

S"D. Kol Nidrei Sermon 5779

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I'm JUST PASSING THROUGH - Let's not Miss the Fruit for the Trees!

Exploring Life's Purpose, differentiating between the means and the ends.

A 5 year old girl asks her mom where people come from, so mom tells her the story of Adam & Eve who were created by G-d, and then from them all people were born. The next day she asks her dad the same question, and he tells her something about us coming from apes and monkeys. So she goes back to mom and says: Mom, you told me something about Adam & Eve, dad said we come from monkeys?!

Says mom: "Oh, I was talking about my side of the family".

We're created by G-d for a purpose. What is it? Why are we here...

Kid: "Mom what are we here?" To help others. PAUSE "Mom, why are the others here"?

Seems like a pretty fair question to ask, especially on Yom Kippur. What is my purpose, what is my life really about...

Steven Covey

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey explains the **difference between being Efficient & effective:**

Efficient people "do things right,"

Effective people "do the right things."

And Covey gives this example. Imagine a group of laborers hacking through a field. Someone climbs a tree and discovers they are in the wrong field. He shouts down from his perch, ***“Hey, we are in the wrong field.”*** The foreman replies, ***“Don’t interrupt, we are making progress.”***

Progress is nice... but we also wanna make sure we’re headed in the right direction to fulfill our life’s purpose.

What is our purpose?

The Torah teaches us that G-d put Adam and Eve in the garden - to work it -

So, our mission is: To Be A Gardener

A gardener’s job is to tend to the garden, to make sure all the trees are growing strong and proud, that they have the sun light, water and space they need to flourish...

But the ultimate goal is to make sure they yield delicious fruit

So yes, there’s focus on making sure the trees, the bark, branches and leaves are healthy, that’s what a healthy garden means

But if he forgets to collect the fruits... He may have been efficient, but he’s certainly not effective!

The same is true in life, in the garden of G-d:

We need to tend to our “gardens”, to make sure we have all that we need for a comfortable life, a nice house, cars, vacations, money, of course good health... all are important

And then there’s the fruits of life...

The fruit - are the mitzvahs, the good deeds we take with us, the main purpose and most precious part of the garden

And that which we are also able to take with us when the time comes for us to leave the garden!

In quantity the bark, branches and leaves are much more than the fruit, but the fruit is the goal, the rest is to facilitate the fruit

Let's not confuse the importance of the means vs. the ends based on the quantity of time that we spend on each. In all areas of life we find that much more time is spent on the means vs the ends:

Preparing a meal takes longer than enjoying the meal

(Preparing a sermon takes much longer than delivering it...)

Planning a wedding can take a year, while the wedding itself lasts 6 hours

We work very hard so that we could enjoy quality time with our families; clearly we spend far more time working than the time we get to enjoy our families

That's just the way G-d created the world... it's the way the garden works, the bark is much larger than the fruit, and that's ok

But let's not forget to pick the fruits...

Example #1: I'm officiating a funeral where there are very few people in attendance, one big man, tough looking, tattooed, is there from the start to finish, goes all the way to the cemetery, breaks down with tears a few times, so I'm curious what his relationship is with the old man who just died. This guy doesn't look Jewish... So I approach him and we enter into conversation. He tells me his story. He was a troubled youngster; he made a living by shoplifting... One day, he shoplifted from this old man's warehouse, and the old man caught him red handed. He gave him some money to go buy lunch... and then gave him a choice of prison... or a job....

“He changed my life! Actually... he saved my life.”

That’s a perfect example of someone who chose the fruit vs. the bark. He could have just worried about his own needs, called the police, protected his “garden” and let the chips fall where they may for this kid... But no, he saw an opportunity to “pick a fruit” – to do a good deed that will transform a life! And he seized it!

Example #2 – during your long 40 hour work, recognize the work is just the bark of the tree, the fruits are the small acts of good deeds that you manage to “pick” along the way...

So... find a few minutes for tefillin during a break; cheer up a stranger; grab a kosher lunch when you can instead of the non-kosher place; give someone who needs it a listening ear; perhaps study some Torah on your iPhone during your lunch break; at a business meeting invite people – whether with Jewish people or otherwise - to make a blessing on the food...

These are the fruits you are picking in the garden of your life...

My “elevator pitch”

A personal example: I never pass up an opportunity of engaging people on an elevator, even just to say hi or to wish them a good day. I don’t know the next time they’ll come in such close proximity with a Jew who looks like me... so this is an opportunity not to be missed, to make a positive impression... it’s true with all of us really; each encounter, be it in business, social or just “by chance” are all opportunities to pick the fruit of the garden, to fulfill life’s purpose of spreading the light of goodness and G-dliness.

Story – the Hour of Fortune

A story is told of a benevolent king who wishes to show his appreciation and love to his loyal servants and ministers, so he throws a huge royal ball for all of them, offering up the absolute best food, drink and entertainment that money can buy. Musicians and other entertainers are brought in from all over the world to provide his guests with the best that there is!

The king also wanted to reward his people with a gift to take home, so upon entering the feast, each guest was given a chest which they can fill up with their choice of priceless jewels from the royal treasury. The smart folks enjoyed themselves at the feast, but made a point to spend some quality time in the treasury... making sure to leave with a full treasure chest... The fools, who couldn't see past the food and drink in front of them, were too busy enjoying the feast to bother with the treasures... and left empty handed...

This is the story of each of our lives. G-d, our Great Benevolent King, places us on this earth and provides us with a lifetime of wonderful blessings... a proverbial royal feast with the best of everything life has to offer... for us to partake of and enjoy!

But He asks of us to make sure not to miss the main point- to take advantage of the mitzvah opportunities, the treasures which we take with us when we leave "the feast."

In heaven there isn't an opportunity to do a mitzvah, a good deed, simply because there isn't the opportunity for evil. Where there is no free choice for evil, there is really no true goodness. Here on earth, where we are presented with plenty of free choice to do good or not good, here is where mitzvahs – priceless Divine acts of goodness and holiness - are available in abundance.

Enjoy the party and all its delicacies, but don't forget the main gift, the priceless treasures, the one thing you get to take with you when it comes time to leave the feast.

Please don't misunderstand me. Judaism doesn't have a problem with us living a wonderful life in the simple physical sense of the world. In fact,

the Talmud teaches “A beautiful home broadens the mind”... Having a comfortable life materially is a blessing and a very positive thing from the point of view of Judaism. However, let’s not make that the main focus of life...

Don’t “Lean” too much

Yitzchak Breiter was a successful owner of a shoe factory in Warsaw before the War. Every day in synagogue he gave a short sermon after the evening services. He spoke virtually every day about the importance and value of faith and trust in G-d, and the absolute need for complete joy that comes from trust in G-d. There was one elderly Jew in shul who listened to these speeches cynically, thinking, “It’s easy for Yitzchak to speak about full faith and trust in G-d when he is sitting on lots of money. He is wealthy and has everything he needs. When you have all the money you need, sure, why not preach about how one must trust Gd. But what about those of us who struggle with putting bread on the table, with paying tuition, with covering our mortgages?” This man mentally dismissed Reb Yitzchak’s sermons and even made fun of his message to others around him.

Unfortunately, Yitzchak’s factory burned down one day. He lost everything. This is pre-insurance days... With more than a little relish, the older man waited for the services that evening, to see how finally Yitzchak would be “silenced” by the challenges of life. To his great shock, Yitzchak stood up that evening and spoke as enthusiastically as ever about how important it is for a Jew to have faith and trust in G-d. To know that G-d is cradling him or her like a mother cradles her infant in her bosom. The infant has no worries in the world. The child is not afraid he or she will be dropped. The child trusts fully that in mom’s embrace he is as safe and secure as can be. This, he said, is how a Jew must feel about G-d.

Unable to restrain himself, this Jew walked over to Yitzchak and says to him, “I have to apologize to you. Today I realized how sincere and real you are. But

please, tell me how you do it!? How do you maintain such strong faith in the face of such a challenge?!”

Yitzchak answered him using a beautiful illustration from Jewish law. According to the Code of Jewish Law, a person must stand during the Amidah prayer, out of respect and concentration. But what about leaning on a lectern, on a chair, or the table? Is leaning considered standing or is it more comparable to sitting? So the law states that leaning is ok so long as you're not leaning too much... What is too much? If the person is leaning with so much of his weight that if the object were to be removed, he would fall, then it is considered as if he is not standing and therefore not acceptable. If, however, he is not placing much of his weight on the object such that if it were to be removed, he would remain standing, then it is considered as if he is standing and he could pray the Amidah while leaning.

Yitzchak explained that the same principle has guided him concerning his wealth. “Sure, I have been “leaning” on my wealth. I relied on it, I enjoyed it, I was grateful for it, I cherished it. But I always made sure not to “lean on it” to the point that if it is taken from me I would fall down and lose my inner dignity and relationship with my soul and with my G-d. I always made sure that my faith and trust in G-d is not “leaning” and dependent on the money. I never leaned on my wealth,” said Reb Yitzchak, “too heavily. I appreciated it and used it, but it never served as the foundation of my humaneness, Jewishness and self-confidence. Therefore, I not fall when this support was pulled out from under me. A Jew must “lean” with all of his or her weight on G-d alone.”

I'm just passing through

I'd like to conclude with a wonderful song by the 8th Day band called: I'm Just Like You, I'm Just Passing Through.

The song is about a story of a Jew who visits a sage, and he notices that his home is bare, with almost no furniture or material possessions. Not because the sage didn't have money, but perhaps because he preferred to use his

money for charitable pursuits, and his focus was more on the spiritual things in life prayer and Torah study.

The visitor is shocked to see such a bare house, and asks his host where all his “stuff” is. The host says to the visitor, “and what about you, where’s YOUR stuff?” “Well,” says the visitor, “I’m just passing through”. TO which the host replies: “I’m just like you. I’m also just passing through.” Meaning to say, we’re all just passing through in this lifetime, and his focus is more on “treasures of another kind” – the type of treasures that he can take with him!

Here is the song, you all have song sheets on your seats; please try to join me for the chorus:

I traveled halfway across the world to see a sage
I heard he lived like such a poor man in this day and age
I said, where’s your leather couches
Where’s your golden chandelier
Where’s your walk-in closet
For all that stuff you could wear

Well all you got is that suitcase my friend, ain’t that true
I said, yeah but you know that I’m just passing through
That’s when he said...

**I’m just like you
I’m just passing through just like you
My heart wants to feel
Something that’s real
And my mind hopes to find
Treasures of another kind
And if you had my eyes you’d see
A palace for you and me**

Although he’s been forever living in this town
People say he never really settled down
They say, where’s your leather couches

Where's your golden chandelier
Where's your walk-in closet for all that stuff you could wear

The neighbors talk but they don't understand
The things he's collecting you can't hold in your hand
Like he said...

**I'm just like you
Just passing through just like you
My heart wants to feel
Something that's real
And my mind hopes to find
Treasures of another kind
And if you had my eyes you'd see
A palace for you and me**

**I'm just like you
I'm just passing through just like you
My heart wants to feel
Something that's real
And my mind hopes to find
Treasures of another kind
And if you had my eyes you'd see
A palace for you and me**

**And my heart wants to feel
Something that's real
And my mind hopes to find
Treasures of another kind
And if you had my eyes you'd see
A palace for you and me
A palace for you and me.**

**Friends, let's make it a year when we're not just efficient, but also
effective**

Where we are clear on the direction we're looking to go

Where we appreciate the beautiful garden of life... but we don't forget to collect the fruit

Where we enjoy all of G-d's amazing blessings, in the Divine "feast" of life

But we remember to collect the priceless jewels that stay with us forever!

SHANA TOVA!