

# Books in Review



*On occasion we receive a number of books on a related topic that call out to be reviewed at one time. I have asked Dr. Michelle Friedman to write such an overview review of several books related to pastoral counseling. Dr. Friedman is a psychiatrist, and directs the pastoral counseling program at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in Manhattan. I am happy to have Dr. Friedman and her article as my guest, substituting in this issue for my column.*

JONATHAN P. SLATER

## Jewish Pastoral Counseling: Recent Books

MICHELLE FRIEDMAN

Jewish pastoral care has suffered for too long from the lack of professional texts written by persons committed to Jewish tradition. Guidance in this field is surely needed as rabbis and educators have always been called upon to respond to natural lifecycle events as well as confronting age-old yet eternally heartrending situations of physical and mental illness, family strife, and catastrophe. They have relied on knowledge and interpretation derived from sacred text, wisdom and examples from their own mentors, and individual common sense. Jewish clergy and professionals also benefited from the knowledge and writings of Gentile colleagues who published extensively in the areas of pastoral technique and who documented the unique ways clergy can help relieve human suffering.

Historically, the establishment of pastoral counseling as a necessary component in rabbinical training has met with ambivalence. With the exception of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School (where I am privileged to chair the department) I know of no other Jewish clergy training institutions that mandate formal pastoral

counseling education for every student throughout his/her entire academic program. This lack of comprehensive training is true in most Christian seminaries throughout the United States as well. Clergy programs that include some pastoral training generally require one or two courses in basic skills as well as a rotation through hospital-based chaplaincy. Other institutions offer optional courses that can be elected by interested students.

This academic unevenness in pastoral counseling does not seem to reflect seminarians' enthusiasm to attend classes in pastoral counseling. Indeed, the best rabbinical students are anxious about their preparedness to deal with the raw and powerful human situations which they are certain to encounter. My experience teaching across the denominations confirms repeatedly that *s'mikhab* candidates absorb and appreciate didactic material as well as supervised fieldwork where they can practice clinical skills. Most of all, students embrace opportunities that help them plumb their own religious and emotional depths. These include facilitated group discussions as well as mentored case presentations that explore complicated and important areas such as responding to moral conflict, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and taking care of the rabbi's personal life.

Ambitious agendas such as these deserve proper textbooks! After a long drought, we are blessed with a rich trilogy—three different yet complementary volumes that should be in the library of every rabbi, cantor, chaplain, educator, and community worker. These are *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, 2nd Edition, edited by Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005); *A Practical Guide to Rabbinic Counseling*, edited by Rabbi Dr. Yisrael N. Levitz and Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski (Nanuet, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 2005); and *Jewish Relational Care A–Z*, edited by Rabbi Dr. Jack H. Bloom (Philadelphia: The Haworth Press, 2006). The books are similar in that each is a compilation of essays written by individuals with expertise or unique personal experience in the subjects they address. All three focus on the practical and the specific, offering many suggestions relevant to diverse clinical settings. To varying extents, all touch on the need for the counselor to be mindful of how he/she is affected by the demanding work of compassionate listening and counseling.

While written from diverse socio-religious perspectives, the books under review will serve interested persons of all denominations. As they are pioneer, single volume works, none can comprehensively cover all of the issues which come under the heading of pastoral counseling. Due to the vast amount of material touched on in each book, I feel they are most useful as a trio. In order to explain this ensemble function, let me outline some of the key similarities and differences. As the titles are similar, I will refer to the books by the name of each volume's editor. Levitz and Twerski's *Rabbinic Counseling* and Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care* both strive to cover core topics in a primer of pastoral counseling. These include: basic interviewing technique, mental illness, trauma and catastrophe, domestic violence, addic-

tions, premarital counseling, and grief and bereavement. Bloom's *Jewish Relational Care* addresses some of the same subjects, as well as others not conventionally thought of as pastoral, in a series of short essays linked by the editor's central theme of relationship as the ultimate connection of God and humankind. Bloom stresses that in order to achieve a sanctified Jewish life, relationships need to be cultivated and repaired continually in human interactions.

Levitz and Twerski assume a halakhic viewpoint, one that is most synchronous with Orthodox Judaism. Perhaps because they intend their book largely for a professional and lay readership that is highly familiar with religious ritual and literature, *Rabbinic Counseling* follows the classical objective textbook model most closely. In other words, authors present religiously sensitized clinical information and sage advice on a variety of critical topics without offering theological or liturgical excerpts or spiritual reflection.

Levitz and Twerski's work offers clear overviews of interviewing technique and areas of psychological distress. One of their foci is marriage. In addition to laying out specific guidelines for pre-marital counseling, separate chapters deal with single congregants and couples in distress. Levitz and Twerski, however, do not deal with crucial relational issues such as homosexuality and marital infidelity. Aging and dementia, including the impact on caregivers, are not addressed either.

Several chapters in Levitz and Twerski's book touch briefly on more personal aspects of rabbinic counseling. These include the demands of non-judgmental listening, especially when the rabbi hears material that conflicts with religious norms, such as end-of-life decisions. While the power differential inherent in rabbinic counseling is referred to, the issue of sexual manipulation or abuse by clergy is not explicated. This book includes whole chapters that are not found in other volumes on topics such as suicidality, rabbinic confidentiality, and the rabbi's family.

Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care* comes from a trans-denominational perspective. The contributing male and female rabbinic authors received their ordinations from a variety of Jewish seminaries. Thus, in contrast to Levitz and Twerski, Friedman considers situations which, however common, hover outside conventional halakhic perspectives. This includes pre-marital cohabitation, intermarriage, and same-sex relationships. The volume assumes that Jewish clergy will be called upon to officiate at gay/lesbian commitment ceremonies, as well as be involved in lifecycle events of Jews intimately involved with Gentiles.

Friedman's foundation is chaplaincy, the care of ill and marginalized persons. The underlying philosophy comes from a view of *bikkur ḥolim* in which the caregiver provides *livui ruchani*, spiritual accompaniment, in times and circumstances of suffering. Thus, while the book imparts basic skills review and clinical information, it also devotes many pages to explicating theologies of suffering and counterpart responses potentially available via pastoral care. In addition to references to psychological theory and traditional Jewish texts, Friedman's authors offer extensive original prayers and custom-made rituals. Many case vignettes and bits of dialogue fur-

ther enliven poignant topics. Caring for the caregiver is a key concern of this text. Various authors throughout reinforce the core theme of paying attention to the spiritual/psychological/personal lives of the professional and lay pastoral persons as they prepare to visit a dying person or to counsel a premarital couple.

Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care* is highly attuned to environments of medical suffering. In addition to chapters on chaplaincy in the acute hospital setting, the volume contains separate chapters devoted to aging and dementia. Here too, as in the chapters on same-sex commitment ceremonies, authors touch lightly on potential religious or personal conflicts posed for the clergy person dealing with end of life situations.

Bloom's *Jewish Relational Care A–Z* posits a model of care-giving underwritten by a specific concept of relationship. This frame strives to undo polarized self fragments and instead to unify basic emotional and cognitive human parts into a balanced whole person. The editor uses the dialectic language of *tzelem/n'shamah* to elaborate a theory of personal integration that flows into meaningful interactions with significant others as well as relationship with God. This organizing theory lends a philosophic tone to *Jewish Relational Care A–Z* that sometimes requires more demanding, complex reading than the earlier described volumes. Like Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care*, Bloom's *Jewish Relational Care A–Z* is written from a trans-denominational perspective and does not presuppose any particular halakhic stances. Again, similar to Friedman's compendium, Bloom's authors offer many clinical vignettes and creative use of liturgy, poetry, and ritual.

The book, which is organized in many short chapters, touches on a number of less usual topics. Some are highly personal, delving into how to manage compassion, fatigue, difficult texts, or the rabbi's personal trajectory (which might include professional crisis, serious illness, or retirement). Others explore the use of music, chanting, and kabbalah. Additionally, caring for non-Jews is considered in a section entitled "How Spacious Is Our Tent," which includes an essay written by a minister who offers his perspective on the relationship between Jewish and Christian communities. Although less oriented along the traditional lifecycle axis, some of pastoral care subjects explored in the earlier discussed volumes also receive consideration. These include the challenges of physical and mental illness, cognitive impairment and presence in the final moments of life. Neither pre- nor post-marital counseling earn separate chapters, but one author writes exclusively on the care and support of those whose sexual orientation and gender identity vary, and another writer addresses the plight of persons going through divorce. Other chapters dedicated to specific niche concerns explore options for women facing unwelcome pregnancies, caring for those violated by child sexual abuse, and caring for the institutionalized developmentally disabled.

In terms of idiosyncratic comparisons as reference texts, Levitz and Twerski's *Rabbinic Counseling* lacks an index and has erratic footnotes and bibliographies. Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care* has an index and consistently provide footnotes and bibliography for each chapter but does not number the chapters of each section. I found this detail cumbersome when assigning or referring to chapters. Bloom's

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*Jewish Relational Care A-Z* has an index and inconsistent footnotes and bibliographies, depending on individual author's styles.

My suggestion is that professional and laypersons committed to Jewish pastoral care buy and read all three books. Even when manifest topics seem the same, the content of chapters in the different volumes is never redundant. Authors' unique perspectives and personal reflections shape what might have initially seemed to be the same subject differently, teaching the reader that his/her authenticity as a pastoral counselor must come from the interface of knowledge and self-examination. While the authors' religious, philosophic, and professional vantage points differ, clinical expertise and compassionate wisdom underwrite each volume.

These excellent works pave the way for the next volume in each set. Jewish pastoral caregivers need to keep notes on their own experiences and then write to the editors about which chapters were most helpful and which material is still unwritten and needed. We are indeed blessed to include Levitz and Twerski's *Rabbinic Counseling*, Friedman's *Jewish Pastoral Care*, and Bloom's *Jewish Relational Care A-Z* in our libraries and we owe their editors and authors great thanks and appreciation.