The Rabbi as Counselor: Pastoral and Mental Health Counseling: Clashing Paradigms?

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Goals and Caveats

- Challenging Topic – outside of my regular presentations
- Yet on the nexus of both roles
- So I accept challenge!
- Yet with caveat – my reflections and the need for dialog
“Counseling is a process involving an interaction with between counselor and client in a private setting with the goal of helping the client change his/her behavior so that a satisfactory resolution of needs may be obtained.” (Pepinsky & Pepinsky, 1954)
Basic Definitions

Pastoral Counseling

“Pastoral counseling, one dimension of pastoral care, is the utilization of a variety of healing (therapeutic) methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully and thus experience healing of their brokenness.” (Clinebell, 1984).
Similarities and Differences

**Similarities**
- Similar methods, perhaps underlying theories
- Shared goals of human growth and empowerment

**Differences**
- Pastoral counseling takes place in a context of ongoing pastoral care, thus termination may never occur
- Potential conflict in the spiritual/religious context of pastoral counseling
Mental Health Counseling has become far more sensitive to the issue of spirituality

ACE, consensus conference

APA Statement on “reparative therapy”
Reparative Therapy

- APA 2009 Statement affirmed opposition to reparative therapy aimed to change sexual orientation noting that such therapies are not only unproven but may induce depression and suicidal tendencies.
- The 2009 Statement showed sensitivity to spiritual beliefs suggesting that when faith is important options might include celibacy or finding a more welcoming faith.
Challenges to the Pastoral Counselor

- Beyond Competence
- Beyond Comfort
- Beyond Ethics
Beyond Competence

- Most of us, unless we specialized later, were trained as generalists.
- Personal issues with the generalist model in counseling – idea of core competencies.
- Application to mental health counselors.
- Application to pastoral counselors.

“It’s worse than we thought – there’s going to be random testing for competence.”
Examples
Marriage and Family Therapy

- My own seminary training was woefully deficient on counseling families
- The importance of research currency – elder’s contact with family
- Use and limits of models
- Bowen family systems theory
Bowen’s Family System Theory
A Key Conceptual Framework

- Bowen was an exception to the atheoretical nature of family studies
- Interested in Emotional Processes
- Key Question: How does one maintain a balance between togetherness and separateness in a family?
Bowen’s Family System Theory

- Emphasized that families are emotional systems – connected by feelings
- Generally this allows cohesion and caring
- But it can be problematic when other emotions such as anxiety pervade the system
Bowen’s Family System Theory

1. Differentiation of Self
2. Triangles
3. Nuclear Family Emotional Process
4. Family Projection Process
5. Multigenerational Transmission Process
6. Sibling Position
7. Later – Societal Emotional Process
Differentiation

- The capacity for autonomous functioning
- Intrapsychic – the ability to separate feeling and thought – not just respond to emotion
- Interpsychic – The ability to analyze free from the emotional demands of others
Differentiation

- Premise – unresolved emotional attachment to family must be resolved rather than simply accepted or reactively rejected.
- It allows connection rather than simply conforming or the pseudo-independence of reactively rejecting.
- Connection and belonging – apartness and “a partness”
Differentiation

Undifferentiated Types

- **Chameleons** – constantly adjust to the emotions of others
- **Family Bullies** – seek to have others adjust to their emotional states
- **Rebels** – Emotionally reactive
Differentiation

- Undifferentiated respond to emotion
- Differentiated can connect without anxiety that choices will cost love or attraction
- Fusion
Alternatives to Differentiation

**Fusion**

- In fusion, the need for approval becomes so intense that one partner loses identity.
- The partner assumes responsibility for meeting the emotional needs of the other while their own needs become submerged.
Differentiation

- Undifferentiated Persons will often fall into relationships characterized by reactive polarities
- Over/under functioner
- Distancer/Pursuer
Differentiation

Fusion

- Societal pressures are greater for women to fuse than men
- Fusion is inherently unstable
Alternatives to Differentiation

**Distancing and Cut-Offs**

- Physical and emotional distancing or cut-offs occur when the individual reactively pulls away since the relationship threatens to overwhelm individuality and create fusion.

- However, cut-offs and distancing do not really end the underlying emotional processes.

- The emotional sensitivities extend into other relationships.
Alternatives to Differentiation

**Triangles**

- Dyads unstable – often bring in a third perspective to relieve anxiety caused by underlying conflict
- Differentiate triangles from threesomes or triads
- Triangles stabilizes dyads through diversion rather than resolution
- Can be an issue as well as a person
Nuclear Family Emotional Process

- The more undifferentiated a person is at marriage, the more likely fusion is to occur.
- Fusion is unstable – resulting in:
  - Marital Conflict
  - Distance and cut-offs
  - Dysfunction of one spouse or child’s development is impaired
  - Projection
The Family Projection Process

- Emotional processes projected within the family
- Parents transmit or project problems to children
- Example – Husband distant so wife focuses emotional energy on children (often one child), leading to differentiation issues for that child
The Family Projection Process

- Parents can transmit other problems to their children as well by their anxieties.
- Parents scan their child when they are fearful that something is wrong.
- Interpret behaviors to confirm their fears.
- Treat the child as if the problem is real.
- Self-fulfilling prophecies and a Russian proverb.
Multigenerational Transmission Process

- Process continues over generations
- Child most involved in fusion moves to a lower level of differentiation, finds mate, projects – problem continues
- Past influences the present over generations
Sibling Position

- Bowen emphasized the emotional processes of the family created a unique environment for each child
- Place in family hierarchy
- Thus differentiation issues may be different
- Sibling studies
Bowen Family Systems Theory

- Reaffirmed the Role of the Family of Origin on the Family of Procreation
- Clinical Implication
- Superman and Kryptonite
Examples
Grief and Loss

- The popular model of grief remains the stage model.
- Yet contemporary grief theory has moved way beyond the concept of stages.
Current Grief Theory

- Emphasizes individual pathways rather than universal stages
The “Grief Work” Hypothesis

- The serious academic study of grief began with Freud
- One must work through painful feelings in order to detach from the deceased and reinvest in life
The “Grief Work” Hypothesis

- Never fully accepted
- Co-existed with other approaches
- Were oversimplifications of ideas that had more subtlety and nuance
- Were continually challenged
Challenges to the Grief Paradigm

- Extending the definition of loss
- Application of new models
- Beyond affect
- Beyond coping
- Continuing bonds
- Culture and grief
- Assessing interventions
The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement
Stroebe & Schut (1999)

Loss-oriented
- Grief work
- Intrusion of grief
- Letting go-continuing-relocating bonds/ties
- Denial/avoidance of restoration changes

Restoration-oriented
- Attending to life changes
- Doing new things
- Distraction from grief
- Denial/avoidance of grief
- New roles/identities/relationships

Everyday life experience
oscillation
The Tasks of Grief

- Acknowledge the loss
- Express manifest and latent emotion
- Adjust to a changed life
- Relocate the loss
- Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss

Worden (Modified)
Moves Beyond Affect

- Greater attention to spiritual
- Neimeyer – Loss as Meaning Reconstruction
- Attig – Relearning the World
- Martin and Doka – Intuitive vs. Instrumental Styles of Grief
Summation: Contemporary Grief Theory

- Acknowledges variety of losses that engender grief
- Skeptical of a predictable set of stages
- Increased attention to cognitive and spiritual aspects of loss
- Increased recognition of “continuing bonds”
- Increased recognition of “post-traumatic” growth
- Recognition of culture – move away from “universal” reactions
- Eclectic approaches – yet “evidence-based”
How Can We Enhance Transformation?

- Language of Survivorship
- Small choices empower bigger ones
- Examination of positive and negative adaptations
- Reflection “How has this loss changed you?”
- The value of “benefit finding” in the experience of grief
Grief Counseling

- Studies show that clients will do better in groups when leaders have transformation rather than coping as a goal of therapy or support.
Grief is not a time bound process that ends in detachment
Utilizing *Continuing Bonds* in Therapy

The importance of stressing continuing bonds in setting goals for therapy
Amelioration of Grief

- Over time pain lessens
- Persons function at similar (or sometimes better levels) than prior to the loss
- Yet, grief still has a developmental aspect
Utilizing *Continuing Bonds* in Therapy (2)

- In termination, make clients aware of the developmental surges likely to be experienced as one continues to live with the loss.
Beyond Comfort

- Conflict between spiritual beliefs and client autonomy
- What works for the individual may challenge our own spiritual values
- The inherent conflict between the clergy role (applying faith) and the counselor role (not imposing spiritual values).
- Yet the emergence of an ecological model in end-of-life care provides another paradigm that may ease conflict.
Beyond Ethics

- Boundaries and Multiple Relationships
- In mental health counseling, multiple relationships can receive sanctions including the loss of a license
- Part of *pastoral care* – thus likely to be an ongoing relationship
- Potential conflicts with the needs of other family members
Beyond Ethics

- The issue of informed consent
Beyond Ethics

- The issue of confidentiality
- Confessional seal vs. State Laws
- Example – Reporting requirements
Utilize Spiritual Strengths
Utilize Beliefs

- How does your faith speak to you in this crises/situation?
- The Value of Enlightened Ignorance
Utilize Faith Practices

- Prayer
- Meditation
- Forgiveness and Atonement
- Spiritual disciplines
- Music and imagery
Utilize Faith Communities

- Help in tangible ways – meals, chores, childcare
- Offer respite care and friendly visitors
- Support groups and special programs
- Library resources and referral
- Ministry of presence
- Other?
Making Funeral Rituals Meaningful

- The Example of Jewish Ritual – Grief as a Process
Create Ritual

Ritual as a Therapeutic Tool
Types of Ritual

- Continuity
Types of Ritual

- Transition
Types of Ritual

- Reconciliation
Types of Ritual

- Affirmation
Creating Meaningful Ritual

- Arise from narrative
- Objects are visible and symbolic
- Planned and processed
- Use primal elements (Fry)
The Challenge of Collaboration

- The value of finding sensitive collaborators in the therapeutic process
- “A” List
- Frankly exploring what we can offer and need
- The goal of wholeness we share