

Bringing Community Together

by Ronit Peleg

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A few days ago, I watched two programs that addressed the fall of the education system in the USA.

The first program, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, featured the film, "Waiting For Superman," a disturbing, yet moving documentary about the deteriorating school system.

Coincidentally, that night CNN's Anderson Cooper discussed the bullying taking place in schools and via cyberspace. This bullying has resulted in many young people taking their lives, by committing suicide out of shame and lack of support. At times, these young people deal with great pain with no help in sight.

That night, *I couldn't sleep because I felt so frustrated to know the answer. There is a way to bring the community together. How? Build trust by creating a safe space for teachers, parents, school staff and children, where all can come together and build a community where each voice is given the time to be heard without fear of judgment.*

A place where differences of color, race, gender, religion,sex are not only **accepted**, but also **respected**.

A place of **heart felt communication**.

The place of council practice.

In today's fast-paced society, we lose sight of our humanity, and can result in great suffering, feeling lonely or disconnected.

Kids turn to violence to get the attention they need, particularly bullying. It gives them a feeling of superiority for the moment and builds up their ego, but underneath there is an insecure child that screams:

"Love me. Hold me. See me. Listen !!!!!!"

In the circle, in that safe space, each child gets a chance to hold the talking piece and feel empowered even if he or she doesn't speak freely. Everyone listens.

We share stories in the **council** and we create a ceremony!

We dedicate the **council**! We know that these lost practices are necessary for building a community.



By sharing stories, we see and feel that we are not alone! Get healed and feel comforted. Feel held and supported.

I sat with thousands of students and parents, rich and poor, from a number of diverse cultures. I sat with principals, that for the first time, sat with a class of special needs kids, kids who were put into a special class- doomed to be the object of ridicule by the rest of the students. Of course they were violent, angry, and created more trouble!

After sitting with me in council, feeling safe and respected as special souls, I invited the principals to come sit with us in a circle. I asked the kids to share what it feels like to be in the special class. The kids and the principals (including me) cried. The kids shared that its like going to be slaughtered everyday. It's humiliating and degrading. The kids shared! And it continued for the rest of the day, week, and year! They turned their anger, humiliation and pain to violence. There was no other way to get attention.

In council we listened, we saw, we held them, and as a result, the kids wanted to sit all day. The principals admitted it was the wrong move to separate them from the regular class, yet they had no better solution.

Now they know!

You should have seen these kids model at our program's fashion show fundraiser! They truly shined in front of 400 guests, including the city's mayor, school officials, media and guests.

I know council works! For the past 30 years, it's proved to be successful in the LA school districts and it continues to grow and reach many other schools. It is also growing in Israel, slowly penetrating and making a difference there. And now it is being introduced in Europe!

It's high time we all connect to our humanity and our hearts, through the simple ways our ancestors set in council.

Many years ago, I was crowned Miss Israel & second runner-up to Miss Universe. I traveled the world and shared stories about life in Israel, and I was eventually recognized as a Goodwill Ambassador.

Shortly after, I was drafted to the Israeli army. Upon my return home, my photo landed in *Time Magazine* with the headline, "Israel's Secret weapon!"

Today, my mission is to bring council to schools around the globe. This practice gave

me hope when I searched for a way of connecting to myself as well as to my husband, family, friends, and community. **Council** brought me home, connected me to my story, my heart, and my feelings.

It connected me to being compassionate.

It taught me to be tolerant with others and less judgmental. It taught me **kindness!** It taught me to be more **respectful** both to myself as well as to others. Council taught me **patience.**

And it taught me to be **trusting.**

This is my work in the world. My vision.

Every child in every class in every school will start the day with **council**, where we will ask, "How are you today!"

It's my hope for a better world that I can pass this practice on to my grandchildren, to all children.

I am ready to share my secret weapon and bring peace.

Amen.

Ronit