

Rabbi Joshua Samuels  
Kol Nidre Sermon  
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### **A Blessing or a Curse?**

When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. This proverbial expression really hit home for me on Thursday. After putting my son to bed I turned on my computer to finish writing my Yom Kippur sermons and it didn't turn on. Although I had a feeling what happened, I waited to hear it from the professional on the other end of the phone. My premonition was indeed correct—the computer's hard drive had crashed. It was toast. Everything was gone.

I was on the verge of pulverizing my computer, not dissimilar from the copy machine scene from the cult film, Office Space. Thankfully, my calm wife reassured me that everything would be okay and that destroying my computer further would definitely not help. Believe it or not, I was a wreck.

Well, didn't you back it up Rabbi?

No! Unlike you, I trusted my computer. I had faith in my year-old Dell laptop that she would not conk out on me. I was naïve. I certainly know better now.

And so my planned sermon this evening on interfaith marriage will

have to wait. I pray that the geek squad computer physicians can retrieve what I had lost.

This whole experience reinforced two things for me. One: I can't stand technology, especially when it turns on me. I come from a father who used a typewriter his whole career. I think he also used two cans and a string for a phone until he recently bought the new iPhone.

And secondly: I love technology. The following morning I posted what had happened on Facebook and many of my friends and colleagues offered me suggestions and encouragement. My online community had gathered around me and lifted my spirits with words of wisdom and love.

From this ordeal came a story from the Baal Shem Tov that I heard a few years back in school.

Once upon a time, the lion grew furious with all of the other jungle animals. Since the lion is "the king," and is most powerful and dominant, his rage evoked deep fright in the hearts of the other animals.

"What should we do?" murmured all the animals at an emergency meeting. "If the lion lets out his anger, we are all done."

"No worries," came the voice of the fox, known as the wiliest of animals. "In the reservoirs of my brain are stored 300 stories, anecdotes and vignettes. When I present them to the lion, his mood will be transformed."

A wave of joy rushed through all the animals as they embarked on a march toward the lion's home in the jungle, where the fox would placate him and restore the friendly relationship between the lion and his subjects.

During the journey through the jungle pathways, the fox suddenly turns to one of his animal friends and says, "You know, I forgot 100 of my entertaining stories."

Rumors of the fox's lapse of memory spread immediately. Many animals were overtaken by profound trepidation, but soon came the calming voice of Mr. Bear.

"No worries," he said. "Two hundred vignettes of a brilliant fox are more than enough to get that arrogant lion rolling in laughter and delight.

"They will suffice to do the job," agreed Mr. Wolf.

A little while later, as the extraordinarily large entourage of animals

was nearing the lion, Mr. Fox suddenly turned to another colleague. "I have forgotten another 100 of my anecdotes. They simply slipped my mind."

The animals' fear became stronger, but soon enough came the reassuring voice of Mr. Deer.

"No worries," he proclaimed, "One hundred fox stories will suffice to capture the imagination of our simple king."

A few moments later, all of the hundreds of thousands of animals were at the lion's den. The lion rose to his full might and glory, casting a fierce gaze at all of his subjects, sending a shiver through their veins.

As the moment of truth arrived, all of the animals looked up with earnest eyes to their bright representative the fox, to approach the lion and accomplish the great mission of reconciliation.

At that very moment, the fox turned to the animals and said, "I am sorry, but I forgot my last 100 stories. I have nothing left to say to the king."

The animals went into hysteria. "You are a vicious liar," they cried. "You deceived us completely. What are we to do now?"

"My job," responded the fox calmly, "was to persuade you to take the journey from your own nests to the lion's den. I have accomplished my mission. You are here. Now, let each and every single one of you discover his own voice and rehabilitate his own personal relationship with the king."

This story resonates with me in a very profound way. Just as the fox forgot his 300 stories, my computer lost many documents including my High Holy Day sermons. But what I learn from this story is that when it comes to the holiest day of the year, what matters more than anything is our individual voices and prayers to God. Cindy, Kim, the many musicians and I can help us get to a spiritual place that we are not accustomed to so we can express our gratitude, regrets, transgressions and prayers to God. But we can only take you so far.

I know some people come simply to hear the Rabbi's sermon. And some of these people expect a political topic and others a more personal message. And while I take tremendous pride in my sermons, at the end of the day, this day, if I have not encouraged each of us to speak to God with our own words, with our own soul, heart to heart, then I have failed.

Each of us must discover his or her own inner voice and inner passion and spirit, and speak to God, b'chol l'avcha, with all of our heart. Today, we strip away our egos and stand before God, pleading before God to accept us and help us return. We pray as a community, but we pray with our own voices.

Perhaps it was a blessing, as my mom likes to say, that I had to re-write everything yesterday. While speaking about interfaith marriage is extremely important to me and relevant in our community, it can wait. What cannot wait, however, is the opportunity right now to engage in tefillah, in prayer as the gates of teshuva are closing. The only person that can address our king, avinu malkeinu, on your behalf is you.

Adonai eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu v'imoteinu, tavo lefanecha t'filateinu, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, grant that our prayers may reach you.

May you hear our prayers and grant us peace.