

BH – THE POWER OF NOW – Kol Nidrei Sermon 5778

Chabad of Port Washington

RADVAZ STORY – When to Leave JAIL

If the authorities told a Jewish prisoner they have one day a year to choose on which they can leave prison and be free to observe Judaism, which day would you choose?

This is an actual case that was asked of the Radvaz. What do you think?

(Ask the people - Yom Kippur, Simchas Torah, Purim, Shabbos, Pesach will be some of the suggestions)

Radvaz answer: The very next day!

The Power of Now, the best-selling book which touched a chord with Americans, and became almost a movement...

Benjamin Zander whose family escaped Hitler in 1938. Today he is the conductor of The Boston Philharmonic Orchestra

In 2008 he gave a TED Talk called “The Transformative Power of Classical Music.”

This is how he ended his talk: **What we say really makes a difference. I learned this from a woman who survived Auschwitz.** She went to Auschwitz when she was 15 years old. And her brother was 8, and the parents were lost.

"We were in the train going to Auschwitz, and I looked down and saw my brother's shoes were missing. I said, 'Why are you so stupid, can't you keep your things together for goodness' sake?'" The way an elder sister might speak to a younger brother. Unfortunately, it was the last thing she ever said to him, because she never saw him again. He did not survive.

"I walked out of Auschwitz into life and I made a vow. And the vow was, "Anytime I speak to anyone, I'll speak as if it's the last time I'll be able to speak to this person."

What's a life well lived? Living each day as if it's the only day!

There's no tomorrow...

And there's also no yesterday... we let go of the past...

Here's a Talmudic story bringing home this point:

Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish two 3rd century Talmudic sages, One day these two great rabbis went to bathe by the **hot springs of Tiberius, this mineral hot spring till today erupts from the earth at a terrifying 140 degrees Fahrenheit but "cools down" to a mere 98 degrees Fahrenheit.** The Talmud states that this spring was the **residue of Noach's flood.**

Maimonides mentions the Tiberias springs as a place with **healing powers.** **Scientific research** in modern times has found that soaks in these hot springs make for **lower blood pressure and higher concentrations of oxygen in the bloodstream.**

A pauper approached the two sages in front of the Tiberius hot springs, and asked them for charity. "When we return from bathing we will give you something," they told him. They went to bathe. We are not sure how long they remained in the hot springs. Maybe a few hours; maybe a whole day. On their return, they found the poor beggar dead.

How you would have responded to this situation if it were you? Say, you were entering a **spa and a homeless** beggar asked you for some money to buy a sandwich. You told him you would soon return and give him a donation. As you return some time later, he's dead. How would you feel? How would you respond?

Well, let me tell you what they did.

When they saw the man dead, the Talmud continues the story, they both said to each other: "Since we did not merit being here for him during his lifetime, let us at least help him after his death." Let us prepare the body for burial, let's purchase a plot for him, let's bury him and place a tomb on his grave.

They took the body to cleanse it, and prepare it for burial, according to Jewish law. As they were doing so, they found in his bosom a purse full of money. It turned out that the “pauper” was actually filthy rich but too stingy and sick to use his own money.

Now let’s analyze this story for a moment, putting aside the ending for a moment. Isn’t their reaction strange? Where’s the guilt...

If this story happened to me, I know how I would react: Like a good classic Jew, with an infinite amount of GUILT. For ten years, I would sit at my therapist’s office and tell him how evil I am; how horrible I am, callous, ruthless, heartless, and merciless. I have brought about the premature death of an innocent poor beggar!

The definition of a Jew: If they don’t feel guilty they blame themselves...

My mother was recused from the jury because she insisted SHE was guilty...

But, shockingly, this was not the response of Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish, the two greatest spiritual giants of the time. We do not sense guilt, or even remorse, in their words. We can almost detect a cold blooded and pitiless attitude. They just killed somebody, albeit indirectly, and yet business is as usual.

“Since we did not merit being here for him during his lifetime, let us at least help him after his death.”

Are you kidding me? You will just give him a nice funeral and all will be forgiven?

Stalin was famous for making nice funerals... after he did away with his enemies...

This Talmudic story, is this a scene from “The god father,” or a story of our sacred Talmudic leaders?

The truth is the Talmud here is articulating one of the most vital lessons in life:

There’s no question that these two sages, were it not for the end of the story, might have spent the rest of their lives in repentance and remorse... No question.

But these sages understood that there is a calling right now!

The man died... I have two choices:

I can wallow in my guilt at what a horrible person I am.

Would that help the man?

A dead person also needs assistance. he needs burial, closure, a grave, cleansing ... yes I can focus on my guilt, but will that take me away from my duty, from my responsibility right now!

Perhaps for the rest of their lives they would be busy repenting, and taking lessons from what they did wrong.

But they understood that their previous mistakes and errors cannot paralyze them to the point of stagnation where they deprive themselves from the calling of the present moment.

They understood that sometimes our inner little devil (yetzer hora) disguises himself in the mask of guilt and shame and endless reflection, to take us away from our responsibilities and opportunities right now at this moment, and cast us into a depression which will guarantee that we'll hurt more people—and ourselves—in the future.

And you know what happens when you live with this attitude of living in the moment? In the process of responding to the call of the moment they discovered that they were not the killers.

So many of us carry all so much of the toxicity of the past—and it defines our present.

When we remain etched in our past we live with guilt...

When we can open ourselves to the calling of now, we put our past in context and sometimes realize were not as guilty as we thought...

2000 years before The Power of Now became an best seller and almost an international movement... the Talmud articulated this lesson

The Baal Shem Tov taught creation is a perpetual event. G-d recreates the world every moment anew.

So all there really is to reality is NOW...

It's a new divine energy that flows through the cosmos and through each of us right now...

If I'm living with an hour ago, a day ago, week, month, year ago, G-d says WAKE UP, smell the coffee, dance to the beat of now

Learn from your past, prepare for the future, but live now

Open yourself up to your calling at this moment, to the energy of now, the divine flow that vibrates through your heart and soul now at this moment...

It's the story of our lives...

Your wife phones you: Where are you? You get mad. Why.. what do you mean where am I? If I would call you with this question, you would not blink. Why with your wife do you get into a bad mood? Because you're living in his past. **You're bringing up a "file"** from the past putting your wife's question into that file, and hence getting angry at her.

If a man is alone in the forest without his wife is he still wrong?

How often is it on the way home from work, already expect what she's gonna say, and what we're gonna say... because we're always bringing up files from the past

Guy pulled over 2am – where are you going? To a lecture. What? At this hour? Yeah... when I get home my wife's gonna give me a lecture...

So what happens if tonight you can date your spouse for the first time, no files, don't put him or her into context. Imagine that you never met your wife before. Do not say to yourself: here she goes again! Here he goes again!

It's all new, wow she's such an interesting person...

Imagine same with all relationships - our children, siblings, co workers, employees and employer, clients, etc.

Most importantly with ourselves. Potential for accomplish something new... To accept a promotion with high level responsibilities, or get involved in a new venture with new opportunities, or get into a new relationship. That's not something I can do! And why not? Who put you in that box?!

Same with yiddishkeit, a guy told me he's considering buying a Sukkah... so nice... the kids... But I'm not really a Sukkah type Jew! Who said! Who made that rule! I'm not the shul type Jew... etc. etc. Whoever branded you a certain type?! If you feel like it, go for it! You're free of any labels from the past! Be today who you want to be!

Lot's wife was punished that she turned into pillar of salt – because she looked back... looking back is salty, negativity...

We look ahead!

The Fleas

In an experiment, a scientist placed a number of fleas in a glass jar. They quickly jumped out. He then put the fleas back into the jar and placed a glass lid over the top. The fleas began jumping and hitting the glass lid. After a while, the fleas began jumping slightly below the glass lid so as not to hit it. The scientist then removed the glass lid as it was no longer needed to keep the fleas in the jar. The fleas have been conditioned to the fact that they cannot escape from the jar.

They're being held captive because they're going by yesterday's reality.
Happens to us too, but today is a new day, recreated anew

Joke

A general noticed one of his soldiers behaving oddly. The soldier would pick up any piece of paper he found, frown and say: "That's not it" and put it down again.

This went on for some time, until the general arranged to have the soldier psychologically tested. The army psychologist concluded that the soldier was deranged, and wrote out his discharge paper from the army.

The soldier picked it up, smiled and said: " **Aah, aah...this is it.**"

We don't get a discharge paper. We were born to this task, and it is ours to fulfill.

Each of us is called upon to accomplish our own specific mission

None of us is dispensible... no one can be me and make MY contribution to the mission

Yom Kippur – it's called ACHAT BASHANAH – the one – unique – day of the year. The only Jewish holiday that's one day, emphasizing its special uniqueness. The lesson: Make each day like a Yom Kippur – each day is the one and only day being presented to you now, with it's own unique importance and opportunities.

**HAYOM song at the end of the each High Holiday services ("we're hayoming...")
It's message is powerful – make each day HAYOM!!!**

Jewish wish for long life is: Arichus Yomim, greater blessing than many days (which we should all merit to have and it's a wonderful blessing) is long days... where each day is long, meaningful.

Each day is a HAYOM!

The Last Kiss

I close with a story told by the Blozhever Rebbe.

"I had a foreign passport from a South American country. It was a passport for myself. My rebbetzin, of blessed memory, and for a young child. But when I received the passport, it was too late. **There was no longer a rebbetzin and my beloved grandson**, as well as my daughter and son-in-law, were all gone too.

Upon receiving the passport, I realized that I had the opportunity to save two Jewish souls, a middle aged women and a young child. When this became known, **about forty children were brought to me by their parents.** Little boys crying and begging to be saved. They promised to be good and not to be a burden to me.

How could I choose? I told the Jewish leaders that I was returning to my apartment and that they should bring me a child.

Two days later a father came with a small son, aged six, I guess he was the child chosen... **“Rebbe, I am giving you my child.”** He bent down, **kissed the child on his head and said, “Shraga, from this moment on, this Jew standing here next to you is your father.”**

That kiss I can't forget. Wherever I go, that kiss follows me all my life. Before he shut the door behind him, the father took one more lingering look at his son. Then I heard the echo of his painful steps as he descended the stairs.

The Blozhiver Rebbe concludes, “All the time, I see before my eyes a father bending and kissing his beloved son and pointing to me and saying ‘From now on this man is your father. The last kiss of a father to his son, follows me all of my life.’”

My friends, the father knew this was the last kiss. Can you imagine the love, the warmth, the tenderness that went into that last kiss?

Let's kiss our children and loved ones this way every time...

Let's live every day...

Let's value every day for the gift that it is!

Free from the worries of tomorrow... or from the shackles of yesterday!

Yom Kippur empowers us to live a year where each day we get up in the morning and say:

Today's the Day! HAYOM!