



Will Raphael Be At Your Seder Table?

‘OH NO!’ I hear you say. ‘Isn’t it enough that we already lay a place for Elijah?’ Well I guess you are right but maybe we can find a place for him in our minds, as we sit round the table and ask the questions - possibly re-enacting one of the earliest ever examples of education by participation. Raphael Jewish Counselling Service was born just over twenty-five years ago. Known then as The Raphael Centre, (though there never was an actual ‘centre’!) it originated to offer help to our own Rabbis and leaders who were no more averse to stress and worry than their congregants. Indeed they were as human as those who sought their help and advice, and then as now, it was a burden that was best borne when they were able to ‘offload’ their particular concerns.

I always find the idea of the four sons in the Seder story, somewhat intriguing. The wise one, the wicked one, the simple one, they are not difficult to understand and many footnotes have been devoted to them. But of the one son who ‘does not know how to ask’, I do have a problem.. Maybe he just thinks he does not know how to ask. Possibly Raphael could have taken him under his wings, enabled him to restore or even attain, some self-esteem. Could this be a question to broaden our Passover horizons this year?

THE NAME ‘RAPHAEL’ refers appropriately to Raphael, the angel, who was the one who, so the story goes, fought off the demon and healed the sick. My efforts so far have failed to find what medicine, if any, he prescribed, or indeed the nature of the illnesses that he tended. It would seem that my predecessors who took his name did so to provide an opportunity to continue his work. Future historians will find little evidence of our activities, however, due to the confidentiality that surrounds so much of what we do. Hopefully, in these few paragraphs I can give you an outline of who we are, where we are, how we are and how you may be able to take advantage. We are a London un-based registered charity that exists to do Raphael’s work. Professional counsellors see clients who may be seeking help due to a multitude of problems, on a weekly basis.. They may be unduly stressed, finding it difficult to cope, have marital problems, be recently bereaved, lost a job, worried without knowing why, or possibly suffering from a trauma. Sometimes their local doctor will suggest they get in touch, or they may see an advertisement, or their Rabbi may point them in our direction. Or they might be reading these words right now. The procedure is simple. One phone call to our 24 hour answering service **0870 787 5056**, to which a reply can be anticipated from an ‘intake counsellor’ very quickly. Usually, following an initial assessment, there will be an appropriate placement.

THERE IS no pressure, and cost is discussed at the first meeting. One is expected to pay according to one’s ability so to do; no-one is turned away for financial reasons. We have rooms in Finchley, Golders Green, St John’s Wood and Harrow, with some counsellors seeing clients from their own rooms at home. Raphael’s coffers are helped thanks to donations by trust funds, benefactors, synagogues, and ‘Angels’, the latter making monthly payments. The ‘Friends of Raphael’ put on various fundraising events including golf days, supper quizzes, and concerts. Raphael prides itself on being ‘inclusive’, as is evidenced by our first two patrons, Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks and Rabbi Tony Bayfield, plus rabbinic consultants from the orthodox and progressive communities. Raphael really is a story about freedom. Like those Jews who escaped from slavery all those years ago, many of our friends and acquaintances may find with Raphael, a route to their personal freedom. You might be able to show them the way!

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