Help! How do I ask for it? How do I receive it?
Classical Jewish Models and Their Relevance for Pastoral Counseling

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Thesis Summary

Help! How do I ask for it? How do I receive it?: Classical Jewish Models and Their Relevance for Pastoral Counseling

By Leah Doberne-Schor

Number of Chapters: Three

This thesis examines the parallels between biblical helping narratives and the establishment of pastoral care relationships. It notes the parallels between the process of entering and creating helping relationships in biblical literature and in pastoral counseling.

The goal of this thesis is to explore traditional models of helping relationships that may be useful to rabbis in establishing helping relationships – particularly pastoral care relationships – with those whom they serve.

This thesis is divided into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The titles of the chapters are: How does a Helping Relationship Begin?; Crafting the Content of a Helping Relationship; and Pitfalls and Problems (What happens when there is no mutually agreed upon contract).

Material used in this thesis: biblical narratives, classical commentary (such as Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Malbim and others), and modern literature on pastoral counseling.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the relationship between biblical helping narratives and the establishment of pastoral care relationships. It aims to see what parallels, if any, there are between the process of entering and creating a helping relationship in biblical literature and in pastoral counseling. There are few clear parallels to pastoral counseling in the Bible; however, there are many examples of helping relationships (of which pastoral counseling is a subset). It is therefore possible to compare the broader principles and forms of both sorts of helping relationships, without focusing on tasks specific to the conducting of pastoral care. This thesis asks: How can biblical stories help us understand the ways in which people seek help, offer assistance, enter into and establish helping relationships? And how, if at all, does this inform or enrich our understanding of the process by which counselors and counselees enter into and establish pastoral care relationships?

As rabbis, we are accustomed to interpreting biblical texts. From the ancient model of *peshat, remez, drash,* and *sod* to modern midrash, we have demanded that the texts speak to us and to the truths in our world. We look to the patriarchs and matriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah – to help us understand and deepen our relationship with God. From them we have learned that God can be our shield, that we can struggle with God, and that God can remember and redeem us. We look to biblical leaders, such as Moses, Miriam, and Aaron, to help us understand how to guide the Jewish people. This thesis continues in this midrashic tradition. Instead of looking to biblical characters for spiritual, psychological, legal, or philosophical insight,

we are looking to their helping relationships to help us understand the process of pastoral counseling. Indeed, for rabbis, the Bible may be a natural point of entry into the language and literature of pastoral care We can utilize our carefully honed interpretive skills and our experience in comparing the Bible to other intellectual and spiritual pursuits as a window into the world of pastoral counseling.

Often, the examples in pastoral care literature are exceptionally generalized. My classmates in counseling class would complain that these general case studies did not provide enough detail to be of use in determining a course of care. On the other hand, many writers employ stories of their own ministry. These narratives contain much detail, but they are subjective. Readers have little way to verify if they agree with an author's perspective or if they have been provided with all of the information. Biblical narratives, on the other hand, provide enough detail to be useful examples. Moreover, we are accustomed to reading and interpreting these stories and to engaging in a dialogue with them, their midrash, and their commentary through the ages. As in life, the interpretive literature reminds us of the many (and possibly contradictory) viewpoints that we might have on any given situation. Finally, writers and readers have equal access to the biblical texts and to their commentaries. It is therefore possible for readers to verify if they agree with an author's interpretation.

Although there are many biblical stories in which characters offer and/or request assistance, this thesis will examine the following narratives:

- The cycle of finding a wife for Isaac, beginning with Abraham's request to Eliezer, Eliezer's request for water at the well, and Eliezer's proposal of marriage to Rebecca's family (Gen. 24:1-61)
- Hospitality stories: Abraham's offer of *hachnasat orhim* (Gen. 18:1-8); Lot's offer to the strangers in Sodom (Gen. 19:1-3); and the elderly man's offer of hospitality to the Levite (Judges 19:10-21)
- Rahab's offer of safety to the spies in Jericho and her request that they spare her life (Joshua 2:1-21)
- Eli's offer of counsel and blessing to Hannah (I Sam. 1:1-18)
- Eli's assistance during Samuel's first experience of prophecy (I Sam. 3:1-9)
- Yael's offer of sanctuary to Sisera (Judges 4:17-21 and 5:24-27)
- Saul's quest for his animals and his requests of Samuel (I Sam. 9:1-27)

I first read these stories with an eye towards a *peshat* sense of the dynamics of these helping relationships. I then turned to *Mikraot Gedolot*, looking at the commentaries of Rashi, Ramban, Radaq, Malbim, Ibn Ezra, and others. How did these classical commentators perceive the contours of these relationships?

I compiled these understandings, and I then turned to pastoral counseling literature. Because none of these stories (except, perhaps the stories with Eli) are close parallels to pastoral counseling, I explored the ways in which the establishment of these helping relationships dovetails with the establishment of pastoral care relationships. For each story I wrote a short piece that noted any points of convergence between the ways the characters enter and create helping relationships in the Bible and the ways that

counselors and counselees enter and create pastoral counseling relationships.

In the end, I focused the discussion on three main areas. The first chapter explores the process of entering into a helping relationship. How does one decide to seek help or to offer assistance to another? To whom does one turn, and why? The second chapter looks at the development of a helping contract. Once two parties have agreed to work together, what are the boundaries of their relationship? What sort of assistance will be offered? What are the responsibilities of both parties? What are the terms of their contract? The third chapter explores the harm that can be caused by failed or broken contracts. What are some of the causes of failed contracts? How can we prevent betrayal and miscommunications? Finally, the conclusion sews together teachings from each of these chapters, noting the ways that these biblical stories are able (and fail) to inform our understanding of the establishment of pastoral counseling relationships.

My hope in writing this thesis is that the biblical stories can be a window for others, as it was for me, into the world of helping relationships. That it might help us to gain insight into our roles and responsibilities as rabbis. And that it might provide us with guidance as we engage in these sacred tasks.

Chapter One: How Does A Helping Relationship Begin?

What brings a person to the moment of asking for assistance? To whom does one turn? And how does someone come to recognize the need of another and to offer assistance? As the relationship between she who asks and she who offers develops, taking on shape and form, the details will matter. But at the moment of encounter, what matters are the statements: "I need help" and "I am here for you." Two sides of the coin – asking and offering.

What brings a person to the moment of asking for assistance? Some characters in the biblical stories decide to seek help when they can no longer tolerate their level of anxiety or distress. Pharaoh's anxiety about his dream, Abraham's uncertainty about God's covenantal promise, Eliezer's distress about his difficult errand, and Hannah's bitter spirit and tears about her barrenness touch the core of their very existence. Pharaoh seeks help because his strange dream upsets him at his deepest core. He awakens from his dream, *vatipaem rucho* (Gen. 41:8), and his soul was agitated.[1] His insides are clanging like a bell (Rashi), and his soul is trembling (Hizkuni). Ibn Ezra cites Psalm 77 in reference to Pharaoh: "I am so overwrought, I cannot speak" (Ps. 77:5). Hizkuni, drawing on the difference between the *hitpael* and *hifil* forms of the verb for unrest (*pei, ayin, mem*), concludes that Pharaoh's anxiety is genuine. He notes that in one instance the use of the *hifil* indicated that King Nebuchadnezzar had only pretended to be anxious for the purpose of testing his courtiers and magicians (Dan. 2:1). On the other hand, the text in Genesis uses the *hitpael* form of the verb; Pharaoh is truly troubled. He is not

[1] All biblical quotations are from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, Philadelphia, JPS, 1999.

playing games with his magicians; rather, he seeks to end his pain.

Abraham's quest to secure Isaac's well-being touches on his own uncertainty about his entire life's purpose. Abraham seeks help at a time when he is confronting his own mortality. He has just experienced Sarah's death, and the Torah notes Abraham's many years, reading, "Abraham was now old, advanced in age" (Gen. 24:1). Sforno suggests that at this moment, Abraham wonders how he has lived his life, what his values have been, and what would be important for him to accomplish before he dies. Although the Torah indicates that Abraham has been blessed with everything, he has one significant point of longing. Abraham worries that he will not live to see Isaac get married (Sforno) and inherit after him (Ramban).

Moreover, Abraham had lived his entire life guided by a covenantal promise between him and God. According to the agreement, Abraham would leave his homeland, journey to the Land of Canaan, and be faithful to the One God. In turn, God would be faithful to him and grant him offspring as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars in the heavens (Gen. 12:1-3). But as Abraham reflects on his life, he sees that he has only two sons. He has been told that Ishmael will not inherit (Gen. 17:21); and he sees that Isaac is still single. Abraham might wonder if the covenant that defined his life will ultimately be fulfilled. Or will his life have been a waste? Abraham decides to do what he can to ensure the success of the covenant, so he seeks assistance in finding a wife for Isaac.

Eliezer is anxious as he approaches the well. This competent servant is overwhelmed and distressed by his seemingly impossible and deeply important task. As

Abraham's chief servant, Eliezer is most likely accustomed to successfully carrying out Abraham's orders. But now, his past resourcefulness eludes him. He wonders how he will ever find the right woman, from the right family, who will be willing to journey back to the Land of Canaan (Gen. 24:3). He remembers the moment when he placed his hand under Abraham's thigh and swore the oath (Gen. 24:9). He knows the importance of continuing the covenant in the next generation. How will he look Abraham in the eye if he fails? Radaq points out that Eliezer can judge if a woman is the right age, if she is beautiful, or if she has a physical defect. But how will he know that she has a good character or that she is from the right family?

Eliezer signals his distress by turning to God in prayer. He prays: "Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the town come out to draw water. And let the maiden to whom I say 'please lower your jar that I may drink' and she responds, 'drink, and I will also water your camels,' let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby I will know that you have dealt graciously with my master" (Gen. 24: 13-14). Eliezer could have asked God for any sign that a particular maiden would be the right wife for Isaac. Indeed, Radaq provides an alternate sign: the spring of water rises to meet Rebecca, indicating to Eliezer that she is the right woman. But Eliezer chooses a different sign, one that points to his inner turmoil: the right woman will hear his cry for help.

Hannah's distress leads her to seek sanctuary. Her family situation is complicated. She is a second, childless wife. Peninah, the senior wife, treats Hannah harshly and flaunts her own brood of children. Although Elkanah treats Hannah well,

Hannah is one of a long line of biblical woman who would echo Rachel's cry, "Give me children or I shall die!" (Gen. 30:2). Hannah, like Rachel before her, may equate children with self-worth and meaning in life. Hannah may believe that without children there is no purpose in living; it is better to be dead. Hence, Hannah is *marat nefesh*, of bitter spirit. When the family makes their annual pilgrimage to Shiloah, Elkanah gives Peninah and all of her sons their portions. Hannah notes the contrast between the many portions Elkanah gives to Peninah and the single portion he gives to her. All of her frustration, pain, and angst well up and she cannot rejoice with the rest of the family; Hannah turns her back on the festivities, refusing to eat. Eventually, she leaves the feast and turns towards the sanctuary at Shiloah for refuge.

As Pharaoh's innermost soul is agitated, as Abraham struggles existentially, as Eliezer feels inadequate, as Hannah's entire identity is in question, those who seek pastoral counseling do so out of a sense of inner distress. As this distress touches the deepest part of these characters' identity and provides the catalyst for encounter, similarly, inner unrest and turmoil can prove a catalyst for a pastoral encounter. Dittes describes this turmoil:

> "I am not myself. I am beside myself. I am less then myself. I cannot see things as they are. I cannot feel things as they are. I cannot cope with things as I should. There is something wrong with me. I am broken. I am not as I was created to be. I need *help*. I *need* help. *I* need help." It is to this sense of self-depletion and insufficiency, this sense of being a misfit and wrong that pastoral counseling is directed... It's a cry for help that is more desperate than it may sound because it is a confession of some degree of personal deficiency and paralysis. [2]

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[2] Dittes, J., *Pastoral Counseling: The Basics*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 1999: p. 18.

A person seeks pastoral help when she or he can no longer tolerate his or her inner pain. When the resources with which he or she is familiar have failed. Only then, and perhaps after much waiting and deliberating, does she or he seek out assistance.

Not all requests for assistance, either in the Bible or in our lives, touch on this inner level. The story of Saul's encounter with Samuel is an example of someone who is not seeking a deeper encounter with the person from whom he asks aid. At the beginning of this story, Saul is engaged on an errand for his father: recovering lost animals. The mission is unsuccessful, but the servant accompanying Saul suggests that they visit a man of God who might be able to help. But Saul does not seem terribly concerned about the lost animals. Rather, he is worried about his father. He tells the servant, "Let us turn back, or my father will stop worrying about the asses and begin to worry about us" (I Sam. 9:5). Saul's lack of interest in the animals suggests that they do not personally concern him enough to cause inner trouble. Unlike Abraham, Eliezer, Hannah, and Pharaoh, if Saul were to seek advice on the asses, he would simply desire some practical tips.

Similarly not all requests from a rabbi are for pastoral care. Sometimes, like Saul, people seek help about factual matters which do not concern them on a deep level. Like Saul, most of us could use assistance when trying to accomplish new, difficult, or perplexing tasks. Many people turn to their rabbi for help in writing a ***ketubah***, learning to read Hebrew, or about other factual matters. These technical questions do not preclude pastoral concerns. Indeed, we could imagine that as a rabbi helps a couple craft a

ketubah, he also opens a space for them to air their hopes and fears about marriage. But if someone is not interested in engaging on this other level, then the encounter will not involve pastoral counseling.

To whom does one turn for assistance? Often, biblical characters seek out those who they believe will be dependable sources of help. They rely on a treaty, outside information, or past experience. Others note that another is indebted to them and will therefore assist them. Some only find help after a process of trial and error. Others do not believe that they can rely on the sources of assistance that are available to them. And while some characters need aid, they do not verbalize their request. These biblical stories thus point to the sorts of people who might be good sources of assistance and to some of the difficulties in finding them.

Many characters turn to someone who they believe will be open to their request and able to provide that which they seek. When the spies enter Jericho, they head for the house of "a harlot named Rahab and lodged there" (Josh. 2:1) because they believe she will be open to them and their mission. Why do the spies visit Rahab? Who is she? And why is her home a good place to go? Radaq, perhaps troubled by the sexual connotations, suggests that Rahab is an innkeeper. An innkeeper would know what is happening in the town, and the common area at the inn would be a good place to pick up choice tidbits of information. Malbim offers that Rahab was visited by many important Canaanites; thus she was privy to many secrets. Hence, the spies needed only to visit her house to find out what was happening in the land. Rahab's suitability is also suggested by her name – wide. She is open to all that is going on in the land; she opens her home and herself to

others; and she extends this welcome to the spies.

Similarly, Sisera has good reason to ask Yael for help; he turns to her for a hiding place because of a pre-existing peace treaty. When Sisera flees from the battlefield, he runs to the "tent of Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was friendship (*shalom*) between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite" (Judges 4:17). According to Radaq, Sisera is seeking a place to hide until his pursuers have stopped looking for him. Because of his friendship with Heber, Sisera has reason to believe that Yael will help him. Although Malbim attempts to exonerate Yael by proposing that Heber had exempted himself from the treaty or that Yael, as a woman, was never bound by it, that he writes such apologies only strengthens the importance of this *shalom* As readers, we do not know if Yael and Sisera have met before. However, Sisera knows of the peace agreement, and he expects to find haven in Yael's tent.

Abraham calls on his servant because he believes this man can be trusted with his most important task. The Torah text tells us that this person was the senior servant (*zaken beito*) of Abraham's household, in charge of all that Abraham owned (Gen. 24:2). Abraham had already successfully relied on this servant, and it would make sense to turn to him for yet another sensitive task. The classical commentators tend to equate this servant with Eliezer, who will be Abraham's heir if he has no children (Gen. 15:2-3). As one of those in line to inherit after Abraham, Eliezer might be an odd choice to send on a mission to find a wife for Isaac, the heir apparent. Yet Eliezer's other qualifications seem to outweigh this possible conflict of interest. For instance, Radaq suggests that Eliezer is truly a part of Abraham's home. If Eliezer grew up amongst the family, he would

therefore be likely to understand the family dynamics. Moreover, a servant is also a good choice for this mission because his role is clear. Unlike Isaac, the servant must do what Abraham commands; he is like an extension of Abraham. We can see this in a literary way: in the Torah the servant does not have a name of his own, but is known only by the role he has in connection to Abraham. Hence, Abraham is confident that Eliezer will be responsive to his needs. Eliezer has been reliable in the past, knows the family, and is required to follow Abraham's orders.

Some characters seek aid from those who owe them debts. They know that their debtors already owe them and are thus less able to refuse their requests. For example, Rahab looks to make a deal with the spies whose lives she has saved. She knows that the Israelites will be invading Jericho, and she wants her life and the lives of her family members to be spared. Because she has shown loyalty (*hesed*) to the spies,[3] she believes they are indebted to her and will therefore help her. On the other hand, Eliezer consciously chooses not to become indebted to Laban and his family. Once he knows that Rebecca is the right wife for Isaac, he must try to convince her family to agree to a marriage proposal that includes some difficult stipulations. Eliezer does not want a weak hand in this negotiating. Hence, he refuses to eat until he has told the family the purpose of his visit (Gen. 24:33).

The spies, Sisera, Abraham, and Rahab turn to individuals who they believe will be reliable sources of assistance. These individuals are likely to be responsive to them – either because of their character (or occupation), a previous agreement or debt, or their

[3] *JPS Tanakh*: 2:12.

role in the family. Some of these characters have more evidence than others that they are turning to someone who is trustworthy. For instance, Abraham has lived with Eliezer for many years. But the characters seem certain they have come to the right person or place.

It may not be easy to find a person who is able to provide the right sort of assistance. Rather, once a character decides to seek assistance, he may need to turn to several sources before finding someone who can help him. Pharaoh first turns to those in his inner circle who have successfully helped him in the past. Only after they fail is he open to bringing in a skilled outsider. Initially, Pharaoh looks to his court magicians. Like the spies, Sisera, and Abraham, Pharaoh had good reason to believe the magicians would be able to help him. In the past, these magicians may have solved many of Pharaoh's problems, and Pharaoh may put a great deal of trust in them. But the magicians are unable to interpret his dream. At this point, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer speaks up. This cupbearer tells Pharaoh about Joseph, a skilled dream interpreter. Because Pharaoh's usual sources of assistance have failed, because he wants to know the meaning of his dream, and because he has received a recommendation about Joseph's talents, Pharaoh calls for Joseph to be sent up from the dungeons (Gen.41:8-14). When usual sources of help fail, Pharaoh becomes open to alternative sources of aid.

Not all characters are open to seeking aid from a variety of sources; hence, they pass by good sources of assistance. As evening approaches, the Levite declines his servant's suggestion to "turn aside to this town of the Jebusites and spend the night in it" (Judges 19:11) because of its gentile population. The youth recognizes that it is almost dark and that the party needs a haven to spend the night. While ideally they would be

able to lodge with an Israelite family, the Jebusite town seems to provide a good enough solution. Me'am Loez suggests that the town was ruled by a king; therefore, the party would be safe from robbers and murderers. But the Levite does not see the possibility of sanctuary in Jebus. Rather, the non-Israelite population proves an insurmountable obstacle, and he determines that the party will continue on towards an Israelite settlement. Even though the Levite is presented with a perfectly good source of help, he refuses to turn aside. Unlike Pharaoh, who is open to many alternatives, the Levite has a mental road-map of what should be done. Even when the lawful leadership of Jebus and the impending dusk challenge his pre-conceived ideas, the Levite cannot or will not deviate from this model.

Finally, some characters demonstrate their desire for help, but do not ask anyone for assistance. For instance, after arriving in Gibeah, the Levite, "went and sat down in the town square, but nobody took them indoors to spend the night" (Judges 19:15). Picture the man, his concubine, and his servants, their donkeys and all of their baggage gathered in the middle of the central square of the town. It seems like the man is sending up a smoke signal. He wants and waits for someone to recognize his need for assistance and approach him, but he does not turn to anyone and ask for a place to lodge. Likewise, Hannah goes up to the sanctuary in Shiloah, fleeing from the family meal. While at Shiloah, Hannah turns to God in prayer. Hannah's search for sanctuary and prayers to God demonstrate her desire for assistance. She seeks a haven in her life, a place where she will feel safe and heard. But she does not turn to Eli, even though he is sitting right by the doorpost of the shrine.

Perhaps it was not customary for strangers to turn to townspeople or to priests. But it might also be the case that something inside of the Levite and inside of Hannah prevented them from seeking aid from a fellow human being. Might it have been too shameful to admit that the family lacked a place to spend the night? Might Hannah have never believed that anyone, anywhere, would actually be able to hear her cry for help? Perhaps it simply never occurred to Hannah that the priest would care about her ordinary problems. Hence, there are times when biblical characters demonstrate, if quietly, that they would like someone to help them, but they cannot or will not ask for aid.

In these biblical stories, those in search of help turn to those who they believe are competent, trustworthy, and open to their needs. In our lives as well, we turn to those who we believe will be reliable sources of help. For many of us, a rabbi can be this trustworthy helper. Like Rahab, a rabbi is perceived to be open to the needs of congregants; their interests are naturally of concern to him. Others might turn to their rabbi because of a perceived treaty of *shalom*. They expect to find a haven in the rabbi's office. In other ways, a rabbi may be like Eliezer. She may be perceived as a trusted member of the extended family, particularly if she has been the rabbi in a location for a long while. Like Eliezer, she is seen as competent, faithful, and not directly enmeshed in family quarrels. Still others, like Rahab, might simply expect that their rabbi will treat them with *hesed*. They have paid their temple dues, have given of their time to the synagogue, and now the rabbi will do his job and help them.

While some people naturally turn to their rabbi as a source of assistance, others might not think to turn to their rabbi. Like Pharaoh, they might already surround

themselves with an inner court of trusted family and friends. Others, like Hannah, have beloved family members who try to be of assistance. Only when these sources of assistance fail might such individuals consider turning to their rabbi. Moreover, some people might simply not find a rabbi to be a suitable source of assistance. Like the Levite who would not lodge with Jebusites, some people, for a variety of reasons, do not and will not turn to or trust rabbis.

Finally, like Hannah and the Levite, others might want to ask for assistance but refrain from doing so. These individuals would like help, and they would like someone to notice them as they sit in the town square. They might even come to the temple or speak to the rabbi. But they cannot ask for help, or their cries for help are subtle and nearly imperceptible. Perhaps some are ashamed. Others might not wish to trouble their rabbi. They might say to themselves, "our rabbi is a busy person; I don't want to bother her. She has more 'real' work to accomplish."[4]

So many people would love assistance and attention, but cannot or do not know how to ask for it. Once I worked in a synagogue that wanted to reach out to others. They announced that those who wanted others to welcome them to the synagogue could take a blue (instead of the typical white) coffee cup. Some pastoral caregivers have attempted to signal their desire to be of help through a pastoral letter to the congregation, alerting congregants to their availability and desire to be of help.[5] Such programs can be of great help. However, some people might still remain, like Hannah and like the Levite, quietly,

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[4] Swift, J., "In the Hospital," in *The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care*, eds. G. Ahlskog and H. Sands (Madison, CT, Psychosocial Press, 2000): p. 184.
[5] ibid.: pp. 183-4.

almost silently, searching for help.

This leads us to our final question, how does someone come to recognize the need of another and offer assistance? Sometimes, a biblical character is approached and directly asked for assistance or assigned a task. Abraham calls Eliezer and makes him swear an oath to bring back a wife for Isaac. Rahab climbs to the roof to speak to the spies and offers her proposal. But very often, characters in the Bible offer assistance to others, without being asked. At times, astute characters recognize a deeper request behind the initial call for help, and they respond on both levels. Finally, there are times when biblical characters offer assistance that is unasked for and unwanted.

Abraham is the biblical and midrashic example *par excellence* of one who watches out for those in need. Sitting under his tent at Mamre, he raises his eyes and sees three men standing above him. Abraham not only sees three men, he sees that these strangers, like all travelers, are in need of hospitality. Abraham leaps to his feet and runs over to them, inviting them in. Abraham is always on the lookout for those in need of hospitality.[6] Some teach that his tent flaps remain open on all sides, indicating openness in all directions.[7] According to another midrash, Abraham is sitting in his tent, in the presence of the *Shekhinah*, when he looks up and sees the travelers. As soon as he notices them, he rises to greet them. For this observation comes the midrashic expression: hospitality (*hachnasat orchim*) is greater than receiving the presence of the

[6] In Genesis Rabbah 42:8 Abraham sends Eliezer out in search of guests, even though it is the third day after his circumcision.
[7] Genesis Rabbah 48:9.

Shekhinah.[8] Welcoming others into one's tent is a holy task; the challenge is to open one's eyes.

Abraham almost miraculously knows that the three strangers would appreciate his hospitality. However, when other characters offer assistance, they need not be as perfect as Abraham. These characters are able to draw on their observations of those seeking or in need of help. Lot, the elderly man in judges, and Yael use their observations to alert them to the needs of the travelers they encounter. Both Lot and the elderly man notice a group of travelers arriving late in the day. Lot sees them from his perch at the town gate. The elderly man notices a stranger, his concubine, servants, and baggage piled up in the town square. Nightfall is approaching, the streets are dangerous, and it is clear to these two men that the strangers need a place to sleep. Lot and the elderly man learned about hospitality early in life.[9] They have been taught to notice others in need and to offer a place to stay, even if such hospitality goes against local custom. Hence, these two men desire to be of assistance, and they approach the strangers with a safe place for them to lodge. Like these men, Yael also sees a traveler in need. Although Yael's ultimate goals are not hospitable, Yael recognizes that Sisera is seeking the haven of her tent. And she invites him in, offering what he believes will be a sanctuary.

Likewise, Eli offers assistance to Hannah based on his observations. When Eli first sees Hannah, he does not know anything about her. However, from his position at the sanctuary door, he determines that she seems to be a woman who has come alone to

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[8] Midrash Tehillim (Buber), Mizmor 18

[9] Rashi, Gen. 19:1 posits that Lot learned about hospitality while he was living with Abraham; Me'am Loez suggests that the elderly man learned about hospitality in his youth. For Me'am Loez see Scherman, N., ed.,

the sanctuary and who looks like she has been crying. How to engage with this woman? What brings her to the sanctuary? Rashi posits that it was not customary to pray silently; Eli would have no frame of reference for someone who was engaged in silent personal prayer. Metzudat David offers that Eli carefully studies Hannah's lips to determine what she is saying. Perhaps Eli believes that he needs to hear Hannah's words to be of service. But Eli cannot hear what Hannah is saying, and he is not familiar with private prayer. Hence, Eli turns to other explanations for Hannah's behavior. Metzudat David notes that Eli has good reason to believe Hannah to be drunk; drunkards often move their lips without saying anything. Based on his knowledge of the world and on his observations of Hannah, Eli confronts her, asking, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?"(I Sam, 1:14).

Although Eli's initial observation is inaccurate, because he approaches Hannah, he opens the possibility for meaningful interaction. Hannah corrects Eli, making him aware of her problems. She replies, "No, my lord, I am a woman of hard-spirit and I have drunk neither wine nor other drink; rather, I have poured out my soul before the Eternal" (I Sam. 1:15). Radaq notes that Hannah tells Eli of her hard spirit and her many woes and sorrows. The biblical dialogue is sparse. But we can imagine Hannah revealing to Eli her inability to bear children, her inner sense of worthlessness, her difficult relationships with Peninah and Elkanah, and her fervent hopes and dreams for a child. In these moments, Hannah pours out a portion of her soul. Eli has opened the door to assistance by observing Hannah and by relating some of his observations to her. Even though Eli's

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The Prophets: Joshua/Judges, Brooklyn, NY, Mesorah Publications, 2000: p. 227.

assessment is incorrect, his observations indicate that he has noticed her. As Hannah recognizes that there is someone who wants to be present for her, she seizes the opportunity for encounter.

Even after a person has asked for assistance, insightful characters are able to determine not only the surface request, but also underlying needs. After Eliezer prays to God, he notices Rebecca. Something about Rebecca speaks to him, for, "the servant ran to greet her and he said, 'please let me sip a little water from your jug'" (Gen. 24:17). Eliezer asks Rebecca for only a portion of that which he is seeking. Yes, he would like a sip of water after his long journey. He would like to find a wife for Isaac, a woman who will fulfill all of Abraham's many requirements. However, Eliezer is also yearning on an even deeper level, one that he may not be able to articulate. He hopes that someone, perhaps this person right in front of him, will not only hear his request for water, but will really understand that he seeks more.

Rebecca perceives Eliezer's yearning, and she provides more than a sip of water for him and the thirsty camels. She sees this stranger as a complete human being, not just a servant. Rashi points out that she calls him 'my lord' as a sign of respect and dignity. Rebecca also takes note that he 'ran' to greet her. And then Rebecca literally demonstrates that she has noticed this stranger by echoing his running with her own haste, her body language matching his. She 'quickly' lowers her jar (Gen. 24:15), and she 'quickly' empties her jar and runs to the well, drawing for the camels (Gen. 24:20). Eliezer "stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the Eternal had made his errand successful or not" (Gen. 24:21). Eliezer gazes (*mishtaeh*) at Rebecca. She has beheld

him as a complete human being; and he stands in awe and amazement.

Like Rebecca, Joseph responds to more than the initial request. Pharaoh demands that Joseph interpret his troubling dreams. He asks for help in the realm of the tangible: "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning" (Gen. 41:15). But Joseph also observes Pharaoh's underlying agitation, and he intuits that Pharaoh is not only distressed about the content of these dreams. Pharaoh's very soul is distressed, and this turmoil is most likely manifest in all of Pharaoh's being – in how he sits, his tone of voice, the expression on his face. Joseph replies, "Not I (*biladi*), but God will see to Pharaoh's welfare!" (Gen. 41:16). Joseph will indeed interpret Pharaoh's dream. However, Joseph replies not just to the content of the dream, but to Pharaoh's innermost agitation. Joseph sees that Pharaoh seeks more than knowledge of his dream; he also seeks someone or Someone who will see to his welfare, to his *shalom*.

There are also times when characters offer assistance to those who do not ask for it and who do not realize that they need help. For instance, Eli aids Samuel by diagnosing a repeatedly perplexing situation. Samuel has been living in the sanctuary at Shiloah for most of his life. He has served as Eli's helper, and Eli has been like his teacher and parent. One night, Samuel hears a voice calling out to him. He assumes that this is the voice of his teacher, perhaps because Eli had called out to him before. But when he runs to Eli's side, Eli tells him to go back to sleep; Eli had not requested his help. This happens a second, and then a third time. Perhaps Samuel is becoming frustrated. Why do I keep hearing Eli call to me? And why does Eli then deny it? Am I hearing things?

What is going on? Eli also notices that while he has not called out, the boy keeps running to his bedside. Eli ponders what could be causing this miscommunication, and he eventually determines that Samuel has not been hearing voices or having odd dreams; Samuel is experiencing prophecy. Now that Samuel's experience has been named, Eli can offer help to Samuel as he encounters this new experience. Like so many others, Eli uses his observations to figure out how to be of assistance to Samuel.

On the other hand, Samuel fails to observe Saul accurately, and his attempts at assistance backfire. Samuel initially responds to Saul's concerns about the animals. But Samuel also has another agenda; he has been told by God that Saul is to be the king of Israel. While Saul is unconcerned with his future and with his life goals, Samuel constantly hints to Saul about his new role. It is possible to read these hints as Samuel's attempts to communicate to Saul that he should think about and discuss his future. But Saul had only wanted basic information about the asses, and he had expressed greater concern with returning to his family.

Had Samuel been observing Saul, he would have noted that Saul had never understood these hints. When Samuel offers, "And for whom is all Israel yearning, if not for you and all your ancestral house" (I Sam. 9:20), Saul replies, "But I am only a Benjaminite... why do you say such things to me?" (I Sam. 9:21). Saul does not understand that Samuel is alluding to the kingship. Instead, Saul notes that he is from the most insignificant clan of the smallest tribe, indicating that Samuel's comments do not compute. Later on, Samuel reserves a choice piece of meat for Saul, as might be appropriate for a king. But he never explains to Saul the meaning of this fine meal. Had

Samuel been aware of Saul's confusion, he might have taken a more direct tack. But Samuel fails to communicate with Saul; and the two talk past one another.

Thus, characters who successfully offer assistance tend to be keen observers. Some, like Abraham, Lot, or Eli, are on the lookout for moments of encounter. They might, like Rebecca or Joseph, take note of the other's body language. They might pay attention to physical circumstances, like Lot, the old man, or Yael. Ultimately, successful providers of assistance are able to respond not only to the stated, but also to the unstated requests; they see a more complete picture of the person in front of them.

Like these characters, in order to be of assistance, rabbis also must be skilled observers. Like Lot, the elderly man, Rebecca, and Eli we need to hear not only the stated requests, but also what goes unstated. Rabbi Ellen Lewis notes that often, those who come to their rabbi's office seeking a book are actually requesting much more.[10] Hence, rabbis need to learn to look beyond the obvious. David Robb and David Kelley list a number of clues that can help pastoral caregivers take note. How does the person approach their rabbi for assistance? Do they call during normal hours? Do they announce that they must meet at once, urgently? How is the person dressed? Is he taking good care of himself? What is the quality of her energy level? What about the emotional climate? Are there signs of anxiety? Depression? Dulled or flat affect? Flooded emotion?[11] While these considerations are only a starting place, they can help pastoral caregivers pay attention, a key prerequisite for offering aid.

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[10] Lewis, E., "Supervision, Therapy, and the (Modern) Rabbi," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly,* Winter 1999: p. 83.

[11] Robb, D. and Kelley, D., "The Assessment Interview," in *The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care,*

Additionally, Abraham, Lot, the anonymous man, and Eli remind us that pastoral counseling occurs, in part, because rabbis are on the lookout for potential pastoral encounters. Like the Levite surrounded by his family and baggage in the town square, those in search of help carry around clues with them, even though they do not knock on the office door or schedule a moment of quiet conversation. Rather, the inner unrest is expressed in everyday language in everyday settings. Perhaps it surfaces during clean-up after mitzvah day, or at an *oneg*, or while dropping the kids off at Hebrew school. Thus, rabbis sit at a metaphorical tent door or town gate, watching for those in need of aid, not only during office hours, but in almost all of their congregational interactions.

Ahlskog explains how a prospective counselee might edge into counseling:

> Some congregants will approach you without being sure of their intentions. They want to see you but are not directly aware of their wish to be counseled. They will begin with a tangential matter. Without realizing it, they are trying to edge themselves into counseling, which also means that they are prepared to be edged out, depending on how you handle the situation... A congregant who disguises the wish to begin counseling will drop this disguise and enter counseling, provided you (1) make no comments about the overt issue... and (2) restrict your comments to feelings they have and your interest in hearing more.[12]

When a rabbi recognizes that perhaps there is something more to the casual comment, then these hidden, almost overlooked moments are able to ripen into pastoral encounters.

Dittes suggests that rabbis treat these casual comments as pastoral encounters, even if they are not initially presented as such.

> Most pastoral counseling comes by surprise and in disguise, not by appointment and clearly separated from non-counseling encounters.... these are more typical encounters, in which you can never be sure, from beginning to end, whether this is

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eds. G. Ahlskog and H. Sands (Madison, CT, Psychosocial Press, 2000): pp. 142-4.

[12] Ahlskog, G., "Essential Theory and Technique," in *The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care,* eds. G. Ahlskog and H. Sands (Madison, CT, Psychosocial Press, 2000): p. 10

> pastoral counseling. But it's not the time for debating definitions or negotiating goals. All you can do is act as though this is pastoral counseling, in case it is.[13]

In other words, a rabbi can offer pastoral assistance, even in ordinary settings, by making an effort to pay attention and to listen to the person opposite him.

While it is important to be on the lookout for pastoral counseling moments, it is also important to recognize not everyone is seeking a deeper encounter. Saul and Samuel consistently miscommunicate because they have different agendas. Saul simply wants an answer about the sheep; Samuel aims to discuss the future of the Israelites and the monarchy. If a person only wants an answer to a question, to discuss congregational politics, to talk about another person, or to engage in political discourse, this person is not seeking pastoral counseling. When a person does not wish to engage with his or her rabbi about his or her inner life, attempts at pastoral counseling will fail.[14]

Good assistance therefore begins, in part, from careful observation. Observation allows pastoral counselors to see and to pay attention to those who come before them. It can help pastoral counselors take note of those who seek out assistance, and it can help counselors notice both spoken and unspoken calls for aid. Observation is therefore critical during the initial moments of encounter. But these first moments are not the entirety of a helping relationship; rather, they set the stage for the relationship that will develop. After their initial encounter, the parties move on to the next stage in establishing a helping relationship: determining a contract of care.

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[13] Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling*: p. 5.
[14] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": pp. 9-10.

Chapter Two: Crafting the Contract of a Helping Relationship

Once both parties agree to enter a helping relationship, they need to determine the sort of assistance that is being requested (and that is needed) and how this assistance will be provided. This process of negotiation results in a contract of care, which provides a framework for the relationship. In this chapter, we will explore how these contracts of care are formed. How do those in need make their requests? How are these requests received? How do both parties arrive at mutually agreed upon expectations and terms, both explicitly stated and implicitly accepted? How do the parties indicate their commitment to their contract? And what conditions prompt a revisiting of their initial agreements?

Throughout the Bible, requests for assistance are rarely met exactly as they are proposed. The party being asked to help may expand upon, qualify, or attempt to clarify the kind of aid he or she is willing to give. Joseph and Rebecca offer more assistance than Pharaoh and Eliezer had requested. They recognize additional needs, which they feel that they are able to meet. Even though they are in socially inferior positions, Joseph and Eliezer provide qualified responses, indicating what they intend and/or feel able to do. In contrast, Rebecca's family and the spies are convinced by lengthy persuasive narratives, and they accept the proposed agreements without qualification.

Pharaoh has Joseph rushed from the dungeon to the palace. As the lowly prisoner Joseph stands before Pharaoh's high court. Pharaoh tells him, "I have a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell

its meaning" (Gen. 41:15). As ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh expects to have his wishes fulfilled, and he orders Joseph to interpret his dream. Sforno notes that Pharaoh tells Joseph that he expects him to understand exactly how to interpret his dream. Rashi uses the French word *entendre*; Joseph will understand the meaning of Pharaoh's dream on all of its levels.

As a slave before Pharaoh, Joseph has little choice but to answer that he will indeed interpret the dream. Yet Joseph's response is enigmatic: "Not I! (*biladi*), God will see to Pharaoh's welfare (*shalom*)" (Gen. 41:16). According to Rashi, Joseph does not believe that he alone can interpret Pharaoh's dream. Rather, God understands the meaning of Pharaoh's dream, and Joseph will relay the message to Pharaoh. On the other hand, Radaq parses this verse as two separate ideas. Joseph will interpret the dream using his intellect, and God will ensure Pharaoh's overall well-being. In either case, Joseph does not simply say yes to Pharaoh. He explains how he will go about interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. Moreover, through his reply, Joseph offers to be God's agent in seeing to the entire *shalom* of Pharaoh. Joseph's broader response indicates that he offers to respond to Pharaoh's entire person, not just his limited request. Lastly, although we would expect a self-deprecating response from a lowly slave, Joseph's statement demonstrates self-assurance. He is confident in his ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream, and he even feels empowered enough to offer additional aid to the great ruler.

Like Joseph, Rebecca affirms and expands upon the request made of her. Eliezer approaches Rebecca with a simply stated request. He asks, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar" (Gen. 24: 19). Unlike Pharaoh, Eliezer is a traveling stranger,

possibly dusty and dirty from the long journey. Moreover, as a servant, Eliezer is probably unaccustomed to asking for help; thus, his request is polite and small. Rebecca not only agrees to this request, but she also expands upon it. Rebecca offers to water the camels as well. Eliezer then asks Rebecca about her family and the possibility of lodging. As before, Rebecca provides additional information. To the question, "Whose daughter are you?" Rebecca answers, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor" (Gen. 24:23, 24). When Eliezer inquires "Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" (Gen. 24:23) Rebecca responds, "There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night" (Gen. 24:25). Thus, Rebecca is able to discern that Eliezer's simple requests only touch on a portion of the assistance he needs, and she confidently offers Eliezer above and beyond that for which he asks.

In contrast, Eliezer does not immediately fill Abraham's request. Abraham says, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Eternal, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:2). Abraham, as master, issues a command. While the servant Eliezer has no choice but to accept, he attempts to clarify Abraham's needs before going on the errand and taking the oath. Abraham has made two statements: Do not get a Canaanite wife for my son! Do get a wife from my ancestral land! If the servant promises to find a wife from a particular place, what is he to do if she does not want to return to Canaan? The first words out of Eliezer's mouth indicate this dilemma, "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to

the land from which you came?" (Gen. 24:5). Should he still continue with the marriage contract? Should he take Isaac back to this other land? How is Eliezer to go about fulfilling Abraham's demand? Eliezer wants to make sure that the task is clearly defined and do-able before giving his word.

After Eliezer points out the potential pitfalls in Abraham's request, Abraham restates the request so that it is possible to carry out, provides Eliezer with help, and indicates a method for Eliezer to be released from the agreement if necessary. Eliezer had asked Abraham what he should do if the woman will not return and whether he should take Isaac away from Canaan. Abraham responds, "On no account must you take my son back there!" (Gen. 24:6). Abraham uses the word *hishamer*, a strong word meaning to be on guard; Eliezer must make absolutely certain that Isaac remains in Canaan. Now Eliezer knows that while finding a wife is important, there is to be no match between Isaac and a woman who will not journey to Canaan. In addition, Eliezer's question seems to cause Abraham to realize that this might be a difficult task, for Abraham offers Eliezer assistance on this mission. He tells Eliezer that God will send an angel who will help him secure a wife for Isaac. Finally, recognizing that even with the best of assistance and due diligence, the task might be impossible, Abraham gives Eliezer an escape clause: "If the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there" (Gen. 24:8).

Unlike Joseph and Eliezer, neither the spies nor Rebecca's family attempt to negotiate the requests made of them. Rather, after listening to Rahab and Eliezer's lengthy persuasive narratives, both parties immediately reply in the affirmative. Even

though Joseph and Eliezer were in inferior positions, they found ways to clarify and articulate what they would actually agree to do. Thus, while the spies are at Rahab's mercy for protection, this does not mean that they must immediately, unhesitatingly agree to all that Rahab asks. Moreover, Rebecca's family is in a position of power. They can refuse Eliezer's request for a marriage contract for any reason they desire.

Although Rahab is in a position of power over the spies because she has saved their lives and because she has the ability to turn them in to the king, the way in which she presents her request is not typical of those in power. Abraham and Pharaoh, assured of their authority, directly state their demands. Rahab, on the other hand, employs a persuasive narrative. Frymer-Kensky points out that Rahab is "a triply marginalized woman. From Israel's point of view, she is an outsider; from Canaan's point of view, she is a woman; and even from the Canaanite woman's point of view, she is a prostitute, outside normal family life."[15] Unlike Pharaoh and Abraham who command servants, households, and nations, Rahab probably takes orders from everyone she meets. How could she ever make an explicit demand from those whom she serves? And if Rahab were to ask for assistance, she would not be assured of her requests being met. She therefore frames her requests in as appealing and persuasive a way as possible.

She begins her request with a lengthy prologue in which she tells the spies about how wonderful their God is. This prologue is meant to soften up the spies and to make them more sympathetic to her request. Moreover, Rahab demonstrates that she shares common beliefs with the spies. She too knows about the power of the Eternal, and she

[15] Frymer-Kensky, T., *Reading the Women of the Bible*, New York, Schocken, 2000: p. 35.

shares their belief that "the Eternal your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below" (Josh. 2:11). After establishing common cause, Rahab reminds the spies of her actions on their behalf. Only then does she ask them to repay their debt to her. "Now, since I have shown loyalty to you, swear to me by the Eternal that you in turn will show loyalty to my family. Provide me with a reliable sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death" (Josh. 2:12-13). Abraham and Pharaoh assume that their orders will be followed. Rahab convinces the spies to listen to her and reminds them of their debt to her. Abraham states all of his contradictory desires, leaving it to the servant to sort everything out. Rahab carefully defines her request to increase the odds that it will be accepted. She hits upon every possible reason for the spies to help her and removes any potential objections. Finally, she seems to overwhelm the spies with a lengthy narrative; they become so caught up in her presentation that it does not occur to them to refuse.

The spies agree without hesitation, without attempting to delimit any boundaries to the agreement. They declare, "Our persons are pledged for yours, even to death!" (Josh. 2:14). No one specifies how this task is to be accomplished. Only after the spies have already agreed to Rahab's request do they think of conditions that they would like to have in their agreement. At first, they simply tell Rahab that she must not disclose the mission. If she remains silent, they will spare her family. This (fairly reasonable) stipulation ends the initial stages of the agreement. Later on, when circumstances change in their favor and when they have had time to consider the implications of this contract, the spies will attempt to change the agreement.

Like Rahab, Eliezer employs a persuasive narrative to convince Rebecca's family to agree to the match. Like Rahab, Eliezer is usually not in a position of power. But as he stands before Rebecca's family, this lowly servant is acting in the stead of his master Abraham. As a servant in master's clothing, Eliezer does not directly state his request; rather, he begins with an introductory story designed to encourage Rebecca's family to agree to the marriage contract. In the end, Eliezer's tale leaves the family believing that they have little choice but to accept this proposal.

First, Eliezer tells the family that he is Abraham's servant, clarifying his identity and his role. He then relates that Abraham has become very wealthy and that Abraham's wife bore a miracle baby who will inherit all of the wealth. Money is always desirable in a marriage, and a miracle baby would be seen as someone particularly special. Radaq reads that the servant's presentation piles *kavod* on Abraham and Isaac. On a *peshat* level, *kavod* means wealth and riches. But *kavod* also means respect, honor, distinction, and importance. The servant emphasizes Abraham and Isaac's strongest qualities, promoting the ways in which this is an ideal match for Rebecca.

The servant then explains why he has come to this particular family in this particular location. He faithfully recounts that Abraham made him swear not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan and to find a wife from the land of his birth. But then, the servant adds an extra detail that was not in the original oath; he says that he was told to take a wife from amongst Abraham's family. This addition would be a powerful explanation of why Eliezer is not only in Haran but also in this house, with this family. Rebecca's family is chosen for this marriage.

Only after relating the positives does Eliezer turn to the potential drawbacks of this match: the bride is expected to go to Canaan. Eliezer preempts the family's concerns by relating his own query, "What if the woman does not follow me?" (Gen. 24:39). The servant responds through another story in which an angel led him right to Rebecca through signs that the servant himself had requested. Only after the signs had come to pass did the servant verify Rebecca's identity and give her the presents that the family now sees. Again, Eliezer makes an editorial change. He had actually given Rebecca the presents before ascertaining her identity, but such information might be taken as inappropriate or too forward. Moreover, these changes strengthen the narrative thrust of this story: God intended for Rebecca and Isaac to be married to one another.

Hence, Eliezer uses the form of a well-crafted story to persuade Rebecca's family that this match was meant to be. He tells the family that they are free to accept or to reject his offer. Their decision – either way – will free the servant from his oath. But the details in the servant's story might make the family think twice before refusing. As Radaq points out, how could the family decline the request, for the matter had been decided by God? Eliezer's tale also demonstrates that he knows exactly what he is requesting. Recognizing that he is negotiating with Rebecca's extended family, he addresses his story to them all. Every detail in the story furthers his case: this girl, from this family, is meant for Abraham's son Isaac.

Just as the servant knows what he is requesting, he expects the family to give a straightforward response, to tell him whether they accept the terms of this agreement. He asks them to tell him their decision that he will know whether to "turn right or left" (Gen.

24:29). Like the spies, Rebecca's family almost immediately agrees to this marriage proposal. Laban and Bethuel say, "The matter was decreed by the Eternal; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Here is Rebecca before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the Eternal has spoken" (Gen. 24:50-1). Eliezer's narrative convinces Laban and Bethuel that this match has been preordained; they cannot change the God's will. The men accept this contract on Rebecca's behalf without question.

Throughout these stories, power dynamics, both perceived and actual, play a role in how requests are formulated and/or received. Those accustomed to power, such as Pharaoh and Abraham, are confident in making requests. But servants are able, like Eliezer, to delimit the boundaries of agreements, or, like Joseph, to offer additional assistance. Those accustomed to following orders use different techniques than their masters when they make requests. For instance, Eliezer and Rahab use carefully crafted persuasive narratives, which persuade both logically and emotionally. Rebecca's family would want to be aligned with a match made in heaven, and they would be drawn to Abraham's wealth. The spies may be convinced to feel indebted to Rahab and with the logic behind her request for *hesed.* But these narratives may also simply overwhelm their listeners. The spies may be anxious to make their escape. Rebecca's family may want this stranger to get to the end of his story so they can sit down and eat. It may be easier to simply say yes – and work out the details afterwards – than to negotiate at an inconvenient time or put up with an unwelcome request from an underling.

Rabbis, like the biblical characters, can choose to respond to requests for assistance in a number of ways. Like Rebecca's family or the spies, they can immediately

agree, almost without thought, to a request (particularly one made at an inopportune time), only to later discover that they have overextended themselves or that they have agreed to more than they bargained for. They might, like Eliezer and Joseph, clarify and delimit the terms of an agreement. And, they might recognize when someone's stated requests, like Pharaoh's, are the tip of the iceberg, and therefore offer additional assistance. As in the biblical stories, these responses take place in a broader context. Factors such as pre-existing relationships, authority (perceived and actual), and expectations influence the ways in which requests for help are perceived and received. Therefore, when we look at the ways in which rabbis receive requests for help, we begin with a broader context.

The interaction between rabbi and congregant takes place in the context of two overarching, unstated agreements, or contracts: the agreement between a rabbi and her congregation, and the agreement between a rabbi and his professional organization, such as the CCAR.[16] We can understand a contract as

> ... an agreement between two parties that stipulates the nature and conditions of the relationship between them, including the responsibilities of each and the penalties that may occur should either party break the agreement. Contracts, to be valid, must be entered into freely and willingly by both parties.[17]

These overarching contracts give rabbis the authority and power to be of help, and they generate expectations. It is against this backdrop that requests are articulated, assistance is offered, and both parties arrive at a mutually agreed upon plan of action

While a pre-existing relationship may exist, each set of parties, in each specific

[16] Rothman, J., *Contracting in Clinical Social Work*, Chicago, Nelson-Hall, 1998: pp. 1-3.
[17] ibid.: p. 1.

case, creates a contract with one another. Even the servant Eliezer and master Abraham, who had a longstanding relationship, clarify the terms and conditions of their agreements. Therefore, although the rabbinic-congregational contract implicitly states that rabbis will be available to their congregations, rabbis have an ability to shape how they will provide assistance in each specific case, and congregants will in turn make known their unique needs and wants in each particular case.

In their work, rabbis need to be aware of the impact of their authority as they create contracts with congregants. According to Jack Bloom, "Being a rabbi means being a Symbolic Exemplar who stands for something other than one's self. It is this symbolic exemplarhood that enables the rabbi to be taken seriously in the first place and the myth that surrounds this symbolic exemplarhood provides much of the rabbinic power to touch individual lives and direct the future of the Jewish community."[18] The authority that stems from symbolic exemplarhood carries two contradictory pulls. On the one hand, rabbis are treated like Pharaoh. They are granted respect and treated deferentially. Their words, at the bedside and on the pulpit, are given extraordinary weight. Rabbis are often uncomfortable recognizing and accepting such authority. In an attempt to act like 'ordinary people,' rabbis might not realize the significance that others ascribe to their words and their actions. Yet when rabbis use their authority well, they can help bring healing, confer blessing, mark liminal moments (such as weddings, *b'nai mitzvah*, and funerals), and be a prophetic voice.

On the other hand, rabbis, like Eliezer, are viewed as the perfect, trusted family

[18] Bloom, J., *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar,* New York, Haworth, 2002: p. 136.

servant. Rabbis are expected to always be there for congregants and to follow the orders and wishes of all the members of a congregational family. Bloom explains,

> Being a rabbi means being set apart, lonely, and subject to unreasonable expectations and demands from all sides. Being a rabbi means belonging to one's own family, the congregational family, and beyond that, being a parafamilial member of many different families. Being a rabbi means dealing with the inevitable conflict between the rabbi's life cycle and congregant's life cycles; having to decide what to do when an event in the congregational family coincides with one in the rabbi's family.[19]

Hence, rabbis often feel pressure to be 'on' and 'available' at all times. Rabbis are likely to neglect their own personal, spiritual, and family needs in order to fill this role of perfect servant. Additionally, because rabbis are constantly reminded of their role as powerful servant, they are susceptible to the myth that they are the only person who can help in any given situation, and that this assistance must be immediate and comprehensive.

While the rabbinic-congregational contract does provide that a rabbi be available to congregants, it does not dictate how this help is to be provided. Like Eliezer, rabbis can help congregants create appropriate, realistic boundaries and expectations of pastoral care. For instance, Breitman points out that "people often share pastoral concerns during ambiguous times, such as during Oneg Shabbat after services, committee meetings, or even on the street, in restaurants, and in supermarkets."[20] But these concerns deserve a sanctuary of time and presence which cannot be offered in the freezer aisle. Hence, Breitman notes the significance of helping people "channel their concerns into an

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[19] ibid.: p. 135.

[20] Breitman, B., "Foundations of Jewish Pastoral Care: Skills and Techniques," in *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook*, ed., D. Friedman (Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights, 2001): p. 91.

appropriate pastoral context."[21] Robb and Kelley explain that such limit-setting also ensures that pastors are able to provide good care. They relate the experience of a pastor:

> "I came to recognize that a caring pastor is often in a vulnerable position with regard to the needs and claims of parishioners. I decided at that point that any 'caring' requiring me to neglect my own well-being or that of my family was a line I would not cross." One of the ways he has kept faith with this commitment is by restricting access to him during times reserved for his family, and insisting on consultation appointments in his office during normal working hours.[22]

By acknowledging the importance of a congregant's pastoral concerns and suggesting that the individual make an appointment at an appropriate time, rabbis not only ensure self-care, they also communicate that these pastoral concerns are important, deserving of attention, time, and energy.

Moreover, rabbis need not always provide assistance, even when it is requested. Like Eliezer, rabbis should attempt to understand what is being asked of them, and whether to offer direct assistance or to offer assistance through an appropriate referral. Such clarification is important in all aspects of a helping relationship, not just pastoral counseling. If someone approaches a rabbi desiring extra study, the rabbi needs to make sure that he has enough time to meet with the person, is knowledgeable enough in the subject matter, has enough free time to prepare before meetings, and wants to engage in this agreement. If a rabbi is not trained in counseling or social work beyond his seminary years, it would be inappropriate for him to offer long-term counseling. In addition, Ahlskog suggests that non-candidates for counseling include those "whose disturbances in psychological functioning are so complex that your role as pastoral counselor will be

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[21] ibid.: p. 92.
[22] Robb and Kelley, "The Assessment Interview": p. 143.

insufficient to their needs."[23] Most rabbis are able to provide short-term pastoral counseling, not long-term psychotherapy.

Hence, rabbis need to determine whether they wish to enter into any particular helping contract. If a rabbi does not plan to serve as a primary pastoral resource – because the problem requires more skill than she has, because she believes that counseling this person (such as the president of the congregation) may involve a conflict of interest, or because she does not wish to (for personal, time or any other reasons), she should make these intentions clear early on and offer an appropriate referral. Breitman suggests that rabbis mention the possibility, by saying something like, "I want to reach a good understanding of your situation, and then I think it will be best for you and me to make some decisions about where to go from there. If I can help you, I will. If I think you will be better helped by someone else, I will let you know that soon."[24] It is important to let congregants know about the possibility of a referral early on so that they will know that this is one of the ways in which a rabbi can fulfill her obligation to be of assistance and so that they will not be disappointed.

Other people may not know what to expect from a rabbi, or they may not feel that their concerns merit the attention of a rabbi. They are overly awed by a rabbi's role and authority. Like Eliezer at the well, they might be tentative in their requests. Instead of assuming that they have a right to meet with their rabbi, they wonder if such a meeting is possible. They only call during appropriate times, never dare to just 'pop in,' and they might worry about being a burden, even if their rabbi enjoys pastoral care and considers

[23] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": p. 7.

pastoral care part of a rabbinical calling. They hesitantly ask for only a small sip of water, when, in truth, their need is much greater. In such cases, a rabbi's job is to find ways to invite people in. For instance, when someone approaches her rabbi with a lengthy, apologetic narrative, it is tempting to demand that she 'cut to the chase' and explain what is on her mind. However, this narrative might be a way of edging into conversation. By thoughtfully listening and responding to such narratives, rabbis can communicate that the door is open.[25]

Rabbis can let people know that pastoral visits are part of the rabbinic-congregational contract by publicly discussing topics of care. Through sermons, bulletin articles, and adult education classes, rabbis communicate that issues like death, spousal abuse, divorce, illness, spiritual questioning and searching, and many other topics are of interest are always on the table. Rabbi Nancy Wiener tells the story of Rabbi Stephen Arnold who had attended an AIDS Walk. He had placed a red ribbon on his *tallit* during the walk, and he then forgot about it. The next Shabbat the red ribbon remained on the *tallit* as he stood on the *bimah*. During the next few weeks, he was surprised as many people approached him to discuss AIDS in their lives. The red ribbon, a small, unstated symbol, cued in the congregation that this was a topic they could discuss with their rabbi.[26] Thus, rabbis can help members of their congregations know that the door is open to requests for help.

Other times, biblical characters offer assistance without being asked. Abraham,

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[24] Breitman, "Foundations of Jewish Pastoral Care": p. 100.
[25] For two examples of such conversations, see the introduction to Dittes, J. *Pastoral Counseling*
[26] Oral communication.

Lot, and the anonymous man in Judges offer hospitality to travelers. Although each of them invites strangers into his home and offers appropriate assistance, these offers are received differently. Abraham and the elderly man's assistance are graciously accepted, while Lot's offer is initially rejected. One important distinction between is the extent to which the person making the offer of assistance listens to the stranger before him.

Abraham's offer of hospitality sets up the biblical paradigm of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming of guests. Abraham runs over to his guests, and he offers them a place to rest in the shade, water to wash their feet, and some bread and water before they continue on their way (Gen. 23:3-5). At the same time, Abraham bows to the ground, calling the men, "my lords" and himself, "your servant." Abraham indicates that he intends to treat these men with respect and that he is honored to provide hospitality for them. The men, in turn, verbally agree to Abraham's offer. According to Sforno, the men let Abraham know they will accept his hospitality, but they indicate that they do not intend to stay overnight because they are in a rush. Thus, the strangers accept Abraham's invitation because Abraham has clearly stated what he intends to offer, and these terms are amenable to all the parties involved.

Like Abraham, Lot approaches the strangers in Sodom and Gomorrah. He too bows to the ground before the strangers, calls them "my lords," and offers them a place to stay. Lot's offer includes a place for the strangers to spend the night and to wash their feet before continuing on in the morning (Gen. 19:2). Unlike Abraham, who welcomes his guests in the middle of the day when they still have much journeying ahead of them, Lot invites these strangers in at a time of day when they would need a place to lodge.

However, the strangers do not immediately accept Lot's offer of assistance. In response, Lot strongly urges the strangers to spend the night, and they eventually agree to follow him home (Gen. 19:3). While we do not know exactly how Lot persuades these strangers to accept his help, according to Radaq, it took many words and supplications. Perhaps Lot presses these strangers because he wants to protect them from the dangerous streets of Sodom. While Abraham might have wanted the guests to spend the afternoon with him out of sheer delight of *hachnasat orchim*, Lot's urging has an added element: the well-being of these strangers.

Although Lot has the best interest of the strangers in mind, why do they initially refuse his offer? Like Abraham, Lot clearly defines the parameters of his hospitality, and he offers assistance that the strangers actually need. Both Ibn Ezra and Ramban suggest that Lot's offer might feel like an imposition. Ibn Ezra notes that the guests initially refuse because they want Lot to press them to stay; they want to ensure that they are actually welcome and that they are not imposing their company on him. Ramban proposes that the guests refuse because of Lot's inferior social status; an invitation from a social inferior is like an unwelcome imposition. But what if Lot's offer itself felt like an unwelcome intrusion? Lot had never met these men before, he does not know anything about them, and they do not know who he is. Why should they trust Lot? How does he know what they need? How do they know that he has their best interests at heart? From this perspective, Lot's invitation might seem *chutzpadik* or possibly dangerous.

In Judges, the Levite welcomes the invitation of the elderly man. Unlike Lot, who races towards the strangers, the elderly man takes more care in approaching these

travelers who seem to be in need of assistance. Instead of immediately offering help, the elderly man inquires, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" (Judges 19:17). This question lets the man determine the sort of assistance that the Levite needs, and it gives the Levite a chance to tell his story. Indeed, the Levite seems grateful for the opportunity. He relates that he is returning home from his journey, that no one has taken him in, and that he has supplies for the animals and members of the traveling party.

Once the elderly man knows that this stranger has indeed had difficulty finding a place to lodge, he offers a place to stay. "Rest easy... let me take care of all your needs. Do not on any account spend the night in the square" (Judges 19:20). The elderly man not only offers to meet his need of a place to stay; he also offers to meet the basic needs that any traveler might have. Although these needs are not articulated at this time, we later read that the man mixes fodder for the donkeys, provides water to wash feet, food, drink, and a place to stay. These sorts of actions are repeated elsewhere in the Bible where hospitality is offered; hence, it seems that in offering to provide for 'basic' needs, all the parties have some idea of what would be involved.[27] Moreover, the elderly man's questioning also allows him to determine if he wants to offer the stranger a place to lodge. Does the stranger seem trustworthy? Would it be safe to bring him home? By first assessing the situation, the elderly man ensures that his help is welcome, appropriate, and safe.

Like Lot, Abraham, and the elderly man, rabbis initiate helping relationships. However, unlike the hospitality stories, in which there is no pre-existing relationship,

[27] For instance, Rebecca's offer to the servant (Gen. 34), and the stories of Lot and Abraham's hospitality

most rabbis who work in congregations generally offer assistance under the umbrella of a rabbinic-congregational contract. Even if a rabbi and a particular congregant have never spoken, there is an overarching framework in which they interact. For instance, although Eli may have never spoken to Hannah prior to their encounter at the shrine, Eli and Hannah already share in a broader contract between the priests and Israelites. This contract entails that priests tend to the well-being of the Israelites and to the shrines. In the context of this contract, Eli can approach Hannah and offer rebuke as well as care.

Because of their pre-existing relationships, rabbis often already know something about the people they are helping. In some cases, rabbis can build upon these pre-existing relationships to offer advice or counsel, even without being asked. On the other hand, rabbis need to be careful that their pre-existing relationships do not cloud their ability to offer assistance or advice. This information may be helpful,

> But it is also true that such prior information or judgment may hinder your ability to be fully present or listen attentively. If you have either been supported or opposed by a congregant in the past, you may need to be especially attentive to how your own feelings affect your capacity to hear this person... Although it is neither possible nor desirable to disregard all previous information of this sort, we do encourage you to enter the process with a relatively 'neutral' point of view. Usually the most important information will come from the individual, not from your previous knowledge.[28]

Regardless of how much prior information a rabbi has gathered, his or her offer of assistance is more likely to be of use and to be well-received if he or she first listens to the person in front of him or her. We can see the importance of listening by contrasting the models of Lot and the elderly man in Judges. Lot assumes that he knows what is

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we have been discussing in this chapter.

[28] Robb and Kelley, "The Assessment Interview": p. 141.

needed, and he launches into his offer of assistance without attempting to get to know the strangers he meets. But without any context, how do the strangers know that they can trust Lot, and why should they trust him? How does Lot actually know what they need? Lot seems presumptuous, and the strangers refuse his help. Similarly, counselors cannot do their job unless they first fully listen to those in their care. Garrett writes the following scenario:

> If someone comes in and asks for a job and the interviewer proceeds at once to make a number of suggestions, he may well be surprised later to find that the client has adopted no one of them. Upon further examination the worker may then find out what he might well have discovered in the first interview if he had done more listening and less talking—that the client's real worry was that he could not hold a job if he got one, or that he did not see how he could take a job because his wife and children were sick at home and needed constant care.[29]

Although it is tempting to rush in with assistance or advice, it is more helpful to take a step back and listen to determine the sort of help that is actually needed.

Moreover, when pastoral counselors jump to conclusions, they undermine the enterprise of pastoral counseling. Dittes explains,

> The counselor who intervenes and manages or resolves the circumstantial problem hijacks the opportunity for pastoral counseling. Such intervention not only fails the opportunity for enablement but in fact imposes further disempowerment by making the counselee feel all the more inept. To avoid this, the counselor offers, as a gift, the discipline of tolerating ambiguity and irresolution.[30]

Pastoral counselors do not just offer advice, but also the sense of wholeness that comes when a person is viewed by another as a child of God.[31]

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[29] Garrett, A., *Interviewing: Its Principles and Methods*, Milwaukee, WI, Family Service America, 1982: p. 32.

[30] Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling*: pp. 20-1.

[31] I took the phrase 'Child of God' from a poem by Marianne Williams, which has influenced me in pastoral care work. The text of the poem is as follows:

Pastoral counselors provide better assistance and demonstrate the inherent value of counselees when they listen and pay attention. The elderly man in Judges provides one model of listening. He refrains from offering assistance until he has some sense of the Levite's perspective. The elderly man's question, "Where are you going and where do you come from?" helps him to learn about the stranger in the town square (Judges 19:17). He is then able to respond to the entirety of the person in front of him – his immediate need for shelter and his frustration and sadness at not finding someone who would take him in for the night. Similarly, pastoral counselors can ask questions such as: What brings you here? Why do you seek counseling? Why now? What is your past history? What would you like to change? These sorts of questions put the counselee at ease, and they allow the counselor to learn the language (literal and figurative) that she or he speaks, to discover from where he or she is coming, and to counteract any preconceived ideas about the counselee, and to assess the sort of help he or she may need[32] Listening to the client "gives the interviewer the advantage of being able to see the situation and the client's problem from the client's point of view. Because it is the client who eventually must act, it is clearly advantageous to start from where he is rather than from some vantage point of the interviewer."[33]

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

[32] Garrett, *Interviewing*: pp. 31-2.

[33] ibid.: p. 32.

Additionally, by listening to a counselee's verbal and non-verbal communications, pastoral counselors indirectly communicate their desire to be of help. Such attention affords "the client the opportunity to feel, perhaps for the first time in his life, that another person is devoting exclusive attention to him."[34] This attention signals the counselor's presence and willingness to be of assistance. When counselors listen to counselees, they can determine the sort of assistance that would be most appropriate. Most of us are not as intuitive as Rebecca, who somehow knows Eliezer's needs. We need to hear the story of the other in order to be of help.

The initial discussion between the two parties begins a process of contracting, a process of negotiating the boundaries, terms, and agreements that both parties make in a relationship. Regardless of how a helping relationship is initiated, successful contracts require both parties to be on the same page. Both parties should share common expectations, which can be either explicitly articulated or implicitly understood. Some agreements (such as between Abraham and Eliezer) contain extensive negotiation. In these agreements, the parties anticipate potential problems, and they bring them up to prevent future misunderstandings. The important elements to the agreement are clearly stated. Other times, explicit agreements require little negotiation because the proposals are clear and simple. Lot and Abraham's detailed offers of hospitality and Eliezer's simple request for water require little discussion because all of the terms are set out up front.

In contrast, more complicated agreements that are entered into with little

[34] Stearn, H., "The Helping Interview," in *Clinical Social Work*, New York, Free Press, 1978: p. 42.

negotiation contain many implicit clauses. For instance, the marriage agreement between Rebecca and Isaac is not simple. This woman (Rebecca) is to marry this man (Isaac) and journey to this land (Canaan). But much is left unsaid. What is to be the dowry? When is the wedding to take place? Who is Rebecca going to take with her? Because these sorts of terms are not specified, it turns out that the parties have different expectations as to when Rebecca will depart for Canaan. This does not mean that all implicit clauses are problematic. When the elderly man in Judges offers to provide for all of the Levite's needs, without specifying exactly what he will do, the Levite confidently accepts this man's offer. The Levite may have decided to trust the elderly man; but he may also be relying on shared cultural practices of hospitality.

While some contractual terms, explicit and implicit, can be tangibly measured, other agreements are, at their core, implicit. Pharaoh seeks a dream interpreter. Does Joseph offer a sensible interpretation? Rahab asks to be kept safe. Will the spies indeed keep her from harm? Eliezer negotiates a marriage contract and asks for water; the elderly man in Judges extends a place to spend the night. However, there are times when the assistance offered can never be clearly defined or tangibly measured. Most notably, we can see implicit agreements in the stories involving Eli. In his interactions with Hannah and Samuel, Eli never explicitly offers assistance, and assistance is never explicitly requested. Rather, Eli, acting in his role as priest, determines how to be of help through his interactions with Hannah and Samuel.

As a priest, Eli sits at the gate of the shrine and looks about; part of Eli's job is to notice what is happening. He adapts this role as he learns about Hannah. When he first

sees her, he notices that she has been crying and that she is moving her lips without making a sound. Eli approaches Hannah and angrily relates his initial observation, that she is drunk. When Hannah hears Eli's observation, she realizes that someone has been paying attention to her, even if he has made an incorrect conclusion. She corrects him and reveals herself to him. She says, "Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress" (I Sam. 1:16). In this one sentence Hannah relates that she has often been seen (or sees herself) as a 'worthless woman.' This sense of worthlessness has led to her 'anguish and distress.' Perhaps Hannah feels such pain because no one really notices her for who she is. She is defined as a 'barren woman,' seen only for her malfunctioning womb. And even though Elkanah her husband loves her very much, his care alone is not enough to overcome this overwhelming sense of insignificance.

As Eli hears Hannah's cries his role shifts. He is no longer observing Hannah in the role of priest/shrine monitor. Now he observes Hannah as a priest/compassionate witness. In this role, Eli witnesses and relates that Hannah is not worthless or undeserving of attention, for he notices her anguish and her distress. Finally, Eli witnesses Hannah as a priest/messenger of God. Eli tells Hannah to go in peace, and he prays that "the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him" (I Sam. 17). This prayer indicates Eli's observation that, although Hannah may feel upset and insignificant, she is not so in the eyes of this priest or in the eyes of God. Rather, Hannah is significant enough to merit a blessing from a priest. Moreover, this blessing asks that God take note of Hannah. In the Bible, God's notice is expressed tangibly; God opens Hannah's womb

and grants her a child. However, it seems that Hannah also has another request: to be noticed, to be heard, to find peace. Eli's prayer might help Hannah feel that God is heeding her, paying attention to her, and with her in her anguish and sorrow. Hannah is not alone, for Eli and God have seen her and are with her.

Eli's advice to Samuel stems from their ongoing relationship with one another. Eli has been acting as Samuel's teacher, mentor, and surrogate parent as Samuel serves in the shrine and helps Eli. Samuel's actions demonstrate evidence of this pre-existing relationship. One night, Samuel hears a voice call to him. He runs over to Eli, thinking that the elderly man has called to him. Eli most likely had called out to Samuel before, and it had been Samuel's job to find out what Eli needed. Moreover, when Samuel runs over a second time, Eli refers to him as "my son" (I Sam. 3:6), further evidence of this parenting/mentoring relationship. Samuel acts out his role as student/son when he runs over to Eli and asks what is needed. But Eli had not called, and he sends Samuel back to bed. This process repeats a second, and then a third time. By this point, Samuel is most likely perplexed. Why does Eli keep calling me and sending me away? Eli might also be puzzled. Why is the boy running to me in the middle of the night when I have not called to him? Eventually, Eli realizes that Samuel must have been hearing a voice of prophecy. As Samuel's teacher, it is Eli's job to instruct Samuel in the various ways of serving the Lord. Once Eli realizes that Samuel has been experiencing prophecy, he follows in this model of priest/parent/mentor/teacher and instructs Samuel on what to do in this particular case.

In these interactions, the roles of Eli, Hannah, and Samuel are never clearly stated.

No one ever asks Eli for help. Eli never asks, "May I help you?" Rather, Eli observes Hannah's tear-laden eyes and odd behavior; he takes note of Samuel's inexplicable offers of aid in the middle of the night. In his roles as priest, mentor, and parent, Eli reflects his observations back to Hannah and to Samuel to be of assistance to them, and to help them find sanctuary.

Although the clearly stated agreements made by most of the biblical characters are explicitly articulated and measurable, only a few elements of pastoral counseling agreements are clearly stated. These explicit items include elements such as the time, length, frequency, and location of pastoral care visits. However, most components of pastoral counseling agreements tend to look more like the relationships between Eli and Hannah and Eli and Samuel. Much is implied; little is clearly stated.

How do we negotiate agreements, work with others, and be of help when the terms of our agreements are unstated, unclear, and/or assumed? One way to understand implicit agreements is to think about unstated family rules. In general, families do not lay out their rules of behavior; rather, they are assumed. Samuel runs to Eli in the middle of the night because he infers that Eli has called him. It seems unlikely that the two wrote out a contract stating, "in the event that the head priest calls in the middle of the night, the helper in the sanctuary is to come as quickly as possible to the bedside..." Yet upon examining their actions, this is exactly what has happened.

Our families operate in similar ways. We develop patterns of behavior which are not stated, but to which we all agree. Indeed, such patterns are only recognized when they are pointed out to us or when they are broken. Many people first discover the

unstated rules in their families of origin when they get married. My confirmation teacher told a story about a couple that always fought about taking out the trash.[35] He assumed that she would take it out. She said it was his job. In pre-marital counseling, they discussed the roles of their respective parents, and they realized that his mother had always taken out the trash, while her father had always taken out the trash. Because the job had been assigned to different members in each family of origin, the bride and groom had made different assumptions about what they would do in their home. In their role as pre-marital counselors, rabbis can help couples recognize the assumptions that they make about marriage and relationships. By helping couples state their implicit assumptions about fighting, finances, child-rearing, social time, family time, and other areas of concern, pastoral counselors can help couples learn to communicate with one another.

As family rules are left unstated, rabbis often take on the role of counselor, listener, or witness and congregants take on the role of counselee without any clearly defined transition. Indeed, counseling often happens without ever being defined as such. Dittes writes,

> The pastoral counselor witnesses, as though it were counseling, even when the counselee doesn't seem to resemble a counselee. Even in mundane and annoying encounters, such as one in which the counselee insists on asking you to attend to his wife's depression while ignoring his own, or one in which the counselee faces the agonizing decision about abortion and asks only what the Bible says about it– even in such non-counseling or pre-counseling encounters, the counselor counsels. That is, the counselor attends and witnesses and reflects feelings.... the counselor takes the leap of faith into the graciously alien reality of counseling, and thereby invites the counselee to leap, too.[36]

In other words, a rabbi can implicitly treat a situation as counseling even though the term

[35] From Rabbi Jerry Brown, oral statement to confirmation class, 1994.

has never been used. He or she can notice the anxiety, the confusion, the worry, the joy, and comment on this general thread rather than on the specifics. This act of noticing, the expression of care or concern, might allow a congregant to take on the role of counselee.

Although pastoral counseling can take place anywhere, at a first meeting rabbis can explicitly state and implicitly demonstrate some of the expectations of a pastoral relationship. The very act of setting up a dedicated time to meet indicates the importance of pastoral care. Ahlskog suggests that at a minimum, counselees should be able to expect that they will find a safe space, the counselor's undivided attention, a non-anxious presence, freedom from harm, and another who is willing to listen.[37] In turn, counselees are expected to come to sessions and to be willing to talk about their lives. At times, these provisions may be explicitly stated. For instance, a pastoral counselor might state that what happens in her office will remain confidential. He might let a counselee know that he has the next 45 uninterrupted minutes to meet with him.

But the majority of pastoral counseling provisions are expressed implicitly. Rabbis can demonstrate a safe space by creating a welcoming office environment. Robb and Kelley suggest that pastors ask themselves, "If I were in a hard place, troubled, or in distress, would I feel comfortable here? Would I feel like talking about it in this place?"[38] They suggest that counselors sit in an open seating arrangement, as desks set up an unstated power differential. Rabbis can ensure that pastoral care sessions will not be interrupted by phone calls or other intrusions; when the meetings remain uninterrupted,

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[36]Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling*: p. 135.
[37] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": pp. 13, 18-19.
[38] Robb and Kelley, "The Assessment Interview": p. 142.

rabbis demonstrate their undivided attention. Additionally, by not interrupting the counselee, by listening attentively, and by taking interest in the counselee, a rabbi offers her non-anxious presence and demonstrates her willingness to listen. Indeed, it may be hard to trust someone who says, "I'm here to listen to you," because the words are easy to say. Rather, it is one's actions which demonstrate that the statement is true.

As the elderly man in Judges uses his first encounter with the Levite to assess the situation and determine the sort of aid he will offer, so too do rabbis use a first meeting as an opportunity to assess the sort of help they will provide. Assessment takes several forms. Rabbis should ask themselves if this is a problem they are able to deal with, whether they should refer the person to another agency or professional, and the extent to which they should enlist community resources for this person.[39] This process of assessment begins almost as soon as rabbis are contacted by potential counselees. Questions for assessment include: How does the counselee contact the rabbi? Did s/he dress up for the meeting? What is his/her body language? Tone of voice? However, a first assessment needs to be only that. At first, Eli concludes that Hannah is drunk; he later realizes that she is crying out to God. Hence, an initial assessment is only a point from which to begin.

Counselors continue their assessment as they hear a counselee's story. At first, the prospective counselee will open with a presenting problem, or the stated reason for seeking help.[40] Like Pharaoh's inquiry about the dream and like Eliezer's request for water, the presenting problem reflects only a portion of the counselee's concerns. Dittes

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[39] ibid.: p. 140.

explains,

> When the counselee explains, at the outset, why counseling is requested, this 'presenting problem' is usually an incomplete and a disguised explanation. It has to be. A big part of the distress that occasions the counseling is the confusion and perplexity. Distress seems to be coming from nowhere, or from everywhere. If the counselee had the insight and the courage to know accurately and fully what the full problem was, he or she would not likely be looking for counseling... Tersely put, it is the goal of counseling to discover the problem and not necessarily to move on to the 'solution.'[41]

This presenting problem forms the beginning of the pastoral counseling relationship. Although it points to other issues, the cover story itself is not a lie. Rather, as Pharaoh's presenting problem about dream interpretation contained his underlying anxiety, so too do cover stories hold within them underlying issues and concerns a counselee wishes to address. As a pastoral counselor listens and responds, verbally and non-verbally, to the broader contours of this cover story, he or she indicates a willingness to help by being present for the other.

Moreover, as rabbis engage with their counselee's narratives, they can conduct a spiritual assessment. Rabbis can ask themselves: What does this person believe? Is his or her belief system working? What spiritual resources does s/he possess? Where are the sources of "spiritual pain, disassociation, and injury" in this person's life?[42] By keeping these sorts of questions in mind, pastoral counselors can determine the extent to which a person's beliefs and practices are working for him or her and the areas which would be useful for counselor and counselee to explore. As a rabbi listens and responds to a

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[40] ibid.: p. 145.
[41] Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling*: p. 137.
[42] Davidowitz-Farkas, Z., "Jewish Spiritual Assessment," in *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook*, ed. D. Friedman (Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights, 2001): pp. 104-124.

counselee's narrative, and as a counselee tells his or her story, the two decide if and how they will create an agreement to work together, the areas they will work on, and the sort of assistance that will be provided.

Successful contracts for assistance entail the implicit or explicit acceptance of these agreements by all parties involved. In some biblical stories, more formal agreements are sealed through oaths and explicit signs. Other times biblical characters informally demonstrate their commitment to agreements through a combination of language and deed.

In formal agreements, both parties participate in the rituals of sealing the agreement. They are both party to an oath or agree to physical signs of their contract. The most complete example of a formal agreement is that between Rahab and the spies. According to Frymer-Kensky, their agreement

> ...contains all the essential elements of the classical Deuteronomic form of covenants. Her acknowledgement of God's greatness forms the *preamble* and the *prologue*; her request for her family's salvation and for a sign of assurance are *stipulations*; the Israelite's demand for silence and staying within the house are their *stipulations*; their promise of salvation or death are their *sanctions*. She requests the *oath* that they give, and in the next section they offer the scarlet cord as the physical *sign* of the treaty.[43]

Additionally, when the spies make their pledge, they swear that they will treat Rahab with *hesed v'emet*. The term *hesed v'emet* is a phrase used to indicate faithfulness to an agreement.[44] The proof of their promise to act by *hesed v'emet* will be demonstrated in subsequent action.

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[43]Frymer-Kensky, *Reading Women of the Bible*: p. 37.

[44] In Genesis 47:29 Joseph pledges to show Jacob *hesed v'emet* by fulfilling a pledge to bury him in the Land of Israel. Similarly, Psalms 25:10 notes that God will treat those who keep God's covenant with

The promise of *hesed v'emet* also plays a role in the contract negotiated between Eliezer and Rebecca's family. After Eliezer lays out the marriage proposal, he asks the family, "if you mean to treat my master with true kindness (*hesed v'emet*), tell me; and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left" (Gen. 24:49). Here the JPS translation is misleading. Eliezer is not asking for kindness out of the goodness of the family's heart. Rather, Eliezer wants to know if the family agrees to abide by the terms of the marriage agreement. Will they accept this agreement? And, then, will they live by it? In verbally accepting the agreement, Rebecca's family promises to follow through on its terms. In turn, Eliezer presents the family and Rebecca with valuable gifts, and he shares a meal with them. These gifts serve as a physical seal to the agreement. Additionally, Eliezer had refused to eat until he had told the family his story. Perhaps he is willing to break bread with Rebecca's family because he believes that everyone has heard the same story and shares a common understanding.

Like Rahab and the spies, Eliezer and Abraham formally mark their agreement with one another. After they negotiate the terms of their agreement, "the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him about this matter" (Gen. 24:9). By this action, Eliezer accepts upon himself Abraham's stipulations. According to Ibn Ezra, this action literally demonstrates that Eliezer is under Abraham's domain. It is also a reminder of the purpose of Eliezer's job: to find a wife for Isaac and secure an heir for the Abrahamic covenant. Rashi notes that Eliezer might have sworn on a Torah scroll or on *tefillin*; however, Rashi posits that in this case, Eliezer swore on the covenant of

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hesed v'emet. In II Sam. 2:6 King David rewards those who treated Saul with *hesed v'emet* by burying the

circumcision, the covenant that his errand will hopefully help to perpetuate. Hence, like the spies and Rahab, Abraham and Eliezer seal their agreement with both an oath and a physical sign. Abraham dictates the terms of this agreement, and Eliezer physically and verbally swears to carry it out.

In less formal agreements, parties indicate their commitment through a combination of verbal agreements (or proposals) and the actions that are necessary for the agreement to take place. For instance, after Joseph tells Pharaoh that he is willing to interpret Pharaoh's dream and see to Pharaoh's *shalom*, Pharaoh indicates that he agrees to these conditions by telling Joseph about his dreams as Joseph listens (Gen. 41:17 and following). Abraham invites the strangers in and offers to prepare food for them; the strangers tell Abraham to do as he has said (Gen. 18:5); and Abraham runs back to prepare that which he had promised. Lot's guests never verbally say that they will accept his offer of hospitality; however, they "turned his way and entered his house" (Gen. 19:3), indicating their acceptance of his offer. In Judges, the elderly man tells the Levite that he will take care of his needs. Then, "he took him into his house. He mixed fodder for the donkeys; then they bathed their feet and ate and drank" (Judges 19:21). Eliezer asks Rebecca for water, she responds in the affirmative, and she then brings him water.

Similarly, Eli and Hannah and Eli and Samuel demonstrate acceptance of their implicit agreements through their actions. In both of these cases, Eli takes on the role of priest/teacher/advisor by listening, paying attention, and acting on his observations. He

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former king; presumably, part of what it means to be loyal to one's king is to do perform such acts of *hesed*.

reflects his observations through his comments, his blessings, and his advice. Hannah agrees to let Eli minister to her as she shares of herself with him. Samuel demonstrates his care for Eli as he runs to the priest when he hears a voice in the night. And, as he acts upon Eli's advice, Samuel demonstrates his trust in Eli.

In all of these cases, an agreement has little weight unless both parties demonstrate their commitment to it. Words mean nothing without action. Had Rebecca said she would bring Eliezer water, and then failed to do so, she would have indicated her lack of commitment to their agreement. Similarly, had Pharaoh heard Joseph's proposal but not revealed his dream, he would have demonstrated that he did not want Joseph to interpret it Indeed, implicit agreements would never come to be without action. Eli might never have related his observations to Hannah. Hannah might have remained silent or insisted that nothing was bothering her. Agreements require that all parties buy into them

While there may be a verbal agreement in which both parties commit to a meeting, pastoral counseling is not usually sealed by formal treaty or oath. In some more formal arrangements, such as pre-marital counseling or conversion counseling, counselees might agree to a relatively formal verbal contract. But in general, acceptance of pastoral counseling contracts is demonstrated by the actions of counselor and counselee. Does the rabbi indeed create a safe space? Does a counselee talk about his or her life? Does the rabbi provide a non-anxious presence? When both parties act in a way that demonstrates agreement to these sorts of implicit stipulations, both parties commit to pastoral counseling.

Even after an initial agreement has been reached, negotiations can continue. The biblical characters return to and renegotiate their contracts in response to new information or altered circumstances. After Joseph hears Pharaoh's dream, he realizes that there is a possibility for him to leave slavery and become a royal advisor; he proposes this change to Pharaoh. When the spies are no longer under Rahab's protection, they suggest changes to the contract. And, when Eliezer and Rebecca's family find that they have different expectations about when Rebecca will depart for Canaan, they negotiate this aspect of their agreement.

Joseph and Pharaoh reach an agreement whereby Pharaoh will relate his dreams to Joseph and Joseph will interpret them; Joseph has also agreed to see to Pharaoh's overall well-being. Once Joseph hears the dream, he provides an interpretation. Joseph tells Pharaoh that his dreams indicate that there will be seven good years followed by seven lean ones. However, Joseph then suggests that "Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt. And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered... let that food be a reserve" (Gen. 41:33-6). These suggestions go beyond dream interpretation, for Joseph is proposing a new element in his agreement with Pharaoh: that he advise Pharaoh as to how to handle the prophecy. The relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh grows and changes as Joseph becomes Pharaoh's right-hand man over all Egypt.

Rahab and the spies also renegotiate their agreement in response to changing

conditions. While the spies are on the roof of Rahab's house, their only stipulation is that Rahab not reveal their mission. However, after Rahab helps them escape outside the city walls, they add more conditions. The spies declare that Rahab must tie a red cord to the window of her home and gather all her family within the house. There are several reasons the spies might have wanted to renegotiate. First, Malbim suggests that the spies realize that the initial terms of the agreement were too broad. Rahab might have mixed her family amongst the townspeople, making it necessary for the Israelites to spare all the citizens of Jericho. To ensure that they are able to complete their mission and that Rahab and her family will remain safe, the spies specify that Rahab should display a sign from the window, separate her family from the rest of the town, and keep both the mission and the sign a secret.

Additionally, the new terms are added when Rahab and the spies are in a changed power dynamic. During the earlier negotiations, the spies had been under Rahab's protection and had little choice but to agree to her demands. Now that they are safely outside the city walls, Rahab no longer has any power over them. Indeed, the spies are in a position to dictate the terms of their agreement. If Rahab does not accept the new stipulations, the spies could decide that they will not uphold their earlier promises. Malbim, noting this shift in circumstances, posits that because the initial agreement was made under duress, the spies do not view it as binding and declare themselves released from their oath to Rahab. Nevertheless, the spies agree that they owe Rahab a debt of gratitude, so they propose new terms to which Rahab agrees.

The contract between Rebecca's family and Eliezer is renegotiated as they discover conflicting, previously unstated expectations about the date of Rebecca's departure. In the evening, everyone had agreed to a match between Rebecca and Isaac and to Rebecca's move to Canaan. The next morning, Eliezer states that he wants to return at once. As Radaq notes, now that his errand is successful, Eliezer wants to return to Abraham at once, without waiting even a single day. The family, however, asks for Rebecca to stay another ten or so days. After all, ten days is not a very long period for Rebecca to make travel arrangements and to say goodbye to her family; ten more days should not make that much of a difference to Eliezer. Indeed, the commentators are puzzled by Eliezer's insistence upon an immediate departure. Rashi suggests that we read that the family is requesting 'days' as in a year, or at least 'ten' months to put together a proper dowry and prepare for marriage. Thus, the parties return to negotiate the date of departure.

However, at no point do they suggest that the initial agreement is null and void. Rather, they attempt to find a common solution to this previously unspecified element of their contract. The family proposes to call in Rebecca to resolve this point of contention. They ask if she is she willing to go immediately, without time for wedding preparations or to say goodbye properly. Perhaps they decide to ask Rebecca because she is the one most affected by this decision. Or, perhaps both parties realize that their differences require outside mediation. In any case, the family asks, "Will you go with this man?" and Rebecca responds, "I will" (Gen. 24:58).

On the other hand, when the parties share common expectations and when no new circumstances arise to challenge the agreement, the characters need not, and therefore do not, renegotiate their agreements. For instance, the contract between Abraham and the strangers to provide hospitality ends after the guests have finished enjoying Abraham's food and the shade of his tent. At this point, the guests move on; the agreement is over. Had the guests decided that they would also like to spend the night; or had Abraham discovered that he lacked sufficient food, the parties would have found themselves renegotiating their agreement. Likewise, although Eliezer and Abraham engaged in detailed negotiations to arrive at their initial contract, this agreement does not change. It is sufficiently broad to account for a variety of circumstances that Eliezer might encounter, including difficulty in finding the right woman and the possibility that the woman would not agree to return to the Land of Canaan.

In the Bible, working contracts are renegotiated in response to new information, changing conditions, and conflicting assumptions. Similarly, in helping relationships, both parties continuously revisit their agreements in response to changing relationships, circumstances, or needs. For instance, in a first meeting of a rabbi and a conversion candidate, the two might agree to meet at a specific time and place. Then, the rabbi might communicate that the first meeting is a chance for them to learn about one another and to discuss the process of conversion. If the candidate agrees to this process, they will then need to discuss the specific steps of the process. What are goals related to study? Jewish living? Spiritual growth? How is the candidate progressing in these areas? If a

stumbling block is reached, what happens? How does the agreement change if a candidate decides that she needs more time to consider the process? As the moment of conversion approaches, meetings might become more frequent. After the trip to the *mikvah* and the declaration before the congregation, the relationship changes again. The rabbi has completed the task of ushering a convert through a liminal moment. While the rabbi may still be a spiritual mentor, the two no longer need to meet as frequently. In light of this, how is the rabbi to help the new convert transition into a different sort of relationship? Similar patterns of relationship occur with other life-cycle events, especially marriage, confirmation, and *b'nai mitzvah*.

Additionally, a contract of care changes in response to crisis. When a rabbi receives a phone call about a congregant in the emergency room, or about a death in the family, she makes herself immediately available. She might extend herself more than normal, by talking with the family late into the night or by making an early morning visit to the hospital. Indeed, everything often goes 'on hold' as a rabbi works with a family for a funeral or as a loved one is in critical condition. However, as a patient's situation stabilizes or as the week of *shiva* draws to a close, this intense relationship changes. No longer is the rabbi so widely available. No longer does she meet as often with the family. Rather, while she touches base and stops by, the relationship returns to a more 'normal' state now that the period of crisis has passed.

In revisiting and renegotiating contracts of care, pastoral caregivers and counselees continually set the parameters of their relationship. They determine the sorts

of assistance that are needed and the manner in which care is to be provided. They ensure that both parties share common expectations. And they form the framework in which a counselee can reveal herself, and a counselor can listen to and be present for another.

Chapter Three: Pitfalls and Problems:

(What happens where there is no mutually agreed upon contract?)

Successful contracts, in which both parties agree to explicit terms, share implicit assumptions, and renegotiate when they discover disagreement and/or miscommunications, provide a framework for helping relationships. Contracts preserve the safety of all involved by ensuring that each party knows what is expected of him or her. However, not all contracts are successful. In this section, we will examine some of the reasons that a contract might fail. We will explore two failed contracts: the contract between Saul and Samuel and the contract between Yael and Sisera. Samuel and Saul fail to form a working relationship because they fail to form a contract. Yael and Sisera's contract fails because Yael intentionally betrays a covenant of peace. Moreover, both Samuel and Yael violate the boundaries of their societal contracts, contracts which place them in a position of responsibility towards Saul and Sisera.

Because Samuel and Saul fail to communicate their differing agendas, they fail to form a working contract. While Saul searches for his lost animals, Samuel prepares to anoint a king over Israel. Samuel acknowledges that Saul is looking for his animals, but he never tells Saul about the plans for kingship. Rather, Samuel offers enigmatic hints and signs. While Samuel's suggestions and symbols about kingship make perfect sense from his perspective or from the perspective of an informed reader, these hints only confuse Saul, who has no idea why the prophet is acting in such odd ways. Indeed, as readers, had we not known in advance that Saul was to be king of Israel we too would

wonder at Samuel's actions Because Saul does not understand Samuel's indirect communications, he is unaware of Samuel's shifting the terms of their relationship.

Saul has every reason to expect that he will find assistance from Samuel, based on his understanding of Samuel's role as a prophet. Samuel, as leader of Israel, is supposed to act in the best interests of the people. He helps them to fulfill God's word, guides them in battle, shows them how to repent (I Sam. 7:3), and prays on their behalf (I Sam. 7:5). He assists them in creating a just society, making the rounds of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah (I Sam. 7:16). In addition, there seems to be an expectation that a person could go to a seer and receive advice; Saul's servant suggests that a seer will "tell us about our errand" (I Sam. 9:8). Indeed, the very name *ro'eh* implies that Samuel will be able to see clearly and provide assistance. Thus, Saul has every reason that Samuel will help him and will know what to do; Saul is ready to trust and follow Samuel. Because of this trust, Samuel's confusing and hostile treatment of Saul may be viewed as a betrayal.

When Samuel meets Saul, he commands him to "go up ahead of me to the shrine, for you shall eat with me today; and in the morning I will let you go, after telling you whatever may be on your mind. As for your asses that strayed three days ago, do not concern yourself about them, for they have been found. And for whom is all Israel yearning, if not for you and all your ancestral house?" (I Sam. 9:19-20). It seemed that Saul was concerned about the animals; now that they have been found, he should be able to return home to his father. What more reason does he have to go to the prophet's house? During the meal Samuel reserves the thigh leg for Saul. The thigh is an honored

portion of the sacrificial animal.[45] Again, this action makes perfect sense to Samuel: one should set aside a special portion for a king. But Saul might wonder why he should receive such special treatment. Indeed, these sorts of unexplained hints might only serve to make Saul more anxious and nervous.

Although Saul agrees to go with Samuel, he never understands what is happening or what he can expect (beyond a meal) at Samuel's home. Saul exclaims in confusion, "Why do you say such things to me!" (I Sam. 9:21). It is as if Saul says, "I am a simple person. I came seeking your help. But you seem to think that there is something more I need. Perhaps you have a prophecy for me. Help me to see what you see. Help me to understand what you want." Saul assumes that this great seer must know what is best; he decides to trust him despite his own confusion.

Even after Saul has been anointed and returns home, he continues relate his experiences with Samuel solely in terms of lost animals. When Saul's uncle asks him where he went, Saul replies that he went "to look for the asses... and when we saw that they were not to be found, we went to Samuel" (I Sam. 10:14). The uncle asks what Samuel said to Saul. Saul answers, "He just told us that the asses had been found" (I Sam. 10:16), omitting any reference to kingship. Saul may have chosen to hide the kingship from his family. Yet this omission may point to the failure of Samuel and Saul's relationship. That Saul does not link his interaction with Samuel – the very interaction that culminated in his royal anointment – with kingship points to a significant breach in communication. Because the two never clarify their assumptions or

[45] McCarter, Kyle P., *The Anchor Bible: I Samuel, a new translation with introduction, notes, and*

expectations with one another, they never find themselves on the same page.

What is the extent to which Samuel and Saul are aware that they are talking past one another? At any point Saul could have spoken up, letting Samuel know that he did not understand what was happening, asking Samuel for an explanation. Saul did not need to blindly follow Samuel's lead. On the other hand, Samuel could have attempted to verify whether Saul understood what was happening. He might have noticed Saul's humble, deferential behavior and realized that the onus of clarification lay on his shoulders. If he realized that Saul did not fully understand all that he was saying, he might have attempted to use a different means of communication. Because Saul and Samuel remain stuck in a single mode of expression and action, they cannot respond to one another and to the changing conditions of their relationship.

And, to what extent has Samuel's hostility towards the institution of kingship and his personal grief and loss over the change of leadership led, inadvertently or advertently, to his perplexing behavior towards Saul? Samuel has made his disapproval of kings clear in a speech to the Israelites. He warns that a king will "rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen... He will appoint them as his chiefs of thousands and of fifties; or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest, and make his weapons and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters... He will seize your choice fields, vineyards, and olive groves... He will take a tenth part of your grain and vintage... He will take your male and female slaves..." (I Sam. 8:11-16). The idea of a kingship is troubling to Samuel.

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commentary, Garden City, NJ, Doubleday, 1980: p. 180.

Samuel also opposes kingship for personal reasons. After he anoints the new king, Samuel will no longer be the chief leader of Israel. Moreover, as Samuel transfers leadership to Saul, Samuel's own sons will lose power. Years earlier, Samuel's mentor Eli was able to put aside his own grief and loss in a similar situation. He helped Samuel understand and respond to his first experience of prophecy, even though Samuel's prophecy meant the demise of Eli's priestly family (I Sam. 3:14). But Samuel does not help Saul. Instead, he offers unclear signals that the new, younger prophet, cannot interpret by himself. Samuel's misgivings about Saul's ascendancy are reflected in his inability to successfully help the new king at this moment of transition of power.

Unlike Eli, Samuel's hostility and anxiety impact his treatment of Saul; Samuel pushes Saul away. He demonstrates his hostile intent as he "comes out towards" Saul and the servant (I Sam 9:14). The expression "come out towards" (also translated as "come out to greet") has connotations of warfare, trickery, and hostile intent[46] Samuel does not want to help Saul; instead, he feels at odds with (and perhaps threatened) by Saul. To confuse and agitate a person who seeks help, to make no attempt to clarify the situation, could be seen, minimally, as not acting in the best interests of the person seeking help, and, maximally, as actively doing harm to a person under one's care. In this light, Samuel betrays his contractual responsibilities as a leader of Israel.

Like Samuel and Saul, Yael and Sisera fail to create a contract with one another. Sisera assumes that because Yael invites him into her tent and because he has a peace treaty with Yael's husband, that he will find safe haven. But Yael does not share Sisera's

[46] Warfare: Num. 20:18, 20; Deut. 1:44, 2:32, 3:1, 29:6, Josh. 8:22; I Sam. 4:1. Trickery/hostile intent:

implicit expectations; she wants to lure Sisera into her tent so that she can kill him. Sisera never attempts to verify if his expectations of safe shelter are correct. He fails to take note when Yael's actions contradict his expectations. He therefore walks right into Yael's trap.

Sisera's desperate need makes him less perceptive about initial clues that his assumptions are faulty. Like Samuel, Yael "goes out to greet" Sisera, an act of hostility and warfare. But Sisera only notices a welcome sight: a woman with whom he has a peace treaty is offering him a place to hide from his enemies. Almost in answer to his prayer, we can hear Yael's welcoming voice saying, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me. Don't be afraid" (Judges 4:18). The verb, *sur (samech, vav, reish)*, is commonly used in hospitality stories, particularly in the hospitality stories involving Lot and the elderly man in Judges.[47] Yael uses *sura* twice. Noting that it is not customary to repeat a request to turn aside, Radaq senses something pleading in Yael's tone. Perhaps Yael repeats this word purposefully, to convince Sisera that hers is a safe tent. And when Yael says, 'do not be afraid,' it is as if she has tapped into the essence of Sisera's emotional state. Yael senses Sisera's need for a safe haven, responds to it, and draws him in. Unlike Lot, Abraham, and the elderly man, who stated what they were offering materially, Yael never tells Sisera what he can expect in her tent. Sisera has no idea if he will find food, a place to sleep, or any of the other common amenities for travelers. But Sisera remembers the peace treaty he has with Yael's husband, he hears her invitation calling to his deepest need for safety, and he assumes the best as he crosses the threshold.

Judg. 4:18; II Sam. 6:20; Jer. 41:6.

Once inside Yael's tent, Sisera continues to ignore signals that her home might not be a safe haven. According to Frymer-Kensky, Yael

> ...welcomes Sisera into her home and begins to nurture him, covering him with a blanket. When he politely asks for water, she gives him fresh milk and covers him again. More than just a hostess, she acts as a mother, and as her mothering enables him to feel secure, he asks her to hide him and lie about his whereabouts.[48]

Instead of caring for Sisera's needs as a general fleeing from battle, Yael tends to Sisera's desires for a maternal haven and loving care. Sisera does not *need* mothering; he needs a place to hide from immanent danger. Building on Frymer-Kensky's suggestion, Sisera has replayed his need for a caring mother figure with Yael. Sisera is lured into feeling especially trusting and secure, and he becomes less likely to notice when Yael's actions are not hospitable.

Sisera's assumptions about his contract with Yael prevent him from noticing that she does not seem to share his understanding of their relationship. Sisera thus fails to notice that Yael does not act like a hostess. Other biblical hosts anticipate and attempt to provide for (if not go above and beyond) travelers' needs. But Yael never offers to provide for Sisera's needs as a traveler. She offers neither food nor water nor a place to wash his feet. Sisera needs to ask even for a drink of water. Then, when Sisera asks for water, he receives milk. While milk, like water, is a beverage, it is not exactly what Sisera requested, but he drinks it anyway.

This milk is a metaphor for the entire relationship between Yael and Sisera. Sisera asks for and expects one thing, and Yael brings him something else. We see this

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[47] Genesis 19:2, Judges 19.
[48] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*: p. 54.

modeled most clearly in the poetic version of this story (Judges 5:24-27). Here Sisera is not killed asleep in his bed; rather, Yael kills Sisera as he is standing upright. In this version, the milk is not an accessory to murder; Yael does not need to offer milk in order to put Sisera to sleep. Rather, the milk is purely a sign of betrayal. Sisera asks for water, and he receives something else, something other than what he requested.

Later on, Sisera asks Yael to "stand at the entrance of the tent. If anybody comes and asks you if there is anybody here, say, 'No'" (Judges 4:20). Sisera believes that Yael is not only a hostess, but also party to the treaty of *shalom* that he has with the House of Heber. Hence, he assumes that it will be safe to trust her as he lies sleeping. Yael, however, never agrees to watch Sisera. She remains silent, and Sisera takes her silence as acceptance. Sisera does not pay attention when she fails to agree to his requests (through word or action) or to renegotiate his requests (for instance, by explaining that she is out of water and has some milk instead). Like Saul, when confronted with inconsistency, he fails to verify that he and Yael share a common contract. These assumptions of hospitality and safety turn out to be deadly.

While most pastoral counselors do not set out to harm or betray counselees, we nevertheless can learn much from examining Yael's betrayal of Sisera and Samuel and Saul's failed contract. We can explore some of the possible difficulties and pitfalls in helping relationships as well as some ways to mitigate such problems. Rabbis and congregants alike prefer to avoid thinking about the potential of betrayal that lies in all clergy-congregant relationships. Surely our rabbis and our cantors, those nice Jewish

boys and girls, would never betray their beloved congregants! But the evidence suggests that boundary violations are more common than we might like to think. The less a rabbi is aware of his or her own inner life, the more likely she or he is to act out in inappropriate ways. Indeed, the greatest danger seems to be in avoidance of this difficult topic. When we avoid discussing and exploring the potential for betrayal and harm in our counseling relationships, we avoid taking responsibility for our role as pastoral caregivers.

Malbim reminds us of how tempting it is to ignore the dangers inherent in helping relationships. Malbim is uncomfortable that Yael could betray Sisera, the peace treaty, and the trust of hospitality. He therefore attempts to absolve Yael of responsibility. Malbim proposes that by separating his tent from the rest of the Canaanites, Heber became exempt from the covenantal peace treaty. Second, Malbim argues that Yael was never bound by the peace treaty because she is a woman and therefore exempt from dealings of government. Malbim also suggests that Yael did not kill Sisera; she may have lifted the hammer, but it was God who made the hammer fall all by itself. In other words, Sisera's murder was meant to be. Finally Malbim suggests (chapter 5) that Sisera was the initial betrayer. He attempted to sleep with Yael; hence, the murder was justified.

Malbim distances Yael from any responsibility for her actions: she is not bound by any covenantal obligations, and ultimately God is responsible for the murder. Similarly, when pastoral counselors believe they are exempt from the covenantal obligations of pastoral counseling, they risk abandoning their responsibilities and

betraying those who come in search of assistance. We can hear the explanations: I can handle my emotions. This case is different. Pat is making so much progress that I cannot abandon him/her now. However, it is precisely when we are tempted to abandon or ignore our responsibilities as pastoral caregivers that we risk betraying the sacred trust placed in our hands. When we keep in mind the obligations that we, as rabbis, have towards our congregants, we take the first step in creating a safe pastoral counseling relationship.

A key element of a safe pastoral counseling relationship is a mutually agreed upon contract. As we discussed the second chapter, pastoral counseling contracts are, by their very nature, implicitly understood. When both parties share common expectations, an implicit contract does not pose a problem. In contrast, when both parties are not on the same page, they are at risk of miscommunication, of failure to be of help, and possibly of causing harm Parties often only recognize their implicit expectations when they are breached or directly contradicted. For instance, Rebecca's family had assumed that she would be staying a while longer in Haran; Eliezer assumed she would immediately journey to Canaan. Only when Eliezer proposed Rebecca's immediate departure did the two sides make this term of their agreement explicit.

When parties do not pay attention to the smaller signs, such as contradictions and miscommunications, that they do not share common expectations and assumptions, they miss an opportunity to clarify their contract and develop a safe relationship. Saul and Samuel, for example, consistently talk past one another. As Saul speaks of animals,

Samuel hints of kingship. Neither takes note that the other does not respond to his remarks, neither notes the disconnections in the conversation, neither attempts alternative avenues of communication, and neither tries to ensure that they both are on the same page. Unlike the obvious differences between Rebecca's family and Eliezer, differences of the sort between Samuel and Saul can go unnoticed if no one is looking out for them. This, then, becomes a responsibility of a pastoral counselor: to be on the lookout for disjunctures in the conversation, for when the counselee's responses and the counselor's responses do not seem to follow one another, and for other subtle signs of misfit. Should a counselor identify such signs, he or she should bring these disconnects into the open, that both counselor and counselee might reexamine and recommit to a common contract.

As pastoral counselors, we, like Samuel are in a position of authority. Counselees may not know what to expect; indeed, they may be exceedingly deferential. However, like Saul, counselees expect that they will be able to trust their rabbi, that their rabbi has their best interests at heart, and that their rabbi will do his or her best to be of assistance.[49] It is therefore the obligation of rabbis to set and maintain safe boundaries. According to Margolin,

> One of the most meaningful uses of empathy in counseling is your willing obligation to preserve the conditions for safety. This means guarding against exploiting the client for your benefit, and it also requires your ability to contain what you hear without inflicting consequences that undermine the client's sense that it is safe to disagree or be different from you. The client must feel safe to give voice to passions and utter the forbidden, safe to explore uncharted sideroads of the inner terrain, and safe to become a differentiated, related, and enduring self... Only with your consistent trustworthiness can the client's initial trust turn into real trust, the result of one person's repeated experiences of another's

[49] Margolin, A., "Sexual Temptation," in *The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care*, eds. G. Ahlskog and H. Sands (Madison, CT, Psychosocial Press, 2000): p. 223.

reliability.[50]

Pastoral counselors thus carry an enormous responsibility: to consciously foster a safe, trusted presence and space.

Pastoral counselors can work toward this trust by clarifying the agreements they make with counselees. Unlike Samuel, counselors should not assume that clients understand what is being said. Rather, pastoral counselors can watch for verbal and non-verbal cues; they can restate the agreement in language the client understands; and they can ask whether everything is clear. Pastoral counselors can also state their expectations up front to avoid miscommunication. Saul has no idea what he can expect from Samuel beyond a general notion that Samuel will help him. On the other hand, when counselors invite counselees into their office sanctuaries, they can discuss the ways in which they can be of help and the limits to that help. What are the responsibilities of both parties? To what extent is the counselor available? What will happen during meetings? What do both parties hope to accomplish in their time together? By arriving at a mutual understanding of the purpose and structure of pastoral counseling, counselors foster an environment of safety.

In addition, counselors can take steps to ensure that they provide a safe space. Unlike Yael, they can set up a physical space that promotes a healthy relationship. For instance, rabbis can refrain from meeting clients when no one else is at the synagogue and can install a window in their office doors.[51] These precautions ensure that congregants

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[50] ibid.: pp. 223-4.

[51] Pearce, S., "Betrayal, Sex, Power, Trust, and Unfinished Business: Transference/Countertransference in the Congregation," in *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Fall 2001): p. 83.

do not feel unsafe from being alone with the rabbi. They communicate that the rabbi will not act in an irresponsible manner. And they may even serve as reminders to rabbis to avoid responding to sexual temptation, to their 'enemy within.'[52]

Moreover, pastoral counselors have the challenge of preserving boundaries of emotional and spiritual safety. Pastoral counseling necessarily involves charged emotional and spiritual issues, for both the counselee and the counselor. These narratives – both in their content and in their form – will provoke anxiety and distress in pastoral counselors. It thus becomes a challenge for the counselor to contain his or her emotional response. According to Margolin, containment means "your ability to hold, *internally*, the ideas and emotional states put forth, as well as evoked in you, by the client... containment includes the interrelated aspects of receptivity and neutrality, self-awareness and reliability. Developing and sustaining a capacity for containment is one of your greatest challenges."[53]

When counselors are unable to contain their emotional responses, they risk 'shutting down' those who come in search of help. For instance, Samuel shows his anxiety and hostility throughout his interactions with Saul. He is unable to listen to Saul, sends confusing messages, and has hostile body language. Samuel may not even be aware of his impact upon Saul. But Samuel's anxiety and hostility send an unstated message: do not approach! Saul responds to Samuel's nonverbal cues; he never tries to question Samuel, to clarify their relationship, or to engage Samuel in any way. Hence, when Samuel cannot contain his anxiety, he prevents a meaningful relationship from

[52] Lewis, "Supervision, Therapy, and the (Modern) Rabbi": p. 82.

forming.

Containment plays a similar role for pastoral caregivers. For instance, suppose Max is talking about his serious illness with the rabbi. At some point in the conversation, he brings up his fears and anxieties about dying. The rabbi, however, begins to cheer up Max, telling him that he will rally soon, reminding him of supportive friends and loved ones. The rabbi might even believe that he's doing the best thing for Max. Max, thinks the rabbi, will heal faster and feel better if he does not brood on morbidity. But it was Max himself who brought up the subject. He wanted to share his narrative of illness with his rabbi. Because the rabbi initiated the change of subject, most likely it was the rabbi who felt emotionally unprepared to discuss death and dying. The rabbi was closed off, anxious, or afraid. In changing the subject, the rabbi not only misses a potential counseling moment; more significantly, this redirection violates the premise of pastoral counseling – that the counselee will find a safe space where he can examine his innermost spiritual world. When we are blind to our own inner lives, we are at risk of violating the trust of counseling.

While it is fairly evident that the content of a counselee's narrative may be discomforting, it is less clear that the form of his or her narrative may trouble a rabbi. Many pastoral counseling narratives fall into what medical anthropologist Arthur Frank would call "chaos narratives." A chaos narrative is an "anti-narrative of time without sequence, telling without mediation, and speaking about oneself without being fully able

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[53] Margolin, "Sexual Temptation": p. 220.

to reflect on oneself... these stories cannot literally be told but can only be lived."[54] The more immediacy and less perspective a narrator has, the more likely his or her narrative is to contain elements of a chaos narrative. Thus, chaos narratives tend to jump around, to lack the cohesion of well-crafted stories

As the medically ill turn to chaos narratives, so too do the spiritually ill. Like chaos narratives, counseling narratives are disjointed because the counselee finds him or herself in a position where nothing seems to make sense. Dittes echoes a counselee's thoughts:

> If the usual worked, I wouldn't be here. For now I feel kidnapped into another world, a demonic underworld, an alien otherworld. My life has been overpowered by invading aliens. I have been conquered by a new strain of virus. I have leprosy of the soul. I no longer fit into my own life. I don't know how to live my life. This is the terror and the despair that brings me to pastoral counseling. I am not myself.[55]

The narratives of pastoral counselees thus contain elements of chaos narratives, for pastoral counselees present disjointed, fragmented, and incomplete stories about their lives.[56] If the counselee could tell a cogent narrative, he or she probably would not have come seeking pastoral care. Although they are not complete, pastoral counseling narratives are not lies or partial truths. They are, rather, versions of a counselee's truth. The role and challenge of a pastoral counselor is to witness what is said and to listen to the person in front of him or her. In so doing, pastoral counselors validate these stories and can be a catalyst for the beginning stages of healing.

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[54] Frank, Arthur, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995: p. 98.
[55] Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling*: p. 19.
[56] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": p. 4.

But it is extremely difficult to listen to chaos narratives. Frank notes that interviewers of Holocaust victims often make an attempt to shift the story away from chaos, towards a narrative of restoration, hope, or redemption. Listeners do not like to sit with the discomfort and the pain. However, in shifting the conversation towards the 'resiliency of the human spirit,' the interviewers fail to recognize what the Holocaust witnesses are actually saying.[57] Thus, those who listen to chaos narratives face a challenge:

> The challenge of encountering the chaos narrative is how not to steer the storyteller away from her feelings... The challenge is to *hear*. Hearing is difficult not only because listeners have trouble facing what is being said as a possibility or a reality in their own lives. Hearing is also difficult because the chaos narrative is probably the most embodied form of story. If chaos stories are told on the edges of a wound, they are also told on the edges of speech. Ultimately, chaos is told in the silences that speech cannot penetrate or illuminate.[58]

When pastoral counselors are confronted with chaos narratives, we feel uncomfortable. Yet we are called and challenged to sit with the pain and anxiety that these stories provoke in us, to refrain from hasty action, from attempting to quickly turn the story of chaos into a story with a solution, to acknowledge the story and the person telling it.

In many ways, the story of Saul and Samuel functions like a chaos narrative. This biblical text seems like a series of disconnected snapshots. There is little or no connective tissue among the various scenes. Readers only glimpse a moment of each scene. Thus, the text does not help the reader fully know Samuel's or Saul's motivations. So much is unclear: why Saul agrees to go with Samuel, what happens on the road between the town gate and Samuel's home, what Samuel thinks of Saul, what Saul thinks

[57] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*: p. 101.

of Samuel. Instead, what comes wordlessly through the story is a sense of palpable frustration. Why won't Samuel just explain himself? What keeps Saul from speaking up? Why do the terms and conditions and venues and agendas keep shifting, with no explanation? The disjointed, anxious nature of the narrative can evoke agitation in the reader who attempts to sit down and analyze it.

Interestingly, even biblical commentaries do not offer analysis of the disjointed nature of the story. Rather, commentators seek a cogent narrative, forcing their analytical frames onto this story. One oft cited narrative is the folk type of the man who searches for his lost asses and finds instead a kingdom.[59] But this folk narrative only captures a portion of the story. It fails to note the actual anxiety and hostility portrayed in the text and in the pauses between the words on the page. It fails to note that the king-select may not be happy with his new purpose. It fails to note what the king loses, what the prophet loses, and how they are coping with the change in their lives. It seems that the biblical commentators, like all of us, are uncomfortable acknowledging narratives that are disjointed, anxiety-provoking, and unfinished. Rather, we prefer to find more satisfying narratives to overlay on the disjointed story, to make the story easier to live with.

Witnessing and listening to chaos narratives is not easy. How is a pastoral counselor to acknowledge, but then put aside her own feelings, her own responses, in order to bear witness? Pastoral counselors are thus familiar with Samuel's position: how are we to put aside our own reactions and conflicts in order to provide care? In order to practice containment, rabbis need to be aware of the impact of transference and

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[58] ibid.

countertransference. Transference can be defined as, "an unearthing of relationships that need to be relived in order to give them a new and better destiny. In those instances, a person imbues new relationships with the significance of previously powerful relationships with family members or other significant characters in his life."[60] Countertransference refers to what counselors show clients from their interior lives.[61] Margolin notes that countertransference refers, "not to the various feelings you may well have silently in this situation, but to acting (verbally or nonverbally) for the purpose of alleviating your own anxiety."[62]

The impact of transference and countertransference can be quite powerful. For instance, transference plays a role in Yael's seduction of Sisera. Sisera has a transferential response to Yael's maternal offerings; he interacts with her as he would a mother figure. Yael perceives Sisera's psychological desires for mothering, his "generalized needs that persist in the present because they have never been met" in the past.[63] She then manipulates them to her own ends. Yael, unlike most pastoral counselors, intentionally uses transference to betray Sisera. Most rabbis are more likely to be unaware of transference/countertransference than to abuse it for their own ends. However, when we ignore transference/countertransference, we may inadvertently betray the trust of the counseling relationship.

There are several ways that transference and countertransference tend to effect

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[59] *Anchor Bible*: p. 186.
[60] Pearce, "Betrayal, Sex, Power, Trust, and Unfinished Business": p. 89.
[61] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": p. 36.
[62] Margolin, "Sexual Temptation": p. 221.
[63] Akers, A. and Ahlskog, G., "Pastoral Care in the Congregational Setting," in *The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care*, eds. G. Ahlskog and H. Sands, (Madison, CT, Psychosocial Press, 2000): p. 118.

pastoral counseling relationships. On the one hand, congregants have positive transference to authority figures. That is, they credit their rabbi with "implicit benevolence and integrity."[64] Congregants also carry negative transference, "distortions that disrupt relatedness and progress toward achieving goals in the present because a prior set of unrelated needs interferes... hidden resentment from the past... is being reenacted in the present."[65] Congregants' transferential associations with authority may be reflected as they 'put up a good front' and refrain from touching on 'forbidden' topics with their rabbi.[66] Or, congregants may show their negative transferential associations as they are highly critical of their rabbi; in reality, they may not be responding to the content of their rabbi's sermon or policy, but to his or her role as an authority.

In recognizing this transference to authority, rabbis can benefit from the implicit trust others place in them; this trust enables the beginning of a pastoral relationship. Moreover, rabbis can learn not to be overly susceptible to criticism that is not actually aimed at them. Rabbis often feel a need to be accepted and to please people. Thus, rabbis' countertransferential responses to congregants' negative transference to authority can lead them to take criticism too much to heart. Rabbis can take steps, including therapy and supervision, to acknowledge their emotional make-up and to find alternate ways to respond to criticism.

Pearce explains that many people become rabbis because of their own need to heal others, to heal themselves, and to improve problems for other people. Rabbis thus have a

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[64] ibid.: p. 119.
[65] ibid.: p. 118.
[66] Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique": p. 35.

temptation to fix things and make them better.[67] And, because rabbis are trained to focus on those who seek assistance, they are likely to be unaware of their own need to be of use or to make things better. When a counselee's transference to authority meets a rabbi's need to heal, it can lead to a violation of counseling boundaries. "The rabbi may try to fill the void in the life of another person, and it is all too tempting to do so in a concrete way. The interaction of the heroic-wounded-healer and the needy-supplicant can play itself out in the rabbi's study or on the pulpit, with disastrous results."[68] This meeting of transference and countertransference is particularly charged in pastoral counseling settings because our spiritual and sexual hungers are closely linked; when we delve into our spiritual hungers, we are likely to evoke our sexual hungers as well.[69]

In addition, rabbis balance a paradox of a deep need for and a fear of intimacy. Jim Bleiberg writes about the inner lives of rabbis:

> Much of our inner lives revolve around a desire for closeness and connection and a countervailing fear of engulfment in uncomfortable intimacies... [yet] we choose a profession that ultimately requires us to develop a highly nuanced capacity for intimacy despite our trepidations. In other words, we are drawn to work that will require us to overcome our deepest fears.[70]

However, in the process of overcoming their fears, rabbis need to be careful that they do not burden their congregations with their inner turmoil. We need to keep in mind that the intimacy of congregational life is a false intimacy, for it can never be reciprocated. Thus, rabbis face the challenge of working through their relational needs in appropriate settings

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[67] Pearce, "Betrayal, Sex, Power, Trust, and Unfinished Business": p. 73.
[68] ibid.
[69] ibid.: p. 72.
[70] Bleiberg, J. "The Seasons of a Rabbi's Life: A Psychological Portrait," in *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1999): p. 4.

-- such as with friends, family members, and therapists. If rabbis cannot find successful ways to work through their troubles with intimacy, they are likely to act out in unprofessional ways, including illicit affairs with congregants.

Other times, unresolved issues in a rabbi's personal and family life can play out in the congregation. Edwin Friedman writes that "all clergymen and clergywomen... are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others."[71] Friedman suggests that by changing their vision of leadership, rabbis can heal the harmful structures and promote healthy relationships in all of these families.

Of particular interest to this thesis, rabbis can develop what Friedman calls "self-differentiation." According to Friedman, differentiation includes, "the capacity to maintain a (relatively) nonanxious presence in the midst of anxious systems [and] to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being."[72] As rabbis learn to differentiate, they are better able to contain their responses to situations. Moreover, they are better able to understand their inner emotional life and to craft a life that is more satisfying. Self-differentiated rabbis do not need to rely inappropriately on their congregations to provide for their emotional needs. Thus, self-differentiation mitigates the risk of transference and countertransference.

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[71] Friedman, E., *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, New York, Guilford Press, 1985: p. 1.
[72] ibid.: p. 27.

Finally, as a party to a broader contract between rabbis and their professional organizations (such as the CCAR) a rabbi can check his or her conduct against this larger agreement. For instance, the CCAR Code of Ethics deals with misconduct in family, social, and financial areas.[73] The following selections from the CCAR Code of Ethics might help rabbis gauge their conduct:

> As human beings, we are tempted by *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), particularly in the areas of substance abuse and sexuality. However, our position as rabbis, teachers of moral standards, and models of moral behavior, demands of us adherence to an exemplary moral code. We must, therefore, not engage in exploitative practices which destroy our moral integrity. We are expected by others, and we expect of ourselves and each other, to be scrupulous in avoiding even the appearance of sexual misconduct, whether by taking advantage of our position with those weaker than ourselves or dependent upon us, or succumbing to the temptations of willing adults. Similarly, recognizing the consequences of addiction, we have a responsibility to seek help for any need or tendency to abuse chemical substances...
>
> As rabbis vested with real and symbolic religious authority, we have the responsibility to recognize the vulnerability of those whom we teach, counsel and serve. It is our obligation to maintain appropriate boundaries in all situations and settings. Unacceptable behavior includes all forms of sexual harassment and intimidation, requests for sexual favors, and any unwelcome verbal, physical or visual conduct of a sexual nature. Any such act or behavior, even if it appears to be consensual, which exploits the vulnerability of another, compromises the moral integrity of the rabbi and is an ethical violation.
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> Moreover, any personal relationship which the rabbi feels the need to keep totally clandestine (beyond the bounds of normal privacy), or which raises doubts for the rabbi regarding its ethical propriety ought to give the rabbi serious pause and propel him/her, at the very least, to seek moral counsel. Among other considerations, rabbis are expected to honor the sanctity and fidelity of committed relationships, their own and those of others. Any sexual activity that betrays those relationships or leads others to betray like relationships constitutes an ethical violation.[74]

This code reminds rabbis of their responsibilities as trusted authorities, makes clear the

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[73] *CCAR Code of Ethics*, at www.ccarnet.org, adopted in the convention assembled June 1991, as amended 2004.

sorts of standards which rabbis are to uphold, specifies certain types of actions which are forbidden, and offers the litmus test of a "personal relationship which the rabbi feels the need to keep totally clandestine," which should cause a rabbi to seek counsel. Of course, an ethical code by itself is not sufficient. Rabbis must want to follow the code and have enough self-awareness to know when to seek assistance.

Through contracting – both with their professional organizations and with those in their care – rabbis can take steps to ensure that the haven of pastoral counseling is truly safe. By returning to their professional contracts, rabbis can recall the responsibility that comes with their position of authority, their mandate of care, their commitment to work towards greater self-awareness and containment (thereby minimizing the dangers of countertransference), and the possibility of seeking assistance for these tasks. By paying attention to the spoken and unspoken elements of pastoral care contracts, rabbis can take steps to keep counselees safe. Rabbis can take care that their actions demonstrate and preserve the safety of the pastoral care environment. And, they can perceive when their expectations and a counselee's expectations are in conflict and take steps to re-clarify their working agreement. By creating and maintaining mutually agreed upon contracts of care, rabbis ensure that pastoral counseling is a truly safe tent.

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[74] ibid.

Conclusion

What do these biblical stories of helping relationships teach us about pastoral counseling relationships? Where is the intersection of the two? And where is the divergence? In this thesis, we have examined the relationship between the establishment of biblical helping relationships and the establishment of pastoral care relationships. Both biblical and pastoral helping relationships are successfully established through the processes of listening, observing, and responding to the person in need of assistance; meeting people where they are; and developing a clear contract. On the other hand, the majority of assistance in the biblical narratives does not involve pastoral care; hence, these stories do not (with the exception of Eli) provide overall models for pastoral counseling.

Helping relationships, including pastoral counseling, begin when someone asks for or when someone offers assistance. Biblical characters, like pastoral counselees, seek help (or would like someone to offer them help) when they are distressed or unable to accomplish a task on their own. Abraham may be too old to journey to find a wife for Isaac. Rahab needs the spies to save her life. Saul has failed in his search for the lost animals. Pharaoh's soul is shaken by his troubling dream. Sisera fears for his life as he flees the battleground. These characters turn to those who they believe will be trusted sources of assistance, such as a family servant, a party to a treaty of *shalom*, or a respected prophet. Like the biblical characters, counselees may seek out or be receptive to a rabbi because their own resources are insufficient and because they believe that a

rabbi will be a trusted, reliable source of aid.

Successful helping relationships are further fostered as caregivers, helpers, and counselors listen, observe, and respond to those before them. In establishing a helping relationship, it is beneficial to begin from the perspective of the person seeking help. For instance, the elderly man in Judges first assesses, both literally and metaphorically, the situation and perspective of the Levite. On a practical level, this assessment allows the elderly man to verify that his help is needed and to determine the sort of assistance the Levite needs. Moreover, the elderly man communicates to the Levite that he, his journey, and his perspective on life are important; in turn, the Levite warmly welcomes his assistance. In contrast, because Lot fails to listen to the strangers before him, his offer of assistance is rejected. As pastoral counselors entering helping relationships, we can benefit from beginning from the perspective of the person before us. When we begin from the client's perspective we are able to assess the sort of assistance that is needed and whether we are able to provide this help. In addition, we foster trust, indicate our desire to develop a working relationship, and communicate that the person before us matters.

Although many of the characters in the biblical stories seek or are in need of a tangible good, many also have underlying emotional and/or spiritual needs or concerns. In order to help these characters, those who offer assistance need to be particularly observant not just of the words that are spoken, but of the entire person before them. Joseph perceives Pharaoh's agitation, and responds by not only 'solving' the dream, but by seeing to Pharaoh's entire *shalom*. Rebecca echoes Eliezer's hasty body language as

she serves him water, demonstrating that she has taken note of his underlying needs. In each of these cases, the initial, tangible issue is the exterior, or, in counseling terms, presenting problem. When people come before their rabbi with a tangible problem – a request for a book, a question about a sermon – they may also be seeking assistance on a deeper level. When counselors listen and respond on this other level, they open the door to pastoral counseling.

It is possible to provide competent assistance while staying on the surface level. For instance, Eliezer successfully negotiates a marriage contract, satisfying his obligations to Abraham and creating a desirable match for Rebecca's family. But Eliezer never talks with Abraham about his fears of growing older. He never addresses the grief and loss Rebecca's family may be feeling at her departure. In responding only on the tangible level, Eliezer indicates that he is not interested in connecting on an emotional or spiritual level. Similarly, when rabbis offer assistance, they may choose to respond to only the immediate problem. At times, this may be appropriate. Like Saul, a person might seek only a simple response to a question. But if a rabbi is not open, observing and responding on a deeper level, she or he may miss many opportunities to establish pastoral encounters.

In both the biblical stories and in pastoral counseling, successful helping relationships are established through a process of contracting. As they create a contract, the parties negotiate the explicit and implicit boundaries, terms, and agreements they make with one another. In successful helping relationships, both parties share common

expectations, take note of miscommunications which may point to differing assumptions, and renegotiate their contract as needed. Such contracts ensure the safety and efficacy of helping relationships.

There are two levels at which contracts operate: on a societal and on an interpersonal level. Societal contracts set the overall expectations of the helping relationship. In the Bible, societal contracts state the Israelites can turn to priests or prophets for aid; that hosts have certain obligations to their guests; that servants are to carry out the will of their masters. In pastoral counseling, rabbinic-congregational contracts state that congregants can turn to rabbis, rabbis can reach out to congregants, and rabbis are trusted sources of aid.

Interpersonal contracts determine the way in which help will be provided in a given situation. As two parties develop a relationship with one another, the hope is that they will arrive at a mutually amenable agreement. When the terms are clear and do not change, little negotiation may be necessary. For instance, Eliezer's request for water is fairly straightforward. Rebecca is willing to bring him a drink, and the two do not need to further discuss this matter. Biblical characters share a common understanding of the responsibilities of hosts and guests, and so they do not always clarify contracts of hospitality. However, Abraham's demands of Eliezer are unclear and contradictory. Although Eliezer, as a servant, must help Abraham, he insists that Abraham specify the terms of this particular contract. Other times, parties may find an agreement satisfactory, at least at first glance. Rebecca's family is persuaded by and accepts the terms of

Eliezer's marriage proposal; the spies add only a single stipulation to Rahab's request that they spare her life. When it is later discovered that Eliezer and Rebecca's family have different expectations about when Rebecca will journey to Canaan, and when the spies discover that they would like (and are able) to further restrict their agreement with Rahab, the parties renegotiate their contracts.

Like the biblical characters, counselors and counselees negotiate, clarify, and renegotiate their contracts. Just as Eliezer negotiates how he will provide assistance in a given circumstance, so too can rabbis determine how they will provide congregants with help. Rabbis can also attempt to clarify certain elements of their pastoral relationships – stating when and where meetings will take place, or the expectation of safe space and a nonanxious presence. As in the biblical contracts, counselors are then expected to follow through and create a safe space, practice containment, and pay attention to counselees.

However, there is a key difference between pastoral counseling contracts and the majority of the biblical contracts we have examined. Most of the biblical helping relationships center around easily articulated tasks and have clearly defined terms. Success can be measured. Does Joseph provide a satisfactory interpretation of Pharaoh's dream? Do the spies save Rahab's life? On the other hand, the terms of pastoral counseling agreements are often implicitly understood and can only be implicitly demonstrated. Indeed, the needs of pastoral counselees can rarely be clearly defined. Pastoral counseling relationships therefore more closely resemble the relationships between Eli and Hannah and between Eli and Samuel. In these stories, no one explicitly

asks for or offers assistance. Rather, acting under the auspices of a priest/Israelite contract, Eli shifts his interactions with Hannah and Samuel into counseling situations, as he listens, takes note, witnesses, names, and blesses. In turn, Hannah and Samuel implicitly state their agreement to Eli's counseling by their receptivity to his actions.

Because of the implicit nature of pastoral counseling relationships, it can be more difficult to determine when there is no shared contract. Most rabbis present open-ended offers of help; there are no clear boundaries; and most expectations are left unstated. Hence, there is likely to be a divergence in how both parties understand the terms of their contract. But those who come to our tents should expect to find a trusted leader and a hospitable place to rest. Like Yael and Samuel, pastoral counselors are in a position of authority; it is our responsibility to ensure the safety of pastoral counseling relationships. However, as the stories of Yael and Sisera and Samuel and Saul demonstrate, there is great potential for harm or for betrayal in helping relationships. While we are most aware of extreme examples, such as rape or sexual harassment, we also need to be vigilant at all times to ensure that we do not abuse our positions of authority

Unlike Yael, most rabbis do not intentionally plan to betray those who come to our door. But when we avoid discussing these issues and when we fail to examine our own conduct, we are at risk of betrayal. Unlike Samuel, rabbis can take note of miscommunications, when a counselee and counselor's interactions do not seem to follow one another. They can attempt various avenues of communication to ensure that everyone is on the same page. The story of Yael and Sisera points to another possible

danger -- the interaction of a counselee's transference and a counselor's countertransference. To prevent this interaction, rabbis can take steps, including therapy and/or supervision, to practice containment. Rabbis can also remember and return to their contract with their congregations and with their governing bodies, contracts which remind rabbis of their covenants of care. Like a treaty of *shalom*, these contracts state that rabbis are to do no harm and to treat those who come to us with dignity and respect.

Although there are many parallels between the helping relationships in the Bible and the establishment of pastoral care relationships, there is also a significant difference. For the most part, the help and assistance offered and requested in these narratives is not counseling. Abraham requests and Eliezer seeks a wife for Isaac. Rahab requests personal safety. Abraham, Lot, and the elderly man in Judges offer hospitality. Yael offers her tent as a haven. Rebecca gives a stranger a drink of water. Those who offer assistance in the Bible are able to solve (perhaps after some negotiation) the problems that others bring to them. They can negotiate a marriage contract, ensure personal safety, provide a place to spend the night, or draw water from the well.

On the other hand, the reasons people seek pastoral counseling do not lend themselves to easy solutions. Often, a counselee cannot put his or her finger on the reason why he or she is seeking help. In fact counselees may be seeking help precisely because they do not know what is wrong. Counselees present disjointed chaos narratives because nothing seems to make sense and because they lack the perspective to comprehend their experiences and emotions. Hence, pastoral counselors cannot 'fix' the

problems of those who seek us out for assistance. Rather, pastoral counselors begin to provide assistance by listening to, accepting, and acknowledging those who seek our help, without imposing a rosier narrative or an immediate solution.

The only biblical character whose assistance closely resembles pastoral counseling is Eli. Like pastoral counselors, Eli witnesses, blesses, and names. Eli takes note of Hannah's tears and her odd behavior. He recognizes that something is amiss, and he reflects these observations back to Hannah. Although Eli's conclusion about drunkenness is false, his observations touch on a truth – Hannah's soul is troubled, and she is in need of assistance. Hannah then opens herself up Eli, he witnesses her pain and her struggles with God, and he blesses her with *shalom*. Because another has noticed and blessed her, even in her brokenness, Hannah is no longer downcast after she leaves the shrine. Eli also recognizes a misfit between Samuel's claim to have heard his voice and the fact that he did not call out to the youth. Eli helps Samuel name his experience as one of prophecy, paving the way for Samuel to respond to God's call. In this encounter with Samuel, Eli puts aside his own loss to be present for Samuel and act in his best interest.

Like Eli, pastoral counselors can offer the gifts of witnessing, blessing, and naming. Bloom writes, "That which is unwitnessed, unnamed, and unblessed can never be fully human. And that which is not fully human detracts from God's presence in the world, thus, as it were, diminishing God. Locating, witnessing, naming, and blessing the often elusive, hidden, 'turned away from'...is crucial to rabbinic work."[75] Rabbis bless not only the wholeness, but also the brokenness of those who seek our assistance.

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[75] Bloom, J., *Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar*, p. 201.

> The more crucial and difficult task is blessing the part not presented, the part being struggled with, the part which has no human existence and is experienced as the 'not me.' Realizing what it is in others, which is often unexpressed, witnessing the struggle and essence that begs inarticulately for naming and blessing, and blessing both struggle and essence with words of one's own, words not received and not encoded in the text, is a rabbinic skill of the first magnitude.[76]

In blessing the entirety of a person, the entirety of his or her experience, rabbis give voice to the holiness that is in all of life.

These two narratives about Eli are the only biblical helping narratives which share enough common content with pastoral care relationships to allow us to begin a discussion about the specific shape that pastoral care relationships take. But these two narratives alone are insufficient to provide traditional Jewish models of pastoral caregivers, as opposed to helping relationships in general. One further aspect of study might be to search for models of pastoral counseling in other genres of Jewish literature. Perhaps the sages of aggadic literature or the rebbes of Hasidic literature may be able to provide further models for this sort of study.

In addition, it may be possible to further explore the possibilities for establishing pastoral relationships between rabbis and congregants. This thesis has focused on the ways that rabbis enter helping relationships, with a particular focus on pastoral counseling relationships. But the help that rabbis offer congregants is not limited to counseling in a rabbi's study. Rabbis offer assistance in a number of arenas – as they officiate at lifecycle events, as they teach classes, even as they interact with congregants at *oneg* Shabbat. To limit pastoral interactions only to a counseling setting may be to miss many ways to be a pastoral helper to one's congregation.

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[76] ibid., p. 217.

For instance, it is possible to take a pastoral approach to lifecycle moments. In my student pulpit, two young men had been called up to serve in Iraq. On the Friday night closest to their deployment, I read an adaptation of a Mi Shebeirach prayer said for Israeli teenagers when they are called up to serve in the IDF. By reading this blessing during services, I acknowledged that war, too, is an unfortunate part of life. I created a moment for the congregation to mourn the loss of their youth to war and to dangerous service in a foreign land; and to express their sorrows, their fears, and their hopes for their young people. We acknowledged God's presence even in this broken moment.

We similarly see the pastoral impact of blessings as we create new rituals and ceremonies to sanctify formerly hidden elements of our lives. Brit bat ceremonies give our daughters a place of honor in the community. Coming-out ceremonies, same-sex wedding ceremonies, blessings for first menstruation, for adopting a child, for receiving a driver's license, for non-Jews who are active in the synagogue, or for sending one's children to college take note of these important transitions. Before we blessed such moments, we may not have thought that they were holy. But by taking note, offering a blessing, and naming such times as sacred moments, we sanctify these formerly unnoted aspects of our lives. As there is the possibility for pastoral interaction through the creation of blessings and lifecycle ceremonies, there may be opportunities for pastoral interactions in many of a rabbi's tasks. Hence, a question for further exploration might include: What are the ways that a pastoral approach can be incorporated into the various helping roles that rabbis fill?

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