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Comfort ye, Comfort ye...

Rabbi Shael Siegel

During the past six months I underwent a very intense program in pastoral care called Clinical Pastoral Education. If there is one word that can best describe the impact that this program has had of my understanding and application to the ministry, it is "transformational". Clinical Pastoral Education, better known as CPE has contributed prodigiously to my understanding of the word "comfort" within the context of Isaiah chapter 40 verse 1 when Isaiah says to Israel in their suffering: **"comfort ye, comfort ye, my people saith your God..."**: The vision I have is that a spiritual, loving and intensely sensitive prophet comes down from the hills of Jerusalem into the villages of his suffering people in an attempt to comfort and assuage them in their suffering. I understand the task of the rabbi, the chaplain in this light. To enter the room of the sick and to offer a measure of comfort. The tradition from which I grew and evolved was an intellectual environment, the emphasis more on the written word and less on the spiritual. If there was any need in relating to the spiritual side it was perfunctory and as the sages would say "latzeit midei chovato", to fulfill one's obligation, not necessarily out of love and genuine devotion, but out of obligation. To visit the sick, to empathize with those who are suffering and in

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need, to participate in humanity on the sensitive, spiritual and delicate level was a default duty, unavoidable in the scheme of things, but not necessarily a priority.

It wasn't always this way, but somehow and through the course of history it devolved as such. This CPE course has taught me above all else that the teaching of our sages extolling the virtues of ministering to the sick needs to be venerated and restored to its position of sacredness. CPE training has caused me to rethink and reconceptualize so many of our teachings, to read more into the text, more of the spiritual and less of the intellectual. The Midrash relating the following story could be seen as an intellectual exercise or as a spiritual challenge:

R. Huna says: One who visits the sick lessens one sixtieth of the illness. It was asked of R. Huna: If so let sixty people visit and the sick will be healed. Said to them: Sixty! But only if the visitors love the patient as their own soul. But even without this the visit helps him. One could be tempted to intellectualize this

(Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 34:1) reference as the rabbi did, but one could understand the text on a spiritual level: The rabbis are saying that one's compassionate presence can bring a small, but real measure of comfort. We can't heal him, no amount of love and compassion can, but we

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can make as small difference: we can comfort him.

CPE has presented to me a new dimension within the theological concept of "tikkun olam", roughly translated as making the world a better place, improving it. Tikkin olam, however is more profound than that. It is the Jewish approach by which we can become co-creators with God in making the world more complete. There are indeed many ways in which we can do this. Many of my coreligionists have fulfilled this theological precept by becoming "greener"; for others more philanthropic. For me CPE has offered another portal by which I can become a co-creator with God. Having been called to the O.R. to offer final prayers (vidui) was one of those sacred moments; it was there that I was totally confronted with the creative power of medicine and it's limits.

I believe that those in the operating room doctors, nurses and technicians were all in need of pastoral care at that very moment when their efforts at co-creation were discovered to be sorely limited. Frozen by the reality of the moment I ministered to the patient, but neglected those servants of God who in spite of their skills came up short. It showed on their faces.

My encounters and limited experience with pastoral care have given them new understanding of what prayer means within my tradition. In our faith there are fundamentally two forms of prayer: **Tefillah**- a structured well articulated formulary that s the basis of our prayer book and **Zaaka**- extemporaneous unstructured crying out to God in our time of trouble and need.

The hospital rooms, the ER, and the family rooms have all become sacred spaces because it is there where God can particularly be felt. These sacred areas are places where I have felt the **Zaaka**, prayer articulated by the sick and their families, not from formularies that have been sanitized by its redactors, but genuine heart-felt out pouring of the soul.

It is this experience that has given credence and deeper understanding to the Talmud Nedarim⁴⁰: a, which relates the following: "R. Helbo took ill. R. Kahana proclaimed 'R. Helbo is sick but no one came to visit.' He rebuked the others as follows, 'did it not happen that one of R. Akiba's students took sick and none of the sages came to visit?' But R. Akiba entered to visit and because he swept and sprinkled the room before him, he recovered. 'My master you have made me live'. Following this R. Akiba went and lectured 'whosoever does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood.'"





Home Improvement

By Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Golbart

IFR rabbi, Yitzhak Dovid Golbart is a founding member and former president of the IFR. Rabbi Golbart lives in Las Vegas with his wife and children.



The Jewish Reporter, dedicated this issue to “Home Improvement.” I must admit that the Ribono Sh’Olam, Master of the Universe, did not gift me with the greatest potential and skill when it comes to using a hammer and saw, but I understand “Home Improvement” can be more profoundly a spiritual directive that is underscored in our Jewish Tradition.

In Judaism the most important spiritual environment we have available today is our home. What goes on in our home supersedes the importance of our synagogues and institutions as a place for spiritual fulfillment and joyfulness. The striving for Shalom Bayit, peace (or wholeness) in the home, is a central concern in Judaism. A good home environment is paramount in securing a successful spiritual and religious life for ourselves and our children.

Those with many different levels of Jewish observance will read this article. Some may just be entering their search for a more spiritual connection with Hashem, G-d, while others consider their life as a Jew to be an ever-present consciousness involving rituals and learning every day. However, I feel confident to say there is always room for improvement to make our homes a better place for celebrating our relationship with Hashem, our family members, and our friends.

When entering a proper Jewish home we find a Kosher Mezuzah on the door post. Affixing this symbol is fulfilling a Mitzvah (commandment) and is a reminder that we are guided and protected by a nurturing, loving G-d Who has prepared a formula for our wellbeing. This blueprint, known as Torah, is not an ancient document that is read only like a history book or gazed at like an old family album; it is Hashem’s program for our daily life. The Sh’m’a that is written on the Klaf (parchment) of the Mezuzah (Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-21) teaches us that our home is the first place to teach our children the values imparted to us by Hashem. If we are blessed as being parents or grandparents, the best way to teach is by example.

Are we living a life commanded to us to “Love Hashem with our heart, our soul and our might?” Are we living a life of G’milut Chasadim, acts of loving kindness, and avoiding the lure of Lashon Harah, evil talk of gossip and slander? Are we following the Aseret HaDibrot, the Ten Commandments, including remembering and keeping Shabbat Holy making our home a Mikdash Maat, a small sanctuary?

Our Tradition places the woman in high esteem. If not for the Ashet Chayil, “Woman of Valor,” standing as the foundation of a Jewish home as wife, mother, teacher and role model, a Jewish home can barely be maintained. What husband can insist on a Kosher home and a home filled with Jewish values without the tireless support and work of an Ashet Chayil?

In Mishneh Pirke Avot there are many recommendations for “Home Improvements.” We find: “Let your home be a meeting place for Sages, and sit amid the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst; Let your home be wide open and let the needy be members of your household.” What better “Home Improvements” can there be than the ones that make our homes a Mikdash Maat?

If the parents are actively engaged in daily prayers and learning, will this not transmit to others in the home? If our children are grown, what fills the parents with more Nachas than seeing them continue our beautiful heritage? Living our lives in this fashion leads to a wonderfully fulfilling life with a home that is holy. These values have more long lasting, life enriching elements than the mere mortar, bricks, and wood of our physical house. They are far more important than remodeling your kitchen or bathroom. Our formula for “Home Improvement” is affordable, joyful, rewarding and a Mitzvah.

I'm Italian...Could I be Jewish? IFR Rabbis Barbara Aiello and Frank Tamburello host conference for Italian anousim

The first annual Italian Jewish Roots Conference was held in February, 2008 in Sarasota, Florida. Keynote speakers included DNA specialist Elise Friedman, Jewish genealogist Kim Sheintal and IFR Rabbis Frank Tamburello and Barbara Aiello. Along with 40 participants, the majority of whom are actively searching for their Italian Jewish roots, conference leaders created opportunities for exciting dialogue and exchanges and addressed many important issues, such as:

Italian Jewish Roots Conference

How can I know for sure that I have Jewish roots? I have always felt Jewish. Is that enough? Say I discover my Jewish roots. Can I just walk into a synagogue? Will I be accepted as a Jew? If I convert, am I a "real" Jew? How do I respond to comments like, "You can't be Jewish, you're Italian!" or "That's an Italian last name, it can't be Jewish!" I really want to learn more about my Jewish heritage. Where do I go from here?

Tuesday's keynote speaker, *Rabbi Frank Tamburello*, shared his fascinating journey from Catholic priest to Jew by Choice to ordained rabbi. Rabbi Frank shared customs his Sicilian family heritage that are steeped in ancient Jewish traditions. As he discovered and embraced his Jewish roots from his family home in Trapani (also his grandmother's surname, no doubt adopted from the large Jewish community in Trapani), Rabbi Frank learned that what was passed on as superstition was in fact a way for Jews under siege and in hiding to maintain their Jewishness.

Sharing the work of two dedicated Italians - historian Vincenzo Vilella and archivist Nardo Buonomi (Braverman), *Rabbi Barbara Aiello* combined their data with her own personal story of uncovering the Italian Jewish roots of her Calabrian and Sicilian families. Noting that research indicates a strong Jewish presence (some say 50% or more of the population before Inquisition times), Rabbi Barbara connected current traditions with a long lost Jewish past.

The Italian Jewish Roots Conference concluded with an opportunity for participants to experience Shabbat. Using

the traditional Italian "third candle" to kindle the lights of Shabbat, Rabbis Aiello and Tamburello gently led participants through the Friday night family ritual that has remained central to Jewish families since ancient times. Singing the candle blessing in a familiar Italian melody, Rabbi Barbara encouraged the group to continue to explore, learn and grow.

Celebrating Shabbat



IFR Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

IFR NEWS-Editor
Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Boca Bear Wedding with IFR rabbi, Rabbi David Degani of Shirat Shalom.

Rabbi David Degani and wife, Lee developed a unique teaching tool to introduce their students to the traditions surrounding the Jewish wedding. Students at Shirat Shalom created the celebration, complete with chuppah, and held a "marriage" between two stuffed bears, "Barry and Bertha." A model wedding can be dicey.

At any age children can feel uncomfortable stepping into the role of bride or groom, so the Deganis found a way to make the role play work. The stuffed bears made it "bearable," that is to say, the use of the toys allowed the students to focus on the elements of the Jewish wedding and to share unabashedly in the joy.

Shirat Shalom's photo essay on the "Bearishnikoff Wedding," shows you how it's done!

Students prepare the chuppah, the canopy of God's love over the wedding couple. All four sides are open to symbolize the endless horizons the couple will have in their married life together.



Barry and Bertha," our bride and groom join Rabbi Degani under the chuppah

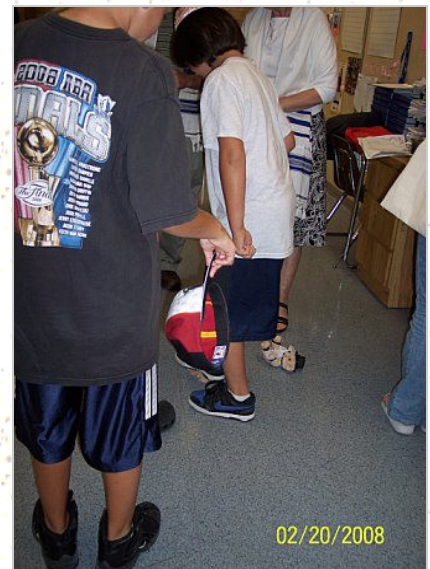


Making the kiddush blessing



The most well-remembered tradition of the Jewish wedding,
The breaking of the glass!

Mazel Tov to our newly married bear couple, Barry and Bertha Bearishnikoff! They are beary grateful to the fifth graders of Congregation Shirat Shalom for hosting their wedding, chuppah and all!



IFR Board 2008-2010

The IFR members nominated their 9 member board in March 2008, the nine member board appointed their officers and advisors for 2008-2010

Rabbi Suzanne H. Carter, President

Rabbi Barbara Aiello V.P. Media /Public Relations Chair

Rabbi R. Zev Wellins V.P. Membership Chair

Rabbi David Degani, Treasurer

Rabbi Shael Siegel Secretary

Rabbi Barry Coffsky

Rabbi Jeffery Feinstein

Rabbi Roger Ross

Rabbi Frank Tamburello

Advisors:

Rabbi "Buzz" Bogage

Cantor L. Jerry Cohn, Esq

Rabbi Lewis D. Solomon

The IFR Board will hold their first board meeting electronically on May 1 2008. Minutes will be posted on the IFR website at www.intfedrabbis.org

**LEFT OVER 2007 IFR Conference T-SHIRTS**

and hats will be given to IFR members who attend the 2009 IFR Conference location TBA

Rabbi David Degani's Shirat Shalom Purim 5768