history of tension in which the two sets of parents had met only once (very

stressfully) at their children's wedding. Less successfully, Father attempted to convince his mother to bring her 95-year-old mother to the Bar Mitzvah even though she had said she wouldn't. Seeing this attempt fail, Father's younger brother uncharacteristically intervened with his mother on behalf of his brother. Although this attempt also failed, the two brothers became closer in the process. For her part, Mother visited her parents by herself for the first time since she had married. Ostensibly, she went to see if her mother's deteriorating health required the hiring of additional help (to insure that she'd be well enough to attend the Bar Mitzvah), but at another level this visit was an opportunity for the daughter (and parents) to begin preparing psychologically for the impending shift in care taking roles that the parent's age and failing health would soon be necessitating.

The most significant aspect of this family's Bar Mitzvah ceremony was the fact that the entire nuclear family sat on the stage throughout the ceremony. Although the researcher initially interpreted this as a missed opportunity for enacting and facilitating the boy's increasing autonomy, the parents felt most strongly that their decision to take part in the ceremony in this way enhanced the effectiveness of the ritual. Upon reflection, it became clear that in effect, this arrangement had allowed them vicariously to have the Bar and Bat Mitzvah they had missed as adolescents. Having matured in relation to their own parents, they were now symbolically celebrating their own rites of passage. And in doing so, they were simultaneously able to acknowledge and celebrate their son's passage. In addition,

this seating arrangement allowed them to symbolically celebrate their boundary as a unit at the same time that they were preparing for the increased permeability of that boundary which the son's increasing maturity was requiring.

Not surprisingly, the son's passage was demonstrated more clearly during the party than during the religious ceremony (in which his haftorah had been shortened and thus had presented relatively little challenge). Here the boy surprised everyone with his social skills and capacity as an entertainer. Singing and dancing with the sexy female band leader, the son looked and acted more like a young man than a boy. This was a performance in which he was the sole star (i.e., he wasn't sharing the stage with his parents) and in which he was demonstrating a competence more highly valued in his system than that of haftorah reading.

Related to this change, it was significant that at the three month post Bar Mitzvah interview, the boy was not present. He had already left for camp and the parents had forgotten to mention it to the researcher. It was as if the system had incorporated the son's new distance and was taking it for granted. In this light, it was not surprising or troubling that during the interview the parents joked about holding on to their daughter (and not letting her go as they had their son). Given the experience so far, it appears that this holding on and maintaining of boundaries is this family's way of preparing for letting go.

The Sheinmans. This family with its seven children and huge interlocking families of origin was an ultra orthodox Hasidic family whose belief in G-d and Jewish law was absolute and all encompassing. For them, Jewish life and family life were synonymous and completely prescribed by divine decree. Within this law and the world it created, there was little room for ambiguity about such things as interpersonal boundaries, generational hierarchies, or developmental transitions. Expectations for behavior were explicit, shared both across and through the generations and reinforced by the enactment of both daily and calendrical rituals. Within this context, the emergence of the first child's adolescence was relatively unstressful. Expectations for his behavior and for the behavior of all family members in relation to him were clear and uncontested. Rules for his transition into Jewish adulthood were concrete and so were the markings of his new status. After his Bar Mitzvah he wore tefillin each morning, was counted as a member of the minyan [quorum], sat at the head table with the men in his family, etc.

In this context, the emotional energy surrounding preparation for the Bar Mitzvah was focused on the child and the effect of the ceremony was direct and undiluted. Neither a family crisis in Mother's extended family, nor Father's difficulty completing for his son the discourse his deceased father had written, nor the needs of any of the other children were able to deflect energy from the central purpose of the event. Once the boy had blessed the Torah for the



first time in the Rebbe's congregation the day after his thirteenth birthday, his passage was indisputable.

During the larger ceremony almost a week later, the emotional highlight was Father's speech in which he evoked the image of his father ("standing in heaven"), and tearfully blessed the entire congregation with the joy of children following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents. Even in this ceremony where the primary focus was on the boy's passage, this father, like the father in the first family, was making use of the ritual not only to reinforce the connections between the past and the future, but to mourn the loss of his father and implicitly the loss of his son's childhood as well.

The image of identically dressed Great grandfather and Bar Mitzvah boy dancing together after the ceremony was a visual demonstration of this family's intergenerational connectedness and the image of all of the men circling and celebrating around them was a similarly clear demonstration of the way in which these connections were valued and reinforced throughout the larger system.

Immediately after the Bar Mitzvah, the family moved on to ritual preparations for the next Jewish holiday, and by the time of the follow-up interview three months later, they were already talking about plans for their second son's Bar Mitzvah. For this family, not only did ritual structure the child's transition, but it was structuring the family's life between one transition and the next as well.

The Gordovskys. This was a single parent Russian immigrant family in which the child's bris [circumcision] in Russia was held in secret. Mother had divorced the boy's father shortly after immigrating to America, and with the help of her parents, who had immigrated with her and who lived around the corner, raised the child without much input from the father. Shortly before the planning period, Father was remarried to a woman who was not Jewish and further decreased his already attenuated relationship with his son.

Although the grandparents lived in a separate household, the separation between them and their daughter and her son was purely geographic. Emotionally, the three generations composed one unit and the roles the members played were complex and confusing. Often the grandparents functioned as parents to both Mother and Son who interacted as siblings. Although at times Mother was clearly in charge of her son, who often clung to her childishly, at other times the roles reversed and the son acted like Mother's parent, aligning himself with Grandmother to chide and/or protect his mother. This confusion was expressed through and resulted in extremely mixed messages about growing up and out. The son could not tolerate his mother's involvement with other men and neither was she able to act on her needs in this regard. Their confusion was fueled and amplified by correspondingly mixed messages from the grandparents. As the Bar Mitzvah (the symbol of the boy's movement) approached, the confused messages that both pressured the system towards movement and kept movement from happening intensified.

In contrast to this confusion about growing up, the family was extremely clear about the value of performance and accomplishment. In Russia, Jews were limited in what they could achieve. In America, there were no such limitations. As a consequence, the boy was studying not only for his Bar Mitzvah, but for a piano recital and a karate tournament both of which were happening within days of the ceremony. Preparation for these additional tests contributed to the intensity of the planning period.

In the absence of a salient father during the ceremony, it was the Rabbi who drew the connections between the generations and whose speech provided the emotional highlight of this family's Bar Mitzvah. Speaking to the extended Russian family and community, the Rabbi emphasized the "miracle" of this child's Bar Mitzvah in America and its meaning in relation to the future of Jewish survival. He reminded everyone of how close they had come in Russia to having lost their culture completely and warned of how easily they could be misled into following the American dream of materialism if they forgot their past and its Jewish values. The Rabbi then brought his message home by speaking to the family in Yiddish. His words were those of congratulation, but the analogic message in this language of exiles was profound. At the dinner/party that night, family and friends reinforced the Rabbi's message with Russian toasts that affirmed the importance of the event in all of their lives.

Although the pleasure of connectedness and the excitement of accomplishment following the Bar Mitzvah were intense, these feelings

ended abruptly shortly after the weekend when Grandmother disclosed a secret she had been keeping from the family. A few weeks prior to the ceremony, she had discovered a potential cancer. Not wanting to "ruin" the Bar Mitzvah she did not tell anyone. It was not until after the weekend that she would share her problem with her daughters who rallied around her. Fortunately, only minor surgery was ultimately required, but, by the time of the three month interview, the Bar Mitzvah was a thing of the past.

The confusion in roles and expectations, however, were not. They were as intense as ever and even though Mother was advancing in her career and going on an out-of-town work assignment, and the boy was going off on an annual vacation with his father, the developmental issues of moving up and out in this family were still problematic. At this point they were being expressed not only through Mother's ambivalent relationship with her boyfriend and the conflictual relationship between him and her son, but also through considerable worry on everyone's part about the boy's upcoming transition from the shelter of the Jewish day school to the "wild world" of public school.

#### Highlights of the Developmental Work Facilitated by the Process

For each of the families, the Bar Mitzvah process worked differently. For the Steinbergs, the process primarily facilitated the adjustment of interpersonal boundaries. For the Goldsteins, it facilitated the adjustment of intergenerational boundaries. For the Hasidic family, it worked anachronistically to "transform" the child



into an adult according to Jewish law. And for the Gordovskys, it was a process that both intensified cultural connections and intensified pressure for developmental change.

In general, however, the circular pattern of movement was similar across systems. The child's chronological/biological development marked by and heightened through the Bar Mitzvah, pressured for change in the adult subsystem. The changes occurring in that part of the system in turn facilitated further change in the child (which theoretically will pressure for more change, etc.).

Through the Bar Mitzvah process, the three adults in the first family realigned themselves in relation to each other and to their extended families and in doing so, facilitated the child's increasing autonomy and connectedness. During the preparation and the ceremony, Father and Mother temporarily became closer so that their son would not have to choose between them. This temporary partnership enabled the parents to culminate and celebrate the success of their shared custody arrangement and thus "complete" their unclear and protracted divorce process.

Mother, for whom the Bar Mitzvah was a precursor to decreased involvement in a nuclear family, used the process successfully to move closer to and become engaged with her large, extended family. This engagement potentiates eventual disengagement with her son. For Father, the Bar Mitzvah enabled him not only to mourn the loss of his father and the loss of his son's childhood, but, in effect, to ensure the connection between his son and his father (i.e., his Jewish past)

such that he could begin letting his son go. That his son be connected to his Jewish past was especially important to this father whose new family's Jewish identity was not at all assured. Through the process, the son's identification with his father and his culture intensified while at the same time he was demonstrating his increasing competence and movement towards greater independence.

Through the Bar Mitzvah, the parents in the second family adjusted the boundaries between themselves and their parents, ultimately enabling the adjustment of the boundary around their nuclear system such that the son's movement beyond that boundary became possible.

During the preparation period, both Father and Mother pushed the hierarchical boundaries between themselves and their parents beyond earlier limits, thus negotiating and demonstrating their increased maturity. During the ceremony, they confirmed their development by vicariously celebrating the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs they had never had by "sharing" their son's event with him. Seated on stage, the family was reinforcing the boundary around themselves as a system while simultaneously allowing it to become more permeable. Through the party (that part of the event in which he was significantly challenged and was the sole star), the son demonstrated his surprising competence, maturity, and readiness to move beyond previous limits.

In the third family, so "culturally determined" (Quinn et al., 1985, p. 102), the ritual transformed the child into an adult in terms of religious practice. (It was the child's absolute identification

with his parents' values and with the ritual's meaning, that so empowered the event.)

Secondarily, the event, attended by both observant and secular Jews, reinforced the family's positive sense of themselves and their world view. In addition it allowed Father to mourn the loss of his father and in the process further differentiate from him. Even if this opportunity had not been taken, however, the ritual's power in this family's context was so strong that this (or any other unfinished emotional business) would not have interfered with the achievement of the Bar Mitzvah's central purpose.

In the fourth family, the process intensified pressure for Mother and Son to move in relation to themselves, each other, and the grandparents. As the child was becoming a Bar Mitzvah, "a man," both his clinging and Mother's staying close were becoming increasingly inappropriate and the paradoxical messages, increasing in frequency and intensity, were pressuring the entire system for substantive change.

In addition, the event affirmed the larger significance of the family's immigration and strengthened the connection between its Jewish past and future. Through the process, the family demonstrated its success and the importance of its achievement in America, and the child demonstrated his ability to excel in spite of the system's confused messages about that ability. In context of the event's enlarged significance, this demonstration becomes more significant also. Through it, the child, undeniably the family's most

knowledgeable Jew, becomes the family's leader in reference to the Jewish culture towards which they are moving. This leadership role creates further impetus for the child's increasing maturity.

## Conclusions

### Introduction: On Drawing Conclusions

In presenting the following conclusions, the researcher makes no claim to universal truths or scientific validity. Instead, these generalizations (i.e., hypotheses) about the Bar Mitzvah process and developmental change are presented as the results of intuitive exploration of impressionistic data. They are the results of a qualitative research process that can be likened more to the act of explicating a poem than the act of performing a scientific experiment.

Metaphorically, the four isolated, unconnected families and their situations were much like poems that the researcher read and tried to understand. The portraits that resulted from the process of fragmenting and regrouping the pieces of each poem (words, images, cadences, etc.) reflect the researcher-as-reader's analysis of that poem in the context of all of the poems. Extending the metaphor, the conclusions drawn from this process were drawn as if the four individual poems had become stanzas in one larger piece, and the connections within each stanza were related to the connections in all of the others. The "truth" or validity of the conclusions, therefore, are more like the truth derived from poetry than the truth derived from mathematical calculations.



More concretely, the process through which these conclusions were drawn involved the observer as research instrument interacting with four disparate and unconnected situations such that they became connected in the researcher's thinking which was informed by theory and personal experience. . Figure 7.1 diagrams the process.

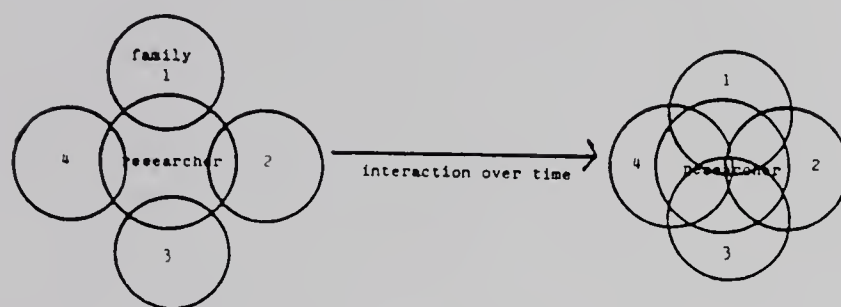


Figure 7.1 The Research Process

The conclusions are a result of the researcher's process of sifting and filtering the data that the families presented over the course of the investigation and of then extrapolating patterns that seemed to emerge. It is an understatement to say that these conclusions are partial, tentative "truths" requiring further exploration. Although stated as facts, they are to be read as hypotheses which, by definition, are constantly evolving.

#### Major Conclusions

(1) The Bar Mitzvah facilitates developmental change.

No matter how much or how little connected to the religious meaning of the event, families who choose to mark their first child's thirteenth birthday with a Bar Mitzvah, "use" the process to negotiate

emotional boundaries within the nuclear system and between that system and its larger context. For the most part, this use is neither explicit nor conscious but an inevitable consequence of the confluence between the biological clock's pressure for change and the ritual's classic function of facilitating transition.

The emergence of the first child's adolescence pressures the system for change in its balance between autonomy and coherence. In order to remain "healthy" (i.e., move along in its life cycle) the system must be able to respond to this pressure by managing change such that the new balance is appropriate to the needs of a system with an adolescent. As a ritual of initiation, the Bar Mitzvah process works precisely on this issue of balance. It works to increase the celebrant's distance from his parents/family at the same time that it works to increase his sense of connectedness to the larger system of which they and he are a part.

(2) The Bar Mitzvah facilitates developmental change differently in each family.

Within the parameters of its basic structure and function, what the Bar Mitzvah does and how it does it is different for each family who performs it, and the differences reflect the uniqueness of each family's makeup, dynamics, and history.

Each family approaches the nodal event with a different set of interactional and intergenerational resources and needs. These resources and needs determine how the Bar Mitzvah will look and feel, and where in the system the process will have its major impact.

Although the "ultimate" outcome is the adolescent's increased autonomy and sense of connectedness, the process towards that outcome is different for each family. Although the process effects both the interpersonal and hierarchical dynamics of the system and ultimately effects all of the interacting generations, the way the process punctuates the system is different in each case. For some, the process acts directly at the level of the child (e.g., Sheinman), for some it works directly at the level of the parental subsystem (e.g., Steinberg, Goldstein), and for others, primarily at the boundary between the family and the larger culture (Gordovsky).

For those highly connected to the culture and its symbols, the process is sufficient to create dramatic and tangible change. For most families, the change it creates is less visible and less clearly defined. For some the process merely intensifies pressure for change in the future.

Given the way in which the Bar Mitzvah process works differently across systems despite its uniformity of structure and function, it can be likened to Palazzoli's (1986) "invariant prescription." In addition to the fact that the same formal action is prescribed (i.e., "commanded" by the culture and transmitted through the generations) for all Jewish families (from the time of the child's birth), and the fact that the prescription/commandment works analogically rather than discursively (to intensify emotional activity and break patterns in the system), the Bar Mitzvah is like the invariant prescription in

that each family interprets and enacts the ritual differently according to its issues and needs most salient at the time.

One feature of this "invariant ritual" that contributes to its ability to work differently in and for each family, is the fact that like all rituals, the Bar Mitzvah has both closed and open parts. That is, in addition to its rigidly defined features, it has, as well, an aspect of openness such that each family can bring to the process its own interpretation and nuance. It can highlight, add, subtract, and/or modify elements of the performance such that it reflects the family's shape and speaks to its needs.

Although some of these "modifications" are conscious and deliberate, the act of shaping the process is for the most part, out of the family's awareness. It is "simply" how they do what is important to them (i.e., for the Goldsteins, the decision to sit together on the stage was a deliberate modification of the traditional performance, but the idea of the event as a family project speaks to a different level of shaping. Similarly for the Steinbergs, Father's decision to present his son with his father's relics was a deliberate adaptation of the symbolic passing on of the sacra, but at another level, it reflects a shaping that facilitated Father's need to mourn).

(3) The Bar Mitzvah process begins months before the public ceremony and continues (to reverberate) for months afterwards.

This phenomenon reflects the fact that ritual process operates at multiple levels simultaneously. At one level, ritual participants are (understood to be) in the liminal, transformative stage of the



tripartite process only during the public ceremony, and there the impact of the performance is concentrated and narrowly focused. At a higher logical level, however, the liminal period encompasses the stage of preparation and stage of reintegration as well as the stage of performance. At this level, ritual participants are in the liminal state of being and open to the transformative power of the process long before and long after the actual event. At this level, the impact of the symbolic process is more diffuse and more subtle. The two levels inform each other such that what happens in the public performance impacts on both the planning period in which the performance is anticipated and shaped, and on the reintegration period in which the performance is remembered and assimilated.

Within this conceptual framework, what is happening in the liminal ceremony is also happening (more diffusely and more subtly) in the pre and postliminal periods as well. Not just during the ceremony but during the entire extended process, the Bar Mitzvah is operating to synchronize individual and group action through the stimulation of affect and intensity in the context of a safe structure. This conceptualization expands Friedman's (1980, p. 430) eloquent notion that "the rite of passage is the year surrounding the event that celebrates it," and that this entire period constitutes "hinges of time" in which the ritual family is most open to change.

(4) In the context of these multiple levels, it is during the planning period that much of the developmental work is begun.

Although the public performance is that part of the process on which most analyses of ritual are focused, it is in the act of organizing and preparing for that performance that families begin the developmental transformation. As with an iceberg, most of what is happening (i.e., how the family uses the ritual to facilitate change) can not be comprehended by looking only at the ceremony, that part of the phenomenon that shows above the surface.

Given that transitional periods require substantive change in families, and given that Bar Mitzvah families are already in the liminal, transitional state as they plan the ritual that will mark their son's transition, it is clear that their actions during this planning period are significant. In this period, the liminal family is "neither here nor there;" it is no longer dealing with a child but not yet dealing with someone who has demonstrated his "readiness" (van Gennep, 1908) to become an adult. It is dealing with someone labeled a "Bar Mitzvah boy" (Garfiel, 1958, p. 170), a title which (if not itself oxymoronic) accurately captures the paradoxical nature of the age.

It is during this period that the "sacred space" which will cushion and protect the participants' journey begins to be created. The family begins to think of themselves as special, to be treated as special, to focus increasingly on the upcoming event, and to actively prevent "defiling" issues or conflicts (e.g., a divorce in the

extended family, a medical problem, scheduling changes) from disrupting their concentration or diminishing the likelihood of the event's success.

It is during this planning period that the logistical and emotional pressures build exponentially. As the event approaches, the system increasingly takes on the characteristics of the cybernetic sweatbox (Hoffman, 1981) in which the accumulation of dissonance pressures for a discontinuous leap to a more functional organization. The ritual process (like therapy) heats up the emotional issues inherent in the system and this intensification potentiates the system's transformation.

Preparation for the ritual is part of the ritual itself. It is primarily the parents' part of the ordeal in which they are tested (by themselves as well as others) on their behavioral and emotional ability to create an experience in which their child can "succeed." Which logistical details are important in the preparation and how the family handles them determines much about how and in what ways the ritual will ultimately be impactful. By focusing on the details that are important or difficult for them (e.g., wording of the invitation, seating arrangements, hotel accommodations), the family not only manages the event, but manages the emotional pressures the event precipitates and brings to the surface. While attending to the concrete logistical details, the family is, at a symbolic level, attending (through those details) to the emotional work of renegotiating boundaries to facilitate developmental growth. This

connection between logistical and emotional tasks explains to some extent, the seemingly disproportionate amount of energy that often goes into the planning effort or the seemingly irrational anxiety that often accompanies details which on the surface appear simple or trivial. During the planning period the symbolic components of the logistical decisions act metaphorically to begin the synchronizing process and prepare the ritual participants for the dramatically affective process of the symbolic performance.

That the developmental work is begun in the preparation period is demonstrated by the family's feeling of accomplishment prior to the event. Even before the first guest arrives, the family has already begun to activate connections to past generations, to feel strengthened by those who have demonstrated support, and to feel pride in what they and the child have already been able to do.

(5) The Bar Mitzvah ceremony is the family's public statement of its private process.

It is the family's symbolic drama that proclaims, culminates, and amplifies what has already happened and prepares the way for what is yet to come. The drama's "plot" centers on the boy's simultaneous movement away from his parents and towards the larger community. The "subplot" involves the movement of all other principals in relation to the protagonist's journey. The guests, as audience, congregate to acknowledge the movement of the actors, celebrate it, and reinforce it in a way that increases the likelihood that the actors will continue to move as they are moving. The effect of this experience is one in



which the actors and the audience become joined in a communal feeling of pleasure and satisfaction (Turner's [1969] communitas).

Through the use of condensed, multivocal symbols reinforced by the rhythmic stimulation of chants, processions, oaths, incantations, etc, the drama arouses emotion and conveys messages analogically that can not be conveyed discursively. In the "hyper affective state" (Wolin & Bennet, 1984, p. 41) induced by this performance, participants feel connected to and reinforcing of one another. For a brief but intense period of time, the idiosyncratic tensions and conflicts in the family give way to an overwhelming sense of supportiveness and cooperation. The family's crisis is "brought in to the street" and "the community gathers to mediate, nourish, and absorb" (Slater, 1974, p. 36).

At the micro level, this condensed drama metaphorically recapitulates the more subtle tripartite rite of passage through which the family gradually moves over time. In "scene one," the preliminary prayers establish the tone and reinforce the sense of difference between normal everyday action and the special ritual action about to begin. This "corresponds" to the family's growing sense of the difference between the way it has been in the past and the way it needs to be in the future. In the second scene, the level of affect is heightened and the initiate is called up to accomplish the transforming act. This is the "transcendent synthesis" (Hoffman, 1981), the "point" at which the family responds to the intensified pressure (resulting from the increasing dislocation between old

patterns and new needs) by adjusting boundaries and changing patterns that maintain them. In the third and final scene, the level of affect is reduced, and the witnesses confirm and celebrate the initiate's new status and prepare to integrate him into the day-to-day world they are all about to reenter. For the family, this is the extended period in which it gradually incorporates and adjusts to the changes in boundaries and behaviors it has initiated.

(6) The developmental work begun in the two earlier stages of the process continues during the period following the ceremony.

Ritual works magically but it does not work magic. The problems and conflict that accompany the emergence of the first child's adolescence are not solved by the Bar Mitzvah. Although ritual resolves existential paradox at a mythic or metaphorical level, it does not provide resolution at the concrete, pragmatic level. Instead, it helps identify, reinforce, and activate the family's natural ability to work out the practical and emotional solutions over time.

During the period following the ceremony/weekend, the family is in the process of integrating and assimilating its tangible and intangible achievements (the child's mastery, the family's success, the support from its larger system). It is integrating the effect of the pragmatic and emotional work it accomplished in the planning period and the symbolic affect of the ceremonial performance.

As ritual participants, the family is in the process of returning to the profane and ordinary world they had temporarily left. Here, with their new status, they are attempting to reincorporate themselves into their everyday life and into the everyday life of the extended family and community. As a cybernetic entity, the family is seeking to reorganize itself at a new level of coherence (Dell, 1982), one which accounts for the perturbations it has just experienced and better meets the demands of its changing field (Hoffman, 1981). As family systems emerging from the "hinges of time" where emotional processes were unlocked, they are struggling to adjust to the changes they have and are continuing to experience.

How the family adjusts and what use it makes of the experience depends in large measure on how it "understands" what happened and what it all meant to them (Bogdan, 1984, p. 381; Quinn, 1985, p. 110). To the extent that the transformative meaning is clear and the symbols of the transformation are tangible, the effect is focused and dramatic. To the extent that this meaning is less clear, and the symbols of everyone's new status more ambiguous, the transformative effect is less focused and less dramatic. With the exception of the ritually observant family for whom the meaning is highly prescribed, most families "create" the meaning they attach to the experience. Beyond the formal meaning of the event that everyone shares, this created, implicit meaning is idiosyncratic to each family and generally outside of its awareness. This "meaning" is expressed

indirectly in terms of altered emotions, behavioral patterns, self image, etc.

While on one level, the family is sinking back into postliminal normalcy and allowing the effect of the experience to "sink in," at a higher level, the family is still very much in the liminal state of the larger process. In this state, the ceremonial event (and all that led up to it) is experienced as simply more pressure for change in a system that is still in the sweatbox prior to its discontinuous leap. At this level, the family's continuing struggle with the paradoxical demands of the adolescent development, and its own seemingly regressive behavior is to be expected (e.g., Steinbergs' refusal to meet jointly, Goldsteins' holding on to daughter, Gordovskys' ambivalence).

Despite the public proclamations and elaborate performance, the boy is not a man and the family's relationship to him, to each other, and to the larger context is not one of total harmony and clarity. Instead, relationships in the post-ceremonial family are continuing to evolve as small changes begun earlier in the process continue to reverberate through the system over time.

To summarize most simply the way in which the Bar Mitzvah works to facilitate developmental change: The first child's emerging adolescence sends the family into disequilibrium. The tensions mount, old patterns don't work and the family is forced into a new, more functional pattern of organization. The Bar Mitzvah facilitates this



reorganization by both intensifying the stress in the system and by providing a way to deal with the stress.

Preparation for the Bar Mitzvah adds a layer of pragmatic stress "on top of" the family's emotional layer of developmental stress. These two layers are connected. The logistical details that emerge as difficult or important reflect those emotional issues that are difficult or important in the family and serve to focalize and channel the family's emotional energy.

Planning for the event precipitates and brings to the surface many of the emotional issues that had previously been dormant or ambiguous. By dealing with the logistical details pragmatically, the family is at the same time dealing with the emotional issues symbolically. By focusing its attention on the pragmatic details, the family consciously plans the event and nonconsciously works on the underlying boundary issues associated with the event's "meaning."

During the ceremony, the family reinforces and amplifies the emotional work it had begun in the preparation stage by enacting a highly charged, condensed drama that, in effect, publicly proclaims that it has done the work--that the child has begun maturing and is ready for increased responsibilities and privileges and that the parents are ready to give them to him (and are ready for all of the changes this implies for themselves). This proclamation is heard and reinforced by all who are important to the family.

No matter what else happens afterwards, the family has made the statement and not only is it more difficult to "go back on" a public

statement, but to some extent the very act of stating the change begins the change process (Madanes, 1986). No matter how childish the boy acts or is treated in the future and no matter what other work the family still needs to do, the boy and his family did accomplish a feat and it was publicly acknowledged. That fact and its repercussions become part of the family's reality, part of how it understands itself.

(7) The Bar Mitzvah ritual speaks directly to the developmental tasks of the contemporary family whose first child is becoming an adolescent.

It is a rite of transition perfectly suited to a transitional age in a transitional society. Given the problems associated with the invisibility of the transition into adolescence (McGoldrick & Carter, 1982) in a contemporary culture profoundly confused about how to deal with this stage of life (Elkind, 1981), the Bar Mitzvah provides for visibility and clarity. It is a dramatic marker that makes change visible, a pacing mechanism that regulates its speed, and an instructional device that attaches positive meaning to the change.

Expressed in terms of the family's primary developmental tasks (Culler, 1987), the ritual promotes the child's autonomy, provides a way for him and his parents to deal with the emotional impact of the separation inherent in the increased autonomy, and provides a way for the parents to begin to focus increasingly on themselves and on their relationship to their own parents. It is a ritual that facilitates the "intercogwheeled tasks" (Golan, 1981, p. 6) of the

multigenerational system in the early phase of its middle years. Given its capacity (like that of all rituals) to operate simultaneously at multiple generational levels, it is a rite of passage for the entire family.

More specifically in terms of the adolescent's needs, the ritual provides a format for acknowledging the dramatic emotional changes that are occurring in him and in his relationship to his family. Within this format, the child is provided a way to demonstrate his "readiness" to be treated differently, the parents are provided a way to both help him demonstrate this readiness and to mourn the loss it implies, and the rest of the extended family is provided a way to support and incorporate the child and his parents in their new relationship to each other.

Through his "trial by recitation" (Arlow, 1965, p. 358) the child emerges from the "isolation" of study, accepts the frightening challenge of the public ordeal, successfully passes the test, and is embraced by "a loving audience." In the center of the stage and at the center of the family, the child demonstrates his competence and feels his "specialness" and his "power" (Zegans & Zegans, 1979, p. 123). (For each child, of course, the test is different and each demonstrates his mastery differently according to what is valued in his world [e.g., Moshe's Torah reading and Seth's entertaining].) Through this modern version of the "rite in the bushes," the child announces that he is changing and demonstrates that the changes are positive. Through this demonstration and the response it evokes from

all who are significant to him, the child gains strength for the more private ordeals of change that will continue to emerge over years.

(8) The Bar Mitzvah is a natural coping mechanism for families facing the normative crises of adolescent transition in that it potentiates internal resources.

Just as the child who begins the first of his teenage years with this affirming public event gains strength for the struggles ahead, so too does the family as a whole benefit. Through the process of preparing their culture's ordeal for their child and helping him get through it successfully, the family begins to identify, consolidate, and celebrate its natural strengths and resources in preparation for future developmental needs. Not only is the child forced to perform beyond his previous capacity, but the parents, facing unprecedented emotional and logistical tasks, are also forced to perform beyond previous limits. Through their private performance (in which they demonstrate unprecedented maturity and competence, and in which they negotiate changes not only in relation to the child but in relation to their parents as well), and through public performance (in which they are literally surrounded by the good will and support of family and friends in a state of trance-like communitas), they discover and reinforce resources in both themselves and in their extended systems.

For the family preparing to enter the uncharted (and frightening) territory of the teenage years, this consolidation of strength is natural and timely. It is a way for the family to "take care of



itself," which, according to Ackerman (1980, p. 148) is "the best thing it can do for the adolescent" within it (e.g., the approval and acceptance of Mother's Tennessee relatives prepares her for decreased involvement in and support from a nuclear family; feeling and acknowledging their success as childrearing partners prepares the divorced couple for childrearing changes; maturing in relation to their parents prepares the couple for the increased maturity of their son, and the increased dependency of their parents; publicly affirming a way of life that is often challenged prepares the family for the next generation's continuation of that way of life; enlarging the significance of the child's accomplishment prepares the family for his future accomplishment.) The Bar Mitzvah stimulates the family's natural ability to take care of itself and to resolve developmental crises over time.

(9) The paradoxical nature of the Bar Mitzvah allows for its power to facilitate developmental change.

Like all transition rituals, the Bar Mitzvah resolves existential crises paradoxically. Through its (paradoxical) capacity for keeping logical levels both separate and interacting at the same time, the Bar Mitzvah is able to address the multileveled system's simultaneous need for individuation and connectedness in the context of simultaneous change and continuity.

The ritual speaks analogically to the basic paradoxical tensions involved in maintaining the health of the family over time. It is both a ritual of elevation and a ritual of consecration. In the

context of the family, it is a ritual of transition, and in the context of the larger system, a ritual of continuity (see Figure 7.2 on the following page). Because it operates simultaneously at multiple logical levels, it is a vehicle for facilitating the child's movement away from the nuclear family at the same time that it binds him closer to that family through its larger past; it is a vehicle for separating the parents from the child while simultaneously moving them closer to each other and to their own parents; a vehicle for celebrating the child's movement while mourning his loss, for strengthening boundaries while making them more flexible; etc., etc. The ritual operates at multiple, interlocking levels and the multivocal rites and symbols that enhance its effectiveness impact at all of the levels simultaneously. The Bar Mitzvah is a public ritual that paradoxically announces that the family's private rituals of childhood are ending.

(10) To the extent that the family is disconnected from its culture and the meaning of its rites and symbols, the family must modify those rites and symbols, add new ones, and/or generally make the meanings more explicit in order to maximize the ritual's impact.

Although it was the researcher's implicit (though unexpressed) expectation that the effectiveness of the ritual's power to facilitate developmental transformation would be highly correlated to the family's level of connectedness to the tradition and its symbols, such a conclusion could not be drawn from this study.

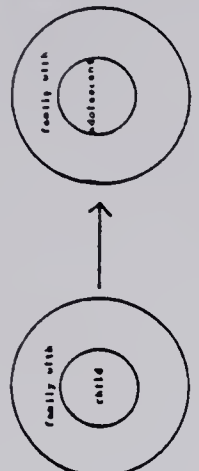
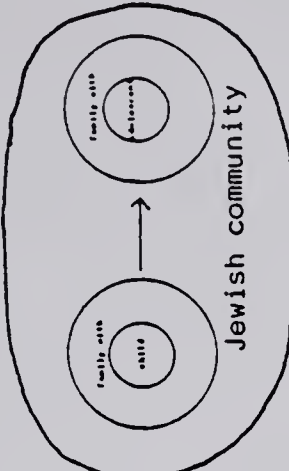
Bar Mitzvah as . . .	Locus of Impact	Level of Change	Type and Direction of Movement
RITUAL OF ELEVATION	nuclear family	second-order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in celebrant's status from child to "man"/adolescent; from parents with child to parents with adolescent.</li> <li>• Increased distance between parents and child.</li> <li>• Movement towards increased <u>autonomy and individuation.</u></li> </ul>  <p>Second-order change for child and for family.</p>
RITUAL OF CONSECRATION	extended family & larger community	first-order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmation of celebrants' (family's) identification with cultural heritage (and with past generations through whom the heritage was transmitted.)</li> <li>• Increased closeness between celebrants and past, between celebrants and larger community.</li> <li>• Movement towards increased <u>connectedness and cohesion.</u></li> </ul>  <p>First-order change in Jewish community.</p>

Figure 7.2 Change and the Bar Mitzvah Ritual

Although there was no doubt about the ritual's transformative power in the ultra orthodox family, there was no corresponding clarity about the ritual's lack of power in the families only marginally connected to their cultural past. Indeed there was considerable evidence of developmental movement even in the Reform family, the family most emotionally cut off from its religious/cultural past.

What could be observed in this regard, however, was the way in which the families variously disconnected from the original meaning of the rites and symbols tended to modify or add to the ritual in order to enhance their ability to stimulate affect. In those families whose emotional connections to the rites and symbols of the performance were tenuous, new rites were added, old symbols were given more tangible expression, and their meanings were made more explicit (e.g., the physical passing down of the Torah, the actual transfer of sacred objects, the added ceremony of candle lighting, the rabbi's explanation, etc.).

In addition, where traditional structure had become less clear and less meaningful, (as in the Reform service), the family seemed to create its own structure (regarding who should do what, when, how, and from where) and that new structure had for them, emotional meaning and transformative significance. Such innovation seems to function, to some extent, as an antidote to the "hollowing out" (Wolin & Bennet, 1984, p. 416) of ritual that has been so prevalent in contemporary Western society as second and third generation Jews mechanistically perform traditional rites that have increasingly lost their resonance.



To the extent that the families who needed the innovations included them in their performance, the ritual had affective power and transformative potential.

## Critique of the Research

### Methodological Problems

Although all observations are self verifying (Keeney & Morris, 1985, p. 99) and all researchers, in effect, see what they are looking for, this research was especially susceptible to the problems resulting from this phenomenon for a number of reasons. The first was the researcher's theoretical biases. It was assumed that ritual had facilitative potential in transitional families, and that assumption was "proven" by what the researcher was able to see in light of that assumption.

Exacerbating this phenomenon was the effect of the families on the research and the effect of the research on the families. As the researcher and families coevolved over time, the researcher was increasingly pulled into the families and increasingly wanted to see good things happening in and for for them. That this emotional connection influenced the researcher's perspective was inevitable. The only corrective for these research problems was the detail with which the families and the family-researcher interaction was described. This detail, it is hoped, allowed the reader to see some of what the researcher could not.

An equally inevitable problem was the way in which the research process influenced the families' experience of the ritual process. At work here was not only the halo effect of being observed, but the effect of answering questions that forced the families to be (among

other things) more reflective and purposeful in terms of their experience. If the very act of asking questions has consequences for change (Steier, 1985; Tomm, 1985), how much more so does the knowledge that the observer is expecting change influence its occurrence? Although the families' pull was out of the researcher's control, the clarity with which she revealed her biases was not. In retrospect, it was an error for the researcher not to have concealed her expectations more artfully (especially in the initial interview). Although she emphasized the exploratory nature of the research and repeatedly expressed the fact that she did not know what conclusions she would be able to draw from the data, the researcher's sense that the Bar Mitzvah process was more significant than was generally acknowledged, was well known by all of the families.

A fourth inevitable problem with this research resulted from the self-selective nature of the observed population. Given the level of stress with which families beginning to plan for their first child's Bar Mitzvah are coping, families who would agree to be part of this study were necessarily highly self selected in terms of self confidence and expectation of success. In retrospect, it is clear that all of the families who participated in this study had confidence from the beginning, that they could handle the stress they were facing not only well enough to manage the event, but well enough to allow themselves to be scrutinized by a researcher who would likely cause even more stress. Surely the findings and conclusions of this study

would have been very different if some of the families had been less well functioning and less resourceful.

Another problem with this research was that the methodology provided so little structure and so few parameters. To some degree, the methodological freedom inherent in open-ended interviews and participant observation became a methodological impediment. With no limit to the way in which the material could be analyzed, there was no end to the multiple ways in which the phenomenon could be described and explicated, and little consistency from one interaction to the next regarding the depth of analysis. This lack of limits in addition to the deliberate inclusion of much detail and many quotations resulted in a final product that is excessively long and cumbersome and to some extent, unwieldy. Perhaps a more highly structured method, one in which the number of variables to be analyzed were limited, would have resulted in a more coherent and elegant piece of research.

Contrasting the open-ended nature of the methodology was the arbitrarily closed nature of the observing period. Given that the research ended only three months after the Bar Mitzvah, it was impossible to even begin assessing the nature of the observed changes and the long-term implications of the process. To have ended the observations while the families were still in the liminal, transformative stage of the process was to have precluded the possibility of assessing the observed movement in the system as either first or second order change. All that could be noted was that change



had begun. Whether those changes were further amplified by other changes or disqualified by counter moves in the system was beyond the scope of this research with its unfortunately limited time frame.

Another major flaw in the design has to do with the underlying danger of applying theoretical concepts too literally. Just as Bateson's double bind concept had been applied too literally with research families (Dell, 1980), so too this research is in danger of having applied ritual theory too literally to the experiences of these families and thus in danger of having not only distorted the theory but of having distorted the phenomena being described as well.

This issue of distortion relates to a final problem with the research: Nowhere in the design is there a process for bringing the researcher's analyses back to the families for their comment. Given the researcher's acknowledgement of the circular nature of the research process and her concern with the ethics of reducing rich and complex lives into simplified research "findings," the methodology's inability to close the "interactional loop" is problematic. Although not part of the research design, it is the researcher's intention to meet with each of the families for the purpose of sharing her analyses and conclusions and of hearing their reactions.

#### Effect of Research on Families

In the context of the above critique, the research's impact on the families was seen as negative in that it altered the phenomenon under observation. In the context of the families, however, it

appears to the researcher that the impact was positive. Beyond the fact that all of the families said that participation in the research helped them to be more aware of what they were doing and more thoughtful, it is the researcher's opinion that participation in the study was even more useful than the families knew. Not only did participation in the research make the process more explicit and not only did it provide a structured time in which the family members sat together and talked about the Bar Mitzvah, but in the process, much information was put into the system. Not only did the children learn about extended family members, about past generations, and about what their parents were feeling and thinking, but the parents heard new information from their children and from each other as well.

While on one level this exchange of information is obvious and explicit, on another it is not. In answering the researcher's questions, the families for the most part, tended to emphasize the positive aspects of their system. While this stress on the positive was expected (given the nature of the research relationship), what the effect of this positive information might be had not been anticipated. In retrospect, it is the researcher's opinion that by stating the positive aspects of the child, of themselves, of the unit, the family was, in effect, reinforcing those positive aspects, indeed making that part of their truth more real. In addition to the generally beneficial effects of positive comment, the process was particularly important for the child in that hearing his parents' positive assessment of him and his progress, reinforced his image of himself as

positive and stimulated more progress. Also, in the process of describing how the boy had demonstrated increased maturity, the adults were, in effect, instructing the child on how he should continue to demonstrate maturity. To the extent that people's reality is a function of how they understand themselves and what is happening to them, these positive comments in the context of the research interviews might well have contributed to the families' positive self image and health.

#### Effect of Research on Researcher: A Personal Exploration

Just as the process of research becomes part of the process of change (Acker, p. 432) for those being observed, so too it becomes part of the observer's process of change. Through the experience of interacting with the families and exploring both their situations and our mutual effect on each other, I learned something about myself as well as about ritual.

Foremost in the domain of self learning, I discovered the difficulty I had and continue to have with the role of researcher. Not only was it very hard for me to maintain professional distance and to refrain from wanting to intervene (i.e., "help") rather than observe, but I was and I continue to be uncomfortable with the very idea of using other people's lives in the service of my research. Despite the acknowledgement of the constructivist nature of the descriptions, my use of self as a way of reducing the power imbalance, and my sincere belief that participation in the study was beneficial

to the families, the overall process of transforming "real" people (whom I'd come to know and care for) into objects of study continues to feel exploitative and dehumanizing. One effect of this research therefore is to insure that the future work I intend to do in the area of ritual and family development will be done primarily in the roles of therapist and of educator rather than in the role of researcher. (I say primarily rather than exclusively as I understand research as an important component of good therapy and good education.)

In the domain of ritual, the research has also affected me personally. Not only do I have a new understanding of and respect for the power of ritual, but my approach to the "modernizing" of rituals has changed dramatically. Until this research, I had been personally resistant to modifications of traditional Jewish ritual. I felt that contemporary adaptations were diluted and empty imitations of "the real thing," and that to the extent that we were letting go of traditional rituals we were losing our culture. This research has forced me to reconsider this opinion of ritual adaptation. Based on both the theoretical understanding of ritual's "open parts," and on the experience of the research families' use of adaptations to enhance affect and facilitate connectedness, I have a new appreciation for the usefulness of ritual adaptation.

In retrospect, I wish I had had this appreciation years ago when I tried (unsuccessfully) to impose traditional (unadapted) Jewish rituals on my own children for whom they had little resonance. Perhaps



had I been less resistant to change I might have found ways of making the rituals more meaningful and more impactful.

## Recommendations for Future Research and Development

Suggestions for future research and development flow both from the problems with this study and from the possibilities it reveals.

### Research Suggestions

In response to the unfortunately limited period of observation that precluded assessment of the changes begun during the Bar Mitzvah process, a follow up study of these families would be very interesting. In particular one would ask how and to what extent did the changes amplify or atrophy in the months or years following the event? What implication does this have in terms of understanding ritual's role in facilitating developmental change?

In response to problems associated with so small a sample population, a study involving a much larger number of families preparing, experiencing, and reflecting on the Bar Mitzvah of their first child would be very useful. In particular the researcher might focus on the relationship between the family's level of connectedness to the culture and the effectiveness of the ritual in facilitating developmental change.

Associated with this issue of cultural identification and ritual effectiveness, the researcher might also explore more fully with this enlarged sample the impact of modifying traditional rites and symbols as a means of increasing their effectiveness in families only marginally connected to the culture.

In response to the serious research problems arising from the self selection of "healthy" families, a study of Bar Mitzvah families who are in therapy or who have a history of psychological problems would be an important complement to this study. Given ritual's dual capacity to facilitate change and stability, do troubled families use the process to maintain the status quo more than to facilitate growth (or healing)? Does the process become yet another vehicle through which the family continues to play out dysfunctional patterns or does the process force some modifications of behavior that have positive developmental consequences? Although anecdotal stories abound about how families express negative and destructive dynamics through the Bar Mitzvah, a serious study from the perspective of family systems would be an important contribution to a fuller understanding of life cycle ritual and family development.

Another interesting complement to this research would be a study comparing the developmental change process in contemporary Jewish families who mark the thirteenth birthday of a first child with a Bar Mitzvah and those who do not. Is there a significant difference between these two groups in terms of developmental change? Would the changes that appear to be stimulated through the Bar Mitzvah occur simply as a function of time? For those families who chose not to have a Bar Mitzvah, what other markers of the child's change are used? How does choosing not to have a Bar Mitzvah impact on the family's sense of themselves in relation to the older generation, to the larger culture, etc.?

Without going into detail, there are a number of other research projects that suggest themselves based on the findings of this study:

- 1) A study of a number of Hasidic families preparing, experiencing, and reflecting on the first child's Bar Mitzvah. Such a study would go beyond seeing the Hasidic family only in contrast to secular families and would begin to reveal developmental differences even within the culturally determined Hasidic world.
- 2) A study comparing the family's experience of the first child's Bar Mitzvah with that of subsequent children's Bar Mitzvahs. How are the developmental issues the same or different from one event to the next?
- 3) A study of families experiencing the Bat Mitzvah of a first child. In what ways are the developmental issues facilitated by the Bat Mitzvah the same as those facilitated by the Bar Mitzvah and in what ways different?
- 4) A study of adult Bar Mitzvahs. What are adult celebrants attempting to accomplish through the process that they missed as children? What consequences does the delayed process have for them and for their families?

#### Development Suggestions

In addition to future research projects, ways in which the findings might be developed in terms of therapy and education also suggest themselves.



## Therapy

Beyond the obvious use of this material by therapists working with families who are currently in the process of planning a Bar Mitzvah (Friedman [1980, p. 437] sees this as the ideal time for inducing change in the family system [emphasis added]), the ritual lends itself to being developed as an assessment tool for therapists working with Jewish families. An exploration of what the teenager's (and/or the father's) Bar Mitzvah was like has obvious diagnostic value. It is a unique "window into the family" (Wolin & Bennet, 1984). Questions regarding the details of the event (e.g., who planned it and how, what were the invitations like, who came, who didn't, where did they sit, what were they fed, what was the emotional highlight, what would you have changed, etc., etc.) would provide the therapist with a great deal of information about the family and could be an effective way of putting needed information into the family as well.

Similarly, the Bar Mitzvah lends itself to being developed as a therapeutic intervention. In Jewish families where the identified patient (IP) is a teenager, or a depressed father, or a male adult inappropriately involved with his family of origin, etc., , the Bar Mitzvah ritual could be developed by the therapist and the family as a rite of passage marking some necessary change (e.g., "Let's redo the Bar Mitzvah that didn't work the first time," or "Let's have the Bar Mitzvah that you missed as a child."). How elaborate or how "public" the event would be would, of course, be a function of the family's

needs, but in any case, preparing for the ritual would be a significant part of the therapeutic work.

### Education

In terms of education, there is much information in this research which could benefit pre Bar Mitzvah families beginning to plan for the Bar Mitzvah of their first child. Given that these transitional families are in what Havinghurst (in Golan, 1981 p. 15) calls "a teachable moment" where there is "maximum inclination to take on new directions," an educational program built on this material would be timely, and possibly very useful in helping families make the most of the ritual process they have chosen to enter.

Working in consultation with rabbis, teachers, and Bar Mitzvah families, one could design a set of educational modules which could go a long way in "coaching" participants towards greater awareness of the significance of the process (without taking the magic out of it by making it too self-conscious an experience), and could help them focus their energies in ways that would enhance the ritual's potential as Friedman's (1980, p. 437) "golden opportunity" for growth.

## Footnotes Chapter I

1. It is a "linguistic atrocity" (Strassfeld & Green, 1981) to use the word Bar Mitzvah as a verb as in "He was Bar Mitzvahed." A person "becomes" a Bar (or Bat) Mitzvah. They do not "get" Bar Mitzvahed.

## Footnotes Chapter II

1. Not surprisingly there is little agreement about pathology as well. P. Dell's (1983, p. 30) concept of pathology as merely a projection of the viewer's values, is a serious challenge to the field's common assumptions. "Boundaries of health and pathology . . . do not exist. We put them there by a process of projection."

2. I don't think it is stretching the point to refer here to Buber and Rosenswieg's translation of the Bible in which the Hebrew word kadosh is rendered not as "holy" but as "hallowing." "Holiness, in other words, is not to be understood as a condition, but as a process" (P. Berger, 1983).

3. This emphasis on the "degree of change" indicates some progress in the way family life cycle development is currently being understood. Although van der Hart still talks about stability, it is relative stability. This is in contrast to earlier theorists who talked about change as if it occurred only during the transitional periods. For example, Golan's (1981, p. 12) definition of transition: "A period of moving from one state of certainty to another with an interval of uncertainty and change in between."

4. The Chinese character for "crisis" is composed of two symbols, one for danger, the other for opportunity. "The Greek word 'crisis' means 'choice' or 'decision.' In modern language, the word 'crisis' denotes a crucial change, a dangerous or otherwise important turning point, a point of decision, a breakthrough in some process of development" (Forsen, 1980, p. 38).

5. This is, of course, an oversimplification. Each period contains elements of the other. It's just a matter of degree. Indeed, in open systems, change is constant (Hoffman, 1981; Tomm 1984a). There is no such thing as "no change."

6. A much narrower view of symptoms is taken by J. Schwartzman in a fascinating article entitled "Symptoms and Rituals: Paradoxical Modes and Social Organization (1982). He says that "symptoms legitimize failure to change in socially appropriate ways. While ritual, on the



other hand, facilitates such change" (p. 3). Although I am intrigued by his hypothesis and although it supports my thesis, such an either-or approach is, of course, unacceptable. Rituals can function in the service of sameness and symptoms can function in the service of growth. In addition, symptoms can be reframed as levers for change; good therapists do it all the time.

7. Systems in which such fluidity is (for whatever reasons) not possible, where such change cannot occur, "appear to share a kind of 'ice nine' (Vonnegut, K. Cat's Cradle) character: a static permeation . . . in which members seem suspended or captured in frozen interactional molds" (Seltzer & Seltzer, 1983, p. 5).

8. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson in Pragmatics of Human Communication (1967, pp. 82-83) talk about second order change involving a discontinuity or logical leap beyond the level of the original system: "While first order change always appears to be based on common sense . . . second order change usually appears to be weird, unexpected, and un-commonsensical; there is a puzzling, paradoxical element in the process of change."

9. Similarly, Keeney and Sprenkle (1982, p. 13) view the discomfort as "a motor for growth," as a sign of returning to life, not the onset of disease.

10. A paradoxical statement is one that intrinsically contradicts itself unless teased apart into a "report" level and "how this report is meant" level, with the second level inclusive of the first (Hoffman, 1981, p. 167).

11. The sweatbox is an appropriate metaphor to counter the "ice nine" image of the frozen system, unable to take the leap, (see footnote 7). Seltzer and Seltzer (1983, p. 1) talk more about temperatures: "The magical inducement of change involves...certain kinds of processes by which a thawing effect is produced..."

12. For others who also insist on this feature of sacredness, see Yeats, 1979, p. 45.

13. For more on this, see Yeats (1979) and van der Hart (1983) both of whom present lists of theorists who require no element of religion in their definition of ritual.

14. The concept of sacredness runs throughout this literature and is fascinating. Even those who contend that the element of sanctity is not necessary talk about the element of "fit" or "rightness." Even Rappoport who understands the function of the ritual cycle as a mechanism for maintaining the status quo (through limiting wars, redistributing land, redistributing people on the land, etc.), talks about the concept of sacredness. In his article (1971,



pp. 70-74) "Ritual, Sanctity, and Cybernetics," he discusses the role of the sacred in the cybernetics of social and ecological systems:

Ritual...not only invokes in the participants private religious experiences, it provides a mechanism for translating these private experiences into messages of social import; it also provides a means for certifying these messages...The concept of the sacred is not only made possible by man's symbolic communication. It makes symbolic communication and the social and ecological orders depending upon symbolic communication possible.

This discussion of sanctity brings to mind Bateson's "sacramental experience" (that "combination of conscious thought and primary process that provides a way through which we enact a part of our ecosystem"), and what Berry (1977) calls "oneness in the creation." The sacramental experience has to do with the complicated relationship between the self and the larger system and is directly related to this discussion of ritual.

15. Bossard and Boll, (1950, p. 16) on the other hand, insist on a distinction: "The reader must not confuse ritual with ceremony . . . ritual may involve very little of the pomp and trappings ordinarily associated with the ceremonial." For them the distinction is important because they are focusing specifically on family rites or customs which, of course, do not have public ceremony attached to them (e.g., family traditions for the night before Christmas, Saturday night baths, how to set the table, etc.). Their thesis is that these "family rituals" must evolve over the course of the family's development in order for the individual members of the family to grow. Families which cling rigidly to certain expectations (e.g., who has to be at home the night before Christmas) retard the development of individual family members. To the degree that the family is able to give up or change rites that no longer fit, the family is healthy (p. 151).

16. The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis (1979) explains how ritual evolved in the human brain and how, in fact, it was partly responsible for the development of the human intellect itself.

17. Adapted from Burns and Laughlin's, "Ritual and Social Power" (1979).

18. Biogenetic structural analysis, as defined by d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus in their brilliant work, The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis (1979), is an analytic process that

looks at the "origin and structure of neural functions under a variety of temporal and contextual circumstances" (p. 20). Biogenetic structuralism holds that human behavior, along with the behavior of at least all higher vertebrates, is a function of the interaction between the organism's central nervous system and the organism's environment (p. 5).

When I first discovered this volume I thought I was embarking simply on a fascinating digression. Although I could hardly pronounce some of what I was reading, I was thrilled to find myself capable of following the material and practically ecstatic when I discovered that this "digression" was actually leading to a very central concept regarding the questions with which I had first begun this work. These authors were not only answering my questions about whether or not ritual "worked," but were actually talking about "how" it worked.

19. This is what Gramsci (1971) calls the "interregnum" and Turner (1982) describes as the "classification of no classification."

20. d'Aquili and Laughlin (1979): "Polarity is the basic problem that myth and ritual must solve" (p. 162). The resolution of crucial antinomies (e.g., God and man, good and evil, life and death) usually results in intensely positive affect" (p. 172). Some of the polar opposites relevant to this study include: digital/anologic; change/no change; left brain/right brain; secular/sacred; pragmatic/aesthetic; structure/communitas; external/internal; God/man; good/evil; life/death; sky/earth; heaven/hell; boy/man; individual/group; holding on/letting go; mourning/celebration.

21. Keeney and Sprenkle (1982, p. 17) talk about using the right and left hemispheres as a whole circuit. They say that this is what Bateson called "wisdom."

22. These two parts of the brain or the central nervous system are also referred to as (1) the ergotropic system (energy expanding) and tropotropic (energy conserving) system; (2) the dominant and the nondominant system; (3) the major and minor modes; (4) the left brain and right brain respectively.

Given the exploratory level of current brain research and the fact that I know nothing about this subject, I present this material with great caution. I have many questions regarding the implications of right brain/left brain research on sex-role stereotyping and it was helpful to see Turner's statement (1982, p. 5) that the two sides should not be characterized as major and minor but as "equal and complementary."

23. Recalling the etymology of the word health: i.e., harmony (harmos-fitting) and the coupling of systems.

24. To the extent that Schwartzman's analysis falls into the category of "mother-blaming," it must be noted as such. See Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale's (1983) article for a critique of this concept and its use in the family therapy literature.

25. Elkind's discussion of "pacing" recalls Zegans and Zegans (1979 [citing Eisenstadt, 1965]) statement that modern society without dramatic rituals tends to "flatten time." "The child is given no sense of a future different from the present or the past." A ritual such as Bar Mitzvah "appears to counter this sense of sameness." (p. 119)

### Footnotes Chapter III

1. Circular questions can be either descriptive or reflexive or both depending on the questioner's intention and the circumstance in which it is asked (Tomm, 1985). Descriptive questions are asked in order to elicit information that will generate or modify hypotheses about the system. Reflexive questions, on the other hand, are asked to deliberately trigger change in the system. Given that this was research, not therapy, and the researcher's goal was to gather information, not to change the system, the questions were always asked for purposes of furthering description and hypotheses building. But the reflexive potential of any question (let alone of the entire interviewing process) cannot be ignored. The systemic researcher (like the systemic therapist) must continually monitor reactions to questions in order to change position and pacing as necessary.

2. Here the reader's attention is called to a brilliant and exceptionally lucid article by J. Schwartzman (1984) in which the author decries the current trend in family interactional research towards increasingly scientific (read quantifiable) research. Recalling Bateson's contention that "quantification is a device for avoiding perception of pattern" (p. 229), Schwartzman understands

...mechanistic/methodology for family research as an analogue to ritual in social systems since it attributes unquestionable sanctity to methodological objectivity and analytic reductionism [emphasis added] (p. 223).

He sees this regression from a novel cybernetic paradigm to the methodological problems of a prior mechanistic (linear) paradigm as an indication of how difficult the shift is. In other words, the ritualistic adherence to the sanctified methods of scientific positivism functions as a homeostatic device resisting the field's leap to a new epistemology.



Schwartzman's warning is included here, not only because of his extraordinary grasp of both ritual and research, but because of the unique--and for the purpose of this research--wonderful way in which he combines the two.

#### Footnotes Chapter IV

1. "Hasidism is a revivalist, pietistic movement begun in Poland in the first half of the 18th century" (Harris, p. 11). The modern-day bearded, dark-hatted Hasidic men and the bewigged, modestly dressed women are distinctive from other orthodox Jews because they believe in a more impassioned, joyous and mystical expression of Judaism and they adhere to the guidance of a revered spiritual leader, der Rebbe.

The movement began as a breakaway group from European Jewry that argued that simple faith was as important as scholarship. The early Hasidic leaders taught that the mystical, expressed through song, dance, and joy, must be as much a part of Jewish experience as the study of the Talmud.

The Lubavitchers, who take their name from the town of Lubavitch, Poland, where they originated, are the largest Hasidic dynasty that survived Hitler's destruction of Jewish communities in Europe (Rosenzweig, 1984, p. 20).

For a beautiful portrait of the Hasidic world, I strongly recommend Liz Harris' (1985) Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family.

#### Footnotes Chapter V

1. This prayer of riddance has been largely abandoned in all but the most orthodox of contemporary Bar Mitzvahs. It is considered too harsh, too inappropriate. It is this researcher's opinion, however, that in terms of the developmental tasks that the family with an emergent adolescent is necessarily attempting, this prayer has great relevance and appropriateness. One could easily imagine Bar Mitzvah parents reciting this prayer in Hebrew and then some modernized translation in English, and then commenting (or having the rabbi comment) on its meaning/relevance (re: the necessary changes this event highlights vis-a-vis how and for what parents of teenagers are responsible).



A P P E N D I C E S

## Appendix A

### Structural Assessment Form

1. Entry into system (referral source, tone of initial contact, etc.).
2. Description of Family
  - a. Prose description of family  
Includes: socio-cultural position (e.g., what generation is the family?); level of education (secular and religious); ethnic/religious identification/heritage (e.g., what language spoken by whom); physical proximity to extended family.
  - b. Structural map (What is the structure of the family?)  
Includes: subsystem boundaries; (e.g., Marital; Parental; Sibling) and/or predominant pattern of boundaries (see appendix B).
  - c. Communication Patterns (How is the structure maintained? transformed?)  
Includes: alliances, hierarchy, who talks to whom, for whom, when, how.
  - d. Life Cycle phase: What are the interlocking developmental tasks of this family and how are they handling them?
  - e. Sources of Support: How extensive is the family's social network? What kind of support does the family count on and from whom?
  - f. Sources of Stress: Are there paranormative stresses operating in the system? e.g., financial crisis, illness, job change, etc.
  - g. Genogram  
Includes: triangles; history of past nodal events; significant events around child's birth, around past Bar Mitzvahs; unresolved intergenerational conflicts; cut offs; toxic issues; secrets; myths; after whom is child named; etc. (See Appendix B).
3. Description of Bar Mitzvah
  - a. Where, when, what, who (see list of questions Appendix C).

4. Description of planning process - e.g., Who's in charge? Who's most/least worried, excited, happy, nervous? Who's involved, who's consulted, who's informed, who's not informed? (See Appendix 4)
  - a. What is the overall emotional tone in reference to upcoming event? dread, joy, excitement, sadness?
5. Identification of difficult/significant decisions.
6. Identification of major themes/issues characteristic of this family.
7. Hypothesis about how difficult/significant decisions and major themes connect with emotional process issues.











## Appendix B

### Key to Family Maps

The family maps in this study combine elements of the genogram and the structural map in that they provide information on the biological and legal relationships among family members and information on patterns of interactional behavior.

Detailed genograms per se are not included in order to protect the anonymity of the research subjects. (Camouflaged) information from the genograms is included in the maps where relevant to the analysis.

The following symbols taken from Bradt (1980) and McGoldrick and Gerson (1985) are used:

- male 
- female 
- married 
- divorced 
- pregnant 
- deceased  
- intimate relationship but not married 
- birth order of children from left to right unless otherwise indicated
- family members living in immediate household (especially in remarried families where children spend time in various households)
- tension  



- conflict —||—
- very close or enmeshed ==
- movement away from nuclear family (as in adolescent's increasing autonomy) →
- movement towards (as in an increased connection to past) ↗ ↖
- emotional boundary ○
- cultural religious boundary □
- new closeness ⤴

## Appendix C

### Stage I - Examples of Questions About Bar Mitzvah Plans

Although the following are stated as direct questions, the researcher interjects more circular questions (e.g., who agrees, disagrees; who's more/less worried, excited, etc.) as appropriate throughout the process.

1. Decision to have the Bar Mitzvah  
Was it made or simply a given?  
When was it made?  
By whom  
Was child informed, consulted, primary decision maker?  
Who most wanted child to have decision-making role?  
Were grandparents informed, consulted, involved in decision making?
2. Date  
If synagogue schedule was flexible, what were the major considerations?
3. Time  
Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, weekday morning?  
How traditional does it have to be? For whom?
4. Place  
In local temple or elsewhere (e.g., in grandparents shul; in Israel?)
5. Guest List  
Who started making it?  
How big - everyone or just immediate family and a few close friends?  
Who's included - all the cousins or just aunts and uncles?  
Who did they have to decide to include/not include?  
Who did they want to invite but didn't?  
Who did they not want to invite but did?  
How many friends of Bar Mitzvah boy invited? Number limited?  
Unlimited?  
How many guests unknown to Bar Mitzvah boy?  
Can little sister/brother invite friends?
6. Invitations  
How formal, informal, traditional, nontraditional?  
Who picks them, addresses them?

7. Traveling arrangements

Who's making arrangements? Who will have to pick up whom?

8. Housing arrangements

Who's arranging for the motel rooms?

Who's paying for them?

Who will be insulted if they can't be put up in family's home?

Who refuses to share a room with whom?

9. Training

How long is the haftorah?

Who's teaching the boy his haftorah?

Who's practicing with him?

Are there any rules about practicing?

Who enforces the rules?

Will he read other parts of the service?

Will he write a speech? What kind? (interpretation of haftorah or Torah reading? Thank you?)

Will anyone help him with the speech? Who?

Who's buying the Bar Mitzvah suit? Any traditions about this?

10. Service

How traditional/nontraditional?

How long? How much in English?

Who will get the aliyahs?

Will women be called up? Will couples?

Would anyone be offended either way?

Will parents each have aliyah or share one?

Will parents make a speech? together/alone?

Will younger sibling participate?

Will divorced father/have aliyah? (with new wife?)?

What will new father's role be?

11. The Party

What kind, when, where, how big?

Kosher? home cooked? pot luck? catered?

Seating arrangements?

if so, head table?

Who sits with whom? what are the considerations? (who can't sit with whom?)

What kind of music? (Klezmer? Rock?)

12. Money

Who's paying?

How much (i.e., what proportion from whom if, for instance, grandparents are helping or if divorced parents are sharing expenses.)?

## Appendix D

### Examples of Questions About Decision-Making Process

As with the questions in Appendix C, these questions and others that evolve from them are made more circular as appropriate throughout the process.

1. What is most significant/important/difficult decision of all those being made?  
For whom?  
How is it being/how was it/how will it be resolved?
2. Who is most/least worried, excited, nervous, happy?  
Who is in charge of planning?  
Who's consulted, informed, not informed?  
Who (if anyone) are people most/least nervous about in reference to event?  
How involved is child in the planning? Passively accepting parents' decisions? Actively initiating ideas? Simply reacting (positively and/or negatively) to decisions?  
How involved are siblings in planning? Actively involved? Decidedly uninvolved? Watching from a distance?  
How involved are grandparents (informed/consulted/central)? What has been their input? What has been the response?  
In this planning period, (1) what is making you most anxious (2) what is giving you most pleasure?
3. Describe in reference to preliminal characteristics.  
(Period associated with escalating tensions, old patterns [behavioral, relational]) beginning not to work; participants preparing to move from a state of ordinariness to a state of specialness, anxiety developing; sense of crisis, breach, separation.)



Appendix E

Stage II - Examples of questions to be answered during  
Bar Mitzvah Ceremony/Weekend

1. What is the general emotional climate: of nuclear family; extended family; congregation?
2. What seems to be the emotional highlight? For whom?
3. How are themes identified in Stage I carried through in Stage II?
4. What is the outcome of the difficult/important decision?
5. Describe in reference to liminal characteristics.  
(Period associated with concepts such as extraordinariness, of being both in and out of time, holiness, valuable, dangerous, marginal, paradox, betwixt and between).

## Appendix F

### Stage III - Examples of Question for Post Bar Mitzvah Interview

1. What is family's reflection on/understanding of event/process
  - For whom was Bar Mitzvah most/least significant? How? Why? Who agrees/disagrees?
  - Who enjoyed it the most/least?
  - Who's most/least relieved that it's over?
  - What surprised them?
  - Disappointed them?
  - What regrets?
  - What to repeat?
  - What to do differently next time?
  - What did they learn about themselves? About others in the family? (ask each)
  - Who surprised them by coming/by not coming?
  - Who came the furthest?
  - "If grandmother were here, what would she say?"
  - What was the most emotional moment during the ceremony/weekend?
2. What has changed since process began (3-6 months prior to Bar Mitzvah)
  - What changes have they observed - in nuclear family; in extended family?
  - What/any life cycle crises since Bar Mitzvah anywhere in system?
3. Describe in reference to post liminal characteristics.  
(Period associated with sense of achievement, transformation, reintegration into ordinary, profane world.)

## APPENDIX G

### Letter to Rabbis Requesting Families

Dear Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_,

In speaking with both Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ where I am a member, and with Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ whom I met through a mutual teacher, your name was mentioned as someone I might contact in reference to a project I am undertaking: As a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, I am doing a dissertation on the contemporary Bar Mitzvah as family rite of passage.

I first became interested in the topic five years ago through my own family's experience with our first son's Bar Mitzvah which was a very powerful event for all of us. At first, I thought our experience was simply a function of our own idiosyncracies, but the more I read about the concept of ritual (primarily in anthropology) the more I came to respect the process and want to know more about it.

It happens also, as you may know, that in the field of family therapy, there is a new and growing interest in ritual. Therapists are wanting to know more about rituals (in their natural state) in order to create therapeutic rituals for client families. I want to study the Bar Mitzvah process in a way that will benefit the therapeutic community, but, more important to me, in a way that will benefit other Jewish families about to enter the process, and benefit the rabbis, ministers, and educators who coach all kinds of families through all kinds of life cycle rituals.

I have chosen to look at Bar Mitzvah not only because of my own experience, but because this ritual is one of the few if not only remaining rituals of initiation into adolescence available to contemporary families. And given how difficult adolescence is -- for everyone--I think that this is a particularly important process to study.

What I am looking for is families who are in the early stages of planning their first child's Bar Mitzvah (at least 3-4 months before the event). I believe that the ritual is not simply the ceremony, but the entire process that precedes and follows it. Too many people make the mistake of thinking that the rite of passage is the ceremony in the synagogue, and if nothing magical happens (and certainly the boy doesn't turn into a man while standing on the bimah), the whole thing is a farce. I want to understand what happens as families interact with the entire process, not simply with the public event.

What I need is a few generous families (who are not in family therapy) who would let me into their experience by talking with me about the family itself and about plans for the Bar Mitzvah, and by allowing me to come to the Bar Mitzvah as a guest. The family would be giving me their time, but in return, I think they would be significantly enhancing their experience. As all of the literature reports and, as you most certainly know from experience, the more families are involved in the process, the more meaningful the experience. Talking with me will inevitably increase the amount and enrich the kind of thinking the family will do in preparation for the event. It will also provide opportunities that often don't happen spontaneously as people get busy and caught up in the process.

I hope that this introduction not only gives you some sense of what I am planning to do, but also interests you as well. I will be calling in a few days to talk with you further and ask if, in fact, there are any families in your congregation which fit my description and which you would feel comfortable (after talking or meeting with me, of course) in introducing me to.

Looking forward to speaking with you, I am

Sincerely,

Judith Davis.



Appendix H

Participation Consent Form

I agree to participate in Judith Davis' University of Massachusetts doctoral research on families experiencing their first child's Bar Mitzvah. I agree to having her interview us and members of our family during the period which begins three months prior to our son's Bar Mitzvah, includes the Bar Mitzvah weekend, and ends three months after the event.

I have been assured (1) that all information collected in this study will be held confidential; (2) that any identifying information will be removed and or disguised; (3) that the audio tapes of the interviews will be destroyed at the completion of the research and that any video tapes will become the family's possessions; and (4) that a report of the study's results will be made available to us upon request.

I understand further that we can withdraw our participation at any time in the process.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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