

# The Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health

**E**ight years ago, Irving Kalsman was visited by HUC-JIR rabbinical student Judith Schindler while he was a patient at a local hospital. Her visit had such a positive effect on him that he and his family decided to establish the Lee and Irving Kalsman Scholarship Fund to foster chaplaincy training at the College-Institute. Subsequently the family sponsored a major national conference on Judaism and healing, and – ultimately – endowed the Lee and Irving Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health.

Twenty-three years ago, Dr. William Cutter, Professor of Education and Hebrew Literature, underwent bypass surgery. The hospital chaplain, Rabbi Meier, had such a significant impact on him that Dr. Cutter devoted a year to accompanying Rabbi Meier on his rounds. He turned that experience into a training opportunity for his own HUC-JIR students, and from there an important elective course was developed at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles.

Dr. Cutter, Director of the Kalsman Institute on Judaism Health, speaks of the “ripple effect” reflected in these events. Indeed he believes that every person involved with Judaism and health has an exponential power on the people they comfort or teach. Look at the effect two seemingly modest experiences had on Mr. Kalsman and Dr. Cutter: courses have been constructed, thousands of patients have been visited, and



▲ Peachy Levy, Dr. William Cutter, Lee Kalsman, Mark Levy, Rabbi Donald Goor and Rabbi Judith Schindler at the Kalsman Institute's first national conference

fifteen conferences or colloquia are planned for the next several years. Rabbi Cutter believes that we function like Gideon's army: making the sounds of an army much larger than it actually is.

HUC-JIR's Kalsman Institute at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles has just that goal and that strategy. By hosting meetings and symposia, sponsoring seminars and conferences, and serving as a think-tank for issues on Judaism and healing, Cutter stated that “we are going to try to be the force that brings different elements [the numerous factions working in the field of health] together.” In addition to reaching people already involved in the health field, the Institute wants to reach those committed to looking at Jewish perspectives on health, while attracting people of all faiths who are interested in healing work.

Along with New York and Cincinnati, it also is reaching out to HUC-JIR students and alumni of all programs to educate them in hospital chaplaincy and pastoral care. Providing research tools and access to literature, the Kalsman Institute offers opportunities to learn about and discuss topics that have not been dealt with sufficiently in the past and new topics such as genetics, alternative medicine, arts and illness, and problems facing people with disabilities.

Almost 80 partners – physicians, nurses, artists, rabbis, publishers, and professors, among others of diverse faiths – have committed to work with the Kalsman Institute to promote the Institute's visions and develop new models of training for health care. Lisa Kodmur, Assistant Director of the

Kalsman Institute, commented on the “many passionate, intelligent people connected” with the Institute. Seventy-five people from the health world and Jewish community came to Los Angeles in March to strategize and create a national agenda.

The first national conference, in April 2000, was designed to initiate conversations among rabbis and other clergy, Jewish communal professionals, doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and congregational leaders. Exploring current health issues with a focus on Judaism and health, the conference was “dedicated to dialogue about the issues that bring religion and health together: spirituality, mind-body approaches to health, and the place of religious leadership in setting social policy,” according to Dr. Cutter. The conference (and the Institute) demonstrate how medical professionals and clergy recognize the significance of interaction between their fields, as well as how congregants show a serious interest in healing issues. Future conferences and projects include working with the following partners:

- The Union of American Hebrew Congregation's Department of Family Concerns on involving congregations with healing institutions and strengthening programs within the synagogue;
- The University of Southern California and the Los Angeles Mayor's Office on dealing with disabilities;

- The University of California at Los Angeles' Medical Center's Department of Spiritual Care on training HUC-JIR and University of Judaism students to become chaplains, and introducing Jewish approaches to health (Dr. Cutter is teaching one of these classes);
- Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, the JCC of Greater Baltimore, and nurses nationwide in developing a congregational and community nursing initiative; and
- Fordham University Law School on cosponsoring a conference "Religious Values and Legal Dilemmas in Bioethics" (January 28-29, 2002).

The plan is to influence the spread of these programs across the country.

The Kalsman Institute brings together the "very ancient tradition" of Judaism with a "contemporary need" for better health care to integrate intellectual, ethical, theological, and spiritual aspects of Judaism with caring and healing of the sick. Since the automatic connection between religion and health no longer exists, the Institute wants to bring it to the forefront of individuals' and congregations' minds. A chaplain's knowledge of Jewish literature and values when visiting the sick will help patients deal with ethical issues and health issues from a Jewish perspective. In addition, with enhanced staffing, the Institute will be able to work more directly on HUC-JIR students' professional needs, while at the same time assisting the UAHC in raising awareness within Reform congregations. The

(continued on page 20)



## A Life-Changing Student Internship

Suzanne Singer, *rabbinical student, HUC-JIR/LA '03*

This summer, I participated in a life-changing experience, training as a chaplain through UCLA Hospital's Clinical Pastoral Education program (CPE). Twelve seminary students, both Christians and Jews, spent five to six days a week helping patients and their families cope with trauma and crisis. The work was exhausting, both physically and emotionally, and it involved the witnessing of an inordinate amount of suffering: parents having to take their baby off of life support; cancer patients reacting adversely to chemotherapy; a three-year-old boy, hooked up to several IV's and monitors, praying that God will give him a new heart.

My most heart-wrenching case was a twenty-six-year-old man who had a horrific car accident. It took the rescue team forty-five minutes to extricate him from the car. He is now a quadriplegic on a lifelong respirator; one of his legs was amputated. He is fully conscious though he cannot utter sounds; his food comes to him via a tube. His mother, understandably, wants to keep him alive at all costs. She is a very devout Catholic and believes that a miracle will cure her son. He mouths words to the effect that he wants to find a doctor who will "fix" him. Meantime, the doctors want to give him a pacemaker as his heart has flat-lined several times.

People ask me how I can deal with such situations. In one e-mail, a friend writes: I have never understood where clergy get their understanding and strength to deal with what could often be looked at as betrayal by God. It is the most amazing thing that people find strength and solace from God instead of being angry. And where you find your own strength to face these people and their plights on a daily basis, trying to give them some kind of comfort and hope.

For me, God's presence is felt in the relationships between people. When people connect through love, and compassion, and concern, that is God providing solace. I do not believe in a God in heaven to whom we plead for help or for miracles. I believe that we call on the God within ourselves and within each other to awaken the strength and courage that is at the kernel of our souls. As a chaplain, when you help another human being, you are given a gift; that gift is the ability to reach out of yourself, to touch another, tapping the life force that unites all humanity.

So there are many life-affirming moments when a patient has cried his eyes out, but ends the visit with a smile because you have really been there for him at a time of acute need. Or when the wife of a patient hugs you, letting you know that you have brought light into the life of a dying man. Or when you're simply able to share a smile with the family of a comatose patient, affirming their need for relief in the midst of sorrow.

At the same time, there are many moments when the task can be overwhelming, when you cannot witness one more experience of pain. The beauty of the CPE program is the enormous support one receives from the staff as well as from one's peers. Our days are scheduled in such a way that we have ample opportunity to process our experiences and the concomitant emotions. Each of us has weekly, hour-long sessions with a supervisor where reflection and self-examination take place. Additionally, we meet in groups several times a week to review and discuss cases. It is amazing how quickly members of a group will bond when confronted with crisis. The result is a sense of safety and a feeling of trust that enables us to be very open with each other as well as affirming of each other. I now have new friends, some of whom will be with me for many years.

The people I admire the most are the doctors and nurses who are around so much relentless pain day in and day out. My clinical pastoral experiences have given me a different perspective on my life and made me aware of all that I take for granted. Certainly, I will always have a new appreciation for the morning prayer: *Barukh atah Adonai, eloheinu melekh haolam, asher yatzar et adam b'chochmah, u'vara vo nekavim nekavim, chalulim chalulim*. Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has formed man in wisdom, and created in him a system of ducts and tubes.

Kalsman Institute staff also includes Dr. Jay Abarbanel, lay leader and former Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California.

Augmenting the College-Institute's 20-plus years of offering classes on *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), the Institute will offer lectures for students and alumni and provide chaplaincy training. The expansion of rabbinical studies at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles into a four year stateside ordaining program is leading to the transformation of its supervised field work program and related courses.

To address the health and spiritual crises in America, the Kalsman Institute stimulates the intellect and advocates for the psychological, emotional, spiritual, and religious sides to healing. In the words of Kodmur, the goal of integrating Judaism and healing is to make people "whole."

The Kalsman Institute complements other HUC-JIR programs that train students and encourage faculty to become engaged with the health agenda: HUC-JIR/New York's Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Center for Pastoral

## The Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health

(continued from page 17)

Counseling in New York [see page 14] and Doctor of Ministry Program, run in conjunction with the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health, which develops pastoral counseling skills of clergy of all faiths; and HUC-JIR/Cincinnati's Clinical Pastoral Education program [see page 15; and *Chronicle*, Spring 1991, number 51, page 10].

In Cincinnati, rabbinical students enroll in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), a national system of experiential education that teaches pastoral care in healthcare settings. With the support of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, this program trains rabbinical students in CPE at the Jewish Hospital and other healthcare institutions. Cincinnati rabbinical students are currently required to

serve a minimum of 400 hours in CPE as part of their ordination requirements. The Cincinnati School is working toward earning accreditation in CPE which will give the College-Institute the opportunity to place and supervise students in various clinical settings, including their congregational pulpit internships.

Rabbi Ruth Alpers, Stein Director of Human Relations and Pastoral Counseling at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, who is working toward becoming a CPE supervisor, noted that the "primary goal of CPE is the professional development of our students training to become clergy. Each individual is working on him- or herself, clarifying personal theology and religious boundaries." She hopes to expand the program to offer CPE to HUC-JIR alumni.

To ensure that the College-Institute's field programs on all campuses are consistent in their training goals and requirements, a national Clinical Education Advisory Committee has been meeting regularly to review and develop institution-wide learning objectives and supervision standards.

# TIME AND THE SACRED

(continued from page 7)

fall on the same monthly dates, and the festivals on the same day of the week. The rabbinic calendar, on the other hand, follows the biblical lunar-solar pattern and has 354 days. The intercalation of the months was initially an arcane and closely guarded process, sometimes subject to political controversy. Similarly, the sighting of the new moon which marked the beginning of the new year in the autumn was carefully monitored by rabbinical authorities; the New Year began according to rabbinical decree, no matter what others might interpret what they saw in the heavens (cf. M. Rosh HaShanah 2:9; Y. Rosh HaShanah 1:3, 57b).

While we are better informed today about the material bases of the celestial and terrestrial orders than were our ancestors, as humans we remain aware of our smallness and finitude in the face of the cosmos. At sunrise and sunset and the changing of the seasons, we feel a sense of awe and wonder-

ment at the grandeur, mystery, and overwhelming power of the world around us. We may still recite with the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims God's handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

Earlier generations of Reform and liberal Jews, reading in the signs of their times the dawning of a messianic-like age of social amelioration and universal brotherhood, gave greater attention to the sweep of history, to time's forward, linear march. We today, looking back on both the advances and barbarities of the past century, while no less committed to the ideal of social betterment, may be less sanguine about human nature and the inevitability of progress. But we still live our daily lives within the cycles and rhythms dictated by the natural order and its calendar. By marking those times with Jewish ritual, by pausing to encounter the sacred and reflect on our creatureliness, we reenact our people's paths and fill our lives with

meaning that transcends both the passing scene and our fleeting place in it. For us no less than for our ancestors, time is the vessel of holiness. For time, well and mindfully spent, is the most precious gift we have.

### For further reading:

Theodor H. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year: A Modern Interpretation and Guide* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953)

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962)

Jacob Neusner, *Between Time and Eternity: The Essentials of Judaism* (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1975)

———, *The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation From Birth Through Death* (New York: Basic, 1987)

Shemaryahu Talmon, "Calendars and Mishmarot," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 1:108-17