

# Golden Ages, Ghost Dances, and the Work of Mourning: A Case Study of the Webs of Relationships in an Organizational Consultation<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Building on a triad model of change, loss, and grief, I describe the ways in which I assisted the members of a mid-western American Jewish synagogue in dealing with potentially traumatic transitions affecting the life of the congregation. Would it, in fact, survive? As what? Could the members let go of their dearly held notion of an earlier "Golden Age"? An account of the consultation is presented, one that provides so-called touchstones that will enable skilled applied anthropologists to conduct similar organizational consultations. I describe my work with an organization in the throes of change. Specifically, I describe and analyze steps in discovering that the synagogue was attempting to enact a "ghost dance" in the service of restoring a "golden age" and in helping the organization begin to mourn its irreparable losses.*

## Introduction: Organizational Golden Ages and Ghost Dances

Historically, the Ghost Dance was a short-lived apocalyptic revitalization movement begun among the demoralized Walker River Paiute by the prophet Wovoka (Jack Wilson). On January 1, 1889, Wovoka had a vision that the whites would disappear and that the ancestors would return, a renewal that could be hastened by performing the ritual circle-dance. He preached that herds of buffalo, antelope, and wild horses would flourish and that their culture, too, would thrive again. The story of hope, and its associated songs and ritual, spread like a prairie grass fire beyond the Ute and Shoshone to the Lakota and widely in the western U.S. Each tribe modified it in the direction of its own culture. Since that time, the idea of a Ghost Dance has been transmuted into a metaphor of many attempts of groups to radically renew themselves in what La Barre (1972) called a "crisis cult" (Kehoe 1989; Saffo 2006). This paper continues that literary license.

This paper is an account of an organizational consultation, specifically, an application of anthropological method to organizational problem-identification and problem-solving. It explores the web of relationships—current, past, and remembered—that constitutes part of the problem and of a possible solution. With respect to theory, this paper is about (a) the difficulty in letting go of Golden Ages—organizational and cultural —, (b) the attempt to reenact and recreate

them via metaphorical "Ghost Dances" of unrelenting, frenzied ritual activity in the present, and (c) the process of acknowledging and mourning their loss. It is an exploration of organizational "Dream Time" in which past, present, and imagined future are hopelessly conflated, so that the only imaginable future is recurrence of the past (La Barre 1972; Stein, 1994a). It is a study of organizational and wider social change. More specifically, it is a study of what Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1975) call "the inability to mourn" change.

Golden Ages, part real and part illusory, are the objects of nostalgia, yearning, and idealization. They are group embodiments of what Volkan (1991) has termed a "chosen glory," which is that part of the group self-representation that musters great pride in its past. Tribal, ethnic, and national cultures, no less than workplace and other organizational cultures in complex societies, often attempt to restore if not recreate moments of greatness their members cannot accept as irrevocably lost. They transform the work of imagination into historic "fact," rewriting history in the act of supposedly restoring it. Couched in the language of continuity, they are monuments to discontinuity and a sense of dislocation in time. Over a half-century ago, psychoanalyst and anthropologist Géza Róheim posited the edifice of human culture to be an elaborate defense against the danger of object loss (1943, 1950). This paper, then, identifies some of the unconscious functions culture serves.

Attempts to freeze or reverse psychosocial time have been the subject of numerous anthropological accounts (Mooney 1896; Burridge 1960; Worsely 1957; La Barre 1971, 1972; Wallace 1956; Kehoe 1989; Devereux 1955). The present paper studies this process through an examination of the largely unconscious dynamics that underlie the difficulties of organizational change in the life of a Conservative American Jewish synagogue congregation in the United States Midwest. It explores the "organization in the mind," that is, the religious organization as a mental representation (Armstrong 2005). Specifically, the shared ego ideal (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1985) that had incorporated the organizational ideal (Baum 1989; Schwartz 1990) had become frozen in time. This paper examines the triad of change, loss, and grief (Stein 1994b) as it applies to an organization. It also explores the role of the consultant's counter-transference as a tool in helping the organizational leaders to give conscious words to the process they were unconsciously enacting. Further, it examines the beginnings of a "collective working through" (Gould 2005) during which the process of memorialization could liberate the congregation from serving almost literally as a living memorial. Finally, it is hoped that it will contribute to the psychodynamically informed anthropological understanding of the "Brave New World" of relentless massive social dislocation in the face of globalization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

### A Methodological Overview

The present study is of my consultation with a Conservative American Jewish<sup>3</sup> congregation in the Midwest. I call the synagogue Congregation Beth El, and I call their spiritual leader Rabbi Jacob Gould. I have done my utmost to disguise the actual congregation. The consultation began in mid-2004 and has continued through this writing in April of 2006. Among the methods used in data collection and consultation were participant observation, open-ended interviewing, 360 degree consultation, and executive coaching of the rabbi, president, and president-elect of the congregation. I came to rely heavily on my own counter-transference; that is, I came to rely upon my emotional response during the consultation both as organizational data

and cues to how to respond (Stein 2004).

In mid-2004, the rabbi invited me to become a consultant to him and to the synagogue board members. Specifically, he wanted me to help them to think about the congregation's future in light of the present and past. He asked me to meet at various people's homes with a small, self-selected planning committee to help prepare for a workshop with the full board in, say, the spring of 2005. Although the format was to be like a retreat, the word *retreat* was specifically *not* to be used. I was told that many board members had attended retreats "where people talked on and on and nothing got done." I kept this taboo in mind as I met with the various groups. I said that I wished my role to be that of listener, open-ended interviewer, participant observer, and commentator and interpreter of group process at these various meetings. As progress ensued, I would present my findings on an ongoing basis. This negotiated role was acceptable to all.

Initially, I met individually with the rabbi, who had invited me to serve mainly as consultant on the process. During the fall of 2004 and winter of 2005, this one-on-one consulting was followed by three meetings with an *ad hoc* committee of four to five people, including the rabbi, the president-elect, an influential member of the older generation, and two other members of the board. This group met with the knowledge and approval of the president. At the end of January 2005, I also attended a full meeting of the synagogue board of directors, primarily as observer and listener. At the end of the meeting, I was asked to briefly describe my role in the forthcoming Board of Directors workshop in which I would serve as listener to "contain" (Bion 1970) and emotionally "hold" (Winnicott 1965) the group, while the president-elect officiated the meeting. In late spring 2005, the off-site, all-afternoon workshop took place with the entire board at a former president's home. In June of 2005, Rabbi Gould made a short speech/sermon at the annual business meeting of Beth El. I note this latter speech because I later analyze it as part of the consultation. In this case study, I intersperse group-process observations with more conventionally "factual" information about the past, present, and imagined future of congregation Beth El.

All of these meetings were interspersed by telephone calls and e-mails including telephone follow-up to the workshop. A future small-group meeting is planned. At my initial meeting with Rabbi Gould, he said that he could use my services as a psychodynamically oriented consultant to help him and the board members think through "where we are" in the life-cycle of the synagogue and to help them think about their future. He said that he sensed that the synagogue was somehow "stuck" but was unsure how and why. He was unsure how to help his congregation move ahead. This, in short, was the problem presented.

### Description of the Consultation Process

Early in our meetings, Rabbi Gould explained that he had been influenced by the work of the Alban Institute, in Herndon, Virginia. The Alban Institute is well known for its consulting activities with American religious institutions, first churches, and now synagogues. This provided his conceptual model for understanding the process of change in American religious institutions. Rabbi Gould asked me to read one of their publications, *Can Our Church Live?*, by Alice Mann (2000), which conceptualized American church history in the metaphor of organizational life-cycles. The rabbi's model of organizational life-cycle was the progression from birth to formation, stability, decline, and death. In particular, Rabbi Gould often expressed uncertainty as to whether the synagogue was in need of *revitalization*, which would restore it to its former functions and stature in Jewish life. Or was it in need of *reinvention/rethinking*, which would acknowledge decline and death, and work on re-thinking the entire enterprise from scratch, so to speak. In this view of revitalization, there is new energy, as in a new spiritual leader of the organization, but fundamentally the culture of the organization remains the same as before. In reinvention or rethinking, there is a refocusing of resources and energy for a completely new purpose, such as creating a new identity for the synagogue. The distinction is between changing the existing structure and creating a new structure.

One of the turning points in my working relationship with the rabbi and with the planning group was when he mused aloud that, up to

that point, he had been working on the premise that the congregation could be *revitalized*. But that from our discussions he was coming to have the conviction that a death needed to be acknowledged and the purpose of the synagogue needed to be *re-thought through* as if it were being created anew.

He began to distinguish, first in the small group, and later in comments to the full Board of Directors, between the *synagogue* as a physical building, and the *congregation*, as a group of Jewish people who assemble for various religious functions. He both observed and feared that many people in the congregation, especially the "old timers," had fused the two, and had even made the place more important than the people. He commented that several people had expressed to him their feeling that their sanctuary was the most beautiful they had ever seen and hoped that they never would have to move. In a similar vein, others had remarked to him that the sanctuary is beautiful, but that the congregation needed a new building in which to house it.

He remarked that, by contrast, Jews were well used historically to pulling up their roots and moving to new places. Still others thought that perhaps a reason that some of the members were so emotionally tied to their synagogue was precisely because, as Jews, they had been uprooted so much over their religious history, and at last had built a place they could call their own. The synagogue became a site in space which they could imbue with their desire for permanence and dread of exile. In short, definitions of identity were at stake and embodied in the congregation/synagogue distinction.

### Beth El's History

At this point, a brief history of Beth El will help put the consultation and its work in context. The following is a synopsis of the Beth El's history in the words of various board members woven into a single narrative:

Beth El was founded early in the 20th century of largely Russian and Polish Orthodox Jews. They formed their synagogue largely to practice their religion. The original synagogue membership was a largely mercantile community who lived in neighborhoods near

the city's downtown. They established a Jewish cemetery and had a *Shochet* (Kosher butcher). In forming a congregation, they were looking for familiarity and camaraderie. What drew them together? They had a common understanding of identity, not much discussion about it, not much introspection, not much sense of choice. They thought of themselves as *Yidn* (Yiddish, for Jews) and did what Jews did.

Their first synagogue was in an old building in the downtown district. For its first four decades, Beth El was an Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

After World War II, there was a schism between the more Orthodox members, who left, and the remainder of the more liturgically and culturally Americanized group who joined the Conservative movement. For instance, Conservative Jewish synagogues permitted mixed seating, that is, seating in which men and women sit together, in contrast to Orthodox synagogues in which they sit in separate sections of the synagogue. In 1947 a large, new building was built much farther out in a residential district. At the height of its growth in the 1950s and 1960s, Beth El numbered about 300 families or about 750 members. At that time it was the center of its members' lives.

In more recent decades, Beth El lost large numbers of members to the still more Americanized Reform Temple and to intermarriage and dropouts from religious affiliation. About twenty years ago, the Reform Temple built a large swimming pool and required membership in order to qualify for swimming. There was an exodus from the Conservative Synagogue at that time. Currently, that is circa the year 2005, Beth El has about 150 families and about 300 members. The overall Jewish population in this city of one million is estimated to be 2,500. The congregation had recently celebrated its centenary, which turned out to be both a blessing and a curse. It was a time of triumph, of basking in and remembering old glory. However, when they compared themselves as they were now with who they had once been, they fell far short of their ideal as embodied in the image and metaphor of a Golden Age.

Further, despite the reality of bitter conflict

and schism in the synagogue's history, congregants tended to remember that there had been a *single* Golden Age, that there had been continuity through the synagogue's distant history. There were many members in their seventies and eighties who could remember the old synagogue, for whom it had been a lived reality rather than only a story passed down to them. They tended to merge the Orthodox and early Conservative synagogue into a single Golden Age.

They continued during the board workshop at the end of March 2005:

Today, we are much more diverse than we were a hundred years ago. What holds us together? Religious identity, faith.

The rabbi corrected them:

We are not a faith community. We are a community of practitioners. ... How do we measure stability? Growth in numbers? Budget? Programs? Facilities? Does that make us safe, successful? What phase are we at? Stability? Decline? Death?

The rabbi introduced the relation between local Conservative Jewish communities and the national headquarters:

Official Conservative Judaism in the 1980's and 1990's was out of touch with the Jewish community. They thought they could disapprove the problem of intermarriage away. They emphasized to hold the line and the fad would pass. It was not a fad and it hasn't passed. How do you define the end of a congregation? When you turn the light out? Can we accept death? Can we have a transplant of purpose? We are dependent on the money from a few who are aging. Do we need to redefine our purpose as a congregation?

Even numbers do not tell the whole story, for dues-paying membership far outnumbers attendance at religious services. This is true not only for Sabbath and Festival services, but even on the "High Holidays" of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) when participation is greatest. Many Conservative Jews who rarely attend services during the rest of the year do so on the High Holidays. The cavernous sanctuary of Beth El was once insufficient to seat

all participants during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The giant doors separating the sanctuary and the social auditorium behind it had to be opened, and many additional rows of chairs placed in the auditorium to accommodate the needs during the 1950s and 1960s. Today, at most 150 are at these services. Despite various recruiting campaigns over the years, the sanctuary is conspicuous for its empty seats. Instead of members of the congregation attending virtually every activity during the year, various small groups of people attend specific functions. For example, one group attends Friday evening services. Another attends Saturday morning services. Still another attends daily morning *Minyan*, a religious quorum of at least ten adult Jews. There is some overlap between groups, but not much.

Many people who remained at Beth El—especially of the older generations, say 60 and older—have acted as if the vastly diminished number is only a temporary reversal, that the hundreds of members lost can be retrieved. They long for the days when there were 25 people in each year's Hebrew School confirmation class and think that it can be restored. Recruitment and fund-raising campaigns are ongoing. Yet there is never enough money to do all the renovation and sponsor all the activities that people would like. The current spiritual leader, Rabbi Gould, who has completed his second year as spiritual and ritual leader, has labored exhaustively to create innovative Sabbath services, to initiate new ritual and educational programs, to do community outreach and recruit new synagogue members, and so forth. Each year, the president and members of the synagogue board have organized fund raisers with only modest results. The large physical plant of the synagogue, built in the mid-1940s, shows its age and is in need of major renovation. It is far too large for the current and projected congregation. Major renovation or moving the congregation has been discussed for over twenty years.

The rabbi well realized that he had come to lead the synagogue at a time of decline. He had a sense of crisis that something new must be done. The new rabbi had come into a widespread *leadership vacuum* and *leadership crisis*. Members used these terms in the planning sessions. Synagogue membership was declining as was the financial

situation, and morale was generally low. The rabbi entered energetically, brimming with new ideas for doing things within the synagogue and building many bridges to the wider Jewish and non-Jewish community.

### A Modern Wovoka

In many respects, Rabbi Gould was a modern Wovoka because he formulated and led Beth El's metaphoric Ghost Dance. He could not initiate enough activities. He was always on the go, seemingly everywhere, resulting in innovative Sabbath services, new children's and adults' programs, frequent meetings, educational programs, and speaking appearances in the wider community. My impression was that the more he did, the more he saw needing to be done. He insisted that he was not tired. At a January 2005 meeting, a planning committee member said, "Rabbi Gould does not get discouraged by small turnouts to his programs." The president-elect replied: "He is running out of energy." Rabbi Gould, previously quiet and listening carefully, abruptly shifted in his chair, brightened and mused:

A light just came on in my mind! I just realized that what I'm doing is trying to recreate the past. That's what's driving the constant innovation in programs. I have to admit that I am getting tired. I realize that what I've been trying to do is impossible.

Early in the consultation process, I shared with Rabbi Gould my fantasy of the congregation bringing to him and unloading onto him their struggle with preserving continuity of the past in the face of actual great discontinuity—and his accepting the unstated assignment or errand (Apprey 1998). Later he said to me:

I had been trying to revitalize Beth El, but I realized that what was needed was renewal. The light went on in my head. I need to put energy in *new* loci of interest, not just keep propping up the *old* structures. It's a frightening thought that things at Beth El are very unstable. I know that we can't go back.

At a January 2005 planning meeting, a board member referred to a conversation she had had with one influential member of the congregation, who had said to her, "Programming is not going

to fix the basic problems. Programs aren't the solution." The president-elect shortly followed by reference to the life-cycle metaphor of congregations:

Do we revitalize? Rethink? Redefine? Reinvent? Where are we? Where do we go from here? The congregation is in mourning for our youth, what used to be.

I made a mental note that this was the first public realization that organizational loss had occurred and that the present was not the past.

He continued:

I keep hearing people say 'I remember when our Hebrew School had 25 in a confirmation class,' as if that should be possible today. ... The first step after a loss is defining what we've lost. What we're mourning [as a congregation] is not real, but embellished (that is, edited). The old days were not without problems.

Much of the imagined Golden Age had, in fact, been dysfunctional.

The president-elect's remarks raise the question: How can the congregation be in mourning, yet demonstrate an inability to mourn? I have two thoughts on this apparent contradiction. On the one hand, as a measure of the modest success thus far of the consultation, the president-elect was saying *with his own voice* ideas I had expressed in earlier small group meetings. On the other hand, the congregation was also *emotionally frozen in chronic mourning* for their romanticized past, which paradoxically signifies an *inability to fully mourn* and thus accept the finality of the loss.

In a subsequent meeting, the president-elect wondered aloud his hopes for the spring Board of Directors' workshop:

I hope there will be open and frank dialogue about where we are, where we are going, and how we get there. To go forward we have to understand where we are. ...What will be the outcome of this process of planning and of the board of directors' workshop? I hope it will be that we are purified.

He clarified his and my role in the spring workshop. He would lead the group and go through the agenda. I would keep the group

emotionally on track, so to speak, and comment on group process—including my thoughts on what we might be avoiding if the group got off track. On my drive back to my hotel that evening, I "heard" within me the chorus from Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, "And Ye Shall Purify." I took comfort from it, feeling that the process was in the direction of organizational healing, not through scapegoating, but through mourning who they had been and could no longer be, mourning the passing of at least some part of their group ego ideal. My counter-transference as a subjective response was a guide to what was beginning to happen in the organization.

Another frequent theme in the planning sessions was the widespread belief within the congregation that it was controlled by a small, powerful, wealthy group of people and families who ran things behind the scenes, an inner circle and shadow government. "People complain that the synagogue is run by the same power group." What may have been true or truer in the past continued to be accepted as the norm in the present. Many Board members as well as other members of the synagogue believed that nothing substantial could be changed because of the shadow government that ruled autocratically. By contrast, one venerable member of the congregation said:

I've heard the same story about secret leadership of the *Schul* [synagogue] for fifty years. It's an excuse not to get involved. People say, 'I have no power, because it's [the synagogue] a cliquish organization.' So they blame the secret leadership.

On various occasions during and after the planning sessions, participants would approach me individually to thank me for providing an atmosphere in which the unsayable, even the unthinkable, could be said and thought, as with what Bollas (1989) called the "unthought known." One woman said, for instance, "I'm so glad you're here. When I talk when you're here, I don't feel crazy."

I remember that on at least three occasions I brought up my fantasy of the entire congregation having a *Yizkor* or memorial service for the past. It would be about what people they had been and about whom they needed to imagine they had

become. The fantasy was a metaphor at once my own and a core feature in the Jewish ritual calendar, hence liturgical property of the congregation. I had brought it up in an early meeting with Rabbi Gould, later during a planning meeting, and finally at the Board of Directors workshop. During the Jewish ritual calendar, memorial services are held four times during the year, on Yom Kippur and on the last days of the three festivals of Succoth, Passover, and Shavu'oth. The focus of these special services is remembering *as a group* deceased family members and Jewish martyrs. My fantasy was a memorial not of others, but of *themselves*. After sharing this image, I let it go and wondered what the leaders and group might do with it and how they might *play* with it (Winnicott 1971).

All of the previous planning committee work and conversations with Rabbi Gould were undertaken to lay the emotional and conceptual groundwork for the Board of Directors' workshop, which was held at a former president's home at the end of March, on Easter Sunday. The question of "What is our purpose?" was a thread through the several-hour set of Power Point presentations and earnest discussion. The word "candid" was used at least a dozen times. I urged participants not only to speak, but to care enough for each other to listen, to try to understand others' points of view. I said that my *modus operandi* in groups was largely the approach of American radio news editorialist Paul Harvey, with whom most of them would be familiar. He would begin with a statement of the widely accepted account of some news story, unearth many details at variance with the conventional story, and at the end say, "And now you know the *rest* of the story." Now it is true that in anthropology and psychoanalysis there is no final "rest" of the story, only a deeper, more honest version of the story. I explained this, too. They understood, though, that we were exploring stories together. I was pleasantly surprised that at several points in the discussion, a speaker would refer back to me and encourage attentive listening. As time went on during the workshop, people gradually shifted from position-taking on issues to storytelling. The atmosphere changed from hard to soft, intimate.

At one point, Rabbi Gould asked "What

ties everything together? What ties everything together is *Tikkun Olam*, repair of the world [a central theme in the *Kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical writings]. That's our spirituality—concern for the world." The issue of Rabbi Gould's tireless efforts came up again, when he said "You can't keep up that energy for special events." Later in the workshop, the issue of decline at Beth El came up. Rabbi Gould said: "When did the decline start and who is to blame? Everyone and no one. Blaming only accelerated the decline. Many leave. Few join. It becomes a depressed congregation." He soon continued with a question everyone was avoiding: "How do you define the end of a congregation? When you turn the light out? Can we accept death? And then perform a transplant of purpose? We are dependent on money from a few who are aging. Do we need to *redefine* our purpose?" Participants began to speak compassionately toward each other, recognizing the various burdens that had been placed on them and that they had accepted as part of service to Beth El.

Three months later, at the synagogue's annual business meeting in June 2005, Rabbi Gould made public his new vision of the past, present, and future of Beth El. This occurred in a mini-sermon that indicated he had metabolized, so to speak, many of the thoughts and sentiments shared over the past months in the small meetings and at the Board of Directors workshop. I made some notes during his talk; the following synthesizes these notes:

Two words come to mind to think about our direction: *memorial* and *legacy*. Our congregation is 101 years old. We want to keep alive memories of other times. A community of memory is the Jewish way. Memorial is a reminder to the future of what took place in the past. We must have a memorial but not *be* the memorial. A legacy is what we give of the present to the future. Legacy is not the same as the building, but is wisdom, good will. We went through trying experiences and are healing from the experiences. The month of Elul, which is still several months ahead, is a month of forgiveness, when we recognize past failings. How do we increase our vitality as a congregation? Not fund raising, not a

new building, not new programs. But look into ourselves and acknowledge past mistakes and forgive. I suggest that we make this an Elul year, to make reconciliation among our congregation. It is traditional to blow the shofar at services during Elul. In that spirit I will blow the shofar now to inaugurate our Elul year here at Beth El. We need to become ambassadors for our synagogue. We need to build an atmosphere of *Hesed* (mercy) and *Shalom* (peace). We need to make Beth El a congregation of integrity. We are a synagogue in transition. I look forward to many future anniversaries of the synagogue.

In invoking *memorial* and *legacy* with respect to his congregation's past, present, and future, Rabbi Gould implicitly addressed how much their sense of history had been bound up with monolithic myth and legend. In fact, part of the congregation's fixity in space and time lay in their having tried to embody the myth and legend of Beth El. To use a different metaphor, Rabbi Gould tried to "un-freeze" the process of story-making and storytelling, freeing the congregation—and himself—to develop and narrate new stories.

The next phase will be a reconvening of the planning group and discussing where to go from here. It feels as if some heavy burden has *begun* to lift. It remains to be seen whether this working through will continue and how the future of Beth El is imagined. (For an extensive discussion of the role of traumatic loss and complicated and incomplete mourning in Jewish history, see Falk 1996).

### **Discussion: Anthropological Reflections on Organizational History and the Process of Consultation**

The history of Beth El and the various meetings and consultations of which I was a part are rich in psychodynamic processes. Their elucidation contributes, I believe, both to (1) an understanding of the history of Beth El and of current leadership / followership, and (2) clues as to how a psychodynamically informed anthropological consultant might be of help to the organization. To begin with, Beth El has both internal and external properties. Perhaps its most emo-

tionally salient feature is the persistent image of the Golden Age, embodiment of idealized, fused self and object representations. The image of the synagogue is paradoxical. At the conscious level, it almost personifies the Golden Age of Beth El, the era in which the congregation was most alive and vital. But at the unconscious level, it seemed to be a living memorial in which the group had located the past in the present, almost like a tomb in which to inter the dead representations. It was filled with undigested projections. At the beginning of the consultation, the organizational leader, Board of Directors, and congregation had been, out-of-awareness, engaged in an organizational Ghost Dance (La Barre 1972; Saffo 2005) in an effort to re-establish the Golden Age, metaphorically to bring the dead back to life.

Over the past several decades, Beth El seemed to have lost, if not abandoned its mission. It should be noted that this was the second time and thus not the first time that this had happened in Beth El's often tumultuous, discontinuous history. Change had taken place that could not be acknowledged. There had recently been many bold experiments to freshen up its product / service line, so to speak. But these occurred at the intersection of two very different, unarticulated understandings of Beth El's mission. One was for the members to serve the congregation according to the older mission, and the other was for the congregation to serve the members according to the more recent mission.

Over the course of the various meetings I attended there was a gradual loosening of the firmly held *paranoid-schizoid* perception of and action in the world, and an assumption of a more *depressive* understanding of and response to others (Klein 1946; Ogden 1989). That is, relationships between participants were less ruled by splitting, projection, rigid position taking, and mistrust, and were more governed by empathy, careful listening, and a desire to repair wounded relationships. Participants emerged as complex people with real feelings, rather than wooden figures.

The current rabbi and president-elect were clearly *reparative* leaders rather than narcissistically destructive ones (Volkan 1980). The rabbi's imagery of *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world),



*Hesed* (mercy) and *Shalom* (peace) is poignant evidence of this. Leaders and group made emotional use of the comments and fantasies I shared with them, including that of memorial and mourning. On some occasions, they made conscious reference to my thoughts; on others, they incorporated and identified with them as entirely their own.

The rabbi came to understand that he had been appointed the container and agent of the vast projective identifications from the congregation to prevent organizational death by restoring the past. He and much of his congregation were engaged in a manic defense against experiencing loss and grief. Of this, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl writes:

Those in the Freudian tradition who developed Freud's ideas on mourning and melancholia—chiefly Abraham, Klein, and Riviere among the early circle—noted that mania follows mourning if the inner world disturbed by loss can be rebuilt, restored to order. (Manic defense is a desperate effort to bring this result about, or to leap over the painful mourning process.) (Young-Bruehl 2003: 282).

Both Rabbi Gould and the group(s) came to understand that they were unconsciously enacting a drama in which he was to be the group messiah / redeemer to avert the sense of loss—and that the task was impossible to fulfill. Part of the group process consisted of gentle interpretation of the action. Repeating gave way to remembering and working through (Freud 1914; Mersky 1999; Hirsch 1996). Frenetic action, enacting the *inability to mourn* (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975), was succeeded by reflection, mourning, and the beginning of reconciliation—not only with others in the congregation, but with who they currently were. The congregation was less imprisoned in a fantasy about the past as they became more liberated to deal with current reality.

## Conclusions

This paper has explored the dynamics of organizational change and of anthropological process consultation through the “lens” of a century-old American Conservative Jewish syna-

gogue. It has illustrated the role of the triad of change, loss, and grief in the experience of organization members. It has discussed the role of idealizing the past—the Golden Age of the institution—and of insisting that it can be recovered—via a Ghost Dance—as a defensive tool against recognizing irreversible loss and experiencing grief. I have argued that organizational and wider cultural discourse can serve as a social defense to contain the anxiety which in turn keeps the experience of loss and mourning at bay (Jaques 1955; Wastell 2003). More broadly, I have argued that organizations, no less than entire cultures, can undergo Ghost Dances to attempt to revive the glorified past (La Barre 1972; Saffo 2005).

I have shown how the *inability to mourn* often entails a single-minded frenzy to reverse time and to restore the past glory. I have described the consultation process during which at least some of the frozen time began to thaw, and the crucial role that *reparative* organizational leadership played in facilitating that thaw. I have also illustrated the use of observer / consultant countertransference in understanding and working with organizations. It is my hope that this psychodynamically informed applied anthropological process can be utilized by other organizational researchers and consultants, action researchers, and applied anthropologists in their work to understand and address the complexities of organizational change. Put philosophically, as Bill Moyers wrote, “We must match [modern science] to what the ancient Israelites called *hochma*—the science of the heart, the capacity to see and feel and then to act as if the future depended on us” (2005:10). ○

## Notes

1. On April 29, 2006, this paper was presented at the 26th Annual Meeting of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology at Estes Park, Colorado. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Professorial Rounds, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA on October 5, 2005. It was also presented at the 2005 Annual Colloquium of the Center for the Study of Organizational Change, University of Missouri, Harry S. Tru-

man School of Public Affairs, Columbia, Missouri, USA, October 28–29, 2005. I acknowledge with gratitude the helpful criticisms that Seth Allcorn, Ph.D., made on earlier drafts of this paper and the suggestions made by an anonymous peer reviewer for this journal.

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3. Conservative Judaism is one of the three major branches of American Judaism, which consists of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism. Broadly speaking, as a movement that began in Europe in the mid-19th century, Conservative Judaism seeks to conserve Jewish tradition rather than to reform it. For instance, Conservative Judaism retains a lengthy Hebrew liturgy and laws of dietary observance. Both Conservative and Reform Judaism evolved out of responses to the European Enlightenment (Haskalah). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Judaism); and <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/conservatives.html>; <http://www.jtsa.edu/about/cj/sacredcluster.shtml>.

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