

### How Do You Want to be Remembered?

Last year at this time I talked about how one way we ought to prepare for death is by creating a Jewish bucket list. Today, I'd like to continue this discussion about death—our own death—by looking at the other side. Not “what comes next?”, although I do love thinking about this, but rather, “How do we want to be remembered?” When we are gone—and then long gone—what do we want people to say about us?

One of my colleagues, whom I was bouncing sermon ideas off of, quipped, “What do you care what people think, you'll be dead!”

Yes, that is true. But it does matter to me that my children and their children's children will speak of me in such a way that makes them proud to be connected to me. And not because of what I accomplish in life—which is quite insignificant—but because of how I treated others and responded to the needs of my family, community and the world.

Whenever my parents (who are here, front row) talk about my maternal grandfather, Jack, they never mention anything about his interests, his possessions or his work. They talk about how he acted towards people; with honor, dignity and compassion. They say how he was completely sincere and genuine his whole life. They talk about the wise counsel he gave anybody at any time. They talk about his dedication to his family and his Jewish community. In other words, over 30 years after his death, those activities that created his daily routine in life, specifically his successful career as a furniture man in Fargo, ND, have become almost insignificant. On the contrary, it's been the spaces between that have truly outlived my grandfather. And it's those nuggets that we hold on to and share.

This has made me think about what I need to do to be remembered in the same vein as grandpa Jack. How can I—how can we—be remembered the way we would want to be remembered? More for the spaces between and less for the conversation starters.

Author and New York Times Op-Ed columnist, David Brooks, gave an incredible TED Talk in Vancouver last year. The title of his brief talk was, “Should you live for your résumé...or your eulogy?”

Of course we know the answer. But I'd like to share his opening to the TED Talk.

*So I've been thinking about the difference between the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the ones you put on your résumé, which are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that get mentioned in the eulogy, which are deeper: who are you, in your depth, what is the nature of your relationships, are you bold, loving, dependable, consistent? And most of us, including me, would say that the eulogy virtues are the more important of the virtues. But at least in my case, are they the ones that I think about the most? And the answer is no.*

Interestingly, the way Brooks addresses this problem is through Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's concept of Adam 1 and Adam 2 in his influential book, *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Roby Blecker and I read and studied this book together this past year in *hevruta*. While it's only 100 pages

long, it still took us a good few months to get through the complex thoughts of one of the great rabbis and thinkers of the 20th century. It is not the book you want to casually read before going to sleep!

The Rav, as Soltoveitchik is referred to by his followers, unpacks the two Genesis stories of Adam and Eve. (Yes, there are in fact two versions, one right after the other in our Torah.) In the first version Adam is created along with Eve, in God's image. They are charged with procreating and having dominion over all the animals.

In the second creation story, just a few verses later, God forms Adam (an androgynous human) out of the dust of the ground and breathes the breath of life into Adam's nostrils giving Adam a living soul. A little while later, God saw how lonely Adam was and created an *ezer k'negdo* or "a helpmate."

Two vastly different stories with two different people. The Rav calls the first, Adam 1 and the second, Adam 2.

You might be wondering, what do these characters have to do with how we want to be remembered?

As David Brooks does so succinctly, he explains that according to The Rav, the two Adams represent two sides of our nature.

*Adam 1 is the worldly, ambitious, external side of our nature. He wants to build, create, create companies, create innovation. Adam 2 is the humble side of our nature. Adam 2 wants not only to do good but to be good, to live in a way internally that honors God, creation and our possibilities. Adam 1 wants to conquer the world. Adam 2 wants to hear a calling and obey the world.*

Adam 1, created in the image of God, desires to create and control like God. Adam 2, born out of the earth, is more humble.

And according to Brooks, we spend a disproportionate amount of time feeding Adam 1 when the Adam 2 in each of us needs nourishment as well. He argues, and I agree, that our priorities are flip-flopped. We live in a world that rewards accomplishment and values stature. These are noble pursuits and much of civilization has been born out of Adam 1's motivation. Without Adam 1, we wouldn't have Hubble's awe-inspiring pictures of deep space, or vaccinations, or a democratic government.

But without Adam 2, we wouldn't have deep and intimate relationships with other human beings. We wouldn't have the inspiration to ask "Why?" and "What is the meaning of all of this?" Without Adam 2, we wouldn't be asking the question, "Who is behind all of this?"

To put it simply, Adam 1 is a human doing and Adam 2 is a human being.

The question for each of us, on this holiest day of the Jewish calendar is: Which self is winning out in our life? The one who builds, but also tears down? Or the one who loves and is vulnerable? The one who craves success and accolades or the one who seeks meaning? Because whichever one it is will dictate how people remember us.

I suspect that the older one gets, the more Adam 2 is nourished. When we're younger, we want to make something of ourselves. We're finally able to answer the question that was posed to us many times in your youth, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Imagine reframing that question to children: What *kind* of person do you want to be when you're older? Perhaps our youth would begin to see the value in Adam 2 sooner and create a list of moral aspirations to live up to. (One can actually do this—make a moral bucket list—at any age.)

In the society we live in, results matter and much of what Adam 2 sets out to do cannot be quantifiable. Brooks writes, "...if you live for external achievement, years pass and the deepest parts of you go unexplored and unstructured."<sup>1</sup>

In the end, I'd like to think that I was able to at least strike a balance between these two aspects of myself. Maybe this blatant inconsistency in the Torah is not what it seems, but that The Rav was truly on to something. The writers, editors and redactors, whomever they were, understood this tension we all face. They wanted us to confront it. Perhaps they also asked themselves: What is my definition of success? And how we answer this can help us understand ourselves better. It will allow us to see which Adam we need to nourish and which one we might need to stop feeding.

However we answer, we need to be honest and true to ourselves.

I want to close with a Hasidic story.

*The great Rebbe Zusya once came before his followers with tears in his eyes. They asked him: "Rebbe, what's the matter?"*

*And he told them that he had had a vision. He said, "I have learned the question – the terrible question – that the angels will ask me when I enter Olam Haba – when I enter the next world."*

*The Rabbi's followers were puzzled. "But Rebbe Zusya, you are pious and wise and humble. What question about your life could possibly be so terrifying?"*

*Zusya sighed. He said, "When I enter the next world, the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you like Moses?' And they will not ask me, 'Why weren't you like Joshua?' They will not ask, 'Why weren't you like Maimonides or Rashi or Rabbi Akiba. Rather, they will say to me: 'Zusya, why weren't you like Zusya?'"*

This year, may each of us get a little closer to the essence of who we really want to be. May our loved ones witness our efforts. May we help them on their journeys as well. And finally, may each of us be written and sealed in the Book of Life. Ken yehi ratzon. May this be God's will.

Shanah Tovah.

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<sup>1</sup> David Brooks: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html>