

The Delray Democrat

My Teacher, the Rabbi-Rouser¹

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Many years ago, I participated in a fund-raising 25-mile bike event. The bike I had was old but with multi-speed settings, so I thought it to be a more than O.K. Oh! Was I wrong! As the ride progressed, I was surprised when so many others seemed to effortlessly pass me. The “so many others” included four-year-olds on trikes and even a zombie on a pogo stick. Not only did I learn humility, but I was inspired to get a new and lighter bike and then try again.

That was a metaphor for my personal experience in activism with Barry Silver. I had considered myself a fighter for the separation of church and state since my ninth-grade protest against a religious Christmas event at my public high school. In my adulthood, I wanted to start a PBC chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (Americans United). When I contacted the Americans United office, I was advised to reach out to someone called Barry Silver who also expressed such an interest in my area. I had already seen Barry when he was the featured speaker at Center for Inquiry event in Broward County. So, I knew what he looked like and, when our paths crossed at a Delray Art Festival, I introduced myself. That is where it began.

Over the years, Barry got me involved with a plethora of causes and events. He always sought to include others and I was part of the “others.” We worked together to create a progressive “umbrella” organization which he called the Justice League. He asked me to participate in a lawsuit he launched against the PBC School District for its failure to teach the science of evolution to middle school children . . . and to use the term, “evolution” instead of “gradual change over time.”

Barry was an activist in the fight for common sense gun regulation and always made a “space” at his rallies to comment on gun carnage and reforms needed. Barry organized, with Michael Cantwell (editor of *The Delray Democrat* newsletter), a public gathering supporting the people of the Ukraine. He argued against the selling of farmland in the Ag. Reserves at a Palm Beach County Commission meeting. And he filed suit to prove that the bans on abortion rights were an example of the intrusion of one religious perspective on others, regardless of their religious affiliations or non-affiliations. He had so many issues, so many projects and so many concerns.

So, let me now connect the dots. What relationship does the story about the 25-mile bike ride have with the story of my involvement with Rabbi Barry Silver. The analogy is that while I considered myself a respectable bike rider and learned that I had much to achieve in that realm, I also considered myself a respectable progressive activist and learned from Barry that I had much to achieve in the realm as well.

Barry was so amazingly informed, so eloquent a speaker, so linguistically talented that I felt honored (and, to be honest, surprised) that he included me in his circle of friends. He officiated at my daughter's wedding and I gave Power Point presentations to his temple. Now I look forward to

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reading his book, Cosmic Judaism, and learn more about this amazing and inspirational man. He still has so much to teach and I look forward to learning from him. I miss him already!