

From the desk of **ARTHUR HORWITZ**

Dear Friends,

I just visited ALYN Hospital, one of my favorite places in Israel, where one therapist caught my attention...

Magic Michael, a “medical magician”, was working hand-in-hand with a physiotherapist, coaxing “Karim” to walk a balance beam, while his mother and older brother watched. Karim was swatting balloons that Magic Michael tossed in his direction. Dressed like a clown, Magic Michael engaged the boy in some fencing, using long, slender balloons as swords. Karim’s older brother couldn’t contain himself and jumped in to play too; while his mother, wrapped from head to toe in modest garb, watched silently, but with appreciative eyes.

Karim, a Muslim Gaza resident, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. A homicide bomber from Gaza, intending to explode himself in the midst of Israeli soldiers guarding an entry point into Israel, detonated prematurely and hit Karim. The bombing sent this innocent young boy into a coma for three weeks. When he awakened he faced a host of physical disabilities and was referred to ALYN.

Only Magic Michael, with tzitzes dangling from a clown’s vest, could coax the boy into doing his physical therapy.

As Karim’s therapy was ending, a 4-year-old boy, “David”, entered the room with *his* mother, also covered almost head to toe in modest, Orthodox garb. David, too, was almost totally covered, but in stark white gauze bandages. The exposed part of the boy’s face was beet red and blotchy. One of his arms was set at almost a 90-degree angle. A physiotherapist took a small snake from a cage and draped it around David’s shoulders. The boy reached upward to grasp it. Then, Magic Michael came over, blowing bubbles into the air. Again, David reached for the bubbles, unknowingly doing the therapeutic exercise he desperately needed for his arms; resulting in a rare smile on an otherwise ravaged face. The mother stared, silently, only feet away from Karim’s mother.



Magic Michael, a “medical magician” spearheads ALYN’s Humor Therapy Program. He is shown here engaging David.

But there was no sibling to jump in and play this time....David was playing with matches and burned down his family’s apartment. His younger brother died in the blaze.

So how do you explain Magic Michael and the amazing results he achieves with the children at ALYN Hospital in Jerusalem? He is not a member of Israel’s Knesset. He isn’t asked whether his politics lean toward Likud, Labor or Kadima. His views on Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, to separate Israelis from Palestinians, are not solicited.

His belt contains balloons, balls and bubbles, not bullets. His clientele are children who are referred to ALYN, Israel’s only pediatric multi-disciplinary rehabilitation center.

In a region where people, religion and geography are intertwined, physical barriers enhance security for Israelis and reshape the demographic equation so Jews remain a majority in their own country. The “C” word, coexistence, which reached its high-water mark via the Oslo Peace Accords, sits atop the dung heap as one more romantic, dance-the-hora-around-the-campfire concept that fails in the face of homicide bombings and inept, spineless Palestinian political leadership.

Throughout ALYN, coexistence exists at its most basic level. In the neonatal intensive care area or the hydrotherapy pool, there is a definite and obvious mixing of Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims, *united by the needs of their children*. Magic Michael and all his fellow staff members and the children of ALYN remind us that despite the fears, the tensions and distrust:

There are opportunities for our humanity toward others to be illuminated.

It’s what keeps a civil society civil during turbulent times and what makes me proud to support ALYN.



Arthur M. Horwitz
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