

Presence

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The great French philosopher Henri Bergson once said, "To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly." That has been the story of Judaism, it is my story, and it is the story of Louis Brier and the Weinberg Residence. The Snider Campus faces a time of significant...maturity. Fortunately, we are well-positioned for a transition of activity and a continuing, thriving mission.

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My transition from engineer to cantor to executive director and to chaplain has felt like an endless re-creation. Each move has required a physical change and a spiritual one, as though drawing closer to the transcendent has an ebb and flow to it. I once wrote that Jewish prayer services are like that: we don't move in a straight line to enlightenment; the path is crooked, with pauses and moments of laughter and tears, song and silence. As chaplain here, I am responsible for the spiritual care of 250 people of all faiths, primarily over the age of 80. I have had to learn about dementia, Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimers Disease. I have had to learn how to journey with those who search for meaning and purpose and want to connect with something larger than themselves, in their own faith. I have had to figure out what quality of life might mean for someone who cannot express themselves and who cannot leave their bed. And, we had to live under the veil of the pandemic, separating families, amplifying suffering.

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In my transitions, I have had to learn about myself. What do I bring to the table? What do I bring that I should leave behind! Like many, I suffered under the image of the chaplain that we get from the media. I remember the chaplain in the TV show "MASH," and that is not me. However, there is an aspect of self-awareness and calm that is required when the only agenda is to guide and to bring clarity and to bring a moment of joy. I have found that my ability to sing, to speak my truth about Judaism, and to listen, have been valuable.

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But there is one thing that rises above all else. Presence. I am present. It is not as simple as "showing up." Presence requires attention and commitment to a relationship. Spiritual care requires presence. Being with another person and creating something new in that relationship, in the moment. A resonance. Shavuot was about Presence. Even our Interfaith Services are about Presence. The relationship that Martin Buber explained in "I and Thou" is the relationship between us at Sinai, and G-d. Presence.

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Now, at Louis Brier, we enter a new time as we emerge from a pandemic. As we reach for the broad recognition of accreditation, we seek a new maturity. The new maturity might not be about 'doing' and it might not require deep soul-searching. It may simply be about 'being present': consciously, attentively, empathetically forging something new out of the relationships between the residents, the staff, the families, and the supporters of this home. May we all recognize the opportunity that we have to perfect our home and our world!

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