



## **Building Our Legacy**

*Rabbi Daniel Green, Rosh Hashana 5776*

### **Beyond the Beard**

This past summer, former Hassidic Reggae singer, Matisyahu, was invited to perform at the Rototom Sunsplash Festival in Valencia, Spain. With his iconic beard shaved and his old hat cast aside, divorced from his wife and orthodox past, the new Matisyahu was ready to take center stage.

And then the ultimatum came... the Festival organizers demanded that in order to perform, Matisyahu would first need to sign a statement endorsing a Palestinian state.

Only one artist from the weeklong Festival was asked to declare his, or her, political position on any issue. Only Matisyahu. Why was he singled out? For one reason only: he was a Jew!

Spain, a land infamous for its “inquisitions” over half-a-millennia prior, would once again demand from the Jew to make a public declaration, against his people, before enjoying the rights and freedoms accorded to men and women of all other faiths.

The clean shaven Matisyahu did not buckle or cave. He stood his ground. Outrage quickly descended on the Festival organizers, from Jewish organizations worldwide as well as members of the Spanish government. In the end, it was the organizers who buckled and caved. Making an abrupt u-turn, Matisyahu was re-invited.

On August 23, the final night of the Festival, Matisyahu took centre stage before thousands of fans in an outdoor arena. He watched how the chilled reggae vibe suddenly shifted. A threatening spirit of hostility filled the air, as massive Palestinian flags were unfurled and waved above the heads of the crowd.

Matisyahu took the mike and chose a hit song from his past. A song he made famous at a time when his beard was still flowing and black fedora still bopping. It was a song called - Jerusalem. With unwavering spirit and conviction Matisyahu sang about 3,000 years of Jewish history and how, without Jerusalem, life for the Jew simply cannot continue.

Matisyahu made a declaration, just not the one the festival organizers had hoped for.

## **Taking a Stand**

I must admit, four years ago when he shaved his beard, I felt betrayed. To me that beard was a national treasure that transcended the property rights of even the face it was on. All that changed, on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Matisyahu took a stand – a stand with his people.

We live in a world where Jews are less and less likely to stand with their people.

We have established an organization, J-Street, to champion the narrative of every other people but Israel. In the United States only 21% of the country supports the Iranian Nuclear Deal, agreeing with Prime Minister Netanyahu that it's bad for America and bad for Israel. 21% of the general American population - not the American Jewish population. The Jew is torn. He's ambivalent and unsure.

## **Rosh Hashana Power Tools**

There is a famous scene in the Book of Kings II (4:13), where the prophet Elisha, on “that day”, turns to the Shunamite woman, who has bestowed kindness upon him, and asks whether he can intercede on her behalf to the King. She turns down the gracious offer and replies: בתוך עמי אנכי יושבת – I dwell among my people.

The Zohar interprets this enigmatic interplay in a metaphoric way. “That Day” refers to Rosh Hashana and “the King” refers to the King of Kings. Elisha offered to pray on her behalf so that God would fulfill her dreams and aspirations for the New Year. Her response: I have an even greater power source than the prayers of a prophet. “I dwell with my people!” Our true strength as Jews is our commitment to stand with our brethren.

Like Matisyahu, we are called upon on Rosh Hashana to answer the question: בתוך עמי אנכי יושבת . Do I dwell with my people or do I stand alone?

## **Who Needs the Community?**

We live in a world where many people view the concept of “community” as a crutch. In our warped reality, “community” is for people who are lonely and disconnected. “Community” is for people without family... or a life! In an age of digital connectivity, does anyone really want to look into the face of another person and have a meaningful interaction?

Malcolm Gladwell once said: “Caring is exhausting.” It seems to be too exhausting for most. We live in world where we expect more and more from technology and less and less from others. We need meaningful relationships.

In a recent article, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks referenced *The Road to Character* - a national bestseller by New York Times columnist, David Brooks. In it he sums up our life choices in two categories: Resume Virtue and Eulogy Virtue.

There is a stark difference between the two. One is the qualities that are valued in the workplace, the other is how we want to be remembered when we’re gone - our legacy.

Job interviews are about qualifications, experience, and work ethic. The following are examples of things not to share at an interview:

- How you always place family first.
- How you keep Shabbat and will be unavailable, even by phone, every Friday night, Saturday, as well as weekday holidays.
- How your pregnant with twins.
- How honesty is your highest value.
- How your passion for fairness & how you fight for the rights of each and every one of your co-workers... even to your own personal harm.

Bottom line rule for interviews- never share eulogy virtues!

Eulogy virtues define us. They are the ideals for which we live for, the relationships we cultivate, and the impact we have on the world around us. Unfortunately, our virtues in life often become confused and skewed.

### **If I had 500 Million Dollars!**

Brooks describes how when you are in the presence of someone with eulogy virtues, they “possess an impressive inner cohesion” and aren’t leading “fragmented, scattershot lives.”

It’s interesting that the Shunamite woman doesn’t say עומדת עמי אנכי – “I stand with my people,” but rather יושבת עמי – “I sit with my people.” She was rooted and grounded with an inner cohesion. As such, she had the power to develop meaningful relationships, even with the greatest of Prophets in Israel.

Brooks shares how these categories of virtue were inspired by the book, *Lonely Man of Faith*, written by Rabbi J. B. Soloveichik. In it is a description of the charge that Adam received in the Garden of Eden – to both “conquer” and to “safeguard” the world. Conquering is all about

resumes virtue – a restlessness need to make your mark. Safeguarding is more reflective with a greater focus on macro life goals. On Rosh Hashana, we contemplate these first moments of Creation and assess how we live up to these two callings.

David Brooks commented that if he was given 500 million dollars to donate to a charity or cause of his choice he would set up a fund to help people build relationships. It is the most precious commodity we have in our world and something which is becoming more and more rare. The spine of Judaism is our relationships our community.

### **The Shiva Sisters**

The “Shiva Sisters” have recently been featured in the LA Times, National Public Radio, as well as various other Jewish media outlets. Their mission – “to cater to all of your Shiva needs.” The headline in the LA Times: *Mourning, with LA Panache!*

In a world where Jews are less and less likely to be associated with a Rabbi or synagogue, the Shiva Sisters provide it all - the Rabbi, the venue, and the food. All part of their acclaimed “concierge Shiva service.”

Is this awesome or awful? The Shiva Sisters may be providing an awesome service for people that really don’t know where to turn. It’s pretty awful, though, that in our moment of greatest religious need this, for many, is their only resource.

### **Relational Judaism**

Ron Wilson, in his book, *Relational Judaism*, describes how synagogues have become too transactional. They have cultivated a vendor/customer relationship. In that context, when the member arrives, he, or she, expects to be entertained, to be inspired, and to be educated. It’s all about the services that the synagogue provides.

That’s not a real community! A true community is not transactional but transcendent. People are not customers but partners. The power is “the pews” not in the bimah. It’s the power of the collective. It’s about meaningful relationships.

This past week, a member of our community went to hear a motivational speaker in Buffalo. A Harvard educated business leader. After the presentation, he approached the speaker. He shared how his father passed away six years ago and how, despite the transitions and challenges, he succeeded in continuing the business into its fourth generation.

She paused, looked at him, and said: “I’m sure you take your father’s legacy very seriously and feel his presence in everything you do. Just make sure that your son feels the same way about you. Make sure you have your own legacy as well that will be a source of inspiration and guidance.”

For many of us, the image of our parents is firmly set before our eyes. On holidays, when we step through the portals of rooms like these, their presence is profound. The previous generation left their mark. They transmitted a legacy. They lived inspired. Will we be able to do the same? We will be able to make our mark? To which virtue are we dedicating our lives?

On this Rosh Hashana let us declare *בתוך עמי אנכי יושבת* – I dwell among my people. Let us value community and see our role within the collective. May we all leave a lasting Jewish legacy.