

CPE Reflection
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There are very few jobs that change your life. For me, CPE and my summer chaplaincy internship at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles changed my life. Without a doubt CPE has been one of the most important professional internships that I have had since starting rabbinical school. There are almost no words to describe why, or how, this experience was so powerful. However, I will try. First of all, I appreciated the model of learning through being a reflective practitioner. Rather than beginning with a textbook or a theory, or assuming that we were empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, the CPE model assumes that we all have the strength and wisdom already within us to be caring and effective chaplains. In many ways, this is in line with my understanding with the essence of Kabbalah. In other words, Jewish mystics teach that our wisdom and talent has been "received" within us at birth. Our job is to "learn" what we have already received. The CPE model follows this idea as well. While there was a comprehensive orientation to the hospital and the program, by the third or fourth day we are already on the floors learning with our CPE mentors. By the second week we were doing regular visits with the patients. We were learning by digging in and doing the hard work up front by pushing back the fear that can often lead to emotional and mental paralysis. More importantly, each day we would have time to reflect with our group or our supervisor to reflect on what we had learned from our experience. This model is so remarkable because we were taught to learn from our experience and our intuition. While rabbinical school can teach you a lot of knowledge, CPE was able to teach me how to find my inner wisdom. In other words, CPE taught me how to learn trust my own instincts, while at the same time, be open to getting direct feedback (and even criticism) from my peers.

In addition to the learning model of CPE, I also learned about the amazing depth and resilience of humankind. While being a chaplain in the Intensive Care Unit and on the Hematology/Oncology floor was often more challenging than not, it also proved to me how profoundly strong and courageous people are on a day to day basis.

The other aspect of CPE that was really important for me was the opportunity it gave me to explore my own theology. While I knew that I wanted to use CPE to challenge my own notions of God, I had no idea to what extent I would still be struggling with these issues. That being said it was really important that I did not have to struggle with this process alone. Not only did I have my cohort at Children's Hospital to reflect with, I was also given the opportunity to work with other Jewish students from other rabbinical schools and other hospitals through the Kalsman Institute. This was a really important way for me to stay connected to the Jewish aspect of my work while I was working in a primarily non-Jewish hospital environment.

Last but not least, CPE taught me how to be a true faith leader, instead of just a rabbi. In other words, CPE gave me the experience and tools necessary to attend to people of all faiths. Rather than feeling like I need to put on my rabbi "hat," I learned how to lead from a spiritual place. It no longer feels like being a rabbi is a role or a job; rather, I believe that CPE taught me how to truly be a spiritual leader.