
What Is a Jew? The Meaning of Genetic Disease for Jewish Identity

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My Jewish friends used to tell me that it was surely some Cossack who gave me my blue eyes and small nose, so comfortable were they with the idea that Jews carry a genetic imprint that makes Jewish eyes brown and Jewish noses large. Or perhaps what caused them to joke was that they were uncomfortable with the possibility that we wear our Jewishness on and in our bodies and our genetic coding. We Jews have always experienced a certain tension and lack of clarity around how we define ourselves as a group. We understand ourselves to be a people, a religion, a nation, an ethnicity and/or some combination thereof.¹ This complex group definition has caused some confusion about how much who we are is about biology and how much it is about culture. And the relationship between our biological and cultural group identity raises some very interesting questions about how we see ourselves in relation to new scientific discoveries in the field of genetics. As science becomes more comfortable with the idea that “nature” and “nurture” interact to make us who we are, so we Jews are beginning to accommodate ourselves to understanding the ways in which our genetic and social identities interact to define who we are. Jewish geneticist Harry Ostrer described this tension well:

Jewishness is not determined by genetics. Nonetheless, genetic threads run through Jewish populations that [provide] them with a group identity. This genetic identity has been retained and modified, much as the religious and cultural identity of Jews has been retained and modified over more than two millennia (Ostrer, 897).

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Defining Who Is a Jew

The standard halakhic definition allows for and seems to differentiate between a biological transmission of Jewishness (you are Jewish if you are born of a Jewish mother) and a religious transmission (you are Jewish if you convert to Judaism through a process, including both accepting Jewish beliefs and performing Jewish actions). But the convert also has Jewish lineage bestowed upon him or her in the process, since he or she is expected to take on the identity of a “son or daughter of Abraham and Sarah,” becoming a Jew not only by practice, but also by a fictive biology. Sue Kahn points out that, given new reproductive technologies, the transmission of Jewish identity through a Jewish mother has also been complicated by modern medical technology, since there is no clear halakhic stance on whether it is the egg or the womb that confers Jewish identity. Thus, according to some experts, a Jewish child can be born with non-Jewish genetic material if the womb in which the child is carried is in the body of a Jewish woman. Others argue that the genetic material is what counts, so a child created with an egg from a Jewish woman might be Jewish even if the woman who gestates the child is not Jewish (Kahn, 165).

The dominant majority of Jewish texts and traditions assume it to be impossible to stop being a Jew, welcoming back even those who have converted to other religions if they wish to return, or accepting as Jewish the matrilineal great-grandchild of a Jewish woman whose family has not practiced Judaism in generations. This underscores the notion that Jewish identity is based on a combination of both inheritable characteristics and religious practice. But the Law of Return in Israel is not inclusive of those who practice other religions, and the tradition of placing someone in *herem* (excommunication, still practiced by some Orthodox Jews for what is considered unacceptable behavior or ideas) also denies Jewish identity to people who are considered to be religiously outside the pale.

The complicated nature of Jewish identity is also reflected in more recent efforts to augment the definition of who is to be included as a Jew, both in Reform and Reconstructionist policies and in Israel’s Law of Return. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews now extend lineage to include those who have a Jewish father. But to confirm their status, patrilineal Jews are also required to participate in Jewish rituals, such as *b’nei mitzvah* or Confirmation ceremonies. And when the State of Israel created a Law of Return, giving automatic citizenship to Jews and their relatives and spouses, the original version did not define the term “Jew” at all and excluded those who had converted out. Difficult cases related to the Law

of Return and claims on Jewish identity brought before the Israeli courts resulted in legislation that confirmed the halakhic concept of who is a Jew. But some of the magistrates and many of the commentators questioned whether Jewish identity in the state ought to reflect nationality and commitment rather than religion or lineage. The question of who is included in the Jewish people and nation is very much alive today.

The Question of Election²

The element of Jewish textual tradition that most poignantly reflects the confusion about identity is the interpretation of the doctrine of election, or what it has meant for Jews to be identified as “the Chosen People.” Election is one of the central categories that define Jewish identity. It is the predominant way of explaining why God cares about this people, calls Israel into being and gives this group the inheritance of a land (Israel), a blueprint for living in that land (Torah) and a promise of future redemption. Yet traditional texts and commentaries differ significantly on the nature of that election. Did God choose this people because they were the descendants of Abraham? Did God continue to connect to them because of “the merit of the ancestors” or because the people assented to the covenant offered at Sinai? The answer given by Jewish traditional sources varies and reflects differing understandings of the nature of Jewish identity as primarily biological or cultural.

This debate runs throughout Jewish history. The Babylonian Talmud seems to favor the idea that election was based on acceptance of the covenant and observance of the law (BT, Avodah Zarah 2a–3b), and the rabbis certainly favored passing the tradition down through their students over their biological sons (Boyarin 197–225). Although status was transmitted based on knowledge of Torah and reputation among Torah scholars, rabbinic Judaism still maintained the value of biological lineage, passing the status of *Cohanut*, the priesthood, from father to son and honoring that lineage in liturgy and synagogue worship practices.

An examination of the traditional liturgy would suggest that Jewish difference from other peoples is based primarily on being chosen because we are the descendants of Abraham. Yehudah Halevi, in his medieval philosophical writings, supports this liturgical perspective, and it is also reflected in Lurianic Kabbalah and in the writings of philosophers like Chaim Luzzato. Moses Maimonides takes the opposite stance, suggesting that God called Abraham not because of any inherent

quality in him, but because of his wisdom; Abraham was chosen not because of who he was, but because of what he believed.

The argument over why the Jews were chosen has been carried on throughout modern times, as well. Spinoza rejected the concept of election based on lineage. He argued that chosenness could only be reconceptualized when and if the Jews were reconstituted in a radically different kind of social organization, and therefore, the concept was totally inapplicable while the Jews were not self-governing. Secular Zionists and reformers were also opposed to election based on Jewish lineage, supporting notions of chosenness based on culture and religion, respectively. Secular Zionists like Ahad Ha'am suggested that election should be construed as national morality. The reformers based their concept of election on the prophetic notion that the Jews have a mission to be "a light unto the nations," bringing the values of ethical monotheism to others. The secular Zionists and reformers both argued that election was a moral concept, but differed about whether that morality was to be focused on building a nation or on spreading Jewish values among the host nations where Jews lived. But religious Zionists, like Rav Kook, and some other traditional thinkers, like Michael Wyschogrod, have continued to maintain a concept of election based on lineage.

Other Jewish thinkers, like Mordecai Kaplan, reject any notion of chosenness and remove any mention of election from the liturgy, including the differentiation among the categories of Cohen, Levi and Israel that support those who claim lineage from the ancient priests. Kaplan's concern about the latter was related not only to dispelling notions of hierarchy in the Jewish community, but also to repudiating any sense of hereditary Jewish privilege. Jewish geneticist Robert Pollack has echoed this argument in contemporary times, rejecting any hereditary notion of Jewish identity, primarily to avoid the inaccurate notion that there is a "Jewish gene."

Many contemporary religious Jews also reject the notion of a Jewish identity based on lineage, since they are uncomfortable with secular Jews claiming Jewish roots based either on nationality — as is the case in the State of Israel — or on ethnicity — as is the case in the United States and other countries. They rather believe that Judaism is a religion that is predicated on being in a covenantal relationship with God. This perspective also includes a rejection of "Jewish culture," which they see as vacuous. Feeling Jewish because you eat falafel or love Woody Allen is woefully misunderstood by religious Jews. They don't comprehend the importance of Jewish culture for Jews who have no interest in the religious dimensions of Jewish life.

The problem of election raises complex ethical questions about the hierarchy that is built into issues related to defining who is a member of the Jewish community.

The question of Jewish election parallels the issues raised above about defining who is a Jew. In both cases, much of the argument boils down to whether the author emphasizes lineage or religion when thinking about these issues. Rather than decide which is more important, it makes sense to assume that some combination of biology and culture is critical to our understanding of inclusion in the Jewish community. The vast majority of Jews are Jewish because they were born of Jewish mothers. However, with an increase in conversion, the acceptance of patrilineal descent and the ongoing questioning of inclusive Jewish identity in the State of Israel, we are facing a much more complicated situation than ever before in defining who is a Jew. This leads us to think more about the relationship between the biological and cultural dimensions of identity. It is therefore important to find resources to support the idea that Jewish identity is a combination of the genetic and the religious or cultural, and not simply based on one dimension or the other. This perspective may be illustrated in two ways. First, it may be clarified through a reading of the biblical story of how God's covenant with Abraham relates to the Sinaitic covenant. Second, it is supported by current findings related to Jewish genetic disease.

The Burning Bush

The traditional Jewish model of defining identity is based primarily on the covenant with Abraham. Although there is much debate over whether Abraham was selected by God arbitrarily or because of his qualities of intellect and morality, Jews understand Abraham to be our common ancestor. We may be descended from Abraham by birth, or we may choose to identify as Abraham's descendants through conversion, but our lineage begins with him. When God reveals himself³ to Abraham, his promise is about the continuity of his descendants.

When God reveals himself to Moses in the desert at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3), he begins by announcing a connection through lineage. God identifies himself to Moses as the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But God also identifies Himself as "I am what I am/I will be what I will be." This identity, known to mystical tradition as "the 12-letter name" (an elaboration on *YHVH*, the four-letter name) implies that God is more than the God of Moses' ancestors. It is, as Martin Buber suggests, the revelation of a God of relationship, a God who will define a covenant not only based on ancestry, but also predicated on a set of beliefs

and behaviors. The God of Abraham is a God of belonging. The God of Moses is a God of behaving and believing. But, of course, this God is one. And so the oneness of this God leads to the one God of two dimensions who revealed himself to Moses: the God of Abraham (the god of ancestors) and the God who is “what I am/what I will be.” This twofold nature of God parallels the twofold nature of Jewish identity. Just as God’s identity is described in terms of lineage (God of your fathers) and religion/culture (I will be what I will be), so the identity of the people of Israel is marked in this twofold way. In this way, we Jews can indeed understand ourselves as made in the image of God.

In the episode of the Golden Calf, we are given a further sense of what the biblical author had in mind in terms of portraying the twofold nature of God as it is expressed through Jewish identity. When the people make the calf, thus abandoning their identification with Moses, God makes Moses an offer. He will start this election process over again, making a new covenant with Moses and his progeny to replace the one made with Abraham. Moses talks God out of this idea, but the possibility itself is instructive. God’s suggestion that the children of Moses could take on this covenant as well (or better) than the children of Abraham reveals two key notions. First, it serves as an important reminder that from God’s perspective, the covenant is revocable, not only based on the behavior of the Jewish people, but also based on lineage. Second, and most important for our purposes, it reminds us that the covenant is indeed based on a combination of lineage and assent. God did not, for example, suggest that he might select righteous people for this covenant. He merely suggests a change in the point at which Jewish lineage would begin. There is no question that the biblical author understood a critical link between biological and cultural sources of Jewish identity. They would not exist apart from one another, no matter at which point in time the process is understood to start.⁴

Therefore, I would like to argue that Jewish identity through Abraham, through the ancestors, is as important to Jewish self-understanding as is identity based on a connection to the religious and cultural tradition of the Jewish people, and that these two dimensions are inextricable. This understanding of “who is a Jew” provides a way of making the Jewish community inclusive, but not unbounded. It incorporates the halakhic definition, based on the idea that Jewishness is handed down through generations or received through the fictive adoption of Jewish lineage by converts, but it is not limited by it. It also recognizes that birth is not enough; there must also be some connection to Jewishness, as is understood in the Reform

and Reconstructionist perspective on patrilineal descent, in which living a Jewish life is required in addition to biological heritage. Since this definition requires assent and engagement in the religious or cultural life of the Jewish people, it does exclude a Jew by birth who does not want to be associated with the group, but it would welcome them back in case they do.⁵ By this definition, the assent can be either religious or cultural, therefore including both secular Jews in the United States and elsewhere who understand their connection to Judaism as ethnic, as well as secular Israelis who see their Jewishness as based on nationality. It would also make room for Brother Daniel, the priest who was born a Jew, fought to save Jews during the Holocaust and wanted to claim the right of return because he identified culturally as a Jew even though he was a priest. (The Israeli courts denied his claim.) And it would include Jews who see themselves as Buddhists or members of other religious groups, but who also want to remain faithful to their understanding of their ethnic heritage.

This definition does not solve the problem of those who are interested in becoming Jewish because of a connection to Jewish culture, but who have no connection to Jewish religion and so are uncomfortable with conversion rituals. These cases would require some kind of acknowledgement or ceremony different from conversion. There is not much support for this position in the official ranks of the Jewish community. But there are indeed many people, at least in North America, who would welcome such a possibility for becoming connected to the Jewish people—especially when that connection is based on academic study or on a relationship with a particular Jewish person to whom they wish to join their lives. The definition also does not solve the problem of connections with other groups who identify as Jews, like some Black Hebrews or the Messianic Jews, who reject the organized Jewish community's claim of exclusive authority in defining Jewish lineage or in limiting the boundaries of Jewish culture and heritage solely to the antecedents of rabbinic Judaism. However, as recent findings in genetics are now providing new information that enable us to ascertain lineage, we may have to reckon with the questions of Jewish identity that are raised by these other groups in new ways.

The Chosen People and Ethical Dilemmas

I am not, however, trying to suggest that acknowledging Jewish difference based on lineage as well as assent is always, or even often, a good thing for the Jews, or for any group that claims that their difference has some meaning attached to it. It not only

fails to remove the ethical problems faced by an exclusive community; it serves to underscore them. Many rabbis and teachers who throughout Jewish history have downplayed the importance of lineage have done so to avoid the problems of Jewish claims of special status based on heredity. What I would argue, however, is that removing the idea that our status is based in part on lineage, no matter how it is explained, has failed to successfully remove the problems encountered by being different. Claims of special status based on observing the law or even on the idea that Jews have a vocation (Mordecai Kaplan's answer to chosenness) or that our claim to chosenness is based on our social organization (as in Spinoza) or the moral mission suggested by reformers or the national mission supported by Zionists do not remove the essential quality of the claim of chosenness. It makes no difference if chosenness means belonging to a tribe or being the bearers of a mission; in any case, the Jews are marked as different. We cannot get away from the fact that viewing the group as different in any way is the very quality that defines a bounded community that includes and excludes. Experiencing Jewish identity simultaneously as both hereditary and by assent does not worsen this dimension of the problem.

It also does nothing to worsen the other problematic dimension of chosenness — the fact that our difference has also led to our being stigmatized and placed in danger. Surely, the biological dimension of our difference has led to heinous racism against us, from the horrendous eugenic programs that halted the immigration of Jews and other “undesirables” to the United States in the early 20th century (Kevles) to the ultimate degradation perpetrated through Nazi racial policies (Gilman). But we should not forget that Jewish exclusiveness and claims to being chosen by God to bring ethics to the world have also been the source of much hatred against us, and counterclaims by Christianity and Islam throughout history have also led to animosity, competition and bloodshed. Claiming that our difference has some meaning, whatever that meaning is, subjects us to the same problems that linking our identity to our lineage does. It is not for us to surrender our difference, no matter what its basis. The goal is to work toward a society that no longer sees difference as a mark of superiority or inferiority, but accepts difference as a normal part of what it means to be human. Then the foundation of our difference as Jews will no longer matter.

The other ethical dilemma we face when we accept our status as a separate group is a corollary to being labeled inferior or superior because of our difference. Seeing ourselves as a tribal community can also lead us to favor our own over

others and to make ethical decisions based upon what is good for the Jews before we consider what is good for humanity or the planet. This has often been described as “concentric-circle” ethics, or the ethics of care, and many ethicists have argued that it makes sense to take care of those who are close to us before we attend to those who wish us harm or who are merely outside our circle. But it is important to question that ethical position. For example, what differentiates concentric-circle ethics from the argument that might be used by Vice President Dick Cheney when he gives contracts to Halliburton? He is, after all, only taking care of those who are close to him. Any time we are able to take care of our own, we are using our power to help someone else and deciding in favor of one cause or idea or one person or persons over others. We need to question the idea that it is always right to help those who are close to us before we consider helping others. What I want to argue here is that being a bounded community doesn’t mean we must inevitably assume that we should take care of our own before we care for others, and that we need to be alert to the possibility that this is indeed a pitfall that often confronts bounded communities, and an ethic we might wish to reconsider.

Despite the problems it raises, this twofold identity based on biology and culture is the situation in which we, as Jews, have lived in, both in the past and today. Thinking about the possible ethical problems we face when we acknowledge our status as a community linked by lineage as well as religion and culture is critical to the discussion about Jews and new developments in genetics that follows.

The Case of “Jewish Genes”

The conversation about identity is important for many reasons, but one of the most crucial aspects is helping us to understand what the findings from the Human Genome Project mean to us. As biologist Robert Pollack points out, new discoveries in genetics do not in any way suggest a single “Jewish gene.” But they do open up new insights about the biological dimension of our identity to which we must attend. The findings of the Human Genome Project explain the genetic resemblances of Ashkenazi Jews, and that should not surprise us. But they also provide evidence to suggest that the people who have considered themselves inheritors of the status of *Cohane* (and many who have not thought of themselves in that way) have to a great extent passed on that heritage genetically for several thousand years, while more recent findings about descendants of the Levites suggest genetic connections that began only about 1,000 years ago in Central Asia (Behar, 2003). This genetic

mapping provides links to groups in Africa, like the Lemba or the Khazars of Central Asia, who also claim Jewish ancestry, and it raises new questions about what we really do mean by lineage. It also raises questions about limiting our notions of Jewish culture and religion to those passed down exclusively by rabbinic Judaism (Egorova and Parfitt).

It is important to note that current thinking about the nature of the connection between biology and culture in general, or the so-called nature/nurture debate, has led to conclusions similar to those drawn by the discussion of the covenant. As we know now, it is the complex interaction between the biological and the cultural that creates the social phenomena of our world as we know it. We no longer need to ask whether nature or nurture is the root cause of depression, sexuality, laughter, aggression or spirituality, or even of many diseases. We have come to know that while there are genetic components to each of these, it is the interaction of the complex biological processes within an individual and within our environment that creates our individual selves and our social world. So, too, we must recognize that as Jews we inherit and pass on a number of genes that, in interaction with each other and our environment, produce many different possibilities for Jewish bodies, including physical characteristics, dimensions of personality and a propensity toward certain diseases. As it says in the Talmud, “all is foreordained and free will is given.” In other words, we live with the understanding that while much of what makes us human (and Jewish) already resides in our genes, the choices we make and the situations in which we find ourselves interact with random chance to create the outcomes that define our lives.

As the above discussion about lineage suggests, we Jews have always been conscious of a biological dimension to our identity. While it was often thought that we passed on our lineage through “blood,” there has also been an awareness of and interest in genetic connections.⁶ Medical science has uncovered a list of about 20 single gene mutations that affect the Ashkenazi population, and some that affect the Sephardi Jewish population as well. Jews have responded to each of these diseases with great interest. They have established foundations that create educational campaigns to alert Jews to the potential threat, to finance further research and to encourage hospitals to create sites for genetic testing. Many of these foundations are involved in legislative campaigns to champion laws to provide resources for those with a particular genetic disease. They have also developed networks to provide care and support for people with these diseases. What differentiates some

of these diseases from the commonly known example of Tay-Sachs disease (TSD) is that they are not fatal at an early age and do not have a clear trajectory. In certain of these diseases, the symptoms may be mild or severe, and the onset may occur after infancy. Caring for and providing social support for people with these diseases is a more complicated social issue, and one that raises an ethical dilemma regarding the concentric circles of care. Should Jews be more concerned with Jewish genetic diseases than with other social problems? Should the burden of care for people with these diseases fall only on the affected families and their extended networks, or do all Jews have a responsibility to be involved in the complex issues related to these diseases?

This issue became important to me 16 years ago, when a close friend of mine gave birth to a daughter who was soon diagnosed with familial dysautonomia (FD).⁷ FD is an autosomal recessive disorder similar to TSD. The disease affects the autonomic nervous system, and those born with it cannot regulate breathing, swallowing, body temperature or blood pressure — many of the things we take for granted. Before doctors understood the disease, FD babies often died from choking. Had Sam been born a decade earlier, this disease would most likely have been fatal. But Sam was diagnosed early and at a time when we know more about how to manage the disease. Fed through a tube for many years and carefully monitored, she has grown into a delightful, witty, charming young woman whose *bat mitzvah* in the summer of 2002 was an event that made family and friends weep with joy. Sam continues with schooling, goes to a Jewish summer camp that accommodates kids with FD⁸ and works on behalf of the Dysautonomia Foundation. Four years ago, with the support of the foundation, researchers developed a genetic test for carriers of FD. In the past few years, they have dedicated themselves to working for legislation to provide accommodations so that kids with FD can lead their lives with better support from social networks. Because of Sam, I am aware of this disease and I have given *tzedakah* to the foundation over the past several years. It is clear that being close to Sam and her parents has changed my life and my attitude about working for the rights of people with disabilities. I do not have the distance from this issue to discern the extent to which the fact that FD is a “Jewish disease” was part of my decision to be committed to and deeply concerned about the work of the foundation. But this situation did raise my awareness of how close relationships serve as a factor in prioritizing ethical concerns.

Conclusions

The persistence of these stereotypes should make us reflect about the larger ethical questions raised here about Jewish identity. Is it worth maintaining our status as distinctive if it means that we will be stigmatized? Of course, the answer to that question is simple; it is unimaginable to me that we would give up being Jewish because it has led to our being stigmatized and mistreated. If the Crusades and the Holocaust did not change our minds, why would a predisposition to certain cancers? But it also gives us an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of difference, and perhaps to make some suggestions for an ethic of justice that respects rather than ignores difference.

When Jews are being stigmatized, we do everything in our power to fight discrimination. It is my hope that this will lead us to a place where we do everything in our power to fight not only for ourselves, but also for others who are similarly stigmatized because they are thought to be different. This idea may prompt us to think about ways in which to respect the rights and humanity of Palestinian Arabs who live in Israel. Or it may remind us that African-Americans in this country have been stigmatized because of their physical and genetic characteristics — a circumstance similar to the ways in which Jews have been stigmatized and oppressed in other times and places. Or it may lead us to work for the rights of people with disabilities to equal access to the legal and social resources that will allow them to live fulfilling lives — lives free of the stigmatization they may have experienced because they, too, are different.

We find truths in often-repeated aphorisms; that is why they are repeated, even if the lesson is not always easily learned. And so I close with Hillel's questions:

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" We must accept ourselves as a people with a genetic heritage, both good and bad, and a cultural and religious tradition, also good and bad, but one that is ours.

"But if I am only for myself, what am I?" The heritage that makes us different must also make us conscious that difference is still not respected in the societies in which we live, and that we have an obligation to work not only on our own behalf, but also on behalf of every group's right to be different. We must consider whether or not it makes sense to give preferential treatment to our own causes, or to work for an end to preferential treatment for any cause.

“And if not now, when?” Although we come from a tradition that cares deeply about the past and takes building for the future seriously, we must work for change in the present, even though we know that everything will continue to change.

Notes

1. I have excluded the term race from this description because of the complex and confusing ways in which the term has been used. When race was thought to be a biological category, Jews were thought to be part of the Semites, a category presumed to encompass the populations of the Middle East. Given the evils that have been perpetrated in the name of racial theory, we should be pleased that this notion of race has been thoroughly discredited — although it is important to note that it remains part of our consciousness because of the misuse of the term “anti-Semitism” to refer to all hatred of Jews, whether biologically, culturally or politically based. Race as a social construction, on the other hand, is a valuable tool in understanding social issues, but its application to the Jewish people is extremely complex, as well. In the United States, Jews have come to be seen as part of the socially constructed “white” race, complicating both their role in the racial politics of America and in understanding who is to be defined as Jewish. The assumption that Jews are white and European has serious ramifications for internal Jewish “racial” politics, since Jews of African and Middle Eastern descent (the original Semites, if you will) are often discounted or oppressed. For a thorough discussion of how 19th-century European anthropological racial categorization was applied to Jews, see Efron, 1994 and Hart, 2000.
2. I base much of the discussion on the question of election on traditional sources culled from Walzer (2003). Additionally, I thank Noam Zohar, co-editor of that volume, for his thoughtful comments on this section.
3. I refer to God with masculine pronouns when discussing texts that use them to portray God as an active character in anthropomorphic terms.
4. Maimonides understood this exchange to suggest the opposite — that beginning with Abraham would rather imply transcending the ethnic confines of the relationship with God (see his letter to Ovadya the Convert).
5. Dena Davis reminds us in her work that while a community can decide whom to include and whom not to include, individuals also have the right to decline participation or identification if they choose to do so.
6. For example, when secular Israeli women decide to have children by alternative insemination, they will most often choose a donor who is a Jew from the same ethnic background, if at all possible. Religious Israelis follow Jewish law and select donors who are not genetically Jewish, for fear of inadvertent adultery or incest that might be the result of mixing the sperm of those who are related, since Jewish law defines lineage through the maternal line (Kahn, 37).
7. For a thorough discussion of familial dysautonomia and its impact on this particular family, see Lindee, 2005 and Ginsburg and Rapp, 1999.
8. Chai Lifeline, a national service group, established Camp Simcha Special to serve Jewish children with life-threatening disorders. See http://www.chailifeline.org/camp_simcha.asp.

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