

Caring For The Caretakers * Blessing Those Who Bless Others

Congregation Or Ami * Rabbi Paul Kipnes And Cantor Doug Cotler

A Service for Honoring Caregivers



Background

The Union for Reform Judaism's Department of Family Concerns, and its director, Rabbi Richard Address, have been reminding synagogues to focus on the aging Jewish population. In a recent article, Rabbi Address noted the preponderance of Jewish adults serving as caregivers for their parents and grandparents. Some bring their older parents into their homes. Others coordinate the care of their loved ones from afar, even cross country. Still others negotiate the labyrinth of hospitals, live-ins, and assisted living homes as part of a coalition of siblings and cousins. While the specific acts of care giving may vary, it becomes clear that the emotional and physical toll on the caregivers is tremendous. Heeding Rabbi Address' call at a recent URJ Pacific Southwest Council Biennial Convention, Congregation Or Ami created a service honoring caregivers.

For More Information, please contact:

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Publicity

Prior to the service, the synagogue utilized three types of publicity:

- *HaChodesh* Monthly Mailer: Service Announcement:

March 30: Shabbat Service Honoring Caretakers: Congregants who Care for Others. With Rabbi Kipnes and Cantor Cotler. We will honor caretakers: congregants who care for their parents, children, and/or friends in need. [Torah portion: Tzav Leviticus 6:1-8:36]

- *Rabbi's Tisch eLearning Newsletter*: Rabbi Kipnes used his eLearning Newsletter to report on the congregation's new commitment to a Sacred Aging (recently renamed "New Directions" project), to address the aging Jewish populations. In it, he announced the upcoming Shabbat Service Honoring Caretakers. See www.oramimail.org/newsletter/index.php?id=119.



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- *Illuminating News Weekly Email eNewsletter*: For two week's the *Illuminating News* announced the upcoming service, offering a link to the *Rabbi's Tisch* eLearning Newsletter and asking congregants to email Rabbi Kipnes if they thought they might be joining us for that service. See

www.oramimail.org/newsletter/index.php?id=125



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- **Blessing of the Caretakers, Service Outline**

(This ceremony may follow the *Amidah*/silent prayer, but precede *Mi Shebeirach*)

- Reading #1 by multiple congregants: **Isn't Life Funny?** © 2001 Susan Roell, daughter and caregiver to "Miss Ruby", 79 yrs old, diagnosis right temporal lobe brain tumor 2/2001)
- Brief Study: Asking a simple focus question, *What does this text teach those who care for others or are cared for others?*, the Rabbi led a brief study of this text:

The image of God can never be diminished in a living human being. The Maggid of Mezeritch, an 18th-century Hasidic master, taught that the *tzelem* (God's image within us) is an intrinsic element of the human being. The Maggid compared the creation of human beings in God's image to a father who has a son. Even if the son goes far away, the father always holds the son's image in his heart and mind. According to the Maggid, God had an image of humanity in mind before we were even created, and this image is unchanging in past, present and future. We always look the same to God.

- Song: **Tefilat Haderech** (by Doug Cotler and Jeff Marx, ©1995 all rights reserved)

Guide our steps.

Light our way.

Help us be strong.

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

Keep the ones

Whom we love

Secure from the storm.

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

Bless the work

We have done,

All our hopes, all our dreams

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

Watch over us,

As we go,

And in peace, bring us home

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

L'chaim, l'simchah, u-l'shalom

Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen

Watch over us

As we go

And in peace, bring us home

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- Reading #3 by congregants: **Eagles in a Storm** (author unknown)
- Honoring Our Elders: The rabbi tells these stories:

In Berakhot, a book of the Talmud, there is a tractate that deals with the question: How far does the honor of parents extend? In this tractate, comes a story of Dama the heathen (Baba Metzia 58b). There are two brief versions in which Dama is offered a large sum of money from representative Sages of the Jewish community, first for "merchandise," and secondly, for "jewels for the ephod," a special priestly breastplate. In order to make the deal, Dama must awaken his father, for the key is lying beneath his father's pillow. This Dama refuses to do. Disturbing his father's rest is unacceptable; he places a higher value on honoring his father than on financial profit. Later on in the story, Dama is rewarded by God. A red heifer is born to his flock. Such a heifer is exceedingly rare and necessary for the priests of the holy Temple for purification purposes. (*Rabbi might "tell" story instead of summarizing it as above*)

The Talmudic tractate ends with an ethical precept articulated by Rabbi Hanina. To our modern ears, the climax is surprising and counterintuitive. The story is not about a heathen whose treatment of his old father is exemplary, exemplary enough to be rewarded by God. The story is teaching us how to fulfill this obligation. The Rabbi tells us that great honor is due an elder, while emphasizing that if one who is *not* commanded to follow the law is rewarded, how much greater the reward for following the law? For following the law means that we have answered a call and are in a sacred relationship.

In one of the most sensitive comments that the Talmud makes about the commandment to honor parents, the Rabbis point out that even the demands for physical care must be carried out with a proper attitude:

A man may feed his father on fattened chickens and inherit Hell [as his reward], and another may put his father to work in a mill and inherit Paradise.

How is it possible that a man might feed his father fattened chickens and inherit Hell? It once happened that a man used to feed his father fattened chickens. Once his father said to him: "My son, where did you get these?" The son answered: "Old man, old man, eat and be silent, just as dogs eat and are silent." In such an instance, he feeds his father fattened chickens, but he inherits Hell.

How is it possible that a man might put his father to work in a mill and inherit Paradise? It once happened that a man was working in a mill. The king decreed that his aged father should be brought to work for him. The son said to his father: "Father, go and work in the mill in place of me and I will go to work for the king. For it may be that the workers for the king will be ill-treated, in which case let me be ill-treated instead of you. And it may be that the workers for the king will be beaten, in which case let me be beaten instead of you." In such an instance, he puts his father to work in a mill, but he inherits Paradise.

- *Rabbi's Introduction to Mi Shebeirach*: The Rabbi's brief *D'var Refuah* or mini-teaching about healing focused on the unique spiritual struggle encountered by those caring for loved ones. The rabbi incorporated the poem (reading #2) **We Are Not A Machine** (© 1999 Jerry Ham, a 58 year old Licensed Practical Nurse, who for nearly six years - stayed at home full time to care 24/7 for his mother, who eventually died from Alzheimer's Disease). Congregants were encouraged to stand and share the **names and a brief anecdote** about those for whom they are caring and/or the caregivers whom they honor. (often the rabbi stood by the congregant's side, sometimes offer a caring hand on his/her shoulder and/or a hug afterward)

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- Congregants were then invited to share the name and relationship to them of others for whom they ask for blessings of healing for physical illness, mental illness, emotional turmoil or spiritual struggle.
- *Mi Shebeirach* was sung
- Conclusion: Rabbi Kipnes read “Rav Joseph teaches that the tablets [of the law] and the broken tablets [that Moses shattered upon discovering the Golden Calf] are both kept in the ark. From here we learn that a scholar who has involuntarily forgotten his learning should not be treated disdainfully.” May our loved ones, who like the broken tablets still retain their holiness, continue to be held close by us, by their caretakers and by God.
- Following Aleinu, song/prayer: **Bayom Hahu** (by Doug Cotler and Jeff Marx, ©1997 Wail and Blubber Music (BMI))

And on that day, we leave our doors unlocked
We walk on streets alive with joy
Each stranger's face, becomes the face of God
It's not far away, 'til we reach that day

*Bayom Hahu, bayom hahu Y'hiyeh Adonai echad
Bayom Hahu, bayom hahu Ush'mo, ush'mo echad*

And on that day, all hunger disappears
Each desperate soul will have a home
Each helpless child will have a hand to hold
None shall be afraid, when we reach that day

And on that day, the winds blow fresh and clear
The forests grow. Our water's pure
We treasure life in all its many forms
It's the only way, for us to reach that day

And on that day, the world will be at peace
A shining lamp will lead the way
Every knee must bend and every voice give thanks
So let us pray, that we reach that day

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1. Isn't Life Funny?

Last night, I was so confused.
My emotions were so raw.
My 'hurts' from all my yesterdays seemed to come flooding back.
With them they brought dark ominous storm clouds into my todays.
I had no idea how to begin to help the sun even peek back through...

Then tonight, as I sat with family,
Awaiting the start of my oldest son's graduation,
My little nephew arrived and reached his tiny arms out for me.
When I took him, he rested his angelic head upon my shoulder.
There may be no more peaceful feeling than this... in all the world...
Next, my oldest son turned and waved before taking his seat at his graduation.
He had no idea where we were in the mass of onlookers,
But he trusted that if he waved to us we would wave back.
His eyes searched...as we returned his wave...
At last, he had found us...
Satisfied, he smiled and sat down.
There may be no greater feeling of 'proud'...

When I returned home,
As family and friends gathered to celebrate in our kitchen,
I went into Mother's room, to give her the last dose of chemotherapy for this month.
I told her about the peaceful little angel...
I told her that our oldest had graduated...
She asked if we had enjoyed our trip...
I told her "Yes."
And made no correction... that there had been no 'trip'.
She asked again if we had enjoyed our trip.
And once again I told her "Yes".
A third time...she asked...this time with more emphasis...
"Did you enjoy your trip???"
This time I smiled,

With proud tears in my eyes,
She looked up at me with knowing eyes...
And I said, "Oh yes, Mother our trip was so very wonderful.
We had a beautiful ride."
This time she was satisfied.
She smiled and told me how glad she was as she turned over and closed her eyes.

Isn't Life funny?
Yesterday the pain was so strong.
I had no idea how to make it go away.

Tonight...after the innocent touch of a tiny child...
Who is about to begin his first steps...
After the generous uninhibited acknowledgement of a young man...
About to begin his journey into a Brave New World...

Tonight after the tender questions
of the 'teacher'...
Whose ride is almost over...
The wisdom rang true...

Tonight I realized...
The clouds have ALREADY parted...
The sun IS shining...
The confusion HAS lifted...
There is NO more pain...
Tonight I realized...
It has been a wonderful trip...
But I am still enjoying a beautiful ride.

© 2001 Susan Roell
daughter and caregiver to "Miss Ruby"
(79 yrs old, diagnosis right temporal lobe brain tumor 2/2001)

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2. We Are Not A Machine

We are the caregivers, but wait, there is more.
So please, hear us out before closing the door.
No we're not perfect, but we're doing our best.
We just want to get some things off our chests.

When was the last time you tried to come by,
Or the last time you called, if only to say hi?
Do you really realize just what we do here?
And just how often we are driven to tears?

Our loved ones and we are in worlds far apart,
And their verbal abuse can tear at the heart.
Their physical care can at times be a pain.
And the emotional struggle can be quite a drain.

What is it exactly, we are trying to say?
What would it take to really brighten our day?
A card in the mail, "I'm thinking of you."
Or a phone call to ask, "Hey! What can I do?"
Even better, a visit from family and friends,
To laugh, to talk, and smile once again.
We must be honest, we don't want to demean.
But please understand, we are not a machine.

© 1999 Jerry Ham (Jerry Ham is a 58 year old Licensed Practical Nurse, who for nearly six years - stayed at home full time to care 24/7 for his mother, who passed away from Alzheimer's Disease on September 8th 2001. He has not returned to work as of yet as he is needing to relax from his long-term role.)

3. Eagles In A Storm

Did you know that an eagle knows when a storm is approaching long before it breaks? The eagle will fly to some high spot and wait for the winds to come. When the storm hits, the eagle sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it.

The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. It rises on the winds that bring the storm. When the storms of life come upon us – and all of us will experience them – we can rise above them by setting our minds and our belief toward God. The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God's power to lift us above them.

God enables us to ride the winds of the storm that bring sickness, tragedy, failure, and disappointment in our lives. We can soar above the storm. Remember, it is not the burdens of life that weigh us down, it is how we handle them. The Bible says,

"Those who hope in the EverPresent God will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles." (Isaiah 40:31)

Author Unknown

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