

Rosh Hashanah: Life is About the Journey

Intro: Joke

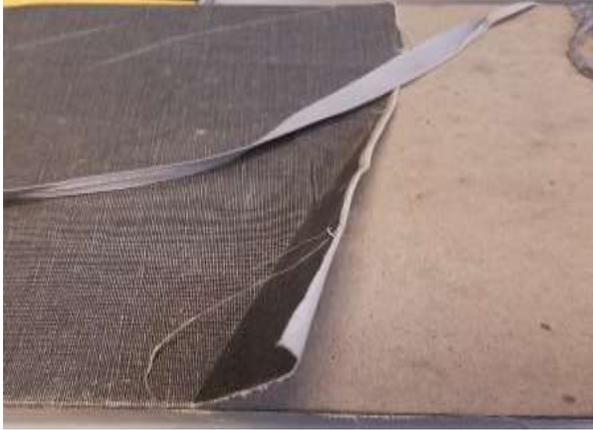
- The story is told of a Jewish mother who shouts at her son: “Get up! It’s time to go to shul.”
- The son says: “Aw, Mom / I don’t want to go to synagogue
- 1) The people there talk about me behind my back
- 2) Nobody ever listens to me
- 3) They don’t like me / I’d rather stay home in bed.”
- The mom says: “But you have to go.”
- The son says: “Give me 2 good reasons.”
- The Jewish mom replies:
- A) “Well for one thing -- it’s RH
- B) And for another -- you’re the Rabbi!”

Confession

- Now, I’m the Rabbi of this congregation and since the HH are a time for making confessions / I have a confession to make.
- I trust it’ll stay btw us
- As Mark Twain once said:
- Confessions are good for the soul / but bad for the reputation.

Grey Ribbon

- This is my confession:
- All through my childhood / I, like the Rabbi who wanted to sleep in hated going to synagogue on the HH.
- I used this machzor / which is why it’s starting to fall apart /
- You’ll notice / it’s the one our movement used for many years / until we got a new edition (The Lev Shalem)
- You might remember that it has a grey ribbon sewn into it.



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- As soon as the service began / I'd take the grey ribbon and place it on the last page of the service (pg 298 -Adon Olam)
- Then I spent the remainder of my time in shul
- Praying that we would get closer to that grey ribbon /so, that I could go home and eat!
- That's how I spent my time in synagogue on the HH.

Danger

- A lot of you are probably thinking / that's not so bad / I do the same thing. The real danger is that it's possible to do with our lives What I did with the HH Service.
- To constantly be looking forward.
- To think that things aren't good / Until we reach the metaphorical grey ribbon in our lives.
- That all this intermediate time is just filler / it doesn't really matter

If You're Always Looking Forward

- When you're always looking forward,
- You fail to appreciate / the here and now
- You fail to appreciate / what's truly important in life.

Lincoln Hall

- There's a great story that speaks to this point.
- A couple of years ago a mountain climber Lincoln Hall / reached the summit of Mt. Everest. but on the descent / Hall was struck by altitude sickness and he couldn't go on.

Dan Mazur

- The next morning / an American climber named Dan Mazur was on his way to the summit.
- He spotted Hall
- He was frostbitten / he'd taken off some clothing -- (But he was alive).

Stopped his Quest for Summit

- Mazur immediately abandoned his quest for the summit.
- He gave Hall oxygen /
- Covered him with more clothing / and helped haul him down the mountain.

Question

- Afterwards / reporters rightfully called Dan Mazur a hero and he was asked on NPR
- 'How could you give up your quest / to reach the summit of Mt. Everest? you could almost touch the top of the mountain.'

Answer

- This was his answer: (paraphrased)
- He said: There's a teaching / that life is all about the journey it's not about the destination.
- How could I sleep at night / knowing that I'd reached the top of Mt. Everest but I'd passed by someone who needed my help?

Dozens did pass by Lincoln Hall

- It's important to note / that dozens of climbers did pass by Lincoln Hall / b/c they were so focused on the summit:
- a) Some saw him and didn't think they could help him
- b) Others assumed he was dead

Don't Remember their names

- Yes, those climbers reached the top of Mt. Everest / but no one remembers their names,
- However, we remember the heroism of Dan Mazur
- B/c he was focused on what was truly important / saving a life. and I was really struck by that sentiment
- That life is all about the journey not the destination.
- B/c it's not just a new age philosophy;

- I want to stress that it's a mentality that's rooted in the Jewish tradition.

Torah: About the journey

- The Torah is the foundation of the Jewish religion and the Torah is all about the journey (we never get to Israel).
- In Exodus 14 / Moses leads the Jewish people out of the land of Egypt.
- The rest of the book is about our ancestors' 40-year journey through the desert.
- It ends – with them failing to reach their destination / the land of Israel.

Moses: Central Figure

- If the central figure in Christianity is Jesus and in Islam its Mohamed,
- I would argue that the central Jewish prophet is Moses.
- Moses is the man who led us out of Egypt,
- Who brought the Torah down from Mt. Sinai,
- Who spoke to God face to face in an intimate fashion

End of life: Pleads with God

- Moses is at the end of his life and he pleads with God,
- He roughly says: 'God: I've put up with this stiff-necked people for 40 years and my dying wish is to step foot in Israel.'
- and God says -- No

Moses doesn't reach his goal

- The greatest prophet never reaches his destination / because his life + (Jewish story) / is all about the journey.
- So, as we gather here on RH
- I think it's the perfect time to remember how blessed we truly are. that's why today
- I want talk about a couple of steps / that we can take and a couple of pitfalls / that we need to avoid
- To better appreciate the magical journey/ that encompasses each of our lives.

1st Mistake

- The 1st mistake we make / is we live our lives in the future (we defer our happiness)
- We postpone our joy / until that far off elusive goal is met.
- Until we reach that metaphorical grey ribbon

Examples:

- Only happy when = 1) Retire 2) Get in Shape 3) Graduate
4) Get Promoted
- However – it doesn't need to be this way.

Una Tanna Tokef

- B/c if you keep putting off your happiness – there's a good chance you'll never experience it.
- We recite the Una Tanna Tokef prayer on the HH and we say: 'who will live / and who will die /
- who by fire / and who by water
who by sword / and who by beast.'

Good people die

- Good people pass from this earth (I do too many funerals) -- life isn't fair. That's why putting off your happiness is problematic.
- B/c we're not guaranteed another year on this earth.
- Plus, all that in-between time / as we're thinking about our goal / that's life

Seinfeld: Yada Yada

- Remember the Seinfeld episode / where George is dating this woman and she says: My ex-boyfriend came over last night / and yada yada / I'm really tired this morning.
- And George is like / you yada yada over the most important part.
- Well let's not / yada yada over life -- Let's enjoy / every moment!

Wendi Winters

- Someone who truly understood this message was Wendi Winters -- *zichrona levracha*

Capital Gazette Shooting

- We moved to the area on June 28th
- I'll never forget the date
- B/c it was the day of the tragic shooting at the Capital Gazette / that took the lives of 5 innocent souls

Wendi Winters a hero

- One of the victims was Wendi Winters.

- She's truly a hero as she charged the gunman / saving the lives of many of her co-workers.
- As I was reading through her obituary online / I was struck / by how full and vibrant a life / she had lived.

Her Son

- Her son Phoenix talked about his mom.
- 'My mom always needed to be doing something,
- Her day's schedule was filled-up with so many events,'
- Her daily routine was to wake up at 5:30 am and work and work and work. At midnight she went to bed.'
- And yet somehow -- Wendi always made time for her family.
- Each of her 4 children felt so loved.

Her Friend

- Her friend Paul Donnelly talked about her life:
- 'Wendi lived life to the fullest / she wasn't one to sit around and watch TV
- She was compassionate about the people she wrote about.
- It was never a chore for her to write the Teen of the Week column.'

Seized the day

- Wendy Winters life was tragically cut short / (and it's not fair) Yet, she didn't live her life in deferment
- She was a woman who spent each day / at the job she loved / in the community she loved / with the family she loved.
- She taught us to live each day to the fullest.

Every Moment Important

- B/c every moment is equally important and that's one of the lessons of the HH -- but there are people sitting here thinking to themselves:
- When's Rabbi Wohl going to finish.
- It's a Monday / I want to go to lunch + get a half day of work in / go golfing
- I've got things to do

Not Fully Present

- There are people (who like myself, when I was younger) / aren't invested in the RH service – they're thinking about something else
- The problem is if you're always looking ahead to the next thing
- You're going to miss the most important parts of life.

Transition

- That's the first danger // but there's another reason / we fail to live in the moment,
- I call it -- The McDonald's Syndrome.

McDonald's

- It's amazing that McDonald's has been so successful.
- You can go anywhere in the world and you'll be able to find a McDonalds'. (Israel, Europe, Asia)
- You can't go more than 107 miles w/o hitting a McDonalds' in the USA (somewhere in Utah)

Why Successful?

- Why is McDonald's so successful?
- B/c it's fast food and we live in a country / where everybody's constantly in a hurry.
- Therefore, if we eat with speed – we can be more efficient (give examples)

McDonald's Syndrome

- Too often / we fall prey to the McDonald's Syndrome /
- If you do that
- You can get lost and forget what's important in your life / b/c you're going so fast.

Getting lost is natural

- Psychologists (Toni Bernhard, D Fortson) say that always trying to rush / is part of the human experience
- As Yogi Berra once said:
- I don't know where I'm going / but at least I'm making good time

Stopping isn't easy

- You need to stop every once in a while, (that's what the HH are for)
- Now yes -- stopping isn't easy (Hitbonenut = explain)
- It forces you to evaluate the direction of your life
- Just like when you're driving and you make a wrong turn / the GPS says recalculate.
- The shofar screams at us: a) stop b) recalculate

- You were lost this year (each of us in a different way) / but you can get back on the right track

Today the world is born

- In our prayers when we blow the shofar / the spiritual GPS,
- We declare Hayom Harat Olam / “Today the world is born.”

Present Tense

- Text of Machzor = Present Tense // (not about the past)
- B/c on RH / we have a chance to start again!
- 5779 = We can reach new heights / milestones (we didn’t think we were capable of)
- We just have to have kavanah.

Kavanah

- The key is that you have to have Kavanah – intention/ focus during prayer (This applies to all aspects of your life)
- Examples from my family
 - 1) Micah’s lego building -- spaceship
 - 2) Julie’s focus when she’s painting
 - 3) Sam’s physics projects

Distance: All the same

- B/c if you only see something from a distance (airplane view) / it becomes blurry
- When we traveled to Europe / I visited dozens of Churches and after a while / they all seemed the same to me (I don’t know anything about Medieval architecture)
- Seeing the beauty in the everyday requires kavanah / great awareness.
- But we know / it’s not so simple

Dr. Naomi Remen

- Dr. Naomi Remen / in her book ‘Kitchen Table Wisdom’
- Provides us with a strategy to cultivate that type of awareness in our lives.
- She talks about a surgeon who came to visit her one day.
- He was very successful professionally / he was wealthy / and yet he was unhappy
- He told Dr. Remen / he couldn’t wait for the day to be over so that he could relax / that he didn’t care about anything anymore

Dr. Remen's Advice

- Dr. Remen provided him with a therapy that's much cheaper and more effective than Prozac

Mantra

- She said: Every day after work / I want you to write in a journal:
- **“What inspired you” // “What surprised you” // “What touched your heart”**

New Eyes

- The Doctor was reticent at first
- Yet, it didn't take long for him to see the world through new eyes.
- A) the miracles in the hospital
- B) the lives he was saving
- C) he began to talk with his patients and learn their stories

Slowing Down

- By slowing down:
- The doctor was able to engage in the process of introspection / and he became much happier
- He was living in the Now!

Full Circle

- Let me come full circle:
- I started off by talking about Moses / and how he never reached Israel, he never reached his destination.
but why did God choose Moses? // What made him so special?
- It's not clear in the Torah / (There's midrashim that try to explain it)
- There's a Midrash that I love that says:
- That one day / Moses was tending to the flock of his father in law Jethro / in the wilderness.
and he saw a bush that was burning with fire / and yet it wasn't consumed.
- When Moses Stopped / God called out: 'Moses, you're the one who'll lead this people.'

Bush Burning for a long time

- What's interesting / is that the Rabbis teach that the bush had been burning since the beginning of time
- It's just that Moses was the first person to notice this great miracle.

- He was the first one who stopped
(that's why he was chosen / b/c he had a higher level of awareness).

Profound Lesson

- Perhaps / there's a profound lesson in this.
- Moses never reached the Promised Land
- Dan Mazur never reached the summit of Mt. Everest
and Wendi Winters life was tragically cut short

What's Important

- What's important is that the three of them /
- Lived with a sense of mindfulness and goodness on their journey
and that's what made them great.

Goals

- Today, our congregation is ready to take on the new year of 5779
- So, this year:
- Let us not put off our happiness (always looking ahead)
- Let us not fall prey to the McDonalds' Syndrome
- Instead / let us live with the mindfulness and goodness
of Moses / Dan Mazur / and Wendi Winters.

Conclusion

- Let us take the time each week to reflect on:
- (What inspired us // What surprised us // and What touched our hearts).
- For in life and in the Jewish tradition,
- It doesn't matter where you end up /
it's all about what you do on the journey.

Shana Tova