

פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים

Panim el panim

Engaging face-to-face

Between Two Faces

Stephanie Kolin

Moses is reeling after his people built the Golden Calf. He is exhausted by their faithlessness and appalled by God's threat to abandon them. Distraught, Moses cries out to God: "*hareini na et k'vodecha*" ("God, show me Your honor"). God interprets Moses' plea as a fervent need in this moment of despair to see God's face. And God answers: "No. You cannot see My face and live." (Exodus 33:20)

This is just one moment in a Jewish tradition that pulls us toward being face-to-face, *panim el panim*, with the other. Such encounters are elevated as sacred connections between people and between human beings and God. While acknowledging the risks involved, Jewish texts and commentators suggest that a face gazing into a face is perhaps the most powerful and transformational posture two individuals can experience. Philosopher Martin Buber calls this moment "revelation," and he teaches that each person leaves the experience with something "more" in them.

Although God warns that seeing God's face could kill a person, our ancestor Jacob's experience would suggest otherwise. In Genesis, as he prepares to meet his brother Esau, he wrestles with what the text describes as an "*ish*," a man. In the struggle, his hip is rent from its socket and his name is changed to "*Yisrael*." As he limps away, Jacob declares: "I have seen God *panim el panim*, and my life is preserved." (32:31) Not only does Jacob live but his heart, his body, and his name are transformed. And, Torah spoiler alert, we learn in Moses' epitaph: "There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom God knew face-to-face." (Deuteronomy 34:10)

Why is being *panim el panim* so meaningful? We find a hint in the construction of the *mishkan*, our traveling wilderness sanctuary. Moses is instructed to build the lid of the ark with two angels on top, "and their faces

will be as a man facing his brother." (Exodus 25:20) God then says: "That is where I will meet with you." In the space between two faces, we find God, God finds us.

As a congregational rabbi and a community organizer, there is no more important practice than building relationships face-to-face. In justice work, which addresses the root causes of suffering, people sit *panim el panim* and share their stories, pain, and dreams. A face gazing into a face creates the space for vulnerability, trust, hope, and even God. There, across lines of difference, we can decide to cast our lots together to heal suffering. Face-to-face meetings not only have the power to change the individuals, but have led communities to make systemic change, as in New York, where community-based organizing led to the protection of children from dangerous incarceration in adult prisons.

And when we cannot sit face-to-face? We find we can see the face of the other even in our own face and the faces of those we love. We read in Proverbs: "*Kamayim hapanim lapanim, ken lev ha'adam la'adam*." ("As a face reflects a face in water, so does one person's heart reflect another.") (27:19) When I look at my daughter's face, I see reflected there the terrified faces of children torn from their parents on our southern border, as if I were sitting across from them, and I am unable to be indifferent.

This is why being *panim el panim* is so risky, so powerful, so beautiful. We do not merely see the person before us and then go on our way. Rather, our tradition asks that our hearts be stirred to empathy and our hands and feet to action as we see ourselves reflected in another's eyes. There, in humanity's gaze and God's presence, we find ourselves accountable to one another and called to action.

Stephanie Kolin is a rabbi at Central Synagogue in Manhattan, a community organizer, and an Auburn Seminary senior fellow. She has been named as one of *Newsweek's* "Rabbis to Watch."

NiSh'ma

On this page, our three commentators examine two verses describing the building of the desert Tabernacle, or mishkan. They explore the gendered associations of the two cherubim facing each other, and the planks of wood and tenons — or sockets — that lay side by side and create the structure of the Tabernacle. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



Rachel Nussbaum: Two strikingly similar phrases appear in back-to-back chapters of the book of Exodus regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*, the desert Tabernacle, the portable spiritual home of the Israelites. First, a pair of cherubim (winged angelic beings) are commissioned to sit atop the Ark, facing each other, which the text describes as “*ish el achiv*,” “a man to his brother.” Then in the following chapter,

we learn about how the *Mishkan* structure itself is to be assembled, with planks of wood whose tenons and sockets fit together “*isha el achotah*,” “a woman to her sister.”

These two phrases are identical, save for the one (notable) difference of gender. The reasons for the difference is straightforward: *k'ruvim* (cherubim) is a masculine noun in Hebrew and *yadot* (tenons) a feminine noun. However, the visual pictures the two verses paint are quite different: the cherubim's orientation dictates that they face in toward each other, whereas the planks must be laid in parallel, side-by-side.

In a place of privilege, the cherubim reside in the center of the Tabernacle, inside the Holy of Holies, on top of the Ark that contains the tablets of the commandments. And yet their face-to-face orientation exists only within the confines of the side-by-side planks, which form the very structure of the Tabernacle.

This configuration rings true to me today. I picture volunteers in my community working shoulder-to-shoulder in the kitchen preparing meals for homeless “tent city” residents or a multigenerational group marching for justice and equality arm-in-arm, like a wall of planks. This shoulder-to-shoulder framework — with directional alignment toward a common goal, and through inter-group partnerships and alliances — allows us to build the Tabernacles of today: communities and societies capable of housing the most intimate face-to-face encounters.

Rachel Nussbaum is rabbi and executive director of the Kavana Cooperative, a pluralistic and dynamic Jewish community in Seattle, and a co-founder of the Jewish Emergent Network.



Seth Cohen: The instructions for the building of the *Mishkan*, the spiritual center of the newly liberated community of Israelites, is rich with detail and symbolic significance. As Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum points out in her insightful commentary on the two selected texts, the juxtaposition of the masculine and the feminine helps remind us of the ways symbolic distinction can shape connection and community.

That gendered binary representation of the cherubim and the planks/tenons (representing the duality of masculinity and femininity), however, belies the fact that we live in a non-binary world, where individuals span and expand the gender spectrum. As we continue to learn and experience how contemporary reflections of gender can be empowering for the ways we understand ourselves and one another, we should also seek ways to reconcile this learning with the texts that inspire us in our spiritual lives.

So, perhaps it is not the two cherubim that we should notice but the spectrum of space between them. Perhaps it is not the pairs of planks/tenons we should be mindful of but the multiplicity of those pairs and how they interact with one other. In that sense, the text might teach us that the face-to-face or *panim el panim* encounters and the beautiful notion of community building that Rabbi Nussbaum notes are not just about male and female but also about reflecting the full spectrum of human identity as we strive to fulfill our collective purpose in this world.

Seth Cohen is a senior director of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, an organization focused on igniting the passion and power in young people to create positive change.



Pat Allen: Rabbi Nussbaum sees confirmation of the gendered language describing the orientation of the cherubim and the planks constituting the

Mishkan expressed in the ways her congregants enact their service to the community. Reflecting further on this theme, I see two cherubim figures retaining their separate autonomous existence. Their positioning describes an energetic task of holding the in-between space. In fact, many artists' renditions of the cherubim show their wings touching but their faces turned downward toward the cover of the Tabernacle as they hold the space for God, who, from that space, will speak to the Israelites. They must temper their individuality in order to perform their quite exalted task. Being face-to-face can generate many distractions from a task at hand.

The planks, however, are to be literally joined via tenon, a type of joint in which the woodworker fashions the end of the plank to fit seamlessly into a prepared space. The plank does not retain its full shape but allows itself to be fitted to another. A tenon requires a mortise. Each plank must lose some of its material in order to accomplish the creation of a physical space. Women are perhaps more familiar with submerging — even sacrificing — parts of themselves in order to accomplish what needs to be done in families and communities. We can imagine the sacrifice of the planks because it echoes ways in which we have tempered our identities in service to others. The individuality of the planks, first in being milled into boards and then into interlocking joints, has been sacrificed for the strength and endurance of the *Mishkan*.

As an artist, I understand the interplay between structure and energy in a work of art. Design and embellishment house the energy of what is being expressed; energy without form cannot be conveyed. Yet we have a long way to go to balance the gendered contributions in our communities and society. Whose identity and labor are submerged and who retains a sense of self as we work for our common good? Both the physical space of the *Mishkan*, so carefully designed of wood and many other material elements, and the energetic space, created by the positioning of heavenly beings, are required for us as individuals and in our communities for the full presence of the Divine to dwell within and guide us. But all of the work can be shared.

Pat Allen is an artist, art therapist, and author of *Art Is a Way of Knowing* and *Art Is a Spiritual Path*. She lives in Berkeley, Calif., where she is a teaching artist at the Jewish Studio Project.

וְהָיוּ הַכְּרֻבִּים פְּרָשֵׁי כְנָפִים לְמַעַל סֹכְכִים
בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל-הַכַּפְּפוֹת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ
אֶל-אָחִיו אֶל-הַכַּפְּפוֹת יְהִיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִּים.

*“The cherubim ... confront each other,
the faces of the cherubim being
turned toward the cover.”*

— Exodus 25:20

שְׁתֵּי יְדוֹת לְקָרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד מִשְׁלֹבֶת
אֶשֶׁה אֶל-אָחֶתָּה.

*“Each plank shall have two tenons,
parallel to each other.”*

— Exodus 26:17

Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses. This month, *Sh'ma Now* explores the Jewish sensibility **panim el panim**: How we might live, love, and work in face-to-face encounters.

God Cannot Survive Our Gaze

Daniel Landes

Seeing God “face-to-face” promises intimacy but signals a complicated relationship. The Torah testifies that Moses “was known by God ‘face-to-face.’” (Deuteronomy 34:10) The medieval commentator Rashi explains that Moses was so intimate with God that he was able to call upon God whenever he wished. Nachmanides, the medieval scholar known as Ramban, understood their closeness to be so strong they needed no intermediary. And yet, despite the immediacy of one face to the other, the Torah restrains ultimate closeness. To Moses’ request, “Show me now Your glory,” (Exodus 33:18), God replies: “You are not able to see My face, for no person can see Me and live.” (Exodus 33:20) Even the sun in eclipse, already covered and obscured by another object, requires levels of filters to be observed. Seeing God face-to-face is suicidal.

More than that, it is absurd. Humans are made in the image of God: We think and accumulate knowledge. But God’s knowledge is one and the same as God’s existence. Moses could not see God’s face, for “to see God” would be to understand God. We are incapable of such action. If we would “see” God, we would “see” that which we cannot grasp. Our limited selves cannot presume to assimilate *Ein Sof* — that which has no limit. And Judaism did not take the option of positing a lesser or human god who could be seen and understood. For us, that would be a denial of God’s Being, infinite at every moment.

Seeing God is an impossible task for humans; surprisingly, it is also impossible for God. Exodus 33:20 *should* be read: “You are not able to see My face, for a person cannot see Me that I shall live!” God cannot survive our gaze. The “I” is also self-referential, referring to God. If an individual could escape the inherent danger of seeing the

Infinite, then — by definition — he or she would construct an image of God that would be profound only in part; it would be a limited, strangulated God. God would be reduced to something finite that a person can comprehend, an icon that might be venerated for its powerful but limited nature. Such seeing, however, is actually a funeral viewing of a dying God, a permanently fixed position of perfection.

But for those of us who worship the “ever living and changing God” (*Ehiyeh Asher Ehiyeh*), such a deathly nostalgia is repugnant. A perfect, unchanging God, the unmoved mover, is just too static for us today and for the conceivable future. The ever-increasing holiness (*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*, of the *Kedusha*, or Holiness prayer) of God in a kabbalistic model makes sense and produces awe for our mega-computer epoch that sees knowledge and understanding — theologically, key elements of the divine — as unimaginable exponential growth and not as mere accumulated data or static cognition.

The utter vitality of God does allow us to see God. We are given a glance sparked by God’s deep penetration of every dimension, nuance, arch, and crevice of the world. Although we do sense God’s presence hiding just behind nature, this is not God’s face but rather the cold transcendent ground of our immanent reality, absent relationship and personality.

Given God’s vitality, where and how does our face meet God’s? Moses almost succeeded. He glimpsed the knot of God’s phylacteries (*tefillin*) on the back of God’s “head,” which contain verses parallel to those found in our *tefillin*. (*Brachot* 6) Thus, the people Israel in their morning wrapping of *tefillin* bind themselves to God, who simultaneously is wearing his *tefillin* and binding Himself to Israel. Our own glimpse of God occurs through prayer. God’s reality is summoned at the beginning of every blessing when we recite, “Blessed are You, God...” (*“Baruch atah...”*). We assert God’s presence and God shows up, tied to us by the image of the *tefillin* knot.

We might also glimpse God’s face in the *beit midrash* study hall, where students push back against their mentor’s lesson. Learning is all about internalizing, formulating, questioning, and reformulating — an endless dialectic. In that wrestling with our ultimate learning partner, God’s face is momentarily revealed and glimpsed, shining between the black print and the bright white page, hovering with the argument.

Finally, God’s face is seen where it has been shunned and avoided. Do you really wish to

see God face-to-face? There is one sure way: when one gives *tzedakah*, one must (as the midrash on Psalm 17 commands) look at the face of that poor woman or man. That face bears the image of God, and one fulfills the verse, “I through *TZeDeK* / charity shall see Thy face.” (17:15) When we are able to give that empathic gaze, we hope that the Merciful One will look that way towards us.

Rabbi Daniel Landes is founder and director of Yashrut, building civil discourse through a theology of integrity, justice, and tolerance. Yashrut includes a *smikha* initiative as well as programs for rabbinic leaders.

Facing the Occupation

Ian Chesir-Teran

There may be two sides to every story, but, when I escort American rabbis and rabbinical students on visits to Hebron in the occupied Palestinian territories through my work at T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, we only bear witness to one side of the story: that of the oppressed.

We meet *panim el panim* with Palestinians like Issa Amro, a resident of Hebron and member of the nonviolent group Youth Against Settlements. Issa describes being imprisoned under “administrative detention” by the Israeli army for months without criminal charges, yet Israeli settlers harass and attack Palestinians like him without the military doing anything to stop it. He shares his anger and shame that Palestinians are forbidden to drive and walk on certain public roads, referred to by the Israeli military as “sterilized.” These roads once made up Hebron’s bustling city center.

We meet *panim el panim* with former Israeli soldiers like Merphie Bubis, a member of Breaking the Silence. Merphie shows us Palestinian homes and stores that have been painted with racist graffiti and also welded shut by the military. She discusses orders she carried out against Palestinians, including random checkpoints and nighttime home raids to “make the army’s presence felt” and protect the Israeli settlers.

These conversations are often jarring and uncomfortable, especially at first. Most American Jews have never sat with a Palestinian activist like Issa or been challenged by the perspectives of anti-occupation veterans like Merphie. But our hosts are unassuming in the way they share their personal stories, and participants soon connect with them, finding the courage to look them in the eyes and ask probing questions such as: “What would you say to an Israeli soldier about to begin military service?” and

“How do you explain all of this to your children?” and “What gives you hope?” Experiences like these allow American rabbis and rabbinical students to access first-hand stories they have not heard before and then to use their rabbinic voices in new ways to talk about the occupation.

By the end of the day, participants sometimes ask why we do not meet *panim el panim* with Israeli settlers. They seek “balance” and an explanation why Palestinians are treated this way, even though most have already heard rationales repeatedly offered for the status quo.

If there is a second side to this story, I answer, it must come from Israel’s government, not from settlers. The Israeli government gives its citizens license to establish settlements on foreign land it holds under military rule. The Israeli government applies two separate and unequal legal systems in Hebron: civil law for settlers, and military law for Palestinians. And I do not want to create false equivalencies or give a platform to those who would try to justify policies that I consider morally wrong.

In biblical times, Nathan rebuked King David for committing adultery with Bathsheva and intentionally sending her husband Uriah to be killed in battle, without first waiting to hear David’s side of the story. (2 Samuel 12) When Jezebel had Naboth killed so that King Ahab could steal his vineyard, Elijah did not ask for King Ahab and Jezebel’s side of the story before condemning their abuse of power. These prophets fulfilled their sacred obligation to speak truth to power after bearing witness to injustice. And though I am no prophet, I take seriously Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s 1963 teaching: “Let there be a grain of prophet in every[one].” (*Religion and Race* speech)

T’ruah does not hold itself out as offering an all-encompassing or neutral perspective on the occupation. There are moral and practical limits to the number of *panim el panim* encounters we arrange on our excursions. I expect that some participants might choose to return to Hebron to meet with Israeli settlers and learn more about their decisions to live there. I respect that choice. My hope is that, during those conversations, our participants will share with conviction, in ways they could not before, the consequences those decisions have had and continue to have on Palestinians and Israelis like Issa and Merphie.

Rabbi **Ian Chesir-Teran** is the rabbinic educator in Israel for *T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights*.

Face-to-Face with My Patients

David Chodirker

In today’s hectic world, human relationships are increasingly mediated by electronic technology. Powerful computers and data networks power the ubiquitous Internet. Mobile communications and social media platforms have transformed how individuals relate to other people, institutions, and the world at large. In the medical realm, the Affordable Care Act and the 2009 HITECH Act mandated the use of electronic health records (EHR) and, in doing so, catalyzed its widespread adoption by physicians and hospital systems.

How have these seismic shifts in interpersonal communication and clinical documentation affected the physician-patient interaction? Can an understanding of the biblical phrase *panim el panim* inform these interactions in a way that deepens the physician-patient relationship and, ultimately, improves patient care?

Panim el panim in straightforward translation means “face-to-face.” As a family physician, I know that most clinical interactions are face-to-face. In the bygone days of paper charts, my attention was naturally directed, nearly entirely (aside from jotting a few paper notes), toward my patient. There was no ever-present technology to be utilized while attending to the patient before me. Today, my floating flat screen sits 45 degrees to my right, intervening in the physical and interactive space between us and invariably siphoning off a portion of both my cognitive and my physical attention from the patient. I have always endeavored to focus on my patients, listening closely to their words, monitoring mood, affect, facial expressions, verbal tone, and body language. The distraction of concurrent EHR navigation stresses the quality of human interactions integral to the physician-patient relationship. From my personal observations as well as published studies, it is clear that physicians using EHRs (which we are compelled to do) focus significantly less on patient-centered communication. Although it is undoubtedly true that EHRs have improved clinical documentation, it is also sadly apparent that they have diminished the art of clinical medicine.

This art is practiced when forging compassionate connections with patients, as we try to fully understand their concerns as well as how their health problems affect their lives. Assessing a patient’s wellness or illness

is a process facilitated not only by physically seeing but also by attentive listening and recognition of nonverbal cues.

The phrase *panim el panim* is encountered first in the book of Genesis, after Jacob wrestles with a man-angel who thereafter changes Jacob’s name to Israel. Recognizing the man-angel as God, Jacob declares, “for I have seen God face-to-face, and my life is preserved.” (32:31) During this profound struggle with God, both God and Jacob were wholly present. Engaged in a relationship with the other, they were able to fully “see” each other. Jacob becomes a survivor, now bearing a new name that transforms his and his descendants’ destiny. God too is changed, as God now recognizes a true covenant-partner, one who will question and challenge.

Similarly, by fully engaging with and “seeing” the whole patient, physicians are better able to understand a patient’s illness and its meaning, and, ultimately, we can help transform illness into wellness. This is at the core of the art of medicine.

Physicians need to prioritize human connections with their patients in order to fully understand the nature and import of their illnesses. Only in this way can we provide the best clinical care our patients deserve. We must increasingly turn the monitor aside (if even for just a few minutes) and, with humility and wisdom, feel empowered to be truly present — to observe, listen to, sometimes struggle with, and ultimately be face-to-face with our patients. *Panim el panim*, in its deeper sense, is a model by which we can help transform our patients’ lives, in ways both large and small. Along the way, we too might find ourselves transformed, small measure by small measure.

Dr. **David Chodirker**, is the founding partner at Wellesley Family Care Associates. Married with four children, he lives in Newton, Mass.

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Consider & Converse:

“*Panim el Panim*” is a guide that walks you through this issue, inspires reflections, prompts questions, and provides ways to connect this reading with other meaningful experiences. It is found online at www.forward.com/shma-now.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*Panim el panim*” — Living, Loving,
and Working Face-to-face

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the Jewish sensibility of “*panim el panim*”/ **how we live, love, and work in face-to-face encounters**. The philosopher Martin Buber explored this notion of sacred encounter decades ago in his pioneering writing on “I-Thou” relationships. Buber set the standard for inspiring much of the way we think about personal relationships—and over the course of the past decade or two, how we organize big communal actions. So, I asked Rabbi **Stephanie Kolin** — an early leader in the Congregational Based Organizing-for-Justice field — to introduce this theme. She connects Buber’s writing with our theme of “*panim el panim*”/ face-to-face encounters, and sees these relationships as sacred connections between “people and between human beings and God. While acknowledging the risks involved, Jewish texts and commentators suggest that a face gazing into a face is perhaps the most powerful and transformational posture two individuals can experience.”

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal can be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*Panim el panim*” — Living, Loving, and Working Face-to-face

Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Much of Rabbi **Stephanie Kolin's** [page 1] rabbinic work is focused on community organizing. She writes “In systemic justice work, individuals sit *panim el panim* and share their stories, their suffering, their joys, and their dreams. A face gazing into a face creates the space for vulnerability, trust, hope, and even God. There, we can decide to cast our lots together to heal suffering. Face-to-face meetings not only change the individuals in them but have also led to victories that have changed the world.” Why is facing another person and sharing one’s story intrinsic to community organizing? Have you experienced such an encounter that was successful? One that devolved? How so and why?
- Rabbi **Ian Chesir-Teran**, [page 3] the rabbinic educator in Israel for T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, shares stories of bringing American visitors to visit Palestinians in Hebron. He writes about the difficulty of these face-to-face encounters. He hopes that “during those conversations, our participants will share with conviction, in ways they could not before.” What have been some of your more difficult face-to-face encounters and what has made them difficult? Should organizations that bring visitors to meet Palestinians provide a “balanced” experience? Is balance always possible? When and why is it not possible? What contributes to making a face-to-face encounter problematic and impossible?
- Rabbi **Danny Landes** [page 3] writes about Moses’s desire to know and see God face-to-face — and why that was complicated. Not only can humans not see the face of God, God cannot survive our gaze. Danny suggests we see God in unexpected ways: the *beit midrash* study hall where students pore over texts and God’s handiwork comes to life, or in prayer or natural beauty. Do you see God’s face? Where and under what circumstances? How might we seek God’s face in today’s more perilous world?

Consider & Converse

A Guide to **“Panim el panim”** — Living, Loving, and Working Face-to-face

Reflective Questions

can help one to integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- Dr. **David Chodirker** [page 4] writes about the use of electronic medical records. Before the implementation of these electronic records, Dr. Chodirker's attention was almost entirely directed to the patient's face in an effort to understand more fully the patient's condition. Today, he writes, “my floating flat screen sits 45 degrees to my right, intervening in the physical and interactive space between us and invariably siphoning off a portion of both my cognitive and my physical attention from the patient... The distraction of concurrent EHR navigation stresses the quality of human interactions integral to the physician-patient relationship. From my personal observations as well as published studies, it is clear that physicians using EHRs (which we are compelled to do) focus significantly less on patient- centered communication.” How have your experiences with health professionals changed since the advent of electronic medical records? Have you asked that your doctor look more carefully at you when you share your reasons for the visit? How is the patient-health practitioner relationship changing in a more technologically-driven world?
- In *NiSh'ma*, [page 2] our simulated Talmud page, three commentators examine two verses in Exodus that describe the building of the desert sanctuary, the *mishkan*. The three commentators, Rabbi **Rachel Nussbaum**, art therapist **Pat Allen**, and senior director of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, **Seth Cohen**, explore the gendered associations of these two verses:

“The cherubim ... confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover.” (Exodus 25:20)

“Each plank shall have two tenons, parallel to each other; do the same with all the planks of the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 26:17)

Rachel writes that the “deep relational connection symbolized by the [cherubim's] face-to-face orientation exists only within the confines of the side-by-side planks. After all, the planks themselves form the very structure of the Tabernacle, creating the vessel that delineates the boundaries of holy space.” She elevates both the importance of the cherubim's face-to-face position AND also the planks that hold up the *mishkan* that are laid one upon the other. What does this teach us about how we structure society? How would you characterize most of your relationships — plank upon plank, or face-to-face? How do these different orientations play out? And how are they interconnected?