



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family

MODERN RITUALS
A Search for New Meanings

Conversation Piece I

THE ANNUAL MEMORIAL YAHRZEIT BASH

My father-in-law passed away very suddenly on the fifth night of Chanukkah when he was hit by a taxi cab coming home from his weekly Talmud class taught by the rabbi who had been his teacher in Germany. At the time his two sons were 18 (my future husband) and 21.

There was a fairly observant family and every year on his yahrzeit, my husband and his brother and their uncle and his son (also unmarried at the time) would go to shul to say kaddish together and then return with their aunt and other cousin to my mother-in-law's apartment to light chanukkiyot and eat dinner.

Then the cousins got married. Then my brother-in-law got married. Then we got married. Every year on the fifth night of Chanukkah we would all traipse to my mother-in-law's after maariv for candle lighting and dinner, adding the new tradition of singing Maoz Tzur in German (which none of them could speak so it was only a facsimile of singing in German). As the years went on, the cousins started having children, my nephews and niece were born and we had our own children (one of whom was born on Chanukkah). Soon we had outgrown my mother-in-law's apartment (and her cooking). The numbers now were skewed toward those who had never even met my father-in-law, and there were children... lots of children. How can a gathering on Chanukkah with a dozen children not include singing, games and presents?

So what had begun as a fairly somber dinner every year slowly but surely turned into what has come to be known as the Annual Memorial Yahrzeit Bash, and my kids and their cousins, all grown up and living on their own, and some with their own kids, would not think of missing it.