

A Little Fatherly Advice Pays Off

STUART M. ISRAEL SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH NEWS

My younger son, Nick, is a Psychological Operations (PsyOp) officer in the U.S. Army. He often wears civilian clothes in his work. I am his wardrobe consultant, at least when it comes to business suits. I have lots of experience wearing business suits, gained over decades practicing law.

Nick used to be an Armor officer. He never wore business suits at work. He often wore flame-resistant ACUs and a tank commander's helmet, like the one that ended the presidential aspirations of Michael Dukakis in 1988.

When Nick switched from Armor to PsyOp, he needed business suits. I advised him to start with Brooks Brothers basics: a dark blue suit and a

dark gray suit. My advice has served him well throughout the U.S., in the Middle East and in Europe. You can't go wrong with Brooks Brothers basics. No promotional fees were paid for this comment, but would be welcomed.

Earlier in the year, Nick was invited to a black-tie charity event in New York City. It would be attended by many *machers* — policymakers, politicians, pundits and philanthropists. Black-tie! Nick called me for sartorial advice. While my expertise is business suits, I did wear a tux to the senior prom sometime in the 1960s.

Don't worry, I told Nick; wear your dark blue suit. You will not be ejected. Besides, what's the alternative, a rental? Feh!

Can I wear my best shirt, Nick asked; it's blue. Wear your blue shirt, I answered. This is the new millennium. People wear white after Labor Day. How about a red tie, Nick asked. Same answer. There will be others wearing dark suits and bright ties. It is a charity event, not the Oscars.

Nick texted a photo from the event, reproduced here. Nick is on the left. His dark-suited, blue-shirted, red-tied companion is eminent Harvard law professor and author Alan Dershowitz.

When it comes to dressing for success, Nick now knows I am the go-to guy. Lucky for the first President Bush that Gov. Dukakis didn't have me on his payroll. ➔



Fashionistas Nick Israel and Alan Dershowitz.

“Happy Fathering Day”



Perry Ohren

Lots of us are lucky to be parents; about half of us lucky ones are fathers. Being a father is a status. It's something you are. To father (I'm not referring to the procreation part here) is a verb; it's something you do. Fathering is the everyday, joy-filled, sometimes-excruciating, dirt-under-your-fingernails, awake-in-the-middle-of-the-night, am-I-making-the-right-decision, angst-ridden, roller-coaster-ride many of us *do* every day. *Doing* fathering *well* is the challenge.

My round-the-clock job is fathering. Sometimes I do a good enough job and sometimes I just show up and it works out, and sometimes I err. All in a day's work!

I was lucky to grow up in a home with a father. He's 82 now, just had his second knee replaced and celebrated his 60th wedding anniversary last week. He grew up in a time when fathering was a status. Get a job/be a breadwinner/show up. As time marched on, he realized that it was socially acceptable to father ... to be involved and curious about all things child (and grandchild). Handshakes turned into hugs and full-throated pride.

My day job is as a social worker who runs

Jewish Family Service. JFS helps fathers of all stripes. Jewish. Gentile. Poor. Wealthy. Orthodox. Homeless. Suicidal. Scared. Old. Young. Proud. Unemployed. Adult children. Holocaust survivors. Fathers come to JFS with all kinds of problems. Problems making ends meet. Problems with their kids. Problems with their partners. Problems with their aging parents. Problems getting older. Problems with addiction. But ... problems are rarely singular. In other words, “I cannot pay this month's utility bill” is connected to “My partner and I aren't getting along any more” is connected to “I'm worried about my kid.”

JFS doesn't have all the answers, but we partner with fathers to help figure out some directions, some options, some ways to change. My experience is that most people (men perhaps in particular) don't want to do the changing, but would rather have “the other stuff” around them change.

I don't pretend to have any wisdom on the subject. I've come to realize in my personal and professional journeys that (cliché forthcoming) life is hard. We fathers, and I think a big part of this is gender role socialization (i.e., how

we learn to be boys→men), have to: 1. Realize there's a challenge. 2. Want to do something about it. 3. Do something about it.

The “doing something about it” most often means letting other people in or asking for help. This counters that gender role socialization stuff I just referenced and for some (me included) it is not easy (understatement intended).

The reality for us fathers is that we're probably most fulfilled when we let others in/are vulnerable/realize we don't have to do it alone. And, essentially, that's my point about fathering. It's an interactive process that involves *being* there (there's no app for that!). Being open to the experience, not having to be an expert in it, learning along the way and packing large doses of humility helps us fathers to father.

I'm lucky to be a father to three kids, straddling 20 years of age, give or take three years. So thanks for the ride to my children, thanks for fathering and “Papa'ing” Dad, and Happy Fathering Day to all. ➔

Perry Ohren is a social worker, the CEO of Jewish Family Service, the son of Tom Ohren and, on a good day, fathering Rebecca, Caleb and Charlie Driker-Ohren.