**Board of Rabbis of Southern California 9/10/2010**

# Watch One, Do One, Teach One

Parashat Bereshit: Genesis 1:1-6:8
Haftarah: Isaiah 42:5-43:10

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A midrash teaches that when Abel was killed by his brother Cain he was lying in a field and his parents Adam and Eve came and sat by the side of his body. They cried and they mourned for him for this was the first death that they had ever known, the first death that the world had ever known. And because it was the first for them and the first for the world they didn't know what to do with Abel's body. A raven, whose companion had also just died (so maybe it was the first human death) said: "I will teach Adam what to do." The raven took his dead companion, dug up the earth as Adam and Eve watched, and buried him in it. Adam said to Eve: "We will do as the raven has done, and together they took the body of their son and buried him in the ground." (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 21)

How do we know how to do anything? If we have never done it before how do we know even how to begin? I guess for some tasks we just jump in and try, perhaps the stakes are not so high or our confidence level is such that nothing seems impossible. Indeed many of us have work benches and garages littered with our failed attempts at assembly or repair without reading the instructions as we applied this jump-right-in approach.

But for others, like Adam and Eve on discovering the death of their son Abel the lack of prior experience (thank G-d) or a

reference point can be paralyzing. And so we just sit there stuck, scared, alone and unsure of how to proceed. Were it not for the raven, those parents might still be sitting there by the side of their son, head in heads, tears streaming down their cheeks not knowing what to do. And were it not for the rabbi, many in our community would be doing the same.

We come into the hospital room, the hospice home, the living room and as we hold a family we say to them, here is what we do now, and this is what we do when and they watch and they learn and they are comforted. The midrash teaches that we must be perceptive; that Torah exists in the world if we pay attention and follow the good example of others. It reminds us that we must study and learn a task so that we can fulfill it correctly, efficiently, successfully. Our tradition continues that after study we must move to action, to doing - because we know that to have only the theory without the application is not enough to make it part of our skill set. Once we have studied it and applied it then our empathy for others motivates us to teach the skill to them so they will not feel the same sense of hopelessness we felt.

In the medical world, this philosophy is known by the mantra, "Watch one, do one, teach one." It is a comforting thought that as my dentist takes a drill to my molar he has watched others do what he is about to attempt, that I am not the first he has tried this on, and in fact he has so mastered the procedure that he can teach it to others.

The same philosophy applies in Jewish tradition, indeed the very idiom "Jewish tradition" acknowledges that these are practices and insights passed down *l'dor v'dor* from generation to generation. Think of the Bar Mitzvah boy who studies, leads the service then tutors his classmates in preparation for their own. Think of the new board members

who are mentored as they come up and mentor others as they leave office. Indeed think of the young rabbi you once were and the people who taught you how to walk into that room and those students you teach now by your own example and experience.

Were it not for the raven, were it not for the rabbi, were it not for the good example, we would be stuck. Everything is easier when have a teacher to guide you. In this New Year, who is your teacher, who are your students, what have you learned that you can share with others?