

Rabbis in Love

Personal Stories

Marilyn Bronstein and Philip Alan Belove

LoveWise Press
Saint Johnsbury, VT

Available from www.rabbis-in-love.com,
Amazon.com, CreateSpace.com,
on Kindle and other retail outlets

Copyright by LoveWise Press
Philip Alan Belove and Marilyn Bronstein
All rights reserved

Copyright April, 2012
Copyright Registration: TXu 1-802=877

ISBN 978-0-0854036-0-7

Advance Acclaim

Gives you a soulful glimpse of realistic and spiritually romantic ways for couples to relate. It is a warmhearted and inspiring read. – **Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi**, author of *Davening* (Jewish Lights)

As Rumi says, “Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere. They’re in each other all along.” The love stories in this book have been with us all along, yet the authors have now done the mitzvah of allowing us to join the couples they interviewed on the journey of the heart to which we all belong. **Cedric Speyer**, M.A., M.Ed., Clinical Supervisor of E-Counseling; Creative Director of InnerView Guidance International.

“I love this book! In strikingly non-interventional interviews, the authors have drawn from their participating rabbinic couples emotionally uninhibited and yet delicately modest dialogues that offer us all profoundly magical, cross-culturally relevant, true stories about the beauty possible between two people, committed to each other in every way over time. It is a warm invitation, calling out to us, ‘Come on in here and hear about love!’” – **Ani Meharry**, Ph.D. in Psychology, author of *Fourth Dimensional Relating: A New Frontier for the Couple*.

“I found the reading of this to be an unexpected and profoundly moving experience. I am weeping openly as I write; this little collection has re-awakened a profound yearning.....something so primal, so deep, that it is hard to understand how it came to be buried.” – **V.C.**, Duxbury, MA.

“Excellent, very well conceived and written, compelling, encourages and engages the reader.” – **Julian Cohen**, Business and Personal Development Coach

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction:

This is a Book about Love 1

Chapter One:

**The Wings of Love
and the Sheltered Nest of the Sabbath**
Rabbi Ronnie and Karen Cahana 9

Chapter Two:

This Love, Like the Moon in All Its Phases
Rabbi Leibish and Deena Hundert 33

Chapter Three:

**Without Touching, Without Gazing, No Intimate
Exchange of Words For Seven Years, and Yet...**
Rabbi Yisroel & Sara Bernath 53

Chapter Four:

How Different Can Two Be and Still Be One?
Rabbi Haim & Caroline Sherrf 77

Chapter Five:

Do Not Awaken Love Until it is Ripe
Rabbi Shefa Gold & Rachmiel O'Regan 101

Looking for Lilith

Rabbi Ohad & Dawn Cherie Ezrahi 127

Chapter Seven

Two Rabbis, One Soul
Rabbi Victor Gross & Rabbi Nadya Gross 161

Chapter Eight

Being There
Rabbi Laura and Charles Kaplan 193

Chapter Nine	
All the Waters of the Flood Cannot Drown Love	
Rabbi Lisa Grushcow & Rabbi Andrea Myers	217
Afterword	253
So, From Under the Bed, What Did I Learn?	
Philip Alan Belove	254
Under the Bed, What Did I Learn?	
Marilyn Bronstein	267
Epilogue	280

Introduction

*“There is only One Story and it’s your Love Story,”
Rabbi Ronnie Cahana.*

This is a book about love.

It’s about what love looks like in real life, and also about what love can look like when it’s a spiritual practice.

This is a book of stories from couples who are very much in love and at least one of the partners is a Rabbi. Of course, you don’t have to be Jewish to learn something from how a Rabbi and spouse make their love-nest. Every cultural group likes to think, “We’re unique.” Our claim is that we’re just like everyone else, only more so.

Rabbis aren’t monks. They fall in love, they marry, they have families. It’s expected. Jewish spirituality is rooted in daily family life; the joy, the passion, the tears, “the whole enchilada”, or as Jews would say, the whole *megilla*.

If you are one of those folks who take pleasure in getting a little *ferclempt*, which is Yiddish for “choked up about something nice,” you will probably enjoy reading these stories. There is something in Jewish culture that says it’s a good thing to feel deeply.

We did not create this to be a how-to book, although we do think it contains inspiring lessons. *Rabbis in Love* is first of all a book of stories.

If you’re a busy executive type and can’t wait to know the bottom line, the “Secrets-to-True-Love-that-Rabbis-Know,” skip ahead to the last chapter. But then come back and read the interviews. Hearing someone’s stories about how they live their love is so much richer than merely hearing homilies.

A Relationship is a Story in Two Voices

Stories are a great way to capture relationships because stories tell you about what he did and then what she did and then what he did, round and round.

It's especially interesting to hear from both partners. You get to see how they are with each other, how they embellish and correct each other.

That is why we've kept the dialogue between the couples intact. It wasn't an easy decision. The synthesized voice is very tidy; the voice of dialogue has all these interesting loose ends and you get more of a feeling for the relationship.

And then there is us.

As we assembled this book, we started to realize that it was also the story of how our own relationship evolved. For three years we interviewed together, edited together, discussed, argued, disagreed and synthesized. Through this process our relationship changed and we changed.

You might be able to get a sense of this as you read the progression of commentaries we wrote together after each interview. At first, we wrote our commentaries in one voice. But after a while that seemed inadequate. We really did have differing perspectives and so we ourselves had to start appearing in dialogue.

So, here is a peek into how we began. In two voices. So you can get a sense of our relationship. We'll start by each describing the moment we first realized we were going to do something important together, the Genesis Moment, as we call it. Every relationship has one.

Philip: The memory I hold is of the time we were sitting in this restaurant eating chicken soup (actually Vietnamese pho) and comparing notes on our Jewish backgrounds and philosophies. You suggested we collaborate on something. I said, "Well, the strangest idea I ever had was about 25 years ago in graduate school. It occurred to me that the next Messiah will be a couple." And you said, "That's funny. I had the same idea almost 35 years ago."

Marilyn: In my mind the story begins even earlier when you showed me a book you were working on. I remember just jumping in and starting to edit. It was obvious to me even then that we had collaboration chemistry. But then I do remember the conversation about the Messiah in the restaurant.

It was maybe a week later. I remember saying, for me, this *Moshiach* couple would be a model of what a great loving relationship could be. Like, “Okay, you think you’re the *Moshiach*? If you’re so enlightened, let me see how you live with someone. That’s the true test of your spirituality.

And, by the way, let’s hear what your partner has to say about that.”

Philip: Did you notice that twice you remembered having realizations before I did? First, it was about the collaboration and then it was your 10 year lead on the Messiah idea? I’ve had to think about that.

Marilyn: So we decided to collaborate on this *Moshiach* idea we shared. We would talk to couples committed to a spiritual path, and also committed to each other. Where would we find such people?

Philip: Since we’re both Jewish, it was obvious. We would interview Rabbis and their partners. We’d do a book called “Rabbis in Love.” Loved the title.

Marilyn: And then it was a year into the project and I realized that we were talking about two totally different visions of a *Moshiach* couple.

Philip: Yes, my idea of Messiah was quite different. It took a while to see where we differed. I’m slower to speak up sometimes. We’ve had to learn how to adjust to each other’s rhythms.

For me, each loving relationship becomes the Messiah for the partners, their spiritual teacher. A Love Relationship changes who you are.

Each relationship really does have a mind of its own. It challenges the partners. It encourages them to stay open to learning. There are always things they can learn in order to love better.

It’s only sometimes that relationships work as a unity. The differences are important. That’s a very couple-as-Messiah realization. As we’ve worked together, we’ve learned to appreciate how we differ and how our differences are a resource.

Marilyn: They are a resource but they are also a challenge.

We bring very different sensibilities to the project. I tend to get into the Jewish stuff. I've always been fascinated with the love stories in the Bible. I love the way they tell us about relationships that are not perfect.

But the way they related then is not so relevant to my life today. I'm looking for new models for love. This project really is my personal quest to find loving couples who can share a spiritual vision, passionately disagree, and yet still live together. I'm looking for my *Moshiach* couples.

Philip: I never imagined I'd find Jewish studies so congenial. If you've been fascinated by the love stories in the Bible, I have been fascinated by the love stories people tell about their own relationships.

I was always deeply fascinated by love. My family name really is *Belove*, and I was teased for it in high school. *Be Love*. But in later life I've come to think that maybe my name has been my calling.

I hold a doctorate in counseling psychology. I do a blog at drbelove.com. I have worked with couples and relationship issues for years. So much exposure to how love could go wrong. I wanted to learn more about the many different ways love can go right.

Marilyn: And here we are, trying to create one book, with one voice.

Philip: While we may have separate sensibilities, we do share a vision.

Falling in Love is a Spiritual Awakening

The task of lovers in a spiritual partnership is to prove to each other that their union is more than only flesh, that their life together matters. How they live and love each other matters deeply. And not only to them, but also to all the lives they touch.

For us, the classic phrase, "and they lived happily ever after", closes the door on the most interesting part of the story. If one is looking for wisdom, then, finally getting together is not the end of the story. It's the beginning. We wanted to hear what happened after they got together.

The Blue Thread

We asked folks for stories about what loving and living together had taught them.

After each interview we share what struck us about this particular couple, in a section we call “the blue thread.” Why “blue thread”? When a Jewish couple is married, they stand under the *tallis* (prayer shawl) and it becomes a *chuppah*, a canopy, to sanctify their union, and every *tallis*, every *chuppah*, has at least one blue thread as a reminder of The Divine.

With each couple, we wanted to know what were the divine threads, the themes of love that bound this couple together?”

Why is this relationship different from all other relationships?

To understand what is unique about each couple we asked them four questions; the *Mah Nishtanah*:

What was the Genesis moment, the moment when you first realized that this relationship was going to be significant?

How does the relationship currently challenge you?

How did you change as result of being in this relationship?

How does your relationship influence your understanding of Judaism, and vice-versa?

As in the Passover Seder, we asked that the questions be answered with stories, no theories.

We spoke to male Rabbis, female Rabbis, Rabbis married to each other, Rabbis who were converts, Rabbis of differing sexual orientations. All the couples we interviewed practiced Judaism in very different ways. We spoke to Orthodox Rabbis, Renewal, Conservative, Reform, and, probably most esoteric, followers of the Hebraic Path. Quite a spectrum.

Each couple found their own unique way of interweaving their love with their Jewish Spirituality. One couple used the lovers in the Song of Songs as their inspiration. Another used the relationship between Lilith and Adam at the very beginning of the human story in Genesis as theirs. Many spoke about how observing the Sabbath each week deepened their intimacy.

Spirituality was also very much in the bedroom. One couple said that it was not until their wedding day that they even touched each other's hand. Another spoke about the physical experience of making love as a way to experience the presence of God. Another couple described the "kissing meditation" they performed on their first date. One couple happily referred to the teaching in the Talmud which says that it is the obligation of a man to please his wife in making love.

And Speaking of the Talmud and the Bedroom, One More Story.

We were at the dining room table with Rabbi Leibish and his wife, Deena. Deena said, "Why don't you tell Philip and Marilyn the story you told your class yesterday."

Leibish said, "There is a story in the Talmud; one of the most prominent Rabbis of the Talmud. He's known as just *Rav*, "The Rabbi." One of his students, Rabbi Kahana, wanted to see how Rav would act during marital intimacy with his wife. So the student hid under the bed of his teacher, Rav.

"So when Rav, who was an austere, holy person, came into the room to be with his wife, he was laughing, being very passionate and expressive in his love, and very emotional. And his student was so taken aback that after a while he yelled out, 'The mouth of my Rebbe seems like the mouth of someone who has not eaten for a long time!'

"And Rav said, '*Ahd k'day Kach!* This is too much!' Like: 'Kahana What in God's name are you doing here?'

And Kahana, says, "This is also Torah I need to learn."

As Reb Leibish pointed out, “The Talmud teaching is that the ideal is to be passionate, to be loving, to be expressive. There’s a tendency to think that passion and expression of love is something that holy people don't do. By telling it as a story, specifically of a prominent Rabbi, we understand.”

We need stories about real people. In this book we are following this ancient tradition.

We are approaching sacred ground.

When this Talmud story was told, people lived in close communities with little privacy. It was easy to see a couple walking down the street or hear an argument from the kitchen. Today, however, we each live in separated worlds.

Ordinarily when people talk about their intimate relationships, they do it from a distance. They talk about principles and lessons learned. They don't share what actually happened. In sharing these stories with us, the couples we've interviewed have sacrificed some of their privacy because they know “this is Torah we all need to learn.” We have to be grateful and respectful. We must remove our shoes. We are about to enter sacred ground.

So please, join us under the bed.

Chapter One

The Wings of Love and The Sheltered Nest of The Sabbath



Rabbi Ronnie and Karen Cahana

To be known just as we are; I think that's what's built into Shabbat, into the system of Shabbat. This is a time of eternal paradise. And it's just strolling together because 'that's the only person I want to be with.' I can't wait for that. Every Shabbat we bless each other. Every Shabbat we tell each other our secrets – Rabbi Ronnie

This [gesturing between her and Ronnie] is Home. It doesn't really matter where we are. But wherever we are together, this is Home. - Karen

Marc Chagal, a Jewish artist in the first half of the 20th century, painted pictures of sleepy Jewish towns in Old Eastern Europe. There were fiddlers on roofs, giant birds and lovers floating in the magic of a kiss. For us, this interview with Ronnie and Karen was like wandering through a Chagal painting.

Karen speaks of Ronnie's "otherworldliness." During the interview she looked at him and said, "You still have that effect on me." It's easy to see why. In this interview you'll hear about their never-ending courtship and their constant celebration of love.

Philip: You've been married how long?

Ronnie: Ninety years.

Karen: Twenty-six years.

Ronnie: Oh, well we've known each other thirty-six.

Karen: I know that I met Ronnie... I met him when I was twelve.

Ronnie: I'm jealous of those twelve years before. What happened? I keep asking your parents.

Philip: Let's start with this question: What sort of things can you know about someone after twenty-six years that you wouldn't have known after fifteen years?

Ronnie: Nothing.

Marilyn: Nothing?

Ronnie: You don't know anything. You're always starting over. It's always courtship. It's in another realm. This is the greatest gift in the world. You're in Wonder. You have always this notion that you're just starting — I don't know anything until now. It is wonderful. That's the greatest gift of being alive; it's being in love.

And so, you start again and say, "Wow. Who are you? You're so fascinating." There's so much. There's just wonder. Love allows you to live in a dimension where there's nothing but the privilege of being close. It's God's gift.

From the beginning, there was magic. I just knew it was destiny. This line and only this line. When we met, with love, it was important for me to reduce myself. I was more a teacher than an equal. At the same time I also loved how she admired me and how Karen was so close to me. She would look with kind of a sparkle when I was teaching. She always had her eyes on me but not as any more than as a teacher.

Even so I believed that I am, and was, accepted on a very ethereal level by Karen. So, I hold the highest pedestal, the highest regard, toward Karen. At the same time I know that my role is to take her out of the practical world, the world that she's so competent in.

My role is more to be a force for her in a poetic, sublime interaction. And I think that's where we came together. There was always an awareness that we were more to each other than what anyone else could see.

Philip: **When did you have that awareness that Karen was the one? When did it dawn?**

Ronnie: When I allowed it. I allowed it. I allowed it.

We were in a Zionist youth group together. I was a minor celebrity in that group and there was a point where she came of age and she wasn't twelve anymore and I noticed her. I knew, and I know, that she has endless dimension. She has infinity inside her.

And so, I told her about it. We were walking on a field, in a baseball field, walking and talking. We had spent a lot of time talking and exploring and expressing ourselves. It was wonderful but it wasn't mutual.

Then at a certain point she was of age and I wasn't anymore in that teacher position. She was going to Israel and I felt a strong loss anticipating her going into the greater world. She had taken a lot of my teachings and lot of the romance of my teachings into her life and she was now, kind of, launching. And I felt that it's time – it became intimate.

She was seventeen and I'm five years older. You were seventeen?

Karen: Yeah, you were twenty-two.

Philip: So this is when the relationship between you changed?

Ronnie: Uh-huh.

Philip: And how did it change? What did you say?

Ronnie: I kissed her.

Marilyn: *(To Karen)* Were you surprised?

Karen: First let me back up a bit and set the stage. The first time I saw him, I was twelve and it was at a Zionist camp. I remember sitting in this open field, a different field than the one where we fell in love.

But there was some Texas, brushy woods and I see this figure moving through the woods. Ronnie walked like a gazelle. He moved with one leg out and then pulled it in very straight, walking solo in the distance through these woods. I was mesmerized. I remember just thinking, "Who is that? Who is that creature?"

Then he came and he was absolutely such an Other Kind of Force, an Otherworldliness in some way. I saw him, I would say, definitely pedestal style, looking up. *(To Ronnie)* You still have that effect on me. You still have that effect on other people, I think. Also he always had this ... there was a child that was with him. He would lead discussions and there was a child with him, a child with Down syndrome, who was maybe six or seven. And he would hold her hand while he was teaching and he was eighteen years old. She would look up at him and then they would walk out and he would bring her everywhere. It was Ronnie's sister. And that was where I made this other assessment. What teenager would not feel in some way burdened or stigmatized to bring his mentally challenged sister with him everywhere he went? He would always bring her along and she looked at him so longingly and he was so gentle that I really felt that this was not only somebody who had great things to teach but somebody who had great humanity.

Marilyn: **So the first kiss was five years later. Did you see it coming?**

Karen: Absolutely not. I'm extremely loyal and I'm very bounded. My sexuality doesn't flow out of my relationship. It's contained. I don't think I ever give off to anybody messages of openness. I think it's very innate. It's like I don't see outside the structure. And I don't try to play with the structure.

So Ronnie was in a counselor kind of role. It didn't occur to me to see beyond that. I mean, I never thought of Ronnie in that way at all. I thought of him as somebody who had something to teach. And we worked together.

Our group had been out at someone's lake for a weekend program and it started pouring and maybe we were 40 or 50 people at a lake house. It wasn't working because there wasn't space to be indoors. So we came back to Dallas.

It was evening, the program was over and we started to just take this walk, Ronnie and I, just talking about programs, about ideas, about life. Ronnie was full of philosophy.

I think the walk was probably until about four o'clock in the morning. We started this walking back and forth, back and forth. And as we were talking – I don't know all of the subjects that we covered – but there was a kind of an energy that kept moving and there was an intensity through these hours and hours. We just came to this place of magic.

I wouldn't have seen it coming before I started the walk and by the end, there was nothing more obvious.

It was probably around April when this happened and I was graduating high school. The following year I was planning to spend in Israel. I was leaving in September. So we went back and forth quite a bit that summer.

Then Ronnie said the most beautiful thing anybody could ever say to somebody. He said, "Go." This was something he always said until we really committed our lives together. He said, "You're going away for the year and you'll see. If you find something better than what we have, then you're blessed. Otherwise, we'll come back together."

And we always corresponded. Ronnie is a poet, and he sent beautiful love poetry. But we – he set the model of freeing each other. When we were not together, we could try and find the perfect love. So, I had relationships, Ronnie had relationships. We did that a few times where we weren't in the same environment. I was in Israel for a year and came back. And then Ronnie was in Israel for the next two years actually. It took about eight years.

Ronnie: Our parents decided.

Karen: Our parents told us. [Laughter] Our parents brought us together. They said, "We think it's time."

Ronnie: So we had a ceremony for preparing ourselves to be married. We created ceremonies for the parents.

Karen: Yeah, both of our parents were there.

Ronnie: They gave us blessings. Usually when Jews have these ceremonies it's a year before the wedding.

Philip: I've been Jewish all my life and I've never heard of this.

Ronnie: Yeah. The T'naim. It's called, in English, "The Conditions." It's a ceremony. It's a time of spending time with the families and then really vowing and understanding the depth of Promise and the ultimate nature of Promise.

You're held to it very strongly. You have to really do internal and preparatory work. You create the structure of the home that you'll build. This is your involvement with the seriousness of relationship.

We wrote out our conditions ourselves. We got blessings from each of our parents. We took a plate and smashed it on the ground and said "This is complete now." It's very dramatic and beautiful.

Really the greatest thing in life is to promise, especially for Jews – Promised Land, Promised People, the Promises of Life, the vows of Being, the relationship with God. And so we never know how the future will be but you can always remind each other of that promise. "And don't forget – don't forget what you said; be aware, be conscious." And so that ceremony really profoundly sealed the direction.

And the families picked up the shards of the broken plate and placed them together and it was very, very beautiful.

Two different families, two different stories. It's amazing how close we are. Actually we've found out in Europe we have relatives. We are related to each other.

It was finding how, why, God brought us together because it wasn't really obvious. The age difference obviously isn't right and odd a bit. And Karen as you can see, as everyone knows, is so beautiful but very, very, reserved about and unaware of her beauty. She has through her whole life been quiet, just watching, and listening, not in any way pushing herself forward. And people really allowed her to be in the background a lot. Most people slid over her. But she was always thinking, always aware, always working, churning with her soul and into everything.

So, because I noticed that, I knew that God had brought us together. I knew that it was soul language and soul discussion. I noticed that her soul was speaking all the time.

I think what we're supposed to do with each other is to say, "You're the one, and you're the only one in the world," to make each other exclusive.

So, even though I gave her that gift to go and try, I knew that it was an exclusivity that I'd found in her. But I've always honored it, to keep it true.

But the ceremony defined it for us. And so it was really very, very beautiful. And the holiness of that moment was a blessing from family and a gift back to the family.

Marilyn: What were you promising each other?

Ronnie: How I'll always honor and how there are certain things I would never do. There are certain things I would never say. Love conditions. You've given me so much precious. I'll honor where you're frail or where you're in your own secret world. And you've given me, allowed me, that closeness, so that I'll always honor it.

We build up from the bottom. To honor is to know what not to do and what not to say to each other. And what's tender and what's been preserved or kept very, very much only for each other and that is sacred.

It's a sacred safety that we give to each other, I hope, and which I've tried to teach. When I marry other couples, I've tried to teach them to really, really honor that gift that someone has given you, the gift of their vulnerability.

So those conditions, "T'naim," were part of our own secret. It's not necessarily written out and given out to the world.

And so we keep asking ourselves how we can be urging each other to our own growth, to our own emerging of ourselves? "How can I be the one that you've entrusted to? How can I be the person that you already see? And how can I be the one that allows you to push me towards places that I've kept bounded?" And that's the gift of why this is an eternal love. Because we're starting over every time, constantly seeing each other, just right now, with the promise still being very active.

Philip: **How could you have known so much about love when you were so young?**

Ronnie: My parents loved each other so deeply. I saw the greatest of loves. My father walked across Israel just to see my mother. She came from the most broken, broken losses, from concentration camps as a young child.

She was seventeen when she came to Israel, and he knew her, and saw her, and he told her that she's so beautiful. People had told her she's an animal and she's the lowest of them, and he said, "You're the most beautiful woman."

And I knew that I couldn't live on any other plane but with that kind of love because it would be truth. So what they had, I prayed for all my life.

So I articulate in that language continually. I know a family. They're just ordinary run-of-the-mill walkabouts doing the world with its harsh scratches. But when they come into their home, at home they only whisper. It's the only language that they have in their house. They would never call off to another room, one to each other. They just whisper to each other, "Wow, it's you." And when I find, and realize, that people are doing their love in such a majestic way, I try to incorporate that into our story.

There's only one story. It's your love story.

And I know that there were people that were hurt when I decided to marry Karen and didn't marry them.

And Karen also had many suitors all the time. Many wanted marriage with Karen. There were people that wanted to join into the love that they thought was meant for them. There was hurt. We still have to care about them. We're still attending to and taking care of people who were hurt in the past.

I know that there was a large price for our love to be. It has to be great. It has to be soulful.

I think this love is dangerous. It should be. Just like God, like God, it is dangerous. You can't be willy-nilly with other people's souls.

Karen: The intensity. I was very attracted to the intensity. I think I hungered for the intensity. My father had been a refugee and my mother's family had been immigrants.

I think somewhere, somehow, there was something of trying to cover over intensity. I think my father's experience coming out of being a refugee was to control for sameness and not have too much high drama.

My parents seemed to have a good marriage, but on reflection, I think it worked well for them because they didn't engage so much. Where they actually got very excited about each other is when they would go away and they would travel and explore. I think they fell in love with each other when they would travel with other people. And then my father would become extremely charming and my mother loved that.

My mother was a good conversationalist and he enjoyed seeing that in her. And so then, against the lens of being out and being curious and being exploring, they would fall in love with each other again.

They would go to theater and they would go to opera, and they enjoyed music and culture together. There was a smell in the house when they were sprucing up, getting ready to go out. There was Shalimar perfume in the air.

So I had a sense that my father really was in love with my mother; he thought she was absolutely, absolutely beautiful, and that was important. Then she thought he was so smart, and that was beautiful. And he thought she was really brilliant, too. But my father worked an hour away and he worked six days a week. And he would leave at 7:30 in the morning and would come back at six for dinner, and we would eat dinner. And there wasn't that much engaging.

On the other hand Ronnie and I, we took a two-year honeymoon. After we married, we traveled for two years. It gave us an amazing foundation with each other. I don't think we felt the great urge to go away to spend time together the way my parents had that urge. We also spend much more time together throughout the day.

You know, I'm thinking about that first question you asked. What struck me was there are things that you learn about somebody after twenty-six years but not after fifteen. And it's through the lens of the family project.

After twenty-six years we're launching our children. We had five kids over ten years, so we're still very much in it. But one of these days they're not all going to be living at home, and we're excited about that again.

I mean we absolutely, absolutely loved the family project. But as it's winding down in the form it's been, I'm learning things about Ronnie, and I see his intensity with his children, that I think I didn't see at the fifteen-year mark.

For me, it's seeing that core person, again, all the way through. I think it's just interesting to see Ronnie in relation to adult children. I think he has the relationships with them in this mentoring kind of role that I saw as he mentored younger people when we were much younger. He takes that role with them, and they look to him for that, and that's really beautiful. I didn't see that as much through the middle years with the younger children. I think the middle years were more challenging years for Ronnie.

I remember moving into a sizeable home after having lived in an apartment for five years when we had the last two children. We moved from Sweden to Toronto and into this sizeable home. So finally, I thought, it won't be four kids in one room. Everybody will have their space and privacy. And we moved into this home and we were like a glob. Wherever we would go, everybody would go together. I anticipated everyone was going to spread out but nobody wanted to. Everybody clung to each other. "Okay, let's have this organic organism move into the kitchen now." Or one would say, "I think I'm going here." "Me, too." "Me, too." And then we would go. "Let's do this together."

So we had this kind of, and still do in many ways, this kind of clan thing that we sort of clan together. The kids, they spindle around each other and they sit on each other's laps and they twist around each other. They're like very, very connected. I think, as they're older and they head off on their own adventures, you know, there is a...

Ronnie: And they love adventure.

Karen: They love adventure, yeah.

Ronnie: And their own LOVE adventures that they're coming to. It is wonderful to see their quests, their fears. The language of the home is always a discourse of love. "What do you need to be a person that can give love? Can I be a person that loves greatly? How to be honoring and not to cheat in love?"

It's a model. I think it's the only thing to really talk about from a religious point of view, too. I want to always *try* to be ready for anyone within our family who asks; the request to be attended to, to be noticed.

Philip: Can that be overdone? We were talking with another couple and he complained that she was always reading his mind and he felt invaded.

Karen: I think there's something about trying not to call someone to where they're not ready to go and being in touch with that place. Yes, we're gently urging each other but we try to not have an agenda.

Ronnie: I think people live in a comfort zone of closeness and distance. Sometimes it's accordion-like and you just need to chase. Sometimes when you are being pursued, you turn back, and sometimes you keep going a little more. And it goes inward and outward.

Everyone does have something that they're preserving yet to the future. If someone peers too closely, the other person might not be ready. So, that's a very important negotiation. Some people need to do the inviting.

Karen: It should be safe. It's important not to threaten; maybe to goad, maybe to urge, maybe to encourage; but not to threaten.

Ronnie: If we talk intimacy, which is failing all around the world, I don't want it to be our failure with each other.

Karen: Talking about vulnerability, I look at it like this: Ronnie calls this “Home.” (*She gestures to the space between her heart and Ronnie’s*). This is “Home.” We traveled for two years and we were always at “Home” wherever we went because we were together.

Ronnie: I think everyone wants so deeply to be known. To be known just as is; I think that's what's built into Shabbat, into the system of Shabbat. This is a time of eternal paradise. And it's just strolling together because “that's the only person I want to be with.” I can't wait for that. Every Shabbat we bless each other. Every Shabbat we tell each other our secrets about them, and their secrets.

To give the blessing to someone, it's hard. It's hard to say, “I know this, I saw what was going on this week. I know you. I'm involved and I want more of it. I want it to come forward, don't hide.”

So with younger kids, as Karen was saying, I think we're always interpreting the world for them. “What is reality? What is the story? What is it that I'm experiencing?”

And we put a valance on it: “This is important; this is what our family sees as important.” That's how we educate: to go through all these sensations that can happen with reality. We ask them to ask themselves, “How do we interpret a successful negotiation with society?”

But then at a certain point, children want a lot more and they want another reality and the best of reality. And that's when we have this new conversation with them. It's not about just successfully negotiating the adult world or their peer world, but negotiating, really, God's World.

Marilyn: God's World?

Ronnie: Yes. It's a private story of whatever you resist or whatever you interact with, with your own life force, in your own soul language. It's a private story of how thankful you are to your life, how gratefully you live in the World of Splendor.

Everyone has their own different nuances to that. And so that shouldn't be imposed from the outside. What's mine isn't yours, I have to honor that.

But I do know that Judaism does give the world the understanding that God expects something from you, that there is a push for high, high growth for that ethereal world. It should be a Garden, of course. It should be something so magnificent. And so there is a sense of reward in Judaism.

I love the structure of being able to tell my story with each person, helping each of my children, my wife and I, in our interpretation, our legend with God.

And that's what we've always implanted in our children, that God language. And now they want to try it out. I think I want to teach my children a kind of eternal trust and not just a temporal reflection on time.

Marilyn: So if a spiritual calling is this “pushing you to a higher growth,” as you put it, can you give us an example? How has your relationship challenged and pushed each of you?

Ronnie: We're in the time now where we are taking care of parents and I watch Karen with just, really, amazement. She is so, so delicate with my family and her family and our family and with everyone where their stories are. When I see Karen touching anywhere or anyone, I see again, I see again, that she, her touch, is urged on by God, and it works. It works so beautifully.

Karen: I think, I mean I think we raise each other. We have really different qualities. We work each other as we go through life.

Ronnie is completely spontaneous. Yes? Very spontaneous. I'm less spontaneous so I fell in love with Ronnie's spontaneity. And I'm challenged by Ronnie's spontaneity. I think I try to live up to it. But Ronnie is still much more spontaneous.

And Ronnie is 'Yes'; he's both spontaneous and he's 'Yes'. So if you put those together and you put that together with being in the Rabbinate and then there's everybody's 'Yes' and everybody is spontaneous and everybody is always welcome... but I think I've asked for just a little bit more control, a little bit. Yes, we love an open home, so we always have an open door, people flowing in and out, day, night, whoever, whenever. I love that. I love the life which that brings.

Ronnie: I've never seen the day that Karen was in the bluster of the void. I chose her. I know her only in joy. I only know her joy. I've never seen her not dance. I've never seen her ... I've never seen you in a way of despair.

I've never seen the world of loss that you've absorbed into your skin. You know how to really glide into life so beautifully, always.

Philip: We hear so much about how you are always saying "yes" to each other. What about your "no"?

Karen: Ronnie doesn't say 'No'. I get a call from someone, it is 2 o'clock in the morning, and I say, "I need to go to my friend's. You just sleep." And he says, "Okay, I'll take you." He 'Yes's' everything. There's no 'No.'

Marilyn: Could you tell us about the challenge of dealing with your differences? Do you ever get tangled up in stuff, you know, a "Love Tangle"?

Ronnie: The Love Tangle is spaghetti, the will to tangle together and to be involved. It's not the tangle of a narrower heart, no. It's a tangle of, "I can't wait to entwine with you".

Karen: I don't know, I think we're still growing up, somewhere.

[Turning to Ronnie]

Ronnie, do you have loss?

Ronnie: I was raised in a holocaust family. I was raised by parents who were orphans. So I was raised by a world that pushed away the void and then lived a kind of fantasy inside their own love.

I completely believe in your love, I completely believe in your wondrous, gorgeous sense of dancing in life. And I just want to be part of it. I try to catch up; I try to catch up to that. I learn all the time. You're a fantastic teacher. What a privilege I got to be that close to you.

There is a naïveté to love. It's a wonderful belief, knowing what to overlook, and to be in the privilege of a kiss, of a breath.

Karen: Well, maybe that's the thing about the polarity between us. When I lean toward the "Spontaneous! Yes!", then I know I lean toward him. Whatever those qualities are, it's ethereal. My mother used to say, "You know, Ronnie is an El Greco. Everything is elongated and long." And she'd say, "He is hyperbolic. Everything with him is 'Magnificent!'"

When I said I was inspired by the intensity, I was inspired by the extremes also. And, you know, with him everything is 'very' and it's 'very' and it's 'very,' you know?

Ronnie: Very ultimate.

Karen: "Meh-od", you know the Hebrew word? He is a lot of "Meh-od" (Hebrew for "very"), A lot of just fullness. So, it's to fall in love, over and over again with what I fell in love with originally.

I think we don't change really, I mean, what we are is what our essence is.

It's the 360 degrees of what I might encounter that made me look at it through one lens or another lens. But there is a space lens that sees it all. I fell in love with Ronnie through that lens, so it's to return to that place.

Ronnie: I see no polarity. I see exactly where that meets and it's exactly perfect. It's perfect.

Karen: I think with those different qualities we're constantly learning from each other because we bond. And particularly at midlife you bump into your limitations. Maybe there's a grounding, maybe that's my function, as more of an anchor piece or something. But I keep always being reminded of The Possible with Ronnie.

Marilyn: I'm going to sing you my ditty that's about what we were talking about.

Karen: Yes.

Marilyn: (Singing)

*The one thing I love the most
about the one that I love
is the way he embraces parts of me
I know not of.*

I was reminded of it when you two were talking about your Shabbas rituals of discovering each other.

Karen : Shabbas is so beautiful...

Ronnie: Seductive.

Karen: Because it's about that time where everything else falls away and it's just inner time.

Ronnie: It's such a gift.

Marilyn: I guess some people just do the falling away part on Sabbath. They miss that part where you bring in everything else. They miss where you always re-discover each other.

Karen: It's so radical. Really.

Ronnie: We have the same dreams. Either we talk in our sleep...

Marilyn: When you have five kids, I guess that's when you have to meet. I'll meet you in a dream tonight.

Ronnie: We can wake up and finish each other's dreams. We're very much in a very long and beautiful dialogue about each other. And actually, we wrote that in our wedding invitations. "I am yours and my dreams are yours." And so that night world is as important to me, to us, as the day-to-day practical. That's what I meant by the courtship.

Marilyn: And the courtship is... how you win her over? What is courtship for you?

Karen: I'm so easy.

Ronnie: That we're continually in the courtship, trying again, and looking and starting over. I love it. I love that privilege, because it's so fascinating to commit to that. It's so beautiful. It's not ever just satisfied. Because I mean I'm blessed all the time because of the future. I'm blessed always.

Prayer prepares you. Every day's prayer prepares you for that privilege. "Oh, this is the reason for the day. This is the wondrous gift, a way I could be a part of you." So it's kind of being on the lookout for the awareness of the magic and the world opens up to us. And we are so blessed and so, so truly given it all.

*Ronnie is the Rabbi at Congregation Beth-El in Montreal, QC.
<http://www.beth-elmtl.org/>*

In August 2011, Rabbi Cahana suffered a stroke. He could only blink his eyes. Five days after this event he blinked out his first sermon to his congregation. With the support of his wife and family and congregants he has been slowly, steadily, and even miraculously, recovering.

In 2013 He was quoted in Time magazine in a photo story by his daughter, Kitra Cahana. <http://kitracahana.com/>

Here is a quote from Ronnie published in that article.

"You have to believe you're paralyzed to play the part of a quadriplegic; I don't in my mind and in my dreams every night I Chagall-man float over the city, twirl and swirl. With my toes kissing the floor. I know nothing about this statement of man without motion. Everything has motion. The heart pumps, the bloods race course, the lungs culminate, the body heaves, the mouth moves, the eyes turn inside-out. We never stagnate. Life triumphs up and down." —Rabbi Cahana Montreal, Quebec, 2013.

His sermons and poetry and other writings are on his website, as well as the audio of this interview.

<http://rabbicahana.com/>

Rabbi Ronnie and Karen

The Blue Thread in Their Love Story

*Come my Beloved. It is the Sabbath. Let us welcome her.
Don't be unhappy, don't be downcast.
Come in peace. Be Glad. Be joyful.
It's the Sabbath. Enter, dear Bride, enter.
-- Lecha Dodi (Sung every Sabbath)*

In every couple's Genesis story, their spontaneously remembered and cherished story of their first encounter, we can get a glimpse of how they hold the promise of their relationship.

In Karen's Genesis story she remembers the moment she first saw Ronnie and her imagination was captured. She was twelve years old.

Karen: This figure moving through the woods ... like a gazelle ... Who is that? Who is that creature?" ... absolutely such an Other Kind of Force, an other-worldliness.

For her there was a promise of moving beyond the quotidian into an "other world," beyond the mundane and into the poetic.

For Ronnie, that Genesis moment when the ordinary relationship crystallized into something magical happened later when Karen was 17. He invited her to walk with him.

Ronnie: I knew that God had brought us together. I knew that it was soul language and soul discussion ... So I told her about it. We were walking on a field, in a baseball field, walking and talking. ... I kissed her.

So that image of the two of them walking, late at night, under a starry sky, talking soul language, in a timeless moment, this is how Ronnie still sees their possibilities.

Again and again, in so many ways, they share with us glimpses into a poetic and sublime time where Love would be recognized as a holy and special state. It would be a time outside, but also inside, ordinary time.

In those moments, everything would be new, always new, always filled with wonder, and a gift from God. Vulnerability would be honored and cherished. Love could flourish in safety.

That's what the ceremony of the *T'naim* was about, stating the conditions under which Love could continue to flower. The Conditions were, in effect, promises they were making to each other about how they would be with each other always.

Ronnie: I'll honor where you're frail or where you're in your own secret world. ... And what's tender and what's been preserved or kept very, very much only for each other. ... It's a sacred safety that we give to each other, to really honor ... the gift of their vulnerability.

But it's not enough to just promise. Every week, every Sabbath, they set aside a time only for them, sacred, "away from the bluster of the void." Within that special time, they raise each other up. They cherish each other, they love each other, they reveal to each other their tender secrets. In that safe haven they remember again and again "Why God brought us together," and where they want to go, and where they can go.

Ronnie: How can we be urging each other to our own growth, to our own emerging of ourselves? "How can I be the one that you've entrusted to? And how can I be the one that allows you to push me towards places that I've kept bounded?"

They are also quite aware of the fine line between encouraging the best in a partner and merely nagging. They emphasize how careful one must be.

Karen: It's important not to threaten; maybe to goad, maybe to urge, maybe to encourage; but not to threaten.

Ronnie: Because we're starting over every time, constantly seeing each other, Just right, just now... with the promise still being very active.

This commitment and practice of deepening their intimacy is the blue thread.

When we look at this blue thread, we are reminded of how the tender parts of love must be protected and nurtured and that, when this is done, love becomes rapture.

Ronnie: So it's kind of being on the lookout for the awareness of the magic and the world opens up to us. And we are so blessed and so, so truly given it all.