

IT MAKES YOU LIVE

Rabbi Arnie Belzer

There is a Yiddish word, best understood when you consider a 103 degree day and a little old lady on Coney Island in Brooklyn, coming out of a stifling apartment. She goes to the ocean and lifts a little water up and says, “M’Chayah.” What it literally means is “it makes you live.” I think transformation is something that makes you live. You can exist; but really living is the challenge and the reward. Transformation is what really makes you live; it’s a M’Chayah.

From our very first conversations more than 20 years ago, the Mastery Foundation has been about sharing something life-giving with those who pour themselves out in ministry and service to others. We saw that so many dedicated individuals and religious institutions were involved in crisis—sometimes a crisis of faith, sometimes a crisis of organization, sometimes a crisis of relationship. And we saw that our shared experience and our methodology gave us some insight into how to assist them in bringing transformation to those situations.

The Making a Difference workshop was our first effort to come together to empower those in ministry to make the lasting, positive difference they had committed their lives to, but also to break our deliberations with significant times of shared spiritual experience and silence in the practice of Centering Prayer. I can’t think of any other interfaith organization of people of faith where we have such a commonality that is spiritual.

That is very powerful, to be able to share that spiritual experience through Centering Prayer, where there is no liturgy, no text, no theology. There is only each person sitting in silence, dwelling for those few minutes in relationship to the divine presence at the center of his or her religious faith. Yet in that silence we share together, certainly we have more in common than those things in our religions that separate us.

I have come to believe that there are really two religions in the world: Those people who say ‘yes’ to life and those people who say ‘no’ to life. And I think people who share the ‘yes’ to life in different religions have more in common with each other than they do with people in their own culture or specific religious tradition who say ‘no’ to life.

As someone who has been involved in the Mastery Foundation since its beginning, I believe in dreams. I believe that it is entirely possible to bring people together in a way that they can participate in their own transformation and in the transformation of those in their congregations and communities. We’ve seen that in many situations—what an amazing kind of transformation that can be.

Arnie Belzer is rabbi of Temple Mickve Israel in Savannah, Georgia, the third oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. He has been part of the Mastery Foundation from its beginning.

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This workshop brought me back to the power of my original calling to ministry in 1982. Even though I was doing all the right things, I had lost much of the power and possibility of being who I am, an apostle of God.

Just saying that at the time was a big stretch, but it helped me be a better pastor and caused me to do things that enabled me to go forward in my ministry.

*Reverend Courtney Canty, Pastor
Wayman Memorial A.M.E. Church, Baltimore, MD*

There are two dimensions to be aware of in ministry, but they are dimensions which are difficult to reach – that of who we are and how to be present to the presence of the divine in ourselves and others. For me, the workshop was a discovery that gave me access again and again to the power of being present and to the power of transformation. Transformation is a shift in our being; social transformation unites us with others, acting in the same space, focusing together for the common good.

*Msgr. Winus J. Roeten
New Orleans, Louisiana*

The distinctions of this workshop continue to open and further my ministry in new ways all the time. And over the years, the habit of Centering Prayer has deepened my relationship with God, and brought a greater depth of appreciation for my vocation as a Dominican, which is to be both contemplative and active.

*Sr. Fionnuala Quinn O.P.
Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Houma
Thibodaux, Louisiana*

This workshop opened me up to new possibilities as a Baptist minister. In 1994, I was pastor of a church in Virginia that had organized some years before and had a number of very active community ministries and needed to build a facility in order to continue. The congregation had hit a stalemate regarding building, and I could not find a way to lead them out of it. When I took the course, the distinctions and Centering Prayer led me to a breakthrough. Three years later, the congregation marched into a new facility. My ministry has continued to grow in other venues as I continue to practice the principles learned in this course.

*The Rev. Dr. Clinton McNair
Director of Pastoral Counseling
Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry*

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