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Journey to the Start of Day: Ancestry, Ethnicity, and My Work as a Clinical Psychologist

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An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun. "Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the rabbi. Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and can tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?" "No," answered the rabbi. "Then when is it?" the pupils demanded. The rabbi said, "You can tell when the night has ended and the day has begun when you can see that the person across from you is your sister or brother."

—Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*

An image from June 2004:

I am 41 years old. I am seated at a restaurant called Savannah, one of only two restaurants in Kissidougou, a tiny town—more like a village, really—in the forest region of Guinea, West Africa, over nine hours by road from the capital. I am working as a psychologist for the Center for Victims of Torture, an organization that provides trauma counseling and mental health training for Liberian war survivors who are in refugee camps in this region. To the best of my knowledge, I am the only Jew in Guinea. Thus, when I suddenly hear two men speaking Hebrew at the table next to me, I approach them, startled, and we start to converse. They tell me that they are from Israel and were hired to direct a road construction project in Conakry and had decided to take a drive through the country. Then they turn to me, and ask, "And what's a nice Jewish girl like *you* doing in Kissidougou?"

This article represents my effort to answer that question.

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WHERE I COME FROM: LEGACIES OF RESILIENCE AND LOSS

My identity as a Jewish woman working in the psychology profession has been shaped by the experiences and values of generations that preceded me.

My Father's Mother, Gittel

My paternal grandmother, Gittel, was born in a small village near Kiev, in what was then called "Russia" and is known now as Ukraine. When she was 4 years old (and her older sister 6 and her younger brother 2), in response to the persecution of Jews in Czarist Russia, her father, Samuel, emigrated to Hartford, Connecticut, where he worked as a fruit and vegetable peddler, sending money to his wife and three children whenever he could. Then World War I began, and for eight years the family lost contact. Money that Samuel sent from America was never received. Sarah, my grandmother's mother, brought Gittel and her two siblings to live in a Bolshevik children's home where she found work as a cook. Thus, for most of her childhood (ages 4–12), my grandmother's father was absent, and she was raised and supported by only her mother.

After World War I ended, Samuel placed newspaper advertisements searching for his family, but the newspapers did not reach the remote area where my grandmother and her mother and siblings were located. A family friend who lived in a more central location, however, saw one of the ads, and this friend undertook the long journey to deliver the message to Sarah. Sarah had no money, but this friend gave her money so that she could flee.

Late one night Sarah and her three children ran through the woods, across the border into Poland. If they had been caught, they would have been imprisoned and possibly killed. At the border, they had to give the Polish officials all their possessions in order to gain permission to cross. Sarah and her three children remained in Poland for a year, with a Polish Jewish family in Rovno, while they awaited permission to enter the United States.

After Sarah received the necessary documents, she and her three children traveled to Warsaw, where a carriage driver drove off with their only remaining possessions. They went to Danzig, Germany, and boarded a ship, traveling third class, bound for Ellis Island, New York. They arrived in January of 1923. My grandmother was 12 years old.

From there, they reunited with Samuel in Hartford. Gittel did not speak a word of English: her native language, and the language of her parents and community, was Yiddish. Nevertheless, within a few years, she learned to speak, read, and write English fluently. She completed the 8th grade in Hartford and was certified to go on to high school, but there was not enough money in the family, so instead of continuing her education she went to work in a nightgown factory in Hartford, trimming threads off of newly sewn nightgowns. A few years later, she completed a bookkeepers training

program at a business school in Hartford and spent a few years working as a bookkeeper. After meeting my grandfather, she began working as a food server and cashier in the cafeteria of the school her two sons were attending. She continued in that job for over 25 years.

When she was 33 years old, her father was loading his truck with fruit-and-vegetable crates to take to the market. He had almost finished loading when he realized he needed one more crate. As he crossed the road, a driver sped by and hit him, then zoomed away. He died en route to the hospital. The driver was never caught.

My Father's Father, Sam

My father's father, Samuel, had a 9th grade education. He worked selling candy in theaters and at baseball games, later as a truck driver for a department store, after that a shoe salesman, and still later as a fruit peddler (like his father-in-law). Both of his parents, as well as several generations of their ancestors, came from Slutsk, a town in the midst of the vast steppes of the Byelorussia region of Russia. Sometime in the eighteenth century, my grandfather's ancestors had migrated into Slutsk from a small, rural village called Stepkovo, located several miles away. During the eighteenth century, when the czar ordered that all Jews adopt surnames (prior to that time, most Jews were known only by their first names followed by the phrase "son of" or "daughter of"), the name of my ancestral village was shaped into a surname.

Samuel's mother, Chaya Leah ("Chaya" is Hebrew for "life") Herman, was orphaned in childhood. Chaya Leah married my grandfather's father, Yasef, when they were both quite young. Yasef, too, had lost his mother in his early childhood and had left his childhood home at the age of 13. His father died when he was about 15. In Russia, Chaya Leah gave birth to one son and one daughter, both of whom died as infants, due to illness.

As a result of the massive wave of pogroms that swept Byelorussia during that era, Yasef emigrated to the United States in the 1890s. Two years later, he sent for Chaya Leah and their surviving daughter, Rose. In America, Chaya Leah was given a new first name: Ida. Yasef became known as Joseph or, to most people, "Joe."

Joe initially worked as a kosher butcher—the same profession that his forefathers had practiced in Slutsk. Later he worked as a deliveryman and house painter. In Hartford, Ida gave birth to six more children. Two daughters died in Hartford at young ages (Rose at age 12 from pneumonia, Alice at age 21 from heart disease).

Of the five children who survived beyond childhood, two, including my grandfather, had to leave school after 8th grade to help support the family. My great-grandmother reportedly had symptoms of depression during her final years of life. I doubt that she ever had the opportunity to fully express

her grief over the loss of four of her children or to talk much about the psychological challenges she faced in adjusting to a new country, where she had few relatives and did not know the language or culture. In that era, most people believed they should weather their losses and go on; there was little recognition that losses that are not talked about or adequately mourned weigh heavily on the soul. She died in her middle-age years, of natural causes, when my grandfather was 18 years old.

My Mother's Mother, Eva

Jacob Lesnick, the father of my maternal grandmother, was born in Poland. In the 1880s, when he was about 10 years old, Jacob and his parents emigrated to the United States, settling in Mattapan, a Jewish neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. Jacob's wife, Sarah, was also an immigrant from Poland, having come to the Boston area with her mother, Esther, as a child. Sarah gave birth to three children, of which my grandmother, Eva Lillian, was the eldest. "Eva" is an English version of the Hebrew word for "life."

Jacob had a small grocery store in Boston. When he was about 50 years old, Jacob was diagnosed with syphilis. In those days, there were no antibiotics, and he developed general paresis, which was then a common complication of syphilis. The general paresis manifested as severe and progressive dementia. The fact that his dementia was caused by general paresis was a strictly held secret. Thus, most of Jacob's relatives had the erroneous belief that he had simply and inexplicably lost his sanity. After several years of mental deterioration, Jacob spent the last 25 years of his life in a state hospital in Foxboro, Massachusetts.

At the time that her father was hospitalized, my grandmother, Eva, was 21, her sister was 17, and her brother was 13. Thus, for most of her childhood and adolescence, my maternal grandmother's father was cognitively incapacitated, and throughout her adulthood he was institutionalized. My great-grandmother, Sarah, supported my grandmother and her two siblings by running the family grocery store.

All three of Jacob's and Sarah's children completed high school, though none went to college. Eva reportedly did well in high school and was accepted to Radcliffe University, but opted to get married instead. Widowed with two young daughters at the age of 33, Eva became a successful travel agent and international tour guide. She was also the first woman in her entire neighborhood who learned to drive. Part of my curiosity about and awareness of distant lands and unfamiliar cultures derives from the dolls, trinkets, and photos she brought me from the tours she led in Italy, Hong Kong, Israel, Greece, and elsewhere.

Eva was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was in her mid-60s. During her final year of life she appeared on television, as part of a panel titled "Facing Imminent Death." This was more than two decades before

the era of confessional talk shows, when most Americans were still quite private about health issues and personal hardships. On the program, which was aired on a public television station, my grandmother spoke candidly about her thoughts and feelings about having a terminal illness. She acknowledged her fears and concerns and openly voiced her awareness of the fact that she was in her final year of life.

My Mother's Father, Harry

The parents of my maternal grandfather, Samuel and Sarah Steinberg, were born in Kourland, Latvia (then part of Russia), in a region near the town of Kovno. Kourland had at one point in history been part of Germany, and for that reason it was considered a more prestigious place of origin than were other parts of Latvia and Russia. Samuel and Sarah got married at a young age and soon after had a daughter, Bessie. Samuel left Russia when Bessie was four years old, intending to go to America. However, for reasons that remain unclear but are probably related to difficulties being admitted to America, Samuel instead went to South Africa. In South Africa, Samuel was recruited to fight for the British in the Anglo–Boer War of 1899–1902.

During these years in South Africa, Samuel had no contact with his wife and daughter, who had remained behind in Russia. After the Anglo–Boer war had ended, he emigrated to the United States, settling in Boston, and sent for his wife and daughter. Bessie died of a childhood illness (probably flu) at the age of 10, a few years after arriving in the United States.

Sarah went on to give birth to eight more children. One of these eight children was my mother's father, Harry. Of these eight children, five died of heart attacks or other medical conditions before they had reached their early 40s.

Samuel and Sarah ran a grocery store in Roxbury, a neighborhood of Boston. Harry became a salesman for a tobacco company. He died of a heart attack in his early 30s, leaving behind a wife and two young daughters: my maternal aunt, age seven, and my mother, who was then three years old.

My Immediate Family of Origin

I was born in Mattapan, then a predominantly Jewish neighborhood within the City of Boston. My father, Jerry, was completing his PhD in physical chemistry at Boston University. My mother was working as a quality tester at Baker's chocolate factory to help pay for my father's education. My parents met when they were both 18 and got married shortly after turning 20. My mother's formal education ended shortly after she graduated from high school.

For my first 11 years of life, we belonged to a Conservative synagogue. Though we did not keep kosher dietary laws or strictly observe the Sabbath, we observed most of the Jewish holidays and, I often attended synagogue services on Saturdays. My brother and I both attended Hebrew school two

weekday afternoons plus every Sunday morning, where we learned to read and write Hebrew and learned Biblical stories and Jewish history, values, and customs.

When I was about two years old, my family moved to a suburb, Newton, which had a substantial Jewish population; our immediate neighborhood was 100% Jewish. I attended a public elementary school in which well over 75% of the children were Jewish and a public junior high and high school which also had sizable Jewish populations. All of my parents' friends, and nearly all of my friends, were Jewish and White until after I graduated from high school.

When I was nine, my mother began working as a real estate agent, partly as a way to keep herself busy and partly to supplement our family income. Soon she was earning twice as much as my father, and this discrepancy in income, given the gender-role expectations that predominated in those days, was very painful for my father. My father's Cold War job designing atomic missiles became less and less interesting and meaningful to him. He became deeply interested in music, acting (in community theater), and writing (novels, stories, plays).

Whereas my mother thrived in our White, upper-middle-class suburban milieu, my father felt isolated and unfulfilled. My parents began to realize that they actually had very little in common and they began to drift apart. Unhappy at his job as well as in his marriage, and disconnected from the poor and working-class multicultural neighborhood and large, close-knit, extended family in which he was raised, at 38 my father experienced an existential and spiritual crisis that turned into a deepening depression.

During a week when my parents had decided to try living apart for a while, my father drove home from searching for an apartment, allowed the automatic, electric garage door to close behind him, and stayed in the car too long. Though he did open the car door and try to exit the garage, it was too late—the carbon monoxide had already entered his bloodstream. There was no note, and the authorities were unable to determine with certainty whether his death was a suicide or an accident. I had just turned 12 years old. As most people in our neighborhood and at my school considered his death to have been a suicide, I have "claimed" the identity of a childhood survivor of parental suicide.

My mother is not a psychologically minded person and did not possess the inner resources to support my brother or me in processing the shattering loss of my father. My mother, brother, and I went through the next several years as solitary beings, sharing a house though seldom interacting in any meaningful way. My father's death was not spoken about at all.

That experience of silence, and the awful burden of carrying within one's soul unformulated memories and unexpressed emotions, has had a profound impact on the choices I make in my practice of psychotherapy. In particular, with my firsthand awareness of the psychological harm caused

by silences about traumatic events, I have consistently tried to support clients in finding the words to speak about their feelings and experiences. I have tried my best to offer them my empathy and emotional presence so that they will feel able to connect with their truths and tell their stories.

A few months after my father died, my school, concerned about the fact that I was not visibly showing signs of mourning, arranged for me to see a clinical psychologist. Nearly 35 years later, I remember that appointment as if it were yesterday. Until I was an adult in college, he was the only person who ever asked me how I felt about my father's death. I was never sent back for a second session, apparently because everyone had the impression that I was all right. Nobody realized the actual intensity of my frozen grief. But I never forgot that a profession existed that focused on helping children survive such catastrophes. I never forgot that there was a job that consisted of asking people what they are going through, and, when they share the reality of their suffering, striving to listen and care. I never forgot that a person who undertakes this type of work is called a psychologist.

* * *

It is possible to discern some recurring themes that inform my personal and professional identity. These include the absence of husbands and fathers; the need for women to work outside the home; truncated educational opportunities and unfulfilled intellectual potential; early, sudden, and multiple losses; the role of chance occurrences as well as of the kindness and moral choices of other people in determining life paths; experiences of social and cultural marginalization; the importance of community; the impact of economic limitations and historical and political events on individual opportunities; women's capacity to endure significant practical and psychological hardships; and the investing of the unrealized hopes and dreams of one generation into the next generation, with the concomitant sense that the descendants in some manner must hold and carry forward the hopes and dreams of the ancestors.

THE IMPACT OF MY JEWISH IDENTITY ON MY PROFESSIONAL CHOICES AND PRACTICES

Here I discuss some widely held Jewish values and core components of my Jewish identity, as these pertain to my choices and practices as a clinical psychologist. For each principle of Jewish identity mentioned, I explore some of the implications for my clinical work. In a playful variation on the theme of the Ten Commandments, this section is structured with reference to 10 commandments I have consistently sought to follow in my career. My aim is to shed light on the variety of ways that my practice of psychotherapy is informed by my ancestry and ethnicity.

1. Be Kind to the Stranger, for You Were Strangers

My ethnic identity is inextricably linked with my awareness of Jews as a historically persecuted, disenfranchised, and despised people living near or among hostile and more powerful neighbors. Thus it is no accident that in making choices with regard to my practice of clinical psychology, I have been drawn primarily to oppressed populations. My professional pursuits have been mainly at the interface of clinical and community psychology. All of my practicum/externship/internship experiences in graduate school were in low-income, urban neighborhoods and focused largely on people of color.

During my career I've been urged to leave the public sector and establish a private practice. I felt very ambivalent about doing so. At the time that I was first attempting to develop a practice, I held a position at a major teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School, providing psychotherapy to people who had lost loved ones in the September 11th attacks (mostly on the two airplanes that departed from Boston). That position allowed me to work in two areas of longstanding interest to me—traumatic grief, and political violence. Despite enjoying this work I felt that something was missing. Virtually all of the September 11th survivors with whom I worked were from a middle, upper-middle, or upper socioeconomic class backgrounds, as were my private practice referrals. I felt a deep calling to work with the poor and disenfranchised.

In April of 2004, I was offered a job as a psychologist for the Center for Victims of Torture, an organization that provided mental health training and trauma counseling services to Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees. Based in Kissidougou, the job entailed working in community mental health centers that were located in refugee camps. I saw this as a chance to reconnect with my interest in community psychology with the quality of passionate engagement I had felt in the mid-1980s while completing a practicum at an ecumenical, anti-apartheid center near Johannesburg, South Africa. During that period of severe apartheid repression, I had became familiar with the experiences of survivors of torture and other human rights violations and impressed by their courage and strength.

Since that year in CVT-Guinea, I have become more keenly aware that to feel professionally fulfilled I need to devote significant time and energy to disempowered populations. By doing so, I am giving expression to values that originate in both my family history and larger ethnic identity. Although I am sometimes faced with social disapproval for "failing" to achieve greater financial success or rise in a more mainstream psychology setting (e.g., a medical center or university), I have the sense that my work is grounded in an important part of my heritage. Empathy for, and a commitment to empowerment of, the marginalized and oppressed comes to me not only through my constitution but through my profound feelings of personal

connection with a legacy of ethnic, religious, and political persecution and mass violence.

2. Respect Religious and Ethnocultural Pluralism

As a small minority in the United States and worldwide, Jews are very familiar with the feelings of discomfort, invisibility and alienation that arise when persons in positions of authority mistakenly assume that everyone is of the same religious or ethnocultural background, or engage in any form of proselytizing. In my work with clients from a wide variety of backgrounds, and particularly in the support groups I have led, I have tried hard to ensure that there is space for diverse forms of religious and ethnocultural expression. In Africa, I have facilitated counseling groups in which singing, drumming, rituals, and Christian and Muslim prayers were combined with Western approaches to healing. In the Middle East, I have worked with Iraqi clients who have chosen to utilize Koranic verses and traditional Arab proverbs as part of their recovery from war trauma.

3. Recognize the Power of Words

In the Hebrew Bible, a belief in the power of language is ever-present. Indeed, God calls the world into being via speaking. Jewish culture, likewise, places a strong value on verbal expression. The healing power of words has been a key theme in my professional practice.

I firmly believe that whatever can be named and talked about can be borne, and, conversely, that whatever is unnamed and unspoken wreaks havoc on the psyche and will manifest in emotional and behavioral problems. Beginning in graduate school and continuing to the present, a major component of my work has been helping clients find words to express what has seemed inexpressible. This has been particularly meaningful for me in my work as a cotherapist in groups for persons bereaved by the suicide of a relative.

I also started and led a therapy group for girls who had been sexually abused. For the most part, these girls had been told by their relatives and others not to speak about the abuse. In the group, my coleader and I took the opposite view: we encouraged the girls to talk about what had occurred, to share their thoughts and feelings with one another, and to tell someone immediately if anyone ever tried to abuse them again. We also invited the girls to write letters to the social caseworker and the non-offending parent. As with so many clients, we found that in overcoming familial and societal pressures toward silence, these girls felt relieved and invigorated.

Many of the traumatic experiences that people underwent in the recent Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars were also considered, by the survivors

and their families and communities, to be unspeakable. Nearly all of the teenage and adult women had been raped and a significant number bore children as a result of these rapes. Many of these women had been captured and kept as sexual slaves for rebel commanders for months and even years at a time. Others had witnessed their loved ones being tortured, mutilated, and killed.

Regardless of how horrific the events, an important component of my treatment approach was helping the client find the words to name and describe them. In the vast majority of cases, these clients had not talked about their experiences with anyone, not even their closest relatives and friends.

During my graduate training in psychology I concurrently completed a two-year training program to become a registered biblio/poetry therapist. I have utilized expressive writing, preexisting poems, storytelling, and book-making in many of my clinical interventions with both individuals and groups, in a wide variety of professional settings. This respect for the power of language is also a reason that much of my clinical work is informed by psychoanalytic theory, for psychoanalysis is grounded in the view that it is beneficial to put memories and emotions into words. Clearly, my belief in the psychological importance of speaking is further informed by my own experience, in my family of origin, of the silence that surrounded my father's death. Yet my passion for the redemptive power of language is also strongly influenced by my Jewish identity, and the privileged place of words in Jewish religion and culture.

4. Resist Tyranny and Pursue Justice

Jewish religion and culture are characterized by a belief in the importance of resisting tyranny and pursuing justice. These values enter into my work as a psychologist in numerous ways. In fact, a basic backdrop for all of my work is my abhorrence of abuses of power and my valuing of human rights and physical and psychological liberation.

Drawing on both my Jewish and feminist identities, I attempt to support girls and women in gaining respect, equal opportunities, greater self-worth, knowledge, and wider choices with regard to their life paths. I have worked with torture survivors from a wide variety of national, ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds and have affirmed these survivors' efforts to seek safety, reparations, and redress. As the psychologist for the United Nations war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone (Special Court) for nearly two and a half years, I provided psychological support to victims of war crimes as they gave public testimony about their victimization. My decision to seek the position at the Special Court was rooted in my view that in the aftermath of human rights violations, justice is a crucial component of psychological and social repair.

5. Do Not Bow to False Gods

The folktales, Biblical stories, and values I was exposed to in my family, in Hebrew school, and in the wider Jewish community instilled in me an abhorrence of idol worship in its many manifestations and a conviction that I will not bow—literally or metaphorically—to anyone but the invisible, noncorporeal God. This principle has found expression in several aspects of my practice.

One of the major false gods that I have refused to bow to in my work as a clinical psychologist is mainstream psychiatry, with its heavily medical model of psychological suffering and its rigid adherence to diagnostic categorizations that oversimplify human experience and that, in many instances, inappropriately pathologize responses to intolerable situations.

6. Claim the Capacity for Chutzpah

Chutzpah is a Yiddish word with nuances of meaning that render it difficult to translate into English. Some synonyms include audacity, cheekiness, daring, nerve, effrontery, pushiness, arrogance, gall, presumption, ballsiness, brazenness, impudence, and guts. It is traditionally used as an insult (as in "what chutzpah!"), namely, when a person disregards social expectations or behaves offensively.

In contemporary American society, however, chutzpah can also refer positively to behavior that is nonconformist and gutsy. In fact, chutzpah is a characteristic that is widely respected and admired by many North American Jews. It is also a characteristic that I proudly claim as part of my legacy, transmitted across at least the past four generations of women in my family.

In many settings where I have worked, the provision of psychotherapy without simultaneous efforts to advocate on behalf of the client's larger needs would be morally and professionally questionable. In many instances, a weekly 45 minute clinical session is simply not sufficient to address the ongoing reality-based external causes of the client's suffering. Furthermore, quite often it would be irresponsible to proceed with psychotherapy without also addressing unhealthy and dangerous conditions in the client's social environment.

Thus, I have often found it helpful to bring to bear the chutzpah of my ancestors so as to better serve my clients. In the United States, this sometimes took the form of having to battle managed care companies and Medicaid so that clients could obtain the mental health services to which they were legally entitled. In Guinea and Sierra Leone, this often took the form of helping clients access food, shelter, protection, and medical care through advocating with nongovernmental organizations or the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).

Occasionally I find that colleagues see me as "pushy," particularly people from White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant backgrounds, who tend to be

more comfortable with women who embody discreetness, moderation, and restraint. When dealing with vulnerable populations I feel it is important to have the capacity to take a stand—and in particular, a stand that presupposes an ability to challenge abuses of power and defend human rights. My practice of psychotherapy, thus, is informed by a valuing of the capacity for boldness in thought and action.

In my efforts to achieve wholeness as a person and clinician, I have benefited from the lessons taught me by clients and colleagues from other ethnic backgrounds, in which quiet acceptance, dignity, and humility are important values. Similarly, I believe, and hope, that my clients and supervisees have felt enriched by lessons I have tried to teach them about the benefits of assertive advocacy. Chutzpah can undeniably be experienced by others (particularly by non-Jews) as off-putting but when applied thoughtfully and strategically can contribute to clients' quality of life in significant ways.

7. Encourage Critical Thinking

The word "Israel," as the name of a major patriarch of the Jewish people, and as a synonym for the people as a whole, originates in the Biblical narrative in which Yaakov (Jacob, son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham) falls asleep and, in a dream, wrestles with a divine angel and prevails. This dream experience was so significant for him that he decides to change his name from "Yaakov" to "Israel," a Hebrew term that is variously translated as "he who wrestled with God and survived," "one who struggles with God," or, more simply, "God-wrestler."

This notion is a core aspect of my Jewish identity and finds expression in personal as well as professional contexts. Of course, the concept or image of struggling with God can be interpreted in a number of ways. For me, it has usually taken the form of encouraging critical thinking among clients, colleagues, trainees, and within myself.

It was only after many years of working alongside colleagues from various non-Jewish backgrounds that I truly understood the extent to which the questioning of authority and development of critical thinking are not only *not* supported but are actually strongly discouraged and condemned in many ethnocultural groups. It took me many experiences of interethnic, cross-cultural misunderstandings and tensions to realize that many individuals (and organizations) place a higher premium on social conformity, interpersonal harmony, avoidance of argumentativeness, quietness, and respect for authority than on rigorous critical analysis, challenging the status quo, and outspoken argumentation.

An example of a professional setting in which this aspect of my Jewish identity was salient was a series of 10-session counseling groups I led for Liberian clients as part of the war-trauma treatment program in Guinea, West Africa. The groups were designed to address a number of core issues faced

by Liberian refugees. Sooner or later, in virtually every group, questions would arise as to how to relate—both intrapsychically, as well as externally, given that many of the perpetrators continued to live in the community—to the people who had harmed them and their loved ones during the war. Often, many of the clients' initial remarks were fairly simplistic and superficial. Typical comments were, "Well, we should just forgive them—that's what the Bible says," or "My pastor said I should forgive him." These comments, coming from victims who had endured very extreme forms of deliberate brutality and violence, usually elicited in me a feeling of discomfort and even suspicion. Through clinical experience with survivors of severe human rights violations, I sensed that there was more beneath the surface and that these statements did not adequately reflect the full range of clients' authentic emotions.

In my capacity as therapist, I had to walk a narrow line between respecting the clients' stated values and exploring their deeper feelings. Walking this line usually led to productive discussions in which clients came to think more rigorously about issues of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparations, and restitution. Before engaging in these explorations, most clients viewed forgiveness as the only alternative to revenge—which the clients defined as doing to the perpetrator something very similar to what the perpetrator had done to them or their loved ones (e.g., violent assault). It was as though they felt pressured to choose between two extremes—total forgiveness or absolute revenge.

Through examining these questions in the group, clients began to entertain alternative views and to pave a middle path in which forgiveness was possible, but under specific conditions. Many came to appreciate the validity of anger and indignation as natural human responses to deliberate cruelty. Many also came to consider the presence or absence of genuine remorse and of a sincere acknowledgement and apology by the perpetrator as conditions for forgiveness. Clients also became more aware of the differences between revenge and restitution and of the possibility of seeking justice through the restoration of collective legal and judicial institutions rather than via violent, direct assault. There was, in a sense, a "Talmudic" quality to this process of utilizing dialogue to develop more elaborated, nuanced positions.

Jewish ethnocultural values cause me to challenge assumptions, and to support clients in moving beyond simplistic or superficial answers toward psychological and social stances characterized by greater complexity, authenticity, and depth. This is not to imply that a belief in the importance of forgiveness is lacking in depth. On the contrary, the capacity to forgive those who have wronged one or one's family can constitute a profound spiritual attitude. In working extensively with victims, however, it became possible to differentiate between clients who had achieved that level of spiritual insight and those who professed the importance of forgiveness merely because an authority figure had told them that that was the "right" belief.

Another area in which I have sought to challenge widely accepted views and encourage critical thinking has been the Jewish tradition of circumsizing eight-day-old male infants. I consider myself to have a strong Jewish identity, I am known by a Hebrew nickname, I am fluent in Hebrew, I belong to a synagogue, and I observe many Jewish holidays and customs. Nevertheless, my opposition to circumcision, a practice that many Jews mistakenly view as a defining characteristic of Jewishness, means that a large majority of Jews would consider me not to be truly Jewish and, if made aware of my views, would not include or welcome me. It is ironic that a stance that I developed as a result of the quintessentially Jewish capacity for questioning and critical thinking would lead to ostracism by a large portion of the mainstream Jewish community.

8. Cherish Community

I am only two generations removed from my grandmother's shtetl in the forest steppes of Russia, and my sensibility has been shaped by the attitudes of ethnic bonding and respect for community ties that characterized that milieu. These social norms have been discussed at length in the books *Life is With People: A Cultural History of the Shtetl* and *World of Our Fathers*. Despite the fact that my feminism, political views, criticism of Israeli governmental policies, and opposition to circumcision sometimes cause me to feel separate from other Jews, the reality is that Jewishness always has been and remains a very salient part of my identity and my being in the world. Often I am troubled by and critical of many aspects of the mainstream American Jewish community. Nevertheless, I value opportunities to work with Jewish clients, and I believe that a shared ethnocultural heritage can strengthen the therapeutic relationship.

The norms for nonverbal communication that are common in the mainstream North American Jewish community are different from those found among many non-Jews. The former include gesturing with one's hands while talking, a fairly rapid rate of speech, a fairly loud volume, using a questioning tone even when uttering statements that are not questions, and a quality of emotional expressiveness that manifests facially, vocally, and gesturally. In my personal and professional experience, I have found that these nonverbal behaviors tend to be explicitly or covertly disdained among White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (as well as some other white non-Jewish ethnic groups). As a result of the intuitive perception of this disapproval, many Jewish clients may feel more comfortable with a Jewish (versus non-Jewish) therapist. If a non-Jewish therapist is working with a Jewish client, the possibility of a strong therapeutic relationship and a successful treatment will be enhanced if the therapist is at least familiar and comfortable with Jewish cultural and ethnic norms.

9. Engage in Honest Self-Examination

Jewish religion and culture place a high value on honest self-examination. The holiest day of the Jewish calendar (Yom Kippur) is a day during which

every Jew is expected to search his or her soul so as to courageously acknowledge to himself or herself and God those times in the past year during which he or she has "missed the mark." The weeks leading up to this holiday are known as the Days of Awe, during which Jews are required to devote considerable time and energy to soul-searching and repentance. In those instances in which one has wronged another human being, it is not permitted to ask forgiveness of God until one has first apologized to the wronged person and asked for his or her forgiveness.

The value that Jews place on self-examination can also be found in secular settings. Jewish writers, poets, and singer-songwriters have tended to be quite comfortable with confessional modes of expression. Jewish painters and filmmakers have also drawn on their internal experiences in order to make art. The Jewish background of Sigmund Freud undoubtedly had some bearing on his development of a curative approach that relies on looking inward and describing one's deepest thoughts, feelings, and memories. It is also not a coincidence that in several countries (e.g., the U.S., Argentina, South Africa), Jews tend to be more comfortable with the premises and practices of psychodynamic psychotherapy than are many other ethnocultural groups. In my clinical work, this value is expressed in the soul-searching I engage in regarding my responses to clients, and in my efforts to process my thoughts and feelings about the work via discussions with colleagues, supervision, writing, and in my own psychotherapy.

10. See That the Person Across From You is Your Sister or Brother

In the Book of Genesis—the first book in the Hebrew Bible—the idea is set forth that every human being is created in the image of God. Although I don't think of this concept in purely religious terms, I do try my best to see the humanity, worth, and spiritual core of every client. This effort is, to a large extent, grounded in my Jewish identity.

According to a well-known anecdote, a student approached a Jewish sage and, in a rather provocative attitude, asked the sage to teach him the whole of Judaism while he (the student) was standing on one foot. As the student held one foot in the air precariously, the sage replied, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and that which is hateful to you, do not do unto others. All the rest is commentary: go and learn it."

This "golden rule" is a crucial component of my practice of psychotherapy. Even when the client is from a very different background from mine, it is possible to find a way to behave toward him or her in a manner similar to that which you would wish for yourself or your loved one(s) if you or someone in your family were in need of psychological care. This requires empathic attunement and a genuine willingness to imagine how the situation is experienced by the client from within his or her own frame of reference.

Sometimes, in order to generate a richer quality of connection with a client, I will visualize a kind of thread extending between that person and me, linking us together in our common humanity. Other times, through becoming aware of the depth and pace of my breathing and consequently relaxing the area of my chest cavity, I am able to experience a physical sensation that corresponds to the notion of "opening the heart." I have found that regardless of behavior or circumstances, if I truly concentrate, it is possible to feel a genuine sense of respect and compassion for virtually any member of the human species.

I have had the opportunity to test this belief in a wide variety of settings. These include a clinic for torture survivors located in an Arab country in the Middle East, a community mental health center in a refugee camp in Guinea, a long-term inpatient unit at a state hospital in Washington, DC, a public school for low-income children in New York, and a stretch of land, in Sierra Leone, that is inhabited by individuals who lost an arm or a leg in that country's long civil war. In several situations I was able to engage in successful advocacy and networking that resulted in refugee individuals or families being accepted for resettlement in the United States.

Though sometimes these efforts resulted from my moral principles, more often I looked into the eyes of the man, woman, or child in need and truly had the feeling that I was seeing one of my own relatives, even if the skin color and features and accent and dress were unlike those of anyone in my family. Perhaps, as suggested by the rabbi in the Hasidic tale recounted by Buber, I was seeing the face of a brother or sister, but more likely, the face that I saw was that of my grandmother, Gittel, who came on a ship, across the Atlantic ocean, to Ellis Island, when she was 12 years old.

* * *

An image from October 2005:

My uncle Joel calls from Atlanta to tell me that my grandmother, Gittel, 95, is in her final week of life. I have to make a decision about whether to fly home immediately or delay my return home by one day so that I can fulfill my professional commitments as the psychologist for the United Nations war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone, where my job is to be present in the courtroom to support vulnerable witnesses while they testify. Today is the final day of the AFRC prosecution, and this is the final witness. He is a man whose wife was raped and killed in his presence and whose arm was deliberately amputated.

As I sit in the courtroom listening to his testimony, my mind keeps wandering back to my grandmother, Gittel. The Hebrew Home in Hartford Connecticut seems so far away, such a different world from this courtroom in West Africa. The vast Atlantic Ocean stretches between

> us. My awareness keeps alternating between the two locations, trying to hold the two realities simultaneously in mind: this man showing the judges the stump where his arm was amputated by renegade soldiers, and my grandmother on her deathbed at the nursing home in Connecticut.
>
> Then, gradually, the guilt I have been feeling about delaying my return begins to fade. I have a deep sense that I am exactly where I am supposed to be, doing precisely what I am supposed to be doing. I start to feel that here in this courtroom, as I strive to support this bearing of witness, I am honoring my grandmother's life. I am being true to her legacy.

I flew from Freetown to Boston the next day and drove to Hartford as fast as I could. My grandmother died four days later, in my presence. Born and raised in a small village near Kiev, she was my most direct link to the land of my foremothers and forefathers, my closest connection to the Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European shtetl communities in which those forms of Jewish ethnic identity that most strongly influence my psychotherapy practice, my international humanitarian activities, and my overall life journey were forged.

May her soul rest in peace. May her spirit continue to inform my work. And may her memory be for a blessing.