



Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Mishpachah: The Modern Jewish Family

MODERN RITUALS

A Search for New Meanings

Conversation Piece 2

MY MOTHER'S VIOLET VASE

My mother was incredibly hard working – except for the joy she had from her children (which is no small matter) she had a difficult life.

My father died and left her a widow with five children at the age of 41. My earliest memories are of her cooking – vats of soup and beef stew and applesauce. Ironing ... curtain rods lined with shirts and dresses and blouses and pillowcases and underwear (yes, underwear).

After my father died my mother went to work full time. So it was work outside and work at home.

Being the youngest, I spent a lot of time alone with my mother. I would follow her around as she performed her household tasks, and constantly pepper her with questions:

"What's that for?" "I need it for slicing onions."

"Why do you do that?" "It makes the ironing easier."

"How does that work?" "You put the clothes in here, and they come out there."

"Doesn't that burn?" "Not if I'm careful...but sometimes I get burned anyway."

My questions were childlike, but specific. Her answers were straight-forward and instructional.

We had a small shelf in the dining room on which my mother kept a few valuables (i.e. breakable objects). My favorite was a small, opaque lilac colored vase. It was delicate glass and fluted out like petals of a flower. When they were in bloom, my mother filled it with violets from our yard. It was an ironic presentation, this delicate little vase filled with equally delicate little flowers, in our chaotic living space.

One time as she was dusting the vase on the shelf, I asked:

"Why do you have that?" "She turned around and looked at me I never understood the look she gave me (quizzical), nor the answer (perplexing).

"This is for me."

It was not until I was grown -- and a mother -- that I understood her answer.