**WAS IT WORTH IT? A NAORRR PERSPECTIVE**

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**BY ROBERT GOODMAN**

It is a great joy to once again be a part of our annual NAORRR Convention. Here *Chevruta,* friendship and genuine sharing replaces agendas sometimes found at other rabbinic gatherings. It is refreshing to me here with you. Retirement is a great equalizer, and our having made it so far has brought with it a modicum of wisdom, *Sechel* and kindness.

I was a product of a large Reform congregation on Long Island. My rabbi served as CCAR president and was an eloquent speaker. His words were beautifully crafted even though I confess that it was often difficult to follow his train of thought during his 30-40 minute sermons. Unfortunately, I was the only homegrown product to enter the rabbinate during his 30 years at the congregation. The magic of Great Barrington Camp Eisner, a wonderfully kind cantor at my Temple, and the nurturing of Max Hausen, one of our assistant rabbis, provided the motivation and inspiration that sent me to Cincinnati and later to New York for rabbinical school instead of a career in math or science.

As I look back over these last 50 years, I believe that I have learned a few lessons which I would like to share with you. If you learned the same lessons as I did, then my words will serve as a brief review which is not a bad thing. I spent about 15 years of my career in Jewish Education. When I attended educational workshops, I sometimes relearned useful strategies because “things that worked” often get forgotten along the way.

We rabbis learned early in our careers that we cannot win over everyone in our congregation. With some people we just can’t win, no matter how hard we try. It is like the apocryphal story of the rabbi recovering from major surgery. The president of the congregation visits the rabbi in the hospital and proudly declares: “Rabbi, by a vote of 17 to 11 the Board of Directors wishes you a speedy recovery!”

As we look back over our years in the rabbinate, our experiences were not all good ones. We sometimes had to fight for and defend the values our wonderful tradition teaches us. The challenges were varied and they were many.

When I am asked if I would do it again, I pause for a minute and then reply: “Yes, I certainly would!” The opportunity to interact with people at critical junctures in their lives and to hopefully touch them meaningfully at these times, is perhaps the most gratifying aspect of the rabbinate. Giving a top-notch sermon that really connects with our congregants makes up for perhaps a dozen that are good but……. Telling a teenage student that He or She would make a great rabbi and later seeing that person become a student at H.U.C. can be a “high” in our rabbinates. When that happens, we know that we have done something right.

My late wife, Mary, and I moved to Jacksonville in 2009. We joined Congregation Ahavath Chesed where Rabbi Elizabeth Bahar now serves with distinction as our Rabbi. I was asked to become Adjunct Rabbi, a term that I translate as “Helper-Outer.” For some years I received a token compensation. A few years later, I told the congregation to keep my “massive” pay check but I would keep my title. These years have become the most meaningful years in my entire Rabbinate. To give freely to our wonderful congregation via life-cycle events, worship participation and pastoral visits (often with my West Highland Terrier, Shayna) and to be appreciated, respected and loved in return, has been the icing on the cake for me. So one lesson for me is the joy of giving back, of being myself without any pretense, and being able to meaningfully and lovingly connect with people one-by-one and without fanfare. It has been a blessing!

As our congregation engaged in the process of finding a new senior rabbi last year, I reminded the leadership again and again that, first and foremost, we need a TOTAL MENSCH (male or female) at the helm. I believe that **Menschlichkeit** is the single most important quality a rabbi needs to have.

I do believe that we can play a vitally important role with our younger colleagues. We can offer to share our abundance of resource materials accumulated over decades as well as the lessons we have learned — often the hard way!. We can become a safety valve for them, giving them honest, constructive feedback with no hidden agenda on our part. I firmly believe that we have a great deal to give to our younger colleagues including lessons they might be willing to learn ONLY from us. Clearly, not all of our younger colleagues are open and receptive to our guidance and mentoring. Some already know it all! Regardless, I believe that it is well worth the effort on our part.

To me, it is very rewarding to continue to use skills I acquired over a period of five decades and to be able to help to enrich the rabbinate of our younger colleagues. May our years continue to be a blessing to us and to those whom we serve.

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