Editor's Introduction

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It is characteristic of religions that they develop and maintain rituals through which the community celebrates or commemorates significant events. Typically, individuals or family units within the community also make use of rituals to mark important milestones in their lives. The communal celebrations or commemorations are generally laid out on the calendar in an annual cycle; naturally, most individual or family occasions are intended as once-in-a-lifetime events.

Thus, for someone actively involved in a religious community, the calendar is regularly filled with a series of activities that add meaning and bring a sense of belonging that extends from the individual to the family to the local—and often the national and international—community, and vice versa. Nowhere is this "rhythm" of life more richly experienced or minutely observed than in the Jewish community.

Our focus in this volume is on what scholars tend to call "rites of passage." Most people speak of them simply as life cycle events or milestones. Jews like to speak of *simchas*, when there's something—birth, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or wedding, for example—to celebrate. Whatever we call them, such rituals have the power to connect us with generations past as well as with our contemporaries. In this respect, rites of passage may be viewed as both conservative and dynamic. In fact, it is the interplay between these two impulses (if you will) that forms the unifying thread among the articles contained in this collection.

In the process of describing and analyzing a wide variety of data, each author also comes to grips, some more explicitly than others, with basic questions such as: How do rituals originate and develop? Why do some rituals become successful and long lasting, while others fall to the wayside? What happens to a ritual when its religious community (or parts of that community), in response to either outside or inside influences, changes to such a degree that the ritual risks losing its relevance? Of course, there are many more questions and permutations of questions that can be, and are, asked, but these three can suffice to make the point: the study and the practice of rites of passage, bringing together as they do many disciplines and many emotions, are multifaceted, important, and prone to surprise both researcher and practitioner alike.

We begin with **Penina Adelman**, "'What Makes a Bat Mitzvah Blossom': Pre-Bat Mitzvah Rituals for Daughters and Mothers." Her article is a reflection

on rituals for the youngest group extensively discussed in this volume, pre-Bat Mitzvah girls:

The Bat Mitzvah ceremony, the coming of age ritual for Jewish girls, is quite recent. In over 5,000 years of Jewish history, the first evidence of a Bat Mitzvah rite may have occurred in nineteenth century Baghdad.

As with many new rituals for girls and women today, there is wide latitude in the creation of new ones and innovations in traditional ones. This is due to the blank slate that is often the starting point for rituals for Jewish females. Jewish women who came of age in the 50s, 60s, and 70s now have daughters who are reaping the benefits of their struggles to be seen and heard in the synagogue.

As a folklorist, the author of this study describes the creation and development of programs for pre-Bat Mitzvah girls and their mothers. Within this context, she raises questions about the significance of these new rituals for Jewish women and girls and for the Jewish community as a whole.

Rachel Kranson follows, with "More Bar Than Mitzvah: Anxieties over Bar Mitzvah Receptions in Postwar America." As the title of her article indicates, she discusses celebrations surrounding the Bar Mitzvah:

"The way things are going, the inauguration of the first Jewish president of the United States is going to be a let-down for the man," joked a member of Great Neck, New York's Temple Beth El in 1961. "The ceremony probably won't be able to stand comparison with his Bar Mitzvah." This lighthearted jab at Bar Mitzvah parties was just one example of a general current of anxiety surrounding the increased extravagance of Jewish lifecycle celebrations in the years after World War II. Throughout the postwar period, Jewish clergy, intellectuals, performers, and writers derided receptions that "stressed the 'bar' more than the 'mitzvah.'"

This article analyzes the uneasy discourse surrounding the ways that Jews celebrated their Bar Mitzvahs in the postwar years. Critiques and concerns ranged from humorous digs to serious condemnation by clergy-members and intellectuals, who feared that the conspicuous consumption exhibited at these affairs degraded American Jews' religious and cultural life.

Anxiety over the rapid accumulation of wealth experienced by many American Jews during the postwar years underlay the critique of Bar Mitzvahs. In the imagination of postwar critics of American Jewish life, extravagant lifecycle events represented a tragic outcome of the Jewish encounter with American affluence. The debate over Bar Mitzvahs, then, provides us with a window into how American Jews grappled with upward mobility in the years after World War II.

Next is **Leslie Ginsparg Klein**, "Becoming Orthodox Women: Rites of Passage in the Orthodox Community." The age under discussion in this article encompasses young Orthodox women of high school age:

Throughout the twentieth century, Jewish communities developed rites of passage for their daughters that celebrated the entrance into adulthood, such as the Bat Mitzvah and confirmation ceremonies. The growth of the feminist movement and egalitarianism in Judaism affected conceptions of what constituted coming of age for Jewish girls.

However, the Orthodox community, the most traditional branch of Judaism, eschewed both feminism and egalitarianism. How then did Orthodox girls become Orthodox women? How did Orthodox education prepare girls to come of age? What life choices were celebrated and discouraged for girls entering into adulthood? How did the changes in an increasingly liberal and feminist-influenced American society and greater Jewish community affect conceptions within Orthodoxy?

This article addresses these questions by looking at Orthodox girls' high schools, a strongly female space where discussions of becoming Jewish women were constantly taking place. It investigates changing conceptions of how the entrance into adulthood was defined and commemorated, and what those evolving rites of passage indicate about what the Jewish community valued and celebrated.

Irit Koren provides an analysis of "Talking about the Jewish Wedding Ritual: Issues of Gender, Power, and Social Control." Brides are at the center of this article, which also includes grooms, parents, and rabbis:

This chapter is based on a sociological study of the ways in which women who identify as Orthodox feminists challenge, resist, and adapt the traditional wedding ritual. These women sought to modify the ritual; doing this required them to negotiate extensively with their husbands, mothers, fathers, and the officiating rabbis.

The relevant data was collected through in-depth narrative interviews with thirty women—all of whom live in Jerusalem and are highly Jewishly literature—and with a subset of their husbands, parents, and rabbis. The study's aims are threefold: to examine the discourse produced by each of the groups that was interviewed; to demonstrate how the theme of each group's discourse reflects the group's relative position along three hierarchiceal axes: gender, authority, and religious knowledge; and to delve into the societal significance of these discourses and their power to shape reality.

The results demonstrate the direct connection between the discourse a group produces in discussing the ritual and that group's dominant or

subordinate position along the axes and explains the significance of each one of these discourses in terms of social power and gender relations.

Jonathan Gross is an Orthodox rabbi in Omaha. He reflects on "The Making of a Rabbi: *Semichah* Ordination from Moses to Grosses": After mastering a difficult Haftarah for a bar mitzvah, it is hard to imagine that there is anything left for a Jewish boy to learn. What makes a person a rabbi? What does the title mean? What knowledge and skills are required?

This essay journeys through the ages from the very first rabbi, Moses, all the way to current *semichah* programs and curricula. Biblical references to rabbinic leadership, curricula listed in the Talmud, the loss of the first *semichah* tradition, and the fifteenth century controversy over reinstating it are all discussed.

This article compares the modern training of a rabbi to the modern rabbi's role and analyzes whether or not they are in sync. The paper also includes some personal reminiscences illustrating the familial traditions that are often involved in deciding to become a rabbi.

In "Perspectives on Evaluating New Jewish Rituals," **Vanessa Ochs** opens the second section of articles, which look beyond a single age group or rite of passage:

The author of this article, which originated as the Symposium keynote address, has conducted wide research on emerging Jewish rituals and their adaption in America. She has observed that when people initially encounter a new ritual practice, they typically ask three questions: Is it authentic? Is it permissible? And: Will it endure?

In investigating the answers to these questions, the author devises and presents a checklist of the characteristic hallmarks of stronger new rituals, that is, those that have the greatest likelihood of enduring. As she observes, new rituals need community ritual organizers, as it were, to plead for their cause. They need to persuade first time participants in the new ritual that shocking innovations ought to become tomorrow's hallowed traditions.

The next article is **Ori Soltes**, "Memory, Questions and Definitions: Images of Old and New Rites of Passage." His particular interest is art and artifacts:

This study begins with the observation that Jewish identity is rife with questions regarding the definition of categories—what is "Jewish"? What is art as opposed to craft?—and that Jewish rites of passage reflect this truth and the truth that part of the answer to such questions articulates an interweave between the individual and the community, as between memory and futurity. Art and artifacts, particularly within the past generation, reflect

a growing address of this complication. A child enters the community with a *Brit Milah*—and in many cases, where the physiology of gender prohibits a *Brit*, a baby naming. Garments and accoutrements reflect this bi-genderal expansion.

With the increased pairing of Bat with Bar Mitzvah, gender-specific symbols of individualized enfranchisement in the community, by way of a new vocabulary of *tallitot* and *kippot*, have spread, and with that spread a further blurring of the traditional line between art and craft. That blur may also be seen not only in works of art for wedding ceremonies, but even in those that serve for the commemoration of loved ones in the form of *Yartseit* candle holders.

These, in turn, intersect the proliferation of objects reflecting on the Shoah and the commemoration of its anonymous dead. A relatively recent holiday interweaves the individual and the community, with a new vocabulary of artistic word, sound, and image, as its paired counterpart, *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut*, celebrating the rebirth and birthday of a communal land, has also yielded art that, coming full circle, interweaves memory with questions.

Oliver Leaman explores "A Need for New Rituals? American Judaism and the Holocaust." In so doing, he also raises questions about the nature and efficacy of ritual:

The Holocaust has had a huge impact on Jewish life, and yet it has not noticeably affected the religion. There have been some attempts at incorporating the Holocaust into rites of passage such as Bar/Bat Mitzvah, weddings, and funerals, and into the liturgy itself, but these have had a limited success and tend to be part of alternative services that are rarely employed. This is in many ways puzzling, since if there is anything on which the Jewish world agrees, it is on the significance of the Holocaust for Judaism.

To try to understand why rites of passage do not on the whole directly respond to the Holocaust, it is useful to examine various theories of how rituals in religion, and in Judaism in particular, operate, and why some are successful and others are not. An examination is made of attempted changes to rites of passage incorporating new material linked to the Holocaust, and an account provided of which ceremonies look more plausible than others, and why. The larger issue of why the Holocaust has not in general been used in rites of passage is raised and linked to its proximity in time to us today.

Almost without exception, we think of Jewish rites of passage within the rabbinic tradition. **Daniel J. Lasker**, with "Karaism: An Alternate Form of Jewish Celebration," invites us to go beyond these familiar parameters:

Karaism has been an alternate form of Judaism for at least 1100 years,

basing its observances on a close reading of the Hebrew Bible in place of acceptance of rabbinic tradition. As a result, Karaite practices differ from Rabbanite ones in a number of central rituals, including dietary laws, Sabbath and holiday observance, marriage laws, and liturgy. Despite their minority status through the centuries, Karaites have managed to survive and, in many cases, to thrive intellectually and culturally. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, Karaites have been recognized by the greater Jewish community as part of the same body politic, despite their different Jewish way of life.

There are perhaps between 30,000 and 40,000 Karaites in the world today, most notably in Israel and also in the Bay Area of the United States. Despite their minority status and the inroads of secularization and assimilation to the majority Rabbanite culture or to their non-Jewish surroundings, many Karaites continue to maintain their unique practices with their own synagogues, rabbis, and other ritual functionaries.

This overview of contemporary Karaite Jewish celebrations serves not only as a presentation of an alternate Jewish way of life, but also as a means of evaluating the limits of Jewish pluralism and tolerance of minority interpretations of Judaism.

Daniel Mandell, **Barbara Smith-Mandell**, and **Jerrold Hirsch** all live and practice Judaism outside of a metropolitan area. Their experiences are chronicled and evaluated in "Without a *Minyan*: Creating a Jewish Life in a Small Midwestern Town":

In 1999, the Mandell family moved to Kirksville, a small town (17,000) in northeastern Missouri, where they became one of just a few Jewish families, and the only one with children observing holidays and keeping kosher. Their adjustment has been difficult and empowering.

They left behind a vibrant congregation and, from necessity, have learned how to organize and lead Seders and other celebrations where before they had been primarily participants. With the closest synagogue ninety miles away, they cannot attend regularly and have had to adjust how they celebrate holidays and *simchas*. While they often feel isolated, they have become what friends call "the Jewish community center of Kirksville": they invite others (Jewish or not) to holiday celebrations and deal with the opportunities and burdens of being "on display" as the most public Jews in town.

Their sons, David and Joshua, are each the only Jew in their school; they often feel isolated and are sometimes treated badly by other children. They discuss their experiences with oral historian Jerrold Hirsch; their parents, Daniel and Barbara, analyze their experiences, separately and together, and

consider how those experiences reflect or contrast with trends in American Jewish life.

As a practicing cantor, **Steven Puzarne** has practical experience within the context of the synagogue. He shares some of this experience in "Raising the Bar, Maximizing the Mitzvah: Jewish Rites of Passage for Children with Autism":

A learned Rebbe once observed that in both Hebrew and Yiddish, the words to learn and to teach are virtually the same, suggesting that according to Jewish tradition, teaching is simply a more intensive form of learning. Over the past few years, the author of this article has had the honor and privilege of intensively learning with, and from, a special group of young people—children with autism—as they prepared to become *B'nei Mitzvah*.

Working in both group and one-on-one settings, the author has had the opportunity to observe several important trends and make several revelatory discoveries, all of which hold great promise for these young people and the Jewish community of which they are a rightful part:

- An increased Jewish communal awareness of the burgeoning number of special needs children within our midst.
- A concomitant sense of obligation to offer these children and their families equal opportunities for Jewish enrichment.
- The remarkable and seemingly innate love of Jewish ritual and spirituality that these young people possess.
- The profound transformative affect that becoming B*'nei Mitzvah* has on special needs children, producing benefits that are both far-reaching and long lasting.

While this Jewish rite of passage is ancient, the participation of special needs children is more recent. To date, the author and his colleagues have supported six special needs children in ascending to the Torah, and they have reciprocated by reminding us of a simpler time when transformation superseded celebration as the order of the day.

Leonard J. Greenspoon