**Practical Guide to Comforting the Mourners - Nichum Aveleim** (cliff notes version)

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**Disclaimer**—any of this can be broken into many classes—this is an abbreviated set of notes to give you an outline of what was covered today, as requested.

**Disclaimer #2-** These are merely some things to think about . It is not an application form to see if you are suited for this or not. Rather if your heart is drawn to this and you are reading this, you are likely right for this calling. There are many many things that can contribute to other people who are in mourning depending on your capacity to serve.

PS-This seems like the course you want me to teach—this is the first handout (LOL)

These self reflections are merely a guide for you to see where you want to place yourself in this work.

It is as if you are a tennis player—are you a beginner or a skilled competitive player? Good to know so you don’t arrange a game with someone out of your league or you can both be frustrated. That said, you can both absolutely play –just not necessarily on the same court.

Remember this is the world of no right and wrong—just a true assessment. Also remember everyone starts as beginners at some point in their lives.

**Focus First on How we prepare ourselves.**

**Our Spiritual Practice—check in with ourselves**

As with the Tahara, this work has the potential to be a powerful spiritual practice. I believe we must start with our preparation first.

First you must **attune** to yourself –what is going on for you? This is a practice where we want to have yourego in check to the best of your ability

**Attuning-acclimatize, harmonize with yourself**

Reflect on how you are feeling in your body -There are lots of exercises available to ground –body movement, chanting, meditating, being in nature, deep breathing, etc etc to feel connected with yourself ,

Reflect on how you are feeling with your emotions. Again, there are lots of exercises to be in the

present moment-could be the same—body movement, chanting, nature, writing out our feelings, etc

Know to the best of your ability how much you can take in and respect your boundaries without judgment

**Self Reflection when thinking about another**

How do you do when someone you love is in pain?

 Do you want to jump out of your skin and run away? Are you freaked out?

 Do you listen because you feel you “should” but really can’t wait for it to be over?

How do you do when someone is with you and they are crying or having some deep emotions?

 Do you feel you have to save them?

How do you feel with silence?

 Does it make you uncomfortable to have those quiet moments with someone?

 Do you feel you have to “do something?”

And mostly how do you feel with your own pain? Do you try to move from it?

 Does it make you angry? Is there room for compassion?

I gave the example of imaging a wounded bird that you want to help—imagine a bird flew into your window by accident this morning and is in pain. I picked a bird because it’s not an animal that we exactly cuddle up with.

So imagine how you would feel in the presence of this wounded animal.

Imagine how soft spoken and tender you would be in this presence.

Imagine how gently you would move so that they would feel safe with you.

This is because they are vulnerable and hurting and don’t have their usual defensive structure to keep themselves intact. Rather, at this moment they depend on the kindness of others to help them. So it is with mourners.

Another way to think of it is to imagine your behavior as you were walking into a Shiva. What reverence do you feel for that moment?

**What to Do**

**What to do for yourself**

Totally give to that human being . This is totally their time and not yours.

Become non attached to the results—there are actually no results –just presence

Stay in the moment as much as possible—don’t be thinking of what you are going to do next, or if you are doing a good job or thinking about your next sentences. Trust your kavannot –your intention to support you through

It is OK and totally appropriate to not know what to do—actually there’s nothing to do. What to do depends on what is happening between you and the mourner–it is a dance you dance with each other so it cant be necessarily pre-planned . But you can say “I don’t know what to say now” (if you feel that way). It builds trust that you are allowing them to be exactly as they are and you are not there to change them

Your task is to be with whatever comes up

Surrender to the moment

Slow down

Learn to be comfortable with uncomfortable feelings

Learn to be comfortable with silence.

Best advice I have it to “do nothing”—rather this is about “being”.

Think of a moment when you felt comforted or wish you had a community to comfort you –what did you like or what would you have wanted at that moment?

Or Does it make you feel uncomfortable to have someone care for you? –just notice

Explore your edges with this

Again, remember there are no right and wrong ways to be—just what is

The “goal” if there is one is just to connect with another being. No agenda

**What to do for the mourner**

**Attuning**-**acclimatize, harmonize with the mourner** (doesn’t matter if you know them or not)

Feel the sense that there is a human suffering from a great loss. Have compassion for them. Hold them in your heart/mind and be spacious to allow their experience to be appropriate for them

Hold them in reverence for the reactions they may be going through whatever they may be

Practice surrendering and acceptance-- No judgment

Know their pain has nothing to do with you

You didn’t cause it and you cant fix it.

You can only walk beside them in their pain

Breathe in to this moment

Practice with friends if you need to

5 stages –denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance –they can be at any point and are not linear

**Once you assess yourself how do you start**?

First know yourself –how much can you take?

If you are new at this and/or feel unskilled, you can start as a beginner

There are many ways to start small—you can wait till the 2nd month or 3rd month to contact someone which is a wonderful thing to do since the overwhelm of the immediate response is over and it could be a good time for them to have visitors.

Also the further from the death the more in acceptance they probably are by that time.

You can start by sending notes or making phone calls and not having face to face contact.

And you can always team up with other supporters so you don’t have to do this alone

If you feel stuck, you can always ask to hear about their beloved—that is so healing for the person to talk about them, tell stories, etc. You can ask leading open ended questions to engage them in talking about their beloved. (come from curiosity-- tell me about…….) You can say “tell me about your husband. How did you two meet?”. They may say it’s too painful –if so **ALWAYS respect their boundaries** –follow their lead

Allow for silence. Check in with yourself. The silence might be hard for you. Maybe that’s your spiritual edge.

What **NOT** to do

Do NOT take up the space with your issues --do NOT say, “oh yeah, that happened to me with my mother’s death too” and start telling your story. Do NOT do that

Do NOT Listen through your experience, rather hear through their experience –imagine how that would feel for them to have gone through whatever they are telling you

Do NOT Imagine you know what they are going through—certainly do not say that (“I know just what you are going through” ---no—you don’t know what they are going through and it can appropriately anger some people)

Do NOT be attached to any results

Do NOT come to heal them or fix them or change them. (their job, not yours)

Do NOT think about what you are going to answer—(live on the edge and allow yourself to say “I don’t know what to say”, “I don’t know how to respond to that” if that is true)

Do NOT speak more than 20-30% of the time

Unlike the Tahara, there are no formulas for doing this work

With a tahara there is a definite routine to follow with clear steps- start to end

There are no formulas here as to being in the present moment.

This is as it unfolds

Like a boat on the water without a rudder

But remember my story of a little /big.

Something so minor to someone can be tremendous to someone else

We never know and can only know if we show up

I invite you all to explore this deeply fulfilling mitzvah

Good luck