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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF AN AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE
SYNAGOGUE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL STRATEGIES
EMPLOYED BY AN INSTITUTION AND ITS MEMBERS FOR THE
SATISFACTION OF SPIRITUAL NEEDS IN A SITUATION OF
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

by

MARTIN LASKIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
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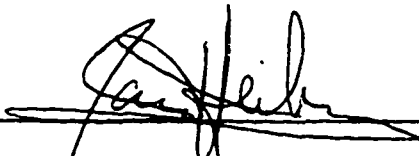
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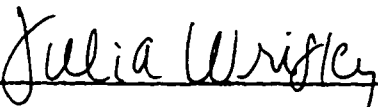
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

September 16, 1996
Date


Chair of Examining Committee

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**To
Esther**

PROLOGUE

In 1901, upon assuming the role of President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America Solomon Schechter said that he envisioned the Seminary as becoming;

...a theological center which should be all things to all men, reconciling all parties, and appealing to all sections of the community... the school should never become partisan ground or a hotbed of polemics... On the contrary, the Seminary and its disciples should in some way participate in, and as it were, anticipate the mission of Elijah, that was to consist not only in solving the difficulties of the Torah, and removing doubt, but also in bringing back the forcibly estranged, arbitrating between conflicting opinions, and giving peace to the world.¹

Over ninety years after Schechter's address, which was given in the early days of the Conservative Movement in America; I embarked upon an ethnographic study not of a seminary, but of Temple Beth Shalom, a Conservative synagogue in a small Connecticut town. A Conservative synagogue embodies the grassroots of the Conservative Movement; the place where ordinary Conservative Jews, not seminary academicians and students come together in the face to face interactions that occur in a religious institution. I sought to find out if this congregation, made up of individuals who represented a wide range of Judaic skills, abilities and religious sensibilities, could maintain cohesion, establish an identity as a religious community, and satisfy the spiritual needs of its members.

Through the research I discovered that this Congregation

was indeed to a great extent able to be all things to all men and women; to reconcile all parties; and to appeal to all sections of the Temple community. This resulted in a cohesive religious community, one in which group solidarity was maintained. How this cohesiveness and solidarity was achieved through the social interactions of the congregants is at the heart of this study.

In order to examine the many ways in which the members of the Temple involved themselves in congregational activities it was necessary for me to attend the widest variety of activities that the Temple had to offer. At times this led to the frustration of wanting to be at two separate activities which were scheduled for the same time. Recalling one such episode should give to the reader not only a feeling for what my field work was like; but also an introductory glimpse of congregational life at the Temple itself.

The Evening Before The Softball Game And The Morning Minyan

It was Saturday evening and I was putting down onto paper some things I had observed that morning at the Sabbath services. There had been a bar mitzvah that morning which made the service a particularly long one. This was not due so much to any added prayers and rituals but rather to the number of speeches that were given. The Rabbi said some words to the bar mitzvah boy, who in turn spoke to his family and the

congregation, and was spoken to by his parents. I discerned in the words of these speeches a cultural performance; not as exotic perhaps as the Balinese cockfight described by Geertz, but one that nonetheless provided me with a key to the ethos of the congregation.² In the midst of my thoughts on Bali and bar mitzvahs the phone rang, it was Marv, the captain of the Temple softball team.

A few weeks ago during the "kiddush" after the Sabbath morning service (which included congregational benedictions over wine and bread; refreshments of cakes, pickled herring and schnapps, and much informal socializing) I foolishly exaggerated my achievements as a softball player during my undergraduate years. Marv had now called to take me up on my words. He asked me to be at the playing field at 9:00 sharp the next morning.

Since the local Jewish Community Center had started a softball league Marv had expended much effort in trying to put together a team of ten players on the days of the scheduled games. I heard from other team members that it was not unusual to see Marv on the morning of a game running over to the pay phone at the side of the ball field dugout in a desperate effort to recruit one or two more Temple members to come down to the game in order to complete the ten player quota. According to the league rules if a team was not able to come up with a complete roster of ten they would lose by forfeit. This had obvious similarities with the Jewish ritual

requirement that ten adults be present in order to form a minyan, (quorum) for public prayer. Orthodox tradition was that the ten adults be male. Conservative innovation was that females counted as well. The congregants at Temple Beth Shalom followed the Conservative tradition in the matter of the religious service but had other ideas when it came to the softball team which was kept an exclusively male preserve.

After speaking with Marv and promising that I would show up for the game I realized that I had a scheduling dilemma for the next morning: I wanted to be in two places at once. I wanted to be at the softball field at nine o'clock to see which ten congregants would show up for the game. I also wanted to be in the Temple sanctuary at nine thirty to see which ten congregants would show up for the Sunday morning minyan. Previous observations had shown me that some regular minyan attenders would probably go to the ball game instead. Perhaps for the congregants, being on the Temple softball team was for them the symbolic equivalent of participating in the minyan. On the other hand, perhaps the incentive to participate in the minyan came not from specifically religious feelings but rather from the desire to take part in the comradery of Temple teamwork. After all, did not Durkheim say that;

...by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing.³

At any rate there must have been some powerful hidden motivator that encouraged the participation of a number of softball players who were constantly striking out and missing easy fly balls at the game; and of a number of minyan members who could barely read Hebrew and were constantly losing their places in the service.

To find out why and how these congregants, despite their differences and varied levels of competence participated together in the life of the congregation would require not only an examination of the face to face interactions of the congregants themselves, but also a look at the history of the Temple and indeed the histories of the Hamden and Greater New Haven Jewish communities. And to shed light on the origins of the pluralism found at Temple Beth Shalom today would require an examination of the evolution of the Conservative Movement. And some explanation as to why I as a researcher was interested in answering these questions could perhaps be found in a small part of another history; that of my own.

And if as an ethnographer I allow myself to enter into the area of personal confession I may as well give the reader an answer to my original quandry: wheather to attend the minyan or the softball game. I attended the softball game. For better or for worse, I rationalized that I could participate in a morning minyan most any day of the year. Temple softball games, considering the ages of the players, and the New England weather, were apt to take place a good deal less

frequently.

The Four Sons

As a child, sitting at the family Passover Seder I would look at the Passover Haggadah and was fascinated by the section on the four sons. This passage includes all of the biblical verses that narrate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and adapts them to four different types of "sons": the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the disinterested, who should be instructed in the laws and meaning of the Passover Seder according to the halakhah "that according to the understanding of the son the father instructs him".⁴

Actually what I was initially fascinated with was how through the use of illustrations the various Haggadot that I came in contact with depicted these four sons. Sometimes the wicked son would be depicted as one armed with weapons of violence, at other times he would be shown as an assimilated Jew, dressed in the clothing worn by the gentiles of that era. The wise son was always depicted as a Jewish scholar, wearing ritual garb such as tallit, kippah, and tefillin. The simple son was sometimes depicted as a young child and at other times as a rough type laborer or other person of presumably limited education. The disinterested son or the one who is referred to as the "he who knows not how to ask" was variously depicted as an infant or as one whose intelligence appeared to be well

below the range of normal. While the Haggadot illustrators imagined and depicted these sons in various forms throughout the ages, my imagination as a child depicted them in its own way too. As a child attending afternoon Hebrew School I imagined these sons as possessing the personality attributes of my classmates. There was Marc the bully who would punch and kick the other kids, myself included, when the Rabbi turned his back to the class. Jay, was the smart one; who knew all the answers and had perfect attendance at the Sabbath morning junior congregation service. Stuart was good at stick ball but not at much else. Finally there was Steven who had some sort of learning problem as evidenced by his inability to read either Hebrew or English when called upon by the Rabbi to do so.

As I became older and my world broadened, elementary school classmates were transformed into high school peers. There was the wicked drug dealer, the wise honor roll student, the simple "c" student and the kid in remedial class.

College presented me with a new host of friends and acquaintances who I also fitted into my imaginary scheme of the four sons. There were the students who belonged to Yavneh, the campus organization for those who considered themselves religiously observant. While never a part of this group I did consider them Judaically wise. At that time the Hillel club at my school was known as a "party" organization. To my way of thinking these fellow Jews were

Judaically simple. There were Jewish students who chose to belong to certain campus political organizations which espoused policies that I strongly disagreed with. In an intolerant way I classified these students as belonging to the camp of the ideologically wicked. Finally there were those students whose Jewish involvement consisted only in their attendance at the annual family Passover Seder. For me these were the ones who either didn't know enough or didn't care enough to even begin to ask the questions of Jewish identity which had so involved me during those years.

The fascination which the four sons of the Haggadah had for me was not only that in my imagination I was able to transpose their different personalities upon other Jewish people with whom I came into contact. I was also fascinated by the fact that the four sons from the Haggadah, despite their differences, came together every Passover to sit down at the same Seder table and contribute to the ritual story telling of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

All of the sons participate in the communal meal albeit in different ways. The wise one asks a wise question, the simple one asks a simple question. The wicked son doesn't stand outside the door and scoff at and ridicule the ritual proceeding. He comes in and scoffs and ridicules the ritual by asking a wicked question and thereby, in his own way does take part in and is indispensable no less than the others in the telling of the story. Even the one who knows not how to ask is

brought into the proceedings by the father who reaches out and explains the ritual to him; and in this process also instructs the others who are present. Everyone is given the chance to participate in the ritual performance; and if this were not done the performance would lose some of its richness, and worse yet some of the guests might start to leave the table and walk out of the house.

Years later as I immersed myself in the role of a participant observer at Temple Beth Shalom I not only became more aware of the religious pluralism among the congregants but my imagination began to sort these congregants out into categories which were parallel to the four sons of the Haggadah. In the interest of objectivity which was necessary for an ethnographic research, I strove to make these categories ones that in my mind would be value free. These categories were now envisioned by me to be related to the skills, abilities, levels of Jewish knowledge and observances, and the religious sensibilities of the congregants rather than related to any concepts of wickedness, wisdom, or intellectual capabilities. The congregants who I observed all participated in the life of the Temple whether it was through public worship, rummage sales, adult education, Sisterhood luncheons or Men's Club breakfasts. As did the sons in the Haggadah, the congregants all sat down at the same table; albeit at different seats and with different outlooks.

Sitting down together at the same table sometimes meant

ignoring each others jutting knees and elbows when the chairs were too close together. At other times it became necessary to move the seats a good distance away from each other. In the following chapters I hope to explain how the members of Temple Beth Shalom were able to sit down at the same Congregational table together, and how no one was made to stand outside the Temple door.

Gaining an understanding as to how a religiously pluralistic congregation maintains cohesion, establishes an identity, and satisfies the spiritual needs of its members was not however the only purpose of this study. In the course of the research, as I looked through Temple archives and came across the pictures and documents of congregants who have since passed from the scene; and as I observed and listened to the congregants of today who eventually would also be gone, the ethnographic importance of this work came more sharply into focus for me. In referring to the An-Ski expedition which was an ethnographic study of two Jewish communities in pre-World War I Eastern Europe Heilman states that;

The need is clear for an American version of the An-Ski expedition and new Archive of Ethnography, where the cultural wealth that is Jewish synagogue life in America can be stored. Such an archive will serve not only as a most valuable resource for students and scholars examining the character of synagogue life in America, it will also act as a vehicle for giving synagogue communities a consciousness of their own worth. Our failure to so document the previous generations of synagogue life in America is tragic. While there are memories and anecdotes about what the synagogue in America was like in previous generations, as of this moment there exists few systematic accounts of synagogue life in America.⁵

Through this study I hope to add a small town Conservative Synagogue to the body of ethnographic knowledge dealing with synagogues in America in the last decade of the twentieth century; and also to say something about the suburban shul as a reflection of American Jewry and American religion as well.

Words of thanks are due to my teachers whose guidance and kind patience have enabled me to bring this work to fruition. Samuel Heilman has taught me much, not only ethnographic and sociological skills; but also scholarly perseverance, and the virtue and ultimate satisfaction which comes from doing something over and over again until it comes out right. Perhaps most important of all he taught me not to be discouraged by criticism; but rather to welcome it as an indispensable tool in the research and writing processes. Herbert Danzger deserves my thanks for the invaluable role he played by showing me how to focus my insights and discoveries and then how to put them down on paper. Jack Wertheimer carefully guided my sociohistorical research and not only led me to important sources of information; but also encouraged me to find new sources of information by myself; I thank him as well. I am grateful to the Memorial Foundation For Jewish Culture whose financial aid in the form of a dissertation research grant enabled me to devote the time needed for the field research. Special thanks go to Rhoda Gorenberg, the Congregation B'nai Jacob librarian, for her help in locating various sources of printed materials which were pertinent to the research. Finally, to my wife Esther, and to our children; Ariella, Eliad, and Dafna, thank you for understanding my need to undertake this project, and for supporting me every step of the way.

Endnotes:Prologue

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3.Emile Durkheim. The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life. (New York: The Free Press, 1915), pp.61-62.

4.Roth, Cecil and Wigoder, Geoffrey, eds. Encyclopedia Judaica. (Jerusalem: Keter Press, 1971) S.v. "Haggadah, Passover" by Hanoch Avenary vol 7 p.1079.

5.Samuel C. Heilman, "In Search Of The Present: Synagogue Ethnography." Conservative Judaism 38 (Winter 1985), p.66.

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INTRODUCTION: THE GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

This dissertation will ethnographically detail a suburban Conservative Synagogue which I studied as a participant observer from 1991 to 1994, in order to examine the impact of religious pluralism upon the ability of religious institutions to satisfy the varied and sometimes discrepant spiritual needs of their membership while at the same time maintaining the social cohesiveness of the institution. The main question I am examining is in three parts:

- 1) How are members among whom there exists a wide range of levels of religious education, able to involve themselves practically in the activities of the institution? On its face this does not seem an obvious problem; but the way in which a congregant participates in the worship service at a Conservative synagogue is largely determined by his or her knowledge of Judaic ritual practices. This includes the extent to which he or she is able to read, if not understand the prayers, many of which are in the Hebrew language.
- 2) How does such an institution meet the spiritual needs of its members? The meeting of spiritual needs involves the individual's search for meaning and the resolution of existential questions. These existential questions often become prominent at times of life cycle transitions and crises. The realm of spiritual needs also encompasses the individual's desire to find and experience what he regards to be "the sacred" in life, whether it be a god, a group identity or some other object or idea.

3) How is the social cohesiveness and identity of a religious institution maintained when there exists a pluralism of ideological perspectives on the part of the members?

Conservative Judaism, which claims 43%, or 890,000 of the 2,150,000 American Jews who are affiliated with a synagogue, offers a good opportunity for the sociological study of the questions set forth above.¹ Conservative Judaism draws its ideology and practices from both Orthodox and Reform Judaism. It has been noted that Conservative Judaism:

...seeks to conserve essential elements of traditional Judaism but allows for modernization of religious practices in a less radical sense than that espoused by Reform Judaism. Following Orthodoxy, Conservatives insist on the sacredness of the Sabbath, which is to be observed, as far as possible, in a world that more commonly holds public worship on Sunday. Dietary laws are respected and observed, but with modifications when necessary.²

The pluralistic nature of Conservative Judaism has been reinforced by the fact that this ideology of Conservatism tends to be ambiguous due to its middle ground position between Orthodox and Reform. Sklare states that:

Conservatism represents a common pattern of acculturation- a kind of social adjustment- which has been arrived at by lay people. It is seen as a "halfway house" between Reform and Orthodoxy. It possesses no ideological system in the usual sense of the term.³

This halfway house status reflects a compromise between two significant trends in post WWII American society. The first trend which was dominant at least up until the late 1960s was the desire of immigrants and their children to become fully acculturated into American society. Among the Jews this led to a leaning towards Reform concerning religious practices and rituals.⁴

Starting in the late 1960s among many second and third generation Americans a second trend developed. This was a renewed interest in ethnic and religious roots. American society also began to show a greater acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity. This led to a counter swing towards tradition concerning religious rituals and practices. Conservative Judaism has attempted to incorporate both trends within its movement. Because the Conservative Movement attempts to include a wide band of Jews it contains within its ranks members who come from a wide range of Judaic backgrounds, skills, and abilities. This has led to what Wertheimer calls:

...an open embrace of pluralism in Jewish religious life. Within the movement itself an effort is made to embrace all Jews who identify themselves as Conservative.⁵

Another factor which encourages the pluralism within Conservative congregations is the independence of the local synagogue as it has developed in America. Each congregation had great leeway in determining its own ritual. Sklare says that:

Religious institutions vary from those characterized by the highly central episcopal type of structure to those organized in the congregational form where local bodies retain much of their autonomy. Largely because of the conditions of Diaspora living, Jews in the United States are extremely congregational- they stress the independence and self-sufficiency of the local synagogue...the directors of each congregation determine their own ritual;...⁶

These three factors then; an ambiguous ideological position that seeks a middle ground somewhere between Orthodoxy and Reform; the effort to embrace all Jews who identify themselves as Conservative; and the independence of local Conservative synagogues in setting ritual policy, have been instrumental in the development of the pluralistic

nature of the Conservative synagogue.

The existence of diverse groups within an institution may lead to conflict over the allocation of institutional resources regarding space, programming time, money, publicity and the support of the professional religious leadership. On the other hand pluralism; when accepted as part of the culture of an institution, can lead to a degree of harmony between diverse groups that allows for a wider range of inclusiveness regarding the membership. This greater inclusiveness can strengthen the institution in terms of its membership size and the diversity of its human resources.

Using an individual congregation to examine religious pluralism in the Conservative movement allowed for an examination of the ongoing encounters of individuals with each other and with the institution. This yielded an ethnography of strategies and mechanisms for handling the conflicts that result from pluralism in a religious institution.

Temple Beth Shalom the specific congregation that was studied in this research, with its close to four hundred member families, is a medium sized mostly middle class congregation located in Hamden, Connecticut, a suburb of New Haven. Temple Beth Shalom is an example of the general situation of pluralism in the Conservative movement. My observations revealed a pluralistic membership evidenced by varying levels of ritual observances, Judaic knowledge and backgrounds, and temple activities designed for and attended by mutually exclusive groups within the congregation. The Temple was an appropriate institutional subject for research on religious pluralism. At this point then it will be in order to say some words about the research

methods used for the study.

The Research Methods.

Ethnography was the choice of methodology used for the study of Temple Beth Shalom. The use of ethnography as a research approach was advantageous for the study of a small community in which face to face encounters and personal interactions in large part shape and define the social nature of the group. Using ethnography as a research method allowed me to describe and interpret the social behaviors of congregants in all the richness and variety of a pluralistic community setting.

As a participant observer I studied the congregation in the widest possible range of its activities. The rationale for this was that the congregants were involved in a wide range of Temple activities. Religion for these people was more than prayer. Certainly worship services did occupy a major place among these activities and was a central focus of this research. But the research also focused on education, social activities, and the social relations of the congregants with the outside community.

During my three years as a participant observer at Temple Beth Shalom which lasted from the fall of 1991 to the fall of 1994, I attended a wide range of worship services. Some services tended toward a traditional Jewish style of worship such as the daily morning minyan, the Saturday morning service, and the Festival services. Other services such as those held on Friday evenings were highly innovative and much less traditional. The High Holiday services exemplified a combination of

both traditional and innovative styles.

I also spent much time closely observing life cycle rituals, especially the bar\bat mitzvahs which brought into the sanctuary a number of congregants who rarely if ever attended worship services. Committee meetings, adult education classes, lectures, cultural programs; and social activities such as picnics, Men's Club breakfasts, Sisterhood functions, and fund raisers took my observations outside of the sanctuary and into areas of Temple activity that were the main focus of Temple involvement for many of the congregants.

In addition to participating in, and observing the activities at the Temple my role as researcher would have been incomplete without talking to and questioning the congregants themselves. Flexible questioning along with some lengthier interviews were used in order to better understand the congregant's own perspectives on temple life. A confession as to my early difficulties in choosing subjects for questioning and interviewing should be made here.

At the beginning of my field work I attempted to obtain a balance in my choice of subjects. For example, if I questioned a member who observed the Sabbath laws strictly, I also made it my point to speak to a congregant from the other extreme; one who gave indications that he or she did little in the way of such observance. I eventually came to realize however that this kind of "even handedness" was giving me a somewhat "exaggerated even handed" view of the congregation. The picture that I was developing of the congregation was bereft of all sharp tones and hues and was turning into a homogenized colorless portrait that did not reflect the reality of the congregation in all of its

socially diverse richness. I subsequently decided to speak to as many congregants as possible among those who took part in at least some aspect of Temple activity. I believe that this approach served the research well. I eventually found that each congregant had a story to tell and a perspective to share.

In addition to ethnographic methods this research contained a social historical component. Temple Beth Shalom by virtue of being a religious institution in the modern world, has been subject to the influence of rapid social change. The Temple's response to such change had to be studied over time and not only in the present. An examination was made of the social history of the Temple and the social history of the local Jewish and non-Jewish communities. This added social historical background to the observations made in the field.

Archival records of the Temple going back to its inception in 1946 as the Hamden Jewish Community center were located and examined. These archives included monthly newsletters, minutes of various board and committee meetings, rabbi's sermons, and local newspaper articles.

The New Haven Jewish Historical Society was found to have a wealth of archival materials relating to the history of Temple Beth Shalom. The Society also had available materials relating to the Greater New Haven Jewish Community dating back to the 1840s. These materials were helpful in developing a community social historical setting in which to locate the Temple.

Now after this description of the research tools used in the study I will move on to a description of the research setting. The focus now turns to Temple Beth Shalom; the congregation that I attempted to make

sociological sense of, both as a participant and as an observer.

The Research Setting

Temple Beth Shalom, founded in 1946 as the Hamden Jewish Community Center, now occupies a modern one story brick building on one of Hamden's main streets. A check of the Temple records shows 394 current member families. Of these families more than three quarters (314) are of married couples. Almost one quarter of the families (80) consist of or are headed by a single person. The Temple has an operating budget of \$393,000. per year; and the average family dues is 785 dollars. The siddur used for Sabbath services is The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book, which was published in 1945 and is considered less of a departure from traditional Jewish prayer texts than the other widely used siddur in Conservative congregations; Siddur Sim Shalom, which was published in 1985.⁷

I attempted to situate TBS in terms of the Conservative norm by comparing the above data with the other synagogues affiliated with the Conservative synagogue movement; The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Unfortunately this could only be partially accomplished due to the fact that "The United Synagogue Databank Survey" is still in progress. However, through the availability of an initial published report and my contacts with the researchers who have access to some of the raw data; I was able to at least get a preliminary although incomplete picture of TBS relative to the other synagogues of the Conservative Movement.⁸

In the United States there are 568 United Synagogue Congregations with less than 400 member families; 174 congregations with between 400 and 800 families; and 68 congregations with more than 800 families.⁹ This means TBS with its 394 families finds itself in the same size range as more than two thirds of all Conservative congregations. The mean budget for medium to large sized congregations, (220-399 member families) is from about \$430,000 to \$750,000 per year.¹⁰ The \$393,000 budget of TBS is therefore typical of this size congregation. The average family dues at TBS which is \$785 per year is right in line with the average for other congregations of this size; (a little under \$880 dollars per year).¹¹ The siddur used at TBS, The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book is used by forty percent of Conservative Congregations. Another 45 percent use the more ritually innovative Sim Shalom.¹² We derive then from the above data a profile of a synagogue that is similar to that of the average Conservative Synagogue in the United States. Comparative data on the family statuses of members of Conservative Synagogues were not yet available from the United Synagogue Data Bank Survey.

I was able to glean a number of details from the Temple office records and mailing lists regarding the geographic distribution of the Temple members. These details taken by themselves, and without ethnographic elaboration or thick description border on the dull and lack a clear organizational logic that would even justify their presentation. I will however present these details in the introduction for the purpose of raising a number of questions that will be dealt with in the following chapters of this study. The data on the geographic

distribution of the members tells us only the addresses of the congregants. This information may be useful for mailing out Temple newsletters or the billings for membership dues. The ethnographic description and sociological interpretation of this data which comes later will hopefully shed some light as to why Temple memberships are acquired and dues are paid in the first place.

Geographically almost three quarters of the families,(284) live in Hamden. Another 63 families live in two of the bordering towns; either North Haven,(44) where no synagogue exists, or Cheshire,(19) which has only a Reform temple. The congregation then, as a community, has borders that are to a great extent geographic in nature. How does this play a role in the creation the Temple's identity?

Nineteen families are from New Haven which also borders on Hamden and does have a Conservative synagogue. Why do these families drive out of their way, in the unpredictable New England weather no less, to Hamden, when they could attend the Conservative synagogue in New Haven? What does Temple Beth Shalom have to offer them that they cannot find elsewhere?

At least four other members of TBS who live locally also pay dues to Orthodox synagogues in New Haven; which they belonged to before moving from New Haven to Hamden. What part does the Orthodox background of some of the congregants play in the conduct of the worship service and ritual?

At Temple Beth Shalom, as is typical of most American synagogues, the congregants themselves are the governing body. In the course of this study references will be made to various committees and

administrative bodies of the congregation. It will be useful then at this point in the beginning of the study to give a sketch of the Temple's organizational structure.

The members of the congregation elect a twenty four person board of directors. The responsibilities of the board of directors are to vote on the recommendations that it receives from the Temple committees and to initiate its own proposals for the running of the Temple; from financial decisions to matters of programming and the conduct of worship services. In addition the board of directors consists of the presidents of the Sisterhood and Men's Club; the chairpersons of the standing committees; and all past presidents who are still members of the Temple. There are a number of standing committees such as, Building Fund, Ways and Means, and Endowment, to name but a few. Of relevance to this study is the Religious Committee, (the official name from the Temple by laws), which is usually referred to by the congregants as the Ritual Committee. The use of this name by the congregants is probably because rituals are the primary business of this committee. This committee considers and recommends any changes in ritual. It also is in charge of ushering at all services; which consists of maintaining decorum at services. The committee consists of the first vice-president as chairperson and twelve members who are appointed by the first vice-president for three year terms. The rabbi advises this committee and is considered the authority on all ritual matters. As we shall see later however the rabbi is far from authoritarian in these matters and to an extent takes into account the religious sensibilities of the ritual committee and the larger congregation.

The rationale why this particular synagogue was chosen for a study of religious pluralism was two fold. To begin with preliminary investigation gave indications of Temple Beth Shalom as being a religiously pluralistic congregation. In the course of the study these indications were borne out, and are discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

In addition to being a religiously pluralistic congregation Temple Beth Shalom promised to be a readily accessible site at which to conduct a participant observer field research. As a participant observer I had the advantage of being enough of an insider to know what was going on, having been a member of the synagogue since the end of 1990.

While I was considered to be in the more traditionally oriented camp of the congregation; (I surmised this by feedback from other members), I developed contacts with all factions of the membership. I became known to the synagogue members including the professional and lay leaders by being active in a variety of synagogue activities such as religious service participation and leadership, study groups, and adult education. Along with my intensive involvement as a participant in Temple affairs came the risk that such activity might compromise my researcher role by my becoming an agent of influence upon the very same activities that I was to study. I made every attempt to carefully steer clear of influencing the planning and execution of such activities. Some explanation of the methodology I used to accomplish this would be appropriate here.

Early on in my field research I came to realize, as did Weissler in her ethnographic study as a participant observer of a havurah

community; that just being there as an observer affected the environment of the group being studied.¹³ I had to take sides because not to express an opinion would; as well as expressing an opinion, influence the outcome of the issue being debated. Not to join in a debate would make those I was observing more self conscious of my presence as an observer. In situations where a vote was called for, not to vote would influence the outcome as much as to vote would. My opinion only meant one more opinion in the pluralistic group of Temple participants.

Before I began the research I discussed the proposed study with the rabbi and with officers of the Temple and was met with a cooperative response. I explained to the rabbi and the officers of the Temple that I was doing a sociological research study with the main goal of finding out how the Temple manages to hold together even though it has members coming from so many different backgrounds. This required my presence at as many Temple activities as possible. I also made it a point to gain access to various standing committees such as adult education and rituals.

I was enough of an outsider not to have been involved with synagogue politics or to have established close personal ties with individual members. Temple Beth Shalom is but a few minutes from where I live and this enhanced the quantity of observations made. I was able to locate Temple archives dating back to its founding and use them as historical background for the study. The Temple archives however made up only a small part of the written material which served as a background for this research. There were also the ethnographies of

religious groups and institutions that needed to be examined even before I could start my work in the field. To help guide my research, and to make sure that it would add something unique to the ethnographic study of religious institutions I looked to those who had already established a body of knowledge before me.

Identifying what had already been done in the field by others so that I could find a research niche of my own was not the only rationale I had for examining the existing body of ethnographic literature dealing with religious institutions. As I became more deeply involved in my work at Temple Beth Shalom I came to realize that doing ethnography as a participant observer is a very personal kind of activity; one which raises for the researcher a number of personal questions:

When am I a participant, and when am I an observer? Can I be both at the same time while maintaining a proper scientific objectivity?

It is difficult not to build loyalties and attachments to the people who you are not only studying, but also participating with in sacred rituals and worship. Could not these loyalties and attachments also get in the way of objective reporting and interpretation?

The advantages of being an insider to the type of group I chose to study seemed obvious to me; I already knew something about it. But could this knowledge not also create prejudiced assumptions on my part that would distort the accurate sociological picture that I wanted to present?

An examination of the literature allowed me to learn how other participant observers and insiders were affected by these issues. The experiences of other ethnographers were instructive in my dealing with these issues; or at least in making me feel that I was in good company with others who experienced research quandaries similar to my own. I have already touched upon the issue of participant as observer with reference to the work of Weissler.¹⁴ In the course of the accounting of my field work at Temple Beth Shalom I will from time to time again discuss and reflect upon my role as participant observer. With these issues in mind we now turn to a review of the literature pertinent to the research.

Review Of The Literature:

In conducting the literature review I focused first on ethnographies of religious institutions and groups in general; and then narrowed my search down to ethnographies of Jewish groups and religious institutions in particular. This provided me with a wide picture not only of what research had been taking place in this area but also some insights into trends in contemporary American religion in general.

A number of ethnographic studies of religious institutions other than synagogues; in this case church congregations in the United States, have been done. Jacobs and Kaslow for example, conducted a study of eighteen African American churches in New Orleans.¹⁵ In this study the authors examined the origins, rituals, and beliefs of African American religion. The authors provide detailed descriptions of the

rituals, worship services, belief systems and organizational structures of these churches. In the same way as these detailed descriptions were provided for a group of churches, I attempted to provide in my study similarly detailed descriptions of these aspects of a synagogue. As an added emphasis I examined the social encounters among individual members and how these encounters impacted on institutional functioning.

Immigrant Chinese churches in California; and the rhetoric used by the ministers in these churches, was subject to an ethnographic examination by Palinkas.¹⁶ The emphasis of this study was on the sermons of church ministers and the ability of these sermons to persuade congregants in the context of a changing socio cultural system. I also tried to look at the speeches given by the rabbi and the lay leaders of the synagogue under study. This was done not only with an emphasis as to how this rhetoric is used to persuade congregants; but also as to how strategies of rhetoric are employed so as to be effective in a situation of religious pluralism.

Ammerman as a participant observer for one year, studied a single Fundamentalist congregation in a middle class Northeast suburb.¹⁷ Ammerman examined the daily life of these mostly middle class church members and dealt with a wide variety of church activities; not only worship services. I endeavored to extend this kind of participant observer study of the varied activities of a middle class religious institution to include the members of a Conservative Congregation.

Reunion rituals such as family reunions, church homecomings, and camp meetings form a group of the "outdoor church" ethnographies that Kennedy studies in the context of American and Scottish

congregations.¹⁸ It was my aim to expand the types of activities described to include temple activities such as picnics, auctions, breakfasts, rummage sales, and softball games, which seem to have aspects of ritual reunions. These kinds of activities seemed to form a large part of the temple social involvements of a number of the members of the institution that I studied.

There are a number of ethnographies of cults and sects that give pictures not only of ritual activities but also of the lifestyles of the members of these groups. Ultra-Orthodox communities of Jews in the United States and in Israel¹⁹; The Children of God,²⁰; Pentecostals²¹; Catholic Charismatics²²; and 'flying saucer cults'²³ have all been the subjects of these studies. These ethnographies were similar to my study in that they examined religious groups not only from the point of view of religious worship services but also by looking at the totality of group social activities.

Goldsmith conducted a participant observation study on two African American churches located on the Georgia Coast.²⁴ Goldsmith examined how African Americans use denominationalism to mark out differences between themselves. I sought to focus attention on how the members of a Conservative congregation mark out the differences between themselves and Orthodox and Reform Jews.

A collection of ethnographies of ritual religious celebrations among sectarian American Jewish groups such as New York Hasidim and emigre Russian communities are found in a collection of essays by Kugelmass who deals with the experiences of researchers in these settings.²⁵ These studies, like the studies of the non Jewish groups are of

communities that are far from the mainstream of American Jewish communal life. My study also examined communal ritual religious celebrations including Purim, and bar and bat mitzvah events as did the ethnographers in Kugelmass' book. I however extended the field research to a mainline Jewish religious group.

I was able to find only one ethnography that dealt specifically with pluralism within a single religious institution. Warner using participant observation together with interviews and statistics gives an account of twenty years in the history of evangelicals and liberals in a small town California Presbyterian Church.²⁶ My study put the conflict between different religious groups in a pluralistic religious institution into a Jewish context. As part of the study of pluralism at Temple Beth Shalom I examined the possible points of conflict between "traditionalists" and "modernists".

Except for Warner who did study a mainline group, the very nature of the non-mainline groups being studied by the above authors however differentiate their studies from mine. In these groups religion plays a more total role in the lives of their members than it does in the lives of those in my study. These groups demand of their members a more extensive commitment to particular lifestyles and practices than does Temple Beth Shalom. My study attempted to build upon these other studies by examining the extent and nature of commitment in a pluralistic, mainline religious setting in which religion does not play such a total role in the lives of its adherents as it tends to do in cults and sects. Religion in a mainline setting, such as in Conservative Temple Beth Shalom tends to be for the member more of a part-time rather than

an all inclusive involvement. Part-time involvement and pluralism are intimately connected to one another. A few words on this relationship need to be given here.

As a religious organization requires greater commitment on the part of its members increasingly greater segments of the time and lifestyle of its members come under the purview of the organization. If for example a religious organization requires that its members follow certain codes of behavior outside of the context of congregational activities, conformity in these behaviors is encouraged and the opportunity for the expression of pluralistic behaviors are limited. Mainline Conservative Judaism puts no demands on what the individual does outside the context of congregational activities. True, there exists the Conservative interpretation of halacha, or Jewish law, in matters pertaining to ones behavior outside the Temple. But in the setting of a secular, democratic society there exists no legal basis for obtaining the individual's compliance with these laws. Not only this, but a Conservative synagogue such as Temple Beth Shalom puts no social pressure upon the individual to conform to standards of behavior outside of the on going congregational activities. This means that the congregants have lifestyles that are open to pluralistic commitments and involvements. **These extra-congregational commitments and involvements that take up a significant amount of the time and energies of the congregants cannot help but determine the varying intensities and types of part time commitments and involvements within the congregation.**

The relationship between part time religious involvement and pluralism will be focused on again later in the study when the multiple

identities of the congregants are examined. For now we will return to the literature review and give attention to ethnographies of synagogues and groups within synagogues. We will start with an ethnographic study of a modern Orthodox American synagogue; Synagogue Life: A Study In Symbolic Interaction. by Samuel C. Heilman.²⁷

My research had as its focus the belief systems, spiritual needs, religious practices and institutional involvements of a group of Conservative Jews who belong to a pluralistic institution. Although it could not be said that Heilman's synagogue members were completely homogeneous in the areas of belief, practice, or Judaic knowledge; they do stand in sharp contrast to the nominally Conservative although heterogeneous Temple Beth Shalom congregants. Heilman's subjects were all members of the Orthodox stream in American Judaism. The distinction to be drawn between the subjects of Heilman's study and of my own is between a denomination that officially denies the legitimacy of pluralism, (Orthodox) and one that does not, (Conservative). The Orthodox are not homogeneous, they just refuse to legitimate heterogeneity. Religious pluralism therefore did exist among these Orthodox congregants, but not to the extent as was the case among the members of Temple Beth Shalom.

Furman conducted an ethnographic study of a Reform congregation in California.²⁸ The main focus of Furman's study was how the congregation deals with the issue of Jewish identity. Pluralism, which to some extent does exist in the congregation is not dealt with.

Prell conducted an ethnographic study not of a synagogue but of a non denominational havurah, (a Jewish fellowship group that meets

regularly to pray or to study) that leaned towards Conservative.²⁹

These havurah members were a fairly homogeneous group in regards to age and socioeconomic status. The vast majority were young, (under the age of forty), graduate students, rabbis, or rabbinical students. This contrasts sharply to the middle aged or older status of most of the Temple Beth Shalom members and to the variations in their occupational statuses and levels of education.

The focus of Prell's study was on prayer and how the members dealt with the issue of prayer in a social context. My study examines prayer in the social life of the congregation but also seeks to build on this activity by examining the wide range of all synagogue activities that the members are engaged in such as education, social activities and the variety of organizations within the synagogue such as the mens and womens auxiliaries.

The study that in some ways came close to mine was the study of a Conservative havurah by Weissler.³⁰ Weissler, much like Prell, focused specifically on the religious participation of the members of the group under study. Even more specifically Weissler made clear the area of prayer that was to be the focus of her study. Weissler points out that:

Because of the centrality of Sabbath morning davening in the life of the Minyan, I have made it the focus of my study. Davening is the most highly valued expressive form the Minyan has created, and is indeed its raison d'etre.³¹

There were however a number of critical differences between the Weissler study and my own. For most of the members of Temple Beth Shalom, Sabbath morning davening did not appear to be the "raison d'etre" for temple membership. As noted before, in comparing my study to Prell's study, there appeared to be activities other than religious

services that many of the Temple Beth Shalom members regard as central to their synagogue membership

Weissler's havurah members, as was true of those in Prell's study, were generally young and well educated professionals. Many of those in this counter cultural religious fellowship, unlike most of the Temple Beth Shalom members had substantial Judaic backgrounds.

The very fact that those in Weissler's group were havurah members points to a high level of involvement with Judaism. The group that I studied was not a religiously "elite" group, attached to a synagogue as a havurah, but rather a synagogue membership in all of its diversity of knowledge, observance, and religious involvement. Weissler says of her havurah members level of observance that; "With very few exceptions, Minyan members kept kosher homes, tending towards a lenient or Conservative, rather than a stricter or Orthodox mode of observance."³² The members of Temple Beth Shalom, including those who were regular attenders at services represented a far wider range of ritual observance.

In concluding the literature review I would like to make the following summarizing point which should make clear the difference between my group and the others, and show why a study of my group was a necessary addition to the ethnography of religious institutions. My study focused on a mainline American religious group. Until now only Warner with his work on Presbyterians, and Furman with her work on Reform Jews have done this. I have added a Conservative synagogue to this body of ethnographic knowledge on mainline American religious institutions.

Looking Ahead

The study itself unfolds in six chapters. Chapter one traces the evolution of the Conservative Movement and Synagogue from its beginnings in nineteenth century Europe to present trends in America. Chapter two gives us a socio historical background of the Jewish communities of Greater New Haven, Hamden, and Temple Beth Shalom from the arrival of the first Bavarian Jewish settlers in 1840 until the present day. Chapters three and four deal in turn with the strategies of inclusion and separation which enable a pluralistic membership to coexist with one another. Chapter five examines the role of life cycle rituals, particularly the bar and bat mitzvah as a model for and a model of the Temple participation of the congregants. Finally, chapter six deals with the issues of Americanization, the formation of a Conservative identity, and the self definition of Temple Beth Shalom as a religious community.

The ordering of the chapters were done with a schematic purpose in mind. By going from a socio historical examination of the past to an ethnographic examination of the present it was possible to show the influence of ideas and trends in the Conservative Movement and synagogue, as well as in general society, on the actual behaviors of individuals in a contemporary congregational setting. The first two chapters therefore examine the past; the next three chapters were witness to the present. Finally, in order to find out what all this means to the congregants; how they define themselves and their congregation as Jewish, Conservative, American, and as a religious community, I devoted the last chapter to an examination of these multiple identities.

These identities however were not arrived at overnight; nor were they decided upon by a vote at a temple board meeting. These identities were the products of a process that stretched over both time and distance. We must begin this story then not in a suburban New England town, but in the Europe of the nineteenth century as we examine the origins of the Conservative Movement.

Endnotes:Introduction.

- 1.National Jewish Population Survey 1990. (New York:Council of Jewish Federations, 1991), p.37.
- 2.Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., s.v. "Conservative Judaism,".
- 3.Ibid. p.229.
- 4.Will Herberg, Protestant Catholic Jew. (Garden City:Doubleday,(1955), p.175.
- 5.Jack Wertheimer. "Recent Trends In American Judaism." In American Jewish Yearbook.(N.Y.:American Jewish Committee, 1989), p.138.
- 6.Marshall Sklare. Conservative Judaism:An American Religious Movement. (N.Y.:Shocken Books, 1972), pp.40-41.
- 7.For a brief comparison of these two prayer books see; Neil Gillman, Conservative Judaism: The New Century. (West Orange, N.J.:Behrman House, 1993).pp.80-81 and p.104.
- 8.Maurice Potosky and Martin S. Kunoff, "The United Synagogue Databank Survey:An Initial Report.", United Synagogue Review, vol.47, (1995) no.2, pp.20-23.
- 9.Martin S. Kunoff. Director, Department of Computer Operations. The United Synagogue Databank Survey. (phone conversation).
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- 11.Potosky and Kunoff (1995), p.21.
- 12.Potosky and Kunoff (1995), p.22.
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29. Riv-Ellen Prell, Prayer And Community: The Havurah In American Judaism. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).
30. Chava Weissler, Making Judaism Meaningful: Ambivalence and Tradition In A Havurah Community. (N.Y.: AMS Press, 1989).
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32. Ibid. p.71.

CHAPTER I: HISTORY OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT AND SYNAGOGUE

Introduction

Three themes have played a central role in the social development of the American Conservative Movement and Synagogue; (1) the efforts to maintain social cohesiveness among a Jewish religiously pluralistic membership, (2) the attempt at self definition as a religious community and the formation of a Conservative Jewish identity and, (3) the adaptation or acculturation of synagogue organization and religious practices to the norms of the host society. The basis for asserting that these particular themes have in fact played such a central role can be found in the amount of attention given to them in the literature on the social historical development of the Conservative movement.¹

These themes however are not particular to Conservative Judaism; they have also played a role in the development of the Orthodox and Reform movements in America. Orthodox Judaism in America is not a monolithic group, either in ideology or in practice. It encompasses various wings and trends that have been described by Heilman and Cohen as "traditionalist", "centrist", or "nominalist"². Reform Judaism has evolved from a movement that was clearly anti-traditionalist to one that now accepts a wider range of practice and belief, both innovative and traditional. This has broadened its appeal to a wider band of Jews thereby increasing the pluralism within the movement.³ Not only have Orthodox and Reform become more pluralistic but by virtue of this emergent pluralism they have had to grapple with the question of self-definition and their respective denominational identities. If there are

many outlooks within the movement then what does it mean to say one is Reform or Orthodox? How can a group identify itself as such if it is composed of a pluralistic membership?

The theme of Americanization is also not particular to the Conservative movement alone. American Reform has had as a primary goal from its very beginnings the Americanization of the synagogue organization and religious practices.⁴ The so-called modern Orthodox were chosen as the focus of Heilman and Cohen's' study precisely because the authors were; "... Intrigued by their struggle to adapt acculturation, to be both Orthodox Jew and contemporary American."⁵ A number of other authors also examine the theme of the Americanization of Orthodox Jews.⁶

If, then, these three themes of pluralism, identity/self definition and Americanization are common to all the major streams of American Judaism are there certain aspects of these themes that are unique to the Conservative movement? The answer to this question lies in the middle ground in which the Conservative movement finds itself between the Orthodox and Reform. Located in this middle ground of ideology and praxis, Conservative Judaism, its members and synagogues, present a wide band which includes all those positions between the Orthodox and Reform. The conflicts revolving around these themes are therefore particularly acute and offer a fertile ground for study as to how these conflicts are played out and resolved or not. Gillman says of Conservative Judaism that it;

"...shares the fate of all center movements. It exists in a state of perpetual tension, constantly pulled both to the right and to the left on any significant issue....More than Orthodoxy on the right and Reform on the left, it is a movement that is held together by

a consensus often on the edge of fragmentation."⁷

In order to understand how the Conservative movement developed the way it did we must go back to the environment that many European Jews, especially those in the west found themselves in starting during the last half of the 18th century. This was the beginning of the period of the Jewish emancipation and enlightenment to which we now turn.

Emancipation and Enlightenment

Conservative Judaism had its roots in the encounter of Judaism with modernity which began in Europe during the middle of the eighteenth century and was composed of two movements. These were the Enlightenment,(referred to as the 'Haskalah' in Hebrew), and the Emancipation.⁸ Gillman says of these two movements that they represent:

"...two faces of one process: the gradual integration of the Jewish community into the political, socioeconomic, cultural, and intellectual structures of European civilization. Enlightenment refers to the cultural or intellectual dimension of that process: Jews began to absorb the intellectual currents in the community at large, enter universities, and study new disciplines; they began to think like their European contemporaries, and more important, they began to apply these new ways of understanding to Judaism. Emancipation refers to the political dimension of the process: Jews became citizens of emerging national states... with the same rights and responsibilities as all citizens of those states."⁹

For the Jewish community this meant the possibility for the development of different approaches towards Judaism. This was because in areas where the Emancipation took hold, Jews no longer comprised a corporate entity subject to the official control of their community.

Individual freedom of choice concerning religious beliefs and observances made possible religious pluralism within the Jewish community.

Historian Jacob Katz describes this development as follows:

Everywhere the individual gained a certain amount of freedom in evolving or absorbing ideas and determining his conduct accordingly. Jews also gained this leeway in their relation to the community and the traditional values represented in it.¹⁰

The relationship between Emancipation, Enlightenment, and religious reform is quite complicated. All European Jews were eventually emancipated, but not all developed a Haskalah, or movement to religious reform. Emancipation meant that Jews could now choose by varying degrees to involve themselves as members of the nation states in which they lived without having de jure to become Christians. But there was a price to pay for integrating socially into the host nation states. Jews would have to change by either abandoning or adjusting their customs and traditions in order to gain acceptance as good citizens of these societies.¹¹ This situation elicited various religious responses from Jewish society. An initial response was that of the Reformers. Their approach was to westernize Jewish religious practices and beliefs in order to facilitate their integration into their host societies.¹² Consequently, the reaction to Reform was Orthodoxy which sought to maintain Jewish religious life as close to the tradition as possible and to resist the westernization and secularization that was now a viable option to the newly emancipated Jews.¹³ A third approach, that of Positive Historical Judaism, which is known today as Conservative Judaism arose in Europe and then in the United States in the latter half of the

nineteenth century. It is to Zacharias Frankel and the European origins of this movement that we now turn.

Frankel and Positive Historical Judaism

Among some of the Jewish reformers of the mid- nineteenth century in Germany there were those who felt that some of their number had gone too far in their attempts to accommodate Judaism to the then prevailing visible forms of Christian church society. One of these opponents was Zacharias Frankel who broke with his Reform colleagues decision, made at a Reform Rabbinical conference in 1845, that the Hebrew language was not a necessary part of Jewish worship. The use of Hebrew as part of Jewish worship was of great importance for the conferees on both sides of the issue. This was because of the symbolic value of the Hebrew language for the Jewish people. Gillman tells us that:

For the Jewish people, Hebrew represented kinship, a sense of belonging, a tie to the Jewish past and to every other Jewish community. It was a powerful symbol of Jewish nationhood. That is precisely why Frankel's pro-emancipation colleagues wanted to weaken its position in the synagogue service and why Frankel wanted to strengthen it.¹⁴

Frankel withdrew from the conference and issued a denunciation of what he felt were the extreme departures from tradition that were approved by the conference members.¹⁵ According to Rosenblum, Frankel did not start a new movement within Judaism; he rather developed a new theological approach to the religion. On this subject

Rosenblum says that;

While Frankel did not see fit to launch a new movement, he did insist on periodically expounding his new theological approach to modern Judaism, which he named positive-historical Judaism. This approach accepted the "historical" dimension that had been so enthusiastically embraced by the Reformers and which emphasized the evolutionary character of the change from generation to generation. It also insisted, however, that the "positive" dimensions of Jewish religion and ritual, the ones that offer continuity and recognizability, needed to be afforded greater emphasis than was being granted to them by the radical Reformers.¹⁶

Frankel believed that Judaism had undergone many changes throughout its history but that these changes happened naturally as part of the ability of living things to adjust to changes in their surroundings. For an individual organism this adjustment was part of the very process of life. For a people or a religion this process is what is commonly called "history". Therefore the term "Historical Judaism" came to represent Frankel's concept of Judaism. In acknowledgement that some Jewish practices were historical and not divine in origin Frankel wrote that:

An institution may also have become normative without benefit of higher authority, arising from ordinary life, from that which the piety of the people had elevated as a guiding principle. And once it struck root, it gained permanence.¹⁷

The Jewish people then would be the source of change and conservation in Judaism. Through a historical process Jewish beliefs and practices would evolve with the collective will of the Jewish people as the ultimate arbiter. The 'people' could of course be united in their will. This would work against diversity in ideology and observance. In fact Frankel seemed to believe that the 'will of the people' would be a

conserving force in Judaism as the following quote from his writings leads us to believe. Frankel wrote that the; "People... will not hurt itself and will not destroy its practices; its own sense of religiosity warns against it."¹⁸ Another possibility perhaps not foreseen by Frankel would be that the 'will of the people' would fragment and in the absence of any strong central legal authority become the source of a future pluralism in Conservative Judaism.

Frankel went on to become the dean of the first modern Jewish rabbinical seminary which was established in Breslau in 1854. This seminary functioned until 1938 when it was closed by the Nazis. By this time Conservative Judaism was well established in the United States. A look at the beginnings of this movement in the United States will serve to demonstrate the ties between Breslau and what later became American Conservative Judaism.

Beginnings of Conservatism in the United States: Sabato Morais And The Jewish Theological Seminary of New York

Sabato Morais, was born in 1823 and educated in his native Italy. He came to the United States in 1851 and spent most of his career years as a Reform cantor in Philadelphia. In 1886 Morais, with the support of a number of others from the more traditional wing of the Reform movement founded the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York. The organization of this seminary was in part a reaction to the issuance of what was known as the Pittsburgh Platform by a group of Reform rabbis in 1885, and was designed to form a bulwark against radical Reform.¹⁹ The

principles contained in this platform went further from Jewish tradition than did the European Reform movement of that time.

Grayzel, in writing of the origins of the Conservative movement as a reaction to Reform summarizes the main points of the Pittsburgh Platform as follows;

It emphasized the prophetic ideals of the Bible as against the regulations of the Talmud. It declared some of the Mosaic legislation no longer applicable, among these the dietary laws. It rejected a return to Palestine. It denied the expectation of a Messiah and substituted the hope for a messianic era, that is, an era of peace and perfection which would come to the world through cultural and scientific progress. It argued that the Jews were a group with a mission of spreading godliness among the peoples of the world.²⁰

This platform served as a rallying point for the Reform movement in America. It clarified for the Reformers the ideological points that defined Reform as a religious movement. It also served as a boundary marker between the radical and more traditional wings of the movement. For the traditionalist wing within the Reform movement; that is to say those who felt that changes in law, ritual, and belief had gone too far, opposition was now further solidified against those who would introduce radical changes in these areas. What was in the Pittsburgh Platform that the Seminary wished to combat was at center the outlook of these Reform rabbis which supported an ideological commitment to a Judaism of morality and ethics; but largely rejected a commitment to its traditional ritual and national components.²¹

Morais in one of his official addresses said that Jewish law in the Pentateuch could be divided into those laws having a local, and those laws having a general application:

Those comprised in the first category lose their force outside of Palestine; the others are obligatory elsewhere. But both, the former and the latter, being of necessity broadly formulated, needed in all ages an oral interpretation. The traditions of the fathers are therefore coeval with the written statutes of the Five Holy Books.²²

Morais, in line with the Breslau point of view was supporting the idea that the tradition was binding upon Judaism but at the same time the tradition itself recognized the need for various interpretations in the course of history. Morais was trying to uphold tradition while at the same time find points of agreement with reform. We see this in another of his statements:

Our Seminary has created itself a church militant, so to say, to fight skepticism arrayed against the history and the tradition that have rendered Israel deathless. Well meaning and un-wise orthodoxy tells us that by keeping altogether aloof from "Reformers"-as Jewish skeptics unwarrantably style themselves- we will guard our children from the effects of teachings subversive to Holy Writ. Isolation is an impossibility. It would be inadvisable if it were possible.²³

By attempting to incorporate both traditional and reformist orientations we see that the Seminary was opening the way for the development of a middle road and the accompanying problems of self-definition in what was to be the Conservative movement. Also the theme of Americanization was evident in the statements of the founders of the Seminary. Joseph Blumenthal a lay leader of the Seminary in its early days reflected on this when he exhorted the Seminary to a:

Strict adherence to an intelligent faith in our holy religion, allied to secular education and American citizenship...²⁴

The Seminary formed a base for a coalition which the founders

hoped would unite all those who opposed the type of Reform as exemplified by the Pittsburgh Platform. Gillman says of the Seminary founders that:

These men over a century ago saw American Jewry as divided into two large groupings, Reform, and everyone else. Their hope was that the Seminary would become the institutional center of the "everyone else" group. ...The "conservative" group of men who founded the Seminary followed the lead of early Reformers in trying to create a coalition. The unifying impulse behind this coalition was to fight Reform. To be a legitimate member of this coalition, one had to be firmly opposed to the growing radicalization of Reform as evidenced in the Pittsburgh Platform.²⁵

The precise way in which the Seminary fought this growing radicalization of Reform was to train Rabbis to head congregations which at the time were mostly either Reform or made up of newly arrived Russian immigrants.²⁶

This new seminary experienced great difficulties. To begin with very few congregations offered it any financial help. There were no Conservative congregations at the time and the Orthodox and Reform movements had their own congregations and institutions to which support was directed. There was also the suspicion of some of the Orthodox that the new Seminary; although calling itself Orthodox at first, really had a Reform agenda in mind, that is to introduce radical changes into Judaism but only to do it more slowly.²⁷

Only about a half dozen students were initially enrolled for the rabbinical program at the J.T.S. By 1901 the Seminary was nearly bankrupt and in danger of closing. Until the time of commencement in June of 1902 the Seminary had graduated only seventeen rabbis. Only two of these graduates eventually realized successful careers as rabbis. Of these two Joseph H. Hertz soon left America eventually serve as the

chief rabbi of the British Empire.²⁸

Support for the seminary, which enabled it to continue on a sound financial footing came from the German-Jewish leadership who were all solidly in the Reform camp. The reason why such a group as this would want to support a conservative seminary will help to underline the importance of the theme of Americanization in both the Reform and Conservative movements. According to Sachar a seminal factor in the growth of Conservative Judaism was the desire of both the veteran German Jewish Americans and the newly arrived immigrants themselves to integrate these eastern European Jews into American society.²⁹

These German Jews wanted to ease the adjustment to American life of the great waves of Eastern European Jews who began arriving in the United States at the beginning of the 1880s. Americanization would mean changes in outward appearances and lifestyles that served to mark these immigrants off from acculturated Americans. Many of the new arrivals maintained traditional religious practices and shtetl lifestyles as much as was possible in the new environment of America. Others lost the spiritual and traditional controls of the Eastern European Jewish community and this led to increases in crime and other social problems in the immigrant ghettos of America.³⁰

The driving motive of the German Jews in helping the acculturation of their Eastern European brethren was not purely altruistic. The German Jews felt that the entry of such visibly foreign Jews might fan the flames of anti-semitism in America. Realizing that the Jews coming from Eastern Europe were not interested in associating with the Reform movement; (and perhaps not wanting themselves to

associate with these new American Jews on a fraternal basis) the German Jews decided to support a cultural and religious middle ground between traditionalism and Reform. In 1902 a number of German Jewish notables headed by Cyrus Adler contributed the sum of five hundred thousand dollars for a Jewish Theological Seminary endowment fund.

The motivation of these Reform German Jews in supporting the Jewish Theological Seminary is given voice in an editorial in an 1891 issue of the American Hebrew. The editorial in part said that the Seminary;

... afford [s] the surest and safest means of handling the downtown problems of Americanizing the foreign element by sending among them trained and well equipped rabbinical teachers.³¹

Adler would look to England to find someone suitable to take on the task of training these rabbis.

Solomon Schechter and the Revived Jewish Theological Seminary

In 1901 Solomon Schechter, the internationally respected Cambridge lecturer in talmud was invited by Adler's search committee to direct the now renamed Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Schechter was chosen for this position because he was both a talmudic scholar and well versed in the outlook of 'wissenschaft', or scientific study. The foundations for the subsequent pluralism and congregationalism that are the characteristics of the Conservative movement in America were laid down in part at least, by Schechter who said that he envisioned the Seminary as becoming:

...a theological center which should be all things to all men, reconciling all parties, and appealing to all sections of the community...the school should never become partisan ground or a hotbed of polemics... On the contrary, the Seminary and its disciples should in some way participate in, and as it were, anticipate the mission of Elijah, that was to consist not only in solving the difficulties of the Torah, and removing doubt, but also in bringing back the forcibly estranged, arbitrating between conflicting opinions, and giving peace to the world.⁹²

To understand how the Conservative Movement would be able to include a wide band of members with differing beliefs and practices we should refer to, in Schechter's own words, his concept of **Catholic Israel**. Schechter said that:

This living body, (in whom is vested the authority to interpret tradition in order to adjust Judaism to its environment) however, is not represented by any section of the nation, or any corporate priesthood, or Rabbihood, but by the collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue... this Synagogue, the only true witness to the past, and forming in all ages the sublimest expression of Israel's religious life, must also retain its authority as the sole true guide for the present and the future.⁹³

Schechter's latitudinarianism which reflected the need to include a pluralistic American Jewry translated into the wide band of ritual policies that were instituted by the Conservative orientated congregations of that time. For example: Some congregations chose to maintain the Orthodox practice of separate seating for men and women. Most other congregations instituted mixed seating and also emphasized a greater American Protestant church like decorum in the public conduct during services. Other innovations among some, but not all of the congregations, were organ music, abridged services, and the use of English in ceremonies. All of the congregations however, retained the mandatory wearing of skullcaps for males and a basic core of Hebrew

prayers.³⁴ These last two items, the mandatory wearing of skullcaps and the basic core of Hebrew prayers seemed to be a 'sine qua non' for definition as a Conservative congregation because this differentiated them from the practices of the Reform in a very visible way.

In addition to the variety of approaches toward issues of ritual there also developed the tendency to avoid the confrontation of ideological problems. Sachar notes that:

Building on Schechter's conception of an all embracing "catholic Israel" the Conservative movement in effect took the position that it would simply avoid confronting ideological problems. So long as congregants accepted the central role of the peoplehood of Israel, as represented by the synagogue, they were free to compromise on issues of ritual. With this approach, it became possible for second-generation East European Jews, even the college graduates among them, to rationalize their identification with the synagogue. Whatever their theological misgivings, they might claim now that they were observing tradition for the sake of "Jewish Peoplehood."³⁵

This was the ideological basis for the pluralism of the Conservative movement and the Conservative synagogue in America. The conception of an all embracing "catholic Israel" and the non-confrontation of ideological problems meant that a membership that held widely differing beliefs and practices could find a common home in the movement. All those that fell within a wide margin of orientations toward Judaism would be accommodated in the movement, few would be considered beyond the pale.

The Founding of The United Synagogue of America

Despite the revival of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America under the directorship of Solomon Schechter and his success in

mustering the support of a number of sympathetic congregations of a conservative orientation there was not yet an official Conservative movement. Schechter began to organize the loosely knit consortium of synagogues that supported him into a framework for an future national organization. In 1913 twenty two congregations joined to form the United Synagogue of America; Schechter was its first president.

Schechter took steps to clearly separate the United Synagogue from the Reform movement; among these were eliminating from membership any congregations that worshipped with bare heads or used the Union Prayer book which was issued by the UAHC, the synagogue organization of the Reform movement. According to Raphael the most widely used prayer books in Conservative synagogues during the 1920s and 1930s were Song and Praise for Sabbath, Sabbath Prayers and the Standard Machzor. These prayer books contained English translations of the Hebrew text and offered the worshippers instructions for the service ritual in English such as at what points to stand, and when to respond in vocal unison to the prayer leader. Directions in English were crucial for enabling those worshippers who were not knowledgeable of Hebrew or with the service itself to participate in the worship. On the other hand Schechter sought to bring into the fold of the United Synagogue congregations that came from the widest band of religious practices who were not part of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,(UAHC).The United Synagogue had as its goals the furtherance of certain traditional observances such as Sabbath and dietary laws, traditional home rituals, the study of Hebrew language and literature and its use in worship; but not the creation of a new movement.³⁶

Schechter, in his address to the initial assembly of the United Synagogue clearly supported a great tolerance in diversity among constituent members. Schechter said that:

The scope [of the Union] is broad enough to admit of the cooperation of all synagogues that are devoted to the cause of the conservation of traditional Judaism, whether they style themselves Conservative or Orthodox. Yes, in view of the danger threatening the historic faith dear to Conservative and Orthodox alike, we regard it as a sacred duty that all such forces unite, irrespective of the differences which otherwise divide them. Such cooperation should not be construed as the organization's approval of all those innovations which some of its constituent bodies may have introduced. The purpose of this Union is to conserve all those positive elements which they have in common.³⁷

Holding on to or restoring a host of observances and traditions that catholic Israel accepted and were emotionally attached to was the way in which Schechter drew a line between Conservatism and the Reform movement. There would also have to be a way of differentiating Conservatism from Orthodoxy. To this end, Schechter rejected a specifically European form of Jewish tradition and insisted upon an Americanized approach to religious lifestyles and ways of thinking. In America Schechter sought to develop a movement that would "conserve" many of the sacred traditions while Americanizing the way in which they were performed. For example, and as noted above, the use of Hebrew and of head coverings in the worship service were to be retained, while at the same time English sermons and an American style of decorum, (such as that at Protestant worship services), were to be instituted and insisted upon. Schechter believed that in order for traditional Judaism to survive in the United States it would have to be Americanized through the United Synagogue. In an address given in 1913 Schechter concluded that:

...close observation for ten years and more has convinced me that, unless we succeed in effecting an organization, which loyal to the Torah, to the teachings of our Sages, to the traditions of our fathers, to the usages and customs of Israel, shall, at the same time, introduce the English sermon and adopt scientific methods in our seminaries, in our training of Rabbis and schoolmasters for our synagogues and Talmud Torahs, and bring order and decorum in our synagogues, unless this is done, I declare unhesitatingly that Traditional Judaism will not survive another generation in this country....³⁸

This meant the training of rabbis at the JTS who were committed to "scientific research", who preached sermons in English rather than in Yiddish, and who insisted upon American style order and decorum in worship services. There would also be an emphasis placed upon the publication of modern textbooks and in building a sophisticated and strong organizational structure as had been done by the UAHC.

Scientific research in the Jewish context meant the scholarly study of the Jewish religion and people. This 'Wissenschaft des Judentums' had its origins in the 1820s among young Jewish intellectuals at German Universities. These students had come from traditional homes and when exposed to university studies felt a great conflict between their traditional beliefs and scientific historical research. Some of these students eventually converted from Judaism while others became indifferent to it. Others though sought to preserve Judaism and reconcile it with modern scholarly methods.³⁹ Meyer tells us that:

Wissenschaft des Judentums created a bridge. Like the earlier and contemporaneous experiments with liturgical reforms, the incipient scholarly movement gave new shape to the inherited content of Judaism. In the former aesthetic considerations prevailed, in the latter scholarly ones. If in the temples Jewish worship was to some extent made to fit the model of the church, in the new scholarship Jewish literature was studied according to the model of university disciplines.⁴⁰

After the United Synagogue was established the number of its affiliate congregations began to increase dramatically. During the period from 1913 until the start of the Great Depression in 1929 the United Synagogue Movement had its greatest growth in the urban areas where most of the Jewish population lived. Wertheimer divides the history of the Conservative synagogue into three periods which he defines as; The Era of Urban Expansion from 1913 to 1929; The Era of Suburban Growth from 1940 to 1965; and Recent Trends from 1965 to the present. This will be used as the temporal framework for a discussion of sociohistorical developments in the Conservative synagogue during these years.⁴¹

The Era of Urban Expansion, 1913-1929

A scant decade after the founding of the United Synagogue by twenty two congregations, the movement grew to over 150 affiliates by 1923. By 1929 there were 229 congregations in the movement. This rivaled the 281 congregations of the Reform UAHC which had been organized forty years before the United Synagogue.⁴² This great growth in the number of Conservative congregations may be explained by the large numbers of Eastern European immigrants and their children who through a process of Americanization sought to leave traditional European Jewish styles of worship. At the same time, these new Americans felt uncomfortable with classical Reform which deviated sharply from what they were used to either in eastern Europe. They may have also felt socially out of place in the Reform temples which were dominated in many cases by wealthy old line German Jews.

The growth of Conservative congregations was not simply an across the board phenomenon of a growing American Jewish population reaching adulthood and deciding to affiliate with a Conservative synagogue. If this were the case then increased affiliation with Conservative synagogues would be proportional to Jewish population density. The affiliation of Jews with Conservative congregations was not always in proportion to the Jewish population of a particular area. For example, Chicago had as many United Synagogue affiliates as did the boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan even though these two boroughs in New York had almost five times as many Jews as did Chicago in 1917. By 1929 Los Angeles and Newark New Jersey had about the same number of Jews but Los Angeles had only one Conservative synagogue while Newark had five. Detroit, with 75,000 Jews had only one Conservative synagogue while the 53,000 Jews in Pittsburgh had five. There were fourteen Conservative congregations in Philadelphia, while in the Bronx with 150,000 more Jews there were only nine. The entire state of Maryland which had ten times the number of Jews as did bordering West Virginia had one Conservative congregation to West Virginia's three.⁴³

Wertheimer gives three possible reasons for these disparities including first and foremost the differential rates of the upward mobility and Americanization of the East European Jews. As immigrants and their offspring became economically successful they moved away from the ghetto neighborhoods and wished to found synagogues that would reflect their new social status. How rapidly this social mobility took place depended upon local economic and housing conditions. A second reason was the amount of exposure immigrants in a particular locality had to

American life. A shorter length of time in America, or the presence of a strong local immigrant culture would tend to slow Americanization and thereby work against the desire to affiliate with the Americanized United Synagogue. Wertheimer, through his studies of congregational histories also proposed a third possible reason for Conservative affiliation. This was that the role of key individual lay leaders and rabbis was often a significant factor in the decision to either affiliate an existing synagogue or add a new congregation to the Conservative movement.⁴⁴

During this era of urban expansion religious services that reflected both traditional Jewish and modern American values were being developed and instituted at United Synagogue congregations. Wertheimer uses the ten point program put forth by the founders of the Jamaica Jewish Center in 1922 as an illustration of much of the Conservative synagogue's religious program of that time;

I. Family pews; II. Conservative services in Hebrew and English; III. English preaching; IV. A Mixed Choir consisting of boys and girls; V. Congregational singing; VI. Two services on Fridays: the first at Sundown all year round, and the second at 8:00 o'clock for the fall and winter seasons only; VII. Confirmation exercises on Shevuoth; VIII. Observing the first and last two days of each and every holiday; IX. Eliminating all auctioneering of aliyoth and excessive mi-Sheberachs on High Holidays; X. Daily services, mornings and evenings when a permanent house of worship is established.⁴⁵

That these ten points were chosen for the religious program reflects both the drive toward Americanization on the part of the Conservative synagogue and also an attempt to please a religiously pluralistic membership. Family pews, English preaching, mixed gender choirs, congregational singing, the confirmation ceremony, and the elimination of auctioneering of aliyoth and excessive mi-Shebarachs

(public petitional or thanksgiving prayers for individuals) on High Holidays clearly brought the aesthetics of the Conservative service closer to that of the American Protestant church. The desire to establish daily morning and evening services and observing the first and last two days of each and every holiday were points that would please those who were more traditionally inclined. Certain of the points were compromises designed to please both traditional and reform minded members. For example, the services would be in English and in Hebrew; and there would be an early and a late Friday service.

The Conservative synagogue exhibited its pluralistic character in ways other than religious ritual. Increasingly women were becoming a larger part of the attendance at the weekly sabbath service. Wertheimer relates the accounts of two Conservative rabbis during this period:

Reporting on his congregation in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Louis Levitsky notes in 1936 that only a half-dozen men out of a membership of 250 did not go to work on Saturday. Although the Great Depression may have accounted in part for this stunning statistic articles written in the early 1920s already noted the emptiness of Conservative synagogues on the Sabbath because men were away at work. As a consequence, noted Rabbi Alter Landesman, "in many Conservative congregations...the proportion of women and children is very large on Saturday mornings."⁴⁶

But the fact that many of the men were away at work does not explain why the women went to the synagogue in the first place. There are at least three possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, women may have assumed the role of going to the synagogue in order to rear children in religion, in place of the absentee fathers who once fulfilled this function. Second, in what was a parallel to suffrage, women may have gotten the idea of taking on some of the other male prerogatives. And third, as a sign of conspicuous waste in the tradition

of Thorstein Veblen⁴⁷, men may have encouraged their wives to attend the synagogue in order to show the others in the congregation that they could afford to have their wives not work and go services.

The depression years of the 1930s and the war years of the 1940s created a standstill in the growth of synagogue building and membership. Many congregations lost members because of the difficulties individuals experienced in paying dues or other synagogue expenses. At the end of the Great Depression and World War II the Conservative synagogue experienced another era of dramatic growth. Now the Conservative synagogue entered into a middle class suburban setting.

The Era of Suburban Growth, 1940-1965.

In the postwar years Americans in large numbers moved from urban areas to the suburbs. Jews, especially those who were upwardly mobile were part of this shift in population. A great growth in Conservative congregations occurred in the New York city suburbs as Jews began leaving their neighborhoods in the five boroughs. Similar growth also began to occur in other metropolitan suburbs across the United States.⁴⁸

The movement of large numbers of Jews to suburban areas after WWII may be in itself enough to explain the sharp rise in the number of new congregations established. Statistics reveal this rapid growth of United Synagogue congregations. There were approximately 350 affiliated congregations at the end of the war. Within two decades this number

increased to 800. Most of these new congregations were located in suburbia.⁴⁹ But this is not enough to explain why these congregations chose to affiliate with the Conservative movement. Two explanations have been offered for the tendency of newly suburbanized Jews to establish Conservative, rather than Reform or Orthodox congregations in the initial stages of this movement to the suburbs. One reason, which was of a highly pragmatic and non ideological nature may have been that Conservative affiliation was looked upon as a middle of the road compromise that would include the broadest band of Jews and offend the fewest. This is in fact an essential element in the character of Conservative Judaism: inclusion of the broadest band of Jews, which makes for a pluralistic membership; and then the establishment of an ideology and practice that will offend the fewest so that group cohesiveness is maintained. This would be important for maintaining the sense of cohesiveness among the Jewish newcomers to the suburbs who initially at least were a minority in a non-Jewish setting. The establishment of a number of synagogues along denominational lines would have divided the Jewish suburban community and waste precious resources of time and money through duplication of programs.

Gordon in his study of Jews in the suburbs notes that in most cases from 1946 to 1956, the first synagogue in a new suburban community was typically Conservative. He believes that this would;

....indicate that the choice of denomination is often a compromise between extreme points of view. Seldom have I found a strong ideological belief which impels suburban congregations to organize as Conservative, Orthodox or Reform. Often the matter is decided by this strange kind of compromise in the interest of the total Jewish community.⁵⁰

Gordon quotes from an interview with one of the organizers of a Conservative congregation in a suburban community to illustrate this pragmatic choice of synagogue affiliation:

We asked our organizers what kind of synagogue they wanted. Some thought it ought to be Reform; others wanted an Orthodox synagogue, and a great number wanted the Conservative. We figured that the Conservative was 'middle of the road' and would not offend any group in the community. So we called it a Conservative congregation.⁵¹

Not only did the method of choice, (i.e. 'We figured that the Conservative was middle of the road' and would not offend any group in the community'), illustrate pragmatism on the part of the congregants. It also indicated the 'looseness' of the Conservative affiliation

Gordon's role as an insider may have influenced the objectivity of these conclusions. His description of suburban Jewish communities in the 1950s however were very useful in getting a picture of some of the social trends that may have shaped the social history of Temple Beth Shalom during this period. Notable among the trends that Gordon paid attention to was the pluralism of the suburban synagogue; choosing Conservative affiliation as a compromise between Orthodox and Reform; the role of the suburban synagogue as a community center; and the religious education of children as a central motive on the parts of Jewish parents for establishing and joining synagogues.

Wertheimer believes that an important motivation for the willingness to compromise may be found in the military experiences of the large group of Jewish men returning from WWII. In writing of this particular cohort Wertheimer states that;

Jewish men serving in the military during World War II had been exposed to an essentially Conservative worship service, even though most Jewish chaplains were not Conservative rabbis, because such a service was deemed most appropriate to the spectrum of Jews in the military. When these veterans returned to found new synagogues in the suburbs, they generally opted for Conservative synagogues as a fair compromise.⁵⁷

The very nature of suburbanization may have provided a key reason not only for these young transplanted urban Jews to affiliate with Conservative congregations; but also for their desire to belong to a Jewish congregation in the first place. In the move to the suburbs individuals left behind familiar neighborhoods and social ties. Especially for the Jews; many of whom left ethnic ghettos in the large cities, this transition may have created a crisis of belonging and identity. As part of a neighborhood with a predominantly Jewish population social ties with other Jews and a feeling of belonging to a Jewish community was possible without synagogue affiliation. Living in the suburbs however, meant a separation from family and familiar ethnic social networks and surroundings, and a series of new social beginnings. Furthermore, the high population density of Jewish neighborhoods by virtue of their being in urban areas meant that Jews would encounter each other on a daily basis through activities of daily living. In the less densely populated single family home suburbs these encounters were less likely to occur. In brand new suburbs that were a mixture of different ethnic groups new identities based upon common civic belonging would take some time to form. In older suburbs; that is to say previously existing small towns which later became suburbs, Jews may have found it difficult to identify with a civic entity dominated by a veteran non

Jewish leadership. The synagogue may have offered the only viable choice for identity maintenance and social belonging for the Jews newly arrived in the suburbs.

Conservative synagogues were especially suited to meet these social needs since they offered the suburban Jews a center for community social activities. It was typical of Conservative congregations to be organized as synagogue-centers and not only places for worship. These synagogue centers offered a wide range of social activities such as dances, sports, adult education, men's and women's auxiliaries and fund raising for a variety of causes. Wertheimer suggests that;

By offering these activities, suburban Conservative synagogues helped to diminish the loneliness of transplanted urban Jews living on the suburban frontier. They provided a communal setting for Jews who shared common generational experiences, as well as the trials and tribulations of geographic and socioeconomic mobility in postwar America.³³

Glustrom in his study of the Fair Lawn Jewish community in New Jersey during the rapid growth of synagogue-centers in the suburbs observed that;

The synagogue-center serves the most practical purpose for a suburban community, which cannot well-afford to support a community center apart from the synagogue. By providing a diversified program the synagogue center is able to enlist the support of large numbers who may be interested in only one facet of the program, but are required to support the entire institution.³⁴

The discussion of the Jewish migration to the suburbs in the postwar era has demonstrated that the desire to compromise between Orthodox and Reform and the desire to establish identity through a group that offered social activities with other Jews in the unfamiliar and often impersonal suburbs were key elements in the decisions of many of

the Jewish migrants to affiliate with a synagogue and to compromise on issues of congregational religious practice. These dual motivations of compromise and identity formation may have not only been central factors in the foundation of suburban synagogues but may also have played a key role in the subsequent maintenance of cohesiveness among their pluralistic congregations. It must be noted however that at times the "compromise" approach between the extremes of Orthodox and Reform may conceivably have become in itself "extreme" in its "middle of the roadness" and may have prevented the development of a clearly defined Conservative identity. The Conservative Movement has been described from within the ranks of its leadership as being:

... a 'catch all' for the dissatisfied, a conglomeration of many needs, pluralistic in approach to the extreme, boasting a left, a center and a right, a tepid orthodoxy and at the same time a timid reform.⁵⁵

By 1965 there were 830 congregations affiliated with the conservative movement. This represented a more than four-fold increase from the 200 affiliated congregations in 1940.⁵⁶ The era of suburban expansion was now over, synagogue growth came to a halt. This was because the move to the suburbs of the returning WWII veterans had been largely completed. Also many of the children in these families had already either had their bar/bat mitzvah or had at least entered the synagogue run hebrew schools which were primary reasons for joining synagogues to begin with.⁵⁷

This brings us to consider the recent trends in the Conservative movement and in the Conservative synagogue.

Recent Trends In Conservative Judaism 1965- Present

A number of recent trends have become evident in the Conservative movement and in the Conservative synagogue in recent years. These trends may be looked upon as manifestations of the broad themes of pluralism, Americanization, and the attempt at self definition and identity formation which have always been characteristic of the Conservative movement in the United States.

Present Day Factions Within The Conservative Movement

From its beginning the Conservative movement has comprised what Rosenblum describes as ;"...a broad coalition of liberal, moderate, and traditional Jewish constituencies."⁵⁸ In fact until the 1960s the Rabbinical Assembly, which is the international organization of Conservative Rabbis, would alternate its presidential choices between traditionalists,(those who subscribed to a more literal,traditional interpretation of Halacha), and liberals,(those who believed in a more innovative interpretation of Halacha that would be heavily influenced by developments in present day society). A recent trend in the Conservative Movement has been an increased polarization between these left and right factions.

The Right Wing

Conservative Judaism as well as the other denominations have been affected by social trends occurring in American society in general. The Conservative movement has attempted to keep a centrist position relative to Orthodoxy and Reform; but has come under pressure from competing segments within the movement that has made this increasingly difficult over the last two decades. Among the strains in the Conservative coalition that Wertheimer identifies are; the ideological gaps between the seminary and the rabbinate; the gaps in knowledge and practice between the rabbis and their congregations; and the continuing polarization of the left and right wings especially over women's issues of ritual participation and rabbinical ordination. Wertheimer illustrates in great detail how the issue of women's ordination has become both a symbol and a catalyst for the polarization between Conservatism's left and right wings.⁵⁹

The right wing faction has coalesced around its opposition to egalitarianism and has threatened to secede from the movement over this issue. Pluralism then seems to have its limits even in the Conservative Movement which tends to encompass a wide band of ideology and practice. In the Conservative Synagogues themselves however, limits may be different than those in the Movement. The Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, (UTCJ) was formed in 1983 by rabbis and lay people as a reaction to the decision of the Rabbinical Assembly to ordain women. The UTCJ had its origins in earlier pressure groups that opposed attempts to change the status of women in religious law. The UTCJ came to widen its agenda so as to also represent those Conservative Jews who felt that the movement had gone too far from

tradition by instituting changes in the liturgy by the adoption the prayer book 'Sim Shalom' by a number of Conservative synagogues. Sim Shalom was considered far too innovative by the UTJC because of changes in the wording of the liturgy that went toward a more liberal interpretation of ideology. The UTCJ went so far as to establish a separate Panel of Halakhic Inquiry which renewed the objection to the ordination of women rabbis and the counting of women in the minyan.

The UTJC recently took steps that seem to have put it on the path of breaking away from the Conservative movement. In 1990 it founded the Institute for Traditional Judaism, a new nondenominational rabbinical assembly. In that same year it also dropped "Conservative" from its name, now calling itself "The Union for Traditional Judaism." By the late 1980s the UTJ had reached a membership of 500 rabbis, (including 150 Orthodox who identify with this movement and 5000 lay families.⁶⁰

The Left Wing

The left wing of the Conservative movement has, in recent years become active around the issue of the religious status of homosexuals. It may be that this issue has become the focus of the left wing of the Conservative movement because other issues such as civil rights, social justice, and peace have faded to the background in American society in recent years having been won by the left. A struggle has arisen over the employment of homosexuals in positions of religious leadership in Conservative congregations. In 1990 the Rabbinical Assembly passed a

resolution that declared opposition to discrimination against homosexuals. The resolution also stated its welcome of "all Jews", including gays and lesbians as members of Conservative congregations. In 1991 the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly; which is delegated by the Conservative Movement to interpret issues of Jewish law, proceeded to deal with the question of the employment of openly avowed homosexuals in religious positions. On one side of the subsequent debate were those who pressed for the complete acceptance of homosexuality as an expression of love equally as valid as that of heterosexuality. The opposing position, which was strongly supported by the chairman of the Law Committee, Rabbi Joel Roth; was one of definite opposition to homosexual behavior and was based upon halacha. The committee adapted a set of principles that were pretty much in line with Roth's position. It held the biblical condemnation of homosexuality as valid but at the same time gave local rabbis the authority to hire homosexuals as teachers and youth leaders.⁶¹ The most recent declaration of the Rabbinical Assembly Commission on Human Sexuality was issued in May of 1994 and concluded that;

"...the Commission recognized the source-based prohibition of homosexuality in our tradition—a prohibition which has been expressed biblically and retained historically. None of us is prepared to ride roughshod over this position.

Even so, many of us also felt the powerfully competing pull of our collective rabbinic conscience which is also rooted in traditional values. This conscience has impelled not only our Assembly but also our Movement's laity to advocate support for the civil and legal rights of gays and lesbians as well as their right to feel welcome in our synagogues."⁶²

We see in this declaration a compromise between the right and left

wings. On the one hand there is the affirmation of the traditional prohibition of homosexuality which is based in Scriptural sources. On the other hand there is the support for the civil and legal rights of homosexuals, "as well as their right to feel welcome in our synagogues". There are also in this declaration words which hearken back to Schechter's' concept of a 'catholic Israel'. As part of the justification for homosexual rights and their welcome in the synagogue the Commission draws upon the support of the 'laity'. Not alone does the Commission innovate, but with the support of the membership, or 'catholic' Israel.

We now move from ideological diversity to a diversity that can be witnessed in the day to day functioning of synagogues, this is the diversity of activities and institutional need. It is a pluralism that is typified by the shifting interests of the synagogue members themselves.

Pluralism and the Shifting Interests of Synagogue Members.

Pluralism in the Conservative Movement may not only be defined as ideological diversity, but also as diversity of activity and institutional need. These different types of pluralism are not equivalent. Ideological diversity involves peoples religious beliefs and ritual practices such as beliefs concerning God and revelation, and to what extent and in what manner are Halachic laws observed. Diversity of activity and institutional need relates to the types of Synagogue programs that the members desire, and that the institution provides for

them. Here we are dealing with the kinds of social activities and educational activities that the congregants want, if they want them at all. Is there a need for support groups for the bereaved, for the divorced, for those with non-Jewish spouses, for parents with pre-schoolers, for those who want to learn to follow the prayer service in Hebrew? Of course one can see an overlapping of ideology and emphasis of activity; for example, expanding social activities rather than participation in communal prayer is in itself an ideological commitment to the synagogue as a community center rather than the traditional house of prayer. The picture of pluralism therefore becomes more complex with ideology competing with ideology, activity competing with activity, and ideology and activity needs competing with each other for resources and attention.

In order to hold on to a pluralistic membership the Conservative synagogue has to have been flexible enough to fulfill the varied religious and social needs of its congregants. The varied needs of a pluralistic membership also change over time. These needs may change as a result of demographic shifts in the composition of the membership based on age, socioeconomic status, gender, family structure, geographic mobility, rate of intermarriage or other social trends that impact upon members lifestyles and relationship to religion. All of these changes in the Conservative synagogue must be looked upon not only as having their causes within these institutions but also as being affected by developments within American society as a whole. Sklare writes that;

Changes in Judaism have their origin in changes in the lives of Jews. Since these changes result from the interaction between Jews and non-Jews, the nature of the general American community becomes one of the determining forces.⁸

The aging of the WWII generation and the delayed age for marriage among many of the baby boomers are one illustration of Sklare's argument. Another illustration as to how trends in American society play themselves out in the Conservative movement and synagogue is the gender issue of egalitarianism. First, we will take a look at the issue of age and marriage patterns and how they have created a need for greater diversity of activities in the Conservative Synagogue.

Seniors, Boomers, and Singles: Pulling The Synagogue In Different Directions.

A 1979 study by Charles Liebman and Saul Shapiro found that the greatest number of Conservative synagogue members were in the age group of forty six to sixty. There were many less members in the twenty six to forty five age group. These researchers concluded from the study that this development was not unique to Conservative Jews.

...although American Jewry, in general, is aging, the membership of Conservative synagogues is aging even more rapidly. Put differently, Conservative synagogues were simply not retaining the allegiance of their younger people. Instead they were populated mainly by Jews who had come of age during the great postwar expansion, a cohort that had reached late middle age by the end of the 1970s.⁶⁴

If we turn to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey we see a continuation of this aging trend among the Jewish population. In the Northeast for example where over forty percent of the American Jewish

population is located⁶⁵, a little over thirty one percent of these Jews are over the age of sixty five.⁶⁶

This aging of the Conservative synagogue membership that became significant in the late 1970s has been somewhat offset by another demographic trend of the 1980s and 1990s. Wertheimer tells us that;

Members of the 1960s generation who deferred marriage and child rearing (as well as joining a synagogue) are belatedly starting families and seeking congregations in which to raise and educate their children. Although conclusive data are not available there is evidence that Conservative congregations are gradually attracting younger people. In some cases, congregations located in new sunbelt communities or in recently constructed subdivisions are attracting primarily young families, much as the Levittown type of congregations did that were founded during the postwar suburban boom. In other cases, existing congregations have developed programs to attract singles and young couples.⁶⁷

Older members have meant a more pluralistic membership in terms of pastoral and social needs due to the deaths of spouses and the increasing disabilities which are likely to occur at this stage of life. Groups for senior citizens and widows or widowers now began to appear on the social club landscape of synagogue activities. At the same time the growth in families with young children has meant that congregational run play groups, day care centers, and new Hebrew school classes must share space with these senior groups in the same synagogue buildings. In many congregations young singles and the divorced must be taken into account when programming for social activities. Having large representations from three generations in single congregations has created a potential for conflict over space, financial resources, and the general social attention given to these constituent groups. Gender issues offer us another example of how new Conservative Jewish agendas developed and became part of the

Conservative Jewish scene.

Women's Issues: Increasing Rights and Involvements Egalitarianism in the Area of Ritual Activities

Starting in the 1970s Conservative congregations began introducing changes in synagogue participation beyond the already existing shared pews that brought women closer to a position of equality with men. This was a result of a strategy on the part of the congregations to attract younger members and also a result of the general women's liberation movement in America during this period. This is not to say that in Conservative congregations before this time women did not always participate in synagogue life to a greater extent than their Orthodox counterparts. Already by the 1950s separate women galleries had been eliminated in most Conservative synagogues. Women however were not permitted to share equally in the rituals of synagogue worship such as being called up for an "aliya" to the torah; to read from the torah; to lead services; or to be counted as part of a "minyan" or prayer quorum.⁶⁸

During the 1970s and 1980s the status of women in both synagogue ritual and administration has continued to move toward increasing involvement and equality,^{69, 70}. This has meant more pluralistic congregations in terms of women assuming active roles in ritual performance and in the formulation of temple policies.

Pluralism in the Conservative Movement has also manifested itself in the two opposing trends regarding prayer and ritual in the

synagogue. On one side is the classic Conservative trend towards the Americanization of synagogue prayer and ritual. More recently there has developed a counter trend of a return in the direction of a more traditional style which has characteristics of the eastern european or immigrant generation American 'shul'. A look at these trends will give us an example of the confluence of pluralism with the issues of the self definition and Americanization of the Conservative synagogue.

Returning To Traditional Forms of Worship: Who Are We?

One of the goals of the early Conservative movement in the United States was to bring American style decorum into the worship service. This decorum, being American in form was modeled after that of the Protestant church. Rabbis were to deliver "sermons" and dress in black robes. The late Friday night service with its heavy use of English was to be given an important place as an alternative to the traditional service held on Saturday morning which is a work day for many congregants. Organs were brought into many synagogues and traditional styles of "davening"; the Yiddish term for a face paced recitation of prayer only loosely in synch with the rest of the worshippers and involving much swaying back and forth, gave way to a more restrained form of "worshipping".

Recently however there has been a counter trend toward traditional worship and ritual forms. This too differentiates classical conservatism from the form it has taken in the present. Wertheimer speaks of the new kinds of programs that Conservative synagogues have

been developing in order to broaden their appeal to those congregants who want to return to at least some of the traditional aspects of Jewish worship. To begin with, Wertheimer observes that;

....efforts have been made to foster a less formal atmosphere in the synagogue and to return to more traditional concepts of Jewish worship. Symptomatic of such efforts were innovations adopted by Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York, the oldest continuously functioning Conservative synagogue in the United States: During the 1970s, the synagogue ceased to employ an organ and "encouraged Jews to daven rather than worship." In many congregations rabbis opted for a less formal role, both by ceasing to dress in black robes and by using their time at the pulpit to teach, rather than deliver a sermon. In addition, a perceptible shift occurred in the focus of Sabbath programs, with congregations downplaying late Friday evening services and emphasizing Sabbath morning services instead. All of these trends indicate a return to traditionalism and a rejection of churchlike behavior...

What accounts for these trends, why do some congregants want to return to at least some of the aspects of traditional worship? Wertheimer offers some possible answers to this question. The return of some Conservative Jews to tradition may be a rejection of what is perceived to be the churchlike behavior in American synagogues, a phenomenon not limited to Conservative synagogues alone. Also, possibly, according to Wertheimer:

...Jews feel so at home in America that they are willing to reinstate rituals regarded as too old-fashioned and alien by earlier generations.¹²

The review of the history of the Conservative Movement and synagogue has brought us to a point at which we see that some Conservative Jews have apparently felt so acculturated to American society that they are willing to go back to traditional styles of religious expression. This is ironic in that one of the original goals of the

Conservative Movement was to Americanize the newly arriving waves of eastern European immigrants. Perhaps though, this recent desire to return to ethnic roots is, in itself part of a wider trend in American society of a renewed interest in ethnic identification. To conclude this chapter the way must be pointed to the next task of the research, which will be to examine the social history of the group of Jews in Hamden who make up Temple Beth Shalom and whose history has been a part of the overall history of Conservative Jews which was examined in this chapter.

Conclusion

Three themes which were shown to have played a central role in the development of the Conservative Movement and Synagogue were presented at the beginning of this chapter. The themes were those of pluralism, identity formation, and Americanization. The history of the Conservative Movement and Synagogue was focused through these themes and the central roles of these themes in the development of movement and synagogue were illustrated. Since however, this research is an ethnographic study and not primarily a study of Conservative ideology or history there is of necessity a transition to be made from ideology and historical development to an ethnography of the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom.

The goal of the research is to show how these themes are played out in the daily interactions of the members of a particular Conservative synagogue. How are these themes reflected in the actual words, actions,,

conflicts, and compromises of the members with each other? Can we find in their social interactions echoes of what has gone before in the development of Conservative Judaism? Can the impact of the three themes; pluralism, identity formation and Americanization be **seen** at a Shabbat service, at a Temple breakfast, interfaith blood drive, or at a bar mitzvah? Can these themes be **heard** in the Rabbi's sermons, in the bar/bat mitzvah speeches, or in the gossip of the congregants in the temple parking lot? But first, we must make the passage from history to the present.

Temple Beth Shalom must be placed in a regional context in order that we understand what will be heard and seen there. The surroundings in which Temple Beth Shalom finds itself acts like a prism that bends our three themes in such a way that not only do they tell us something about the Conservative Movement and Synagogue in general; but also tell us something about what is unique to a particular synagogue in a particular New England town. Keeping our three major themes in front of us we will now proceed to the next chapter and sharpen our socio historical focus on Temple Beth Shalom as a case study of these themes in the Conservative movement and synagogue.

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CHAPTER II: SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF NEW HAVEN, HAMDEN,
AND TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

The Social History of the Greater New Haven Jewish Community

Settled by English colonists in 1638 the city of New Haven, Connecticut currently with a population of approximately 128,000, lies on the Atlantic Coast roughly midway between New York City and Boston.¹ Not until the 1750s did a few individual Jews and their families arrive in the area. These early arrivals were mostly merchants and peddlers who did business in the area. Since the nature of their business kept them moving from place to place they did not set up any Jewish communal institutions such as synagogues, cemeteries, or mutual aid societies. More permanent Jewish settlers began to arrive from Bavaria in about 1840. By 1843 enough of these German Jews had arrived in order to constitute a 'minyan' or prayer quorum of ten adult Jewish males and establish Congregation Mishkan Israel. This was New England's second Jewish congregation after the congregation in Newport Rhode Island which was established in the previous century.² Mishkan Israel followed Orthodox ritual until the 1870s when it began to adopt Reform practices such as mixed seating, the abolition of second days of holidays and most notably the use of Isaac Meyer Wise's new prayer book, the Minhag America, literally the 'American rite'. During the 1870s Mishkan Israel formally affiliated with the Reform movement.³

Only two other aspects of the history of Mishkan Israel are relevant for the purposes of our study. The first relevant historical development was that Mishkan Israel was, along with many of the

original congregants of Temple Beth Shalom, part of the general post World War Two movement of Jews out of New Haven and into the surrounding suburbs, particularly Woodbridge, Orange, and Hamden.⁴ After a series of moves out from the center of New Haven Mishkan Israel moved eight miles north to Hamden in 1960 to become one of Hamden's two synagogues.

The second aspect of note is that over the years Mishkan Israel gained a reputation for being the champion of progressive and even radical social causes. This was highlighted by the personalities members invited to speak at the synagogue such as Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King and Alger Hiss.⁵ As we shall see later in the study this was a factor in socially differentiating Mishkan Israel from Temple Beth Shalom which never possessed such a radical social agenda.

The next group of Jews to arrive in New Haven were the immigrants arriving from Russia in February 1882 in the wake of anti-Jewish pogroms. These Jews were followed by a steady stream of compatriots. By 1887 there were about 3,200 Jews in New Haven. During the 1890s the Jewish population grew to about 8,000 and then had another spurt of growth as a result of the refugees created by the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. By the outbreak of World War I in Europe the Jewish population of New Haven had reached about 20,000, most of whom were 'ostjuden'; Jews from eastern Europe rather than from Germany.⁶

It appears that at least two factors played major roles in attracting Jews to New Haven. As early as 1881 New Haven was a major production center of the world corset industry. The major corset

manufacturers in the city were Jews who had been part of the German Jewish immigration of the 1840s to 1860s. Meyer and Strauss employed 1200 workers; I. Neumann employed 600; Heilner and Strauss employed 600 and Isaac Strauss another 500 workers.⁷ The Strauss Adler Co., also corset manufacturers was the largest Jewish owned business in New Haven in 1890. Many Jewish immigrants got their first jobs in America by working for this company.⁸

New Haven itself was an economically booming town in the 1880s and 90s as its industries expanded. Some of the major manufacturers at this time were Winchester (firearms); Sargents Hardware; J.F. Goodrich (carriages) and Bigelow Boilers. These industries were reluctant to hire Jewish immigrant workers. This may have been because of anti-semitism which was at least partially driven by the fear that among the Jewish immigrants from Russia were a large number of socialists and communists who would foment labor unrest if given a chance to work in the factories.⁹ The non Jewish workers that were hired however created a niche for Jewish shopkeepers to establish businesses and to sell them goods.¹⁰

In addition to the opportunities for earning a living New Haven was easily accessible by the direct railroad line that connects the large East Coast cities from Washington through Baltimore, Philadelphia New York and Boston. This meant that Jewish immigrants who originally settled in the crowded Jewish areas of the large cities could seek opportunities in the smaller towns along the railroad routes and still maintain at least a minimal contact with the families and neighborhoods that they left behind.

From the 1890s to the present the Jewish population of New Haven fanned out to the western edges of the city or to the suburbs as their economic lot improved and as part of the general white flight from areas settled by blacks.¹¹ The Jewish community in Hamden started from this movement to the suburbs, and it is to the early history of the Jewish community in Hamden that we now turn.

The Early Days of Jewish Settlement in Hamden

The town of Hamden with a population of about 52,000¹², including an estimated 5,000 Jews¹³; was incorporated in 1786 and borders on New Haven as its northern suburb. The first group of immigrants to come to the town were from England. The population in the town was composed mainly of those of English ancestry until the 1840s. From that time until the end of open immigration to the United States in 1920 the Irish, and then the Italians, made up a large part of the newcomers to the town. Some of the immigrants from these two groups came directly from Europe to work in the stone quarries and saw mills that dotted Hamden in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Others, who originally settled in New Haven, became prosperous and moved to the more spacious suburb of Hamden.¹⁴

According to interviews with a number of long time Jewish residents of Hamden and New Haven very few Jews lived in Hamden prior to the postwar period. The few Jews living in Hamden prior to this time who were affiliated with a synagogue belonged to one of the congregations in New Haven. Until 1935 there was no public high school

in Hamden; Hamden students attended the public high school in New Haven. As a result of this Jewish social life for the few Jews living in Hamden consisted of activities in New Haven. An interview with one of the founding members of TBS who was a teenager living in Hamden in the 1930s illustrates this point:

Where did I go to meet other Jews? Sure, I always went to New Haven. Hamden didn't have a high school, so we all went to Hillhouse High School. There were plenty of Jews at Hillhouse at the time, you know, from Legion Avenue. Even after my parents moved from New Haven they still belonged to Beth El, [a Conservative Synagogue in New Haven at the time]. There were some youth clubs there and all the kids knew each other.

After WWII Jews came to Hamden in greater numbers. These Jews originated from basically two geographical locations. Quite a few came from the original three block square first zone of settlement area of New Haven known as "Legion Avenue". In the middle of the 1940s Jews from the first area of settlement in the Legion Avenue area began to move out to the roomier and more expensive fringe areas of the city. This move to outlying areas was typical of Jews from first areas of settlement especially in the postwar era.(see chap. 1, p.42). The Westville section of New Haven was known as the "Golden Ghetto". The public high school that served this area offered Hebrew as a foreign language and employed a full time Hebrew instructor. Now the school is predominantly African American. As the New Haven schools became integrated starting in the 1950s many Jews, along with other whites moved out of the fringe areas of New Haven and into the surrounding suburbs including Hamden. In the minds of older New Haven area Jews "Legion Avenue" takes on a powerful mythical quality. It was a neighborhood of pushcarts and bagels, smoked herring and Jewish bakeries. Yiddish was spoken on the

streets and every street seemed to have a small Jewish house of worship. The area thrived until the early 1950s. Then, after two decades of urban decay the Legion Avenue neighborhood ceased to exist not only as a Jewish area but also in the physical sense. This came about through the movement of the children of the immigrants to the suburbs, the race riots and fires of 1967, and finally by the urban renewal initiated by Mayor Richard Lee in the 1960s. With federal money as part of the "Model Cities Program" the neighborhood was leveled to make way for a highway connector that was never completed. In place of the old Jewish enclave are square blocks of empty lots covered with dry sandy soil and a few clumps of bushes and grass. The nostalgic myth of "Legion Avenue" is the New Haven version of New York's Lower East Side. In talking with some of the old timers who lived there I got the feeling that the destruction of this neighborhood and its transformation into desert like lots by Mayor Lee was for them the local version of the destruction of Jerusalem and the leveling of its walls by Titus. In the words of one of the old timers who grew up in the Legion Avenue area in the 1930s:

We were poor alright, but it was safe, you could leave the door open all day and night, it didn't matter, nobody would hurt you It was real Jewish, the stores, the shuls. Then Mayor Lee came and started to put in the highway connector, that was around the time of the riots when the blacks burned down whatever the city didn't knock down. That's progress, now you can't even get a good piece of pickled herring anymore.

Not all the Jews who came to Hamden originated in New Haven. Another group of Jews came from out of town. Many of them were from New York. They came to take jobs in local industries or as clerical workers in one of the local hospitals or at Yale University,

headquartered in New Haven. Because of the anti-semitic and exclusiveness policies of Yale the doctors and professors would not arrive until the 60s and 70s. A brief discussion of anti-semitism at Yale should be appropriate at this point.

Anti Semitism at Yale

Dan A. Oren in his historical study of Jews at Yale tells us that during the first half of this century at the Yale School of Medicine not only were admissions of Jewish students curtailed but in addition:

Prospects for Jewish faculty were also poor. A conscious policy of the 1930s was to keep German refugees away from Yale.American-born or -raised Jews had dim prospects as well. The unwritten rule was that a Jewish teacher should not hope for promotion beyond the rank of associate professor.¹⁵

By the 1960s and 1970s this situation had changed dramatically toward greater acceptance of Jewish faculty at Yale. This was part of a national trend that was influenced by the Second World War. The mass mobilization of the nations human resources for this conflict threw together people from many social backgrounds and religions. In a war situation the abilities of individuals tended to be valued more than family connections; American society was moving toward a meritocracy. In addition, the G.I. Bill gave many of the non-rich, including Jews, the financial means to attend elitist schools such as Yale. Finally, since the enemy nations in World War Two were racist and in the case of Germany anti-semitic; racism and anti-semitism became less acceptable in American society.¹⁶ This changed situation was reflected in the increased number of full professors at the various Yale faculties

starting at the close of WWII and continuing up to the present.¹⁷

This consideration of the relationship between Greater New Haven, Yale and the Jews was articulated via the issues of anti-Semitism and exclusiveness. It will be useful to keep this historical background in mind since, as we shall see shortly, exclusiveness and anti-Semitism were also factors in the process of the Americanization of the local Jews.

Now after our discussion of the origins of Hamden's Jewish community we turn our attention to what happened when the out of towners and the Legion Avenue Jews found themselves together in Hamden during the early post WWII era.

The Jews of Hamden: A Search For Identity

Most of the Jewish, as well as the non Jewish newcomers to Hamden, including those from New Haven, and from further away were young WWII veterans and their families. In Hamden, as well as in suburbs across the nation developers had bought tracts of land cheaply and were putting up small one family houses. Mortgage rates for veterans were low. In Hamden FHA loans through the local banks were being made at around 2 percent interest.¹⁸ In addition the town of Hamden gave a big reduction on local property taxes for veterans. Perhaps this was a way of showing them thanks for their service in the war, as a way to get votes in local elections, or simply to make money for developers.

Because there was a mix of Jews in Hamden from different areas of origin and because homes were mostly single family and not very

densely concentrated; many of these newcomers, especially those without families in New Haven, had no contact with other Hamden Jews. One of the founders of the Hamden Jewish Community Center who came from out of town said in an interview that:

We didn't know anybody. I mean any Jewish people. We had nice neighbors but they were all Italian or Irish. Later on I found out that there was another Jewish couple on the next block, but this was only when I met them at a meeting (to organize the Hamden J.C.C.) We were lost out here. Hamden, it was the end of the world, full of apple orchards. But we came because my husband got a good job in New Haven working for one of the tool factories. Houses in New Haven proper were too expensive, except the ones in run down areas. Hamden had brand new homes at good prices.

From the above comment we get the impression that although this woman missed being in close proximity to other Jewish neighbors, and from this point of view regretted the move to mostly non Jewish Hamden; economic considerations superseded Jewish ones. That is to say, although Hamden had few Jews; it had good houses at reasonable prices and access to job opportunities.

The stage was now set for the founding of a Jewish organization. Young families had arrived from New Haven and from out of town. They felt socially isolated, as suburbanites, and as Jews. Still they came to Hamden because it was a step up for better jobs, better homes, and open areas for their children to play in; in short, the American Dream. This was the generation of Jews that grew up in Jewish neighborhoods such as Legion Avenue in New Haven, the Lower East Side of New York or their counterparts in other cities with sizable Jewish populations. Perhaps it can be said that if these people had really cared about

'Jewish community' they wouldn't have come to this 'exile' in the first place. But as often happens in life one only values what he has when it's gone. These people came with bright ideas of the American Dream and material advancement. They didn't expect to be missing a community, or to be lonely; but this is how they eventually came to feel. Their children would not feel the same because they did not know what a tightly knit community based upon common ethnicity and neighborhood was like. But particular in the memory of the parents generation was the experience of growing up in such neighborhoods. What they did very soon after arriving in Hamden was to band together and establish a Jewish community center.

The Hamden Jewish Community Center

The purpose of the Hamden Jewish Community Center as outlined in the minutes of the first meeting was to provide;

a social organization for adults and children, a religious center for the children, and a young people's league.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that in this statement of purpose there is mention of the desire to provide a religious center for the children, but no mention of providing one for the adults. The Hamden adults who were interested in religious activities were commuting to the New Haven synagogues. Perhaps they felt that the children needed something they could walk to. More significantly the stated purposes were a reflection of the family and particularly child orientation of early suburbanites. The ideology of suburbia was, everything for the children, for Jews and

Gentiles alike.²⁰

The Hamden Jewish Community Center finally led to the establishment of a synagogue. But in reality the synagogue was not in place of a Community Center; it was rather in addition to one. The first synagogue in Hamden would have to become many things, both religious and social, to suit the varied needs of the Jewish population.²¹ The recollections of one of the founding members of the Hamden Jewish Community Center should illustrate this point:

We had a hundred people at our first meeting, it was in 1946. We had to use the auditorium of the Church Street School there were so many Jewish people in Hamden who were interested in starting something. How did it all start? Well until World War Two there were maybe fifty to seventy five Jewish families in Hamden. Then starting after the War a lot of Jewish veterans looking for good homes and schools for their families started moving in. So, there were five of us Jewish couples who used to meet socially from time to time ourselves. Most of the adults were interested in social contact with other Jewish families for themselves and for their children. But there were some including my husband and I who also wanted a synagogue. We couldn't push too much for it because we would have lost a lot of support because people already belonged to New Haven synagogues and were paying dues to them. So we just started with a community center. But after awhile I think that everybody realized that we needed a synagogue too. Bar mitzvahs were starting, children needed Hebrew school, unfortunately people had yartzheits and needed to say kaddish. It wasn't convenient to go to the synagogues in New Haven for everything. So, in the end those who wanted a synagogue and not just a center won out.

The words of this temple founder points to the existence of a pluralistic membership in the Hamden Jewish Community Center, even before it evolved into a synagogue. It appears that while some members wanted a community center for social contacts there were others who also wanted a synagogue center; which as defined as Deborah Dash Moore was an institution which:

incorporated worship, recreation, sociability, and Jewish education under one roof."²²

What eventually developed was not a community center with the stated function of providing for social rather than spiritual contacts. Instead there was created a Temple which would aspire to fulfill the needs of a pluralistic membership which included those whose primary interest was social contacts as well as those who looked for spiritual fulfillment.

From Community Center To Community Center With A Synagogue

The first religious service was held by the Center at the local Masonic Temple during the High Holidays of 1948. From the 1966 Anniversary speech it is recalled:

The fall of 1948 really started us on our way to being a synagogue. Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur Holidays were observed in Hamden for the first time, and history was made. The pattern was set for our future, too, because the services were Conservative, and were conducted by a student Rabbi from the Jewish Theological Seminary."²³

The significance of beginning on the High Holidays, aside from being symbolic; that is to begin a new endeavor on Jewish New Year, also had a useful purpose. According to the Temple old timers I spoke to, in 1948 as well as now the biggest turnouts for services were on the High Holidays.

Pragmatic concerns involving the religious education of children were behind much of the push to expand the religious activities of the Center. Children were approaching the age of Bar and Bat Mitzvah. These were not yet the days of two car families and it was not possible

to rely upon the infrequent public bus service from Hamden to the Jewish areas of New Haven where the closest Hebrew Schools were located. In June of 1947, within a year after the Center was founded, a three day a week Hebrew School was established. The local Elks hall was rented for this purpose.

Still, there was no place to hold regular weekly religious services for Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. This may have been a key issue in the decision to transform the community center into a synagogue. Just as families did not want the inconvenience of travel into New Haven for their children's Hebrew School they also wanted a Bar Mitzvah setting that was closer to home. There was also the matter of having to belong to both the Hamden Jewish Community Center and to a synagogue in New Haven for the Bar Mitzvah ceremony; with all the extra expense this entailed. Funds were raised, property was purchased and in June of 1950 a ground breaking ceremony for the new building was held. The establishment of the Hamden Jewish Community Center was not without resistance from both some Gentiles and some Jews in the town.

One of the founders of the Center attached the following note to a group of documents she sent to me concerning the early days of the Center. The note read:

It may be of interest to know that when the property was purchased it was purchased in Bill Marcus' [one of the original organizers of the Center] name by him because in Spring Glen Jews were not welcome. However, before morning of the next day, someone found out who the purchasers really were, [a group of Jews] and for what purpose the property was bought.[to build a Jewish Community Center] Bill received a call offering to purchase the property for double the selling price!²⁴

This story has clear similarities to the purchase of the land for the Conservative synagogue in Sklare's study of the Jewish community of the suburb of "Lakeville" during the postwar period. Sklare also relates how longtime Jewish residents of Lakeville were uneasy over the effect a new influx of Jews would have on Jewish-Gentile community relations.²⁵ There were some veteran Jewish residents in Hamden who also shared this uneasiness. In the twentieth anniversary speech referred to previously the speaker states that:

Peculiarly, there was some objection to the organization of the Center. This was not from non-Jews in Hamden, but from a few Jewish people who had lived here, unidentified and untouched by Judaism, spiritually or culturally.²⁶

These Jews who were in opposition to the original establishment of a Center were acting on the motive of desiring anonymity as Jews in an environment they felt was somewhat hostile to them. Years later and in a similar way those who opposed changing the name of the Center to that of a Temple, although not wanting to remain anonymous, did want to limit their visibility as a Jewish religious organization. We will see however, that Temple members would soon come to realize that being 'American' in both the eyes of the non-Jewish citizens of Hamden, and in their own eyes meant precisely having the high visibility that was once avoided. Having Temple picnics, Veterans Day commemorations, rummage sales, and bingo nights was positive proof to the Temple members and to outsiders as well that the Jewish community in Hamden was not that different from their church going neighbors. Religious services with church like decorum, American trained rabbis, and a liberal use of English also bridged cultural gaps between the members of Temple Beth

Shalom and the church goers. In the fall of 1952 the Hamden Jewish Community Center hired its first permanent Rabbi, Rabbi Aaron J. Weiss, a graduate of the J.T.S., and affiliated with the United Synagogue of America. These two acts meant that there now could be no doubt that the community center had become a synagogue.

Why did the members of the Hamden Jewish Community Center chose to affiliate with the Conservative Movement rather than the Orthodox or Reform? As discussed in the first chapter,(pp.42-46) there were two central reasons why many of the suburban synagogues founded in the early post war years affiliated with the Conservative Movement. One reason was that the suburban Jews looked upon Conservative as a middle of the road compromise between Orthodox and Reform that would alienate the fewest potential members. Starting a new community required the most inclusive movement. Another reason was that returning veterans, who made up a large part of the Jewish community in the suburbs had been exposed to Conservative style religious services while serving in the armed forces. In speaking with some of the founding members the compromise issue was indeed mentioned as a reason for Conservative affiliation. It seemed though that the compromising going on was more typically between spouses,(i.e one leaning toward Orthodox and the other leaning toward Reform) rather than between groups of members. There were many veterans among the young suburbanites who founded TBS. When I brought up the issue of the Conservative style services during their wartime years in the armed forces the four veterans I spoke to did have positive comments about them. These comments were based around the memories that the army

services were short, used a great deal of English, and were opportunities for making contact with other Jews.

Rabbi Weiss held the official title of 'Rabbi-Director'. This was significant in that it showed that the institution was still conceptualized as a community center with social activities as well as a synagogue which tended to religious observances and the spiritual needs of its members. The amount and variation of social activities is evident from an examination of one of the monthly Hamden Jewish Community Center Bulletins from 1954.²⁷

In this bulletin, which was edited by lay members of the Center, announcements of the following social activities sponsored by the Center were found: Sisterhood Auction Jewish War Veterans Meeting Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary Meeting,(wives of JWV men) Minstrel Show, (put on by Center members) ORT meeting (ORT is a Jewish women's fund raising organization in support of vocational training in Israel and elsewhere) Men's Club meeting Sisterhood meeting Council of Jewish Women meeting Center meeting lecture on 'Marriage and Divorce' Theater Party trip sponsored by the Men's Club Sisterhood Cards and Mah Jong Evening An Ort Card Party A Psychology Lecture Series An ORT cake sale An ORT Bazaar The opening of a children 's game room.

The sheer amount of social activities shows us that the Center was heavily involved in providing activities that would facilitate social contacts among a group of young, well educated family oriented suburbanites. The diversity of the activities, albeit within the limited band of middle class suburban interests, shows an attempt to offer a little something for everyone as an inducement for involvement with the

center. At this point in time, the mid fifties we see no senior activities or singles activities. This was because the membership was a typical post war suburban one, with social life centered around the young nuclear family.

There was however a division between men's and women's activities with only a few activities being joint gender in nature. If in the house of prayer the gender walls were being broken down with mixed seating and increased female participation in the rituals; in the house of assembly on the other hand the organization of activities and often participation in these activities were largely done along gender lines. The attempt to involve as many as possible in Temple activities among a pluralistic membership then becomes a twofold process of inclusion and separation. In one sphere of activities, the religious ones, females are brought in together with the males in order to encourage their participation. In the social sphere women are separated into their own activities such as sisterhood and JWV auxiliary in order to provide them with a niche for female involvement. The question is why did women want inclusion in religious activities, but were content with separation in social activities via the Temple auxiliaries such as the sisterhood?

I asked a woman who was active in synagogue activities in the 1950s why this was so. Her explanation was as follows:

Well, first of all we girls liked to have a good time together without the men. I don't mean all the time without the men. We also like the couples activities like the dances and things. But sometimes we just wanted to be by ourselves We could laugh, tell our own jokes and our husbands wouldn't be there bossing us around. It was equal, the men had their Mens' Club and we had the Sisterhood.. You know separate but equal,(laughs). But in the services it was either push our way in or be left out. We never

thought of having a separate women's service where we could do everything that the men did. What sense would that make, we wanted the whole family together at services. You know, the family that prays together, stays together. In order to take part in the services we had to be allowed to do what the men did, like getting aliyas and reading from the Torah: although this didn't happen until later on, in the 1970s. We didn't want to be left with setting up the food for the oneg on Friday nights, or the kiddush on Saturday mornings. Which is by the way what we still do today, but the men help out too, and we have aliyas and everything that they have.

Mens' Club and Sisterhood were a 'separate but equal' arrangement for social activities. There were also mixed gender activities. Religious services however were family oriented; as exemplified by family seating. When women demanded equal ritual rights there was no way of giving them separate but equal involvement; this would have impinged on the family orientation of the religious services.

Facilitating social contacts; the inclusion of diverse groups in common activities; or at times the creation of separate niches for involvement are themes that will recur in the study of the Temple and in understanding how solidarity is maintained among a pluralistic membership. In addition to the fact that not all the members of Temple Beth Shalom were of a single mind as to the emphasis to be placed upon social activities as opposed to religious ones; there were also differences of opinion among the members as to the style and substance of the religious services and rituals. There were those who wished to preserve much of the eastern european Orthodox flavor of the shuls they grew up in and their parents attended. Others pressed forward for innovations that gravitated toward American Reformed. These two issues; that of defining the Temple as primarily a social activities

oriented or a religious activities oriented institution; and the depth and pace of Americanization and ritual innovation became major concerns among the pluralistic membership of Temple Beth Shalom from its early days to the present. A look at the history of these issues and how they shaped the Temple during the decades since the 1950s will help us better understand the issue of Americanization among the membership at Temple Beth Shalom today.

The 50s and 60s: Tradition versus Innovation. Conflict and Compromise

In carefully reviewing Temple records from this period and in speaking to those who were active in Temple life at this time a few trends became apparent that are worthy examining in order to better understand the Temple today.

By 1956 despite the heavy emphasis on social activities the Hamden Jewish Community Center had a full time rabbi and was also increasingly involved in the functions of a synagogue, including weekly religious services and life cycle events such as bar mitzvahs and baby namings. It was in this year that the Center formally adopted the status of a synagogue by changing its name to Temple Beth Shalom. A closer look at this name change will tell us something about the theme of Americanization and the Jews of Hamden in the 1950s.

Hamden Jewish Community Center/ Temple Beth Shalom: What's In A Name?

The Center did not change its name to Temple Beth Shalom until 1956, which was ten years after its' founding and four years after it acquired status as a synagogue. Why was there such a reluctance, to change the name from 'Jewish Center' to 'Temple Beth Shalom'? In speaking with a few of the old timers I learned that the issue of changing the name had much to do with the relation of the Jewish community to the other residents of Hamden.

Giving a name to a person is an act that is typically sacralized in the context of religious tradition. Giving a name to an institution is also a sacred act in that transcendent meaning is being given to an object. When members give their institution a name they are not only making a statement to themselves about their identity; they are also declaring their identity to outsiders or at least how they want outsiders to identify them. Berger says of names and identifications that:

...all identifications take place within horizons that imply a specific social world. The child learns that he is what he is called. Every name implies a nomenclature, which in turn implies a designated social location. To be given an identity involves being assigned a specific place in the world.²⁶

One of the old timers who was asked about the name change said that;

.... Some people didn't want to change the name to a temple. They thought this sounded too Jewish. You grew up in New York and don't understand what it was like in Hamden in the old days. We had to deal with anti-semitism. Nothing terrible really happened, but there were people in Hamden who just didn't want us here.

The name change issue was finally resolved and now the congregation turned their energies towards enlarging the physical plant of the Temple itself. From 1956 until 1964 as evidenced by minutes of

board and committee meetings, a tremendous amount of energy was given to the ever expanding Hebrew school and to the problems of allocating physical space for the myriads of social and religious activities. From the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s the congregation's time and resources were largely devoted to the building of a new sanctuary. This was completed in 1964 after years of intensive planning and fund raising activity. This brings us to a discussion of the Temple building whose physical structure has remained essentially the same since the new sanctuary was completed.

Temple Beth Shalom from the outside looks a great deal like any contemporary American public building that is used for a civic or business function. (see appendix fig.4 p.318 for illustration of TBS.) Its functional low line structure is not much different from the regional Boy Scout offices a block away, the public elementary school down the street, or the telephone company offices not far away. One must examine the Temple building more closely, for its religious function to be discerned. True, the style of the building is probably a function of economics, or taste, or simply the general trend in architecture at the point in time that the Jews came to Hamden; rather than a statement of ideology or symbolism. But the non-descript appearance of the building in itself is a statement of keeping a low profile in the community. Narrow stained glass windows that are hardly visible from the outside, the front entrance door handles in the shape of the tablets of the law, and the letters attached to the building wall spelling 'Temple Beth Shalom' in English rather than in the Hebrew that not even all Temple members, let alone non Jewish passerby can read are the only visible

indicators of the function of the building. The building is American, it is in no way exotic but it is not at all like most of the local American houses of worship which are predominantly Protestant or Catholic. The Protestant churches in Hamden are mostly old wooden buildings, with steeples and bell towers in typical New England white clapboard style. The Protestants, as the original founders have been in town longer than anyone else. The somewhat newer Catholic churches are mostly made of stone, with visible crosses and high arched entrances. The Temple certainly doesn't look Jewish; but it does look different than the Christian houses of worship in town.

There is something else about the outward appearance of the Temple that perhaps indicates something about the stage of the Americanization of its congregants. In front of the entrance is a flagpole which flies an American flag. At the base of the pole is a stone marker upon which is engraved: 'In Memory of the Jewish Veterans Who made the Supreme Sacrifice.' I checked the other houses of worship in town and none of them were seen to display an American flag outdoors, neither did they have similar memorials to their fallen in war. This is not an indication that they are not American. It is rather as if the Protestant and Catholic congregations identify effortlessly as American; being American is a taken for granted part of their identities. The Jewish congregation of Temple Beth Shalom on the other hand still has to claim this American identity by an outward display of flag and military memorial. I spoke with the founder of the Temple's Jewish Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter and asked him about the flag and memorial, he told me that:

Our chapter had the Temple put it up. This was after the addition was built in the sixties. There were many of us veterans and we wanted to show the non- Jews that we fought too. Some of them still had an attitude, you know, that Jews were cowards. I was in the Army Air Corps during the War and saw enough action. I tried to get into the Coast Guard Academy here in New London but at that time before the War it was pretty impossible for Jews to get in.

Now that the new sanctuary was built the board became increasingly concerned with the issue of how to fill this large sanctuary with worshippers.

Starting in the mid 1960s from the time of the completion of the new sanctuary numerous references began to appear in the Board meeting minutes that attendance was less than hoped for. It wasn't that attendance at services had suddenly dropped off; but rather as one old timer put it; "We spent all that money on the sanctuary so we wanted people to use it." Attendance at services varied according to the service offered.

Friday night services were the focus of the religious week based on the elaborate planning for special programs on that night. The Temple board and officers were fairly content with the numbers attending on this night. Saturday morning was more problematic. At times it was difficult to get ten adult men together for a minyan, (the Temple did not count women as part of the minyan until 1977). From time to time resolutions were passed to the effect that board members should attend Saturday morning services at least once a month. There were attempts to have a weekday morning minyan and an evening minyan but these always seemed to end in failure. As one member who was active in trying to keep a minyan going in those days reminisced;

The men were busy. They were all young and had families to support. They had to be at work at a certain time and they worked late. Okay, a few men had their own businesses and could make their own hours but there just weren't enough of them that were interested. Later on we got some more retired people, you know, the young ones got older, and it was easier to have a minyan in the morning.

That women were becoming a larger part of the attendance at weekly services at TBS was a general trend in Conservative congregations that went back to the Depression years of the 1930s as was discussed in the previous chapter, (see chap.1, p.41)

One strategy for getting enough men for the morning minyan was to mail out postcard reminders that a "Yartzheit" was coming up. The "Yartzheit" being the annual anniversary of the death of a close kinsman at which time it is customary to come to the synagogue to recite the "Mourner's Kaddish" during the service. This only worked sometimes because people did not want to have services interfere with getting to work on weekday mornings. Most members preferred to attend Friday night or Saturday morning services on the week of the Yartzheit and say the Mourner's Kaddish at that time. The religious assumption behind this was that the congregants at TBS did not feel themselves bound by Jewish religious law to say the Mourner's Kaddish on the exact Yartzheit date, but rather felt comfortable in making up their own rules, and arbitrarily picking a Yartzheit date.

High Holiday services were well attended and the fact that many more congregants attended these once a year services than attended weekly services necessitated elaborate planning to deal with the unusual and large crowds of worshippers.

A number of rabbis served the congregation during this period.

Tenures were not very long, usually three to five years. This is in contrast to the last quarter of a century which has been dominated by only two rabbis. This can perhaps be explained by the statement of one of the members from that period who said that:

We didn't pay the rabbis much during those early years; so we usually got someone who was just starting out. After a few years the rabbi would want to move on to a bigger congregation that would pay him more money. Now we can keep rabbis here longer; they don't feel that they have to move on in order to earn a decent living.

What is significant to note about the Temple's rabbis during the entire history of the congregation is the non-ideological criteria applied to their hiring, retention, and dismissal. The congregation always hired a Conservative rabbi and never seemed to get involved in issues as to what wing of the movement he was from. When I asked members what they remembered as the reasons for Rabbis deciding to leave or for their not having their contract demands met by the board the issue of the rabbis being judged as too 'Orthodox' or too 'Reform' never came up. Members evaluated Rabbis on their friendliness, personal manners, their abilities to involve people in activities, attract new members, and to be available at times of personal crises for congregants and their families. These were the services that the congregants were interested in; social activities and spiritual support in time of personal need.

During the 1950s and 1960s the only disputes relating to religious practice or ideology were centered around the bar mitzvah ceremony. Here ideological disputes took on a very practical form with discussions as to whether or not taking pictures and musical entertainment should

be allowed on the Sabbath. These disputes had both **symbolic and sociological** significance.

Taking photographs or playing musical instruments on the Sabbath are according to halacha, which is the body of Jewish law, forbidden activities.²⁹ To forbid picture taking on the Sabbath would symbolically place the Temple closer to the practices of the Orthodox movement; to allow such an activity would be to place the Temple closer to the Reform. From the sociological point of view the upwardly mobile suburban parents of the post World War Two era were interested in giving their children more elaborate bar\bat mitzvah receptions than had been the case during the previous generation. Hiring a photographer and providing music was part of this elaboration.

There were never any conflicts between the congregation and the Rabbi over ritual matters. The Rabbi interpreted the ritual law, usually with reference to the decisions of the Rabbinical Assembly and the congregation accepted his decisions. Often the decisions of the Rabbinical Assembly were vague enough to allow the Rabbi to go along with whatever path the Temple board of directors, upon the advice of the ritual committee chose to follow. The ritual committee could only make **recommendations** to the board of directors. The Temple Board was the congregational body that actually voted ritual policies into effect. For example, if the Rabbinical Assembly decided that women may be allowed to have aliyot to the Torah, the rabbi could accept the congregation allowing or not allowing this to happen. The congregational rabbi is able to act according to what is expedient for keeping his position which usually means the avoidance of conflict, and to retain or

innovate on tradition according to the collective will or consensus of the congregation. This idea finds its roots in Schechter's concept of catholic Israel and the universal synagogue. (see quote from Schechter chap.1,p.33); which in turn can be traced back to Frankel and his belief in the collective will of the Jewish people as arbiter, (chap.1, pp.26-27) The desire to avoid conflict went along with the Conservative ideology of including the widest band of members as was pointed out in the last chapter, (chap.1,pp.32-33). Sociologically this put a great amount of decision making power in the hands of the lay leadership rather than with the religious professionals.

As we now move to the late 1960s and continuing through the 1970s and 1980s we shall see how gender issues became a major expression of the role of the lay leadership at Temple Beth Shalom. I have chosen to focus on the gender issue at Temple Beth Shalom during these years because this issue was, I believe, a key element in the development of the Conservative movement during this time. Innovations and changes in the interpretation and practice of Jewish law have expressed themselves in this area more than in any other. If we look at Conservatism as holding a middle position between Orthodoxy and Reform; and then also conceptualize Conservatism itself as having left, right, and center camps; we see that critical defining borders between the movements and between the camps have tended to be formed by gender issues. It is to a consideration of these issues in the history of Temple Beth Shalom that we will shortly turn. But I should first note that the issue of gender will repeatedly turn up in the course of this study. It was not possible to isolate this issue and deal with it in one

section of the study alone. This is because the issue of gender enters many facets of the social fabric of the Conservative movement and Temple Beth Shalom as well.

The Late 1960s Through The 1980s: Gender Issues at the Forefront of Congregational Debate.

Conservative synagogues, including TBS have not lived in a social vacuum. Trends in society as a whole have played a major part in innovating ritual both on the movement and congregational level. In the previous chapter it was asserted how the rising tide of feminism in the decade of the 70s' was the catalyst for the Conservative movement and synagogue becoming much involved in the issue of the place of women in ritual and leadership roles, (see chap 1, pp.41-45). TBS too, was a part of this Movement trend. In the 1970s and 1980s egalitarianism dominated the discussion on religious ritual issues at TBS. Here we have an instance of a group that felt itself disenfranchised attempting to gain a more equal place for itself in the Temple's ritual life. How the congregation dealt with this issue should give us a background as to how it attempted to deal with other issues of pluralism that were evident at the time of the field research.

From its beginning Temple Beth Shalom had mixed seating. On the other hand, the roles that women played in the administration of the Temple and in ritual activities evolved over time. In the early days as far as the administration and important decision making of the

Temple was concerned women were prominent only in what was considered by society to be typical women's work. In looking over the nominating lists for officers and the reports of committee chair people a clear gender pattern emerges. Women had positions of leadership on committees dealing with youth activities, the Hebrew school, library, temple bulletin, and of course the sisterhood. The sisterhood took care of setting up for social events, card parties, most fund raising, and refreshments after Friday night services. Executive office positions were filled by men, except for the recording secretary which was always a woman. This was sociologically in line with the norms of American society in general which placed women in supporting clerical roles while men maintained the executive positions. Board positions were almost always filled by men, but there were more and more exceptions to this as the years progressed. The religious committee, at times referred to as the ritual committee was exclusively in the male domain not only in leadership but also in composition. Women however apparently had substantial influence upon the running of the Temple in a more indirect way. I was told by two of the women whose spouses were prominent in Temple affairs during this period that they often privately influenced their husbands as to the decisions they made in their positions as executive officers.

Girls had Bat Mitzvahs on Friday nights at which time they led part of the service, and gave a speech on a Jewish topic. They were not allowed to read from the Torah as did their brothers on their Saturday morning Bar Mitzvahs. Women did not receive aliyot. Being called for aliyot was an issue of great importance to the women. This has to do

with the fact that in coming up for an aliyah the individual makes close contact with a most sacred object; the torah scroll. The close contact with this sacred object has traditionally in Judaism been the prerogative of men only. By being granted the right to come into contact with this sacred object women are symbolically recognized as being on an equal level with the men as part of the religious collective. Women did at times participate in services by coming up to the bimah and reading a prayer in English or by opening and closing the ark at certain points in the service. These acts however did not bring them into direct contact with the sacred Torah. Significantly however, most girls received a Hebrew school education along with the boys. This and the societal trend toward gender equality set the stage for change in the 70s.

The first written mention of the Temple taking up the issue of counting women in the minyan and allowing them to have aliyot to the Torah was discovered in the handwritten minutes of the Ritual Committee meeting of December 10, 1973. The notes read in part:

The Ritual Committee met on Dec. 10 to discuss the question of counting women in the minyan... On the question of counting women in the minyan the committee voted No. As a result of the debate the committee was asked by one of its members to reconsider the issue of aliyot for women. This was reconsidered and after much debate, was voted down. On both the Minyan & the aliyot questions, the view was that the vote had to be negative until some guidelines were available on how a positive vote would be implemented.³⁰

We see from the above that there was a hesitation to move ahead on this issue without official guidelines from the Board. The Rabbi's position is not mentioned in these and in the following proceedings that dealt with this issue. I found out from Temple members who were

involved in this issue at the time that the Rabbi was in favor of Aliyot and Minyan status for women but left it up to the congregation to decide what would be most comfortable for them. This was in accord with the Conservative ideology of changes in religious practices being rooted in, and claiming their legitimacy from the will of catholic Israel as well as historical research. Rather than looking at the actions of the Rabbi in this case as simply being those of convenience or non-ideological pragmatism we see that they were in fact rooted in Conservative ideology. After receiving the above report from the ritual committee the Temple board set up its own committee to work out guidelines for women's' aliyot. By a close vote of 5-4 the committee voted to adopt a set of guidelines which were approved at a board meeting the next month. The guidelines granted women aliyot but stated that no more than two aliyot should be given to women at the same occasion. In addition women called up for aliyot would not wear their own talit, (prayer shawl) and kiss the Torah by kissing the fringes of the talit and then placing it on the scroll as do the men; but would instead do this with a talit retained on the bimah (altar) for this purpose.

The sociological significance of this decision was that the men allowed the women to assume the role of men for the short time that the aliya took place; but held back in allowing women to actually wear a ritual symbol of the Jewish male- the tallit. Also, the picture that emerges from the nature of the above recommendations and the closeness of the vote was that the ritual rights granted to the women were given reluctantly and conservatively in accordance with the

ideology of the movement which was to include the widest band of members and offend the least. These ritual rights were granted only because of the grassroots pressure exerted by those in the congregation who supported egalitarianism and because of egalitarian trends in the Conservative Movement and society in general at the time. This was illustrated in the first chapter on the history of the Conservative Movement, (p.41)

A picture of the forces at work at Temple Beth Shalom during these years when women's rights of participation were being debated can be drawn from an interview with Susan, a congregant who was asked to recall these events. This congregant, who is now in her early fifties is the daughter of a Conservative Rabbi. She is Judaically knowledgeable, regularly attends Sabbath services and upon occasion prepares a Torah or Haftarah portion which she chants from the bimah. I asked her to describe for me the divisions among the Temple membership over the women's issue during the 1970s. She explained that:

There were divisions but I don't think that it was so much a split between those who leaned more toward Orthodox and those who leaned more toward more innovative Conservative. Well it may have been part of that but the opposition to women's participation came mainly from someplace else. Some people felt that the women who wanted equal rights wanted them only because it was part of being a feminist to want them and had nothing to do with them being interested in participating as dedicated, knowledgeable Jews. Okay, it was true that some women were using this whole thing as a feminist issue and really didn't care about being Jewish. But there were other women who were motivated by their daughters. Their daughters had bat mitzvahs and were called to read from the Torah at this time. Their mothers thought that if their daughters were doing it then they should be doing it too. Most of the really older women though, refused to be a part of coming up to the bimah except for opening the ark or doing a reading in English. We had a few men who came from Orthodox shuls when they were growing up and some who came from pretty traditional

Conservative synagogues where women were far from equal. Having women called to the Torah and counted as part of the minyan was something too strange and different for them at first. But once they saw that women were coming up for aliyot and that they knew what to do, and were serious about participating in services, they got used to it and there wasn't any problem.

From these comments we see that there were actually a number of divisions within the congregation on this issue. There were women who regarded the issue in terms of the **general feminist trend** and not as a particular Jewish issue. Then there were women who regarded the issue as a particularist Jewish expression of feminism and were primarily interested in achieving equality with men as **Jewish participants** in the service. Some women, particularly older ones backed off from equal participation with men because of their own traditional orientation. Or perhaps age in itself was a factor here, in that certain life long patterns were resistant to change.

Opposition from the men came from those who were opposed to changes in the tradition as well as from those who questioned the motives of the women; feeling that they were mainly feminist and not based in wanting the opportunity for greater participation as committed Jews. I asked this Susan if there was any turning point or critical confrontation on this issue that finally led to its resolution. She said that:

The real turning point was when women were allowed on the ritual committee. It may sound strange that there was a time when only men were allowed to serve on this committee but that's how it was. My husband who was president at the time opened the committee to women He actually had the Temple's by-laws changed to do this. A few men, maybe half a dozen were opposed to this

but once it was done it was done. No one quit the Temple over this issue.

In January of 1978 the board voted to carry out the recommendation of the ritual committee and women were given the right to aliyot on an equal basis with the men. At the same time it was agreed that women would be counted as part of the minyan. What had to change in order to make the vote change? In speaking with a member of the board and ritual committee from this time we see that the decision on the minyan had a decidedly practical motivation behind it.

We were having a hard time getting enough men to come for the morning minyan. This was a problem because people had yartzheits and needed a minyan. Once we counted women the situation got better. It wasn't that new women started to come to the minyan but now the women that came for a yartzheit and were there anyway could be counted.

By virtue of these decisions on aliyot and the minyan women had achieved full equality with men in the area of ritual participation at Temple services.

By the early 1980s women were assuming leadership positions on the Temple's board of directors and the executive board. As with ritual rights this too came about as part of the general trend in American society toward egalitarianism that influenced the Conservative movement which was discussed in the previous chapter. A woman was first elected president of the congregation in 1980 and another woman was elected to this position in 1989. By 1992 there was a woman chair of the ritual committee which for many years was the center stage for the Temple's gender controversies. The gender issue brings us up to the

present. What needs to be done now is to bring us up to date with socially relevant descriptions of the Jewish communities of New Haven and Hamden today.

The Greater New Haven Jewish Community Today

In a recent demographic study it was estimated that there were about 28,000 Jewish individuals in the Greater New Haven area.³¹ An in-out migration has characterized the New Haven Jewish population. Based on an informal study done in 1976 it appears that an undetermined but possibly sizable number of young Jews have left the New Haven area. At the same time Yale University, its affiliated hospitals, and the Southern New England Telephone Company have attracted many Jewish academicians, doctors, and other professionals, especially from Boston and New York.³² Perhaps this is because New Haven is not far from these two cities with large Jewish populations and those who relocate in New Haven remain in easily accessible distance from the families they left behind. This may bear some resemblance to the way Jews moving from New York City to New Haven during the early part of the century felt about the families they left behind as mentioned previously in this chapter. Orthodox migrants from out of town have tended to settle within walking distance of the four Orthodox synagogues which are all within the New Haven city lines. Four of the area's five Conservative synagogues are in the suburbs as well as all four of the Reform temples. None of these synagogues are recent additions to the community; the newest congregation being the Conservative Or Shalom

Orange which was founded in 1971.

According to Cohen's demographic study of New Haven area Jews mentioned previously the area's five Conservative synagogues have a combined membership of about 2,400 families. This is in comparison with the combined membership of the four Orthodox synagogues which is put at about 1,200 families, and the membership of the four Reform synagogues of about 1,500 families.³³

With only 28,000 Jews there are three New Haven area day schools that represent different religious trends including; a Conservative Solomon Schechter school, an Orthodox Torah U' Mesorah school, and a school run by the Lubavitch Hasidim. The Greater New Haven Jewish Federation serves as an umbrella organization for the Jewish community in New Haven and the fourteen surrounding towns. There are two community senior residences and a senior day care center. Recently the Jewish Community Center, following the exodus of Jews from New Haven to the suburbs, was relocated to the town of Woodbridge which is home to much of the Federation and Jewish Community Center leadership and benefactors. This is significant in that it concentrates Jewish communal power, influence, and therefore decision making in the hands of the wealthy Jews of the western suburbs and Westville. This leaves the less affluent Jews in the other suburbs, with diminished influence in setting communal policies and priorities. A Department of Jewish Education and a local weekly Jewish interest newspaper are sponsored by the Federation. The DJE runs a twice a week evening "high school" which is attended by about 250 teenagers, and an adult education program. There is one combination kosher meat and grocery store in the immediate

area; some of the Orthodox bring in kosher meat from New York. There are active Bnai B'rith, ORT, Hadassah, and ZOA chapters that are not affiliated with any specific synagogue. The Jewish Family Service sponsors a number of support groups and is partially funded by the local United Way. It can be said in summary that the New Haven area Jewish community is a diverse one in terms of religious affiliations, secular Jewish activities, and day schools. This points to a pluralism in the Jewish community in that the community appears to have diverse enough interests and needs in order to support all of these institutions. The executive director of the Greater New Haven Jewish Federation estimates that at least fifty percent of the Jewish population is serviced by at least one of these institutions at some point in their lives.³⁴

There is also a pluralism in terms of when TBS members identify with the Jewish community of the larger region; when they identify with the Hamden Jewish community; and when they identify with their Temple. This speaks ultimately to the issue of plural commitments. A few examples should serve to illustrate this point.

The public activities supporting Israel, Russian Jewry, or Holocaust commemorations are typically done within a Greater New Haven regional framework and the TBS member will then identify with the larger region. TBS members will volunteer to help organize these events and will attend them. There are issues such as the Hamden Public School Calendar and the High Holidays which involve mediation between the Hamden Jewish community and the town government. At this point the TBS member will identify and make common cause with the Hamden Jewish community including the congregants at Mishkan Israel and any

other town Jews who are involved in these issues. Joint letters to city officials will be written and strategy will be coordinated. At times there are conflicts of interest between Greater New Haven Jewish communal activities and TBS activities. An example of this has been the location of the regional twice a week evening supplementary Jewish high school. In these situations the TBS member identifies with his temple as opposed to the larger region.

Most of the New Haven Jews who did not move to the suburbs are still located in the Westville area. Among the Jews who remain in Westville or in a few other areas of the city, many are retired or send their children to one of the Jewish day schools or non sectarian private schools.

Further west, just outside of New Haven are the wealthy towns of Woodbridge and Orange. Upwardly mobile Jewish professionals, among them a good number of doctors from out of town have bought homes in these towns. Jews living outside of Woodbridge often refer to them as the "snobbish Woodbridge doctors". In speaking with members of Temple Beth Shalom I have often heard comments of resentment toward the Woodbridge Jews which evolve around their prominent leadership roles in the Federation which is attributed by Temple members to their wealth.

Westville, Woodbridge and Orange then are considered to be the "Jewish" areas of Greater New Haven.(see map, fig.1 in appendix). This is not only because Jews are concentrated in these areas. This is also because the Jews living in these areas dominate the Federation and the Jewish Community Center by virtue of their ability to donate large sums

of money to these institutions. A theme that characterizes the relation of the Hamden Jewish community to the center of Jewish wealth and power in the western suburbs is "us against them". This situation will later be shown to play an indirect role in maintaining social cohesion at Temple Beth Shalom which is located in the comfortable but less affluent town of Hamden to which we now turn.

Hamden and Its Jewish Community Today

Hamden's Jewish community is not located in any particular area or areas of the town. The estimated 5,000 Jews who live in Hamden are spread across the town; living in its mostly single family homes as do their non-Jewish neighbors. Since the town covers an area of roughly thirty three square miles³⁵ and has 52,000 residents; population density is much less than a city such as adjoining New Haven which covers half the area and has a population of one and a half times as great. The population density of Hamden is 1,599 per square miles while that of New Haven is 6,920 per square mile.³⁶ That there is no particular "Jewish area" of Hamden is socially significant. It means that Hamden's Jews cannot rely upon a neighborhood residence to casually meet other Jews on a daily basis. Being able to do so might allow them to achieve a sense of ethnic identity based on place of residence as have those living in more densely populated neighborhoods with sizable Jewish populations. Ethnic identity could also be based upon residential origin but as mentioned before the Jews of Hamden come from diverse points of origin. Belonging to Jewish organizations, rather than living in a Jewish

neighborhood then becomes the primary way of identifying with a Jewish community. Sklare makes note of this in his Lakeville studies. In discussing the social patterns of this suburban Jewish community Sklare states that:

Social interaction has shifted away from the extended family at the same time that it has become detached from an ecological base. Not only does the interaction pattern of the Lakeville Jew extend far beyond the vicinity of the home but even those areas in Lakeville which are predominantly Jewish in population lack a distinctive Jewish character.³⁷

Sklare then goes on to state that:

It is in the light of these changes that the significance of the Jewish organization must be understood: it partly fills the vacuum created by the erosion of the natural community of family and neighborhood. Under contemporary conditions, then, affiliation and involvement in organizational life becomes a form of belonging to the Jewish community. As such, it is a way of affirming and validating one's Jewish identity.³⁸

Time and again in the course of my conversations with Temple members I have heard; "We joined the Temple for social reasons, because we wanted to meet other Jews", or, "We're Jewish so we had to belong to something Jewish". Although these reasons for joining the Temple were heard from both the baby boomer generation and from their parents generation; it was the older generation which put almost exclusive emphasis on these social and identity issues. The younger generation, as might be expected, gave as an additional reason for joining the Temple, the Judaic education of their children; or more specifically in many cases, giving them a bar/bat mitzvah.

This is significant in that it meant that the synagogue participation of the younger generation would not only be composed of

social activities; but would also be focused on child oriented activities such as the Hebrew school, youth clubs, and the bar/bat mitzvah ritual.

The only ethnic group to occupy a specific area of town are the blacks who live in the area that borders on one of New Haven's black ghettos. Hamden is mostly white,(87.5%), with blacks, the largest minority making up 8.5% of the population.³⁹

The Italians and Irish are dominant in town government and the civil service. One need only look at the surnames of local politicians, officials, and civil servants to recognize this fact. Once Hamden had a large working class population that was largely composed of these two ethnic groups. In recent years the population of Hamden has been changing from third and fourth generation working class to more of a mix of relocated professionals who are part of two income families.⁴⁰ The Irish and Italians are by and large Catholics. There are twenty two houses of worship in Hamden; two are Jewish, fifteen are Protestant and seven are Catholic. In looking over the social announcements in the local Hamden weekly newspapers and in the daily New Haven Register I was struck by the number of social activities and meetings conducted by the local churches. In speaking with neighbors and other Hamden residents I learned that the social lives of many of these people revolve around church activities as well as getting together with family and friends. In fact, many meetings with friends happen in the context of church activities. As will be shown in the following chapters of this research the Jews of Hamden are no exception to this pattern. To take an active part in the social life of Hamden one belongs to some community organization; typically this organization is a house of worship. It is

almost as if that for Jews to become involved in the social life of this New England town they must become active in Jewish houses of worship; most importantly from the social standpoint.

The very ecology of a suburban town such as Hamden makes church or synagogue affiliation vital for the development of social relations with others. This has not always been true. When close knit extended families, living in close geographical proximity were more the norm in American society, significant amounts of social interaction would take place within the confines of this setting. Due to the erosion of the extended family social interaction has shifted away from this group and has moved to organizational affiliations.⁴¹ A description of some of the formal and informal locations where Hamdenites in the 1990s make social contact with others will serve to illustrate this point.

Hamden is a suburb consisting of mostly single family homes which are usually located in specifically residential zones. Most stores are located in commercial zones either in strips along a few of the main streets or in the town's shopping plaza. This means that there are few pedestrians walking in the streets. One drives to the stores and drives to work. There is little chance therefore of 'running into someone' on the street. These chance meetings are most likely to occur in a few select places such as; the Hamden Plaza stores, the town library, or at public school activity if one has children who attend. Synagogues and churches, through their many and ongoing activities offer a place where chance meetings with acquaintances are likely to occur. By belonging to a church or synagogue in Hamden one is increasing the odds of acknowledging familiar faces on a frequent basis not only at the house

of worship but in the other town centers as well.

The very nature of suburbanization then, as pointed out in the previous chapter, (see chap.1,pp.44-46) has been an influence on suburban Jews, including those of Hamden to found, join, and maintain community synagogues. The histories of the Greater New Haven and Hamden areas as they are related to the history of Temple Beth Shalom have now been presented. The Temple has also been placed in the present day settings of New Haven and Hamden. Something should now be said about Temple Beth Shalom itself at the present time. The setting of Temple Beth Shalom today will be described as it relates to the three major themes of this research; religious pluralism, Americanization, and Conservative Jewish identity.

Temple Beth Shalom Today: A Religiously Pluralistic Membership

A number of observations illustrate that the Temple Beth Shalom membership is a religiously pluralistic one. To begin with, there is a wide variety of individual levels of ritual observances. According to the Rabbi's estimates no more than thirty members, (about 4% of the adult congregation) observe sabbath and dietary laws to the extent that they never go to work or shop on sabbath and never eat non-kosher meat either at home or on the outside.

Many, but not all bar/bat mitzvah receptions are held in the Temple social hall and catered by an approved kosher caterer. Out of the 46 bar/bat mitzvah rituals held during my two years of field

research fifteen, or about one third of the receptions, were held at non kosher facilities.

There are wide variations in worship service attendance. Twenty, or about 3% of the adult members attend the daily morning minyan. Sabbath morning services are attended by fifty, or about 7% of the adult members. About eighty, or 11% of the adult congregants are present at the Friday night services, and most of these eighty are not the ones who attend on Saturday morning. In conversation with Friday night regulars as to why they never attend on Saturdays, a multitude of reasons were offered, most typically heard:

Saturday mornings are too long, and boring. I don't understand what's going on so what's the sense? At least on Fridays there's a lot going on in English.

I have to work on Saturday.

We do things, we go places on Saturday. Maybe the family goes on a trip, or we have to go shopping. We can't kill the whole morning at shul. By the time they finish the services half the day is gone.

There's more people on Friday nights. Not only that but there's more people who I'm friendly with and that I talk to.

From these comments we may discern reasons of skill and ability in participating in services, levels of observance, life styles, and social networks that are perhaps related to these criteria as reasons for attending one Sabbath service rather than another. These comments may simply be excuses for a lack of something else. This something else may be the lack of meaning and relevance the services have for these members.

During the High Holidays close to six hundred members and guests are in attendance.

Religious orientations and levels of knowledge vary even among those who regularly attend the daily morning minyan. Among this group are congregants who are very observant as well as those who are basically non observant but continue to come to the minyan at least once a week well after the year they came daily to say kaddish for a departed kinsman.

Among families with children religious education has taken many paths. Fifteen families send or have sent their children to the Conservative day school. Two families have sent children to one of the Orthodox run day schools. The great majority send their children to the Temple's afternoon Hebrew school. The Rabbi told me that there are no families who have chosen none of the above.

Here we may discern a relationship between Jewish education and Conservative Jewry. Just as adult Conservative Jews tend to be a pluralistic group consisting of individuals coming from a wide range of skills, abilities, and religious sensibilities; the education that their children receive also varies widely and reproduces this pluralism into succeeding generations.

Even very involved members participate in Temple activities as they choose. Some congregants are active only in the house of prayer, other participate exclusively in the adult education classes, still others engage in only the Temple's social programs. The social programs of the Temple are a clear illustration of another aspect of Temple Beth Shalom; that of its Americanization.

Temple Beth Shalom: An American House of Worship

The social activities of the Temple are remarkably similar to that of the neighboring churches in Hamden. Rummage sales, breakfasts with speakers, support groups, youth groups, annual picnics, dances, card parties, and fund raisers are the staples of Church and Temple social programs alike. Next door to the Temple is the Spring Glen United Church of Christ. Both houses of worship use each others parking lots for the overfills of cars on their respective holidays. On the High Holidays rooms in the Church are sometimes used for the Temple's baby sitting program. The Temple and the Church conduct semi-annual drives at which time members from both congregations donate their work and blood to the Red Cross. That these activities occur may be a reflection of the simple fact that the Church is next door and the logistics of existing so close together encourage this cooperation. Another, more significant reason for this cooperation with a local church is that it is a way in which the members of TBS seek to demonstrate their American and town identities. These interfaith activities have a sociological significance in that they provide points of institutional contact between the Jewish and non Jewish communities of Hamden. Some of the outcomes of these contacts will be considered in chapter six of this study which will explore the multiple identities of the congregants.

In addition to American and Jewish identities there is another issue of identity at the Temple which is: What does it mean to be a Conservative Jewish congregation?

Temple Beth Shalom: Its Conservative Identity

What it means to be a Conservative Jew is an issue that suffers from a kind of 'benign neglect' at Temple Beth Shalom. It appears that the congregants, rather than defining themselves as possessing a specific Conservative identity, define themselves simply as **not being Orthodox or Reform**. A look at the other Jewish house of worship in Hamden should illustrate this point. Mishkan Israel is a Reform temple that has made a name for itself by being active in somewhat radical causes. This was discussed earlier in the chapter. Mishkan Israel plays a central albeit passive role in helping the members of Temple Beth Shalom define themselves as Conservative Jews. By looking at what Mishkan Israel does the members of Beth Shalom see what they themselves **are not** and therefore what they **are**. For example: the congregants at Mishkan Israel don't cover their heads in their sanctuary and invited a member of the P.L.O. to speak even before Rabin's handshake with Arafat on the White House lawn. These are things that the rabbi and congregation at Beth Shalom do not or would not do. This offers the congregation an identity of being religiously traditionalist and politically moderate by comparison to the one other temple in town. A parallel of this is illustrated in Heilman's Synagogue Life in which the integrity of an Orthodox shul is maintained partially by the process of members differentiating themselves from other congregations.⁴²

There is hardly any talk of Conservative theology or history at TBS. The members rarely bring this up, and neither does the Rabbi. Adult education courses, varied as they may be, never touch on this topic. It will take a closer examination of Temple activities to see that

religious pluralism, and Americanization in themselves are two central social ingredients that help to form a self definition for Conservative Jews.

Conclusion

This study has so far examined the histories of the Conservative Movement, the Conservative Synagogue and the Jewish communities of Greater New Haven and of Hamden. Finally a brief history of Temple Beth Shalom was presented. In going from a macro to a micro level T.B.S. was placed in its broader historical and societal context. In looking at these contexts we see that a central theme along with those of Americanization and the formation of a Conservative Jewish identity in the Conservative Movement in general and at T.B.S in particular has been: **The challenge of finding a way for people of varying ideological and religious points of view and skills to coexist in a single institution which is multivocal and multiplex. If we can get to the bottom of this question we will gain insight as to how coexistence is achieved between religious and ideological pluralistic groups in general.**

One way in which this challenge is met at T.B.S. is through creating an interdependence among the pluralistic members by dividing prayer and ritual tasks into skill and interest based components. This enables a diverse membership to be included together at the same service. This strategy of inclusion is also evident in the Temple's adult education activities. An examination as to how this strategy works is the focus of the following chapter; which will take a look at inclusion in the

prayer and study activities of the congregation. After this we will go on in chapter four to see what happens when differences are so great so as to make difficult the coexistence of a pluralistic membership at the same service. In this case we will examine the way in which a strategy of separation has been developed. In chapter five it will be shown how freedom of choice for the congregants; especially in the area of life cycle rituals, encourages a pluralistic membership to participate in Temple life. Finally in chapter six we will explore the ways in which multiple identities are enabled to coexist at the Temple.

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Chapter III: INCLUSION AND THE PRAYER RITUAL:A JOB FOR EVERYONE**A Thick Description.**

I begin the work of examining this religiously pluralistic congregation by offering a thick description of the physical setting that the congregants find themselves in as they enter the sanctuary.

Geertz says that the aim of thick description is to:

...draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics. Thus it is not only interpretation that goes all the way down to the most immediate observational level. The theory upon which such interpretation conceptually depends does so also.

Three dimensions of this environment are immediately visible to the worshipper as well as to the researcher upon entering the sanctuary. These dimensions are the layout of the sanctuary space; the decorations and the objects found there; and the dress of the congregants as they participate in the house of prayer. Through a thick description of these dimensions it will be shown that there is, on a deeper level, more meaning to them than initially meets the eye. An examination of these dimensions will give us some significant clues as to what this congregation, Temple Beth Shalom, is socially about.

**The Space In Which Congregants Take Part In The Prayer Ritual And
The Objects Within This Space That They Choose To Highlight:**

The sanctuary at Temple Beth Shalom is a hall that measures forty five feet in width and fifty six feet in length, (see fig.2 appendix). The sanctuary is not so small that one would feel a close physical intimacy with the other worshippers; nor is it so large that one would feel isolated from them. It is a middle sized sanctuary when compared to those of the other Conservative synagogues in the area. The sanctuaries at Bnai Jacob and Beth El Keser Israel are both at least twice the size of Temple Beth Shalom's. Those at Or Shalom and Congregation Sinai are somewhat smaller. Moderation and taking the middle ground is a tradition at TBS.

Traditionally Jews face east, towards Jerusalem, during prayer. In the synagogue the Holy Ark where the Torah is kept is on the east side of the sanctuary. This way those at prayer are not only facing Jerusalem where the Holy Temple once stood but at the same time face the Torah which contains the Five Books of Moses. Despite this strong historical and symbolic attachment to facing east during prayer, at TBS the holy ark is on the south side of the sanctuary. I found out that this is the result of the Temple having been built by a series of additions over a number of years. For some technical architectural reason it was deemed expedient to put the ark on the southern and not eastern wall. Only a few members I spoke to seemed at all aware of this non traditional location of the ark. Those who were aware seemed rather amused by this curiosity rather than upset by it. This is significant in that practicality was observed to take priority over tradition as was

later on observed to be a common occurrence in congregational life.

There are ten rows of stationary wooden pews that run the length of the sanctuary from the bimah; to the rear where an easily hand operated folding wall closes off the social hall area. The bimah is the raised platform in the front of the sanctuary where the ark containing the Torah scrolls is located. From the ark Torah scrolls are taken out during Sabbath morning and other services to be ritually read from the pulpit which is also located on the bimah. Each pew can seat about twenty people. This means that approximately two hundred congregants can be seated at one time in the sanctuary. If additional seating is needed such as happens on the High Holidays, Purim eve, Simchat Torah, or when there are many guests for a particular life cycle occasion, two things can be done. Folding chairs may be brought in and put in the available places in the sanctuary. This provides seating for about another hundred people. Also, the social hall can be combined with the sanctuary by opening the folding wall between the two rooms This adds room for another three hundred seats. Altogether then, the combined sanctuary/social hall can seat about six hundred people as it usually does on the first day of Rosh Hashanah and Kol Nidre (Yom Kippur) eve. The size of the seating area in the sanctuary, and even the area of the Temple building that is designated as sanctuary changes then in order to meet the needs of a membership that has varied service attendance patterns. Precisely because the congregation is a pluralistic one the seating space must be flexible enough to meet the varied attendance patterns of its members.

The pews are divided into two sections by an aisle that leads to

the bimah. On the bimah are two pulpits that both face the congregation. One pulpit is used by the rabbi to speak from and the other is used by the leader of services and from which the Torah is ritually read to the congregation. This is an innovation over tradition most significantly in that the Torah reader, the Rabbi, and whoever leads the services all face the congregation rather than the ark during most of the service. The origins for this go back to certain tendencies in Reform Judaism that developed in the nineteenth century and that were later adopted by the Conservative movement. Eugene Mihaly in his study of the relationship between Jewish prayer and synagogue architecture writes that:

Reform Judaism's emphasis on the sermon focused ever increasing attention on the pulpit and brought corresponding changes in the interior design of the synagogue. The Bimah which consisted primarily of a reading desk from which the Torah was read and services were conducted was removed from the center. What emerged was a seat arrangement which is subtly conducive to encourage an audience-like attitude rather than one of an involved worshipping congregation. This attitude of passive observer was further encouraged by changes in the liturgy which tended to make the entire service reader-centered. The fact that the reader faced the congregation in prayer further aggravated the process.

This presents a service such as the one at Temple Beth Shalom that is more like an instructional session between the leaders and the congregation rather than the leaders and congregation together addressing their conception of God. The service then is more of a step by step instruction in group prayer than a group effort by virtuosi who are all sure of what they are doing. Here, Conservative TBS has absorbed a Reform practice. This can be attributed to the varied skill levels of the members; or at least to those who designed the building,

such as when to rise, when to sit, and when to join in the responsive readings. Indeed, pages in the prayer book are frequently announced by the Rabbi during the course of the service because many congregants cannot keep their places. Significant amounts of direction must be given from the bimah because of the lack of skill among many of the members. A statement by Laura a member in her middle forties who had no formal religious training as a child is typical of what I heard from many of the congregants:

Half the time I'm lost at services. I never went to Hebrew school and the only Hebrew that I know is the reading I picked up at an adult education class. I try to follow in the English and I get lost. It's good that the Rabbi tells us what page we're on every time we go to a new prayer, that helps me get back on track.

They not only help Laura and others like her get back on track but they also serve to keep the overall action of the service on track. The announcements by the Rabbi have entered the prayer ritual itself. That is to say even when the worshippers do not need help, they feel the announcements should be made, as part of the worship ritual.

When the prayer leaders look at the congregation they are doing more than instructing; they are also refocusing attention from the ark/God to the congregation. The congregation itself then, becomes an object whose sanctity is celebrated in the communal worship. Here one is reminded of the words of Durkheim who stated that:

The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem.³

But with the refocusing of attention from the ark to the congregation the implication is that the congregation has somewhat

bypassed the ark and Torah as representing themselves and now focuses more directly upon themselves as their object of worship.

I believe that this is true of the way the congregants at TBS see themselves in relation to the worship service; and may also explain why some of them are willing to deal with the feeling of incompetence such as was expressed by the congregant who claimed that she was 'lost' at services.

In considering her statement I asked myself why would she and others like her be willing to feel incompetent week after week in following the prayer service? Would this not be demeaning, and a blow to one's self image as an adult? Of course, if something were obtained in return for experiencing these negative feelings, then there would be a rationale for going through this. What then could the congregant be receiving in return? The possibilities that I came up with were; a) fulfillment of a religious practice that the congregant considered to be obligatory or, b) achieving a feeling of community with the congregation at prayer.

Knowing the nature of many of the congregant's pick and choose policy towards which traditions and laws they would observe, I doubted that they were coming to Temple out of a strong sense of obligation to fulfill Jewish religious law. Perhaps then the motivation came from the desire to experience the communion of a worship service. By taking an active role in the service, the individual, even though somewhat incompetent in knowing why and when to rise and sit, and the meaning of the Hebrew prayers; is nonetheless able to identify with the congregation, and through collaborating with the group in this service

partakes in the strength of the group and the effervescence of the sacred moment. To quote Durkheim:

...the practice of the cult, whatever they may be, are something more than movements without importance and gestures without efficacy. By the mere fact that their apparent function is to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to his god, they at the same time really strengthen the individual to the society of which he is a member...

So far the layout of the sanctuary has been described along with some examination as to how space is used in the organization of group prayer. Within this space there are also decorations, inscriptions and plaques. An examination of these items can give us a clue as to the things that the congregants at T.B.S. have chosen to highlight. We may begin with the ark since it is the largest and most noticeable decorated object in the sanctuary. The ark, which extends from floor to ceiling takes up almost half a sanctuary wall and is seen by all of the worshippers as they sit in the pews. The doors of the ark are decorated with ten gold colored Hebrew letters with the numerical values of one through ten and represent the Ten Commandments. This is the most elaborate decoration in the Temple. Milhaly gives us a possible reason for this emphasis on the ark in many American synagogues built during the post World War II period. This has to do with the imbalance mentioned previously in which the service was becoming increasingly reader centered with the attention of the worshippers being focused on the pulpit. Milhaly writes that:

Perhaps one of the motives for the ever increasing emphasis on the Ark, characteristic of a number of recently erected synagogues, is an attempt to correct the disbalance. One notes a tendency toward the ever more impressive, ever larger and more elaborate Aron Kodesh. It may well be that it serves as a sound corrective for the over-emphasis of the pulpit, or even as a

counter-balance for a humanism which dangerously borders on an anthropo-theism.

Also in the sanctuary are six stained glass windows which line the two side walls on either sides of the pews and consist of scenes from the bible. These are scenes that would be familiar to those with only the most rudimentary Hebrew school education; or to go to an even lower common denominator, familiar to those whose knowledge of the bible is limited to a few movie or television epics such as Cecil B. De Milles Moses And The Ten Commandments. The creation of the world, the flood, the parting of the Red Sea, the burning bush, the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai and the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land are bits of basic biblical events that show up from time to time in popular American culture not only in the movies and in television but also in Negro spiritual, American folk or children's songs, (God said to Noah, there's gonna be a floody); public speeches, (M.L. King, and his many comparisons of the civil rights struggle to the children of Israel entering the Promised Land); or common conversation such as one jokingly saying to others; "Let there be light", when switching on the lamp in a darkened room.

The point here is that the stained glass windows represent themes that are recognizable to people from the widest band of Judaic knowledge who may enter the sanctuary. All will find something visually familiar to make them feel at home. Not only do these themes stained onto the glass speak to the widest common denominator of Jews; but as part of the Judaeo-Christian heritage of America they speak to Christian visitors as well who often are in attendance as guests or relatives of

families celebrating life cycle rituals. I asked myself if indeed these were the motives for selecting the themes of the stained glass windows. There were no discussions in the Temple minutes that discussed how these themes were selected. But in an ethnography of a temple perhaps the written records are not the key to understanding these themes. The key to an understanding is what is seen and heard in the temple itself.

During the Sabbath service when bar or bat mitzvahs took place and the sanctuary would be full of guests the Rabbi would almost always say a few words to the assembled about the stained glass windows. He would emphasize that the windows represented scenes from the Bible that should be familiar to all. I asked the Rabbi why he took the time to speak about the windows. He said something that seemed to support my interpretation of the symbolic significance of the windows. He said that:

I know that at bar mitzvahs we have lots of guests, many of whom are strangers to the Temple, not only to our Temple but to synagogues in general; either because they never come to services or because they aren't Jewish. I don't want them to feel that the sanctuary is a weird place. Maybe many people aren't sure what is in the Torah; but I think everyone knows at least some of their Bible stories.

There is a foyer leading into the sanctuary whose walls are richly furnished with inscriptions and plaques that may tell us something about what the congregants regard as important to their Temple community. The inscriptions and plaques in the foyer are an illustration of the importance given by the congregants to two aspects of their Temple involvement. These are the family oriented life cycle events which play an important part in Temple activity, and will be examined in greater detail in chapter five; and the voluntary service

offered by congregants to the administration of the Temple and its activities which will be discussed in chapter six. A walk through the foyer, which one must take in order to get to the sanctuary either from the coat room or the front entrance is like walking through an everyman's hall of fame of families and officers in the history of Temple Beth Shalom.

Families may honor departed kinsmen or life cycle events through purchasing a leaf on the Tree of Life that adorns the inside wall to the right of the main entrance to the Temple. In Judaism the Torah is traditionally referred to as " ... a Tree of Life to them that hold fast to it, And everyone that upholds it is happy"⁶ At Temple Beth Shalom as well as all of the other four Conservative synagogues in the Greater New Haven area the 'Tree of Life' has come to also mean a decorative motif upon which congregants commemorate life cycle rituals. At TBS the Tree of Life is a stone relief of a tree with numerous branches extending from its trunk. Hundreds of flat leaf shaped stones are attached to these branches. For one hundred dollars apiece congregants may have an inscription put upon one of the leaves. Inscriptions commemorate a wide variety of life cycle events, and not only those that are connected to traditional Jewish ritual observations such as bar mitzvahs and weddings. There are inscriptions for wedding anniversaries; in honor of the births of children or grandchildren; and for milestone adult birthdays. In adding these commemorations the congregants are innovating new traditions by incorporating life cycle events that have no religious rituals attached to them into the same decorative commemorative format as is used for life cycles which are

marked by religious rituals. By commemorating a fortieth birthday, or a twenty fifth wedding anniversary on the tree of life a secular life cycle event is not only given importance by being publicly proclaimed but is also given a kind of Jewish religious sanctification by virtue of its place on the Temple wall.

A number of the leaves had written on them memorial inscriptions for kinsmen who had passed on. Before the tree of life was put up four years ago the only place to install memorial inscriptions was on the brass memorial board which hangs on another wall in the foyer near the main entrance. This memorial board was the type of the one traditionally found in most American synagogues. Congregants would purchase brass plaques that would slide into grooves in the board. Upon these plaques were written the name of the deceased, and the date of the anniversary of his death according to both the Jewish and civil calendars. Next to each plaque was a small light bulb that would be turned on by the sexton every year upon the anniversary of the death according to the Jewish calendar. At this time close kinsmen were required to recite special memorial prayers at the daily synagogue service. This ritual is known as the 'yartzeit' the yearly anniversary of a bereavement.⁷

There were then two ways in which to memorialize a deceased loved one on the walls of the foyer; either through a plaque on the more traditional memorial board which was connected to the performance of traditional ritual, or on the newer tree of life which not connected to the performance of such ritual. This expansion of choice in public decorative memorials allows the individual tastes of the congregants to be openly expressed. This may be particularly important when dealing

with attitudes towards memorializing the departed; as heard in the words of the following congregant who chose to memorialize a departed relative with a leaf on the tree of life rather than with the more traditional plaque on the memorial board:

I got the leaf for my mom because it's on the tree of life. People also have birthdays and other happy things on that tree. I didn't want something on the memorial board, it's too sad, only for the dead. I felt bad enough when she passed on. At least let her grandchildren see something that remembers her in a brighter way. The Temple sends me a card once a year when I have to say kaddish for her. It's always a different date each year, (pauses) I guess that's because it's the Jewish date. Anyhow, I don't need the plaque with all the Hebrew written on it, I can't understand it anyway.

For this congregant a plaque on the memorial board would not satisfy the need to memorialize her mother. The memorial symbolism of the brass plaque was not written in this congregants language; not in terms of the Jewish calendar; the Hebrew inscription; or the direct and stark association with death. The leaf on the tree of life however spoke to this daughter in a language she was more familiar and comfortable with. The tree of life and the memorial board are decorative inscription which are put up on the initiative of congregant families. Not only do families honor their own. When we step outside of the family we see that their are plaques and inscriptions initiated by the organizational arms of the congregation in order to publicly honor certain of its members.

Similar to the construction of the memorial board, but much smaller in size are three bronze plaques which have engraved upon them the names and dates of office of the past presidents; of the Temple, the Men's Club, and the Sisterhood. The presidents names are added to these plaques at the time of their completion of office. This

honor which is bestowed upon those who volunteer their time and energy to serve the congregation, symbolizes the great value the congregation puts upon such service. The congregational community honors those who serve it voluntarily. There are no plaques for past rabbis. This may seem odd but perhaps can be explained by the fact that although Rabbis also serve the congregation they are **employees** and not **volunteers** in a communal effort. We also see that the congregation also recognizes that there are many ways in which its members may serve it. One may be honored on a plaque not only by being Temple president but also by being chief officer in the Men's club or the Sisterhood.

I believe that the desire to permanently put names on the wall says something about modern American suburban life in general, and its Jewish variation in particular. Children go away to college, meet spouses from other states, are drawn by career opportunities to distant cities. Adults are transferred by their employers, or lose jobs through corporate downsizing and are forced to move elsewhere in order to earn a living. There are divorces, families break up. Retirees move to Florida and leave children and grandchildren behind.

Among Jews there are those who intermarry or who assimilate to one degree or another and thereby weaken their involvement in Jewish family and community traditions. The fact that ones children have a bar/bat mitzvah does not guarantee that ones grandchildren will have the same. That one comes to Temple to say kaddish on the anniversary of the death of a parent does not mean that the same will be done by ones children.

Perhaps this need to memorialize in durable bronze or stone represents a symbolic negation of the reality of the instability of family and community in the suburbs of America; and for all American Jews, suburban or not, the uncertainties of Jewish continuity in the late twentieth century.

Now having discussed the physical setting that the congregant walks into when he enters the sanctuary we will turn to another element in an examination of the setting of the house of prayer. How does a worshiper look as he or she enters the house of prayer; that is to say what clothing is worn in order to enter this sacred space?

Dressing For The House of Prayer

Eviatar Zerubavel in discussing sacred and profane time notes that;

A person's outward appearance is also among the most effective ways in which the categorical distinction between sacred time and profane time is ritually marked.⁶

He then goes on to relate this idea to the Jewish Sabbath by saying that;

It is, thus, quite understandable that an entire chapter of the Sabbath tractate in the Mishnah is devoted to particularly detailed descriptions of how men and women ought to appear in public on the Sabbath. In order to accentuate the fundamental distinction between sacred time and profane time, Jews have established a cultural differentiation between types of clothing which are associated with each, following the Talmudic imperative, "Thy Sabbath garments should not be like thy weekly garments." This accounts for the evolution of special Sabbath garments such as the Sabbath cap and caftan, as well as for the fact that Jewish women wear special dresses and jewelry during the Sabbath which they do not wear on regular weekdays.

Heilman, organizes the clothing worn by the Orthodox Jews that he studied into categories that will also be useful for application to the study of the dress of the members of Temple Beth Shalom. Heilman writes that;

For the shul Jews there are two large categories of garments: (1) the profane clothing of ordinary life and (2) the ritual, or prayer, garb which must be worn for religious reasons. These two categories may be further subdivided. The first contains both the clothing worn to shul on weekdays or chol and that worn on Sabbaths or kodesh. The second may be divided into items that are worn by some persons but not by others.¹⁰

For the members of Temple Beth Shalom there is no special religious significance to the profane clothing that they wear in everyday life. None of the congregants including the Rabbi wears a head covering or any other distinctive clothing as a matter of religious custom in everyday life. The implicit message here is that the role of being a Conservative Jew can be played out in the realms of Temple activities and home observances exclusively. There is no need to exhibit manifestations of this role in the greater realm of American civil society. This is unlike the Orthodox among whom there are those who keep their head covered at all times. There are also Orthodox sects that have their own distinctive styles of clothing. Within the house of prayer at TBS however profane clothing does vary according to the service and according to certain criteria of the congregant.

At services on holidays and Sabbaths, men almost without exception, wear jackets and ties. Jeans or sneakers are almost never worn. Women wear skirts, sometimes very short, especially among some of the younger women; who do so because perhaps they are part of a

younger generation that eschews modest dress as a prerequisite for attendance at religious services, or dresses or dress slacks. Hats are worn by some women congregants. Children below the age of bar/bat mitzvah often wear sneakers and sometimes jeans. Usually the young boys will wear a sweater or a shirt with a collar and buttons without a tie. Young girls will wear skirts, dresses or pants.

When coming to the house of prayer on weekdays for the morning minyan dress is somewhat different. Men and women come in casual wear including sneakers, jeans, and in the summer, shorts. At the minyan on weekdays some congregants may come in jackets and ties but this is a function of their going to work right after the service. On Sundays the sportswear mentioned above is the rule.

It is significant that dress for the Sabbath service tends to be more formal than the casual dress for weekday services. This indicates that the Sabbath service for these congregants is looked upon as being special and deserving of special dress. This continues a Jewish tradition that has persisted for generations of Jews; at least since the shtetl of Eastern Europe.¹¹ Heilman also notes this continuity of special Sabbath dress among the congregants of the modern Orthodox shul he studied in the 1970s.¹² Perhaps though for the Conservative Jews in Hamden the norms of contemporary American dress play a greater role than the tradition of the shtetl. This can be illustrated by the following from my field notes of a Sabbath morning service:

Paul, a congregant in his middle forties walks into the sanctuary wearing faded jeans and what appears to be an old well worn sweater. Paul comes to services irregularly, perhaps once every month or two and always dresses in this informal way. Diane, sitting next to me, who is attired in a dress and hat whispers to me; " Hey, look at him,(Paul), I bet he wouldn't go to work like

that." I comment to Diane that; "Who knows, maybe he would, he teaches at one of the local schools and the dress codes aren't too demanding." "Yeah, replies Diane, but nobody would go to church on Sunday morning like that."

Diane, in criticizing Paul's style of informal dress in the Temple on the Sabbath uses as references what she imagines to be the norms for attire in the work place and at Church. What she imagines these norms to be may be based upon her conjecture, her experience, or a combination of both. This is not the significant point here. What is significant is that she refers not to what she believes are **traditional Jewish norms** to justify her comments about proper Sabbath dress in the Temple; but refers to the norms of the **American work place and Church**. This serves as an example of the influence of American social norms on the decorum of the Temple. It illustrates the Conservative Synagogue as being culturally an **American house of worship**, not only a **Jewish one**.

Lack of Judaic knowledge on the part of a number of congregants coming for a Yartzheit was observed to create an interesting social gaffe regarding normative dress in the house of prayer. My field notes tell the following story;

It was the second day of Passover which fell on a Sunday this year. The Sunday morning minyan which takes place on all non holiday Sundays starts at 9:30. When a holiday falls on a Sunday, special holiday services replace the usual morning minyan service. As I looked around the sanctuary at the forty or so congregants present, all dressed in the usual holiday clothes I noticed three worshippers who were dressed in jeans, sneakers, and other casual weekend clothing. I was somewhat puzzled by this and wondered if these people were trying to make some sort of fashion statement. I then recognized who these people were and on this basis was able to understand why they came dressed in such an inappropriate manner for the Passover service. I had seen these people at the Sunday morning minyan for the past few weeks. They had all recently lost close relatives and were coming once a

week to say the mourner's kaddish. Today, on Passover, they came to the Temple as usual in the clothes of an ordinary Sunday. They apparently had no idea that it was to be a holiday service that day. They came in punctually at 9:30 and expected a half hour Sunday morning minyan. What they got was much longer and quite different! I later checked this theory out with Stu, the gabbai. He confirmed my suspicions and mentioned that when these puzzled worshippers turned to Stu for an explanation as to why this wasn't a usual Sunday morning minyan he told them the reason for the difference. Interestingly, all of these people stayed for the entire service that they walked into quite by accident.

What we have here is what Goffman might have typified as an interactional modus vivendi. Goffman writes of such a situation that:

Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored.¹³

Here we have an example of the coexistence of the worshippers at Temple Beth Shalom. The claim of the group who defined the situation as a Sunday morning minyan rather than a Passover festival service; and therefore dressed accordingly, was temporarily honored by the group who was indeed there for appropriate holiday service. Beyond the Jewish issue involved here was also the matter of saving face.

I believe that the two most significant controlling elements behind what congregants will and will not wear are **age** and **orientation toward traditional religious practice**. This translates into a generational issue. The most formally dressed are those who are older, (pre- baby boomers), or those of any age who are traditionalists regarding Sabbath and Holiday observance. The least formally dressed are those who either are younger, (born after WWII), especially those among them who are less traditional in Sabbath and Holiday observance.

At first glance the above scheme of criteria controlling dress may

seem complicated and somewhat curious. Could not style of dress be related to one general controlling element? I believe it can be. Through further analysis we see that the controlling element is **orientation toward tradition; whether this tradition be the Jewish one of getting dressed up in ones best for the Sabbath and Holidays; or the tradition of pre-1960s America, that of dressing formally for attending congregational worship services.** What happens in the Jewish world is not separate from the influences of society in general.

At Temple Beth Shalom there is not only the type of clothing worn by the congregant to consider but also the ritual garb that he or she wears; or sometimes chooses not to wear.

Ritual Garb

The Rabbi and the ritual committee do set certain parameters for appropriate ritual dress in the sanctuary. Sometimes they are enforced, other times they are ignored. For example, all males, including children are required to wear a head covering in the sanctuary. If any male, including members, visitors or even non-Jewish visitors were to enter the sanctuary with head uncovered a member of the ritual committee or another member of the Temple would remind that person to cover his head.

I witnessed this situation occur a number of times. What I noticed in particular was the method used as the reminder. When spotting a male without a head covering a member would never tap him on the

shoulder or motion to him in any other way that he must cover his head. The member would walk out of the sanctuary to the lobby where the box with kippot was located and bring in a kippah and offer it to the bareheaded male. It was always accepted. This was an unobtrusive way of enforcing the rule. The person in violation of the rule was not inconvenienced by having to go and get a kippah himself. The message of the method of enforcement was as if to say; " Look, I'm sorry but we have this custom here, so you will have to conform to it. Here, I got the kippah for you, didn't want to make you go out of the way, instead I am going out of the way for you so you can be appropriately dressed for the ritual performance." Another implicit message in the way the worshipper was given the head covering might be; "I don't consider your being without a head covering in the sanctuary to be so terrible an act that you won't be allowed to remain inside while I get you a kippah. Also I am not so surprised or shocked that you either forgot to cover you head or didn't know that this was expected of you." The unspoken contrast that I have in mind here is one with an Orthodox synagogue in which it is expected that worshippers will know the rules.

Some rules and traditions of ritual dress were "on the books" so to speak, but not enforced. For example, it is Jewish tradition that all married Jewish males wear a tallit during daytime prayer at the synagogue. A tallit is not worn after sundown except at the Kol Nidre service on the eve of Yom Kippur. Temple Beth Shalom accepts this tradition. If a married male however attends a service without a tallit he will not be asked or reminded in any way to put one on. This very well may be because a male worshipper present in the sanctuary without a

kippah would visually stand out and easily be noticed by everyone else present since all males are expected to have their heads covered. On the other hand a male without a tallit would not be such a standout since there are always a number of males in the sanctuary who because of age or marital status are legally without a tallit. Furthermore, and this has to do with the Conservative identity of the Temple; the option to attend a service bareheaded has been characteristic of the Reform moment as opposed to Conservatism. The presence of bareheaded adult males at the Temple would therefore weaken the Conservative identity of the congregants. In fact, once when a male worshipper entered the sanctuary as an invited bar mitzvah guest and was noticed to be without head covering I overheard one of the regulars tell his seat mate, "Ah, he doesn't know what the hell he's doing he's from Mishkan Israel, (Hamden's Reform congregation.)" This regular then went over to the guest and offered him a kippah. It was not unusual to hear such denigrating comments about the Reform Temple in Hamden. Sometimes these comments took the form of a joke such as; "Mishkan Israel is closed for the Jewish Holidays" or "Instead of gefilte fish they serve shrimp for the kiddush after services." These jokes were not at all based in reality. Their significance was that they showed an attitude of condescension on the parts of TBS members toward the congregants of Mishkan Israel; at least in matters of Judaic knowledge and observance. In chapter six I will show how this condescension helps the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom form an identity as Conservative Jews.

Another example of laxity in enforcing the wearing of ritual garb is the wearing of tefillin at weekday morning services. Tefillin, which

are usually translated as "phylacteries" are described by The Encyclopedia Judaica as:

...two black leather boxes containing scriptural passages which are bound by black leather strips on the left hand and on the head and worn for the morning services on all days of the year except Sabbaths and scriptural holy days.¹⁴

It is accepted Orthodox ritual practice for adult male Jews to wear tefillin at the morning service. Some women in the Conservative Movement also choose to don tefillin. In fact at least one woman at Temple Beth Shalom does this. At the morning minyan however, only about a third of the fifteen or so worshippers actually wear tefillin; and unlike in the case of the kippah no one is ever asked or encouraged to wear this ritual item.

Why this is so perhaps lies in the differential mechanics of donning these respective ritual items. A kippah is simple to place upon one's head. If reminded to put one on there is no great skill needed to comply with the request. Tefillin on the other hand require a good deal of knowledge on the part of the wearer in order that he place the leather thongs and cube shaped containers properly on the arm and forehead. He also must recite the appropriate blessing while performing this act.¹⁵ The worshipper who is requested to perform such a ritual act may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to do it. Of course the one making such a request could show the worshipper how to do it but this would be time consuming and slow down the pace of the service.

I believe however that there is another and deeper symbolic reason for worshippers never being asked or encouraged to don tefillin at TBS, while they are asked to put on a kippot. This has to do with the reluctance to intrude into another's personal physical space, which

is considered somewhat socially taboo in present day American culture.¹⁶ If one requests another worshipper to don tefillin and then has to show him how to do it; this would most likely cause the one who made the request to enter the requestees personal space, including the touching of hands and arms. Requesting another to wear a kippah does not entail such an entry into personal space. This aversion to penetrating into the personal space of others demonstrates an Americanism of the congregants.

I questioned one of the minyan participants about his reluctance to wear tefillin. His reply reflected a pick and choose nature in the area of ritual observances; which as this study unfolds will be shown to be typical of many in this congregation:

I've been coming since my dad passed away. I figured it was the right thing to do. It's been six months and I only have five more to go. I try to come at least two or three times a week- it's better than nothing. Anyhow there's no way that I'm going to put on tefillin. The last time I did it was once just before my bar mitzvah about thirty years ago. I don't remember how to do it. Sure, the Rabbi and some of the other guys here offered to show me how, they were real nice and supportive, but they didn't push. I took it hard when my dad died. I guess that's why I come here a few times a week, it's like a support group, people ask how you're doing. But tefillin? I bought into the minyan but I didn't buy into the tefillin. It's just such a strange thing for me because I wasn't brought up with it. People want to do it, it's great for them, but it's just not my thing.

Picking and choosing may mean not only opting out of an observance that you would normally be expected to do. It sometimes may also mean performing an observance that although not prohibited is not one that is normally expected of you. One woman, in her 60s, who came back to Judaism at a late age also wears tefillin. When I asked her about this she replied; "Why shouldn't I, we're equal with the men

aren't we? If I want to do it I'll do it. If we women accept the men's rights, then we should also take on their obligations, no?

Another example of official rules that are not enforced is the issue of head coverings for women. Above the box with the kippot and doilies for congregants who may have come unprepared there is a sign which states; "All those who enter the sanctuary are requested to have their head covered". Since there is no mention of gender in this notice and since there are head coverings in the box for men and women it is clear that the rule for head covering applies to both men and women. A quick glance around the sanctuary makes it clear that this rule is not enforced for women. At any given service there are a number of women, of all ages, bareheaded. If a woman however were to be called to the bimah for an aliya a member of the ritual committee would remind her to cover her head if she had not yet done so.

We see then that the rule for women wearing head coverings in the sanctuary is a flexible one, subject in most situations to the interpretation and judgement of the individual congregant; both the woman and potential enforcer of the rule. We have here an illustration of Garfinkel's *et cetera* clause which states:

The *et cetera* clause provides for the certainty that unknown conditions are at every hand in terms of which an agreement, as of any particular moment, can be retrospectively reread to find out in light of present practical circumstances what the agreement "really" consisted of "in the first place" and "all along."¹⁷

That the rule regarding head covering for women is so unclear at Temple Beth Shalom, (i.e. difference in stated policy versus actual practice) also greatly expands the choices and the rationales for these choices among female congregants. A woman may choose not to wear a head covering either on the basis of believing that, a) head coverings

at worship are an anachronism that have no place in modern Judaism, or that b) women should not have to wear head coverings as men are required to do because there should be ritual differences between genders,. On the other hand, a woman may choose to wear a head covering either on the basis of believing that; a) exempting women from the obligation of wearing head coverings is a sexist anachronism, (this is an egalitarian rationale or that, b) in Orthodox Judaism women, (at least those who are married) must have their heads covered in the synagogue; this is the way it has always been done, and we will continue to do it this way. Men at Temple Beth Shalom have no such choices as to wear a head covering or not. If they don't wear one in the sanctuary, they will simply be told to do so. It cannot be assumed however that worshippers who enter the sanctuary at Temple Beth Shalom will themselves know what ritual garb they are expected to wear. The following discussion should illustrate this point.

Access to the sanctuary is through a double door that connects it with the main lobby. In the lobby and just before the doors to the sanctuary is a closet which contains a supply of Temple owned 'tallitot' or prayer shawls for the use of the worshippers. This is another innovation since it assumes that at least a certain number of worshippers will not own their own. This assumption is true judging by the number of these Temple owned tallitot that I saw worn at services. What this tells us is that Judaic skills and knowledge cannot be taken for granted to exist at high levels among all the members. The availability of ritual head coverings is also a reflection of this point. Close to the closet with the tallitot is a wooden box on a stand

with head coverings. A sign above the box states that all who enter the sanctuary must cover their heads; yet some apparently miss this. Here too, as with the prayer shawls it cannot be assumed that all worshippers are familiar with this practice. At this point the specific variations in styles of ritual items of dress will be discussed from the standpoints of the different people who choose to wear or not to wear them.

Head Coverings

In Synagogue Life Heilman discusses the types of head coverings worn by the members of his Orthodox congregation.¹⁸ Among his subjects head coverings were construed as fairly accurate communicators of information about the intensity of their religious observance. Of course, as Heilman noted head coverings could be misleading if the wearer intentionally wanted to project an image of himself that was not accurate. At Temple Beth Shalom as a rule, no male would ever wear a hat to services as some of the members of Orthodox synagogues do. The only exception I saw to this was that of one of the congregants wearing a baseball cap to the Sunday morning minyan. This was done only for a few Sundays towards the end of the professional baseball season and was a fashion statement in support of his favorite team. To wear a hat would be a violation of the decorum of a Conservative synagogue which has been patterned after that of the American Protestant church. We therefore are interested only in Heilman's observations on the head covering called the "yarmulke". This

is the Yiddish/Polish term for skullcap which is used by older members of Temple Beth Shalom, (generally over the age of 60), and curiously enough by younger members in their forties and fifties whose Judaic backgrounds are limited. An explanation for the use of common terms by older members who were exposed to Orthodox Judaism while growing up and by younger members who have limited Judaic backgrounds is as follows: Both the older members and these younger ones were not exposed to the normative Conservative education that has been taking place in Hebrew schools and Day schools during the post war era. This education has replaced Yiddish terms with Hebrew ones. It has also replaced the Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation with the Israeli Sephardic type. As a rule of thumb when a congregant goes up to the bimah to say the blessings over the Torah it is possible to estimate his generation and Judaic education by the Hebrew pronunciation he or she uses. Exceptions are those older people who through adult education recently acquired a knowledge of reading Hebrew. These people learned a modern Israeli Hebrew which is characteristic of the younger congregants.

Getting back to the yarmulke, Hellman noted that among the worshippers at his Orthodox synagogue;

There are knitted yarmulkes, white linen ones, black ones, plaid ones, velvet ones, small ones, and large ones. Each may make a different statement. The smaller the yarmulke in relation to the head, the less likely is its wearer to be one of the traditional Orthodox Jews of Dudley Meadows. Knitted yarmulkes are more often worn by the young. Velvet yarmulkes, especially those whose sheen has worn away and whose surface has become crushed by the weight of an almost ever-present hat on top of them are usually the sign of the most frum, those for whom modern fashion and good looks are less important than proving that the head-covering is constantly worn. The smooth white yarmulke whose appearance indicates that it has more often than not been folded

and stored rather than used is the first signal that its wearer is an infrequent sojourner in any shul. In short the yarmulke can tell a great deal.¹⁹

The yarmulke, or kippah may tell us something as to the wearer also at Conservative Temple Beth Shalom, but the signals are somewhat although not entirely different and oftentimes ambiguous. Men who wear the large Bukharian, multi colored kippot are making two fashion statements. One statement is that they or a close relative have visited Israel and that they have an interest in Jewish ethnic, if not necessarily religious culture. This statement becomes public knowledge among the congregants when the wearers of these "ethnic" kippot are invariably asked during the kiddush socializing that takes place after the services, a number of questions regarding the origins of the kippah they are wearing. Detailed descriptions are given to the questioners about where the kippah was purchased and about the trip to Israel itself. Another statement is that they think wearing this kind of a head covering is appropriate at an American suburban synagogue even though it is ethnically strange.

Knitted kippot are most often worn by the more regular attenders who tend to be more observant than most members of the congregation. A knit kippah makes the statement that its wearer is involved with Jewish ritual to the point that he spent the time and the money to acquire such a head covering. Many times the wearer's Hebrew name is knit into the kippah. This further personalizes the wearer's bond to Jewish involvement and exhibits at least some knowledge of the ability to read Hebrew. Some kippot have embroidered on them pictures of

favorite pastimes such as sports equipment or tools of a profession such as computers or musical instruments. In addition to personalizing the individual's attachment to ritual these also make the statement that tradition and involvement in the modern world are compatible with one another and that the wearer is comfortable in both worlds.

The shiny black or white kippot taken from the box outside the entrance to the sanctuary most often means that the wearer is an infrequent visitor to the house of prayer and doesn't own a kippah of his own. At other times however, it is used as a back up kippah if a worshipper forgets to bring his own from home.

From time to time kippot of a certain color are given to Sabbath morning worshippers as part of the color theme of the bar/bat being celebrated at that service. These kippot, chosen by the celebrant's family are placed in the kippah box. Worshippers may or may not choose to wear them. Invited guests of the bar/bat mitzvah almost always wear these kippot so as to identify with the occasion. The Rabbi too will be sure to don one of these specially colored head coverings. Those of the worshippers who are not invited guests usually will not wear one of these kippot. Perhaps it is felt that to wear one would be a case of representing oneself as something one is not; namely a guest of the family. Or maybe the fact that someone paid for these and if you are not an invited guest you are reluctant to take a 'party favor' kippah.

Women who opt to wear a head covering in the sanctuary can be divided into four groups. These groups exhibit certain sociological distinctions regarding insider status or feminist orientation. There are those who wear a hat; there are those who wear a men's style knitted

kippah; there are those who wear a doily; and those who wear a kippah from the box outside the entrance to the sanctuary. Wearing a hat or a men's kippah is usually a sign of being a regular at services, because it means you own such headgear and come prepared to the synagogue with it. Wearing a doily usually means one is somewhat less a regular than the above mentioned group. In the case of regulars however it can also mean that the wearer, not wanting to wear a hat and not wanting to appear in male ritual headgear, opts for a specifically feminine article. The women who wear the men's kippot from the box outside of the sanctuary either don't want to fuss with the bobby pin used to fasten the doily to the head or are expressing their egalitarianism by wearing what the practical, (it's easy to put on and doesn't easily fall off of your head as doilies tend to do), oriented regulars among the men wear, (see previous discussion of men's kippot).

As with the kippot there are variations in the kinds of tallitot, (prayer shawls) worn by the congregants; and in the clues they may give us about the backgrounds of those who wear them. The closet near the sanctuary entrance houses a number of prayer shawls that are kept by the Temple for the use of Sabbath and holiday worshippers. The chapel that is used for the morning minyan also has a cabinet with prayer shawls used for the daily worshippers. These tallitot are narrow and are made of some sort of synthetic material. They have a few black or blue horizontal stripes on either end. On Sabbath and Holidays the tallitot near the sanctuary are basically worn by infrequent visitors to the Temple who do not own a tallit of their own or who may forget to bring one. Those who attend the Temple on a regular basis usually wear

large wool prayer shawls that have folds in the material and stripes of various colors. Congregants wearing this type of tallit are usually the ones observed to be doing the most singing and swaying while at prayer. As with elaborate kippot these tallitot reflect the extra time and money invested in proper ritual garb on the part of the wearer.

Only a few women choose to wear prayer shawls. If a woman is seen in one it usually means that she is either a young girl who is a graduate of Ezra Academy, the local Conservative day school; or one of those who had an adult bat mitzvah at the Temple. The common element that leads to the wearing of tallitot among women appears to be a strong background or current involvement in Jewish education.

Bright colors and unusual designs characterize the prayer shawls of the women who choose to wear them. Many of these tallitot are hand made by the women themselves and are done from pieces of cloth purchased in fabric stores. There are tie dyed designs, prints, and batiks. This wide variety of self made tallitot allow the women a good deal of self expression in the wearing of this piece of ritual garb.

Ritual Garb: A Summation

Two themes stand out in our discussion of the dress of the congregants in the sanctuary at Temple Beth Shalom. It was pointed out that there is a great amount of laxity in the enforcement of the ritual dress rules including the wearing of the tallit, the tefillin, and head coverings for women, although not for the men. In addition casual dress is permitted although most of the congregants dress formally for the

services. This laxity in the enforcement of rules enables the congregants to pick and choose in the area of dress for the prayer service. This I believe is an important factor in the ability of the Temple to include a wide band of congregants at the worship service. The congregants are allowed a sense of limited free expressions in the highly visual area of appearances and at the same time are accepted at the communal service.

In addition a second theme is evidenced in the ritual garb of the congregants. Certain items such as the kippah, tallit, and tefillin mark people as either insiders and competent or outsiders and incompetent in performing the worship service. Not only whether or not the individual chooses to don such items, but also the style of these items, (i.e. tallit with folds versus short flat ones) has the effect of signifying insider/outsider and competent/incompetent status.

The setting for the house of prayer has been described in terms of space, objects, decorations, and the dress of the congregants. All of these physical items have been shown to have sociological meaning as being symbols by which the congregants organize their space and dress in order to define their roles as Jews, Conservative Jews, Jewish women, insiders or outsider to the Temple, and Judaic knowledgeable. These are the background items for what is the focus of this chapter; the congregants themselves, and the roles that they play in the worship services at Temple Beth Shalom. We will see how individuals in this pluralistic congregation are encouraged to take part in these worship services through the availability of a wide range of tasks that cover many levels of Judaic skills and backgrounds. We start with two groups who play major roles on the bimah; the professional and the lay

leadership.

Professional Leaders and Lay Leaders

The first division of ritual work to be dealt with is that between the lay leaders and the professional leaders of the Temple. In the house of prayer at TBS there are two professional leaders who are actually hired for the purpose of performing rituals. The most significant of these leaders is Rabbi Goodman. Of lesser importance is Cantor Palmer who was hired two years ago to lead High Holiday and Festival Services and Friday night and Saturday morning services when there is a bar/bat mitzvah and the parents request his services. There are on the average some fifteen to twenty such bar/bat mitzvahs each year.

Rabbi Goodman is a man in his early forties. He holds both Rabbinical ordination and a Doctorate in Biblical Literature from the JTS. He is married and has four children ranging in age from thirteen down to two years. Rabbi Goodman was brought up in the Conservative movement, his father having been a Conservative rabbi. The Rabbi is short, slim, and an avid football fan; the family van sports a Dallas Cowboys bumper sticker.

The Rabbi's wife is a full time social worker with a local hospital and is not involved in Temple activities aside from attending services on Sabbath and Holidays. She virtually has no role as 'rebitzen', or rabbi's wife; and by not being an appendage to her husband's career, mirrors the family roles of the other working wives in the congregation.

It is not difficult for a member of the congregation to observe

that the Rabbi and his wife have an egalitarian relationship; the kind that is idealized by many of the middle class suburban professionals of the congregation. The Rabbi takes part in school car pools and is actively involved as a parent at his children's Conservative day school. He is often seen taking care of his children at the kiddush after the services. As part of his sermons he frequently mentions his role as a parent.

The Rabbi will not ride or use the phone on the Sabbath. He keeps a kosher home but has a liberal interpretation as far as eating in restaurants goes. He will eat non meat dishes at certain local restaurants. These details of the Rabbi and his family were mentioned because they will all be shown to play a part in the relationship of the Rabbi to his congregants. For the present it is sufficient to say that the Rabbi has a background and a lifestyle that distances him from the rest of the congregation in the area of religious observances while at the same time allows the congregation to identify with him as someone who is open to some compromise in following these observances.

From my observations it became apparent that the Rabbi's role in worship services at times when there was no life cycle celebration had little to do with leading the prayers but much to do with orchestrating the conduct of the service. On Sabbath mornings for example the Rabbi would rarely recite Torah. He would never lead the services except for one or two readings in English or Hebrew upon occasion. He did however give a sermon or lead a Torah discussion as part of the service program every Sabbath. During the service which was always led by lay members the Rabbi would sit in his chair on the bimah next to the

Temple president or another representative of the board in his absence. The Rabbi's main function seemed to be getting up from time to time, taking a few steps to the pulpit and announcing to the congregation the appropriate place in the prayer book or Bible, for the Torah reading. Actually this is quite standard in a Conservative synagogue. Sklare, in his description of the role of the rabbi in religious worship in the Conservative synagogue writes that:

...the Conservative spiritual leader has come to be charged with planning the service so that it will proceed without interruption. He must see to it that there are no long pauses conducive to conversation, that the service is sufficiently varied so that boredom does not ensue with the attendant shift of interest away from the pulpit, and that breaches of decorum among congregants are quickly spotted and promptly dealt with. In contrast to his Orthodox colleague, the Conservative rabbi actually conducts public worship.²⁰

In going over my field notes it became clear that the Rabbi's most visible involvement with services was during life cycle events. When there was a bar/bat mitzvah the Rabbi would, in addition to the sermon, give a talk to the bar/bat mitzvah and also involve the celebrants family in certain prayers and participations in the service ritual. He would say the prayers at baby namings and wedding announcements and when requested to would say the prayer for those of the congregation who were ill. Just before the Mourner's Kaddish towards the end of the service he would read a passage in English from the prayer book which reflected on mortality and the memories of loved ones; and then read a list of those who passed away at this time of the year. The Rabbi would then lead the mourners in the Kaddish.

On Friday nights and Festivals the Rabbi's role was similar. On the High Holidays the Rabbi took a greater part in the services by

reciting or leading a few more prayers in both English and in Hebrew. Perhaps this greater involvement on the High Holidays was due to the fact that many members showed up at the house of prayer only at this time and it was the only opportunity for the Rabbi to appear before them. The Rabbi however, was fully in charge of conducting the "Yizkor" or Memorial Services for departed kinsmen which took place four times a year; once on the second day of Rosh Hashana and on the second days of the three Festival of Succoth, Passover, and Shavuoth. At these services the Rabbi led all of the prayers; sharing the prayer leader role with no one. The Rabbi also is the one who recites the Mi She'beirakh prayer. This is a petitionary prayer that is usually said at some point during the Torah reading part of the service. This prayer which is recited upon the request of a worshipper may be said for one who is ill, for a woman after childbirth, for a couple before a wedding, or for a bar/bat mitzvah.²¹ We see here in the prayer services a division of prayer and ritual tasks between the Rabbi and the other service leaders. The Rabbi takes on the job of doing the public prayers and readings dealing with life cycles. The other parts of the service are done either by lay service leaders or by the cantor.

A deeper analysis of this particular division of ritual tasks leads us to some insights as to why the services are so divided. Judging by the large turnouts for house of prayer activities that are connected with life cycle events as opposed to the much smaller attendance at other house of prayer activities we get the impression that participation in the house of prayer is, for most members of the congregation, important only for life cycle occasions. This means that it is vitally

important for the congregation that the Rabbi himself, rather than lay service leaders officiate at these times. The Rabbi realizes this and acts accordingly. While it is true that the cantor was hired in large part to lead services at bar/bat mitzvahs; it is the Rabbi who officiates at the parts of the service that directly deal with this life cycle event. The rabbi in effect, plays a role that bears some resemblance to a latter day shaman. Eliade writes that:

...the shamans have played an essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community. They are preeminently the antidemonic champions;...In a general way, it can be said that shamanism defends life, health, fertility, and the world of "light," against death, disease, sterility, disasters, and the world of "darkness."⁴²

In dealing with life cycle rituals later in this study we will see that for many congregants the house of prayer is thought of and used only as a place for life cycle rituals.

Another important reason why the ritual tasks are divided in this way is because of the desire of the Rabbi to withdraw somewhat from service leadership in order to open up opportunities for lay participation. This is a goal of the Rabbi because he feels that through greater lay participation in the services there will be greater attendance at services. He explained in to me in the following way:

The way it works is that if someone gets a part in the service, let's say to lead a section of the prayers or to do a reading from the Torah, other family members and sometimes even friends will make it a point to come to the service that week to see him do this. One person given a part in the service can easily bring in three or four more members who probably wouldn't have come that week.

As mentioned previously, in order to make room for as many lay people as possible to take a part in the service the Rabbi has to reduce

his role as service leader. On the other hand, at times when there are no qualified congregants present he has to **expand** his role in the services. In other Conservative synagogues in the area this is not done to such an extent. B'nai Jacob for example, has a full time cantor who leads services. Or Shalom sometimes has lay leadership, but there the Rabbi dominates the performance of the service. At Beth El Keser Israel there is great lay participation in leading the services but this seems due to the large number of members who have backgrounds that have prepared them well to do so.

In a sermon during the High Holidays of 1992 the Rabbi called for greater lay participation in leading services during the year. His stated goal was to involve thirty more congregants on one level or another of leading services. A year later at the 1993 High Holiday services the Rabbi announced that this goal was surpassed—sixty more congregants had taken part in service leadership. Some of the roles of the sixty new participants were small; such as a short English reading on Friday night; but other new participants actually led major portions of services for the first time. If anyone approached the Rabbi and showed a willingness to lead service, the Rabbi would personally tutor them in learning the part.

One may ask, if the Rabbi was so intent on involving more people in leading services, then how could the hiring of a cantor be explained? Would this not reduce the number of opportunities for lay participation? The hiring of the cantor was in fact opposed by a number of members of the ritual committee for precisely this reason. To explore this further we must first take a look at the idea behind a cantor. Furman tells us

that:

In the traditional synagogue, a lay person or more often the **chazzan** (cantor), led services by serving as the reader of the congregation; his function was not to read **in place of the congregation**, but rather, to set a tempo for congregational prayer, which was not recited in unison, but rather with each person reading, mostly out loud, at his or her own pace.²³

The role of the cantor has undergone change in the American synagogue during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A greater amount of congregational singing in unison has been encouraged. One reason for this has been the desire of synagogue leaders to maintain decorum at services; worshippers who were assuming an active role in congregational singing would have scant time for private whispering, conversations, or gossip.²⁴ The cantor then became more of a song leader for the worshippers.

When the idea of hiring a cantor was first brought up before the ritual committee at T.B.S. it was pointed out by the chairperson that since lay leadership at services had increased the attendance at these services had gone up a great deal. This seemed to be attributed to the fact that when one of the members led services, especially for the first time, family and friends would make it a point to attend. At times the Rabbi would contact a member who he thought had the potential to lead services and he would ask not only that person but also his or her whole family to attend; and for each member to take a part, no matter how small, of the service. Also, a number of the regulars were against the hiring of a cantor because they wanted to be sure they had someone who knew all of the temple prayer tunes and styles. It was another faction in the Temple that initiated the hiring of the cantor.

Mainly these were the people who wanted someone more professional to lead services at the bar/bat mitzvah services. While the lay cantors performed well in term of leading the services; there was much to be desired in terms of their musical abilities. In some of the discussions that took place in the ritual committee I detected a sociological motive for hiring a cantor; one which had to do with enhancing the status of the congregation. A comment from one of the committee members; which I heard echoed from others on the committee was that:

Look, B'nai Jacob has a cantor, and so does Mishkan Israel. We get about as many people as they do for Friday night and Saturday morning services. Why shouldn't we have a cantor too?

In addition to the status of being on a par with some of the other Synagogue in the area; especially B'nai Jacob and Mishkan Israel which are known to be wealthy congregations, the idea of having a cantor who was also a university professor was looked upon as an added status enhancer. The fact that Palmer was a professor was brought up positively a number of times in the committee discussions, although his area of scholarly involvement was in no way related to Judaic studies or the field of sacred music.

The cantor at T.B.S., Dr. Palmer continued to engender some controversy among the congregation. Palmer is friendly and well liked by the members he comes into contact with. He is a professor of language at one of the state universities. he was born a non-Jew and converted when he married a Jewish woman. Palmer is also a practicing Orthodox Jew. Although he and his family belong to an Orthodox synagogue in New Haven; they had no problem with praying in a Conservative synagogue. He is very observant of Jewish dietary laws

and Sabbath restrictions. In the Orthodox tradition he keeps his head covered at all times. When Dr. Palmer leads Sabbath services he arrives at the Temple on Friday afternoon, before sundown, so as not to violate the Sabbath by traveling in a vehicle. He sleeps at the Temple overnight and after Sabbath morning services he walks for one and a half hours to his home in New Haven. In case of really bad weather he stays at the Temple until the Sabbath is over and gets a ride home from his wife who comes to pick him up. Sometimes he stays at a congregants house for the Sabbath but his choices of hosts are limited because he is strictly kosher and eats only foods that are prepared in a kosher kitchen. Underlying some of the opposition to cantor Palmer is the fact that he is Orthodox; not that he is a convert. This seems to be an odd twist and may tell us something about the Conservative identity of the congregation.

Members take pride in the fact that Temple Beth Shalom has enough of their own knowledgeable people to lead services. Bringing in an "outsider" from the Orthodox community is somewhat of a blow to Temple pride. It makes some members feel that this Conservative synagogue is not able to run ritual matters themselves and has to bring in the Orthodox to do it for them. It also shows that the congregation may have a more tolerant attitude towards converts than it has towards Orthodox Jews. This should not be surprising because after all, there are a number of converts who are members of Temple Beth Shalom. These converts in choosing to be part of the congregation have by their act of joining made a positive statement about the congregation and the Conservative movement; i.e. recognizing a Conservative congregation as

Judaically valid and also worthy of their joining. Members of Orthodox synagogues on the other hand, have chosen Orthodox affiliation over Conservative,(or Reform affiliation) and thereby personally reject belonging to these movements.

It was felt by some of the members of the ritual committee that Cantor Palmer took on this job not only for the monetary rewards involved. Palmer had years ago studied cantorial skills with a private teacher. He very much wanted to use these skills in leading synagogue services. The Orthodox synagogue to which he belonged did not offer him frequent opportunities to lead services. This was because many of the members of his congregation were capable of and took turns leading services. Although Palmer is not a member of Temple Beth Shalom; is an Orthodox "outsider"; and is paid for his duties; it seems that he is able to fulfill some of his needs for religious participation through participation at the Temple. In a sense Cantor Palmer offers another example of the fulfillment of spiritual needs for a wide band of individuals in a situation of religious pluralism at TBS. A similar situation occurs at Conservative Beth El Keser Israel in New Haven. There on the holiday of Simchat Torah a number of women who belong to the Orthodox Westville Synagogue attend services for the express purpose of holding and dancing with the Torah as part of the ritual celebrations. At their own synagogues; according to Orthodox halacha women are not allowed to do so.

The Rabbi and the Cantor are, in the view of the congregation, paid employees of the Temple. A formal contract provides them with a set remuneration for fulfilling their ritual roles. Observing the services

at Temple Beth Shalom makes it clear however, that the lay leaders from the congregation itself fulfill major roles of ritual leadership in the worship services. In order to better understand how this inclusion of congregants into the worship service through the allocation of ritual tasks promotes congregational solidarity, we turn to the roles of the lay leadership in the house of prayer.

The Lay Leaders In The House of Prayer

The leadership roles that are delegated to the congregants in the worship service at Temple Beth Shalom run the spectrum from those that require a high level of Judaic knowledge and ritual competence to those that require little such knowledge or competence. This differential in required skills provides congregants with the opportunity to comfortably participate in areas commensurate with their backgrounds, skills, and tastes. An examination of these leadership roles should illustrate this point. We will begin with the role of lay prayer leader or Torah reader which is filled on a regular basis by half a dozen of the congregants. The congregants themselves have no noun that signifies this lay position as is the case for the cantor and the rabbi. Perhaps because the person who assumes this position changes from service to service, he or she is referred to by the task performed. There are the people who lead the heavily English Friday night service, or those who, using the Yiddish term, *daven* the mostly Hebrew service on Saturday morning, the Festivals, or at the daily morning minyan. There are also those who read Torah when this is a part of the service.

The Lay Service Leaders

There are six men and two women congregants who frequently lead services. Four of the men learned to lead services when they were children and belonged, with their families, to **Orthodox synagogues**. An Orthodox background is common to many of the male congregants who are Judaically knowledgeable and capable of leading rituals. Apparently the Conservative movement; in the case of Temple Beth Shalom at least, did not produce a great number of competent service leaders in the baby boomer generation. Another prayer leader also learned to lead services as a child, but at a **Conservative synagogue**. The fifth male congregant who frequently leads services; but only those on Friday nights, is a convert who learned this skill as an adult through being tutored by one of the more knowledgeable congregants at the Temple. Both women who frequently lead services learned this skill through having adult bat mitzvahs at the Temple. We see here that the skill to lead services was acquired by most of these leaders through a strong background of Judaic involvement during their childhood years. For the few leaders who did not have this background this skill was acquired through adult bat mitzvah in the case of the women; or adult conversion and voluntary follow up studies in the case of the male without a Jewish background. **The key for having the skills to lead services; if not acquired through mandatory childhood learning, is through the adult bat mitzvah or continuing conversion studies. In sociological terms this means voluntarily undergoing as an adult what is usually a childhood rite of passage, (i.e. either bat mitzvah - or conversion, which is**

symbolically similar to entering the covenant through circumcision as a newborn).

All of the service leaders except Ed, who only leads on Friday nights, attend Sabbath morning services regularly, rarely missing any, except if ill or out of town. Three of the men, Bob, Larry, and Bill are also frequent attenders and leaders at the daily morning minyan. All of the prayer leaders, except Ed, sometimes chant Torah or Haftarah portions at services. Bob though, is the main Torah reader, who does this almost every Sabbath and at the Monday and Tuesday minyan. Bob has a central role in the lay prayer leadership and this should be examined more closely.

Bob, in his late forties, and a university research scientist seems to exist in two life worlds. This dual existence, consisting of Jewish and secular identities mirrors, albeit in an extreme form, the lives of the other congregants. At the Temple Bob is a Jewish religious virtuosi. The Temple would be hard pressed to find someone to do what he does; reading Torah, and leading services on an almost daily basis. Bob often leads services on the Holidays such as Passover, Succoth and Shavuot. He is a constant fixture at the Temple. On the other hand Bob has been married for over twenty years to a non Jewish woman who has remained a devout Christian. They have no children. Bob explains that this is because since his wife wouldn't convert he didn't want to have children only to raise them as gentiles. The presence of a person like this in a leadership role says much about the openness of Temple Beth Shalom.

Bob's central role in the prayer service is not only based on the fact that he so frequently discharges these duties. Of even more

significance is the fact that the delegation of prayer service tasks is built around him. It is automatically assumed by all potential service leaders that Bob is responsible for leading the entire Sabbath morning service, reading the entire Torah portion for that week, and for leading the daily morning minyan. If one wishes to participate as a service leader he or she notifies Bob of the ritual task to be performed and the proposed date of such performance. This is Bob's territory and entry into it must be cleared with him. The Rabbi too defers to Bob in this matter. When the Rabbi encourages and schedules other congregants to take part in service leadership roles he always makes sure to clear the time slot with Bob. Bob is informed in advance, by the Rabbi, of all bar/bat Mitzvahs and the tasks which will be assumed by the celebrant and his family.

Recently Bob lost his job at the university and began sending out job resumes to distant parts of the country. This caused much discussion and concern among congregants as to the difficulties of possibly having to run services without him. While there are other service leaders none of them are a jack of all trades like Bob, who is able to lead all services. The others seem to be specialized in the performance of either one particular service or even one particular part of a service. This opens up specialized tasks for the congregants who are able and willing to participate in the service according to their individual skills and tastes. Scott leads the P'sukei D' Zimrah,(opening hymns) and the Shachari't (preliminary service) on Sabbath mornings. David too leads Shachari't and also does an occasional haftarah reading. Bill leads the morning minyan upon occasion and also does an occasional

haftarah. Larry leads the Shachari't and sometimes parts of festival services. Ed leads Friday night services. Henry leads Festival services and the Haftarah readings for these services. Helene does the additional (Musaf) Sabbath service and occasionally chants portions from the Torah.

If Bob cannot lead Sabbath or morning minyan services for one reason or another; then Stu, who has taken on the role of the gabbai, commences to contact people and asks them to lead different parts of the service until the entire service is covered. Stu, as well as a number of other congregants, play a central role in organizing the services although they never lead the prayers or chant from the Torah. Much like the stage crew in a play these people are the support personnel whose function is to make sure that the ritual props and the performers of the ritual are in their proper places on the stage and are doing the right thing at the right time. It is to this group of leaders and to the other participants in the ritual activities in the house of prayer to which we now focus our examination.

Allowing The Less Competent To Participate.

There are congregants who would like to take a leading role in the services but who either lack the skills to do so or would simply feel uncomfortable in getting up on the bimah and leading prayers or chanting from the Torah. For these people there exists the opportunity to participate in service leadership in a variety of other ways. Stu, being the gabbai is in charge of choosing worshippers to receive

honors, (kibbudim) such as saying blessings over the Torah, or in handling certain ritual items during the service. The role of kibbudim will be examined later in this chapter. Stu's role in the service goes beyond the realm of ritual activities. Stu is the one who makes sure food is purchased and brought out for the kiddush that follows the service. Stu also is the one congregants go to if they have complaints or suggestions regarding the service. If the matter is one that deals with ritual Stu brings it to the attention of the Rabbi. If the matter is one of housekeeping, such as the temperature in the sanctuary, or the kind of food served at the kiddush; Stu always tries his best to keep everyone content.

There are also at least two, and sometimes three congregants who remain on the bimah during the entire service and help others perform their ritual roles. Especially in a congregation in which there is a wide band of backgrounds and skills relating to the fulfillment of ritual duties there is often a need to help congregants do such things as; recite the Torah blessings; dress the Torah in its ornamental sheath; open the curtain of the ark; and recite the blessings for the challah and wine from the bimah at the conclusion of the service. There are five congregants, all women who have had adult bat mitzvahs at the Temple who have volunteered to assume these functions.

Finally, in our discussion of service leaders there is a task role which requires only the least amount of knowledge of the prayer service ritual. This is the role of the ushers on the High Holidays. These ushers, which number about ten at any one time during the High Holiday services help seat worshippers in the sanctuary; find prayer

books for those who didn't find one themselves; help enforce the quiet decorum of the service; and direct the traffic of congregants as they flow out of the sanctuary at the end of services.

All of these congregants who were described thus far fulfilled leadership roles in the house of prayer. The roles were specialized, each individual occupying a certain niche of involvement according to abilities and tastes. Receiving a task to do in the house of prayer comes about in a number of ways. Frequently what happens is that a new member, after appearing regularly on Friday evenings or on Saturday mornings, will be approached by the Rabbi and asked if he or she has a background in leading services. This gets people involved from the very beginning of their memberships. Sometimes a member will approach the Rabbi and inform him that he or she would like to learn to read Torah, or lead services, or help with other rituals on the bimah. In the case of Torah reading the Rabbi will refer the congregant to the Temple's adult education program. There are ongoing courses in Torah and haftarah reading taught by members knowledgeable members of the congregation. If one wishes to lead services the Rabbi offers to instruct on a one to one basis. To help with ritual objects on the bimah the Rabbi will arrange a kind of "apprenticeship" with someone who is already doing this task. Sheila once apprenticed to Stu and now Joan is Sheila's apprentice.

Consciously or subconsciously the Rabbi was making use of a sociological scheme when he set up these relationships. This scheme of socialization into the group is what Borhek and Curtis refer to as the "process of progressive commitment". The authors say that:

The process of progressive commitment may also be furthered in a piecemeal fashion by making little commitments that later lead to larger ones that are justified by already having made the little ones. He who raises his hand today may take communion next week, testify the week after, publicly confess his sins the next week, contribute half his wealth the next, and so on. Each act is later seen by the believer as incompatible with disbelief; He is committed to an adaptation of his own personal behavior.²⁵

As a participant observer I too took a part in leading services. In my case the Rabbi not only found a niche for me but he also involved my entire family by carefully parceling out suitable parts of the Sabbath morning service for us to lead. In planning for my son's bar mitzvah which took place about a year after we had joined the Temple the Rabbi suggested that it would be a nice idea if my wife and I and our two daughters joined our son in leading the entire Sabbath morning service. The service and Torah readings were divided up among the members of our family in such a way that included everyone, even our five year old daughter. Since the bar mitzvah the Rabbi has asked us to again lead services as a family group. He told us that he hoped this would be an inspiration for other families to do the same.

In this instance of participant observation not only was I participating in the service but so was my family. This turned out to be a rewarding experience for all of us and provided me with an insight into the feelings of other families that likewise participated in the service. It was gratifying for us as a family, and I assume for the other families as well, to collaborate on leading a service. Much planning and practice was involved in this project. This provided for family time together that was spent in the pursuit of a common goal; that of the successful leadership of the service. Moreover this provided an

opportunity for us as a family to publicly proclaim our unity, identity, and competence as a functional family unit to the assembled congregation of worshippers.

Involvement as a family unit at services is an activity that is typically stressed in the Conservative movement. This may come from the fact that in the Conservative synagogue women are offered an equal role in service participation as are men. When women assume this role they are no longer available to take care of the children while their husbands are engaged in prayer. Something must be done with the children while both parents are so engaged. There are a number of ways for meeting this need. Children may be involved in service participation or leadership roles as part of the family unit. They may also be offered childrens services or on the grounds temple baby sitting and play groups.

The foregoing discussion has described the involvement of people who have been willing and able to assume fairly major roles in the house of prayer. Most of the congregation however consists of people who either rarely if ever attend services. Even among those who regularly attend one or another of the services there are many whose Judaic backgrounds discourage them from even assuming minor ritual roles. The next part of the chapter explores how ritual jobs are designed and divided to involve these people as well.

Walk Ons and Bit Parts In The House of Prayer

Heilman defines "kibbudim" as; "...the public honor associated with

the ceremonial performance of a ritual act, usually within the house of prayer."²⁶ Heilman describes kibbudim in the context of an Orthodox congregation. In his study he deals with a congregation in which most of the members are adept at performing at least some of these ritual acts; many of which require varying levels of the ability to read Hebrew. At Heilman's "Kehilat Kodesh" the "gabbai" who in a sense represents the collective congregation dispenses kibbudim to the members who seek and value them. Heilman tells us of the social role the kibbud fulfills by saying that;

The public presentation of kibbud is bestowed upon individuals by the collectivity, represented by the gabbai. If, as Mauss observed, "to give something is to give a part of oneself," the group- when, through its gabbai, it gives out kibbudim-gives of itself to itself, thereby linking individuals to the collectivity "by the mechanisms of obligation which are resident in the gifts themselves" In some instances the kibbud may incur obligations of repayment, while at other times it serves as such repayment. More specifically, such acts as making a donation to the shul, sponsoring a kiddush, or volunteering one's time and energy for community benefit may either generate a kibbud or repay one.

The gabbai, (bestower) congregant,(recipient) relationship of kibbudim at Temple Beth Shalom is somewhat different than that of Heilman's Orthodox synagogue. At TBS the congregant who is called to perform the ritual task is not so much receiving and honor as he or she is fulfilling an obligation to the group by donating his skills and abilities to the performance of the service. This is because in addition to there being only a limited number of people in attendance at services there still an even more limited number of worshippers who know enough or feel comfortable enough to carry out a kibbud if called upon to do so. The following examples from my field notes should illustrate

this point:

I arrive at services somewhat later than usual this Sabbath morning. As soon as I sit down Stu, (the gabbai) gets up from his seat on the other side of the sanctuary and hurries over to me. He says; "Listen Marty, you don't mind doing third aliyah today do you? (third aliya refers to one of the sets of blessings that are chanted in Hebrew before and after a section from the Torah is read). We're really short on people who can do this today, okay?" My reply is "Sure I'd be glad to, thanks for the honor" To which Stu replies;"No, no, thank you!" I have noticed that Stu always thanks the person who accepts an aliyah. There are about a hundred people present at the Sunday men's club breakfast. Only a few of the Saturday morning service regulars are there. After the breakfast Stu passes out the booklets for the "birkat hamazon", (communal grace after meals). Stu looks over those in the social hall then approaches me and says; "Listen, can you lead the blessings?" After I lead the grace and the booklets are gathered up Stu comes over and says to me; "Thanks, you really saved the day, you did a great job." I really didn't do such a great job, I did stumble over a few phrases, but I guess that I was the most capable performer at the time.

There are occasions however when getting a kibbud is regarded as a sought after honor by the recipient. One of these occasions is on the High Holidays. About a month before the Holidays a few members of the ritual committee meet and decide who will get ritual honors for the services on these days. Those awarded an honor are notified by letter as to the honor, and the approximate time of the service that it is to take place. These honors are given on the basis of those who the committee feels have given a great deal of time and effort on behalf of the Temple during the past year. A number of these people who are so honored have rarely if ever attended the house of prayer during the year, but have been active in other facets of Temple life. To be inclusive the Temple honors contributions of time and effort in areas of congregational activity other than purely religious activities. Another occasion when members are expressly awarded honors for contributions

of time and effort to the Temple is on the annual Friday night service that honors those who taught courses as part of the adult education program. There are no aliyot to the Torah on Friday nights so kibbudim are made up by having honorees come up to the bimah and read a passage from the service in English or in Hebrew. The chairperson for adult education carefully works this out beforehand so that no one will have to do a reading that is beyond his or her ability to read Hebrew. Similar to the Friday night adult education service there are services to honor those active in Sisterhood and the Men's Club.

Receiving kibbudim as a participant in life cycle rituals is an occasion when the Temple, or more significantly, a family group is the dispenser of honors that are sought after by the individual. When a bar/bat mitzvah, or a baby naming is being celebrated on a Sabbath the family involved determines who gets which honor. This is done in consultation with the Rabbi well before the day of the service. Chapter five of this dissertation will be devoted to life cycle rituals; and the way in which new rituals are innovated and traditional rituals are modified and negotiated among a religiously pluralistic membership with varying degrees of competence in performing such rituals. At this point however we will proceed to a look at the Saturday morning Sabbath services in order to examine the ways in which ritual tasks are parceled out so as to achieve the participation of the widest band of congregants, and to make use of a wide level of individual abilities for a successful group performance. The Saturday morning service will offer us an illustration as to how the members of a pluralistic congregation are fitted into the framework of traditional kibbudim. Chapter four on

the other hand will illustrate how entire services and their attendant kibbudim, such as those on late Friday nights, are innovated for congregants who fall outside the range of traditional services in terms of skills and abilities.

Coming Together For The Sabbath Worship.

On Sabbath mornings approximately fifty congregants, or roughly seven percent of the adult members; representing a wide range of knowledge, skills, and Jewish orientations come together and perform the ritual tasks that are necessary for such a worship service. Services start at 9:30 and usually are finished at 11:30. The congregants do not all come at the same time. They may be seen entering the sanctuary as late as 10:30. The members feel free to choose how much or how little of the service to attend. After the service about half a dozen of these congregants walk home from the Temple in strict accordance with the halachic prohibition on Sabbath travel by motor vehicle. Some congregants either walk or drive home to a Sabbath afternoon meal where they and their families observe the home rituals which are traditional for this occasion. Others, upon driving out of the Temple parking lot, continue on their way to restaurants, family trips, and shopping excursions. With variations that are appropriate to the specific service, similar scenes are acted out on Festivals, High Holidays, and Friday nights. We see here a great variation in the observance of Sabbath laws and traditions.

During the service however, these congregants are able to

temporarily unite in carrying out the public worship. Something must be happening in the interaction between the congregants as they assemble for the worship service that enables them to create and maintain a group solidarity in this situation of religious pluralism.

Sabbath Morning Service Kibbudim

It cannot be assumed that by randomly selecting congregants who are present at the Saturday morning service it will be possible to come up with a group that will be able to perform the ritual kibbudim . This is because the ability and willingness to perform ritual tasks are far from uniformly spread among the members present in order that they may be used interchangeably for this purpose. Therefore in many cases "new" ritual kibbudim must be invented and traditional kibbudim adapted in order to involve the widest range of congregants and achieve a cohesive group performance. To begin with there are some simple steps that are to deal with this situation. The gabbai has to know who among the worshippers is able and ready to do what; otherwise congregants may be embarrassed and the performance disrupted. Stu, who is the gabbai knows the abilities of those who attend Sabbath morning services on a regular basis. He knows who can recite a blessing over the Torah and who is comfortable with the ritual lifting of the partially unrolled Torah scrolls after they are read from. Although, as pointed out before, Temple Beth Shalom is egalitarian in the area of ritual participation, women are never asked to lift the Torah. Lifting the Torah scrolls can require a certain amount of muscular strength in the

arms especially at the beginning and end of the yearly cycle of readings when all of the weight is on one side. No doubt some of the women of the congregation are more physically suited to this task than a number of the men. It is assumed though by the gabbai and even by female substitutes in his absence that men are more reliable in his matter. I myself felt this assumption to be questionable at best since lifting the Torah is more a matter of technique rather than of muscular strength. Women are called up to dress the Torah by putting on its cloth cover , pointer, breastplate and crowns while the man who has held it aloft sits holding it on a chair to the side of the ark. On the festival of Simchat Torah, when congregants take turns parading and dancing with the Torah, lighter ones are given to the women and to the post bar/bat mitzvah adolescents for this purpose. Smaller children are given lightweight "stuffed toras" to carry around.

Aside from actually leading the service or reading from the Torah or the Haftarah which are tasks done by the "virtuosi" of the congregation; the central ritual tasks to be assigned to congregants present are the "aliyot l'torah" or the going up to recite the Hebrew blessings before and after sections from the Torah are read. There are usually seven such aliyot on a Sabbath morning. The first two aliyot are by tradition given to a person who claims descent from the High Priests, or the Levites of Temple times. There are few such people at Temple Beth Shalom and therefore those who fit in this category are frequently called to fulfill this role. The rest of the aliyot are open to any other adult member present. But there is a great deal of ritual procedure one must know in order to carry out this task properly. First of all one

must know their Hebrew name and the Hebrew name of their father which are used by the Torah reader to call the aliyah designee to the Torah. Some of those called up for an aliyah give the Hebrew name of their father, as has been traditional in Jewish ritual. Others, especially women, give the names of both parents in order to make it egalitarian.

In all of my observations at Temple Beth Shalom I have never witnessed an instance where one called up to the Torah is unable to give either his Hebrew name or that of one of his parents. Apparently anyone, including stranger or guests, who agrees to accept an aliyah knows this information or would otherwise defer from this honor. There are however problems with the recitation of the benedictions. Some congregants cannot read Hebrew. During the Torah reading there is always a printed transliteration of the benedictions lying open on the table upon which the Torah is being read from. This helps with the performance, but often the words are stumbled over and mispronounced. The one who reads the Torah will quietly and as unobtrusively as possible give help as needed. A wide variation in accuracy of pronunciation is accepted. There are times when the reciter of the benedictions must pause and wait for a response from the congregation. There are also times when the person saying the benedictions must repeat certain responses from the congregation. Sometimes the person called up for the aliyah gets mixed up on this account and consequently the entire congregation is thrown off on the proper timing of the response. The blessings are chanted with a particular tune. Not everyone knows or can carry the tune well.

There are aspects of the ritual that require not only vocal

performance, but physical acts as well. When the congregant comes up for an aliyah he is shown by the reader the place in the scroll where the reading will start. The congregant is expected to touch this place with his tallit (or in the case of a woman who is not wearing a tallit with the cloth used to bind the Torah) and then kiss the part of the tallit that touched the Torah. At the end of the reading, and in the same way, the person called for the aliyah is expected to kiss the part in the Torah where the reading finished. When he completes the ending blessings he must stay on the bimah until the next person so called up finishes his part of the ritual. Finally he is expected to shake hands with those gathered around the pulpit for the reading and then on the way off the bimah to shake hands with the Rabbi who is seated to one side of the ark. As he walks down one of the aisles to his seat a number of congregants will offer extended hands and say "yishar kohakha" which roughly translated means "more power to you".

Perhaps to an Orthodox Jew or to a member of Temple Beth Shalom who is Judaically knowledgeable and practiced the above ritual task would be done as second nature. This is not true of many of the rest of the congregants. The comments of the following congregant, a woman in her mid forties should help to illustrate this point;

I just panic when I get called up for an aliyah. As you know my Hebrew isn't that great, I just learned to read it a few years ago. I grew up in a Reform congregation, and as a child attended only Sunday school) I always think that I'm going to make a mistake, like you know, "big time". I must sound pretty bad up there. Well, actually no one has ever corrected me so I guess I'm doing okay. Of course that may be because everyone is so nice and they don't want to embarrass me!

Precisely because everyone on the bimah "is so nice" and tolerant of the less than perfect performances of the congregants; the

congregants are willing to risk performing these ritual tasks, even if they feel somewhat incompetent in doing so.

Even a congregant with a more advanced Judaic background than the one whose Judaic education was limited to attending Reform Sunday school as a child has doubts as to his competence in performing ritual tasks as part of the worship service:

No matter how many times I go up there I still think that I am going to do something wrong. And sure enough it happens. Like the time I started saying the blessing that comes **after** the torah reading when I was supposed to say the one that comes at the **beginning**. I had a feeling that I was doing something wrong when I heard Mike, (the Torah reader) mumble something under his breath. I looked up across the bimah to the Rabbi and he had a puzzled look on his face. Mike then pointed with his finger to the page with the blessings at the one I was supposed to do and said; "Hold on kid, this one first!" But you know what really freaks me out? Sometimes I think that I will mispronounce a Hebrew word and it will come out to a curse or something awful. Well, I wouldn't know the difference and most of the congregation wouldn't know either. But then there's the Rabbi, and maybe Bob and (laughing) "I wouldn't want lightning to strike me down!"

We see that the Rabbi and Bob have the status of final arbiters in matters of approaching the holy. They lead the congregant safely through the encounter with the holy that takes place on the bimah. They make sure that the congregant called up to the bimah doesn't get zapped.

As already has been shown, there is a great tolerance of ritual mistakes in the house of prayer; and not only a great willingness, but also a prime directive, to avoid embarrassment for those who make these mistakes. Outsiders however may need to be made aware of this. When Cantor Palmer's contract came up for renewal after his second year on the job the ritual committee met to evaluate his past performance. At the meeting a number of issues were discussed regarding Palmer's

performance over the past year. In general the comments were positive. There were a few negative points that did not engender any great excitement among those who were present. One criticism however was taken very seriously. A member of the committee related that at a bar mitzvah ceremony Cantor Palmer was noticed to have nodded his head disapprovingly from side to side when the boy made a mistake. It was pointed out that this was done while Palmer was on the bimah and in full view of the congregation including the bar mitzvah's family and guests. When this was brought up at the meeting another two members of the ritual committee added that they too had witnessed this and were very disturbed by it. The committee unanimously agreed that this point should be brought up at the negotiations with Cantor Palmer. They were brought up, Cantor Palmer expressed his regrets and promised that it would not happen again.

We have here a case of an **inversion of tradition**. In an Orthodox synagogue such as the one that Heilman studied it is accepted and expected that mistakes made in the Torah reading will be brought to public attention and corrected by other worshippers. A case in point is the following incident described by Heilman

Rabbi Kinorg, a young bearded bread salesman, recognized as active in Jewish observance, has been standing in front of the bimah during the Torah scroll reading of Jimmy Kaufman, the young boy who regularly reads. At a certain word, Kinorg calls out a mistake he alleges Kaufman to have made and which he therefore asks to have read correctly. (Halacha demands that the reading be heard exactly as it is written.) No one else seems to agree with Kinorg's hearing and Kaufman is motioned to continue.

Kinorg repeats, "I demand that you repeat the word. I will not let you continue unless you correctly read the word."²⁸

The tradition at Temple Beth Shalom however, mandates that

mistakes such as these be overlooked in order to avoid the public embarrassment of the Torah reader. Not all kibbudim however are as demanding as the ones that involve saying blessings over, or reading from the Torah.

There are simpler kibbudim than that of aliyot to the Torah on the Sabbath morning. One of these is the lifting and dressing of the Torah, (hagbahah and glilah) whose egalitarian aspects were discussed previously in this chapter. What will be considered now is how the traditional nature of this kibbud has been transformed by a new tradition that was innovated by the Saturday morning regulars at Temple Beth Shalom.

As mentioned before, raising the Torah and displaying it to the congregation before it is wrapped up, dressed in ritual ornaments and put back in the ark, requires a certain amount of coordination and strength on the part of the person carrying out this kibbud. Aside from this aspect of the kibbud there is not much else in the way of a demonstration of competency on the part of the recipient. True, one should know to face the ark while holding the Torah aloft and to keep it held high while the congregation sings a few phrases in Hebrew which proclaim that this is the Torah given by God, through Moses, to the people of Israel. When it comes down to it however, performing this kibbud does not have the same prestige as an aliyah to the Torah. A new tradition however, has lent a different kind of prestige to this ritual task in the eyes of some of the congregants.

It is customary to unroll the Torah for a width of three columns in order that they be visible to the congregation when it is held aloft.

This can be somewhat difficult to do and may interfere with the balancing of the Torah. For this reason many of those called for this kibbud only open the Torah one or two columns. Early in my field research I noticed that some of those who were called on to perform this ritual task were opening the Torah not the customary three, but eight or nine columns! When this would happen there would be sounds of chuckles and whispers from the regulars and the Rabbi would look up at the Torah with an exaggerated look of awe on his face and using his finger would slowly count the number of opened columns as he mouthed the numbers. This happened during a number of Sabbath services. What was happening was that a ritual task was being made into a competition between a number of the congregants. This was a competition that required no Judaic knowledge to excel in. Elements of a contemporary American sports and fitness competition; that of "pumping iron" were symbolically merged with the raising of the Torah. In fact, after one such display of physical strength and coordination the Rabbi said to the congregation, "Some people believe in "pumping iron", we at Beth Shalom have "pumping Torah".

Another occasion for giving new meaning to this ritual task was as follows. On a Sabbath when there were two occasions to raise a Torah the Rabbi arranged with Stu to call up two brothers, one after the other to perform this task. The Torah portion was about the rivalry between Jacob and Esau. The two contemporary brothers at the service competed with each other in the Torah display. As the second brother went back to his seat the Rabbi said to the congregation; "Just as we read about the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau, we see the same

thing today with the "Miller boys", (who by the way were not boys but somewhat middle aged). In speaking of sibling rivalry the Rabbi cast a biblical theme in terms of familiar, contemporary, family issues. Heilman calls this process **contemporization** which he means to be; "...the explanation, exemplification, and elaboration of Torah material in present day terms."²⁹

The opening of the ark, or p'ticha in Hebrew is a kibbud that is considered lower in status than that of saying the blessings over the Torah or of lifting or dressing the Torah. There are two reasons for this lower status. One reason is that in opening the ark sacred objects are not directly touched. Even the ark is only touched indirectly by the recipient of this kibbud pulling on the string attached to the ark curtain in order to open and close it. The second reason is that the action itself is simple and requires a bare minimum of Judaic or secular knowledge to perform. In certain instances of performing the p'ticha the person doing it also takes the Torah out of the ark and hands it to the prayer leader. This makes things a bit more complicated but not by much. At Temple Beth Shalom p'ticha is usually reserved on the Sabbath for those of the congregation who would have difficulty performing the other kibbudim.

It has been shown how the Saturday morning service offers a number of opportunities on varied ability levels for participation in the service ritual. Many of these participations, especially the high prestige ones require some knowledge of Hebrew. An aliyah to the Torah requires at least a reading knowledge of Hebrew. Although if necessary a transliteration can be used, the results usually are not that impressive.

Leading part of the service or reading the Torah or Haftarah require a much greater ability to read Hebrew and to sing. Services such as those on Friday nights offer a greater range of points of participation, many of which rely more on secular rather than on Judaic abilities.

Conclusions

We have seen in this chapter how a wide band of congregants with varying levels of skills, abilities and backgrounds are included in prayer and ritual activities. This is accomplished through a delegation of the tasks involved in the communal performance of these prayer and ritual activities. This strategy of inclusion which helps to maintain solidarity among a pluralistic congregation does not always work. Sometimes the differences among the pluralistic congregants are so great that the division of ritual tasks has its limits **within a single service**. In order to maintain coexistence among the pluralistic congregants other strategies are needed. Among them the strategy of **separation**, rather than **inclusion** is often used. On the Sabbath for example there is a Friday evening service which is mostly in English and is structured to appeal to a group of members who generally have different interests, skills, and backgrounds than those who come to the mostly Hebrew Saturday morning service. In a similar way, the two services on the evenings and mornings of the Festivals are structured to appeal to these different groups. During the High Holidays parallel sets of kibbudim are offered in order to appeal to the different groups that find themselves together in the sanctuary on these days. By offering

congregants the opportunity to **separate themselves** into different **worship service groups or parallel kibbud groups** the Temple is ultimately **including them** in the overall congregational prayer activities. A look at how this is done will be the focus of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER IV: ALTERNATIVE INVOLVEMENTS AT THE WORSHIP SERVICE:
BRINGING THE OUTSIDERS IN

Introduction

In the last chapter we discussed in some detail the Saturday morning service. Particular attention was given to the delegation of ritual tasks and kibbudim and how this brought into active participation a somewhat wider range of congregants in terms of their Judaic knowledge, skills and abilities. There are however limits to the variation and pluralism that can be contained in a single service. The fifty or so congregants who attend this service represent only about seven percent of the adult membership. The Saturday morning service is a traditional one in terms of the Hebrew language and Judaic skills necessary not only for carrying out ritual leadership roles and kibbudim; but also for active participation in the worship service. If major innovations in this service were made in order to appeal to the skills, abilities, and religious sensibilities of those who usually do not attend this service; there would be a risk of alienating the religious sensibilities of those who are regular attenders.

When I speak of the religious sensibilities of the congregants I am not only referring to ideological points of view regarding the conduct and content of services. In fact, ideology seems to play less of a role than does the issue of competence versus incompetence as a determining factor in service style preferences among the congregants.

In my conversation with a Saturday morning worshipper who had

the occasion at one time or another to attend the service on Friday evening I heard the following complaint:

Friday nights are like a Reform service. Half of the service is responsive readings in English. It really isn't at all like the shabbos davening on Saturdays.

On the other hand, I heard the following from a Friday evening regular who attended a few Saturday morning services as a bar mitzvah guest:

It gets too heavy in the morning. Almost everything is in Hebrew. The services go on and on and on. I don't know what its all about unless I look over at the English translation.

If we listen closely to the comments such as the ones above we discover an issue that **underlines**, and perhaps to a large extent **forms** the basis of the differing religious sensibilities of the congregants; here I refer to the skills and abilities, the very competence of the worshipers to perform the traditional rituals.

In this chapter I will show how alternative involvements at worship services are used to bring in outsiders who do not have the competence to lead or actively participate in a more traditional way. I have chosen two services to illustrate this point; each service has evolved in its own way in order to deal with the unique exigencies of different populations.

We will begin with The Friday evening service which generally brings in those who want to attend a weekly Sabbath service but whose religious sensibilities and ritual competencies differ markedly from those who attend on Saturday morning. We have here a clear **separation** of Sabbath services that because of this separation are able to avoid many of the difficulties inherent in trying to play to two audiences at the

same time. At this service ritual roles have been innovated to bring these congregants into active participation and leadership roles.

Next we will examine the High Holiday Services which brings together into the sanctuary, congregants from the full spectrum of religious skills and sensibilities at the same time. Here, strategies of dealing with different audiences at the same service are brought into play by offering parallel sets of kibbudim and involvements to the different populations present.

Before we will begin our examination of the Friday evening service, which brings in about eighty congregants or about eleven percent of the congregation; it will be of help to take a look at the origin of this service in the Conservative Movement. The historical origins of this service will tell us something about the function of this service in the present.

Origins Of The Friday Evening Service.

The origin of the Friday evening service is rooted in the development of the Conservative synagogue itself (see chapter one pg.40). Sklare explains that the Saturday morning worship in Conservative congregations has been supplemented, or even supplanted by the service held on Friday night.

According to Sklare:

Friday evening worship permits the individual to engage in prohibited activities on Saturday and yet at the same time participate in some type of Sabbath observance. Friday night worshippers need not feel very guilty about absenting themselves from the traditional Sabbath service. Furthermore, the new Friday night service is free of the rigor and legalistic approach to observance characteristic of Orthodoxy. It represents accommodation to the new norms assimilated by the Conservative group.

The following from my observations of Friday night worshippers at TBS illustrates Sklare's first point concerning prohibited activities on Saturday.

Barry, a family man in his mid forties came from a home with a background of synagogue prayer service involvement. His father in fact was a regular at Temple services including the morning minyan before he passed away a few years ago. Barry had been active for years in the Temple leadership, being on the board and holding a number of executive offices. During my period of participant observation Barry would be elected president of the congregation. Barry would often lead the services at the Sunday morning minyan and he did a good job of it. Barry would frequently attend Friday night services with his family but never showed up on Saturday mornings. I found out from other members of the congregation that Barry owned a business which he felt required his presence on Saturdays, a day on which much of his sales were made. Even after he became president of the Temple no one seemed to be upset that he did not attend Sabbath services due to his work. The idea of Temple leaders "having" to work on the sabbath was tolerated by the membership; or perhaps the reverse, that because it was tolerated by the membership, Temple leaders could convince themselves

that Sabbath work was a justified priority in their lives. Even among those who would not work on the Sabbath there seemed to be little in the way of censure for those prominent people who broke this rule. In a discussion with a fairly observant member about this seeming dichotomy between Barry's leadership and religious observance I was given the explanation that:

Well, yeah, you know what they say, Shabbos is Shabbos, but business is business. Barry does a lot for the Temple, he never stops working, and it's all volunteer.

This tolerance has practical social consequences for the congregation by allowing non observant members to become Temple leaders. This means that members from a wide range of Judaic observances and practices can play leadership roles in running the Temple and in influencing the direction that the congregation takes in regard to the conduct of services.

Nate in his 50s, with two children in college comes from an Orthodox background. He has a high administrative position with the State Department of Education. His Saturdays are often taken up by conferences and workshops. Nate often leads Friday night services and towards the end of my observation period he began attending Saturday morning services and demonstrated his great ability to lead these services too. When he started to come on Saturdays he ceased coming on Friday nights.

Sid, also in his 50s with two school aged children comes from a

Yeshiva background. He often goes to study Talmud with the Lubavitch Hasidim who offer adult education in New Haven. Sid holds a middle management position at a large corporation and his work schedule varies. There are periods of many weeks or even months that he works on Saturdays. At these times he misses Sabbath morning services but attends on Friday nights. Like Nate, when he doesn't have to work on Saturdays he attends Saturday services and doesn't attend on Friday nights. Sid is open with others and often discusses his predicament. He puts it simply:

Well, what are you going to do? You have to make a living. I wasn't born rich. I hate working on Shabbos, but you do what you gotta do.

The three above examples illustrate how the Temple offers its congregants the opportunity to 'cut and paste' together a Sabbath prayer involvement that is conveniently in line with lifestyles and religious sensibilities.

Although Sklare believes that part of the reason for the attractiveness of the Friday night service to Conservative congregants is the convenience of the time as opposed to Saturday morning he feels in addition that:

...the special characteristics of the Friday evening service are also important factors. First it is notable that inactivity on the part of the worshipper is a dominant characteristic of this service. As we have pointed out, the congregation in the traditional type of Jewish worship is a very activist body. Furthermore, a detailed knowledge of the liturgy, as well as the ability to read Hebrew fluently, is essential for participation. The Friday night Conservative service, however, demands much less from the worshipper. He is only required to join in some responsive readings and in various other types of prayers, and to sing familiar hymns. Merely a minimum familiarity with the Hebrew language and liturgy is needed. This service, then, represents an adjustment to the declining knowledge of the prayer book and the

language in which it is written. As with most middle-class worship, the action on the pulpit is central. In conformity with over-all trends in our culture, the individual is no longer an active participant, but is cast in the role of a spectator.²

As we now turn to an examination of the Friday night services at Temple Beth Shalom we will see that the worshipper passivity as described by Sklare holds true only at some of these services; at the 'regular' ones. At other times, when there are 'special' services, the opportunity for a wide range of congregants to take active leadership roles is greatly expanded, thereby bringing the outsiders into worship service involvement.

The Division Of Ritual Tasks At Friday Night Services

There are basically two sets of services for Friday evenings. There are the "regular" Friday evening services and there are the "special" Friday evening services that involve the participation of one or another of the constituent Temple groups such as The United Synagogue Youth, the Sisterhood, or the Men's Club. Sklare makes the point that these groups are an expected feature of the Conservative synagogue because they serve as inducements to synagogue affiliation for many Jews who would not join solely on the basis of wanting to participate in religious activities.³ Through membership in these constituent groups not only do a wider range of individuals join the Temple; but by incorporating these groups into special services a wider range of congregants involve themselves in the religious activities of the Temple.

Actually the contents of both regular and special services are practically identical; what makes each one unique are the ways in which and to whom the service leadership roles are apportioned. On a regular Friday night the service is lead by one of the lay leaders or by Cantor Palmer if there is to be a bar/bat mitzvah the next morning. The Rabbi always leads small parts of the service such as the mourner's kaddish and gives a sermon. In addition, in the case of a bar/bat mitzvah weekend as mentioned above the bar/bat mitzvah does the kiddush at the end of the service. The kiddush which in Hebrew means sanctification is the prayer said over a cup of wine in the synagogue and at home in order to consecrate the Sabbath or a festival. In the contemporary American synagogue the kiddush, both on Friday nights and on Saturday mornings is frequently sponsored by the congregation and involves light refreshments in addition to the wine. In addition to being a religious ritual this has given the kiddush the function of serving as a congregational social hour.⁴ Aside from these instances the worshippers play the passive role in the services as was previously described by Sklare.

If, however, there is a special Friday evening service the division of leadership tasks becomes much more complex, allowing for the participation of up to twenty three more congregants in addition to the Rabbi.(see fig. 3 appendix, Form used for delegating prayer leadership tasks at Friday evening services at Temple Beth Shalom). We see that these service leadership tasks generally require less skill and ability than do the kibbudim on Saturday mornings. This in effect creates a second class or bogus leadership when compared to the Saturday

morning leadership roles. But because the Friday evening service consists of different congregants than those who attend on Saturday morning these leadership roles need not be compared to one another by the congregants and are not considered second class or bogus roles by the congregants at the Friday service. For the Friday evening worshippers these are real leadership roles, because they are the roles typical for this service.

On Friday evening, since the Torah is not read there are none of the kibbudim associated with it; such as chanting a portion from it, or saying the blessings before and after each portion is read. Performing one of these tasks would be a problem for a congregant with a limited knowledge of Hebrew. At Friday evening services on the other hand, a congregant with absolutely no knowledge of reading Hebrew has five points at which he can lead a prayer or responsive reading in English. In addition there are seventeen points in the service at which the congregant may start off a Hebrew prayer by simply saying the first word of the prayer. At this point the congregation joins in the singing and by the sheer number of voices drowns out the voice of the prayer leader covering up any of his mistakes or mispronunciations. If, as happens on occasion, the prayer leader, especially a beginner makes a major mistake such as starting the wrong prayer, or being grossly off tune, the Rabbi and the worshippers stand ready to cover the mistake and save face for the leader. They do this by joining in the prayer in loud voices thereby helping the performance of the prayer leader in two ways and at the same time. They are, at the same time; drowning out the mistake, and also supplying the leader with the right cue for

continuing the singing. This kind of tact on the part of the audience in the handling of a performer who makes mistakes is mentioned by Goffman who says that:

When the performer is known to be a beginner, and more subject than otherwise to embarrassing mistakes, the audience frequently shows extra consideration, refraining from causing the difficulties it might otherwise create.

I noticed this tactful exercise in the discreet support of the prayer leader on a number of occasions. After some time however, I began to have doubts as to how discreet this audience intervention really was; considering the fact that it was often accompanied by a certain amount of laughter on the parts of both audience and prayer leader. At the same time as they were covering up the leaders mistakes through loud participation; the worshippers were also acknowledging these mistakes through laughing at them. Here too Goffman can be a help in making sense of such a situation. He observes that:

Whenever the audience exercises tact, the possibility will arise that the performers will learn that they are being tactfully protected. When this occurs, the further possibility arises that the audience will learn that the performers know they are being tactfully protected. And then, in turn, it becomes possible for the performers to learn that the audience knows that the performers know they are being protected. Now when such states of information exist, a moment in the performance may come when the separateness of the teams will break down and be momentarily replaced by a communion of glances through which each team openly admits to the other its state of information. At such moments the whole dramaturgical structure of social interaction is suddenly and poignantly laid bare, and the line separating the teams momentarily disappears.

I came to realize that among the worshippers of Temple Beth Shalom there was an unwritten agreement which recognized that there

were many levels of skill among those who took part in leading the prayer services. In order to allow such a pluralistic membership to perform the service together the congregants would cover for each others mistakes. Worshippers and leaders admitted this to each other in their mutual laughter which often took place when the mistakes made by the leader were being covered up. This presents us with a paradox. The one being laughed at gets and appreciates the joke; while at the same time his status is being degraded to that of an incompetent. By laughing at the joke however, I believe that the one who made the mistake is sending a signal to the ones who covered up the mistake that:
'Although I exhibited and admitted my incompetence, I did understand the mistake I made and I don't feel so incompetent and status degraded that I cannot laugh at what has just happened.'

Friday Night Special Theme Services

Special services are a common occurrence for Friday evenings. Out of roughly fifty Friday evening services a year about twenty are part of bar/bat mitzvah weekends. An examination of the services announcements in the Temple bulletins for two years reveals that out of the remaining thirty evenings there are services built around the participation of the following groups which I will presently list and give brief identifications of:

1.Sisterhood: The women's auxilliary which is involved in the sponsorship

of fund raising activities such as rummage sales and auctions; social events such as adult membership dances; and in setting up the refreshments for the kiddush after Festival and Sabbath services.

2. Men's Club : The men's auxiliary which sponsors the monthly Sunday morning breakfast and speaker; the Temple softball team; some fund raising activities such as raffles; excursions to spectator sports; and together with the sisterhood, the annual Temple picnic.

3. United Synagogue Youth : The youth club for high school aged children of Temple members.

4. Jewish War Veterans : The Temple branch of the national J.W.F.

5. Adult Education Staff : Consists of all those who volunteer their time either in teaching or administering the Temple's adult education program.

6. B.B.Y.O. youth club: The Temple branch of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization which is part of the international B'nai B'rith Jewish fraternal organization.

7. Confirmation Class: Sixteen year old boys and girls who have completed three years of Jewish religious studies after the bar mitzvah. Studies consist of meeting with the Rabbi once a week for an hour and discussing a wide range of Jewish topics from mysticism to current

events and sexuality and Jewish tradition.

8. Community Jewish Singles: Open to all area Jewish single men and women who are interested in meeting members of the opposite sex. Sponsors three or four social activities a year such as trips to the theater and dances. These activities are held together with other temple singles groups in the area.

9. Hebrew School Graduation: The graduation ceremony for those who have completed five years of Hebrew school is held at a Friday night service at the end of the school year in late May.

10. Installation of Officers: The yearly installation of new Temple officers and board members.

11. Ezra Academy Sabbath: The Friday evening service which is conducted by Temple families whose children attend the regional Conservative Solomon Schechter Day School.

12. College Student Sabbath: The Friday evening service conducted by children of Temple members who are attending college.

13. Primary Hebrew School Classes: The upper grades of the Hebrew School, (ten, eleven, and twelve year olds) each take turns in taking part in leading the Friday service.

14. Aleph Class Consecration: The Friday service devoted to the theme of

the beginning of Jewish education for the youngest Hebrew school students.

These special theme services provide an alternate model for involving the congregants in the communal worship. Rather than participating only as individuals they also participate as members of a special interest group. Participation in the service is done through these smaller groups which are based upon common interests and involvements. This enables congregants to have as their primary focus of Temple involvement a specific constituent group consisting of close acquaintances and at the same time participate in wider congregational activities such as the Friday service.

The participation of the members in the leadership tasks of these services are carefully orchestrated and planned out well in advance. The procedure for this is as follows: About a month before the special service is to take place the Rabbi contacts a member, usually the leader of the Temple group involved. This liaison person is given a form, (see figure 3, appendix) which breaks down the leadership parts of the service. The liaison completes the form by filling in the names of the people from his or her group who will perform each task. This job of delegating the service tasks requires a great amount of tact and negotiating skill on the part of the organizer. The organizer must be careful not to leave out those who would regard being left out as a social slight. Care must also be taken to find suitable roles for each participant. If a member is asked to perform in a role that he feels is beyond his Hebrew language capabilities he will be put in the situation

of either making an excuse as to why he cannot attend that evening or; be put in the embarrassing situation of having to admit that he is not up to fulfilling the role. Many of the roles however are in English. This means that many members who could not participate in leading the Sabbath morning service are able to easily participate on Friday evenings.

The fact that most Friday evening services are either built around group participation themes or the family oriented bar/bat mitzvah increases the attendance on these evenings. The Rabbi recognized this by telling me that:

Look, if we didn't have the special services we would have a lot less people. It has a sort of a snowball effect. If a kid or even an adult for that matter participates by going up on the bimah and reading something then that brings in the rest of the family to see him. Also it gets people a little more comfortable with coming up to the bimah. Reading a few lines in English isn't as traumatic as coming up for an aliya.

Being asked to lead a part of the service on Friday evening is looked upon as an honor bestowed by the congregation upon the member; but it is also considered an obligation, as a call to Temple duty. The person who participates by assuming a role at the Friday evening service gets the satisfaction not only of being honored by the congregation; and not only of being needed for the congregational service, but also of being competent enough to perform the ritual role as does the participant in Saturday morning service leadership.

Receiving kibbudim at the High Holiday services however presents a somewhat different picture. Because almost the entire congregation attends at least part of the High Holiday services, the

services and the kibbudim offered at these services must appeal to both those who are competent at performing ritual tasks as well as those who are not.

The Division Of Ritual Tasks At The High Holiday Services

The High Holidays are a time at which many members of the Temple who are absent from services the whole year enter for a few days into the house of prayer. On the two days of the New Year, Rosh Hashana; and on The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur the combined social hall and sanctuary is packed to overflowing. While on Saturday mornings there are usually about fifty congregants or roughly seven percent of the adult members attending the service; on the High Holidays there are present no less than six hundred worshippers present. This great divergence between the numbers of congregants present on the High Holidays and the number of those present at the services held during the rest of the year is typical not only of Temple Beth Shalom but of American congregations in general. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey fifty nine percent of Jews who identify themselves as being Jews by religion attend synagogue on the High Holidays; while only eleven percent of these Jews attend synagogue weekly.⁷ Why this is so should be briefly discussed.

According to Neusner what brings Jews into the synagogues in such great numbers on the High Holidays, also known as the Days or Awe are the personal, existential themes that these holidays present to the worshipper. Neusner writes of the High Holiday services that:

While much of the liturgy speaks of "we", the individual focus dominates, beginning to end. The words say "we" but mean me. The Days of Awe speak to the heart of the individual, telling a story of judgement and atonement. So the individual Jew stands before God possessing no merits, yet hopeful of God's love and compassion... The power of the Days of Awe derives from the sentiments and emotions aroused by the theme of those days: what is happening to me? Where am I going?

Moments of introspection and reflection serve as guideposts in people's lives. That is why people treasure such moments and respond to the opportunities that define them. The themes of the Days of Awe stated in mythic terms address the human condition, and the message penetrates to the core of human concerns about life and death, the year past, the year beyond, the wrongs and the sins and the remissions and atonement.

The universal aspect of existential themes means then that the Temple will be full of congregants who represent a wide range of Judaic skill, abilities and religious sensibilities. Ritual tasks will need to be customized in order to include this broad range of congregants in the service. This task is more problematic than at the Saturday morning or the Friday evening service which somewhat self limit the range of the congregants by their inherent appeals to different segments of the Congregation. How this task is accomplished is the focus of the next part of this chapter.

Alternative Kibbudim: Alternative Involvements.

About a month before the High Holidays a sub-committee of the ritual committee meets in order to decide which members will get kibbudim during these services. Dozens of kibbudim are given out for the High Holiday services. The committee makes an effort to apportion the kibbudim not only among those who have been active during the past year as regular attenders in the house of prayer; but also to those

whose activities may have been limited to other facets of Temple life such as the Sisterhood, the Men's club, or the lay administration. Letters are mailed out to those who have been chosen to receive kibbudim about two weeks before the holidays. The letter details when in the service the kibbud will take place and exactly what it entails. Accompanying this letter is another letter which describes the honorific nature of receiving a High Holiday kibbud. A member knows that if he or she was picked to get an honor on the High Holidays it was out of recognition for service to the Temple during the previous year; either donations of volunteer work or money. Since there are present in the sanctuary during the High Holidays both those who attend Friday evening services as well as those who attend Saturday morning services during the rest of the year; ritual tasks must accommodate both levels of competency needed for these two Sabbath services. For those who are competent at performing Judaic rituals there are honors given out that are similar to the traditional kibbudim of the Saturday morning service, such as aliyot to the Torah or displaying and dressing the Torah. Other of the honors are along the lines of the Friday evening service kibbudim such as leading a prayer or responsive reading in English from the bimah.

A useful organizing principle for doing an analysis of the High Holiday alternative involvements for the less competent congregants is to first categorize the traditional ritual involvements done by the more competent congregants. Then we may ask how parallel involvements are introduced to the worship service in order to facilitate the participation of the less ritually competent. In doing such a task analysis we find

three broad categories of ritual activities.

- 1) Handling ritual objects, such as the Torah or Torah ornaments.
- 2) Receiving aliyot to the Torah which includes, saying blessings before or after the reading of portions from the Torah or actually chanting portions of the sacred writings.
- 3) Joining in synch with the congregation in the performance of the worship service. This entails joining in the prayers, singing, responsive readings, rising from ones seat, and bending the knee when appropriate.

For these three categories of tasks there are parallel involvements that the less competent congregants may assume. It is to these involvements that we now turn.

The Alternative Handling of Sacred Objects.

At the Kol Nidre service which takes place on the evening preceding the day of Yom Kippur and is considered one of the most solemn services of the year, all of the Torahs are taken out of the ark. The Temple owns ten Torahs. This means that ten people are chosen to hold these Torahs on the bimah while the Kol Nidre prayer is being chanted. Usually the ones picked for this honor are the past presidents or vice presidents of the congregation. According to the traditional practice as codified in the Shulhan 'Arukh; the legal code of halakhah or Jewish Law, compiled in the sixteenth century, only two Torah scrolls are taken out for this occasion.⁹ Taking out the Torah

scrolls at Kol Nidre then is not in itself an innovative ritual; but increasing the number of people so involved in the service does create an alternative involvement for many more of the congregants than would usually be the case.

This task requires only a very rudimentary ritual competency on the part of the congregant although it is a ritual activity and involves the handling of a ritual object. One need not know much more than that the Torah is considered a sacred object and that you don't drop it or hold it upside down. It is customary to hold the Torah with the right hand with the Torah resting on the right shoulder.¹⁰ I noticed however that a few of the congregants on the bimah were holding the Torah with the left hand or against the left shoulder. Some apparently found it more comfortable to cradle the Torah in both hands rather than rest it against the shoulder. Nothing was done by any of the service leaders such as the Rabbi, Gabbai, or Cantor to correct these ritual aberrations. Nothing was done to make those who participated in this ritual task feel in any way incompetent at what they were doing.

Another task to be delegated to congregants on the High Holidays has nothing to do with direct performance of ritual activities but does open up an avenue for participation in the activities of the house of prayer. This is the task of usher.

Being An Usher: An Alternate Way For Congregants To Follow The Progress Of The Service.

About thirty members; ten for each of the two days of Rosh

Hashana and the one day of Yom Kippur are asked to be ushers during these services. It is up to the Men's Club and the Sisterhood to recruit these people from their ranks. Many of those who are active in the Men's club or in the Sisterhood use their activity in these groups as their main if not sole avenue of Temple involvement. Acting as ushers offers these individuals an opportunity to be involved in the communal prayer activities without really having to pray. The job of usher includes finding seats for people who come in late when many of the seats are already occupied; keeping people from entering the sanctuary in the middle of certain solemn prayers and the Rabbi's sermon; procuring prayer books for those who have not found one themselves; and in making sure that those who are scheduled for kibbudim on the bimah get to the right place at the right time. When one receives a letter stating that he or she has been chosen for an honor on the High Holidays that person is asked to hand this letter to an usher upon arriving at the Temple. The usher will then know for sure that the honoree has shown up on time to perform his or her assigned ritual task.

The role of usher is a necessary one in a Conservative synagogue because of the great importance attached to decorum. From the beginning of the Conservative synagogue in America decorum in the worship service was encouraged in order to Americanize the worship service, (see chapter 1 pp.40-41). It is clear that decorum also fulfills another need of the Conservative worship service. Since there is a wide band of Judaic knowledge among the worshippers, decorum must be maintained in order that directions for the service, given by the rabbi

from the bimah may be easily heard and understood by the worshippers. Many of the worshippers would be lost if left on their own to follow the service. It could not be assumed that their fellow worshippers would cue them. This is not only because there may be a fair chance that ones fellow worshiper is also lost in following the service; but this also implies something about relationships in the synagogue.

Since the congregation is a religiously pluralistic one individuals may be especially cautious not to interfere with the sanctuary behavior of a fellow worshipper. During services at Temple Beth Shalom I often noticed worshippers leafing through the prayer book while responsive readings by the congregation were taking place. At other times I have noticed worshippers sitting in the pews with their prayer books closed while most of the others are reciting a prayer in unison. There appears to be an understanding among the worshippers that if someone is not following along in the prayer book it is because he is exercising his option to follow or not to follow the conduct of the service in his own way. To remind him to come back into the service and follow it as part of the group would be considered as an intrusion on his right to exercise his individual options regarding this activity.

From my observations I noticed that the ushers could usually be seen walking around the sanctuary attending to their assigned duties while holding their unopened prayer books. From time to time when the Rabbi would announce the page they would open the prayer book, flip to the page, leave a finger in to mark the place and then close the book. I rarely saw any of the ushers actually praying even though there seemed to be ample time to do so in between their duties. It

seemed as if the ushers were involved in parallel activities at the same time; one apparent and officially delegated by the congregation, and the other bogus. The official activity was to do the job of ushering and thereby facilitate the prayer activities of others. The bogus activity was to appear involved in the prayers by holding the place in the prayer book while not actually praying. This was an excellent opportunity for those who wanted to involve themselves in prayer by proxy; by helping others pray, and by appearing to follow the progress of the communal prayer by keeping the place with a finger in the prayer book.

In addition to the alternative handling of ritual objects and the bogus following of the service we have at Temple Beth Shalom an alternative way of receiving something akin to aliyot to the Torah on the High Holidays; although the Torah is not involved and the aliyot can only be described as a set of second class or bogus aliyot. Here we shall see that on the High Holidays those who come up to the bimah to do readings from the prayer book in English are given a public acknowledgement that is parallel to those who come up to chant the blessings before or after the readings from the Torah.

English Reading From The Bimah

When a congregant is given an aliyah to the Torah he or she is called up by the Gabbai who in Hebrew states the name of the kibbud recipient, and the number of the portion to be read. After the recipient of the aliyah finishes chanting the concluding blessings and as he goes to walk down from the bimah, the Rabbi shakes the hand of the

congregant and wishes a 'yishar koach', which roughly translates as 'more power to you'. On the other hand, when one receives the honor of reading a passage from the siddur the Rabbi calls the honoree to the bimah in English, using his English name. As the honoree leaves the bimah the rabbi shakes his hand and says; 'good job.'

We see that the public recognition given for both types of honors are similar in format; a call to the bimah proclaims the name of the honoree and the honor to be given; a handshake and congratulations by a synagogue functionary is offered as the honoree completes the ritual task and leaves the bimah. There is a great difference though in the level of Judaic skills and abilities necessary to perform the traditional as opposed to the alternative rituals. This is mainly related to the use of Hebrew. The innovative readings are done in English, and congratulations are in English. The traditional aliyot are done in Hebrew and likewise the congratulations offered to the honoree are in Hebrew. This makes this type of ritual involvement more accessible and more comfortable for the less competent. At the same time the more competent are still offered a traditional ritual involvement. Even though doing an English reading is a second class honor in that it is non traditional; not connected to the Torah reading; and does not involve the handling of sacred objects, it too is announced and congratulated publicly from the bimah; although in the profane English rather than in the sacred Hebrew. Here we have an example of parallel kibbudim done in different linguistic currencies, according to the varied skills and abilities of the congregants.

Conclusions

Through the study thus far we are moving outward in an ever widening circle of participation of members in this religiously pluralistic congregation.

In chapter three we first examined the roles of the service leaders who read Torah and led large parts of the Sabbath morning worship. We then moved on to look at the roles of those who performed other kibbudim and less demanding ritual and support tasks at this same service. In chapter four we widened the circle of inclusion to examine the Friday evening service which fulfills the role of an alternative Sabbath service to the one held on Saturday morning. The Friday service was shown to be innovative in nature and appealing to the religious sensibilities and skills of those who generally did not attend the more traditional Sabbath morning service. A look at the High Holiday services provided us with an illustration of the presence at the service of traditional as well as innovative kibbudim and ritual tasks; made necessary by the attendance of almost the entire congregation on this occasion. This accommodated the needs of the entire congregation which finds themselves once a year seated in a single service. Aside from this once a year occasion the circle of inclusion still leaves many of the congregants out of active worship service participation.

Even among those who attend Friday or Saturday morning services regularly, not all involve themselves in leadership roles or in performing kibbudim. All congregants however, if they remain members long enough, go through life passages which are ritually marked in a

religious context. There are births, marked by circumcisions for boys, and naming for girls. Children mark their coming of age with bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies and celebrations. There are weddings and there are deaths in the family. Departed kinsmen are not only buried but they are also ritually remembered through rites of mourning and prayer.

The circle of inclusion and participation now widens to encompass the congregants who makes use of the Temple primarily for the celebration of these life cycle passages. At the same time that the individual congregant makes use of the Temple in order to ritually mark these life cycle passages, he is drawn into a greater involvement with the congregation. The rituals of the bar and bat mitzvah offer us a particularly good illustration as to how this greater involvement occurs. It is to an examination of these rituals, and to how they are celebrated at Temple Beth Shalom that we now turn.

Endnotes: Chapter Four.

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CHAPTER V: INNOVATION AND TRADITION AT THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH: A
MODEL FOR AND A MODEL OF FUTURE TEMPLE INVOLVEMENT

Introduction

Attendance at services and participation in leadership and kibbudim roles among previously non or only marginally active congregants increases when a bar or bat mitzvah takes place as part of a worship service. As mentioned in chapter two, the attendance at a Sabbath morning service never exceeds fifty worshippers. When however, a bar/bat mitzvah is part of the service it has not been unusual for me to observe an additional fifty to one hundred extra filled spaces in the sanctuary. To be sure a number of these additional worshippers are non Temple members who are attending as guests of the family celebrating the ritual. There are however almost always present a number of guests including family members themselves who are members of the congregation but rarely or never show up for Sabbath morning services. In addition, ascending to the bimah to lead parts of the service, participate in the Torah reading, or perform other kibbudim are family members and friends who rarely if ever take on such activities.

Life cycle rituals are important to the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom; so important that it motivates them to participate in services in ways that they usually would avoid at other times. The ante is raised for service involvement. For example, relatives of a bar/bat mitzvah who are unable to read Hebrew will practice for weeks to learn to chant from transliteration the blessings before and after the Torah reading in order to be able to come up for an aliyah. Other relatives will learn to

lead service or to chant portions of the Torah in order to participate on a grand scale in the service. Why is this so? Why is this life cycle ritual so important so as to evoke such participation from those who are usually either absent or on the sidelines of service involvement? Indeed if we look back to chapter two,(pp.75-76), we remember that a major motivating factor for turning the Hamden Jewish Community Center into a Temple was the desire to have a conveniently local place to perform and celebrate the bar mitzvah for member families. In order to properly examine the role that this life cycle ritual plays in the life of the congregation we should first say a few words about life cycle rituals themselves; in their universal, in their historical Jewish, and finally in their contemporary American Jewish significance. In going from the universal to the particular we start with Arnold Van Gennep and his following description of rites of passage. Van Gennep says that:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades.... Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined.¹

Van Gennep categorizes rites of passage as being composed of three steps which make for an individual's transition from one status to another. He calls these rites:

...the rites of separation from a previous world, **preliminal rites**, those executed during the transitional stage **liminal (or threshold) rites**, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world, **postliminal rites**.

Jewish life cycle rituals are no exception to these transitions in the status of the individual as related to the community. The public rituals and ceremonies that make up circumcision, naming, bar/bat mitzvah, the wedding canopy, burial and mourning play a role in the life of the individual Jew who chooses to so mark these transitions by participation in a Jewish communal context. Knobel makes the point that:

Judaism has a highly developed series of rites that mark both initiatory and transformative moments in the lives of Jews. The rituals permit both the individual and the community to experience in an orderly and regulated manner the changing status of the Jew's relationship to other individuals and to society as a whole... In general, the rites are rooted in biblical regulations (**mitsvot**, "commandments") that were refined and standardized in the Talmudic and medieval periods. Although Jewish law (**halakhah**) defines the essential elements in each rite, local customs (**minhagim**), provide some degree of variation from community to community.

We see from the above that the performance of Jewish rites of passage are on the one hand bound or at least somewhat directed by the regulation of law and tradition; and at the same time open to community innovation. This combination of tradition and innovation in life cycle rituals is especially apparent in the practices of American Jews. Accompanying the development of different streams of Judaism there have evolved divergences in the traditional life cycle ritual practices. Knobel says that:

During the last century and a half, Judaism became divided into four streams, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist, and this has created an increased divergence in the liturgy and ritual of life cycle ceremonies. The greatest divergence from standard traditional practice as defined by the Talmud and the later legal codes occurs in Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism. In addition, the growth of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s has had a significant impact on life-cycle ceremonies in the non-Orthodox movements: new rituals have been created specifically for women and some standard rituals have been made more egalitarian by the inclusion of women as equal participants or by the removal of sexist language.⁴

Neusner, in his study of American Jews today makes the point that the observance of Jewish rites of passage plays a central role in their identification with and practice of being Jewish.⁵ He gives as an example the widespread observance of puberty celebrations. Neusner says of these observances that:

The single most important rite in contemporary Judaism in North America is the celebration of puberty, for boys among the Orthodox, for boys and girls among Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist, which is to say nearly all Jews."⁶

Data from the National Jewish Population survey of 1990 tend to bear out Neusner's impression. According to the survey eighty five percent of adult males who were born Jewish and reported their current religion as Jewish or who are currently Jewish but were born Gentile had become bar mitzvah. Bat mitzvah statistics were not taken into account due to the fact that this ceremony is a relatively recent one and is largely absent among the Orthodox.⁷

Based on my questioning and discussions with Temple Beth Shalom members the other rites of passage such as those at birth, (circumcision for boys and namings for girls), marriage and death rites, did not appear to play a major role in their joining or participation in the

Temple. Perhaps this was simply because although the carrying out of these rites of passage in a Jewish way was important to Temple members; these rites of passage could be carried out in a Jewish format **without belonging to a Temple**. Readily available are mohels for circumcisions, Rabbis and rented space for weddings, and Rabbis and Jewish funeral homes for burials. These are all but a phone call away.

In male birth rituals for example the circumcision is almost always held outside the Temple, either in the hospital or in the home of the parents. During my three years of observations there was only one circumcision held in the Temple. This occurred when the parents wanted a large reception in the Temple's social hall immediately after the ceremony. The circumcision is ritually performed by the mohel and not the Rabbi and is a family and invited guests only affair. On the other hand the ritual of giving a name to a female newborn is done in the context of a regular sabbath morning service at the Temple; is directed by the Rabbi, and in addition to family and invited guests is attended by all those congregants who happen to be present at the service. This makes the naming ritual somewhat of a congregational activity. This ritual however occupies only a **minor** part of the service. It consists of the newborns parents coming up for an aliyah and the rabbi reading a short proclamation of the baby's name together with a blessing for the newborn.

Turning to the rites of passage of puberty, (the bar and bat Mitzvah), we see that while the **actual religious ceremony** is held in the presence of the congregation at a regularly scheduled service and is therefore a congregational activity; the **celebratory affair** which is

sometimes held in the Temple social hall, and sometimes held outside the Temple, is not a congregational activity and will therefore not be included in our discussion.

If we look at the marriage rituals of the congregants we see that the wedding itself, may or may not be held in the Temple sanctuary. It is however for invited guests only and not part of a congregational service. It therefore does not come under the domain of a congregational activity.

Life cycle rituals dealing with death fall across the spectrum of congregational versus non congregational contexts. These rites are spread out over days, weeks, months, or even years; involve differing levels of emotional intensity; take place in a number of different settings; and involve a changing cast of participating characters both within and without the congregation. Funerary rites and the other rituals connected with the death of a kinsman initially include the funeral, burial and shiva period, (seven days of mourning at home) are basically family and close friend affairs, and do not take place in the Temple or in the context of a congregational service. These can therefore be considered non congregational in nature. The recitations of the kaddish, yartzheit, and yizkor prayers do take place in the context of congregational services at the Temple. But they are simply prayers recited by mourners while standing at their seats in the context of a worship service; and beyond this do not involve any special public ritual or ceremony as does the bar\bat mitzvah.

Bar and bat mitzvah as opposed to these other life cycle rituals take place in the synagogue and through ceremony and ritual interface

with a large part of the regularly scheduled Sabbath service. In addition it requires synagogue membership and requires this membership for a number of years prior to the ritual itself due to the mandatory Hebrew school preparation. This makes the bar mitzvah life cycle ritual an appropriate case to study as to how Temple members with a wide range of Judaic skills, abilities, and religious sensibilities ignore these differences and unite in common cause to support an institution that is necessary in fulfilling this ritual need.

At the same time as the bar mitzvah serves as a promoter of Temple involvement and solidarity it also, as celebrated at the Sabbath service, has a tendency to be an issue of contention among the congregants. This has to do with the nature of the rite itself as it has evolved among American Jews.

Neusner writes that the bar mitzvah ceremony of American Jews:

....is an intensely personal and familial rite, and it has taken over the synagogue and turned public worship into a private celebration. People who are not invited to a bar mitzvah that is celebrated on a Sabbath morning in a synagogue feel out of place at public worship. And rightly so. The family takes over the synagogue, and that is why the rite is a synagogue rite at all.⁸

The bar mitzvah at Temple Beth Shalom fits Neusner's typification of this ceremony. There are two bar mitzvah seasons at Temple Beth Shalom. This is the same at all of the Conservative synagogues in the New Haven area. The fall season runs from after the high Holidays until the Sabbath before Thanksgiving. The spring season runs from after Passover until the summer school vacation at the end of June. A few congregants choose to have the bar mitzvah on the Sabbath immediately after their child becomes thirteen. This is the more traditional approach

since it pointedly emphasizes the date of attaining status as an adult in the Jewish community with all the attendant rights and obligations that go with it rather than the ceremony and reception itself. At Temple Beth Shalom almost all the parents choose a date during one of the bar mitzvah seasons. Over the two year period of my observations there were forty two bar and bat mitzvah, only four of these were done outside the two seasons. The placing of these seasons were purely utilitarian and geared toward the paramount role that the family played in this rite of passage.

The winter months were left out because a sudden snowstorm might prevent the attendance of relatives from far away. The summer months were left out since this was the time when families took vacations or children were away at summer camp. Although there never was a threat of appreciable snow at Thanksgiving, families were involved with this secular American festival during this weekend. Some of the Sabbath regulars I spoke to however found an added benefit in this separation of bar mitzvah Sabbaths from the rest of the Sabbaths during the year. A Sabbath and morning minyan regular told me that:

I come here to daven. When there's a bar mitzvah it's a family spectacle. Sometimes I don't even feel like coming when they have one. At least I know that during certain parts of the year we have our normal services.

Another Sabbath morning regular and an occasional morning minyan attender expressed feelings that were similar to those expressed above.

The bar mitzvah are nice, but I feel like a stranger sometimes, in my own Temple. I like it better on a regular shabbes when we're more of a close knit group. So that's why you don't see me here

for a lot of the bar mitzvah; except for the kids of the regulars, that's more like family to me.

Although some of the congregants who are regular service attenders on Saturday mornings occasionally choose not to show up when there is a bar mitzvah; friends and relatives of the family celebrating this occasion more than make up for these dropouts. It is to the participation of these additional worshippers that we now turn.

The Role of The Bar Mitzvah Ritual In Increasing Temple Affiliation and Participation

Often when I was present on a Sabbath morning when there was a bar or bat mitzvah at the Temple I noticed that the parents of the child reaching this milestone were people whom I had never seen during my observations of Temple activities. I thought that perhaps this was due to the fact that I had missed some activities that were the very ones that they had participated in. Another possibility may have been that these congregants had temporarily not been active in Temple life during the period of my observations. I was able to negate these possibilities through a number of ways. To begin with I asked congregants who I knew were frequently involved in Temple activities if these parents participated. These informal surveys, usually done at the time of the kiddush after the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony gave me the distinct impression that almost all of the parents whom I suspected as being infrequent participants in Temple activities were indeed so. I did not want to rely on this as my sole source of information on the matter

however. Since these parents had all sent their children to the Temple's Hebrew school for a number of years; the logical person to ask was the Hebrew School principal.

Jane, an active Temple member for fifteen years, a teacher in the Hebrew school for six years, and appointed principal two years ago; was by virtue of her Temple involvements both as an employee and a congregant, a promising source of information. From my field notes, the following remarks from the principal will tell us something about the involvement of parents of Hebrew school children in Temple activities:

Some parents, show up at the Temple for the first time to register their kid in the Hebrew school because you know we demand five years of Hebrew school before we will allow them to have a Bar Mitzvah here. Actually, they join a temple for the first time because of the Hebrew school and Bar Mitzvah. Anyhow, for the five years that their kid is in Hebrew school they basically just drop them off for classes and pick them up. Their biggest involvement with the Temple is arranging car pools. The only other times they are at the Temple are when we twist their arms to come by having their kid's Hebrew class participate in services or in things like model seders, Chanukah, or Purim celebrations. Other parents are pulled into Temple activities as a result of joining only for the Hebrew school. Of these, a few drop out of Temple activities, or the Temple altogether when the last of their children are bar-mitzvahed... but you know, a lot of them continue their participation and are really lifelong active members.

The picture I had gotten so far was that the desire of parents to give their children a bar/bat mitzvah was a strong factor in affiliating with the Temple. The question then that needed to be answered was why parents desired their children to have bar/bat mitzvah in the first place. To find an answer to this question I would have to start by going to Rabbi Goodman and to parents in the congregation.

It seemed to me that having a bar/bat mitzvah for ones children was a universal occurrence among Temple Beth Shalom members who had

children of an appropriate age for such a ceremony. There seemed to be no cases of families in which this did not hold to be true. I asked the Rabbi if he could confirm my impression, and he did. He said that there were no cases he could recall in his ten years as Rabbi at TBS in which Temple members did not give their children a bar mitzvah. He felt that if parents didn't want to give their children this ceremony they most likely would not have joined the Temple in the first place. The Rabbi added that what some parents do want however is:

....to have a bar mitzvah without the pain; without the five years of shlepping the kid to Hebrew school. If they could get away without this then some parents would. On the other hand many parents do want their children to get at least the basics of a Jewish education, even aside from bar mitzvah training.

In looking over my field notes including discussions with the congregants, I found that bar/bat mitzvah rites were mentioned repeatedly as the primary reason for affiliating with the Temple in the first place. A few examples from my field notes should illustrate this point:

The divorced mother of an 11 year old Hebrew school boy: Well, I don't believe in any of the supernatural stuff. I might like to, but I honestly can't, it doesn't make any real sense to me. But... I want my son to feel he belongs to something, to have a Jewish identity. It's especially important to him that he has some kind of a strong identity since his father is not with us.. How could he feel Jewish unless he had a bar mitzvah? All of his friends will have one. So, that's why I joined, maybe I'll stick with it after the Bar Mitzvah but I doubt it. I would never come to services anyhow.

The mother of two boys who had bar mitzvah at the Temple:

My husband and I thought about joining the Temple even when our kids were small but never got around to it. Then when Josh became eight we knew that he had to start Hebrew school because of the bar mitzvah, so we joined and even though we don't go to services much we are very much involved in the other things like sisterhood and men's club and are continuing it even now after

our kids are finished with the Hebrew school.

M.L. Why did you want your kids to have a bar mitzvah in the first place?

Well, it was partially because of the grandparents. They really expected it, on both sides of the family. And also most everyone we knew who was Jewish had their kids bar mitzvahed. We didn't want our kids to feel different or left out.

The issue of feminism played a central role in the next congregants decision for her daughter to become a bat mitzvah. The following member, the mother of two children, a boy and a girl said that:

You know what? It's a women's issue. I guess that if I had only a boy I would have joined and of course had him bar mitzvahed. But especially since I also have a girl, I really wanted to give her a bat mitzvah. Look, I never had a Bat Mitzvah, that was thirty years ago. My parents belonged nominally to an Orthodox shul. It was just for the High Holidays and yartzheits. I didn't even go to Hebrew school, but my brother did because he was a boy and had to have a bar mitzvah. Well I didn't want it to be the same thing with my girl. Now I may have a bat mitzvah myself.

The wish to pass on the culture, to pass on Jewishness to the next generation was often heard as the reason for joining the Temple in order to give ones children a Jewish education. The bar mitzvah was looked upon as a means to further achieve this goal. The mother of a Hebrew school pupil expressed this in the following way:

We're Jewish, we want David to be Jewish too. We don't do much at home or go to shul so he has to learn it from Hebrew school. The big reward is the bar mitzvah; otherwise it would be pretty tough to get him to go; it's tough enough as it is.

Developing a sense of belonging to something; pleasing grandparents; not wanting the child to feel left out; feminism for a girl; or the inter generational continuity of Jewishness were the various

commonly given reasons for having a bar or bat mitzvah for ones children. What links these Temple parents together is that all of them need a Temple to belong to in order to carry out this coming of age ceremony. **The performance of this life cycle ritual provides a point of necessary cooperation which serves to unite a pluralistic congregation. Members must cooperate with one another in maintaining the group cohesion necessary for the maintenance of the Temple. If this were not done the arena for performing the ritual that they all desire albeit for a multiplicity of reasons would not exist. Individuals and families come to the Temple in order to ritually mark these events. By coming to the Temple to mark these events they are in effect accepting the imposition of a uniform framework of ritual law and custom upon their intensely personal experience. This necessity to come together for a common cause lessens the divisive effects of pluralism. At the same time as the divisive effects of pluralism are lessened congregants may expect that this traditional framework be customized to suit their varied needs, tastes, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding Jewish religious practices. This creates a social arena for the open expression and demonstration of this self same pluralism. This is because life cycle rituals, especially the bar mitzvah offer an opportunity for creative self expression. At Temple Beth Shalom the family that is publicly celebrating the bar/bat mitzvah is given much leeway in customizing the involvement of family members and guests in the service, including the innovation of new ritual roles for them.**

At the same time this customizing must be done within certain boundaries of the Conservative tradition and interpretation of halacha.

Through these public rituals the pluralism of the congregants is both contained and expressed. It is to an examination of this interplay between tradition and innovation that we now turn.

The Custom Designed Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Beth Shalom.

During the three year period of my field study at Temple Beth Shalom I had the opportunity to observe over thirty bar and bat mitzvah. During this period I was also able to participate in the preparations for and actual performance of this ceremony because my son came of bar mitzvah age. Now as a participant observer I would not only get to see what transpired upon the bimah during the bar mitzvah service; but I would also get a first hand view of the preparational and staging activities the family of the bar mitzvah engaged in prior to the event.

Since my son was a pupil at the local Solomon Schechter Day School the Temple did not require him to attend it's Hebrew school as preparation for this rite of passage. This meant that I would have to initiate the planning for the bar mitzvah myself rather than having the Hebrew School cue us as to the timetable of preparations. About a year before my son's thirteenth birthday I asked Rabbi Goodman what initial arrangements should be made for the bar mitzvah.

A meeting time was set up and on a weekday afternoon I was sitting in the Rabbi's study ready to hear what he had to tell me about the ground rules for my son's bar mitzvah. Rabbi Goodman began with what he felt were the basics, or traditional parameters of what had to

be done and what could not be done. Since my son was a day school pupil the Rabbi said that he expected him to certainly do the minimum, which would be to chant a portion from the haftarah, (prophets) and read a section from the Torah, (the maftir). Some children who can't manage this just chant a part of the weekly haftarah reading; or in some cases just read rather than chant. Those children who are able to, also lead a part of the services. How much they lead depends upon their ability and willingness to learn the material and to perform in front of the congregation. It was also expected that after my son turned thirteen but before the Saturday of the bar mitzvah he attend a morning service at the Temple and pray while wearing tefillin. Traditionally the right and obligation of donning tefillin played a central part in the rite of passage from child to an adult in the Jewish religious community.⁹ The bar mitzvah at Temple Beth Shalom was not asked to purchase tefillin of his own. Here a few words should be said about purchasing Judaic items as an expression of ones Jewish identity.

Heilman, in an ethnographic study of the purchases of Judaic objects made by Ultra Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews in Jewish book and gift stores says that:

As Jews moved away from traditional religion and their knowledge of it decreased, objects that were once a standard and recognizable part of their environment became less so. Things that once had meaning because of their use in ritual context no longer hold the same meaning for the context is no longer intact. And, thus while today because of the processes of mass production and the improved economic condition of Jews anyone may in principle buy anything he or she wants on the open market, wants are still shaped by moral, cultural, social and religious consciousness.¹⁰

As I previously mentioned in chapter three; out of the fifteen congregants who attend the morning minyan only about a third wear

tefillin. It is not surprising then that the bar mitzvah at TBS is not asked by the Rabbi to purchase his own tefillin. Clearly we see here how the bar mitzvah's wants are shaped by his religious consciousness.

The minimum expected of family members was that the parents and siblings past the age of bar/bat mitzvah would have aliyot to the Torah and say the appropriate blessings. The family was also expected to purchase a tallit which would publicly be presented to the bar mitzvah before he came up to the bimah during the service. The tallit would be presented to the bar mitzvah by a choice of a family member or members. The family would provide refreshments for the kiddush after the service to which all the congregation and not only bar mitzvah guests were invited. These refreshments could be arranged by simply paying the sisterhood to take care of it. If the family wished it could arrange the kiddush themselves but it would have to be through a caterer that the Rabbi approved of as being kosher. The Rabbi also made it clear that in accordance with halacha no picture taking would be allowed anywhere in the building during the Sabbath time period.

The aforementioned were parts of the ritual which were the same for all bar and bat mitzvah. These were the parameters set down by Conservative tradition; the interpretation of this tradition by Rabbi Goodman; and the traditions developed over the years by the Temple itself that would provide for a certain uniformity of the bar mitzvah ritual. By containing, by putting limits upon family customizations of the public bar mitzvah ritual in this religiously pluralistic membership a certain congregational solidarity could be maintained. All families involved in bar mitzvah would to an extent undergo the same ritual

process and have a somewhat similar, even if not identical, experience and memory of the occasion. Congregants, in the way that veterans discuss military experiences, alumni reminisce on college days and mothers share stories of pregnancy and childbirth; had available a shared repertoire of family bar mitzvah experiences. A collective memory and tradition is formed for the congregants, based upon the similar ritual observance of this life cycle passage. But, among a congregation composed of individuals with different religious abilities, skills, and sensibilities there is also the desire to express these differences through the ritual. **Tradition imposes certain boundaries upon the congregants in the observance of this life cycle ritual; their differences are expressed through the innovations and customizations to which we now turn.**

Expressions of Pluralism Through the Familial Innovations and Customizations of The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Rite of Passage.

After the Rabbi outlined for me the basic positive and negative ground rules of the bar mitzvah ceremony he said to me that:

Remember, this is a very important occasion for your son and your family; and a lot of it is up to you in how you want to do it. Within limits, of course, you can do anything you want.

At Temple Beth Shalom I observed a number of innovations in the kibbudim given to the guests of the family of the bar/bat mitzvah. The family of the bar/bat mitzvah was charged with assigning the usual Sabbath service kibbudim to whomever they so chose to honor. In addition there were a number of kibbudim that were added especially

for the occasion. Rabbi Goodman told me that the family frequently wished to honor guests in addition to those who assumed the traditional kibbudim. Often, some guests who the family wished to honor did not have the skills to assume kibbudim which required a knowledge of reading Hebrew. Not only this, but in addition there were at times guests who were friends of the family or even relatives who were not Jewish and therefore were not allowed by halacha to assume traditional kibbudim. In order to bring these people into service participation the Rabbi had prepared a number of innovative kibbudim which he could suggest that the family use.

In chapter four a form which outlined a set of new, non-traditional duties for the Friday evening service was presented, (see fig 3, appendix). When there is a bar/bat mitzvah similar duties are offered as kibbudim for the guests and family members as part of the Saturday morning service. There are however a number of additional innovative kibbudim to widen the circle of those included in service participation. For example, guests would be honored with doing readings which were entirely in English from the Supplementary Readings section of the Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book.¹¹ The readings in this section are, what their name implies, supplementary to the traditional order of the prayer service. Not only are they supplemental but they are mostly from non scriptural sources. Of the ninety two readings only thirty two, or about a third are taken from sacred sources such as the Psalms or the other books of the Bible. The other sixty readings are from a number of different sources. The works of Conservative movement thinkers such as Solomon Schechter, Israel Friedlander, Louis Ginzberg, Robert Gordon,

and Abraham Heschel, among others figure prominently in this section. There are also passages which we may term as coming from American civil religion such as; The Star Spangled Banner, America The Beautiful, My Country Tis of Thee, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, The Declaration of Independence, and The Bill of Rights. Then there are a few selections from Jewish literary figure such as Hayyim N. Bialik and Emma Lazarus. One may also select a reading that is not included in this supplement, such as passages from poetry or literature, either Judaic or secular.

Since most of the readings in this supplementary section are not traditionally religious the way is opened up for service leadership participation for a wide band of religious sensibilities; not only for those with Conservative affiliation but also for secular Jews and non Jews. Some readings from the Supplementary Selections which are frequently chosen to be used as guest kibbudim readings have been; 'World Peace' 'America Founded on Biblical Precepts', 'In Praise of Great Men', 'The Call To Justice', and 'Ethical Teachings'. These selections stress non-supernatural aspects of Judaism and emphasize the brotherhood of Jew and non-Jew alike. In addition there are two prayers in the prayer book which are usually reserved to be used as a guest kibbud at the Sabbath service. These are; the 'Prayer for Our Country'¹², and the 'Prayer for Israel'¹³ The former prayers are typically called in to use to honor a non Jewish guest with a kibbud. The latter prayer is used to honor an Israeli guest of the bar mitzvah's family. To illustrate how the use of reading such as the 'Prayer for Israel' as a kibbud brings into service leadership participation types of guests who would not ordinarily participate because of religious

sensibilities I offer the following two examples from my field observations:

A boy who came with his family from Israel to live in America a few years ago celebrated his bar mitzvah at the Temple. His uncle a native born Israeli in his late thirties flew in from Israel for the occasion. When it came time for aliyot to the Torah I was surprised that although the boy's parents and friends of the family received aliyot the uncle did not. It had been my observation from other bar mitzvah that close relatives of the bar mitzvah, especially ones that could read Hebrew; which was obviously the case of the Israeli uncle, received aliyot. After the Torah service was finished however the uncle came up for the kibbud of reciting the prayer for the State of Israel, first in Hebrew and then in English. Being friendly with the family of the bar mitzvah I decided to find out what was behind this unusual apportioning of aliyot. At the kiddush after the service the father of the bar mitzvah told me that he wanted to give his brother an aliyah but his brother refused this offer. When I asked why he explained this in the following way: Father: My brother had a bar mitzvah because my parents made him do it. My brother doesn't care much for religion. You know, left wing youth movement in high school, then a few years on a kibbutz. He said he wouldn't go up and do something that he didn't believe in, he would be a hypocrite. The prayer for the State of Israel was okay though. He isn't a total atheist, (laughing) no, not at all.

The uncle of the bar mitzvah who is a secular Israeli¹⁴ chose to distance himself from a certain form of kibbud,(aliyah to the torah). An alternative kibbud, (prayer for the State of Israel) did not offend his religious or secular sensibilities, therefore allowing his participation. Not only can this innovative kibbud satisfy participation criteria among one with a **non traditional** religious outlook but the same kibbud can also make possible the participation of another with a more **traditional** outlook. To illustrate this we present the following which was observed at another bar mitzvah ceremony also involving a guest who was a relative from Israel.

The Israeli aunt of the bar mitzvah did not come up for an aliya to the torah at the sabbath service. Instead she read the prayer for the State of Israel. At the kiddush after the service the mother of the bar mitzvah who was also my wife's friend introduced us to the aunt. In the conversation that followed the topic of women's participation at services came up. The aunt expressed her views as follows: Tzviah: I think it's nice that women come up for aliyot at your synagogue. But you know, I could never do it myself. In Israel it's not done that way, except maybe in the Reform synagogues and there aren't too many of them. My husband and I aren't that religious but we are 'masorti' (traditional). Our house is kosher and we say kiddush on the holidays. Look, I could never get used to women coming up for aliyot to the torah. Reading a prayer for Israel, that I can manage with.

The Israeli aunt's position as to the traditional status of women visa vis aliyot in the synagogue service is somewhat ambivalent. She thinks that innovation in this area is good at an American synagogue; but being used to the Orthodox predominance in Israeli houses of worship, is too uncomfortable to carry out the innovation herself. A less radical innovation, that of having women coming up to the bimah and reading a prayer for the State of Israel suits her religious sensibilities and allows her to participate in the kibbudim.

Another way in which service leadership roles are expanded to include more worshippers is through the sharing of the same kibbud by two or more worshippers. Husband and wife, brother and sister, grandmother and grandfather, or two friends will be given the same aliyah and will recite the blessings in unison. This not only provides additional participation in aliyot and stresses family participation; but at the same time facilitates the participation of those who may not be confident in their Hebrew or prayer skills. The comments of this bar mitzvah guest after sharing an aliyah with her husband illustrates this point.

I don't know how to read Hebrew, let alone do a brocha on the torah. But I can read the transliteration and besides, I told my husband to do it in a loud voice so that way he would cover up any of my mistakes.

Doubling up also occurs when the cousins or Hebrew school classmates of a bar/bat mitzvah come up together to sing one of the concluding hymns. It was not unusual for me to see seven or eight children from ages three to thirteen come up to sing a hymn together. Typically some of the children would be singing loudly and knew what they were doing. Others, especially the younger children would be standing there with confused looks, barely or not at all moving their lips.

Finally, even a kibbud which requires no special skills is sometimes doubled up on. This is the task of opening the curtains of the ark prior to the 'aleinu' prayer toward the end of the service. One person is sufficient to pull the strings that draw the curtains open. But, upon occasion I have seen two people called up for this honor. Such was the case with two great aunts at their nieces bat mitzvah. The two elderly ladies went up to the ark, and both of them, after much fumbling grasped the cord to open the curtains. As they descended the steps from the bimah I could discern smiles on their faces. Later I learned from talking to the mother of the bat mitzvah that these two great aunts, in their late seventies were especially pleased at having this kibbud since it was their first ever. Reflected in their pleasure were the generational and feminist issues that have played a role in the development of the Conservative movement.

Thus far we have seen how the importance assigned to the bar/bat mitzvah acts as an incentive causing people to come together to

support the Temple which is necessary for the performance of this ritual. We have also seen how innovations in kibbudim further bring in to ritual participation people who otherwise would have been left out. There is another social role that the bar/bat mitzvah plays in the life of the congregation. In listening to the speeches given from the bimah during this ceremony I came to realize that these speeches represented a cultural performance. **They were a model for and a model of the participation of a pluralistic membership in their Temple.** We now turn to an examination of the bar mitzvah speeches and how they perform this function.

The Bar Mitzvah Speeches As A Cultural Performance: A Model For And A Model Of Congregational Participation.

The bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies that I observed at Temple Beth Shalom included public addresses by the bar/bat mitzvah, the rabbi, and the parents of the celebrant. Common to these speeches was the fact that they all combined elements of tradition as well as innovation. The bar/bat mitzvah gave a short speech connected to the Torah reading and expressed thanks to his family and those present for the occasion; this was traditionally referred to as a Dva'r Torah or the Bar Mitzvah Derashah (talmudic discourse).¹⁵ He would then add on to this a longer speech of a personal nature which dealt with his own experiences and feelings regarding not only his bar mitzvah, but also the process of growing up; this was an innovation. The Rabbi delivered his usual Sabbath morning sermon and in addition would, at a separate point in

the service address the bar mitzvah. This was the traditional thing for a Rabbi to do at a bar mitzvah service.¹⁶ The substance of the address to the bar mitzvah as we shall later see however, was innovative in nature, and frequently dealt with topics that had only the remotest connection with Judaism or religion. The parents would come up before the ark and read a prayer of thanksgiving and proclamation that their child is now responsible as a Jewish adult; this was part of Jewish tradition.¹⁷ The parents would also give a personal address to the bar mitzvah which often was a long emotion filled narrative of the family history; this was an innovation.

We have in these public addresses a dual track of basically impersonal and then highly personal proclamations. The bar mitzvah says some words on scripture, the Rabbi gives a sermon, and the parents read a prayer of thanks; these are impersonal and not particularly concerned with or directed to the celebrant. The celebrant's discussion of his feelings at this turning point and the words of the rabbi and of the parents to the celebrant, on the other hand, are personal and directly involve the bar/bat mitzvah as an individual. **It is here, in these personal words spoken from the bimah at the time of the ceremony that marks the transition from Jewish religious childhood to adulthood that we may find an important clue to the meaning that Temple membership has for the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom.** In order to better understand the sociological significance of these speeches and the meaning they have not only for the bar mitzvah performers on the bimah, but for the worshippers in the audience as well; we should look upon them as cultural performances. **These speeches then may be**

analyzed in Geertzian terms as models of the existing Temple involvement of the adult congregants as well as a reinforcer and template for the future adult Temple participation of the bar/bat mitzvah. Geertz says that:

The acceptance of authority that underlies the religious perspective that the ritual embodies thus flows from the enactment of the ritual itself. By inducing a set of moods and motivations - an ethos - and defining an image of cosmic order - a world view - by means of a single set of symbols, the performance makes the model for and model of aspects of religious belief mere transpositions of one another.¹⁸

In other words, religious ceremonies may express who you are while at the same time form who you are more.

Geertz illustrates the model of/model for paradigm with ethnographic descriptions of cockfights and the performance of religious dramas and dances in Bali. Temple Beth Shalom located in Hamden does not offer us such an exotic setting but we too in witnessing the bar mitzvah performance, particularly the speeches, are afforded an example of religious ritual as both a reflection of culture and a template for the construction of culture. The model of and the model for that the bar mitzvah performance publicly symbolizes is that of the participation of the adult congregant in congregational life. To begin with we will deal with the speech of the bar mitzvah that he gives to the worshippers after the haftarah reading.

Most of the bar mitzvah speeches that I heard were composed of three distinct sections. The first section was typically a rather brief, sometimes only two or three sentence summary of either the Torah or haftarah portion read that day combined with a longer discussion which

tenuously related the scriptural theme to the bar mitzvah's personal life and experiences. The second part was the 'thank you' section in which the bar mitzvah expressed his thanks to all those who were involved not only in helping him prepare for this event but who also played significant roles in his growing up. The third section is what I would call the memorial section. In this part of the speech the bar mitzvah would mention deceased relatives who unfortunately were not able to share in the joy of the celebration.

A closer analysis of the three parts of the bar mitzvah speech will serve to illustrate how this speech serves as a model of and for Temple participation. We start with the first part, the exposition of scripture.

Traditionally the practice of giving a talk on the Torah or haftarah portion ritually read that day was designed to allow the bar mitzvah show the congregation his ability to give a learned discourse on some biblical or Talmudic subject.¹⁹ Rabbi Goodman explained to me that in most cases the Jewish educational backgrounds of the bar mitzvah at TBS would not suffice for him to give a D'var Torah on such a traditionally high level or to easily relate to these topics. Rabbi Goodman therefore allowed the bar mitzvah to just remotely connect his speech with the Torah portion and then personalize and contemporize it.

Traditional scripture therefore was cast in terms of how it relates to the bar mitzvah personally, in the context of his everyday modern world. The tradition is being reinterpreted in terms of modern

secularity. This reinterpretation is what Peter Berger calls the reductive option which individuals use in order to make religion meaningful to themselves in the situation of modernity. Berger says of the reductive option that it is:

...an exchange of authorities: The authority of modern thought or consciousness is substituted for the authority of tradition, the **Deus dixit** of old replaced by an equally insistent **Homo modernus dixit**. In other words, modern consciousness and its alleged categories²⁰ become the only criteria of validity for religious reflection.

Berger goes on to say of the reductionist option that:

The major advantage of this option is that it reduces cognitive dissonance, or seems to do so. The major disadvantage is that the tradition, with all its religious contents, tends to disappear or dissolve in the process of secularizing translation.²¹

As has been pointed out and emphasized in this and previous chapters the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom are afforded many options by which they may make relative the tradition to their personal tastes and needs. For many of the congregants tradition may be paid a few words in passing and used as a legitimizing backdrop for custom designed rituals and observances. At the time of the bar/bat mitzvah the child, soon to become adult, is being initiated into this reductionist way of looking at religion.

The following quotes taken from the bar/bat mitzvah speeches I heard at Temple Beth Shalom will serve to illustrate this point:

The bible story of the crumbling of the walls of Jericho by the Israelites reminds me of how **my walls of fear** crumbled as I practiced and gained more confidence in being able to do my haftarah.

The building of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem was done

carefully and according to plan. This is also how one should **build a life.**

It took great faith for the Israelites to cross through the dry land when the Red Sea parted. They tried something that was never done before. This is what we must all do: **try new things.**

Even though David was small he killed the giant Goliath. Even though I am not very tall I tried out for the middle school basketball team and I **made it: thanks David!**

Bible stories are then related to the anxieties created by puberty; such as identified by Erikson.²² Taking on the challenges of new responsibilities; planning for adulthood; taking risks; dealing with a changing body; and forming an identity are common themes that run through these speeches. These themes, and not those of Torah and traditional Jewish learning are the ones which dominate the first part of the bar mitzvah's speech.

The second part of the bar mitzvah speech consists of the **thank you's.** Most of the thanks are given to family members for their love, nurturing, and understanding not only during the period of often trying bar mitzvah preparation but also throughout the celebrant's life up to this point. The following quotes from this part of the speech were typical and heard with only minor variations time and again:

And I want to thank my parents, for being such good parents; for always being there when I needed them and for driving me to my piano lessons, little league, and orthodontist appointments.

Although we may fight with each other a lot I really love my two sisters. Thanks for putting up with my practicing chanting for my bar mitzvah even though I know it used to drive you crazy.

Thanks grandma Ethyl and grandpa Harry for all the trips to the toy store and all the stories you read and games you played when you used to baby sit for me.

I want to thank the rabbi and the Hebrew school teachers who helped me learn all of this. Sorry I gave you such a hard time.

The Hebrew school teachers, and the Rabbi who carry out the actual training for the bar mitzvah are given their due, but just barely. In this speech the family takes center stage as it does throughout the ceremony. The religious and ritual activities of many of the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom will most often take place at the points of marking life cycle events. These events, from birth to death, are intensely family experiences. We have seen in this and previous chapters how individual congregants often initially involve themselves and participate in the house of prayer in the context of family activities. By putting an emphasis on family above learning and tradition in his speech the bar mitzvah is publicly presenting a model of how things are now in the congregation and a model for how they will be in his future as an adult member of the congregation.

A final word on the second section of the bar mitzvah speech. This has to do with the often heard references to the hobbies and activities that have competed with the Jewish education and bar mitzvah preparations of the celebrant. A frequent theme of the bar mitzvah speech concerns the sacrifices made on behalf of secular pursuits in order to attend Hebrew school and receive a Jewish education. Acknowledgement is made of the many secular commitments and interests that reduce the time and effort that can be put into Jewish activities. **Involvements with the Temple must be carefully chosen; for the child, on**

the basis of what is bare necessity, and done under parental compulsion; for the adult, based upon lifestyle and secular involvements.

An area of Temple involvement that T.B.S. members appear to be willing to sacrifice time normally used for secular pursuits is that of memorializing deceased kinsmen. The third, or what I call the **memorial** section of the bar mitzvah's speech is devoted to acknowledging those family members who because of distance, illness, or demise, could not be present at the ceremony.

For many of the adult members of the congregation attendance at prayer services is limited, or nearly limited to occasions of saying memorial prayers for departed kinsmen. I ascertained this from the large numbers of members present in the sanctuary for Kaddish, Yizkor, and Yartzheit prayers; but who were rarely present at other times. The 'memorial' section of the bar mitzvah's speech while not a prayer, presents a model for this future involvement in the Temple for the purpose of memorializing deceased kinsmen. The following excerpts from my field notes should give us an idea of what is typically said in this part of the speech.

I am sorry that my grandfather Ben passed away just a few months before my bar mitzvah. I know he would have loved being here today, and we all miss him very much.

I don't remember my grandmother Ruth. But my parents tell me that when I was little she played with me a lot, and loved me very much. I feel that she is very much in spirit here with us today.

My Aunt Janet is no longer with us; but I will never forget her and always remember all of the wonderful things we did together.

The adolescent at Temple Beth Shalom, at the time of the ceremony marking his or her transition to Jewish adulthood, learns that the sanctuary is a fitting place to memorialize deceased family members. At the bar mitzvah this is done by saying in English, a few personalized words of remembrance. In adult Jewish life this will later be done by saying the Kaddish prayer in Aramaic.

In addition these comments tell us that the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is also for the old folks, whose departed loved ones are publicly memorialized from the bimah.

While the speech of the bar/bat mitzvah tends to be somewhat personal and emotional, a much greater show of emotion is witnessed in the speech of the parents to the bar/bat mitzvah as they stand facing each other on the bimah. These words though are not only an emotional testimony of the parents as to their feelings for their child. These words are also a public proclamation before the congregation of the special identity of the family, which is accomplished by the retelling of events from the family history. This provides a model for and a model of the family as the central focus for Temple involvement.

Proclaiming The Family Identity To The Congregation: The Speech of The Parents To The Bar Mitzvah.

In planning of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony the Rabbi asks the parents if they would like to say a few words to their child from the bimah. Only in a few exceptions do the parents opt not to do so. Judged by the often choked voices and tears of the parents, (and sometimes

those of other congregants), this is the most visibly emotional part of the ceremony. For the parents, this speech of **theirs**, and not their child's speech or Torah reading seems to be the event that marks the passage of their child into adolescence.

If to the parents the most significant and meaningful aspect of the bar mitzvah rite was the traditional one of the bar mitzvah becoming an adult in the Jewish religious community; responsible for his acts and permitted to count as part of a minyan, read from the Torah, and wear tefillin; the parents speech, if there were to be one at all, would take note of these themes. Instead the parents speech invariably consists of a recapitulation of the history of the parent child relationship; including the feelings of the parents at the moment of the child's birth, and other milestones such as the first word spoken and the first day at school.

But beyond the parent child relationship the history of the family itself is put into narrative form. Family pursuits, ways of having fun, humorous experiences, moves from place to place, traumatic experiences such as deaths or serious illnesses are all brought to the attention of the congregation seated in the sanctuary. It is as if by doing this the family history as told from the bimah becomes a sacred history much as from the bimah the sacred history of Israel is read from the Torah.

From the reference point of the family of the bar/bat mitzvah **this speech** is the most visible emotional highlight of the ceremony. It is at this point that the parents often cry and cannot continue, and give their address to the Rabbi so he can finish reading it for them. It is here that congregants, including those not from the family are sometimes seen to be wiping tears from their cheeks. What the parents are

presenting is a narrative of family histories that are on the one hand particular and serve to give identity to the family; while at the same time illustrate the experiences of 'everyfamily'. My field notes from a mothers address to her daughter upon the occasion of the daughter's bat mitzvah should serve to illustrate this point:

When it came time for the parent to get up and speak to the bat mitzvah, Rabbi Goodman announced that the girl's mother felt that she wouldn't be able to get through the speech that she had prepared and therefore asked him in advance to read it for her. In an aside to the worshippers the Rabbi said that he knows he will have the same emotions at his daughter's upcoming bat mitzvah a few months from now. In fact, the Rabbi, a calm speaker under any circumstances had no trouble when it came time to speak at his daughter's bat mitzvah. Apparently he was trying to help the mother save face regarding her inability to deliver the speech. The main points of the mother's speech were as follows:

The girl had a hard time growing up. There was a divorce when she was young; the mother lost her job; the home that the girl was born in and spent her early years was foreclosed on; and the mother nearly died from an illness a few years ago.

The fears of ordinary middle class people. Divorce, unemployment, loss of home, and life threatening illness, were publicly and personally testified to from the bimah, and struck an emotional chord with the congregation. Here and there among the worshippers I could see tissues coming out.

Not all of the parent's speeches involve a retelling of such traumatic histories. This is because not all families share such histories or are willing to share them with the congregation. But there is one family experience, traumatic in its own non dramatic and low keyed way which is the frequent main theme in the parent's speech. This is the theme of the passage of time, of family time. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony forces the parents to acknowledge the passage of this time, and to acknowledge that their children will not stay children forever. The passage of family time from the child's birth to the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is recollected in the parent's words as having been composed

of both happy and sad events. Strong emotions are brought forth in recalling both these types of events; the sad ones because they happened, and the happy ones because they happened and will not come again. In addition, the as yet to occur future family time is looked forward to with a mixture of hope and fear. As has occurred in the past, the future holds the potential, or some would say the inevitability for both fortunate as well as unfortunate events to happen.

It is at this point, looking ahead to the future, that the Rabbi's speech to the bar/bat mitzvah plays an important role. Here the words of the Rabbi represent something more than the customary well wishes that are extended to the bar/bat mitzvah. In this speech the Rabbi is setting forth a model for the child's future religious world view which is of marked similarity to the religious world view that already exists among many of the congregants who are now sitting the sanctuary and listening to these words. In the Rabbi's speech to bar/bat mitzvah he will not only give the youngster a model to follow but he will also validate what is already the model of many of the congregants.

The Rabbi's Charge To The Bar Mitzvah: Believe In Yourself and Have Faith In The Future: A Message of Religious Reductionism.

The details of the Rabbi's address to the bar/bat mitzvah differ according to the child, but the formula for this speech tends to remain uniform. There are three parts to this speech. The first part of the speech is praise for the performance of the bar mitzvah. Whether the

performance was limited to just saying the appropriate blessings and reading only a section of the haftarah; or included the reading of a large part of the weekly Torah portion and leading most of the service, the Rabbi always says to the bar/bat mitzvah something along the lines of; "You did a wonderful job today." This praise I believe, is more than just basic politeness or merciful kindness as the case may sometimes be. The praise that is so uniform for every child is a model of the encouragement given to all who participate in ritual tasks. This uniform praise is given not in spite of the fact, but rather because of the fact that the congregation is a pluralistic one. As detailed in chapter three; no matter the level of skill or ability shown by the congregant in participating in ritual tasks, this participation is valued and encouraged. Indeed, more than this; it was shown how these tasks themselves are manipulated in ways which allow all to be included and honored. This message of encouragement is repeated throughout ones career of Temple membership; whether it be at the time of the bar mitzvah, or as an adult participant.

In the second part of his address the Rabbi talks about the bar/bat mitzvah as a unique individual. This is always related to the child's hobbies, after school activities, sports involvements, and character traits such as; kindness, sense of humor, sense of justice, or seriousness of purpose. What I feel is significant about this part of the speech is the fact that the Rabbi does not relate these characteristics to any specifically Jewish images or value criteria. These attributes of personal character are cast rather in secular ethics. That ethics and not religious tradition are held up as the model for positive personality

traits is not particular to Temple Beth Shalom, but is part of an overall trend in American religious expression. Berger says that:

...many Christians and Jews in contemporary America will say that they have little use for the properly religious contents of their respective traditions but that they greatly value the ethical teachings- which is why they send their children to be instructed in churches and synagogues!...To strive for justice, to be compassionate, to have a concern for the poor or oppressed- or more specific ethical concerns, ranging from sexual codes to the abolition of violence-all these need not have anything to do with any supernatural definitions of reality.²³

Excerpts taken from the Rabbi's speeches to the bar/bat mitzvah as recorded in my field notes should lend support to Berger's point:

You are a kind, sweet, wonderful, young lady. You always try to bring people together. This is something I noticed in your relations with you Hebrew school classmates. This is something the world needs more of, people who bring peace.

You have a strong sense of right and wrong, a sense of justice. I recognized this during your years of Hebrew school, and more recently when you were so active in getting donations for the Hamden Food Bank. Your sense of justice and caring are a wonderful example for the entire community.

You have an amazing sense of humor. As a matter of fact you kept me laughing through some of your bar mitzvah lessons. Keep your sense of humor; it brightens up your world and the world of others.

The emphasis on secular ethics rather than religious tradition is connected to the pluralism of the congregation. Secular ethics tend to be flexible and open to change and variation from individual to individual. Religious tradition and morality are less open to change and variation since for believers they stem from an absolute and supernatural source.

Not only is the religious tradition of morality reduced to secular ethics. The outlook of religion is recast in psychological terms. To quote

from Berger regarding this issue:

A different language is provided by psychology. What the religious tradition "is really all about" here is not ethics but the mental health or wholeness of the individual.²⁴

This may be illustrated by examples from the third part of the Rabbi's speech to the bar/bat mitzvah; the exhortation to achieve personal success in the future.

You can be anything that you want to be. Just as you did a wonderful job on your bar mitzvah, you will be able to achieve whatever you put your mind to; whether it be in school, or the world of work.

Remember, there will always be good times and there will be bad times in your life. This has to be, it has to be for everybody. But remember, just as the good times, such as your bar mitzvah day pass quickly, the bad times will pass too. Just be strong in the bad times and you will get to the times that will be really good.

You worked very hard on your bat mitzvah, you are a hard worker. Continue to work hard, at school, and when you take a job. The hard work will pay off throughout your life, as it did today.

The Rabbi is extolling self confidence, optimism, and hard work; in short the **American** virtues of a good mental attitude towards the challenges an adult faces in the modern world. This is a reductionist model of religion. Not the **Jewish** virtues which are encompassed in the unchanging absolute commandments from heaven; but rather the attitudes toward life that enhance the societal adjustment and the mental health of the individual.

Conclusions

We have seen in this chapter how a religiously pluralistic membership is brought into life cycle ritual participation through innovations in ritual tasks. This effectively brings the individual to

involve himself with the Temple. The bar /bat mitzvah ceremony was chosen as an illustration of this. While a certain amount of innovation is allowed in the bar/bat mitzvah, innovations are kept within a framework of practices which are part of the Conservative tradition. The ceremony surrounding this rite of passage is enlarged upon by allowing families to add their customized innovations at certain points of the ritual. Other parts of the ritual remain uniform for everyone. This creates a cohesive tradition for the entire membership to share in and at the same time allows families to satisfy their differing tastes and religious sensibilities. Families, within the bounds of the veto of the Rabbi are allowed to have their time on the stage and to co-direct, along with the Rabbi, some of the movements, lines, and emotion filled drama of this rite of passage.

In addition to bringing in a wide range of congregants into ritual participation, it was also demonstrated how the bar/bat mitzvah ritual speeches serve as a model for and a model of Temple involvement.

Until this point in the study we have concentrated on an examination of the theme of the maintenance of congregational solidarity in a religiously pluralistic congregation. Three other themes however, which have played central roles in the development of the Conservative Movement and Synagogue were set out at the beginning of this research. These themes were the adaptation or acculturation of the synagogue organization and religious practices to the norms of the host society,(in this case Americanization); the formation of a Conservative identity; and the attempt at self definition as a religious community. It is to these themes that we now turn in the next and final chapter.

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CHAPTER VI: MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AT TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

Introduction

The congregants at Temple Beth Shalom are Jewish, American, mostly Hamdenites, and members of the Conservative Movement. An examination as to how these multiple identities coexist should help us to gain an understanding of the process of Americanization; the formation of a Conservative identity; and the Temple's attempt at self definition as a religious community.

In order to examine these themes we will continue to move outward from the center of our circle of Temple participation. We will maintain a presence in the sanctuary and house of prayer; but in addition will move into the circles of the houses of study and assembly. It is here, in the adult education, the Temple picnics, Men's Club breakfasts, musical shows put on by the members, and community blood drives that we observe the formation and coexistence of a multiplicity of identities. We begin our examination of these identities by first looking at the process of Americanization among the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom.

The Adaptation or Acculturation of Synagogue Organization and Religious Practices To The Norms of The Host Society: Americanization at Temple Beth Shalom.

In the early days of the Conservative Movement and the United Synagogue Americanization of the newly arrived masses of Eastern European Jewish immigrants was a major goal of the movement. In fact this was one of the major factors behind the support given to the movement by the already established German Jewish community in America. This issue was examined in chapter one which dealt with the history of the Conservative Movement and synagogue. The Americanization which we speak of at Temple Beth Shalom today is of a different type. Today we are dealing with the coexistence of an already established, taken for granted, American identity side by side with a Jewish one.

Americanization at Temple Beth Shalom does not involve the assimilation of newly arrived immigrants. In looking over the membership roster and from my conversations with congregants and Temple officers it became apparent that very few of the congregants were born outside of the United States. There are Arkady and his wife Vera, the Russian immigrants who were adopted by the Temple as part of the Greater New Haven Jewish Federation's support program for newly arrived Jews. There are a sprinkling of five Israeli families, most of whom have lived in the U.S for many years. There are a half dozen older members who arrived from Europe either as small children during the period of open immigration before 1920 or as refugees either just before or after the

Second World War. The rest of the congregants are native born either first, second, or third generation Americans who are indistinguishable in speech and dress from the other inhabitants of the town.

Introducing the newly arrived immigrants who were used to traditional forms of Eastern European Jewish worship, ritual, and synagogue organization to a Protestantized American style decorum was an important part in the process of their Americanization as discussed in the first chapter. The situation at TBS is certainly not one of Americanizing the worship services and rituals of Eastern European Jewish immigrants; this has already been accomplished; if not at TBS then at the synagogues of the parents and grandparents of the members. What is going on at the Temple is rather the educating of basically Americanized congregants in the Jewish symbols and styles of worship and rituals that have in many cases been made unfamiliar through neglect and disuse. The focus of Americanization is not to be found only in the arena of Temple worship. Americanization is also to be found in the desire of the congregants to fully identify and integrate themselves with American civil society; to be Hamdenites, and to be Americans, and to be Jews, all at the same time; and without the cognitive dissonance that this may cause. As Prell observes:

The suburban Conservative synagogue sought to define more than etiquette; it attempted as much to create a Jewish identity within a middle-class framework as it sought to create a middle-class identity within a Jewish framework. ... It was an extension of middle class suburban life that could maintain one's compatibility with America and ensure one's uniqueness as a Jew.¹

In examining the symbolic identification of TBS congregants with their Jewishness and with being part of American civil society and culture we are dealing with their attempt to make compatible different

identities; to live in different worlds at the same time; to be fully American insiders but at the same time to be insiders to the Jewish community. We appropriately then turn to Purim, a holiday which has as one of its themes the often precarious status of Jews living in a non-Jewish host society; and the way in which Jews sometimes use their wits in order to coexist with this society. Now we look at this celebration from a different point of view; as a cultural performance of Jews living not in ancient Persia, but in Hamden, a place in the small town America of today. First some background on the Holiday itself.

Purim

Purim is a holiday which according to Jewish tradition commemorates an event in the history of the Jewish people. According to this tradition the Jewish community in Persia was threatened with annihilation by a government minister named Haman sometimes in the fourth century B.C.E. Through the intervention of the Jewish Queen Esther who was married to the Persian King Ahasueras, this disaster was prevented. There is little in the way of historical evidence to verify these events but the holiday itself had been in existence for some time by the second century C.E. when a whole portion of the Mishnah,(the oral interpretation of scriptural ordinances) dealt with the laws for its observance, mainly that of reading the Book of Esther from the Megillah scroll.²

The Megillah is a handwritten parchment scroll from which the story of Purim is traditionally chanted with a special cantillation that is

used only in reading this book.³ The public reading of the Megillah takes place in Orthodox synagogues and in some Conservative synagogues twice each holiday; once at the start of the holiday in the evening and then again the next day at the morning minyan. The story itself is rich in theatrical drama, and all that this entails. The congregation is expected to participate in the telling of the story not only by listening but also by being an active audience. When the name of Haman, the anti-semitic villain is read the audience is expected to make loud deprecatory noises by booing, stamping feet and turning 'groggers' the Yiddish word for noisemakers. In order to cue the congregants when to start and stop making noise a traffic light; the "walk- don't walk" type is displayed from the bimah. On a deeper level this traffic light has a symbolic meaning for the congregants as citizens of Hamden.

The Traffic Light On The Bimah

The traffic light that is used on Purim has somehow become the property of the Temple and has been present at the celebration for a number of years. I found out from some of the members that the light was surplus property of the town of Hamden and was given to the congregation upon the request of one of its members. On Purim as I sat among the worshippers however, I noticed that Rabbi Goodman jokingly leaves the method of acquisition vague as he introduces the light to the congregation. He tells the congregation that:

The traffic light on my right, (pause) I won't go into how we got it, (greeted by laughter from the congregation) is here to help us

with the reading.

This joking statement and the audience's response has a deeper meaning when examined more closely. This was in fact an insiders joke, the insiders being the Hamden Jewish community.

Jews have only been in Hamden in any appreciable numbers since after World War II. Even now the Jewish population is not large especially when compared to the large numbers of Irish, Italians, and Yankees. City government is to a large extent dominated by the Irish and Italians especially when it comes to the Police, Fire, Public Works and Education Departments. A year ago a gentile woman with a Jewish husband was elected mayor. Although it is not the mayor, but her husband that is Jewish; and her husband belongs not to TBS but rather to Hamden's Reform Temple, Mishkan Israel; congregants do feel some satisfaction in this political accomplishment.

These feelings of pride and accomplishment were expressed by an old timer of the congregation in the following way;

See, when we wanted to start a community center here in 1946 the town gave us a hard time with the zoning. There weren't any real zoning problems, they were anti-semites and didn't want a Jewish place here. We had to threaten to take them to court and they gave in. Now we have a Jewish mayor, things changed!

Of course the mayor is not Jewish, but in the mind of this congregant the mayor being married to a Jew is significant enough to make her somehow part of the Hamden Jewish community. By the Rabbi saying; "I won't go into how we got it, (the traffic light) he leaves the door open in the minds of the congregants for idealized fantasies as to how their fellow town Jews actually pulled off this feat. The Rabbi is sharing a secret fantasy with the congregation, he is letting them in on

a conspiracy, although one that has no basis in fact. These conspiracy fantasies are dual in nature. These are the secret conspiracies of an out group such as the Jews taking advantage of the dominant gentiles, while at the same time having penetrated and assimilated sufficiently into the in group in order to take part in small town corruption. Could it be that the Jews of Hamden have penetrated the corridors of small town politics, police, and public works to the extent that they are able to pull off slightly corrupt deals such as misappropriating town property for their own ritual purposes just as other ethnic groups are alleged to have done from time to time?

After this comment of the Rabbi's, ("I don't know how we got it.") I picked up a few laughing interchanges from those sitting around me. From my field notes I record;

Yeah, we ripped it off from the corner of Whitney and Skiff (a particularly busy intersection not far from the Temple). We rip it off every year and put it back after Purim, and: Hey, the goyim got a wreath, (Christmas) on the High School, we can take a traffic light, and: Leave it to the Jews and that's what happens, and: Ha! we slipped the chief of police a few bucks and he got it for us.

These comments and jokes were coming from Sabbath Service regulars and from people who are active in the running of the Temple. They surely must know that the acquisition of the traffic light was quite legal and not as intriguing as their stories would suggest. The insiders are jokingly laying claim to a crime which they never committed! Turning to Simmel should help us better understand this matter. Simmel writes that:

Among other things the secret is also the sociological expression of moral badness, although the facts contradict the classical phrase that nobody is bad enough to want in addition, to

appear bad. For often enough, spite and cynicism do not even let it come to a concealment of badness; in fact they may exploit badness in order to enhance the personality in the eyes of others-to the point where an individual sometimes brags about immoralities he has not even committed.⁴

What the Temple member outsiders think may be something quite different. They may actually believe that the traffic light was obtained through political pressure and the connections of Temple members with the town government. As a participant observer and at this point in my field research an outsider to the running of the Temple I too thought that some corruption may have been involved in obtaining the light.

But, it seems that this light has a collective meaning for TBS members. It flashes a symbolic message, one that says the Jews of Hamden have come of age. In actuality or in fantasy they have been admitted to the inner sanctum of corrupt town political dealings. The image of the Jew as sharp, unscrupulous businessman;⁵ and of the ethnic-hyphenated- American as a tough dealer in city politics becomes merged. A Jew can actually hold on to certain negative stereotypes and not be ashamed of them, now that ethnic pressure groups are culturally acceptable in America. Becoming like the gentiles and participating in small town politics in all its corruption was I believe to be the main theme of the insider's jokes about the acquisition of the traffic light. This replaced the traditional Jewish theme of getting even with the gentiles by means of aggressive economic and legal retaliation, more common in a situation of anti-semitic oppression.

Is He Jewish- Does He Know If I Am?

The congregant at Temple Beth Shalom, part of the town's Jewish minority, identifies himself both as an insider and an outsider to Hamden civic life. The congregant therefore is a **marginal man or woman**. A marginal person is:

A person in a dilemma, or state of mental conflict, by reason of his participation in two different, distinct cultural groups. He is not fully loyal and committed to the values and standards of either, nor is he fully acceptable to either of the groups with which he identifies.⁶

This feeling of dual identity is a shared intimacy of the Temple members. In the Temple there exists a taken for granted Jewish identity. Congregants know each other as being Jewish. Outside the congregation, in the American world where a TBS congregant looks and dresses no differently from any other middle class suburbanite his identity in casual encounters is that of an American. Revealing one's Jewish identity to a stranger was not something always done in a straightforward way by Temple members to those who were known to be non- Jewish; to those who appeared to be non-Jewish; or even to those whose being Jewish was considered very possible but not certain. Perhaps this is a function of American custom that religion is generally not brought up in business or other secular contacts; or at least not until the parties get to know each other better. Or perhaps identifying oneself as Jewish was felt as a social stigma by some of the Temple members. Goffman's idea of the attempt of individuals to establish a safe social interaction can be helpful here. Goffman explains that:

When two teams establish an official working consensus as a guarantee for safe social interaction, we may usually detect an

unofficial line of communication which each team directs at the other. This unofficial communication may be carried on by innuendo, mimicked accents, well placed jokes, significant pauses, veiled hints, purposeful kidding, expressive overtones, and many other sign practices. Rules regarding this laxity are quite strict. The communicator has the right to deny that he "meant anything" by his action, should his recipients accuse him to his face of having conveyed something unacceptable, and the recipients have the right to act as if nothing, or only something innocuous, has been conveyed.

Some comments from a few of the Temple members about their meetings with strangers will serve to illustrate the above quote from Goffman.

Well, I'm proud of being Jewish, why shouldn't I be? But you know I don't broadcast it to people who I just meet. I mean Catholics or Lutherans don't go around saying to people they have just met- Hi, my name is Bob, I'm Catholic, or Lutheran or whatever. If I get to know a person a little better, then we can get into religion, if it comes up at all. Maybe it's not right, but you know I don't always want people to know that I'm Jewish. I feel that they might not like Jews or they will treat me differently. When I was in the army that happened sometimes. If I find out that the person is Jewish I can relax. Whenever I meet a new person I always think to myself- is this person Jewish? I guess I figure if the person is Jewish we have a lot in common and the relationship can get closer much faster than if he isn't Jewish. It's funny, if the other person is Jewish he is probably thinking the same thing about me- I wonder if he's Jewish too? At any rate this information isn't given out so easily. We usually beat around the bush, give out hints to each other. You know, use a few Jewish words like schlep (to drag), or say something about lox and bagels. It's kind of a game I think between two Jews who are pretty sure the other one is Jewish but don't come out in the open with it until certain signs are given.

The act of cautiously gathering and releasing information regarding being Jewish in social encounters with strangers was a theme that I witnessed being symbolically acted out between audience and speaker at a Men's Club breakfast at the Temple. A look at this event should tell us something about the identity of Temple members as American insiders as well as outsiders.

The Men's Club Breakfast: Is The Speaker Jewish?

The guest speaker for the Sunday morning breakfast sponsored by the Men's Club was Joe Wolf who is a well known local T.V. channel weather person. Just before he started to speak I heard a number of people sitting at the table around me ask each other; "Is he (Joe Wolf) Jewish? I believe that these congregants were not so much wondering if he was technically Jewish, (the name Joe Wolf and the fact that he was asked to speak at a Temple breakfast was almost a give away), but rather if he indeed presented himself as Jewish, and would identify himself to others as being Jewish.

As if Joe Wolf realized that the audience was asking themselves these questions he continued throughout his talk on his work as a weather person to pass hints that he was Jewish. He never however openly came out and proclaimed that he was Jewish. His increasingly obvious hints served to establish not only that he was Jewish but also that he knew the things a Jewish insider knows. Most of these allusions to being Jewish were in the form of references to things considered ethnically Jewish or in the use of Yiddish expressions. This was similar to the previous statements of one of the congregants describing the way she would drop hints of her Jewish identity to a stranger. Goffman would call these hints, "putting out feelers" which according to Goffman involves:

...guarded disclosures and hinted demands. By means of statements that are carefully ambiguous or that have a secret meaning to the initiate, a performer is able to discover, without dropping his defensive stand, whether or not it is safe to dispense with the current definition of the situation. For example, since it is not necessary to retain social distance or be on guard before those

who are one's colleagues in occupation, ideology, ethnicity, class, etc., it is common for colleagues to develop secret signs which seem innocuous to non-colleagues while at the same time they convey to the initiate that he is among his own and can relax the pose he maintains toward the public.

The following comments of the guest speaker and my observations on them are from my field notes:

J.W. (Laughing), "Thanks for the whitefish". Which can be interpreted as meaning, "You know what to serve a Jewish guest, and not only am I a Jewish guest but I like Jewish food too."

J.W. "During the big ice storm last winter my neighbors thought that I had Christmas lights on my house because there was a series of power failures and the house lights kept blinking on and off." This drew an even bigger laugh from the audience than the whitefish comment. In Hamden there are quite a few residents who set up elaborate displays of electric Christmas decorations in front of their houses. These displays make the Jewish houses without Christmas lights noticeable by virtue of their lack of such decorations. Also the high school and town hall display wreaths during the Christmas season. This disturbs some of those in the Jewish community and every so often there are letters of complaint in the local paper arguing that such displays violate the separation of church and state. Perhaps what drew the laugh from the congregants was the fantasy of a Jew remaining true to his tradition by not celebrating Christmas (i.e. not displaying Christmas lights), but at the same time appearing to be a part of the Christmas season by a series of power failures that make his lights blink on and off like those of his Christian neighbors. This fantasy would give the Jewish person the best of both worlds; being true to his faith, but at the same time not appearing as an outsider to the members of the dominant culture. Joe Wolf referred to the "Heimishce, (homey) girl" that he worked with. This was a really clear hint using a Yiddish expressions in his talk.

A member of the audience said that he had a daughter in Buffalo, (this was to illustrate some point that he was trying to make about the copious amounts of snow there). As soon as he said that he had a daughter in Buffalo, Wolf replied, "Mazal Tov", (congratulations).

Wolf used the yiddish term "Hazary" (pork, non-kosher food, or junk) when referring to certain bad precipitation; "there was snow, ice, rain, and all that Hazary falling from the sky." The audience applauded and laughed louder with each more obvious hint of Wolf's Jewish identity. Finally he said; "I love it when people laugh at the right time." This can be interpreted to mean, "I like to speak to and be with insiders (Jews) like myself"

who take the right cues There is a rapport between us because we are Jews. I hope that this rapport, based upon a common ethnicity will continue for the rest of my lecture.

Even before the speaker started his talk he knew that his Temple audience was Jewish. The audience too, perhaps though to a slightly lesser extent was confident of the speakers technical Jewish ethnicity. What the speaker was doing throughout his talk was to give the audience hints of his **self identification as a Jew**. What we really have here at the Men's Club breakfast is not only the putting out of the feelers that accompany many initial interactions between Jews and strangers. What we have here on a deeper level is a symbolic play acting of these real life encounters.

The speaker and the Jewish audience are recreating an act that is usually played out in front of non Jewish audiences; that of slowly and cautiously revealing ones non visible Jewish identity, which exists side by side with ones visible American identity. They are recreating what goes on in the world outside of the Temple, but in this instance within the safety of the Jewish Men's Club breakfast.

We may say that the American identity of the TBS congregant is a visible one by virtue of his or her appearance, language, dress, and lifestyle which outside of the Temple at least is quite similar to his other middle class neighbors. Still perhaps being a Jewish minority in a Christian majority social setting causes congregants to periodically and publicly reaffirm this American identity not only to outsiders as we shall later illustrate, but also to themselves. One way of doing this is through the innovation of ceremonies which not only proclaim but also celebrate and glorify this identity. One such ceremony that I observed was the

Sabbath morning service in honor of the appointment of the daughter of a congregant as Judge to the Connecticut State Superior Court.

Recognition of A Career Advancement: A Congregation Celebrates Its American Identity.

Fran, a woman in her late sixties came with her husband Jack from New York to Hamden about ten years ago. They moved to Connecticut to be closer to their children who had moved here because of career opportunities. Fran always belonged to an Orthodox synagogue in New York, did not drive on the Sabbath, kept two sets of dishes for milk and meat and would never accept aliyot to the Torah or even to open the ark. She came to services at TBS almost every Sabbath and was active in the Sisterhood. Her husband Jack died a few years ago. From what I heard from other congregants Jack was also an active member of TBS.

On a Sabbath morning in February Fran decided to host a kiddush for her daughter Alice in honor of her recent appointment as Judge to the State Superior Court. Her daughter was not a member of TBS and lived in another town about an hour away from Hamden. By sponsoring the kiddush Fran was in effect making what Anselm Strauss would call; "a public proclamation of a turning point" in her daughter's identity.⁹

At the Temple a kiddush would not only be sponsored to mark a religiously traditional turning point such as a bar mitzvah, naming, circumcision, wedding or yartzheit. Upon occasion the kiddush was used

to mark the granting of a degree, a professional license, a milestone birthday or wedding anniversary. In the case of Fran's daughter the judge, the celebration of her daughter's appointment was built into a large part of the service. The service itself and not only the kiddush was turned into a celebration and recognition not only of the achievement of a member of a congregant's family but also into a celebration and reaffirmation of the Jewish success in America. Fran had suggested sponsoring the kiddush. The Rabbi picked up on this and through innovation customized the service to fit the occasion.

To begin with the Rabbi suggested to Fran that the kiddush be held on Sabbath Mishpatim on which the Torah reading deals with law, a great deal of it being civil law. Fran's daughter, and other family members who were present read passages in English during the service and also had aliyot to the Torah. Many of the English readings referred to America and were from the section in the siddur for special occasions.¹⁰ The Rabbi related his sermon to the occasion and said that:

We can still believe in America despite all of its problems. Fran's daughter comes from a family that went from immigrants to judge in three generations. This is an example of the wonderful freedom and opportunity we Jews have in this country.

The Rabbi was paying homage to a central myth in the collective historical memory of American Jews; the myth of the 'Goldineh Medina', (the Golden Land, the Land of Opportunity), which was especially made manifest through upward occupational mobility. In Eastern Europe the Jews had been petty merchants, artisans and common laborers. Very few of them were wage earners. Upon arriving in America many of these

immigrants went to work in shops and factories and became wage workers.¹¹ Herberg notes that:

...it was primarily the sons, and later the daughters, of the newly "proletarianized" Jewish immigrants who were in a position to take advantage of the mobility of American society. Unlike other immigrants, Jewish parents were passionately concerned with giving their children an education, and Jewish young people proved remarkably receptive to Americanization. Equipped with language and knowledge, they quickly passed out of the "proletariat" into white-collar, professional, and academic occupations.¹²

The Sabbath service and the kiddush in honor of Fran's daughter becoming a judge was on a deeper symbolic level a collective celebration of this very successful intergenerational Americanization and upward occupational mobility.

We now move from symbolic forms of congregational expressions of Americanization such as the myth of the 'traffic light', and the service and kiddush in honor of the new judge to a group of non-religious activities that actually thrusts the congregation into involvement with the wider American society.

Sklare, in examining the secular Jewish organizational affiliations of suburban Jews comments that:

If the proliferated structure of the Jewish community offers a form of Jewish association for the secular minded, it also functions as a "Jewish Alternative" in another sense: as a means of association for Jews interested in improving and extending relationships with non-Jews and furthering integration into the general community. Paradoxically, integrationist sentiment among Jews is mobilized and channeled within the framework of the ethnic community, rather than exclusively through non-sectarian groups. As a consequence, associational ties with the Jewish community can be retained and even strengthened so that integration into the larger society is proclaimed.¹³

At Temple Beth Shalom we have a number of examples of the involvement of members in the wider civic community through

participation in synagogue sponsored activities. There are the community food drives, the annual joint blood drive with the church next door, the Veteran's of Foreign Wars commemorations, the volunteer efforts at one of the local soup kitchens and at one of Hamden's nursing homes. There are the interfaith Thanksgiving services, and the program in which volunteers from the congregation take the places of Christians who would otherwise have to work on Christmas Eve. Participation in these activities serves to integrate Temple members into the community based volunteerism which has long been a part of American civic life.¹⁴ This in turn provides opportunities to make social contacts with members of the wider community not only as individuals but also as individuals with a Jewish identity. **Put in another way; by engaging in civic volunteerism through the Temple, one may integrate into the wider American society while openly proclaiming ones Jewish affiliation and identity.**

The example from my field observations that I will use to illustrate this point is that of the community Red Cross blood drive. This activity will be looked at from two perspectives. Initially we will look at the perspective of the congregants projecting outward in their attempt to involve themselves with and create a positive impression upon the non Jewish Hamden community. The second perspective will be from outside the Temple; as I seek to find out how the members of the nearby Spring Glen Church view these efforts of the Temple members.

The Community Blood Drive

Attending a wide range of Temple activities as a participant observer was, as it should be, a demanding and time consuming task. From solemn worship services to picnics and softball games I had involved myself in whatever activities I felt would be helpful in gaining an insight into the social workings of the Congregation. During the period of my field research the Temple's triennial turn came to host the blood drive. So it was on a June day, with a mixture of good civic feelings and mild anxiety that I decided to literally give blood for the cause of ethnographic research. Rather than interview congregants involved in the blood drive after the event, I wanted to speak to them at the moment that they were involved in the fellowship of doing such interfaith volunteer work.

For the last ten years TBS, the Spring Glen Church, and Congregation Mishkan Israel have jointly conducted this blood drive under the auspices of the American Red Cross. The initiative for doing this came from the local Red Cross. They were the ones who originally contacted the local houses of worship and suggested that they become involved and pool their resources for this project. On a yearly rotating basis each congregation turned their respective social halls into a collection center for blood donations. Volunteers canvass their fellow church or synagogue members via telephone and Sabbath announcements from the altar or the bimah, to donate blood or to serve as support workers for the Red Cross technicians who do the actual blood collecting. The volunteer support workers provide refreshments for the

donors and help them off the tables after the blood is taken.

After donating blood I asked a few questions of the volunteers from the Temple such as; why they decided to give blood or to help out and, how they felt about the Temple involvement in this event. Some of their replies as recorded in my field notes will serve to illustrate the meaning that this activity has for these congregants:

It's important. It's helping people , actually it's saving lives. I'm really glad that our Temple is part of this, especially since we do it with the church down the street. That's what brotherhood is about, isn't it?

I'm too old to give blood. You know they don't want to take a chance on someone over sixty five. But at least I help out with the cookies and the juice. I remember that years ago, people, you know the gentiles, used to say that the Jews helped only their own and didn't care about anyone else. Well, here we are, working together with them.

It's a nice idea, helping people who need blood. It brings people together, from our Temple, and from the Church. This is what religion is really supposed to be about, doing good deeds, mitzvot, and it shouldn't make a difference what religion you are.

It's a nice community project. Well, I mean aside from the main purposes of giving blood and saving lives. I think there's a lot of good will going around from all the cooperation on this one.

If we listen carefully to the words of these congregants we can discern two distinct reasons for the importance they attach to the undertaking of this volunteer project. The first reason, which is the immediate and obvious one, is to collect blood in order to provide transfusions to save lives. The other reason, which is always mentioned is the gaining of good will and respect and to foster social ties and cooperation with the non Jewish community. The themes of interfaith cooperation and civic responsibility are grounded in what Herberg calls the American Way of Life. Herberg writes that:

Interfaith in this country is the device that American experience had elaborated for bringing some measure of harmony among the

religious communities and in some degree mitigating their tensions and suspicions. It is made possible by their common grounding in the American Way of Life and their feeling that despite all differences of creed; "brotherhood" and affirmative co-operative action" among Protestants, Catholics and Jews is not only possible and desirable but is also in a sense mandatory if American democracy is to function properly.¹⁵

I counted at least fifteen TBS members who were working as volunteers at the blood drive. I asked one of the organizers of the blood drive, who was also a Temple member about the number of blood donors from TBS. She told me that there were close to forty. This means that there were at least fifty members of TBS who were involved in this inter faith effort, either as volunteers at the collection center, or as actual donors. What does this number mean; in terms of a proportion of Temple members; in terms of any special self selection; and in terms of being a reflection of the entire congregation or of a particular segment of it?

If we look at the number of congregants involved in the blood drive as a proportion of the total Temple adult membership we see that about 7% took part in this activity. This may not seem like much, but it is the same proportion of members who attend the Saturday morning services. While this participation in an interfaith activity does in no way reflect the interest of the entire, or even majority of the congregation, it is equal to the interest shown for a service that plays a central role in Temple life.

As I considered the individuals who were involved in the blood drive I asked myself if these congregants represented a particular segment of the congregation. At first I could not identify these members

as representing any special segment of the congregation. Some of these people were Saturday morning regulars, other came to services only on Friday nights. There were present those whose Temple involvement was almost exclusively through the Men's Club or the Sisterhood. There were those whose involvement in Temple activities was mainly through their attendance at adult education activities. What I did however notice was that what these congregants had in common was their intensive involvement in **some area of Temple activity**. If the blood drive could be said to represent a particular segment of the population, it was not a segment of a **particular type of Temple involvement** but rather that segment of the Temple membership that was **active in some aspect of Temple life**. The interfaith blood drive then did have wide support from the Congregation; that is to say from the active, involved members.

It has been shown how the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom regard interfaith cooperation as a means of identifying and involving themselves with the wider American society; and in gaining the respect of the non Jewish locals. We will now listen to their Christian counterparts to get some idea as to how **they** perceive this community effort.

The Scotts' Birthday Party

The Scotts', who were our next door neighbors are a retired couple who belong to the Spring Glen Church. On the High Holidays, Passover, and Chanukah they would wish us a happy holiday, and we would reciprocate in kind on Christmas and Easter. We would watch their house when they went to visit relatives in Maine, and they would do the same for us when we took trips to Israel. As is frequently the style of interaction with neighbors in the suburbs, conversation between us would most likely occur by chance; while walking the dog, raking leaves, or mowing the lawn. From these conversations I learned that Mr. Scott was a deacon in his church and that Ms. Scott was an active member of the woman's auxiliary. The Scotts' would faithfully attend religious services every Sunday and volunteered much time to church activities including grocery shopping for shut-ins and collecting food and clothes for the needy.

When our two oldest children had their bar and bat mitzvahs the Scotts' came to the service and reception. When it came time for Mr. Scotts' 80th birthday celebration, we were invited. It was here that I met the friends of the Scotts', most of whom also belong to the same church as they did. At the table where my wife and I sat were six other guests, all of whom were members of the Spring Glen Church. Early on in the course of our conversation I mentioned that my wife and I were members of Temple Beth Shalom. This evoked a lively response from the other people about the fine people that they knew who belonged to our Temple. Many of these Temple members were met through interfaith

projects such as the food and clothing collections and the blood drive. Our table mates emphasized how interfaith projects were the way "things should be", and how "all the religions have to work together in order to solve the mess that America is in", (a reference to social ills such as drugs and crime).

Perhaps these kinds of comments, especially in my case, could be attributed to propinquity. Also the common ground of social class and neighborhood may have played an important role in the social contacts between Jews and Christians which our table mates spoke of. I do however believe that the **neutralization of religious identities** was only a partial reason why these social contacts between Christians and Jews were able to develop. To explain these social contacts we must also look to the very **involvement and identification** these individuals maintained with their respective congregations. These churchgoers and temple members created a common ground for social contact with each other as members of congregations involved in interfaith projects. **The volunteers and donors from Temple Beth Shalom with whom I spoke at the blood drive had realized something that was central to their process of Americanization. They realized, perhaps subconsciously, that becoming American meant not distancing oneself from the synagogue, but rather becoming more involved with it. Synagogue involvement can serve as a vehicle which helps congregants maintain their Jewish identity, while at the same time share in the same American civic identity as their non Jewish neighbors.**

In addition to being American and Jewish the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom by virtue of their membership in a synagogue

affiliated with the United Synagogue of America are nominally, at least, Conservative Jews. How have the congregants attempted to form a Conservative identity; and what does this mean to them?

The Formation Of A Conservative Identity: Some Historical Considerations.

Historically the formation of an identity has been a problematic issue for the Conservative Movement. The twin desires of the Movement to occupy a centrist position between Orthodox and Reform and to include within its fold the widest possible band of adherents by being all things to all people and offending the fewest has led to the creation of this problem. The historical development of this issue was dealt with in some detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Sklare found that it was not at all unusual for Conservative Jews to define themselves by how far they were removed from Orthodox and Reform practices. Sklare, from the vantage point of the 1970s stated that:

While some individuals describe themselves as Conservative because of their alienation from Orthodox practices, others define themselves from the opposite direction-- they point out that they are Conservative because they are not Reform.¹⁶

The tendency of Conservative Jews to identify themselves by their distance from both the Orthodox and the Reform appears to have persisted to the present. We hear this in the lament of a Conservative philosopher:

...most Conservative Jews would have great difficulty answering the question "What does it mean to be a Conservative Jew?" A common answer to that question is "Well, I guess it means being not Orthodox and not Reform"-hardly a triumphant or positive answer. And this despite the availability of Emet Ve-Emunah,¹⁷ the Movement's first formally articulated Statement of Principles.

A look at the ethnography of Temple Beth Shalom will provide us with an illustration as to how the congregants define themselves as Conservative Jews through focusing on what they are not, namely Orthodox or Reform.

Forming a Conservative Identity At Temple Beth Shalom: We Are, What We Are Not.

For a few of the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom the identity of being Conservative Jews has most developed through organizational involvements **outside** of the Temple context. There are regional and national conventions and workshops sponsored by the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, The United Synagogue of America, and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. Attendance at these events has served to foster a sense of belonging to and identifying with the Conservative Movement. But only about fifteen families have sent their children to Ezra and perhaps each year two or three of the congregants attend Movement functions outside of the Temple. For example, there is the member whose children attend Ezra Academy, the local Conservative Day School:

Our children go to Ezra and also to Camp Ramah, (one of the summer camps run by the Conservative Movement). I guess we get much of our Conservative identity from that. We are very involved

with the Temple too, but somehow Ezra and Ramah make us feel part of something bigger; that we are connected to Conservative Jews and Conservative Judaism instead of just the local shul.

For most of the congregants however, we must look to the communal worship service at Temple Beth Shalom, and in addition to those of Reform and Orthodox synagogues in order to understand how a Conservative identity is formed.

As a participant observer at Temple Beth Shalom I developed the impression that most of the members formed their Conservative identities not by reference to ideology or belief. Conservative identities were formed rather by the reference of the members to various normative Conservative religious practices and to their understanding as to how these practices differed from those of the Orthodox or Reform. Most significantly these religious practices included; the conduct of worship services, and the degree of gender egalitarianism in the service. These then, were the boundary markers that congregants used to differentiate themselves from the Orthodox and Reform and to establish their own identity as Conservative Jews. These practices were so central in forming a Conservative identity because they were the most visible and simple to understand. The congregants did not possess enough of an in-depth Judaic knowledge to really understand the more abstract theoretical and theological issues that separate Orthodoxy, Conservatism and Reform.

I speak in terms of the congregant's **understanding** of Orthodox and Reform practices because I found no evidence that any more than a handful of congregants had an in depth, accurate knowledge as to what these practices actually were.

The degrees to which congregants observe dietary laws and Sabbath work prohibitions also figure prominently in the formation of a congregant's self definition of what it means to be a Conservative Jew; much in the same way as the conduct of the worship service and gender egalitarianism figure in the formation of the Congregation's identity as a Conservative synagogue. Since I am studying the congregation as a social unit rather than the individual congregants only those practices that are congregational in nature, (i.e. that can be observed as taking place within the context of congregational activities, rather than the private practices of individuals), will be examined.

The historical differences in the decorum between Orthodox and Conservative services were discussed in the first chapter. In the contemporary American synagogue however, especially when one compares the modern Orthodox style of worship to the Conservative we find that differences in decorum are not as great as they were in the early days of the Conservative Movement. Weissler says that:

There is a variety of forms of Orthodox worship, ranging from more to less Americanized: in large synagogues, Sabbath and Festival services are usually conducted by professional rabbi and cantor; in smaller congregations, leadership rotates in the traditional manner, and the rabbi functions chiefly as halakhic authority; Hasidic shtiblekh (small gatherings for prayer) closely resemble those of Eastern Europe. In "modern Orthodox" congregations, the language of conversation, sermons, and announcements is English, while among some of the "traditional Orthodox" it is Yiddish.¹⁸

Now in the words of the congregants themselves we will examine their attempt to stake out Conservative identities by comparing their religious practices with the Reform and Orthodox. We begin with a look at how the congregants compare their worship service to their impressions of Orthodox and Reform services.

The Conduct of The Service

You know, we have a nice service. People sing together, and pretty much stay in their seats. I'm not saying that people don't ever talk to each other during the service, but it's kept at a minimum and people try to whisper. We were at a bar mitzvah recently at one of the Orthodox synagogues in Westville. The women were yakking away in their separate section, the men didn't stop talking, and there were kids running all over the place.

Tell me how many times have you heard our Rabbi tell the people to keep the noise down during a service?-probably never. Members here know that making noise during the service is not acceptable. When I was a kid we went to a small Orthodox shul. I guess you could have called it a 'store front shul'. Anyhow, the gabbai there had to keep banging on the table to bring the people back to order when they made too much noise talking to each other. But you know, many of the Orthodox synagogues today are pretty much like us.

I haven't been inside an Orthodox shul since I was a kid. We belonged to a Conservative Synagogue but I used to go with my grandfather to his shul sometimes on Shabbos. I remember a lot of old men swaying back and forth and it seemed like everyone was doing their own thing. You know, nobody was singing together like we do here. I guess the old timers liked it, but I could never get anything out of an Orthodox service. When I go to the synagogue, I want something a little more formal.

Not only do the congregants compare and differentiate the style of their services to the Orthodox, but they also do this with the Reform as comments from the following congregants indicate:

I'm pretty modern when it comes to religion, but I think Mishkan

Israel goes too far in the way they make their service look like something from a church. Well, I don't want to judge, but let's just say I don't feel very comfortable there. Half the men don't wear yarmulkes, and they have an organ. I wouldn't feel comfortable with the Orthodox either... I guess Conservative is about right for me; it's someplace in the middle.

I wasn't here last week because I was at a bar mitzvah at Mishkan Israel. The people don't daven there; it was kind of like a sing along. And then on top of that, the organ kept blasting away. I was glad to be back here, (at TBS), we don't go crazy with the davening, but we don't make a farce out of it like the Reform do.

These congregants then, perceive themselves to be somewhere in the middle, between Orthodox and Reform; but are they really? I believe they are closer to Orthodox than they perceive themselves to be. Evidence for this may be found in the many red lines in the conduct of the worship service that they won't allow themselves to cross. Men are required to wear head coverings in the sanctuary. Aside from a few English readings from the siddur, the service is conducted in Hebrew and Aramaic. The Torah and haftarah portions are chanted in Hebrew. Although women are called to the Torah; the order for the aliyot is the same as the Orthodox, with those of Cohen or Levite decent called up first. An organ is not used at the service, and picture taking is not allowed on the Sabbath or Holy Days. Why **these** are the lines that are chosen not be crossed I think has to do with their high visibility, as I made reference to a short time ago as a way the Congregants differentiate themselves from Orthodox and Reform. **There are then red lines on the right and on the left. But I believe that aside from the issue of egalitarianism more and bolder lines are drawn between the conduct of the service at Temple Beth Shalom and that of the Reform rather than that of the Orthodox.**

The evolution of the issue of gender egalitarianism in the Conservative Movement and Synagogue was dealt with in the first chapter of this study. This issue in the history of Temple Beth Shalom was also examined in some detail in chapter two. Now we will take a look at how gender egalitarianism plays a central role in the formation of a Conservative identity among the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom.

Gender Egalitarianism In The Formation of Conservative Identity at Temple Beth Shalom

By taking a look at the congregants, and what they are doing on the bimah at Temple Beth Shalom on a Sabbath morning it becomes immediately apparent that there exists a situation of gender equality in the worship service. There are often women leading the service, reading from the Torah, and handling ritual objects such as the Torah adornments. Furthermore, one may easily get the impression that women, at times, dominate the action on the bimah. In addition to the women who are present for ritual activities there are also on the bimah the temple president, and ritual vice president, who are both women, and another woman from the ritual committee who assists with the ritual objects. Not only have women at TBS achieved a status of official gender equality but they have also taken full advantage of this situation by assuming the tasks, both ritual and administrative, that this equality has permitted them. This enhanced status of women in Temple leadership roles is central to the formation of a Conservative identity.

In speaking with both female and male congregants I was able to

discern the role that gender equality plays in the formation of a Conservative identity for the congregation. Comments from the following congregants should serve to illustrate this point:

If our Temple didn't have equality between men and women, you wouldn't catch me here. My parents belonged to an Orthodox shul when I was growing up. It wasn't that they were Orthodox or went to shul aside from the High Holidays; but where we lived in New York that was the closest and least expensive one to belong to. Anyhow, when we moved to Hamden and then my kids started Hebrew school I had my first real experience with a Conservative Temple. It was a real eye opener for me as a Jewish woman. Here I could do everything the men did. Of course I didn't know how to do anything. So I learned Hebrew and how to follow the services. If Conservative Judaism is good for something it's that we have equality.

M.L: Well what about the Reform Temple, they have equality too wouldn't it have been easier to join a Reform Temple? I mean, you wouldn't have had to learn much Hebrew to follow the services there.

That's true, but what would be the point of equality there? Equality to do what? Nobody does much of anything traditional in the services there. The men don't do anything and neither do the women. The only time they have a Saturday morning service is when there is a bar mitzvah. Look, what's good about Conservative is that it has a fairly traditional service and it lets women be a part of it. That's something both the Orthodox and the Reform can't offer.

This congregant has staked out the Conservative identity of her Temple or at least what she regards as salient to this identity. For her this identity is based not only upon gender equality but also upon an ability to do something heretofore restricted. In that, it mirrors general feminism. In a sense there is a paradox in her position. She wants gender equality in ritual participation (something she could have with the Reform), but she wants the ritual to be traditional, (something that the Orthodox have but would not allow her to participate in). A Conservative congregation is a compromise between Orthodox and Reform on this issue of gender equality in participation in traditional rituals. Paradoxically though, by allowing for the participation of women in these

rituals, these rituals become innovative and therefore non traditional. Therefore egalitarianism in ritual is at the same time a force for tradition as well as a force for innovation. By pushing for the participation of women in the performance of traditional rituals egalitarianism is innovative. But once women lay claim to these rituals it is in their interest to maintain these rituals in as traditional a form as possible in order to conserve the very substance of the prize they have won. Here I will turn to the ethnography in order to illustrate this point.

Egalitarianism And The Preservation of Worship Service Ritual: A Paradoxical Relationship.

During my period of field work at TBS women whose fathers were considered to be of Priestly or Levitical descent won the right to be recognized as such when called for aliyot to the Torah. During the debate on this issue in the ritual committee there were some men who suggested that the recognition of Priestly or Levitical descent was an anachronism to begin with and should be eliminated altogether, thereby putting all those, men and women, who were called for an aliyah on an equal status. It was pointed out by those who advocated this solution that another Conservative synagogue in the area had long ago adopted this position and that TBS should follow their progressive lead. In answer to this suggestion one of the women on the ritual committee said that:

Look, if we get rid of this tradition then we women have nothing to gain. We don't want to get rid of the Cohen and Levi aliyot by

taking it away from the men as well as the women. What good would that do? What we want is to be allowed, as the men are, to be part of it.

This woman knew that gaining the right to participate in this ritual would be a hollow victory indeed if the ritual itself was abandoned by the congregation.

There was also another way in which the admission of women to equal ritual status with men helped to preserve tradition, and this had to do with providing an impetus for adult education. As women achieved equal access to participation in an increasing number of ritual roles they realized that in order to exploit this new status they would have to learn how to perform these ritual activities. This led to the establishment of adult education classes in which one was given the opportunity to learn to perform rituals such as; chanting from the Torah, following the order of prayers from the siddur, and leading the worship service.

But it was not only the women who took advantage of this adult learning. There were more than a few men who although by virtue of their gender possessed the right to perform these ritual tasks, were unable to do so because of a lack of appropriate skills. As did the women, some of these men took advantage of the adult education to acquire ritual competence. We see then that egalitarian inclusion while in itself a ritual innovation, also served at the same time to preserve ritual tradition. This was done in two ways; first by bringing in a new class of participants who now had an interest in maintaining the ritual tradition, and second, by serving as an impetus for adult education.

Males at TBS regard gender equality as a major component in the way they define their Temple as being Conservative; perhaps though attributing less importance to this than do the women, as the following comment by a male member illustrates:

What does it mean that our Temple is Conservative? Well, men and women sit together and women come up for aliyot. I don't have any trouble with that. That's the way it should be. At Mishkan Israel the men and women sit together too, but we're a lot different from Reform; we lean more toward the Orthodox. We don't use the same siddur (prayer book) as the Orthodox do; but if you compare them they aren't that much different. I mean its not like we went and changed everything.

This statement is a simplification on the part of the congregant. Perhaps it is so because he really does not know the ideology of the different trends in Judaism and must differentiate among these trends on the basis of outer appearances. I do not however assume that members of other synagogues could give more profound answers to questions on the ideology and beliefs of the different trends in Judaism. If we briefly take a look at some examples from ethnographies of other religious institutions that were previously discussed in the introduction to this research we will see that the tendency for American Jews to differentiate among trends in Judaism based upon outer appearances rather than ideology is not at all unique to the members of Temple Beth Shalom.

Chava Weissler in her ethnography of a Conservative havurah, observes that:

For most Jews, theology is irrelevant to the daily round of Jewish existence. Being a modern (or pre-modern) Jew has much more to do with the ongoing texture of Jewish life, with the ritual and esthetic dimensions of living.¹⁹

Riv-Ellen Prell in her ethnographic study of a non- denominational havurah makes the point that from the beginning of Judaism in America:

New formulations of Judaism in America were controlled not by rabbis but by the rank and file membership. Theology, consistent observance of law, and, initially, religious education were not the concerns of new Americans. Their vision of Judaism was not laid out in ideological programs but within institutions... The laity was concerned with carefully orchestrated forms of interaction and decisions about ritual matters that would reflect what it meant to be an American Jew.²⁰

In the specific group that Prell studied we saw that rituals and decorum more so than ideology played a central role in defining the Judaic orientation of the members. In reflecting upon her study Prell concludes that:

I have understood that decorum, the province of the laity, as key to the formulation of Jewish identity in America. Decorum engages the individual at the juncture of the social and the sacred. It symbolizes social identity more readily than theological meaning because it emphasizes form and convention.²¹

Frida Furman in her ethnographic study of a Reform temple makes the observation that most of the congregants:

...are not Jewishly literate; that is, they are not well versed in Jewish history, texts, or thought. Confronted with situations in which they are called on to articulate the basic nature of Judaism or to explain the symbolic significance of certain ritual symbols, they frequently rely on an expert to do the job. They feel ideologically incompetent.²²

Although the congregants of TBS identify their Temple with being part of the Conservative Movement; this identification is a somewhat tenuous one. Aside from egalitarianism it is an identity not based upon ideology or belief but rather upon certain practices and the way in which they compare these practices to those of the local Orthodox and

Reform synagogues. This is not surprising given the difficulties that the Conservative Movement has had in defining itself as a movement distinct from the other two trends in American Judaism. In a similar way other religious groups also formulate their identities.

The acculturation to the norms of the host society, (in this case Americanization), and the formation of a Conservative identity form part of the picture we are trying to compose of the way in which the congregation defines itself. But at the heart of the matter of identity is not only how Temple Beth Shalom defines itself as American or Conservative; but how the Congregation attempts to define itself as a religious community. This in spite of the fact that the participation of many of the members in prayer and ritual activities are only limited at best.

We have shown how through widening circles of involvement based upon divisions of ritual tasks, members are drawn into Temple participation. Other members are drawn in through participation in life cycle events which are celebrated at the Temple. But what of the members who are drawn only marginally, or not at all into these kinds of activities? Now our examination of congregational activities must extend outside the sanctuary and go into the social hall and the classrooms that are used for adult education in order to see how these other members are brought to participate in the Temple.

The Self Definition of Temple Beth Shalom As A Religious Community: The Roles of Educational and Social Activities.

Bryan Wilson in writing of the interrelationship of religion and community writes that:

Religion in the past solemnized men's social relationships and their community life. In the modern world, natural community has largely disappeared: men no longer live, learn, work, play, marry, and die in the same community. Yet there is no doubt that men hanker after the benefits of community, seek contexts in which they are personally known, and in which they share responsibilities with others... Because religious activity is predicated on transcendental concepts, because sharing and caring are the core of its operation, because the celebration of the transcendent truth is also a celebration of the community in which the truth is cherished- for all of these reasons, religious groups provide the intrinsic, as well as the symbolic, benefits of community.²³

In a number of ways other than sacred ritual Temple Beth Shalom has provided the intrinsic and symbolic benefits of community to its congregants; and has thereby arrived at a self definition as a religious community. This has been achieved by:

- A) drawing congregants into educational and social activities;
- B) providing an arena for members to form social contacts and networks
- C) reinforcing already existing geographical boundaries between itself and other segments of the local Jewish community

We will now turn to an examination of each of the above areas in order to better understand these processes of identity formation.

Educational and Social Activities.

Judaic study at an Orthodox synagogue such as the 'Kehilat Kodesh' in Heilman's study is synonymous with **Torah study** which involves the Tanach, or Bible, the Mishna and Talmud, some contemporary rabbinic commentaries, and selected mystical and exegetical texts.²⁴ At Temple Beth Shalom Judaic study involves any topic that has a connection to Jewish knowledge; no matter how tenuous this connection may be. For example, Israeli folk dancing, Yiddish films, American Jewish literature, Zionism, and Jewish cooking have all been taught as courses in the context of the Temple's adult education offerings. This broad definition of what is considered Jewish studies **facilitates and reflects** the participation of a pluralistic membership in the activities of the Temple. Furthermore, this wide range of subjects enables members to involve themselves in Jewish learning without making a commitment to specific Jewish beliefs. A Temple member may deny the existence of God, and the sacred nature of the Torah, yet participate in educational activities by learning about American Jewish history or how to cook Jewish holiday foods.

In order for a member to use the synagogue as a house of study, that person must be both **motivated** and **able** to do so. At TBS there is a wide band of variation on both these counts. A member may remain a member without ever participating in study activities. This of course refers to adult members. For children study goes on for a minimum of five years in the formal setting of the Temple's afternoon Hebrew school. The children are obligated to do this in order to celebrate their bar/bat

mitzvah at the Temple; they are in effect a captive audience.

Unlike a child, if an adult member is unwilling to learn, there are no formal rules or sanctions that the Temple can invoke make him do so. Ways must then be found to involve the adult member in the learning process. In addition, members come from a wide variety of Judaic backgrounds. I know of at least ten members who have yeshiva or Conservative day school backgrounds. Other members attended afternoon Hebrew schools as children, either Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform; and with varying educational results. Many members especially women who were born before the baby boom generation have no formal Jewish education at all. A variety of educational activities that are geared to these diverse backgrounds must therefore be offered in order to ensure the participation of the widest band of congregants. The Sabbath afternoon study group offers us an illustration as to how educational activity takes into account the varied abilities of the members and brings them to greater participation in the Temple community.

The Study Group

The Sabbath afternoon study group meets once a month in the social hall after the morning services are concluded. There is no formal membership in the group and it is open to any congregants or guests who wish to stay after the services, partake of the lunch which the group provides, and listen to a presentation by a volunteer lecturer from the congregation. On the average about thirty people attend these events. While I do know that the group was started about five years

ago, the primary motive for its founding appears to have been social rather than educational.

A few of us who usually came to Shul on Saturday morning thought it would be a nice idea to socialize after services. We did socialize during the kiddish after services but that usually broke up after about half an hour; people wanted to go home and eat lunch. So we thought why not have lunch together and also some kind of activity to go with it. We came up with the idea of having group discussions on Jewish topics.

Every study group participant is given the opportunity to lead a session although not everyone chooses to do so. Because of the wide band of Judaic knowledge not everyone is able to present a talk that would be pertinent to a Judaic topic or to the Torah reading for the week. The greatest leeway is given as to what is considered an appropriate topic for the group. A few examples will serve to illustrate this broad mandate given for choice of topic.

At a study group session before Purim a member who was a free lance artist gave a talk on masks; masks being part of this holidays tradition. This talk on masks however had nothing to do with Purim at all. The whole talk was devoted to the universal history of costumes and masks. This was an area of expertise for the speaker because she was involved in this kind of art. Judged by the many positive comments that I heard after the presentation was over this was considered an appropriate topic by most of those present. There were some listeners however who complained that:

This had nothing whatever to do with Purim. We're supposed to have Jewish topics; this is a Temple, not Hamden high school adult education.

Someone really should make sure that the topic has to do with something Jewish; otherwise what's the point of a study group like this?

I believe that these were reasonable evaluations of the appropriateness of the topic to the activity. But these were only two critical comments as opposed to the many other positive comments that I heard. And despite these criticisms I never heard of anyone involved in the study group trying to change the situation by formally proposing stricter guidelines for choice of topic. We have here an example of the tolerance shown by congregants in a pluralistic setting.

At the Sabbath of another study session the Torah portion read at the service was about Amalek, an ancient enemy of the Israelites. Amalek has symbolic meaning in that it is representative of the enemies of Israel in every generation. The talk given for this session was on anti-semitism in America today, and a number of recently published articles on this topic were presented and discussed. At still another study group session a humorous skit on some events in the life of King David was put on by a group of Temple members. At another session an attorney gave a talk that was supposed to deal with criminal law in the Torah but instead rapidly developed into a discussion of contemporary American legal issues.

Those who had greater knowledge in a Judaically related field led sessions that were more directly oriented towards Jewish topics. One member who had recently completed a graduate degree in Jewish Studies gave a talk on a Hasidic sect that was recently in the news. The Rabbi who regularly attended the study group always gave a Judaically related talk the one time a year that he led the group. As a participant observer, I led a session on holidays in modern Israel.

Perhaps not everyone was able to follow the sessions that were more directly oriented toward Jewish topics. On a number of occasions I observed the focus of some listeners become diffuse as complex Judaic issues were discussed. At these times they would get up from their seats, walk to the buffet lunch table, take something to eat or drink and wander off into the kitchen, joining other members who had already in a similar fashion left the lecture. Still, regardless of the speaker, or the topic, both of which were known in advance of the study session; the same listeners showed up each time. This, and the groups of members sneaking away to chat in the kitchen led me to believe that in addition to study, another attraction of the study group was the opportunity for the members to come together, share a meal and socialize with one another. This was not a phenomenon unique to Temple Beth Shalom. Heilman observes of the members of a study group in a modern Orthodox synagogue that:

Each man has come to the class for reasons of his own. For some, study of this kind belongs to their conception of Jewish religious observance. For others, the class offers a chance to get away from wife and family. One man admitted that by coming to the class he had found another way to get in the smoking that his wife would not let him do at home. For still others, such gatherings offer an opportunity to exchange gossip or to engage in sociability.⁴⁵

Having a group of members sitting down together once a month at a Sabbath lunch and listening to a talk on a topic chosen by one of their own is an example of a loosely structured learning experience. A great many of the Temple activities however are based neither on religious study, life cycle rituals, or communal prayer. These are what may be termed social activities. These social activities widen the circle

of inclusion of individuals into the Temple community.

Social Activities And Forming A Congregational Identity At Temple Beth Shalom.

In 1962 sociologist Gibson Winter deplored the emergence of what he called the "Organization church", which tried to overcome the disorienting effects of residential mobility by involving its members in a network of independent activities and functions through which they would develop loyalty to the organization. It substituted committees for sacraments, bazaars for confession, and a collection of functions for community. During the same period, the rabbi Bernard Lander worried that the synagogue no longer nurtured prayer and piety as much as it sponsored sisterhoods, brotherhood, parties, dances, and programs with a recreational and quasi-therapeutic aim. Some clergy complained about the expectation that they "run a show" in which congregations sought more to be entertained than edified.²⁶

If one looks, over the period of a year, at the Temple Beth Shalom Bulletin which is mailed out to members monthly it becomes clear that social activities take up a significant part of the Temple calendar. Sisterhood sponsored activities include; dinners, card and mah jong tournaments, rummage sales, art auctions and dances. The Men's Club sponsors monthly Sunday breakfasts with speakers, an annual picnic, a softball team, an occasional fishing trip, and outings to spectator sporting events. There are joint Men's Club and Sisterhood amateur shows such as musical revues and short plays. Fund raising is a motive behind some of these activities, but I believe that fellowship is the primary motive for the sponsorship of these events. Gordon states that:

Jews have traditionally regarded their synagogues as the proper place for fellowship, as well as for prayer and study.²⁷

Heilman describes how among Orthodox Jews prayer and study in

groups are activities that nurture fellowship.²⁸ While prayer and study among some of the members of Temple Beth Shalom do nurture fellowship, many of the congregants find fellowship additionally or instead through social activities. To understand why this is so we turn to the words of the congregants themselves. A Member who attends many of the Men's Club activities comments that:

I don't care too much for going to services. I show up on the High Holidays and sometimes on a Friday night when my kids who are in the Hebrew school are part of the service. What I really enjoy is the Men's Club. They're a great bunch of guys. We have a good time together planning our programs. Sometimes after a meeting at the Temple we go out and have coffee at the diner down the block. We don't always get a lot of business done but we tell a few good jokes.

Not only the activities themselves encourage fellowship; but also the planning for these events are social occasions.

The Sisterhood fulfills a similar role for the women. The comments of a member of Sisterhood demonstrates her appreciation of the social importance of the events sponsored by her group:

I come to services almost every Friday night. I enjoy the services, they aren't too long and not hard to follow. At the kiddush after the services people stay and talk for some time. I guess they want other chances to come together, not only at the kiddush and the services. We're always planning for something or other, and a meeting on a weekday night is a good way of getting out of the house and seeing friends. You know what's really good about Sisterhood? You can get together with your girlfriends without having to go through the trouble of inviting them and their husbands over for dinner; or spend a lot of money going out to a restaurant with them.

Here one may ask however: if egalitarianism is so crucial to this Conservative synagogue, then why are there these separate clubs? A possible explanation could be that these same gender clubs attract a particular age group. Perhaps only older members would join these

clubs because the younger men and women who have grown up in the atmosphere of the feminist movement and gender egalitarianism would shun participation in these groups. Would not the younger congregants, particularly the women regard these clubs as a throwback to the days when the Temple Sisterhood was a mere appendage to the usually male dominated board which ran Temple affairs; and the Men's Club was an exclusively male 'old boys' network?

I did not however find that these clubs attracted a particular age group. Members appeared to come equally from the young as well as the middle aged and the elderly. I think that the previous comments of the Men's Club and Sisterhood members at least partially explains why this is so. These men and women not only nurture social relations with their spouses, or with other members of the opposite sex. In addition to these relationships they seek same gender friendships and camaraderie. The Men's Club and Sisterhood fulfill this need.

The opportunity to make friends may not only be a reason for involvement in the social activities of the Temple; but also may be a factor in increasing the individual's commitment to the Temple. Sklare notes that in Conservative synagogues:

...the active congregant finds that much of his social life takes place within the portals of the synagogue. His "outside" activities may well be with the friends he has made there, and thus he is bound to the congregation through social ties as well as suprasocial interests.

The congregant's involvement in Temple activities leads to increased social ties with other members. These social ties may bring with them the possibilities for networking and expanded social connections which may prove beneficial to the congregant in his or her

life outside of the Temple, as we shall now see.

The Benefits of Temple Involvement: Networks and Social Connections.

While describing the social ecology of the town of Hamden in chapter two it was mentioned how chance meetings between acquaintances typically occur in only a few select places such as the shopping center, the town library, or at public school activities for those with children who attend. By belonging to a church or synagogue the chances that one will acknowledge and be acknowledged by familiar faces in daily activities outside of the house of worship increases. Being a member of a congregation therefore provides an arena for making social contacts with other members both in the religious institution itself and also on the street. **This may reduce the feeling of isolation among the suburban dweller by increasing the frequency of his or her chance social encounters with acquaintances. At the same time as reducing the isolation of the individual these casual social encounters help to create a self definition of the religious community be reaffirming who is recognized and who is not recognized as belonging to it.** The following comments from TBS congregants in reply to my asking them about chance encounters with other congregants outside the Temple will illustrate this point.

Our son is in the Hamden High School theater program. Whenever we go to see him act in a play we meet a few other Temple members who are parents of students in the theater program. These are the only people we have to talk to during the intermission. Not that we're good friends with them or anything, but its always nice to be out someplace and meet someone that you know.

I go to Weight Watchers meetings once a week. There's a group of us there from the Temple, maybe three or four, who sit together and give each other encouragement. There are some other women there who I know from other places like the P.T.A., the bank, or the hairdresser; but aside from saying hello we really don't talk. I have nothing much in common with them like I do with the women from the Temple.

You know how many Temple people I meet at the library? It seems that whenever I go there I see someone who I know; Jews like to read. Even if I don't know the person that well we always speak more than just saying hello. Of course the only thing we have in common are the other people in the Temple- so we talk about them.

Beyond these chance encounters the social contacts of individuals are facilitated in a number of ways by virtue of their Temple membership. Two of the ways in which this happens is through the exchange of social information among Temple members and in the framework of norms that are established for appropriate behavior in certain social situations. We now turn our focus to the monthly Temple newsletter which will be shown to play a primary role in these processes.

The Temple Newsletter: Spreading The News, While Providing Alternatives For Traditional Behavior.

Upon joining the Temple a members gains access to the Temple as a vehicle for the public dissemination of statements about oneself and one's family in a number of other ways besides the memorialization of kinsmen and the bar\bat mitzvah speeches that were discussed in previous chapters of this study.. In addition the individual may use the Temple not only to disseminate information about himself and his family;

but also through Temple involvement find out information about others in the congregation. **This exchange of information not only aids in forming a sense of community among the congregants. It also gives congregants a guideline for behavior in certain social situations in which the individual no longer feels knowledgeable or competent enough to employ traditional guidelines.** As an illustration of this point we may take a look at the last few pages of the monthly Temple newsletter which are devoted to acknowledging contributions made during the previous month to the various Temple funds.

It is here that we find listings of memorial funds set up by families or friends of deceased congregants as well as summer camp, Hebrew school, and Temple library funds. In looking over the listings one can learn quite a bit about what has recently transpired among the congregants and their families. Deaths, births, bar\bat mitzvahs, weddings, graduations, illnesses, job promotions, wedding anniversaries, milestone birthdays, and acknowledgements of thanks for favors done are among the announcements of donations given in recognition of these events. But in addition to being a source of congregational information these listings of donations tell us something deeper about the individual in the modern world and his uncertainty about how to behave in certain social situations.

In a traditional social setting, that is to say in a community where people relate to others according to longstanding and universally accepted patterns of behavior; individuals know what to say and do when the kin of a friend dies, or when an acquaintance is ill, or when a life cycle milestone is reached. In the situation of modernity; one in

which choice prevails and certain traditions for many have been rejected, forgotten, or more likely never learned at all, there is an unease on the part of the individual about what to do and how to do it.

I have heard this unease in the words of the congregants:

Is the Siegel family sitting 'shiva' (the seven day period of mourning) If they are, do they expect, or even want friends and acquaintances to pay a condolence call?

Am I regarded as a friend who is expected to make a shiva call; or am I just an acquaintance that by making a shiva call would make me look somewhat presumptuous?

The Goldsteins' oldest daughter just graduated from college. They had a party; we weren't invited, not that we expected to be, but I do see Mr. Goldstein at Saturday morning services and we talk a lot at the kiddush. How can I recognize this family milestone?

I wanted to visit Herb in the hospital, but he was only there for a few days and until I heard about it I couldn't find the time to fit it into my schedule which has been kind of crazy lately. I don't know if he wants anyone to visit him at home. We do see each other every month because we are on the ritual committee together, what should I do?

What we have here is a situation in which the traditional ways of dealing with such situations either are no longer known, or are no longer accepted as socially binding. Congregants, even if they themselves know and follow the tradition cannot be sure that other Temple members have knowledge of or appreciate these traditions. This creates a hesitancy and confusion about what constitutes normative behavior. By publicly listing expressions of sympathy or congratulations in the Temple newsletter members are able to deal with this ambiguous situation in a way that not only is more convenient and less time consuming than the hospital visit or condolence call; but even more significantly is socially acceptable to the members of the Temple community. But beyond this, the listings in the newsletter serve as a

running account of what is going on in the lives of the congregants; and by this disclosure, sharing, and dissemination of information the sense of community is enhanced. In the suburbs one may be socially isolated from others. Individuals and families may pass through crises and life cycle milestones that are played out unnoticed by next door neighbors, not to mention by those who live down the street. But as a member of the Temple, one belongs to a community that is aware of and publicly recognizes the individual and at least some of his or her significant lifetime passages and achievements. What the Temple is doing is fulfilling the social need of belonging to a community that gives recognition to the unique identity of the individual. But social contacts made at the Temple do not always end at the the borders of this community. The influence of these social contacts are sometimes felt beyond the social world of the congregation itself. It is to this aspect of Temple life that we now turn.

Networking Beyond The Temple: Perceptions of Influence.

Social contacts that are made at the Temple sometimes lead to social connections or networking, which may prove useful to the congregant in dealing with other institutions in the community such as places of employment, business, or state and local government agencies. I did not discover this at the beginning of my involvement with the Temple. But as I was accepted into the social life of the congregants, and as these congregants increasingly came to share confidences with

me, I realized that this was a typical phenomenon. A congregant who is a public school teacher in one of the nearby towns had the following story to tell:

One year positions were cut at the school where I worked and I was transferred to a really bad place. I had been working at this new school for about two years and I hated every minute of it. I tried to transfer back to where I worked originally but my efforts were of no use. I didn't know anyone who had pull in the school system. On one Simchas Torah celebration at the Temple I struck up a casual conversation with another of the congregants and I told him of my predicament. He looked at me seriously and said, "You want to go back to your old school?-consider it done! By the start of the next school year the school board approved my request for a transfer back to my old school. It seems that this Temple member knew the superintendent of schools in the town where I taught. He got me out of a tough situation; made them an offer they couldn't refuse; like some kind of a 'Jewish Godfather.' We have some well connected people here who are willing to help other members out.

During the time of my field research I learned of four cases in which congregants who were nurses at local hospitals or nursing homes did favors for members and their families. I also knew of three cases in which Temple members acquired jobs through Temple contacts. There were also incidents of Temple members helping the children of other congregants deal with school guidance personnel or college admissions.

Two more brief stories from my talks with Temple members will illustrate the use of Temple social connections by the congregants. One story involves a hospital admission, the other the opening of a small business:

My wife had to go to the hospital for surgery. The day we were scheduled to we arrived at the admissions office and there was some mix up. The hospital was giving us the run around. A nurse came over to us and said that she thought she has seen us at the Temple. She didn't know our names, and we only joined the Temple a few months before; but the fact that she knew we were members was all it took. She had us admitted to the hospital in a few minutes. Later she went and called the Rabbi and had him pay

my wife a hospital visit after the surgery.

When my husband started his kosher deli he had a grand opening. Let me tell you something. That first day of business the place was packed with people not only from the Orthodox Jewish community, but also with members from our Temple. We weren't giving the food away for free either; that wasn't why they came. I think they came to show support for a new kosher deli, and because they knew us and wanted to help us out.

The stories and rumors about the acquisition of the traffic light which was used at the megillah reading were the wishful fantasies of Temple members regarding their Temple's imagined influence in local civil affairs. The stories of the teacher, the hospital patient, and the store owner story did involve actual situations in which social contacts made through the Temple **may** have provided these members with useful social networks that aided them in their activities outside of the Temple. But these perceptions of network influence; or at least the **degree** of such influence may have been more **perceived** rather than **real**. If, as I suspect that this is the case, we may learn something significant about the way these congregants view their Temple. **The congregants look upon their Temple as a community, as a powerful community, that offers great benefit to its members in their dealings with the outside world. By being part of this congregation the congregant feels that his individual power is increased.** This suggests that the congregants as individuals feel that they lack the ability to project any great amount power in their dealings with the civil community outside of the Temple. By being part of the social network of the Temple however, they enhance their ability to further their own interests in the civil arena.

We have so far discussed the fellowship of educational and social activities and the social contacts that accrue from Temple involvement as

contributing to the self definition of Temple Beth Shalom as a religious community. There is another factor that helps the Congregation define itself as a religious community. This is the way in which the congregants of Temple Beth Shalom establish their distinctness as a group by conceptualizing the differences between themselves and other Jewish groups in the area. This enables the Congregation to define itself by drawing boundaries between itself as a religious institution and other groups. Previously in this chapter we examined the process by which the congregants at TBS defined themselves as **Conservative Jews** by comparing themselves to the Orthodox and Reform. Now we will take a look at how the congregants identify themselves as **Temple Beth Shalomers** as compared to members of another nearby Conservative congregation and to another segment of the local Jewish community.

Temple Beth Shalom:Defining Boundaries Between Us And Them.

Heilman, in discussing the self comparison of a modern Orthodox congregation to other similar congregations points out that:

If a group may refer its behavior to, and define itself in terms of, those it is not, it must also be prepared to characterize it self in terms of those similar to itself...Since evaluation is implicit in any such comparisons, two groups likely to be defined as identical scrupulously scrutinize each other. Each realizes on the basis of the **other** group's action it may be judged. Indeed, two groups which are alike frequently threaten each other's identity the most; for, once adjudged identical, not only by others but by themselves, any discrepant activity on the part of one group calls the other's activity into question as well.³⁰

Beth El Keser Israel, called BEKI by its members is a Conservative congregation in the Westville section of New Haven. BEKI is similar to

TBS in a number of ways. The prayer rituals at both congregations are essentially the same. The congregations are both egalitarian, and neither congregation allows the taking of photographs on the Sabbath. Both congregations have a weekday morning minyan; a late Friday evening service, which includes many responsive readings in English; and a Saturday morning service that is mostly in Hebrew. Both congregations use the Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book and The Weekday Prayer Book which are issued by the Rabbinical Assembly of America. During the course of the past three years ten families have left BEKI to join TBS. There was no movement the other way. Only one of these changes was due to geographic mobility; that is to say on account of a move out of New Haven and into Hamden. I spoke with all of the adults in the remaining nine families in order to find out what caused them to switch synagogue memberships. The reasons they gave can give us insight as to how the members of TBS compare themselves to, and thereby differentiate themselves from, another Conservative congregation. Through this process of comparison the members of TBS help to define themselves.

We belonged to BEKI for many years before we switched to TBS. We still live in New Haven but we schlep all the way to Hamden now. One of the reasons that we switched was because of what happened at BEKI. The Yalies took it over. They started their own services on the High Holidays in the basement of the synagogue because the services weren't to their liking. But the worst thing was on Saturday mornings at the kiddush after the services. They wouldn't even give you the time of day. I mean they wouldn't even look in your direction. They would just form their own little circle as if no one else counted for anything. I didn't expect them to be friendly with everyone; but they could at least have said hello. We don't have cliques at TBS. The people here are nice- what's the word for it- heimisch?

Basically there was a group at BEKI that dominated every service. Okay, I'll give them credit, they knew how to lead the services

and read from the Torah. But have people here at our Temple who can do this too. The difference is that the people here who lead the services are just regular people; they aren't arrogant about it. At BEKI they seemed to form their own little privileged group and didn't want to have anything to do with anyone else.

At our shul everybody does something. Whatever you can do is appreciated. At BEKI if you aren't some kind of a scholar you just don't count for anything.

The congregants who changed synagogue memberships looked upon Temple Beth Shalom as a synagogue that appreciated the involvements of its members on many levels; and was free of cliques. Not only did the members who left BEKI to join TBS compare synagogues in this way, but so did other members of Temple Beth Shalom:

We have a great Temple. Everyone is friendly and we don't have cliques. I heard that things got so bad at BEKI that some of the people there started to have their own separate service in the basement. That would never happen here.

They started to lose so many members at BEKI that they formed some kind of committee on how to make BEKI a 'warmer place'. We don't need anything like that here. People here are naturally warm, no one puts himself above anyone else.

The congregation at TBS not only recognized borders between itself and another similar local Conservative synagogue. The congregants also conceive of themselves as being in conflict with other segments of the local Jewish community. As mentioned in chapter two, these are the wealthier Jews of Orange and Woodbridge who dominate the lay leadership of Greater New Haven Jewish Federation.

Simmel conceives of conflict as setting boundaries between groups in a social system by means of accentuating group consciousness and the awareness of being separate. This aids in establishing the identity of the group within the social system.³¹ TBS members conceive

of a conflict between the power of the wealthy Jews, especially those who belong to Congregation Bnai Jacob in Woodbridge, or are on the Federation board; and the members of their own Temple who have a self image of being unassumingly middle class. Money and occupational prestige appears to play a central role in this conflict as reflected in the words of the following TBS members.

We have some doctors and lawyers and rich people here at the Temple but they don't make a big deal out of it. They don't form their own little groups, and they don't try to run the place. Just look at the last three presidents we had here. There was a secretary, a guy in the tire business and a medical receptionist. At Bnai Jacob the president is always someone with a lot of money. I once went to a bar mitzvah there and it sounded to me that there were doctor's beepers going off every three minutes. They can do what they want at Bnai Jacob, it doesn't affect us. But then they also run the Federation and the Jewish Community Center. They decided to build the new J.C.C. next to themselves in Woodbridge. They didn't even consider putting it up closer to the folks in Hamden.

When my husband and I were younger we were asked to get involved with the Federation Young Leadership. Of course they asked us because my husband was an attorney. Anyhow, we went to a few meetings and then they tried to hit us up for a big donation. Well, we just weren't in their league, and they lost interest in us pretty quickly. Beth Shalom isn't like that at all, and that's a big reason why we belong here.

The Federation sponsors a community high school where courses are given on Jewish topics twice a week in the evenings. Now its one evening a week at Bnai Jacob and one evening here in Hamden; either at Mishkan Israel or at our shul. It wasn't that way a few years ago. Then they had the classes only at Bnai Jacob. Our Rabbi had a major fight with the Federation and got them to give in. Why should our kids have to ride out there all the time—because we're not as rich as they are?

These concerns of the congregants are matters of social class rather than religion; but these concerns of social class do play a part in creating boundaries between Temple Beth Shalom and other Jewish religious and communal institutions.

Conclusions

We have seen in this chapter how the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom identify themselves with a number of groups. In addition to being **American Jews**, they are also **Conservative Jews**, and they are members of a **specific religious community** which is distinct from the other Conservative Temples in the area.

The Americanization of the worship service, temple organization, and the congregants themselves has already taken place. The issue that the congregants deal with now is how to remain fully integrated into American society while at the same time maintain, or reinforce, their Jewish identities. A number of examples from the ethnography were employed in order to illustrate this theme. What socially transpired at the Megillah reading, the Mens Club breakfast, at a special Sabbath worship service honoring a newly appointed Jewish judge, and the community interfaith blood drive were indications of the dynamic involved in the maintenance of both Jewish and American identities.

The congregants have a Conservative identity, one that is defined not so much by ideology or belief but rather by religious practices and the comparison of these practices to those of the Orthodox and Reform. The congregants defines themselves more by what they are not, Orthodox or Reform, rather than by what they are, Conservative. Gender egalitarianism in ritual participation gives the congregants a sense of how they differ from the Orthodox. The generally traditional form of the worship service provides a line of demarcation with the Reform.

The congregants at Temple Beth Shalom attempt to define

themselves as a specific religious community. There are a number of ways in which this is done. There is a camaraderie developed through educational and social activities. Networking and social connections are extended into the wider community and are a source of support for the congregants. Through involvement in the social activities of the congregation the congregants acquire information about one another. The congregants also have a sense of the particular social class grouping they occupy within the larger Jewish community. From conflicts between these class groupings much of the Temple's self definition as a religious community is drawn.

4

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CONCLUSIONS

I hope that the two themes which play a central role in shaping the social behaviors of the congregants as they participate in the activities of Temple Beth Shalom have by now emerged from the ethnography. First, there is the desire of the individual congregant to go his own way, to customize, to choose, to express his individuality in matters of religious ritual and temple involvement. In addition and at the same time there is his desire to participate as part of the congregation, as a contributing member of a cohesive social group. This pull and tug between individualism and the desire to be part of the group forms a synergistic relationship, one that enables the congregant to express his individuality through a self customized participation in Temple activities, while at the same time allows him to be part of a cohesive religious community.

Temple Beth Shalom is not an isolated example of this pull and tug between religious individualism and the desire of the individual to be part of a cohesive religious community. This phenomena is part of the larger cultural pattern of religious pluralism in America.

Temple Beth Shalom: Part of The Landscape of Religious Pluralism In America.

America is a religiously pluralistic society both in terms of the ideological and social divisions between religious communities and also in terms of what goes on within these communities. Chava Weissler, in her ethnographic study of a Conservative havurah writes that:

In their pluralism, Minyan members are thoroughly American, subscribing whole-heartedly to the notion of "religious preference" and the idea of religious freedom. They support "freedom of choice" both in the selection of a particular religion, or no religion at all, and also within their own religious lives.¹

Religion in America has become an increasingly individualized, personalized phenomena. Many individuals pick and choose, not only their denominational affiliation but also how they practice religious rituals and observances.

Here we may turn to Robert Bellah who in writing of religion in America observes the following:

Religious individualism, ... goes very deep in the United States... Already in the eighteenth century, it was possible for individuals to find the form of religion that best suited their inclinations. By the nineteenth century, religious bodies had to compete in a consumers' market and grew or declined in terms of changing patterns of individual religious taste. But religious individualism in the United States could not be contained within the churches, however diverse they were. We have noted the presence of individuals who found their own way in religion even in the eighteenth century. Thomas Jefferson said, "I am a sect myself," and Thomas Paine, "My mind is my church."²

But religion cannot be practiced as a purely individual enterprise, that is to say without other believers. Durkheim, in defining religion says that:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden-- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing.³

The American religious landscape is no exception to Durkheim's definition of religion as "an eminently collective thing". James Wind and James Lewis tell us that in America:

Although the importance of congregations is not primarily of numbers, the numbers are impressive. According to the National Council of Churches, in 1990 there were at least 350,337 congregations in the United States, down only slightly from 350,481 in 1989. ...American religion has been, and by in large remains distinctly congregational.⁴

The collective aspect of religion in America manifests itself through the congregation, while religious individualism manifests itself through the freedom of the individual to choose his religious beliefs, practices, and associations. The ways in which the congregants deal with the potentially

conflicting themes of religious individualism and the desire to be part of a cohesive religious community provides the outlines for the story of Temple Beth Shalom.

Temple Beth Shalom: Religious Individualism And Congregational Cohesion.

In order to involve himself in the activities of the Temple the T.B.S. congregant seeks his niche, according to his own Judaic skills, abilities, and religious sensibilities. The activities of the congregation are structured in such a way so as to provide this niche. Through this customized involvement the congregant is also able to contribute with a measure of competency to the maintenance of the social cohesion of the religious institution and in the process find satisfaction of his spiritual needs.

At Temple Beth Shalom religion is not only about individuals exercising their opportunities to choose, to innovate, and to find their niches for active involvement in congregational activities. It is also about the small groups that they form, and the face to face interactions that take place within these groups. These small groups do not stand isolated from each other, together they form a congregation. The congregation is held together through the instrumental bond of coexistence, made up of the loyalties that individuals have to these small groups, and through a moral solidarity

which derives from a number of common religious, ethnic, geographical and social class identities which transcend these groups and unites them into a religious community.

Involvement in congregational activities, the satisfaction of spiritual needs, and the maintenance of group cohesion and identity in the face of religious pluralism bring us back to a consideration of the questions asked at the beginning of this research.

The goal of this study was to ethnographically examine a suburban congregation in order to ascertain the impact of religious pluralism upon the ability of religious institutions to satisfy the sometimes discrepant spiritual needs of their membership while at the same time maintain the social cohesiveness of the institution. The main question I examined was in three parts, the first part being:

1. How Are Members, Among Whom There Exists A Wide Range of Levels of Religious Education, Able To Involve Themselves Practically in The Activities of The Institution?

I made the point in the beginning of the study that the way in which a congregant participates in the worship service at a Conservative synagogue is largely determined by his or her knowledge of Judaic ritual practices. This includes the extent to which he or she is able to at least read, if not understand the prayers, many of which are in the Hebrew

language. Therefore, in order to answer this question my examination focused on the worship service in an attempt to uncover the strategies used by this religiously pluralistic membership that enabled them to achieve an instrumental bond of coexistence at the communal worship service.

Ritual And Coexistence In The Sanctuary:A Division of Ritual Tasks.

In his work The Division of Labor In Society

Durkheim said of this division of labor that:

...indeed, the economic services that it can render are insignificant compared with the moral effect that it produces, and its true function is to create between two or more people a feeling of solidarity. However this result is accomplished, it is this that gives rise to these associations of friends and sets its mark upon them.⁵

Among the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom there exists not a division of labor, but rather what may be termed a division of ritual tasks and multiple avenues of Temple activity involvements. These ritual tasks and Temple activity involvements are geared to the different levels of skills, abilities, and religious sensibilities of the congregants. Through innovations in ritual tasks every member is offered a niche of involvement. Not only the ritually competent, but also the ritually incompetent are able to take part in the

service. In an expanding circle of involvement, congregants with diminishing levels of ritual skills and abilities are brought into ritual participation.

The most knowledgeable are able to perform the traditional ritual tasks such as leading the services in Hebrew or reading from the Torah. Others are able to assume the traditional although less demanding ritual tasks such as chanting the Hebrew blessings before and after the Torah reading. Many more of the congregants perform non-traditional tasks, such as prayers and readings in English which are innovated to allow for their participation. What I believe is important to note here and is key to understanding how congregants of varying levels of competence are able to coexist at the same service is that as a rule traditional ritual tasks are not watered down or eliminated for everyone so that the less competent as well as the more competent have the opportunity to perform the same tasks equally well. To do this would cause dissatisfaction among those who are able to perform the traditional tasks, because their religious skills would be socially devalued. On the other hand to have available exclusively those ritual tasks which only the very competent could perform would leave out the less competent, and impinge on the social cohesiveness of the congregation. Instead, traditional ritual tasks are available for those who are able to handle them, while in addition innovative ritual tasks are introduced for those who are less competent, but

still want to participate in service leadership.

In addition to a division of ritual tasks, the instrumental bond of coexistence at the Temple is also achieved through a strategy of laxity in the enforcement of traditional ritual norms. This allows the congregants to "pick and choose" to some extent which rules they follow and which rules they do not. There is a certain laxity in the wearing of ritual garb by congregants in the sanctuary, and congregants are hesitant to criticize the personal religious practices of some of the Temple leadership. Mistakes committed in the Torah chanting or in the leading of services are seldom corrected in public. When differences in the religious sensibilities, skills and abilities of congregants however are too great for them to comfortably participate in the same service together the strategy of inclusion gives way to a strategy of separation.

A congregant can participate in a Sabbath service either by attending the mostly English one on Friday nights or the more traditional, mostly Hebrew one on Saturday mornings. The Saturday morning service attracts the more Judaically knowledgeable and ritually competent insiders, while the Friday evening service is structured so as to attract and facilitate the participation of the less knowledgeable and less competent outsiders. Some members who rarely attend worship service are drawn into ritual participation through family life cycle ceremonies, most notably the bar/bat

mitzvah.

Through inclusion in the worship ritual the congregants are able to fulfill the roles of competent, productive members of the religious community, which means being able to do at least some part of the ritual work of the congregation. By sharing in the teamwork of the worship ritual, congregants identify with the religious community. "Homo Faber" meets "Homo Religiosos" and in the process religiously pluralistic members construct a religious community that is in no small part integrated through a division of ritual tasks.

The very worship ritual and the way in which the congregants participate in it serves as a model for and a model of a pluralistic congregation that is able to hold together socially. The worship service itself publicly proclaims that despite their different religious sensibilities and competencies the congregants are able to form an inclusive pluralistic religious community. Understanding how the congregants are able to involve themselves practically in the ritual activities of the Temple enables us to move on to a consideration of the research findings regarding the second part of my initial research question:

2. How Does Such An Institution Meet The Spiritual Needs Of Its Members?

In order to gain insight as to how a religiously

pluralistic institution such as Temple Beth Shalom is able to meet the spiritual needs of its members I had to first find out what, if any, spiritual needs play a role in motivating individuals to become members of the congregation in the first place. What does the Temple have to offer individuals to make it worth their while to join into a congregation with others who may differ from them in religious outlook and practice?

Coming Together For A Common Purpose.

I could think of many reasons why individuals would join a religiously pluralistic congregation such as Temple Beth Shalom. Through conversation and questioning I found that some congregants simply wanted to meet other Jewish people, others wanted a place to go to services, and some were looking for a Jewish education for their children. I took these statements of the congregants to be valid reflections of their feelings. But I was looking for some common motivational denominator that would encompass the widest range of Temple members. I thought that beyond the reasons that the congregants gave for joining the Temple there might be observable actions on their parts that would give me a greater insight into this matter. After all, if they wanted a place to meet and socialize with other Jews there were a host of other organizations that could serve this purpose such as the Jewish Community Center or the

local chapter of B'nai B'rith. True, only a synagogue could provide worship services, but except for the High Holidays and for obligatory memorial prayers for deceased kin only a small percentage of congregants attended the daily, weekly, or Festival services. In looking at the actions of the congregants I observed that a great amount of time, energy, and material resources were expended on the bar/bat mitzvah ritual. In addition many congregants said that they joined the Temple in order to give their children a Jewish education at the afternoon Hebrew school. Even more significantly this statement was frequently coupled with the explanation that; "In order to have a bar/bat mitzvah you had to send your child to Hebrew school." This meant becoming a member of a synagogue.

Politics make strange bedfellows, so too do certain spiritual and social needs. The congregants at Temple Beth Shalom need a place and a ritual mechanism to celebrate life passages, whether it is the coming of age of their children through the bar/bat mitzvah, or the memorialization of departed kinsmen through wall plaques and memorial prayers. Temple Beth Shalom, from the point of view of a synagogue that fulfills the spiritual needs of its members can be looked upon as a "life cycle ritual synagogue". When congregants involve themselves in the fulfillment of spiritual needs they are mainly involved in those existential needs that are brought to the fore by life cycle passages. But life cycle rituals not

only fulfill the spiritual needs of the congregants. These rituals also fulfill an important social function for the congregation.

At Temple Beth Shalom the bar/bat mitzvah ritual provides a point of necessary cooperation among a religiously diverse membership. Parents have to join together in order to maintain the Temple and keep the Hebrew school running even if only, or mainly, for the sake of having their children accomplish this life cycle passage ritual. But even beyond being a point of necessary cooperation this ritual has an important symbolic meaning for the congregants.

The bar/bat mitzvah ritual is to a great extent shaped and customized by the family members involved in it, and at the same time acts back upon the congregants to give them a model for their Temple participation. This is particularly evident in the speeches given by the participants at this occasion. These speeches serve as a model for and a model of the participation of the congregants in Temple life. Significant components of this model are a part time commitment to a religious lifestyle, and an emphasis on secular ethics and American virtues as opposed to a divinely ordained religious morality.

Through participation in the customization and innovation of rituals at the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony the congregant finds out who he is and becomes more of who he is at the same time. Here we witness a series of cultural

performances that serve to symbolically represent and sanctify the ethos of Conservative Jews as well as suburban Americans.

The instrumental bond of coexistence formed at the worship service and at the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is an important factor in creating a moral bond of solidarity. I came to realize however that this was in no way equal to a moral solidarity that reached beyond the worship service and united the members into a congregation, into a religious institution with its own unique identity. After all, not all the congregants regularly attend the worship services, and a family can participate in life cycle rituals for its members only for a limited number of times. For many members Temple involvement is primarily a matter of participation in activity groups other than those involving the worship service. I therefore had to confront the third part of my initial research question:

3. How And Why Is The Social Cohesiveness And Identity Of A Religious Institution Maintained When There Exists A Pluralism Of Ideological Perspectives On The Part Of The Members?

To answer this question I had to find out how the congregational solidarity that transcends the separate activity groups is achieved and maintained. It is here that I examined the many social groups that the congregants identified with and gave their allegiances to.

A Multiplicity Of Identities.

Temple Beth Shalom can be seen as consisting of a series of different populations who use the Temple in different ways yet still manage to coexist with each other inside the same institution. But in addition to this instrumental social bond there also exists the moral bond of solidarity that binds first the participants within these population groups to each other and then radiates outward to form a solidarity among the groups that when taken together make up the congregation.

A congregant may be part of a study group or a softball team, a standing committee or a morning minyan, the sisterhood or the men's club, a Friday night or a Saturday morning prayer group. Indeed, for the individual, Temple involvement may be primarily focused or almost entirely limited to one such group to the exclusion of all else that socially takes place in the Congregation. Often the "Friday night people" are hardly aware of the "Saturday morning people". Two congregants by chance meet each other outside the Temple and upon learning of their common congregational membership explain the fact that they have until now been unaware of this common membership by stating to each other something along the lines of; "Oh- you must be one of the Friday night people, I usually go on Saturday, that's why we never see each other at Temple." Or, "I don't go to daven much but you can always find me at the sisterhood meetings." But the Temple members who are active in

specific congregational activities are socially bound together not only by being part of these activity groups, but also through a series of transcending identities to which they seek to give expression. They are Jewish, and they are American, they are part of the Conservative movement, and they are members of a specific religious institution. The examination of these issues of identity shed light as to how the congregational solidarity that transcends the various specific Temple involvement groups is achieved and maintained.

The great degree of acculturation and acceptance of Jews into American society has meant that most Jews, on the streets, schools, and work places of America are culturally the same in manner, speech, and appearance as their non Jewish peers. The issue of the Americanization of the masses of Eastern European Jewish immigrants that loomed so large for the founders of the Conservative movement at the turn of the last century is no longer an issue for their descendants at the turn of this century. The Congregants at TBS are American, but they also want to retain, or in some cases reestablish a Jewish identity. If one cannot practice his Jewish identity on the street than one can come to the Temple and through religious rituals, as well as insider jokes, and ethnic words and expressions, present Jewish cultural performances to other congregants who understand the symbolic language being used. This was illustrated in the description of the men's club breakfast where the guest speaker symbolically played out the

ritual of American Jews trying to guess if the person they come into contact with in the secular setting was a fellow Jew or not, and conversely if they themselves should reveal their Jewish identities. It was also illustrated in the description of the interpretation the congregants gave to the acquisition of the traffic light for the Purim service and how this related to their feelings of being a Jewish minority in small town America.

The congregants at TBS have also I believe, come to realize that being part of the American cultural mainstream does not mean the rejection of religious affiliation and involvement even if this affiliation and involvement is with a minority religion such as Judaism. Quite the contrary, by being members of a temple the congregants of TBS share the lifestyle of fellowship and community involvement that their churchgoing neighbors regard as an expression of American civil religion. In addition, interfaith activities in the name of the civic good provides links between Christians and Jews. The interfaith blood drive, held together with the nearby United Church of Christ was an illustration of this point.

Although the members of Temple Beth Shalom ponder little the ideology of the movement to which they belong, they also have an identity as Conservative Jews. To a great extent the congregants define themselves as Conservative by comparing their ritual practices to those of the Orthodox and Reform. In other words they define who they are by who they are not.

Perhaps this is why laxity in the enforcement of rules of ritual garb have their limits. It is not tolerated for males with uncovered heads to remain in the sanctuary, and there is strict gender egalitarianism in ritual participation. Compulsory head covering symbolically identifies the congregation as not being Reform, gender equality identifies them as not being Orthodox. Not being Reform and not being Orthodox is the closest many members can come to defining their Conservative identity.

This is not a muddled ideology, this is Conservative Judaism; to be innovative where expedient, (not Orthodox) and to conserve all that is possible, (not Reform). That Conservatives define themselves mostly in negative rather than positive terms; we are what we are not, rather than we are what we are, effectively precludes establishing too close of an identification with the Orthodox or the Reform and the resulting danger of blurring their own identity.

The members of TBS in addition to having identities as Jews, as Americans, and as belonging to the Conservative movement also identify themselves as members of a particular religious institution, to a Temple that has its own unique character as opposed to other temples and to the rest of the Jewish community.

Temple Beth Shalom: Self Identity As A Religious Institution.

When congregants talk about themselves as a congregation they are saying something about who they are, about what they envision themselves to be like. For example, the Christian Fundamentalist congregants of Nancy Ammerman's study looked upon themselves as; "being a group of saved sinners who joyfully direct their lives according to rules found in the Bible...⁶ The congregants at the Reform temple studied by Frida Furman rooted their identity as a congregation in a certain style that reflected; "a gestalt that assumes good taste, sophistication, elegance, and non-ethnicity--all characteristic of a particular socioeconomic and educational status."⁷ The Jews at the synagogue of Samuel Heilman's study regarded themselves as "the modern Orthodox Jews of Kehilat Kodesh".⁸ For the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom it is the issue of social class that plays a crucial role in marking the borders of the Temple as a specific religious community and in defining themselves as such.

Other Conservative congregations in the New Haven area are perceived by the TBS members as being composed of rich snobs, arrogant doctors or elitist academicians. The Jewish Federation leadership is looked upon as a closed group of rich people. I recall hearing a congregant refer to TBS as the "Robert Hall" of local synagogues. Robert Hall being a clothing store chain which had a reputation for selling good,

solid, down to earth, middle class and non-presumptuous clothes. This is how the congregants see themselves, as the salt of the earth, as a congregation that finds room to welcome and include those who are of modest means rather than only the wealthy, who earn their living as receptionists in the offices of physicians, rather than as physicians, and who sometimes stumble over Torah blessings, rather than flawlessly read Torah.

Social contacts are established, continued, and nurtured at the kiddush table and at other times when congregants have the chance to engage in informal social conversation. Through common Temple membership networks are established that extend beyond the Temple and enable congregants to exert pressure and influence for each other, whether it be for employment or in dealing with public institutions.

I believe that the influence which accrues from Temple connections as perceived by the congregants is somewhat exaggerated. Are certain members really so powerful and well connected that they are able to coerce school boards, hospitals and employers into doing favors for Temple members? It would certainly be of some interest if this were true, but it would be of even more interest if as I suspect, that congregants to a great extent only perceive that this is true. This leads me to believe that the congregants certainly do look upon their Temple as a real community, one that offers great benefit to its members by supporting them in their

dealings with those outside the congregation. In short, the congregants have identified themselves as belonging to a social entity that has established clear borders between themselves and the outside world. Yet despite these borders the Congregation is very much a part of the outside world, and shares something very basic with the culture of the American suburb.

Temple Beth Shalom In The Context Of Suburban Culture.

The desire of the congregant to express his religious individuality through participation in innovative and customized religious ritual on the one hand, and wanting to be part of a cohesive religious community on the other cannot be understood as something entirely separate from a similar phenomena which is also characteristic of American suburban life. Social scientists have noted that the suburbanite displays strong aspirations for self expression as well as the tendency towards social homogeneity and conformity in life styles. A clear illustration of this is in the matter of the appearance of the typical suburban block of homes.

Herbert Gans, in his study of Levittown noted that although suburban home owners are generally willing to make compromises in order to conform to the group norms that determine the appearance of their property, these compromises do have their limits. Gans says that the demand for conformity

is reduced by:

...limiting block standards to the exterior appearance of the front of the house and the front yard, the back being less visible to outsiders. Interiors, which involve the owner's ego more, are not subjected to criticism. People are praised for a nice-looking home, but there are no wisecracks about deviant taste in furnishings- at least, not to the owner.

William Whyte, JR. similarly noticed this existence, side by side, of the dual tendencies towards group conformism and individual self expression in the suburbs. He makes the point that:

In an environment that seems so homogeneous, one might think there were few distinctions one would have to worry about. To the practiced eye, however, there is much more diversity in the scene than the bystander sees, for the more accustomed one becomes to the homogeneity, the more sensitized is he to the small differences. At Levittown, Pennsylvania, residents are very much aware of who has what "modification" of the basic ranch-house design...¹⁰

Here then we have two diverse trends which coexist with one another in the social life of the suburbanite. The suburbanite can express his individuality, can innovate upon a common theme, but within certain bounds. To be part of the community he must conform to some standards which are socially expected of all.

The very way in which the congregant at Temple Beth Shalom involves himself in the rituals of the worship service and the life cycle ceremonies is not only a parallel of this dual track of conformity and self expression that is characteristic of suburban life, but since we are speaking here of religious rituals, is also a sanctification of it.

At TBS the desire for self expression is observed in the congregants customizations of life cycle ritual participation, styles of ritual garb, and the pick and choose attitudes regarding religious observances. Through a wide choice of ritual and social activity involvements the Temple gives its members the opportunity to express their individuality in unique and creative ways. This expression of individuality is sanctified through religious ritual as was made particularly evident in the analysis of the bar/bat mitzvah speeches.

But at the same time that TBS offers its congregants the opportunity to be unique, and give creative vent to self expression, it also puts limits on how far they are allowed to depart from the traditions of Conservative Judaism. This is in the nature of Conservative Judaism, a movement which conserves as well as innovates tradition. The popularity of Conservatism in the suburbs may be attributed in part to the fact that the trends of individual self expression, and of conforming to established group norms which are characteristic of suburban life, find their parallels in the trends of innovative self expression and the conservation of tradition that are characteristic of Conservative Judaism.

Members of Temple Beth Shalom, and perhaps as future ethnographic studies may reveal, suburban churchgoers as well, find through participation in worship service rituals, life cycle rituals, and the social and cultural activities offered by the institution not only the comfort and camaraderie of the

group, but also a wealth of opportunities for creative self expression. By a careful mix of innovation and tradition which addresses the needs of the congregant for both group religious involvement, and the expression of religious individuality Temple Beth Shalom has been able to involve the widest band of congregants in its activities and still maintain the social cohesiveness of the institution. But what of the future? In the light of recent trends in the Conservative movement and American Judaism in general will Judaically pluralistic Conservative congregations such as Temple Beth Shalom be able to continue to fulfill these dual roles? It is to a consideration of the future of the Conservative synagogue that we now turn.

The Future Of The Conservative Synagogue: Can The Center Hold?

Will the Conservative synagogue continue to contain its left and right wings and prevent them from defecting to the Orthodox, the Reform, or to havurot that are only marginally or not at all affiliated with Conservative congregations? The Union For Traditional Judaism, already discussed in this study, (pp.54-56), seems to be on the path of breaking away from the Conservative movement. But aside from this right wing faction there does not at the present time seem to be any major defections away from the Movement. Some disturbing

trends have been noted however that cast uncertainty on the future cohesion of the Conservative synagogue and movement.

Jack Wertheimer, in referring to a number of recent surveys on American Jewish denominations makes the following points. To begin with, although generally holding its own in the area of denominational switching with the Orthodox and Reform, the Conservative synagogue is being challenged by the Reform in certain areas of the country.¹¹ In addition there is also evidence of defections by some of the more observant younger Conservative families to the Orthodox and of some of the "best" of Conservative youth to the countercultural Havurah movement.¹² Finally there is some possible, but as yet inconclusive evidence that there is attrition among younger Conservative Jews which may foretell a demographic crisis in the future.¹³

In light of these developments we may ask what the Conservative synagogue can do in order to prevent these developing trends of attrition from gaining further momentum. The answer I believe, may be found in a continued effort to encourage the coexistence of innovation and tradition in the worship ritual.

Innovation And Tradition: Towards a Mutually Beneficial Coexistence.

If Conservative synagogues are to survive as religious congregations rather than as institutions that are solely, or mainly involved in social and cultural activities, they must bring into ritual activity participation the widest band of their congregants. This means accommodating the traditionalists, typically those who are able to competently involve themselves in traditional ritual activities, as well as those whose skills, abilities, or religious sensibilities preclude them from such involvement and who are most typically the ritual innovators.

If a congregation becomes dominated by a group of religious virtuosi who alone among the congregants achieve insider status, the ritually incompetent stand to be alienated from whole hearted synagogue participation and membership. On the other hand, bringing ritual activities down to the lowest common denominator of performance in order to accommodate the less ritually competent risks the alienation of the ritually competent traditionalists. As I have illustrated in the case of Temple Beth Shalom, this "damned if you do- damned if you don't" situation is not inevitable. At Temple Beth Shalom the more competent worshippers are provided with a religious service that allows them the opportunity for full traditional ritual participation, while the less competent worshippers are

offered innovative alternative ritual participation. These parallel tracks of ritual involvement form a synergistic relationship that is based upon what each group has to gain from the others involvement in the worship service. This can serve as a model of cooperation for other pluralistic Conservative congregations.

The more competent congregants, if they wish to get more than a small percentage of their temple's members to attend worship services, and to achieve the number of active members that is necessary for a viable and vibrant congregation, must give their assent to the incorporation of innovative rituals in the worship service. These rituals, although innovative, should be grounded in the traditional rituals that must continue to be practiced as part of the worship service. The more competent traditionalists must also be ready to give of their time, expertise, and patience, to serve as mentors to the less competent congregants. With time and practice some of the less competent congregants will reach the goal of traditional service participation. For the less competent congregants the non-traditional, innovative rituals may be looked upon as "ritual involvements for the time being", until skills are improved upon. For others, either skills and abilities will not advance, or religious sensibilities will preclude traditional ritual participation. Here a continued innovative ritual participation must be permanently incorporated into the service as a parallel involvement that

will not diminish the opportunity for a full traditional involvement for those who are so oriented.

The less competent, unless they want to run the risk of losing the tradition, which is the source, the touchstone, from which innovative rituals are derived, must in no way hinder the performance of rituals done in the traditional way. It is on account of the survival of the traditional rituals, performed in proximity to the innovative ones done at the same worship service that the innovative rituals are given a measure of validity and sanctity. We had an illustration of this at the High Holiday services at T.B.S. in which virtually the entire congregation in all their Judaic pluralism was present in the sanctuary.

At these services, along with the traditional ritual of the aliyah to the Torah which was done in Hebrew, there also were a number of what I referred to as "alternative aliyot". These were in reality not aliyot to the Torah at all, but readings done in English from various Scriptural or secular sources. As in the case of the traditional aliyah, the name of the honoree was proclaimed to the worshippers, and the honoree ascended to the bimah to perform the ritual. This parallel innovative aliyah partook of the sanctity and prestige of the traditional aliyah because it was done in proximity to it and was patterned on it. If the traditional aliyah had ceased to be practiced this obviously could not have happened.

Ritual innovations at Temple Beth Shalom, are a form of

variations on a traditional theme. Because much of tradition is conserved at the worship service there are numerous sacred themes upon which variations can be played. Because variations are allowed the congregant is not only able to participate in the ritual but is also able to express his individuality through involvement in it. And because the innovative rituals are all firmly grounded in a common tradition, both the traditionalists and the innovators can take part in producing a common service, and in coexisting with each other.

We Meet Again With The Four Sons .

As in the case of the questions asked by the four sons at the Passover seder ritual, the congregants at Temple Beth Shalom are allowed to frame their ritual involvements in ways that are meaningful to themselves. In fact, these variations on a theme become part of the ritual narrative and hence also part of the tradition. Are not the questions of the four sons however different they may be, variations on the single theme of "the meaning of all this" the meaning of the sacred ritual?

Through the ethnography I have shown how congregants in a pluralistic religious setting, choose and customize their ritual participation according to their religious skills, abilities, and sensibilities while at the same time unite to form a cohesive group to which all the congregants may identify with. This is indeed unique, the parallel operation

of both innovation and tradition; a mosaic of divergent individual involvements, but a socially cohesive congregation. Perhaps the social dynamic of congregational coexistence and solidarity at Temple Beth Shalom can be an example, a template, for the operation of other religious institutions in America outside the Conservative, and indeed even outside of the Jewish context that are beset by the difficulties inherent in a situation of religious pluralism. But now I would like to return the focus to the people I had the privilege to observe and participate with- the Congregants of Temple Beth Shalom.

I hope that my study has succeeded in giving the reader a picture of a middle class, small town, suburban, American Conservative congregation at the end of the twentieth century. But beyond this I hope that I have given the congregants of TBS, and those of similar congregations a sense of what is the exotic and the sociologically fascinating in their midst. This, their story, can take them beyond their middle class surroundings and imbue them with a feeling for the symbolism and the deeper universal meanings of their actions. The role of the rabbi has something in common with the role of the shaman. The speeches given at the bar/bat mitzvah can be interpreted not only as a model for and a model of the congregational ethos of Temple Beth Shalom, but also as a model for and a model of the suburban, and the American ethos. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony itself fits into what Van Gennep would categorize as a rite of passage of puberty, different

from, yet in some ways similar to such rites in Africa or Australia. Blood drives with the church next door are part and parcel of the American civil religion, and the Temple softball team has much in common with the morning minyan.

The members of Temple Beth Shalom comprise a "Robert Hall" congregation that is ordinary in many respects. But upon careful observation and analysis these congregants were shown to have a complexity, a unique desire to express their individuality through ritual participation, while at the same time belong to a socially cohesive congregation. Through ethnographic description I celebrated the common congregant, the common man and woman, and gave to them a voice and painted of them a portrait. And through this I hope to have given them and others a sense of their own self worth.

Finally, when everything is taken into account, the histories of the Conservative movement, the local Jewish community, and the Temple itself, the strategies of inclusion and separation, the life cycle rituals, and the layers of identities, we are left with a religious community. It is a religious community in which all the members are allowed to become part of a team that for softball games as well as for prayers forces no one to sit on the bench, but makes sure that everyone gets a chance to play, or to pray, as the case may be, and as their skills and abilities permit. Congregants are allowed to make choices and to innovate on tradition, but limits are set, and tradition is also conserved. Individual

expression is allowed to flourish, while at the same time the social cohesion of the group is maintained. In the tradition of the four sons of the Passover Haggadah, the Temple finds room for everyone to sit around the table and to participate in a sacred ritual while at the same time add to it a flavor of their own.

Endnotes:Conclusions

- 1.Chava Weissler, Making Judaism Meaningful: Ambivalence and Tradition In A Havurah Community. (N.Y.: AMS Press, 1989). p.388.
- 2.Robert N. Bellah et al. Habits Of The Heart:Individualism and Commitment in American Life. (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp.232-233.
- 3.Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life. (New York:The Free Press, 1915), pp.62-63.
- 4.James P. Wind, and James W. Lewis, American Congregations: Volume 1:Portraits of Twelve Religious Communities. (Chicago:University of Chicago Press,1994), p.1.
- 5.Emile Durkheim, The Division Of Labor In Society. (New York:The Free Press, 1984), p.17.
- 6.Nancy Ammerman, Bible Believers:Fundamentalists in the Modern World. (New Brunswick:Rutgers University Press, 1987). p.75.
- 7.Frida Furman, Beyond Yiddishkeit:The Struggle For Jewish Identity In A Reform Synagogue.(Albany:State University of New York Press,1987), p.109.
- 8.Samuel C. Heilman, Synagogue Life:A Study In Symbolic Interaction. (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p.20.
- 9.Herbert J. Gans, The Levittowners:Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community. (New York:Pantheon Books,1967), p.177.
- 10.William H. Whyte, JR. The Organization Man. (New York:Doubleday, 1957), p.345.
- 11.Jack Wertheimer in A People Divided:Judaism In Contemporary America.(N.Y.: Basic Books, 1993) tells us that:"Reform continues to exhibit great popularity in its traditional areas of strength-the Midwest and South- but is gaining many new adherents throughout the nation. A plurality of Jews in Los Angeles, Boston, and Cleveland now identifies with Reform. Just as the middle decades of the century witnessed dramatic numerical gains by the Conservative Movement, the closing decades of the century are a period of particular growth for Reform Judaism." p.54.

12.Ibid. pp.141-142.

13.Ibid. Wertheimer observed that:"Self-identification with Conservatism is stronger among middle-age groups than among younger or older groups. In some communities the largest segment of Conservative Jews is aged thirty-five to forty-four and in others forty-five to sixty-four; but the percentage of Conservative Jews aged eighteen to thirty-five is smaller than in either of the other two age categories. The apparent attrition among younger members constitutes the greatest demographic challenge facing the Conservative movement."p.55.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Map of Greater New Haven

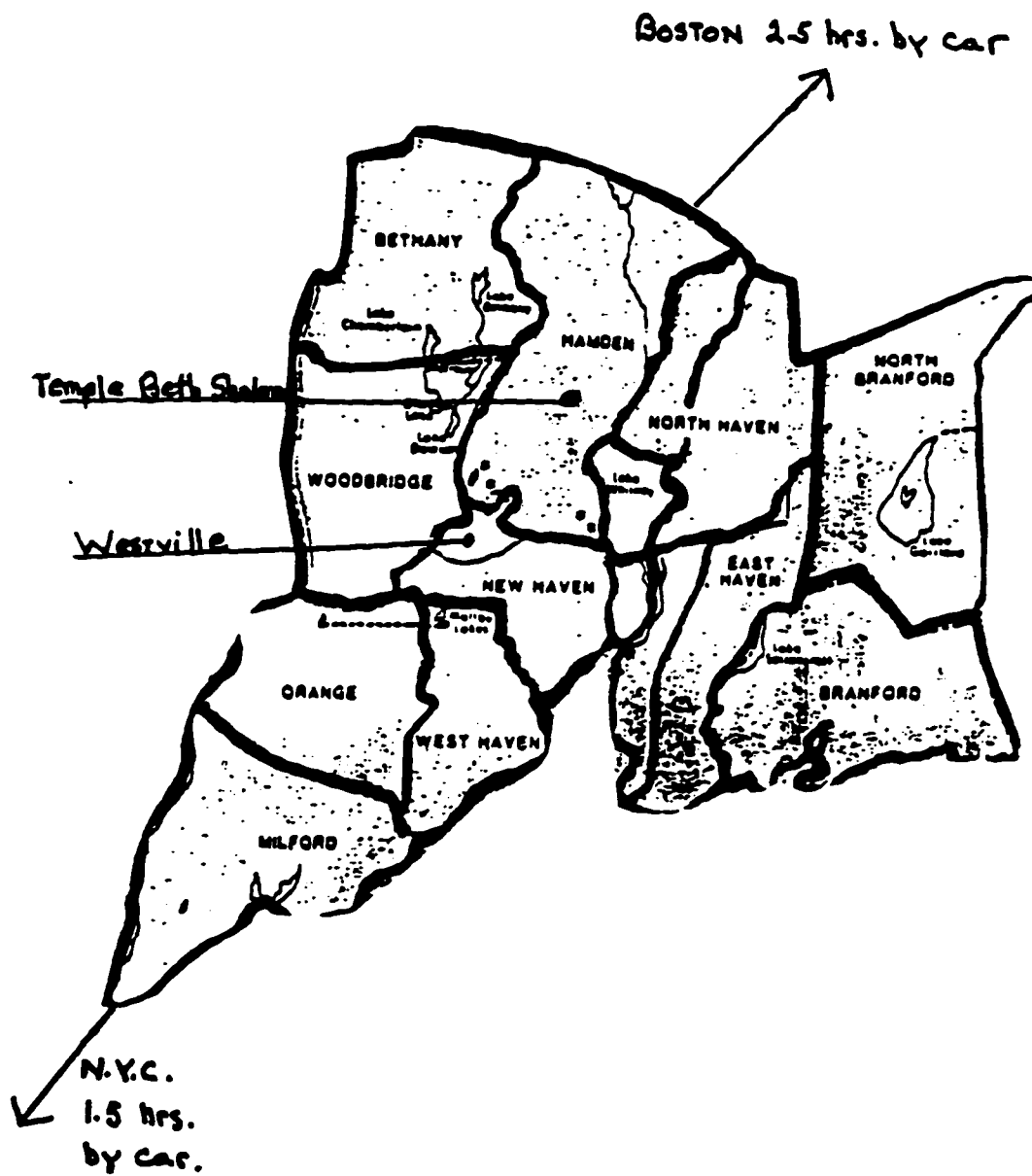


Figure 2: The sanctuary and surrounding area at Temple Beth Shalom.

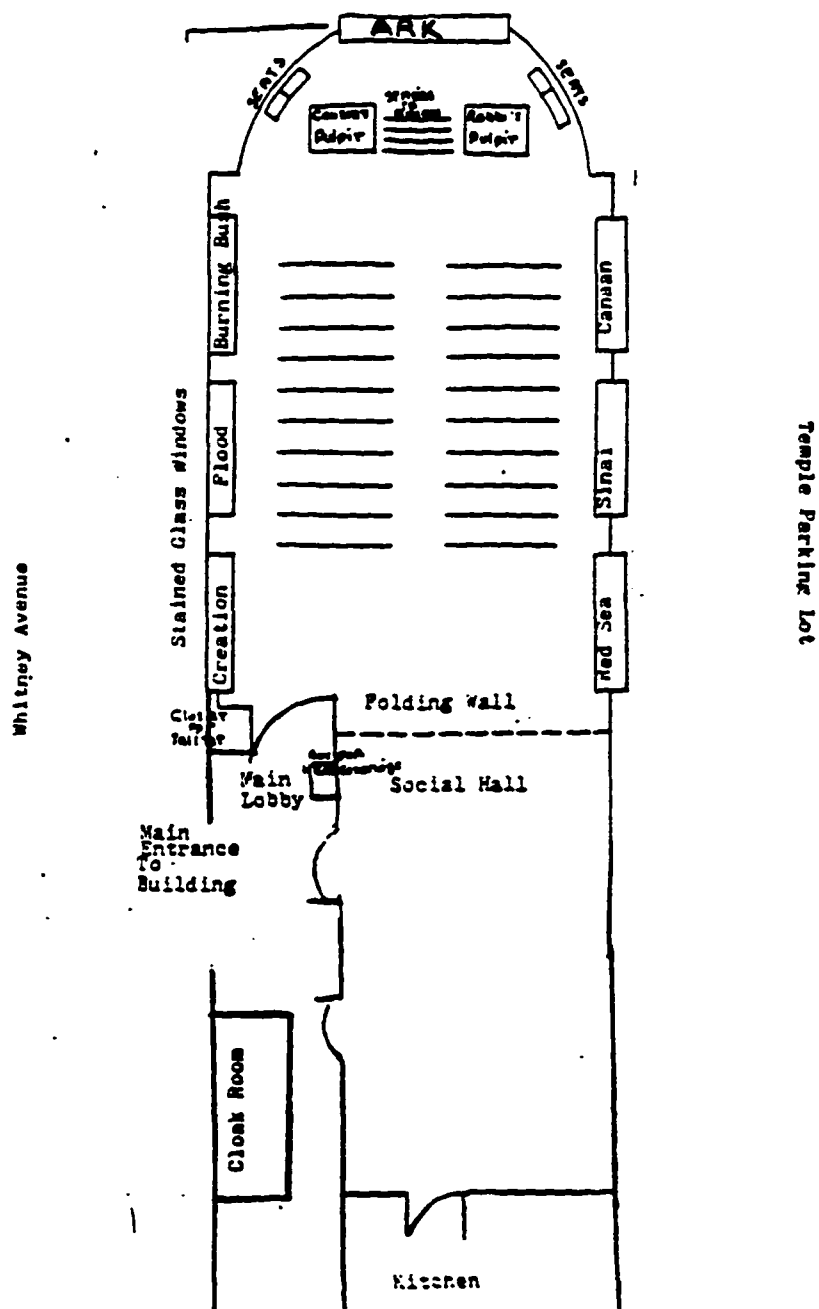


Figure 3. (page two).

P. 21-25 Silent
 P. 25 Oseh Shalom (Hebrew)-----
 P. 26 Hebrew-----
 P. 27 English & Hebrew-----
 P. 28 Kiddush (Hebrew)-----
 Sermon-----Rabbi
 P. 37 Open the Ark-----
 P. 37 Aleinu (Hebrew)-----

 P. 39 Mourners' Kaddish-----Rabbi
 Temple Announcements-----
 Club Announcements-----
 P. 41 Adon Olam-----

Figure 4: Photograph of Temple Beth Shalom, looking east from Whitney Avenue in Hamden. February 1996.



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