

HELP! I NEED SOMEBODY!

by Lois Silverman

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Voice from recording: You have reached the hotline of the Sisterhood President of Congregation Beth El, Miriam Malamud. I cannot answer the phone right now, but if you will leave your name, phone number, and a message, I will get back to you as soon as I can. I know your call is important so leave a message of any length on my voice mail. Please begin after the beep. Shalom [BEEP]

BUILDING COMMUNITY TO COPE WITH LOSS

1

Hello, this is Judith Presser at 444-5556. I'm calling to thank you and the Sisterhood for helping my family after Jonathan's funeral.

Shiva was a hard time for us. We didn't expect an 18-year old to be killed coming out a shoe store with his sister; how can someone imagine that a taxi would jump the curb and kill your son! And our daughter Lori—what will it take for her to get rid of her guilt and her pain when she thinks of her brother's death?

Miriam, I can't get rid of the pain and the anger. I can't call what happened to my son an accident. I can't even think of forgiving the cab driver who killed my son as some of my gentile friends have told me I should do.

You know, people were kind to us during *shiva*, but now, I think they're avoiding me—as if my loss were catching—or maybe they don't know what to say to me.

Miriam, you and the Sisterhood women were so great being there for me and my family—could you help me now!

2

Miriam, I need help. Oh, this is Joan Silverberg, 999-8987. My mother Anne Beck has just passed away—boy, do I hate that euphemism—she died—on the operating table this morning. She went in for a minor heart by-pass operation that they do five or six times a day. They have a 95% success rate, but Anne Beck—51 years old—the mother of three, grandmother of five, was one of the five percent where the operation failed.

Miriam, I was joking with her just this morning, before they took her to the OR. I didn't say good-bye!

Dad's in a state of shock, and my sisters have to fly in with their families with their very small kids. But I can handle the arrangements for after the funeral myself. Keeping busy right now is good for me.

Anyway, Miriam, the help I need is to get a minyan in my parent's house. Mom was always very impressed at Sisterhood *Shabbat* with the services the women did themselves especially those on *Shabbat* morning. Do you think we could get a minyan of women with a woman to lead the service for one day during *shiva*? My sisters and I would love to honor mom this way.

And Miriam, as soon as I can I want to learn how to lead a service, too!

1

Miriam, this is Marsha Kaplan. I need some advice. I need...I don't know what I need.

I just had a miscarriage. The doctor said it was nature's way of saying that the baby wouldn't have survived.

Miriam, why did God let this happen? I've been a good Jew and a good person. Sorry.

You know what hurts is that there is no one I can talk to about this. I know others have had miscarriages before, but this is the first time anything like this has happened to me. It hurts so! It's like a part of me!

I guess it's the same as losing a parent or a husband—but I never knew this person this child of mine—I never held her or kissed her.

People lose a lot of things in their lives—like jobs, health or mental capacity, and the loss affects them deeply. But this is different. I don't even know if there are prayers to say.

Miriam, I need help! Please! [dial tone]

Voice from recording: You have reached the hotline of the Sisterhood President of Congregation Beth El, Miriam Malamud....[BEEP]

BUILDING COMMUNITY TO CELEBRATE TOGETHER

Miriam, this is Roxy Simons at 944-8696. My brother is getting married, and I don't know what to do.

We are all thrilled that he is finally getting married. When he turned 38 we almost gave up hope. His fiancée is a lovely girl—a Ph.D. in computer science. She's not Jewish—but she's converting.

The problem is she's asking me all sorts of questions, and it's fun answering them. But last night, she asked me one I just couldn't answer.

We were talking, and she said that Judaism seemed to be more than just a collection of beliefs and laws. Being a Jew was more of a mindset.

I asked her what she meant and she said that Jews have a long history, many beautiful traditions and a set of ingrained feelings that seemed to be passed down almost subconsciously from parent to child. Then she asked: "You know, Roxy, I know the rules and regulations, and I even know the history. But how do I get the feelings that every Jew seems to have on hearing the *shofar*, reciting the *kaddish*, having an *aliyah*, dancing at a Jewish wedding, or even seeing the Israeli flag? How do I become part of the 4000 year old chain of Jewish women when I light candles or hold my son after a *brit*?"

I couldn't answer her since I'm not sure you need these emotional feelings in order to be Jewish. But, Miriam, how can we show our people who have chosen to become Jews the spirit of Judaism, especially the women who will raise the next generation of Jews?

Is there a way we in Sisterhood can help? I'd love to be part of that project. Thanks.

2

Miriam, this is Esther Berg. My number is 945-4323. My daughter-in-law just had a baby girl. We're so happy. The baby naming is Saturday, and my whole family is coming. You know we have a small family. My daughter-in-law Joyce's family isn't Jewish, and we don't know if they're coming in. Joyce, obviously is depressed about that. but she won't push her family to come in because she's afraid they'd feel out of place and that her parents wouldn't be allowed to take part in the religious service. That is sad since Sara Ann is their grandchild, too.

Could you spread the word to the Sisterhood members that the baby naming will be this *Shabbat*? We'd like to have a few more people there than usual—it would make it more like a celebration. Thank you so much.

3

Mrs. Malamud, this is Jane Gross, 444-3231. I don't know if you recognize my name. We just moved to town six months ago, and we really haven't gotten to know anyone in the Jewish community. That's why I called you—I need help.

Passover is coming up and—I feel funny asking, but the synagogue isn't having a seder. Do you know anyone who is strictly kosher and wouldn't mind four extra people—two of whom are under eight? I'd make anything I could to bring to a seder—we are strictly kosher in our home. Or maybe you know of other people like us who are alone; I'd be willing to invite them to my house for a seder.

I am really alone here—my family and my husband's are so far away. And I don't know if I stand not being at a family seder for Passover; I can stand anything but being alone on Passover.

Could you help us by playing matchmaker? Thanks.

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BUILDING COMMUNITY TO ENHANCE JEWISH LIVING

1

Miriam, this is Marge Pearlmutter at 994-4454. I'm calling for two things.

I want to thank you and the Sisterhood for starting that *Rosh Hodesh* group. I haven't been so excited about Judaism and learning since...gee—I don't know if I was ever excited about Judaism before. The Sisterhood women who've been leading the group make me feel a part of the ritual now and really make those Bible stories I learned as a kid mean something to me as an adult.

That leads me to the second reason I called: The *Rosh Hodesh* group is wonderful, and I've learned a great deal—but it's not enough. I want more. I want to bring the excitement and the experience I get once a month into my life every day.

Miriam, can Sisterhood help me?

3

Miriam this is Joan Gordon. My phone number is 945-9594. I have *yahtzeit* for my mother, and I need a minyan to say *kaddish*.

I've tried everyone I know, but they all have excuses why they can't come. The last time I went to the synagogue to say *kaddish* for my mother, we were short three for a minyan.

I was thinking that maybe the Sisterhood could help me and maybe the whole congregation. There are many sisterhood women who are able to *daven*. I've seen them do so well at the *Rosh Hodesh* group. Yet these same women seldom come to the daily minyan. Couldn't we get these women who are so dedicated to the *Rosh Hodesh* group to help make a minyan during the week?

Sisterhood and its members support the mourners during *shiva*, but what about after *shiva*? Doesn't respect for those who have passed away continue—especially when a loved one wants to honor them by saying *kaddish*?

Sorry to go on, but I know my mother would have been one of those who would support my idea and come to the minyans.

Please help me! Thank you.

Voice from recording: ...I know your call is important so leave a message of any length on my voice mail....[BEEP]

BUILDING COMMUNITY TO EXPLORE OUR SPIRITUALITY

Miriam, Barbara Kurtz. I heard you've appointed a chair for Sisterhood Sabbath. I'm glad you're starting early after the reaction to last year's service.

I remember the evaluations we received after that *Shabbat*. And thinking back, they were right in their criticism. Almost everyone wrote that the prayers as well as the English readings were done by rote, without feeling. It sounded to almost everyone there as if the people taking part in the service could have cared less if they were taking part in a religious service or not; they read their part as quickly as possible as if they couldn't wait get it over with and go home. There was no continuity. And the sermon wasn't meaningful or appropriate to the occasion although a long time member delivered it.

My mother-in-law, may she rest in peace, always said that a successful service is when everyone in the sanctuary can take home one bit from it: a humorous story, an idea, a feeling of unity with our people, or a new insight into oneself or God.

But during last year's Sisterhood Sabbath there were no emotions, no warmth, nothing spiritual in the sanctuary, and it used to be that Sisterhood Sabbath was the one service of the year where we women could express ourselves and our spirituality.

I hope Sisterhood Sabbath will be that way again, and then, Miriam, maybe we could expand Sisterhood *Shabbat* to every *Shabbat* during the year. I'll help, if you like. What do you think?

Miriam, this is Rebecca Cohen. I've been a Sisterhood member since my children and I moved to town and joined the synagogue after my divorce about four years ago. My children go to the synagogue's religious school—Sarah's ten and Greg is eight.

Sarah's a bright girl. She just seems to absorb everything the teachers can give her—especially in religious school. She's always talking about what she's learning about prayer and God. She's excited, and it makes her brother and I excited about Judaism, too. But it's getting to be a problem—we can talk about what Jewish things we do in our home, but I don't know how to talk to her about prayer and God. I'm not sure of my own relationship to God or how a Jew can approach the Divine. When Sarah starts talking about God and Jewish prayers, I'm so proud of her, but when she asks me about what I believe, I'm embarrassed since she seems to know more than I do.

How can I tell her I don't know anything about God or prayer? If it were science or history, I could learn about it myself. But these concepts are different. Sarah thinks I'm so smart, and I'd like her to think that way for as long as possible.

Can Sisterhood help me? Thank you.

ENDING

Miram: (one phone) Hello, Janice. This is Miriam Malamud, 942-3151. Call me back as soon as you can. I need you to contact the rest of the Sisterhood board for an important meeting. We've got a great many things to do. I'll give you the details when you call, but this meeting should really be something! Why we may even generate so much excitement that we'll have to double the number of tables we set up for our next meeting.

Thanks, Janice. I really need your help.

QUESTIONS FOR TRIGGER SCRIPT

BUILDING COMMUNITY TO COPE WITH LOSE

1. What is community?
2. How can a community help alleviate the pain of an individual's loss?
3. What should be one's reaction to those who cause the death of a loved one?
4. What is "forgiveness?" And is it always possible to "forgive?"
5. Does one have an obligation to say good-bye to a terminally ill person? Is there a need for people to say good-bye? What if there is no chance to say good-bye?
6. Are there different degrees of loss? What are the common denominators between types of loss?
7. Why do those people who feel obliged to comfort the mourners during shiva often avoid the mourners after shiva? How can Sisterhood change this attitude?
8. Why do crises build community faster/better than simchas?
9. How can one generation in a community help the others in coping with loss?

CELEBRATING

1. What is community?
2. What is the role of the non-Jewish relative in a Jew's religious life cycle ceremonies?
3. Are there emotional components to being Jewish? Is so, can they be taught and learned? Are they important?
4. Is it important to have a community when one celebrates holidays and simchas?
5. How can one generation teach the other how to celebrate Jewishly?
6. How do we welcome a Jew-by-choice into our community?

JEWISH LIVING

1. What is community?
2. Why is study so important in enhancing Jewish living?
3. Why is study with other Jewish women important?
4. How does community enhance Jewish learning?
5. How does community enhance Jewish living?
6. How can a small group build a Jewish community to enhance their Judaism?
7. How does saying kaddish build community and enhance Jewish living?
8. How can Sisterhood enhance its members' Jewish life?
9. How can community enhance interpersonal relationships?

SPIRITUALITY

1. What is community?
2. Why is emotion important in the search for spirituality and worship?
3. Why are people hesitant to join a minyan? How can we encourage people to join a minyan?
4. What obligation do Women League leaders have to join minyans?
5. Is community necessary when one explores spirituality?
6. How can exploration of our Jewish heritage help one seek spirituality?
7. How can children help us seek the Divine and our Jewishness?
8. What are we seeking when we seek spirituality in our religious services and observances? Can it be attained?
9. How does prayer build community?
10. How can sisterhood Shabbat become important in building members' spirituality?
11. How can we make Judaism more meaningful to ourselves and our Sisterhood members?

QUOTATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

It is now more than ever necessary to preserve the Jewish community in a vital form. Albert Einstein, Cosmic Religion, 1929

Many of the precepts apply only to certain individuals, places and circumstances. It is only when all Jews are together as a community that the whole Torah can be fulfilled. J.M. Epstein, Kitzure Shné Huhot HaBerit, 1683

Separate not yourself from the community. Hillel Mishna: Abot, 2.4

Why is the Confession couched in the plural?...Because all Israel is one body, and every Jew is a member of that body. Hence follows mutual responsibility among all the members. I. Luria, quoted by Hertz DPB

The wicked son is he who excludes himself from the community. Mekilta, to Exod. 13.8

The community is Israel's rampart. Simeon b. Lakish Talmud: Baba Bathra 81

I believe in a world where there is a great deal of power at the local level, at the bottom, at the community, like a pyramid. What we've done is reverse it: the power is on the top, the weakness at the bottom.... We must go back to communities. Frank Tannenbaum quoted by H. Breit, NY Times, March 11, 1951