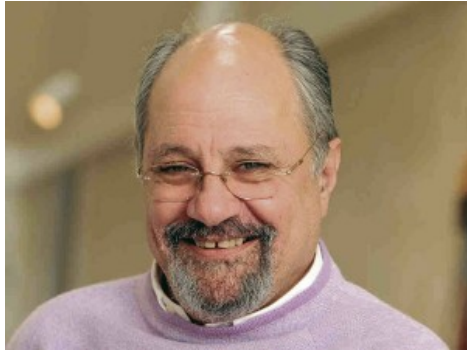


# Kindness is only a start

As seen in the Bucks County Courier Times



If you've lived in the Philadelphia region long, you've heard of Daniel Gottlieb, family therapist, author, former newspaper columnist and host of the mental health radio call-in show "Voices in the Family," on WHYY 90.9.

He's a light in the dark. Funny, gentle-natured, smart and with a compassionate, common-sense take on living and loving. What more do you want in a man?

Gottlieb's written several books, the most recent concerning autism and his grandson, Sam, who is on the autism spectrum. Gottlieb is, however, engaging on most any topic.

He nearly gave up the chance for that to be so.

Decades ago, at age 33, married with children and on top of the world career-wise, Gottlieb was in a car accident that left him a quadriplegic. He concedes his path after the accident was nearly impassable, but after years of despair that turned to depression, he managed to see his way clear to embracing life differently than he'd ever anticipated. To be of use to others, and in doing that to make the most of what was left to him — his mind, his spirit and the ability to love and engage the rest of us.

Who better to speak about opening doors and hearts to others who are struggling than a man who knows the way is hard enough without unnecessary obstacles like carelessness and judgment.

Gottlieb will speak at Ohev Shalom Bucks County, 944 Second Street Pike, Richboro, on Feb. 9. The event kicks off with a breakfast at 9 a.m., followed by an hour presentation and a 30-minute question-and-answer period.

Gottlieb's talk is in celebration of Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.

General seating and breakfast costs \$18 a person. Buy tickets online at [www.ohev.org](http://www.ohev.org) or call 610-348-6186.

There is seating for 300.

Gottlieb was invited to Ohev Shalom by its Committee for Inclusion B'Kavod. Inclusion, that is, with "kindness, acceptance, visibility, opportunity, dignity." That's a whole different thing than simple tolerance or even just kindness.

Among the committee's most intense work is "Celebrations," a family education program for kids with special needs. It's led by a rabbinical leader and special educator with help from volunteers.

The committee aims to serve all ages, though. All disabilities. And a ramp into the building is just a start, Miller stressed, echoing Gottlieb.

Some people don't feel comfortable in all aspects of synagogue life because physically they can't make it work for them. This committee seeks to change that, and the good news is that sometimes the simplest change can make an enormous difference.

Someone's grandfather can get to services using a cane but needs to be seated immediately. Placement of a chair right by the door is the difference between getting to worship with others or staying at home.

A woman who uses a wheelchair can't quite reach the peg to hang her prayer shawl without a fuss and so chooses to stay away. The mezuzah — a parchment with religious text — above the doorway is out of reach, too.

Is the text in prayer books large enough for old eyes? Can some of the service be signed for the deaf?

I met recently with Inclusion B'Kavod committee members Arlene Roman of Middletown and Lindsay Miller of Upper Southampton. Miller co-chairs the committee with Shelley Rubin and Joanne Adar.

Both come by their insight and passion regarding the needs of those living with disabilities via their work careers. Miller, an early childhood speech pathologist, also worked for BARC. Roman worked in Philadelphia and later in New Jersey with special needs teenagers. Other members of the committee are moms and dads to kids who have disabilities. Still others just see the work of the committee as critical.

As for Gottlieb, among his most compelling messages is that once you accept the realities of life — some of them brutal — you're clear to choose how you intend to live. Will you engage the world in full color or in despairing shades of gray grieving your life and wishing it was different?

Gottlieb concedes he took quite a while to decide. His personal honesty is reflected on his business card. It reads simply, "Gottlieb. Human."