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An Overview of Jewish Beliefs and Traditions for Counselors

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An Overview of Jewish Beliefs and Traditions for Counselors

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is estimated that approximately 82% of the United States' population practices some form of religion, with 78% of the population define themselves as Christians (Pew, 2008). However that landscape seems to be changing. New immigrants to the United States are outside of those proportions, with higher numbers of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists being represented. In addition more people are changing their religious beliefs and practices in adulthood (Pew, 2008). This change of the American religious landscape makes it more important than ever for counselors to be informed of religious practices and cultural values.

In most counselor training programs emphasis has been placed on the importance of multicultural knowledge and competence. While being educated about cultures different from a counselor's own, and how culture may affect the counseling relationship is emphasized, often these classes focus mainly on racial identity with less emphasis on religious diversity (Miller, 2003).

Coinciding with this lack of training is an often tumultuous relationship between counselors and religious leaders. Some religious leaders have voiced fear that counselors will pathologize religion and undermine a client's faith (Miller, 2003). These select religious leaders believe instead that the help a person needs can and should be provided by their religious leaders in a way that coincides with the practicing of their faith. This fear comes with some degree of merit, as there have been counselors who view religion as nothing more than a coping mechanism that can be replaced with

healthier methods, a trend dating back to Freud's theories (Hoffman, Guy & Feldman 2007).

In addition some counselors are also likely to fear that differing religious views between a client and counselor could negatively impact the client counselor dynamic. Some see discussing religion as a potential minefield that could damage the therapeutic relationship, worrying that differing religious beliefs and practices could lead to a loss of trust (Miller, 2003). However, new research is suggesting that religion and counseling can work together, often with better results than operating in isolation, for the well being of clients (Miller). These findings have resulted in a greater push for education regarding religions and their practices in counseling. Understanding a client's spiritual and religious views will help a counselor understand and ultimately assist with a client's mental health (Miller and Thorsen,1999).

This paper is designed to aid in the process of familiarizing counselors with the tenets of one specific faith, Judaism, and the beliefs of Jewish clients that may impact the counseling process. In order to help counselors more deeply understand the Jewish population, this paper will focus exclusively on the Jewish faith and will explore the history of the religion as well as common practices and beliefs of modern American Jews. The paper is designed to help those unfamiliar with the Jewish faith to begin to understand how a client's Judaism may affect his or her life and the counseling relationship. It is important to note that this paper is designed to be an introduction and an overview of Judaism. It does not represent all of the knowledge available regarding Judaism, because, as with many religions, variations between factions, communities, families and individuals are likely to exist. The examples provided here are selected

because of their likeness to be significant, however, there are many not included that to a Jewish client may be more important. While this paper will not provide a comprehensive manual for counselors working with Jewish clients, it will enhance familiarity with the framework and vocabulary of Judaism, so that the process of exploring what that faith means to a client may be more accessible. By increasing one's understanding of Judaism counselors will be better able to understand what their client's faith means to them, and will be able to provide more appropriate help.

Miller (2003) cautions in the introduction to her text on religion and counseling that:

Even when a client self-identifies as being of a particular spiritual or religious group, the counselor needs to explore that identification for that particular client.

Where a client lives in a country, in combination with his or her religious community's culture can have a great impact on that client's beliefs, values and the application of those beliefs and values. The counselor needs to be very careful making assumptions regarding the spiritual or religious dimensions of a client's life. (p5)

To begin, it is important to note that many Jewish scholars and writers do not write out the word God, instead writing g-d. This is a sign of respect; it is Jewish custom not to write God's name outside of religious texts, especially in a place where it may be erased, deleted or thrown away. For purposes of clarity, and because this is not a custom the author shares, in this paper you will see God used, except in a few instances of quotations from other authors.

It also is important at this time to acknowledge my own cultural and religious identity. As I am not Jewish the information provided here in is not from an “insiders” prospective. While I am not a Christian, I have grown up in the United States many of my cultural values and habits have been influenced by Christianity. It was my goal in writing this paper to minimize any cultural biases I may have while acknowledging that my own views are likely to be influential as well. It is my hope that all counselors will be aware as they read this, both of my potential biases, and their own.

CHAPTER TWO

The foundation of Judaism

This first section discusses the religious beliefs of Judaism, including its connection to other religions. A brief overview of the important historical events is also provided.

Monotheism

Judaism is one of the three monotheistic religions, meaning that the Jewish people believe in a singular higher power, God. The earliest religions of the world focused on multiple gods or deities. The birth of Judaism marked the first monotheistic religion. From the Jewish faith, Islam and Christianity were established, meaning that all three religions have the same origins, and in fact the God that each of them refers to viewed by many scholars and believers as the same God (Young, 2009).

In addition to a common ancestry there are some key beliefs and principles that can be found throughout the three monotheistic religions. For instance, all three religions embrace the monotheistic concept of time, meaning, that there was a beginning to all things and there will be an end. Time is linear, and for humans there is only one life. However, all three believe in some form of spiritual after life, and none believe in reincarnation or rebirth (Miller, 2003).

Monotheism incorporates the concept of free-will, the ability of all people to choose their actions. God may have a path, but we are free to break from that path. One must choose to live life in accordance with God and moral codes of conduct religions provide. Choices, however, will have eternal consequences (Miller, 2003). What those consequences are vary based on religious views.

While the parallels and similarities between the three religions are significant, there are also differences between the three. These differences often have a significant impact on the lives of those that practice each faith and their interaction with one another. Similar to family ancestry, their origins may be connected but each is unique, though differences often feel more significant than similarities. The following sections will illustrate beliefs and teaching most commonly associated with Judaism.

Defining Judaism

In his article on working with Jewish clients, Schlosser (2006) offers this summary as a way of defining Judaism: “All at once Judaism is a culture, a religion, an ethnicity, and a set of traditions that is embedded in Jewish people’s expectations, belief systems and family dynamics” (p 424).

There are roughly 13 million Jews worldwide, 6 million of whom, reside in the United States, the highest number in any one country, the second being Israel with an estimated 5 million. (Young, 2009) Geographically, throughout history, Jews have migrated throughout the world, especially the Middle East, Europe and North America. This complex history of relocation has impacted the Jewish culture significantly, and geographical origin is likely to impact the beliefs and practices of any Jewish client.

There is no uniform way to be Jewish as Jews vary in their cultural and ethnic identification, adherence to religious orthodoxy, and practice of cultural customs and Holiday observances (Friedman, Friedlander, & Blustein, 2005). What all Jews do share is a common ancestry, which makes up the core of their culture, and is often identified as the single most important component of the Jewish identity.

For someone coming from a non-Jewish background, or simply the greater American culture which is infused with Christian concepts, one of the most difficult concepts to understand about the Jewish culture is that it does not view itself as a religion. In fact there is no Hebrew word that translates to have the same meaning as “religion” does in English. The closest that can be found, or words that are used in Hebrew to signify a similar concept, are “dat” which would more accurately translate to law, and “Emunch” which is closer in meaning to the phrase ‘trust in.’ (DeLange, 1999). Judaism is a culture and a community; in fact, if a person does not believe in the spiritual or faith components of Judaism they may be still considered a Jew. It is estimated that 75% of the Jews living in Israel and 30% of the Jews in the United States identify as secular or nonreligious (Young, 2009). This means that they may not believe in God, attend religious services, or practice Jewish traditions, but they still consider themselves (and are considered by other Jews) to be Jewish.

DeLange (1999) describes Judaism by stating “to be a Jew means first and foremost to belong to a group, the Jewish people, and the religious beliefs are secondary, in a sense, to this corporate allegiance” (p. 292). The cultural elements, including the rituals regarding food and clothing, are seen as more key components to the Jewish identity than the spiritual faith itself.

There is also much debate about whether or not Jewish people can be defined as a ‘race’, which would imply that all Jews were descended from a similar ancestral line and geographical region. While there is common ancestry for many Jews, especially the earliest Jews, a common biological thread is not considered to be a component of being Jewish now. It is best to view Judaism as a culture, meaning that there may be a racial

component, it is not necessary, and while there is a spiritual religion, it also is not a requirement for being considered Jewish (Young, 2009).

Kertzer has identified four elements that he believes are pertinent to all Jews, and therefore define the core of Judaism. They are; “(a). an emphasis on the importance of life, (b) freedom for all people, (c) balancing the rights of humans with animals and the earth and (d) human action to repair the world” (as cited in Schlosser, 2006 p 427). In short, Kertzer and Schlosser define this philosophy as a commitment to Justice. Schlosser (2006) also adds the importance of intellectual pursuit, personal insight and debate as important educational achievements. The highest cultural values are family and tradition.

Jews believe that there is only one God and that he is perfect. They view God as existing outside of our views of time and space; he has always existed and will always exist. He does not have physical form. Perhaps most importantly, he is not the overseer of the universe but rather the universe is a part of him, he is therefore present in all things at all times (Finkelstein, 1999). God is all-knowing and will reward the righteous and punish evil doers (DeLange, 1999).

Language

The language most commonly associated with Judaism is Hebrew, which is the primary and original language for all text and services, and learning at least some Hebrew is considered an important part of being Jewish (Miller, 2003). The other language commonly associated with Judaism is Yiddish, which is a language originating in Europe from the combining of German and Hebrew. It is not an official language of the Jewish

faith, but rather one that is commonly spoken by people of European Jewish decent (Miller, 2003). Most ceremonies and services in the United States are conducted in English, with some Hebrew readings, although this may vary based on region and faction of Judaism (Diamant, 2007).

Views on Humanity

The Jewish faith is based on the principle that all humans have free will. We also all have impulses that are both good and bad and that we exist in a constant flux between these two impulses, meaning that people are neither born good nor bad and we all have the potential to be either. Bad acts are viewed as breaks with God, and God will take into account intent and severity when assessing their soul (Young, 2009).

The Jewish culture emphasizes not only personal adherence to Jewish law, but also a responsibility of all Jews to extend their influence to other Jews in hopes of guiding them to live within the laws as well. This is an important component of Judaism because it means that those who are affected by another's bad acts share some (though not equal) responsibility for not influencing that person to live by the Torah. Finkelstein (1999) illustrated this by saying "Judaism considers every member of the faith responsible for the moral conduct of those neighbors over whom he is able to exert influence" (296). This concept is especially true when focusing on family dynamics, which will be addressed more fully later.

The Torah

The Torah, or sacred scroll, is the primary text of the Jewish faith. In fact, it is the founding document of all three monotheistic religions; it appears as the Old Testament in the Christian Bible, and as the beginning foundation of the Islamic Quran.

The Torah consists of the five books of Moses. The first book, Genesis, outlines the creation of the earth and covers up until the formation of the 12 tribes, who were the first Israelites, and thus the first Jews. The second book is Exodus, which contains the story of Moses, who frees the Israelites from enslavement by the Egyptians and receives the Ten Commandments from God. The Ten Commandments are seen as the foundation of the Jewish faith and all behavior is judged based on its adherence to the commandments. The following three books include Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which outline more of the collective Jewish history as well as God's law regarding behavior (Young, 2009).

Every synagogue must have an official scroll that was created according to strict guidelines set to ensure that there are no variations between copies. This scroll must be contained in a special ark, typically a handcrafted wooden container, with an eternal flame burning before it. These scrolls are handwritten by a specially trained Rabbi. The ark must be placed to face the direction of Jerusalem and during prayer all members must face it (Finkelstein, 1999).

The Torah is the written law for the Jewish People. The term "Jewish Law" refers to the regulations of the Jewish community and all Jews are expected to abide by them, however, they are not seen as a social law. Historically, they have never been used to

manage a society. These laws are seen as a personal commitment, a covenant between an individual and God (Finkelstein, 1999). The Torah contains 613 Mitzvots which roughly translates to “commands” or “good deeds” in English. These are decrees from God about how people should behave. These Mitzvots can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They are occasionally in conflict with one another, and most scholars and Rabbis’ believe that the only reconciliation for this conflict is personal choice (Diamant, 2007).

Violating Jewish law, either via a singular event or by making a choice in ones everyday life that is incongruent with the Jewish faith, does not bar someone from the Jewish community. To be in violation of one Jewish law does not excommunicate a Jew from the community, and he or she is still expected to adhere to all other Jewish laws. Their break with God is seen as a matter between the person and God (Finkelstein, 1999).

Tanak

While the Torah is most commonly referred to as the primary text for the Jewish People, it is actually only one component of the larger Tanak, which is an acronym standing for Torah, Nevi'im and Kethuvi'im. Nevi'im or the Prophetic books, contains the history of the early Jews. Most notably it includes the history of the creation of Israel, the first king David, and his son (the second king) Solomon who built the first temple in Jerusalem. The distinction between these writings and that of the Torah is that the Nevi'im is not thought of as the word of God, but rather that of his prophets who were commissioned by God to challenge the Jewish people to obey their covenant with God (Young, 2009).

The final book of the Tanak is Kethuvi'im, which roughly means "writings". This is a collection of literature and writings on the Torah and Nevi'im. It includes more stories of the prophets and other prominent early Jews, along with poems, proverbs, and psalms that reflect the teachings of the Torah (Young, 2009).

The Talmud

The final essential component to the Jewish faith is the Talmud, often referred to as the oral history (although it does exist in written form). The Talmud is collection of writings focusing on implementing the Ten Commandments and the text of the Torah. It is a large body of work that has been added to throughout history by many Rabbis, authors, and editors (Steinsaltz, 1999). The Talmud explores how the Torah should be applied to everyday life and is designed to help Jews apply the Torah to every aspect of their life. However, the Talmud cannot be viewed as a book of answers on how best to apply the 10 commandments, as it is a place for scholarly debate, in which opposing ideas are discussed and supported by the text of the Torah (Young, 2009). Often opposing arguments can both be supported by the Torah. Hoffman (2007a) wrote, in regards to this practice of debate, that if it has not been figured out in seven thousand years, perhaps it is not meant to be; instead the debate and the reinterpretation are what is important.

The beginning of the Jewish faith

The story of Abraham is outlined in the Torah. It is said that God spoke directly to Abraham, identified himself as the one and only true God, and called on Abraham to denounce all other gods. Abraham and his wife Sarah moved from what was

Mesopotamia to what later became known as Israel. Their twelve grandsons names' inspired the names of the 12 tribes, or the Nations of Israel. From these 12 nations came all Israelites, and thus Jews are descended. Abraham is viewed as the first Jew, and he is present in the beginning points for Christianity and Islam as well (Young, 2009).

Types of Judaism

Judaism can be viewed on a spectrum from those who are very spiritually devout and traditional to those who are more liberal and secular members. There are several types of Jews who can be defined by general common characteristics; however within each of these groups there is often a wide range of variation when it comes to spiritual beliefs and adherence to Jewish customs. First, Orthodox Jews are strict observers of the Torah and the Jewish traditions. They are likely to live in small communities separated from non-Orthodox Jews because they typically believe that Jewish law cannot appropriately be observed in an integrated community (Young, 2009). Orthodox Jews maintain a strict kosher diet and observe the Sabbath by refraining from work. Work is defined broadly and includes such things as using electricity, cooking, driving, cleaning, and handling money (Schlosser, 2006). Those who are committed to observing the Sabbath in this way need to live close to their temple in order to walk to Sabbath services. (Schlosser) There are a few Orthodox Jews who live within an integrated community; they are often referred to as Intergrationalists (Young, 2009).

Hasidic Jews are similar to Orthodox Jews in their beliefs. The main difference between Hasidic Jews and Orthodox Jews is often the difference in dress. Orthodox Jews tend to wear more modern clothing, and the men wear a yarmulke, or skull cap

(Schlosser, 2006). Hasidic men typically wear all black and peyos, which are curls on either side of the face, and a black hat instead of a yarmulke. Women wear modern but conservative clothes with sleeves past the elbow. Some women wear wigs and may shave their heads as a commitment to modesty. They adhere to the strictest guidelines of the Jewish faith and like the Orthodox Jews often live in small self contained communities within larger cities. They believe the Torah is the literal translation of God's law. Women and men sit separately during all services and ceremonies, which are conducted in Hebrew (Schlosser).

Conservative Judaism is next on the spectrum. This is typically seen as a "middle of the road" approach. Ideologically, Conservative Judaism falls between Reform and Orthodox factions. It developed after the Reform movement as people were looking to have their Jewishness play a more central role in their lives, while maintaining some of the more progressive interpretations (Diamant, 2007). Conservative Jews adhere to the Torah and keep it foremost in their lives; however, they leave room to accommodate for social change. One example of this approach is that some conservative factions will ordain female Rabbis, as they view women in a more equitable role than does the Orthodox community (Young, 2009). Conservative Jews have relaxed many of the traditions around the Sabbath. While attending religious services is still essential they are more likely to drive and participate in some other work activities (Schlosser 2006). They are also likely to keep Kosher (Diamant, 2007).

Reform Judaism is seen as the most progressive of the subdivisions. Services are no longer held in Hebrew and many of the restrictions, especially about keeping Kosher and the Sabbath, are relaxed. They focus on the belief that people should choose for

themselves which practices they wish to integrate into their lives based on their own sense of what will bring them closer to God (Diamant, 2007). They have also moved away from emphasis on the arrival of a future savior, a focus for the conservative factions, and instead focus worship on the connection of the community as a culture. Lastly one significant difference is that typically Orthodox and Conservative Jews see their primary identity as Jewish. For example, what country they live in is of little importance. This is different for Reform Jews who are encouraged to view the country they are born in as their primary identity, and to be loyal to that country (Young, 2009). Critics of the Reform movement see their rejection of Jewish practices like wearing the yarmulke and prayer shawl and maintaining a Kosher diet as a way to earn approval from the Christian community. They are seen as making their Jewishness private so that socially they will be more accepted (Diamant).

While the Orthodox and Hasidic Jews view the Torah as the literal word of God, both the Reform and Conservative factions view the Jewish law as an ongoing history that is always changing and evolving (Diamant, 2007). They are likely to put more emphasis on the writings in the Talmud than the Orthodox factions.

Lastly there are several groups of Jews whose focus is not on the spiritual aspects of Judaism but instead focuses on the culture and community. These include the Reconstructionists, and the Secular Jews who do not focus on the spiritual components and may not believe in God or the spiritual teachings at all (Young, 2009). Reconstructionism was founded by Mordecai Kaplan and is based on the notion that Judaism is an evolving civilization with a religious base but not limited to religion alone. He believed that every generation should “reconstruct” Judaism to make it their own (Diamant, 2007). Finally,

secular Jews view themselves as part of the Jewish community, and identify strongly with the practices of Judaism, but may not believe in God, or the Jewish teachings of God (Young).

CHAPTER THREE

Beliefs, Rituals and Holidays

Core Beliefs

The Jewish faith views sin as a missed opportunity to be righteous or kind. It is seen as less of an infraction against God as viewed in the Christian and Muslim faiths. In fact, the Hebrew word for sin is *chayt* which comes from archery and translates to “missing the mark” (Diamant, 2007). When someone has committed a sin against another person, they atone through a process called making *teshuva*, meaning to ask for forgiveness from the person or people you have wronged, not from God. Also, it is not necessary for them to forgive you for the atonement to be seen as complete (Diamant).

One of the central tenants of the Jewish faith is to be committed to the community and charity. *Mitzvot* is the act of doing good deeds and is broken into three components. The concept of *tzedakah*, which roughly translates to “righteous giving” is the act of giving money to charities or those in need. *Gemilut hassadim* is the giving of time and energy; it is volunteering. The final component is *tikkun olam*, or “repair the world” which is the commitment to social justice, or seeking justice for those who are repressed, exploited, or enslaved (Diamant, 2007).

The Jewish faith holds that a Messiah is coming (Christianity, and Islam believe that one Messiah already has). This Messiah will be a descendant of King David and he will be accompanied by the prophet Elijah. He will restore Israel and Jerusalem to their rightful seat of power and peace, harmony and justice will spread throughout the world. At this time both the living and the dead will be judged by God and the dead will rise

from the grave. Jews will be judged based on their adherence to the Torah, but even the non-Jewish will be judged. If the non-Jews have lived a life that followed the basics of the Ten Commandments, they too will be welcome in the Kingdom of God, which is the eternal afterlife (Young, 2009). The importance of the afterlife and even the pending arrival of the Messiah depends on the branch of Judaism. The Reform movement has lessened the emphasis placed on the Messiah, arguing that the present and ones actions in life of far greater importance. Also, while the end of time is outlined in sparse detail in the Torah, there are very few references to it in the two other portions of the Tanak and the Talmud (Young, 2009). Of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism puts the least emphasis on the Messiah and after life.

The Synagogue

A synagogue serves many functions for a Jewish community. It is thought of as a place of assembly (socializing), learning and prayer. These three components are interconnected, and learning is seen as a highly valued form of prayer (Diamant, 2007). Each synagogue must meet a membership requirement of 10 adult men, called a Minyan. In order to be a member of a Minyan a man has to have completed the ritual of Bar Mitzvah, which happens at the age of thirteen (Diamant).

Each synagogue is autonomous and decides independently how it will interpret laws, what percentage of the service will be in Hebrew, and how creative or traditional services will be (Diamant, 2007). The autonomous nature of synagogues means that the beliefs and practices of its members are likely to vary both between factions and from synagogue to synagogue.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath, or Shabbat, is the holiest day of the week. Originating from the creation of the earth as outlined in Genesis, God created the earth in six days, and on the seventh he rested. The seventh day is known as the Sabbath. In Judaism, the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and lasts for twenty-five hours. In the Hebrew calendar the days of the week are identified by their distance from the Sabbath.

Sabbath is seen as a time to make peace and to feel connected to God and the world. It is a time to honor freedom from slavery and a reminder to continue to strive for greater freedom for everyone. It also means redemption and is seen by many as a time to focus on what is right in the world (instead of what is not) (Diamant, 2007). The observance of the Sabbath varies between families and synagogue and factions. In the more liberal factions Friday night is seen as a time for the family and Saturday morning as a time spent at synagogue. The more conservative factions will likely put more emphasis on formal services, often with one on Friday night and multiple services on Saturday. Regardless of faction, Sabbath services involve the reading of the Torah and are focused on a specific passage. These passages are read on a yearlong cycle with the first passage always read during the first week of a new year (Young, 2009).

As mentioned before, for many Jews, work is prohibited on the Sabbath as it is considered a day of rest and prayer. What is considered work varies depending on the branch of Judaism. Orthodox Jews, for example, believe that anything other than attending worship services is work. Other branches look more to honoring the spirit of

not working and will try to refrain from business and employment types of work (Diamant, 2007).

Important Holidays

Rosh Hashanah, which is in the autumn, is the celebration of the New Year based on the Jewish calendar. It is a ten day period of repentance, and it begins with the sounding of a shofar, which is a Ram's horn. During Rosh Hashanah Jews reflect on the previous year, asking God for forgiveness for their violations. It is not entirely a period of mournful reflection but also of hope for the upcoming year. This is symbolized by eating special candy to try to bring about a pleasant new year (Young, 2009).

Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, is immediately following Rosh Hashanah and is a day dedicated to prayer for forgiveness by and reconciliation with God. On Yom Kippur everyone must apologize for the hurtful words and thoughts from the previous year. Fasting is a common component of Yom Kippur, and some view it as a sacrifice to atone for their mistakes, others view it as a way of ensuring that nothing gets in the way of repentance and prayer (Diamant, 2007). Typically on Yom Kippur Jews will spend the entirety of the day at the synagogue. Yom Kippur services focus on the communal confession "We abuse, we betray, we are cruel. We destroy, we embitter, we falsify." The belief is that we all make mistakes and that it is not a matter of if you have done wrong, as we all have things for which we need to apologize (Diamant, 2007).

The most commonly known holiday to non-Jews is Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights. It has become a well known holiday because of its close proximity to Christmas.

However it is important to know that it is not the holiest holiday for Jews, and in large part it has become a celebration of family and children. It originated as a day of remembrance of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the Macabre revolution during the second century C.E. (Young, 2009). Hanukkah now has become a celebration of light, and the story of one day's worth of oil burning for seven days was added much later because many Jews were uncomfortable having a holiday celebrating a military victory (Diamant, 2007).

Passover, also called Pesach, which translates to lamb, is a celebration in spring commemorating the freeing of the Israelites from Egypt following the last plague, the death of all of the first born sons. On the night before God told the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood on the door. When the angel of death came he did not enter the homes with marked doors, literally "passing over" the Jewish sons (Diamant, 2007). Following that night Moses led the Israelites from Egypt and eventually to Israel where they became a free people (Young, 2009). The Passover celebration is in recognition of both of these events.

During Passover, dietary rules are stricter, most notably the restrictions on yeast products. Any bread, pasta or beer containing yeast is forbidden during Passover. For many this means removing it from the home all together (Diamant, 2007). Instead Matzah which is an unleavened (yeast free) bread, becomes common. Yeast free bread is eaten to symbolize how at the time of the escape from Egypt there was no time for bread to rise (Young, 2009).

Passover is commemorated with a highly ceremonial dinner or Sedar on the first and sometimes second night of the eight day celebration. The food at a Sedar is specific and symbolic. A shank bone of lamb, chicken or turkey and a roasted or boiled egg are served to signify the sacrificial offering on the eve of deliverance. Haroset is a salad of nuts and fruit and is meant to symbolize the mortar for bricks and the hard work the Israelites had to do while enslaved. Parsley dipped in salt water and bitter herbs are served to symbolize the suffering of the Israelites. Last on the plate are green vegetables, symbolizing the new season. At the Sedar an extra plate and glass of wine is included at the table for Elijah, the prophet who will announce the arrival of the Messiah (Young, 2009). In some more modern Sedars an orange is also included on the Sedar plate, it is symbolic of the suffering and contribution of the once invisible Jews like women and gays (Diamant, 2007).

Also in the spring is Purim, which is a celebration and intended to be fun. It's celebrated with large parties often with costumes and alcohol. Services at Synagogues include plays and songs which often focus on making fun of Jewish traditions. In fact "Purim Torah" refers to what is seen as the duty to make fun of all things sacred (Diamant, 2007).

Two new holidays have been added to the Jewish calendar in the last fifty years. The first is Israel Independence Day, which is set by the Jewish calendar to line up with the anniversary of May 15th, 1948, the day Israel became an independent nation. The second is Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is 14 days after the start of Passover. One third of the Jewish population was killed by the Nazis during World War II, totaling over six million people. To honor the people lost, Jews light seven candles, one for each

million Jews killed, and the final one for the non-Jews who were either killed or risked their lives to help the Jews (Diamant, 2007).

Rites of Passage

The Jewish culture marks every life change with a specific ceremony or meal. The first of which is at birth with the Brit Milah, which is the circumcision of male infants eight days after birth. The ceremony is held at the synagogue before family and the community. It is one of the oldest traditions of the Jewish people and is thought to symbolize the covenant between God and the child (Diamant, 2007). Some communities will hold ceremonies for the birth of females as well, known as Brit Bat, which is relatively new and not as common or structured. It is most popular in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements (Diamant, 2007). In the Jewish faith there is no ceremony marking a child's entrance into the faith. Jews are considered Jewish from birth; they simply are by virtue of their parents being Jewish (Finkelstein, 1999).

Bar Mitzvah is a celebration marking the transition of a boy into an adult member of the synagogue, however it does not symbolize a full transition to adulthood. Instead it marks when a child is able to fully understand and participate in his faith (Diamant, 2007). Following their Bar Mitzvah boys are bound to the Commandments and participate in all fasts and ceremonies. For the Bar Mitzvah boys learn Hebrew and must read from the Torah before the members of his synagogue. It often follows a year of study about the Torah and the principles of Judaism (Diamant). Similarly there is a Bat Mitzvah for girls; however, that tradition varies depending on the branch of Judaism. For instance Orthodox Jews prohibit women from reading from the Torah and so the Bat

Mitzvah serves the purpose of presenting a girl as a woman to the community (Young, 2009).

Wedding Ceremony

A Jewish marriage ceremony is seen as a contract between the two people entering it. A Rabbi will often oversee the ceremony and provide a blessing, but it is not seen as the Rabbi performing the marriage. In addition to the ceremony before family and the community the bride and groom sign a Ketubah which is a marriage contract, outlining the duties of marriage. Once traditionally signed by the husband, it is now often signed by both husband and wife (Young, 2009).

The Chuppah is an arch like structure, traditionally covered in prayer shawls under which the wedding ceremony is conducted. It is intended to symbolize the home a couple will build together and their commitment to a marriage dedicated to God (Young, 2009). The start of a wedding is marked by a processional of both the bride and the groom's families. During the wedding seven blessings are given, known as Sheva b'rochot (Diamant, 2007).

The ceremony ends with the breaking of a glass. There is not one clear explanation for this tradition; instead there are several explanations for the breaking of the glass. Some believe that it is designed to break the serious mood of the ceremony and mark the beginning of the celebration. Another view is that it is a reminder of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and at a time of joy there must be recognition of the losses the Jewish people have been through. A third explanation is that a broken glass cannot be easily mended and once broken is forever broken. Like marriage it is a

permanent change, by breaking the glass it is hoped that the marriage will not be as fragile. A final less commonly used explanation is that the glass breaking is a sexual symbol for the breaking of a woman's hymen (Diamant, 2007).

During some Jewish weddings, following the ceremony but prior to the celebration the bride and groom spend 10 to 15 minutes secluded from everyone. A tradition called Yichud, it was originally for the couple to consummate the marriage sexually. It is now seen as a time for the bride and groom to spend a few quiet minutes together in the midst of an often hectic day. Traditionally the bride and groom fast on the wedding day and they break that fast together during the Yichud (Diamant, 2007).

The celebration that follows the ceremony has only a few traditional practices and they vary between factions. For instance in the most conservative Orthodox communities the celebration is split by gender with men on one side of a dividing curtain and women on the other. There the bride and groom will be lifted in chairs over the curtain barrier and hold a scarf between them. Though most celebrations are no longer separated this chair dance remains a common ritual (Diamant, 2007).

Interfaith marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew is discouraged. This is in large part because Judaism is seen as more than just faith, but rather a constant way of life and culture. Having a Jewish family, started by a Jewish marriage, is seen as God's law. However, having an interfaith marriage in most cases will not bar a person from the Jewish community and their children will likely be welcome as well. Many Jewish communities are also open to non-Jews converting as long as they do so whole heartedly.

(Finkelstein, 1999). Both interfaith marriage and the openness to converting will vary dramatically depending on the faction and community to which a person belongs.

Like interfaith marriage, divorce is also an issue of great debate and variation. Some of the more liberal factions view divorce as a common practice in modern times and have devised a ritual between the couple with the Rabbi for the dissolution of a marriage; it includes tearing the corner of the Ketubah marriage contract (Diamant, 2007). Others view marriage as a commitment before God that should not be ended.

Funerals and grieving

The Jewish faith encourages a lengthy grieving process following the death of a loved one. This time is marked by very specific customs. The structure is seen as a way to help people grieve, and by taking away any need to plan or make decisions the mourner is left to focus solely on their grief (Diamant, 2007). When someone dies, a window is opened to allow the soul to leave. Traditionally the body cannot be left alone between death and burial, which must happen quickly. Most Jews do not practice embalming or cremation as both are seen as desecrating the body and it is believed that at the end of days the dead will be called forth from the grave to enter the Kingdom of God (Young, 2009). Also, cremation has taken on an additional taboo following the Holocaust (Diamant).

Traditionally the funeral should be held within a day of death, but cannot be held on the Sabbath. Aninut is the time between the death and the funeral and is considered a private time for the family. People do not visit the grieving family, and it would be seen as highly inappropriate to offer any form of condolences. It is not seen as a time to

be comforted (Diamant, 2007). During the funeral mourners will tear their clothing, or wear a torn piece of fabric to symbolize torn clothing. This is done to symbolize the feeling that a person as well as the world has been torn apart by this death (Diamant, 2007).

Shiva is the seven day period following the funeral. During this period people who are in mourning refrain from business and pleasure. Traditionally they will stay home from work and school, and they will not watch television or leave the house. During Shiva the mirrors in the house are covered to discourage vanity. The reason for this time is to grieve. Visitors are now welcome in the home but it is not seen as a social visit, but rather as a time to come share in the grief, therefore typical social visiting norms do not apply. It is common for friends and family to offer support either with household chores or child care. Sending flowers is not common (Diamant, 2007).

Following Shiva is Shloshim, which lasts for thirty days. There are not as many restrictions, and most of life will return to normal. However mourners are expected to attend prayer daily and to refrain from celebrations. When a parent or spouse dies this period is extended for twelve months (Diamant, 2007).

Finally a year after the death the unveiling is held. This is when the head stone is put in place and a small grave side service is held for the family. When visiting cemeteries it is common to leave a stone on the head stone to leave a mark that you had visited (Diamant, 2007).

Clothing

The most easily identifiable clothing tradition of the Jewish People is the yarmulke, or skull cap. This is worn by Jewish men to signify their reverence for God. Orthodox men wear a yarmulke at all times when they are awake. Conservative and Reform Jews are more likely to wear it only during religious ceremonies and holidays (Young, 2009). The talit is a prayer shawl; it is worn to symbolize humility before God, typically on the Sabbath and during ceremonies. Orthodox men wear a small version of a talit under their clothing at all times (Young). Less common in the Conservative and Reform branches, but typically found among the Orthodox is the tefillin, which are small boxes containing important passages from the Torah that are worn strapped to a man's head and left arm during prayer. This is to symbolize how the Torah is always in heart and mind (Young).

Kosher food practices

The Jewish faith is known by many non-Jews for its strict food practices, known as Kosher. Keeping Kosher is guided by practicing Kashrut which is the system of laws or rules about what can be eaten and how it is prepared (Diamant, 2007). The importance of keeping Kosher varies amongst the Jewish People. Orthodox Jews believe it is a strict requirement of God, and it must be followed to illustrate one's commitment to God. Conservative and Reform Jews have varying degrees of belief about the importance of Kosher observance. Some see keeping Kosher as a crucial element of the Jewish life style, they may believe it is God's will that they do so, or they may see that it once served a health purpose that is not strictly necessary at present but that is essential to the Jewish identity (Young, 2009). Many liberal factions view it as not necessary but as choice that

keeps them connected to their Jewish community (Diamant). Some Jews may incorporate certain Kosher observance, such as not eating pork, but do not practice other restrictions.

Kashrut divides food into four categories. Trefe which means “damaged” or “torn” is food which cannot be eaten, this includes any animal with a split hoof or that chews its own cud. Many modern ‘high tech’ foods, such as MSG, food coloring, preservatives and growth hormones are considered trefe (Diamant, 2007). Dairy is ‘milchig’ and meat is ‘fleisging’ these can be eaten but not combined and must be prepared in separate cookware. Pareve is food that is neutral, it includes all fruits and vegetables. Fish which has both fins and scales is also kosher, however seafood that does not have fins and scales, such as shellfish, eels, shark and any sea mammal is prohibited. Most fowl is also permitted with the exception of birds of prey, wild birds, and their eggs (Diamant). All meat should be butchered in a specific manner and performed by a shochet who is a trained kosher butcher. Purchased food must be marked as kosher on the packaging. This means that the processing of that food was overseen by a trained Rabbi. Alcohol is considered kosher, especially certain wines which are often key components to Sedars and celebratory meals (Diamant).

Family and Gender

To be Jewish and to practice Judaism in accordance with the Torah and Talmud is often seen as being not solely about one’s individual actions, but that of his or her family. The family is seen as a unit, with each member bearing responsibility for the other members’ behavior and adherence to Jewish law (Diamant, 2007). Family routines and rituals are encouraged as a way to foster a strong, healthy family connection (Diamant).

Mothers are seen as primarily responsible for the faith and spiritual education of their children. In an interfaith marriage it would be expected that the children would follow the faith of the mother (Finkelstein, 1999). Gender roles, especially the role of women, vary among branches of the Jewish faith. Orthodox Jews, for instance separate men and women during worship, and some of the strictest groups will exclude women from worship all together (Miller, 2003). However more progressive factions are likely to hold feminist values and will ordain female Rabbis (Miller).

There is a debate amongst Jewish leaders and practitioners about how the Torah and Talmud define marriage, and therefore whether same-sex marriage is accepted. For some the Torah interprets marriage as a balance of opposites, with specific roles for the wife and husband (Hoffman, 2007b). While both roles are seen as having equal importance, they are often viewed as having specific rules unique to gender. Women, as wives and mothers, are seen to be the source of unconditional love and support while men, as husbands and fathers, are seen as the source of discipline, expectations and responsibility (Hoffman).

Converting

Converting to the Jewish faith is a relatively new phenomena. Historically conversion was not common because being Jewish was often considered to be a crime and thus practiced in secret. Therefore, new members were not allowed both for their safety and the safety of the current members. Even now Jews do not practice organized recruitment, meaning they do not seek out new members. Anyone wishing to become Jewish must do so as a personal choice and the process is likely to be lengthy in order to

demonstrate his or her commitment to the faith (Finkelstein, 1999). Recently conversation has become more common, especially in cases of interfaith marriages. To become Jewish, a person would need to attend classes, one-on-one meetings with a Rabbi, and study all aspects of the Jewish faith. When the person converting feels he or she has learned enough, the person who is converting meets with a panel from the synagogue for an oral test. If they pass the oral test, a symbolic Brit Milah is held and they are considered a member of the Jewish community (Diamant, 2007).

Jewish views on homosexuality

The Jewish concept of “conservative” does not necessarily coincide with the current American socio-political definitions, which is typically Christian in origin. In the Jewish community it is not uncommon for even strict Orthodox Jews to support liberal social issues. This approach stems from a commitment to social justice. For example some Orthodox Jews support same sex marriage, even though they believe homosexuality is against God’s will, because they believe homosexuality to be an individual issue between the person and God. Their strong belief in free will and personal choice would take precedence over any objection they have with homosexuality. Rabbi Hillel Goldberg (2007), a contemporary scholar on Orthodox Judaism, outlines his view, and that shared by many of the more conservative Rabbis regarding sexuality. He strongly believes that the act of homosexuality is against the Torah, but that the impulse is not. People must make the choice to refrain from homosexual relationships not because they are unnatural but because God has told them not to, and to truly live life by the Torah they must abstain. However, even with his strict views on homosexuality he does not believe that those who are gay should be disowned or shunned by the community or

Temple. He differentiates between seeing the act of being homosexual as bad, versus seeing the person committing the act as bad. In their article Woloweksly and Weinstein (2007) likened homosexual urges to those of premarital sex; having the desire is not a sin but acting upon it is.

In Judaism, like most religions, homosexuality and gay rights remains a divisive topic. However it seems more likely for a member of the Jewish faith to be supportive of LGBT members than members of other religions, or the current cultural norm.

Significant Global Events

Israel, as we know it today, was officially established in 1948 as a homeland for Jews following the end of the Second World War. The first law passed by the newly formed government was to grant citizenship to any Jew, and this has become known as the right of return (Diamant, 2007).

One cannot look at the views of modern Jews without acknowledging the impact of the Holocaust on Jews throughout the world. Six million Jews were killed during World War II and many others were relocated either by choice or force. This has caused significant changes to the mindsets of many Jews. There is now a trend amongst Jews to view God as more passive, who does not have, or chooses not to use his power to intervene on earth. The percentage of Jews identifying as secular has increased dramatically since World War II, these Jews typically hold on to the cultural identity of being Jewish but no longer believe in God or the religious components of being Jewish (Young, 2009).

The Holocaust is known to the Jewish people as The Shoah, which means “catastrophe”, in Hebrew. One of the lasting negative views that has remained since the Holocaust is a notion that Jews are inferior and deserved annihilation, this view can be espoused by both the Anti-Semites and internalized by Jews, which creates an internal conflict and shame regarding their Jewish heritage (Schlosser, 2006).

Anti-Semitism

A poll conducted by the Anti-defamation League (2005) found that 14% of Americans hold strongly anti-Semitic views; this translates to roughly one in six people. Schlosser (2006) outlines wide reaching areas where Jews are likely to experience anti-Semitism, typically through stereotypes or negative beliefs. Some examples he outlines include religion (such as the idea that Jews killed Jesus); political (Jews are communists), financial (Jews are rich and control the economy); and racial (The Jews are genetically inferior). While American culture and law aim to be secular they are still infused with a Christian privilege that can lead to those of other religions being seen as outsiders or going unnoticed (Schlosser, 2006).

Internalized anti-Semitism can result in shame or self hatred about one’s Jewish heritage and can often lead to people withdrawing from their faith and denying their identity and heritage (Schlosser, 2006). Even if Jews do not experience discrimination first hand, knowing about these types of events creates a certain level of fear that they will experience them and that in and of itself can be traumatizing (Schlosser).

CHAPTER FOUR

Considerations for working with Jewish clients

One of the primary things to remember when working with a client who identifies as Jewish is the fact that Judaism can be viewed as an ethnicity or culture in addition to a religion. It cannot be assumed that a client identifying as Jewish practices the religious aspects (Miller, 2003). Clients may identify themselves as Jewish, but consider themselves spiritually secular.

It is important to keep the three elements, spirituality, culture, and religion, in mind when working with a Jewish client. The domains are likely to vary and all may act as sources of strength or conflict for a client. Time should be spent identifying the elements of Judaism that are most significant to the client, or that are most pertinent to his or her presenting concern.

A study by Yeung and Greenwald (1992) found that Jews are more likely to seek counseling than those that practice other religions or none at all. This seems especially true for the liberal end of the Jewish spectrum. For the more conservative members of Judaism, however, seeking counseling or mental health services is less likely. For instance, most Orthodox Jews are unlikely to seek mental health services, especially if those services are provided by a non-Jewish clinician or a woman, as sharing private information or seeking help from either would be in conflict with their beliefs and values (Yeung & Greenwald). They are far more likely to seek out a Rabbi for answers, following the notion that all one needs to know to live a fulfilling and healthy life is outlined in the Torah. It is even possible that they would view themselves as spiritually

weak if they could not find the answers to their problems within their faith (Greenberg, 2007). Hoffman, Guy and Feldman (2007) expanded on this by stating:

Those who identify with the ultra-Orthodox camp generally view psychotherapists as a threat to religion and religious values, while modern Orthodox Rabbis generally relate to them as colleagues in ministering to the emotional and psychological needs of people in distress (p.1).

Counselors should be aware that a client may hold this view; that coming to counseling may feel as though they are weak. It's also important to consider that people important to a client, like family, may feel this way, leading to a lack of social support regarding therapy.

Some Rabbis will support therapy but only with a Jewish counselor, or if necessary a secular counselor who may be restricted from talking about issues of religion and faith (Hoffman, et al, 2007). One potential problem with this is that many Jews view all aspects of life as an element of being Jewish. Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lao, the former chief Rabbi of Israel and Tel-Aviv, also cautions that "The Psychologist does not operate in a bubble and something of his faith, his world view, and values are also imprinted in his treatment."(in Hoffman et al. p.2) Hoffman et al. did find, however, that even some of the most ultra-orthodox Rabbis would support treatment when the issues were severe enough that they believed that nothing else would help and that the person's very soul was at stake. The authors found that in some of the most severe cases of psychological distress, such as schizophrenia or obsessive compulsive disorder, these Rabbis would

give the person in question permission to loosen some religious restrictions if doing so would be a benefit in their treatment (Hoffman Guy and Feldman).

On the other side of the debate, many counselors and psychotherapists are uncomfortable with religious leaders providing mental health advice. Many caution against receiving help from untrained leaders who may focus on religious rituals and beliefs to the detriment of the person in distress. Hoffman et al. (2007) provided several case studies illustrating the potential danger of religious counseling for mental health. However they did not provide information on successful instances of religious leaders providing assistance, nor did they provide information regarding the frequency of detrimental practices. Dismissing the effectiveness of religious leaders may close off a potential avenue of support to a client.

Hoffman et al. (2007) outlined a model for interdisciplinary collaboration that begins with both mental health professionals and religious leaders educating each other of the beliefs and practices of their specific field. The authors held such workshops where mental health professionals provided information and hosted a discussion with a group of Rabbis. At the end of the workshop the Rabbis reported an increased positive attitude towards psychotherapy and a higher likeliness that they would recommend therapy. Collaboration between a counselor and Rabbi should be left open as a possibility.

Family Concerns

Some Jewish clients may be concerned about coming to therapy and being asked to discuss their families, especially their parents. For many the commandment of

“honoring thy mother and father” prohibits them from discussing anything negative with regards to their family (Hoffman 2007b).

It is important also to recognize that for many Jews, the issues of one person are reflected on the family as a whole. If one person is seen as having mental health issues it could reflect poorly on the family of that person as well (Greenberg, 2007). Opposing outcomes can result. On one hand, someone may be less likely to seek out treatment out of fear that their struggles would negatively impact their family. On the other hand, families as a whole may attend treatment and be engaged in helping the identified client, as that individual’s well being is a priority for the family as a whole. Diamant (2007) expressed this later option of family therapy as ideal and consistent with Jewish values.

Also when working with family concerns and dynamics, it is important to be aware of any acculturation process that may be occurring. Since Judaism is a cultural minority, clients will have to balance the cultural identity of their family with that of society as a whole. Clients from minority backgrounds can often feel torn between their culture of origin and the larger majority culture.

Treatment models

Judaism is a learning-focused faith where Rabbis are referred to as teachers or scholars and members are often seen as students. This focus could be useful in therapy. For example picking a treatment approach such as CBT and other learning based initiatives may prove to be the most useful for the client. In fact several authors have outlined how behavioral psychology principles can be found in the Jewish faith and teachings. Hoffman (2007a) pointed out several instances of cognitive and learning

approaches in the Talmud, most notably the statement “An action retrains behavior and thought. A thought does not retrain a behavior.” (Gennis Raba, 91:8).

In his article “Reality Therapy and the Talmud” Barr (2009) discussed the emphasis of free will in the Talmud, and the use of both in therapy. Reality therapy is a behavioral approach focusing on choice. Our actions are in response to our instincts, but that choice can supersede those instincts (Barr). This is a theme commonly seen in the Jewish faith, as free will and intentional actions play a significant role. In addition Barr points out that the Talmud frequently directs people to focus on their own internal experience over that of others. Barr paraphrases King Solomon by saying “If a person wants another to alter a negative attribute, then that person must take the lead and exemplify this behavior and the other will respond and mirror behavior accordingly.” (33)

Still other models are likely to be effective. Give the high value of the family structure inherent in Judaism, family based models and systemic work are likely to be effective, especially if the client is a child or young adult, whose parents are highly influential in his or her life.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that Jewish psychologists have had significant influence in the field, beginning, and not ending with Sigmund Freud (all though he described himself as an atheist in later years.)

Multicultural competency

Lastly it is important to remember that Judaism is a culture, and in the United states, a minority status. Clinicians should keep in mind multicultural competencies

when working with Jewish clients. It is important to acknowledge that society in the United States is reflective of its high number of Christians. Christianity is the cultural norm for most American ways of life. This can lead to Jewish clients feeling like they are “outsiders”. Clinicians should review the research and discussion on cultural identity and utilize that information in their work with any non-Christian client.

A key component to being a culturally competent counselor is to be aware of one’s own beliefs and biases. When working with a Jewish client, a counselor needs to examine their own religious views, as well as those of society as a whole. This is true even for Jewish clinicians as beliefs often vary from person to person.

CHAPTER FIVE

Case Study

Isaac was a 24 year old male, who lived in a small city where he attended a local university for graduate school. He decided to seek out psychotherapy because he has been feeling anxious and uncertain about what he should do with his future. He first came in for counseling a few months before graduation. At the time his plan had been to return to Philadelphia where his family was to find a job and “settle down.” When asked why he was starting to feel uncertain he becomes physically uncomfortable and states “concerns about my family.” His counselor could sense that talking about his family made him uncomfortable and yet seemed to be significant. When pushed further he responded with “I’m Jewish, we don’t talk about family to strangers.” The counselor reassured him that she respected his parents and faith, and hoped that by talking about it he could help decide for himself the choices that would be most consistent with the two. She followed this by saying that she was not Jewish herself, but that she had some familiarity with the basic tenets of Judaism. She also hoped as they worked together he would feel comfortable elaborating on what his faith means to him, and what practices and beliefs were significant to him.

Isaac seemed to relax at this point, and thanked the counselor for acknowledging his faith, and for wanting to know more, saying “I was worried you would tell me that the only way to feel better is to think only of myself and to give up some of my Jewishness”. He then began to describe his family. He defined them as “Conservative Jews to the point of almost Orthodox”. “In my house the answer to every question was ‘because we’re Jewish’ Judaism came first, followed by family, which he described as “one and

the same". He reported never having a problem with his family until he started college. For his undergraduate degree he went to a school in Boston, and his parents "sort of supported" his choice, but they were worried that far away from them he would be more likely to "lose his way".

In college he found a supportive group of friends and fellow Jewish students. He became active in Hillel and began feeling like being Jewish was more a part of his identity than before when it felt like something his parents pushed on him. "The only problem is I realized I was becoming a different kind of Jew. My views were more liberal than my parents. Honestly, I started to see myself as Reform Jew." His parents did not have a positive opinion of Reform Jews, often accusing them of "hiding their faith", and Isaac admitted that part of him felt that way too. "It's been easier to be Reform, I feel less like I stick out, less like I have to ask for exceptions."

After leaving Boston these feelings intensified. In his new city there were very few Jewish people. He found a local synagogue which has been a source of support but he began feeling isolated being "the only Jew in my program or at my job...I can't reasonably ask for Saturdays off, or for kosher food anywhere." "I'm starting to feel guilty about being Jewish, that it puts a burden on others to accept me, and then I start to feel mad at myself for feeling that guilt." Recognizing the influence of this thought Isaac and his counselor spent several sessions exploring his feelings about his faith as well as society as a whole. They focused on what being Jewish has added to his life, the positive experiences and feelings it has been a factor in. Slowly his anxiety began to lessen and he felt more comfortable with his identity. "I even told my boss that I won't work Saturdays anymore, that I need the day for me, and it was important."

Sessions still focused significantly on what his family would think about the choices he is making. His romantic relationship was also a source of distress. Isaac met a girl the prior year in Boston, and she was a Reform Jew. They had been together for three years, but he has talked about her very little to his family. “They don’t approve, she isn’t Jewish enough. It’s the same to them as if she were Christian or Muslim. They won’t even meet her.” One of Isaac’s options after graduation was to move back to Boston, where he loved living and where she still lives. “I want that life, but I want my parents to be okay with it, and I don’t think I can have both.” Without pressuring him to decide one way or another he and the counselor explored what he felt about both options. “Philadelphia was home, and my family is there, but Boston feels like it could be home, and like my future family could be there.”

At this point in time the counselor was beginning to worry about a bias she was starting to feel. Her instincts were to encourage Isaac to move to Boston and to allow his future family to be more important. Concerned about her bias she suggested that Isaac consult with a Rabbi either from his current Synagogue or from one in Philadelphia. Isaac was planning a trip home for Passover and decided to try talking to the Rabbi at the synagogue his family attended. He also felt he was at a place where he could tell his parents what he was thinking, and was hopeful they would listen. His new hope was that they would agree to accept his girlfriend, and consider moving to Boston with them. When he came back he expressed surprise about his meeting with the Rabbi. “He told me that my parents wishes should be mine as well, which I expected, but he went on to say that ultimately God wanted for me to have a choice in this, he was letting me choose.” His parents had responded how he had anticipated; they were still opposed to

his move and his marrying his girlfriend. His Rabbi however agreed to sit down and mediate a conversation with the family. This conversation didn't happen at that meeting, but a few months later he was able to return to sit down with his family. In counseling he continued to explore what he wanted his parents to know and what questions he had for the Rabbi. In that meeting his parents agreed to give hesitant support to his marriage, but they refused to move to Boston and said they would continue to push for them to relocate to Philadelphia.

When Isaac ended counseling he felt fairly comfortable with his decision to move to Boston. "I still have guilt about not disappointing my parents, but it is guilt I think I can live with and I think God understands my choice." He thanked the counselor for taking the time to help him explore his views "You must think us Jews are a bit strange, but thanks to your guidance, I'm okay with that."

Review of Case Study

The counselor in this study demonstrated several key points about working with Jewish clients. First and foremost she was aware and appreciated the importance of Isaac's Judaism. Equally as important was her understanding of her own biases and how her cultural and spiritual identity was a factor in their work together. By acknowledging these two pieces she was able to create a safe and supportive environment for Isaac to explore his own feelings without judgment or unintended pressure to change his beliefs.

In addition the counselor also had an introductory knowledge of the Jewish faith and culture. This meant that she knew things like the importance of family, and the

different forms of Judaism. This knowledge made it easier for her to begin to understand the individual meaning these elements had for Isaac.

Lastly she was aware of the challenges Isaac faced as a member of a minority group. She knew that the environment he lives in is heavily influenced by Christian values and practices. She understood the acculturation process and was able to help Isaac as he balanced his parents' influences with those of society as he began to decide what was best for him personally.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

When working with a Jewish client or looking to understand the Jewish faith, direct interaction and experience with Jewish communities will provide far better insight than reviewing the scholarly facts. This is especially true given the high degree of variance between Jewish people. Like with any culture or religion there are simply no easy definitions or universal truths available. The goal of the information provided above is to help ease the nerves of a clinician as they begin a relationship with a Jewish client. This information can help conversations to be more meaningful for both the client and clinician and understanding these basics may help build trust within the relationship. Knowing the basics or some of the beliefs will make it easier to understand the individual experiences and beliefs of a client.

APPENDIX

Websites for more information

www.uscj.org – Conservative Judaism

www.urj.org – Reform Judaism

www.jrf.org – Reconstructionist Judaism

www.ounetwork.org – Orthodox Union

www.havurah.org – National Havurah Committee

www.uje.org

www.shomash.org

www.hillel.org

www.mavensearch.com – world wide synagogue directory

www.adl.org – Anti-defamation league

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