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To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
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4/27

Today is brought to you by the letter Q.

Q is for quiet. The hospital was quiet today. All our ICU beds are full, but our deaths are down and our Emergency Department has beds. Clusters of nurses whisper together. Many fewer white hazmat suits walk the halls. Everyone is quite sure we can't relax yet, but how long can you hold such heightened vigilance? Apparently my compassion fatigue got the best of me. Here's what happened:

We receive "consults" on patient charts. These are requests from the medical team for a chaplain to visit a patient with reasons like "poor prognosis" or "crying a lot". This is something every hospital I've ever worked in has. Someone always handles the consults in the department. Depending on the size of the hospital and the Spiritual Care department's reach, there might be a steady stream of consults throughout the day. We are a small department in the midst of a pandemic, and I have no idea what this department's normal consult flow is like, but we only get 3-4 a day currently. When I arrive, checking the consult list is among my first tasks. Today we had 4. I looked up the patient charts, triage the cases and call to schedule. My morning was full, but when I got to my first patient visit, it was in the ICU. I dress for the occasion (long white anti bacterial gown, gloves, N95, firm eye shield). I go through the "gate" decorated with labeled paper bags of PPE, wait until the automatic door closes before opening the next one, and walk onto the unit. I find the patient room, read the list of PPE necessary to enter (I'm all good, minus the hair thing called a bonnet, but I feel okay) and I go in to the room. It's hot in those negative pressure rooms, so I'm sweating and my glasses and eye shield fog up. They speak Mandarin, so I don't know what's said, but there are tears and it seems the pace of the conversation is slowing. I tell them I can give them another minute for goodbyes. Aaaaand done.

I'm so relieved it's over (and my sense is that this was a successful call for everyone). I begin to doff quickly. Glove inside glove, eye shield up, and per post consult etiquette, I introduce myself to the attending, to let her know what happened. She starts to stand up: "Umm, were you just in THERE"? "Yeah. Spiritual Care consult". "Why didn't you doff per the protocol for covid+/hospital born virus?!?!? Didn't you see the chart? You should have done that call from out here. Who the hell let you in there? This is no joke

4/24

So the expression "Lord have mercy"? Now I know why it came to be. When we don't have words for the things we hear and see. When the voices of reason that we trust, the people responsible for our employment and safety say things like "fuck if I know" ...all I can think of to say is Lord have Mercy.

Lord have mercy on the fresh, pretty, clear eyed nurses. Lord have mercy on the exhausted ones. Lord have mercy on the amazing, young, quick-responding new doctors. Lord have mercy on the veteran ones, who call me and cry. Lord have mercy on the parents of the 23 year old obese, autistic patient. Lord have mercy on the family who understood all to well my suggestion that they tell him, he can't respond, but maybe he hears you. Lord have mercy on the ones wrapped in white body bags who don't get picked up right away. Lord have mercy on

the ones wrapped in brown ones. Lord have mercy on the people who shower us "heros" with gifts of sweets and hamburgers. Lord have mercy on the ones who have to divide it, distribute it, unwrap it and cart away the trash. Lord have mercy on the ones who fast in devotion all day. Lord have mercy on the atheists who scoff. Lord have mercy on the ones who say "I'm fine" with a big smile. Lord have mercy on the ones who grin silently when they hear it.

Lord, have mercy on us. I'd like to end with Shabbat Shalom, but perhaps tonight that's a stretch.

4/23

The Muslim community did not want fresh food, just dates, juices and bottles of water placed in the masjid (I should've asked first..duh). They are all working, and will take a short break to pray before breaking fast, but not to really eat and theres nowhere for them to keep their food.. so for all of you who so readily volunteered to pitch in for a meal, your generosity and זריזות למצווה is duly noted, but for now, I have to decline. Apologies for the false alarm.

Wanna hear about my day?

My general feeling about the day isn't new - it felt long and sad. I did several planned spiritual care patient/family calls, and several staff ones. The staff see us coming with our iPads and our fresh duck Bill's and I know what's coming. They look hungry to talk, knowing I'm a safe repository for their grief. I always say hello, tell them what room and bed I'm going to. Standard practice. What do you know about what I'm walking into that I didnt read in the chart? I feel them watch me enter, then exit the room. Sometimes they send me to another room, sometimes they want to download. I can't call it "vent" cause that word has its own unique meaning now..they are exhausted and since all are forbidden from wearing make up, their vulnerable, exhausted skin gives them away. Their red rimmed eyes. So they start with pleasantries, about the weird weather (was that snow this morning?!), and then it comes. Eyes overflow, heads shake, and then whispered words. Dry snakes of fear and loathing. God. Rent checks. Death everywhere. Homework and dinner. "We're a religious family. The church is my community. When my 10 year old asks why God makes this happen, what can I say"? The anger is palpable. The self loathing. I identify. "I'm not sure God isnt as sad and angry as we are", I say. "I bet you taught your son that God is love and compassion, right? Well, what loving compassionate God would do a thing like this? Ask yourself if you can worship a God who would do this to Gods very own creations." She looks at me and says "your words are like honey, Rabbi". It's not that I don't believe my words, I do. They comfort me, too. What she doesnt know is that while I was talking to her, I was thinking about how seeing her face, swollen with fear and sadness and her sharp, quivering voice will stay with me for a long, long time as an image of God.

4/22

I'm getting used to things I didnt expect to ever feel okay with. I'm getting used wearing scrubs to work, donning PPE (but only doffing gloves) sterilizing it for reuse, and the enormous toll it takes to walk around wrapped in plastic, see the world through plastic, hold the pen through plastic. Its awkward, disorienting, slow and sweaty. It squeezes my nose and scratches my forehead. Its frightening what I can get used to.

There are things I can't seem to get used to. I can't get used to the look on the nurses faces- even the new ones, freshly imported from Texas or Philadelphia. I can't get used to the terror behind the eyes of the doctors who can't fix this. I can't get used to the dread on the faces of the EMTs, who have "5-10 DOAs a shift", or their supervisors who come to my office, close the door, and silently cry. I can't get used to the elevator opening and 2 stretchers with wrapped bodies rolling out. I can't get used to hearing conversations between 70+ year olds

like this one (it made me blush): "I love you". "I love you more". "No, I said it first". And coming in the next morning to hear that he'd died 2 hours later. I can't get used to being the camera-holder for pixedated, devastating, horrified goodbyes. I can't, I just can't.

4/21

I could barely haul myself out of bed this morning, but with Kobi's care and patience, I persisted and actually got into my scrubs, drank some delicious, hot coffee, and we drove off to Brooklyn.

I decided I absolutely had to take it easy today. And I did (hooray!). Late last night, between emergency calls (5 of them), I spoke with a friend who said something that struck a chord with me. She said she thinks that I am called to this work because something about it helps me feel connected to what being human is - the good and the bad of it, that the honesty of it grounds me.

I got a lot of necessary things accomplished today, but/and saw only one patient. I am on my way home, tired but not broken, tense but not terrified. I feel the subway platform beneath my feet, and I'm okay.

4/20

I have questions about time. I know when we are waiting for something (think your child's bat mitzvah) time seems to crawl, like pouring molasses in winter. Then during the simcha, time has this echoey feel, because the liminality of the moment makes time stand still and be neither present, past, nor future but a mush of them all. Then afterwards, the following shabbat say, it feels like it happened years ago. The week seems so long. So that's true when we have markers in the sand. But what of this? Was it just last night I felt so scared that I couldn't rest or was it a month ago? Yeah, I'm still scared, terrified in fact. But it's different. Like I'm metabolizing the fear somehow. Digesting it. Eating it.

I worked though this day as if I was walking through dirty water. I was tired, sure. And that lends itself to me being easily distracted, yes. But I couldn't see my feet- that is, I was fumbling and disorganized, slow and somewhat confused or disoriented or something. I watch bodies roll by in the hallways, I did face time calls with patient families: "no, he's not responding to your 7 year olds voice, I calmly say. Yes, I know he's moving, but that's the ventilator not him". "Of course I'll hold her hand while holding your voice near her ear so she can hear you. No she didn't squeeze my hand when you asked. I'm so sorry. I know, I know you were hoping (dare I tell him I was too?)". The day happened. Work was produced, medical charts updated, letters of thanks written, prayers said, data collected, staff comforted, interviews arranged...it all happened. But I might have only been barely there.

And how does this relate to my question about elasticity of time? It is because at each time today that I looked up and wondered where I was (at least a thousand), what day it is, who is driving this train and how do I get off, I realize it's the same day and I pray that God might know when this will end.

4/19

Kobi Tav made delicious shnitzel tonight, plus salad and excellent white wine. I ate and drank more than my fill because if I'm honest, I'm afraid of what I'll face tomorrow and somehow eating allowed me to stay in the present. It was a sweet Shabbat and an easy Sunday. I spoke to my nieces, one of my mentors, my dear friend..but Monday will still come when the sun rises, whether I want it to or not. Please continue (or start) to pray for me...

4/17

Today was 4 days long. So much happened but one idea kept repeating itself and seemed to

define the week. How can we, the chaplains best help the medical team?

Two ways:

1) Get video chats with as many families as possible. This means coordinating time and platforms with family members (face time, skype or WhatsApp) and medical teams (ha!!), reviewing charts, getting in the room alone around cleaning, respiratory therapists, etc. Facilitating the conversation by showing all parts of the condition (ventilation, ekgs, feeding apparatus, monitors, swelling, etc.), visibly trying to rouse patient, talking the family through what they're experiencing and so on. Each visit takes up to 2 hrs including follow-up with the referring docs, writing the note, and doffing, donning.

2) Figuring out how to reframe the family's religious focus from: "we're pray so hard, but he's still really sick. This makes us feel abandoned and angry with God " to: "praying for comfort and peace feels so hopeful", or their ideas of the patient from: "he's a fighter, he'll get through this" to: "hes fighting to let go of the life he loved so much".

The doctors I worked with (I made 3 video chats happen today) made me ache. They're tired and young and scared. They want a win, a hug, a tear of joy. Can't blame them.

The expression Shabbat Shalom is taking on new meaning. Best wishes to all for a hug, a win, some joy.

4/16

It was a full day. There was normal administration to do - notes to write up, follow up calls, the diocese dilemma continues, the palliative care roster to review, etc.

My team and I continue to absorb the enviromental pain, fear and despair. The humour around is darker, the skins are thicker, the fuses are shorter. At least it's not silent any more. I guess we're growing accustomed to this new normal. I notice they're discharging geriatric Covid+ patients back to their nursing homes (including both "omein" and the kippa one). I learned that the homes are setting up communal rooms for them, to stave off loneliness and delirium.

Besides my administrative duties, I cared for 10 different patient families by phone today. 3 catholics, 2 Jews, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Muslim (Bengali), 2 Christian's and 1 "no religion". Each story was heartbreaking and complex. One was on their second terminal extubation in the family, 3 were hospital employee's loved ones, 3 needed to plan video conferencing for tomorrow with more than 3 people besides the hospital (me). Each of the 10 will be planning funerals before next weekend. I gently use expressions which are starting to feel natural like: "I cannot imagine what these conversations must be like when you are so close to hearing of the end of your father's life".

I heard desparate messages from around the hospital today: from the geriatric unit "we have some beds open, that has to be a good sign, right"? From the EMTs: "we are getting more calls than ever, but people are gone when we arrive. People are afraid to go to hospital. They know they'll die alone there." From the palliative team: "this is happening in waves and we had only 10 deaths overnight- we must be on a hiatus. It reminds me of the early days of A.I.D.S."

And so another evening rolls in, I'm getting used to the routine - handing things over, piece by piece by the door. Kobi wipes each one down and sets aside: glasses, mask, shoe, shoe, phone,

phone, wallet, badge, watch - until it's just me, my scrubs, my socks and my hair elastic. I'll go into a scalding hot shower. Kobi will wash my clothes in the tub later (now who's the hero?!).

4/15

We've made havdalah and Passover is over for another year (now that we are official 1 day yom tov observers). It didn't really feel like passover to me at all. I'm just achey and sad and tired and don't want to go back to work tomorrow. Or ever. I like being at home, a short break outside to take a little sun, reading with the cat on my lap, a nap, learning a little with Kobi...no mask, no shield, no gloves, no fear, no hesitation when I stand up to leave my desk, no pause when the phone rings, no tiny jump when my cell buzzes, no tension in my face when I wake in the morning... I pray for this dark, dark time to pass swiftly and in our day. כן יהי רצון.

4/14

Today began with sun, a ride to work (thanks to Jon Brownsteins car and Kobi Tavs planning and driving!!) and the chance to shoot the breeze with our girl! I started my day with a patient visit as I'd promised the daughter of 95 year old man, I'd bring him a kippa (he didn't like it- too small). While I was there the nurse asked me if I would visit another nonagenarian, so I got to use the MARTI a translation service with live real time translators. Really awesome. It was like an iPad propped on a wheelie device and when I clicked in, and chose "Russian" a woman appeared, introduced herself, and helped me learn that this man wanted me to make משרך, a a prayer for his repaired health and wellbeing. Awesome! I'm thrilled he didnt say anything mean, the nurses warned me that he could be tough. At the end he was quiet and then suddenly bust out with "Omein". He clearly replied with as much strength as possible. He coughed..a lot. "Omein, Omein"! The nurses said. They told me they hadn't seen him say anything in days. They started to say it too, with great enthusiasm, almost shouting.. "omein omein, hallelujah"!! Dare I say he smiled? Well, that would be an embellishment, because of course he had a maskcovering his face, but a girl can dream, can't she?

4/13

Renewal of body, renewal of spirit have meaning. I thank God that today happened when I was not depleted. It began with a bloody monsoon and then seeing my train stop entirely covered in graffiti inside. Lawlessness reigns. Wind and pouring rain, warm and dark. If I believed in such things I would say Gods furious. I had more stories of death and bodies and tears then I have since this scourge began.

The intensity caught me by the throat. 1st the numbers- how many dead over the weekend, how many last night til today. "What will they do with all the bodies", one of my pal care teammates asked. An EMT died, 25 are home sick with Covid. One of the Emergency Operations people a marine, called weeping. A colleague died alone. "I can't take anymore bodies, I just cant", she wailed.

I went up to see 2 patients, I did video calls with both. Both are covid+. They are both "full code" right now, meaning if they go into heart or lung failure, they have to be resuscitated.

These calls are referrals. The docs want families to release them. Families don't understand what they're asking of the teams. The medical team call us in to video chat with family. The idea being if they see with their own eyes the dramatic changes, they will allow their loved one to die in peace. I hope it doesn't sound manipulative. It's not. Its 100% about compassion. For the patient, for the Rapid Response Teams and their families and for the family who are going to lose their patient either way.

I did my first referral with the priest. He and I tag teamed well. Both to bear witness together, to be in the sadness together and to work together. We prayed (Lords Prayer which I only kind if recall from middle school), he anointed the patient with oil, we took turns holding the phone, so that family sees all angles. I spoke with the daughter afterwards in the hall and told her we could do this again with the Doctor tomorrow. She could only nod as she wiped her face dry.

4/8

I'm scared I've hit a wall.

I did no work today, none.

Got nothing accomplished.

I cried (thanks for holding that pain Naomi Kalish).

I got in 2 disputes (one with my boss, one with my priest).

I have had 1.5 (still riding) absolutely terrifying subways rides with train cars packed with itchy, jittery, hungry, very mentally ill and physically sick fellow passengers (thanks Governor Cuomo and Mayor Bill DeBlasio).

I know but do not feel Pesach beginning in a few hours.

I am really missing my girl.

4/7

I'm possibly just too wiped out to reflect today. This might just be a list of some of the events that filled my broken heart...but please don't misunderstand - your love and virtual support of these musings are like balm on my wounds. Like water in the wilderness. Here it goes:

I went with another chaplain to about a quarter of all nursing stations today to check in and to deliver a copy of laminated cards (see below, I hope you can enlarge it). We explained the purpose of them is to honor a life when no loved one can be present and to honor the dedication of the care-giver who was present.

I walked 10,000 steps before 1pm doing that.

The young woman who lost her father yesterday, remember her? I had about 15 texts and calls with her to help her with funeral arrangements, how to retrieve, unpack and disinfect her deceased fathers belongings, claiming and identifying his body.

I brokered peace between my palliative care team's needs for my entire team to be given PPE so that we can facilitate final conversations between patients and their families and the hospital's supply guardians- we are waiting for one more sign-off and then we will be granted one, (ONE!) set of PPE each to pick up in the morning.

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