**Appreciating Kids, the Present Moment, and Accepting Responsibility Keys to Grown Up Happiness**

**Occasion:**2006 Rosh Hashanah

At 13, I was floating through life; at 25, I drove sports cars and dated around; at 37, I walked away from a major accident unfazed, at 38, I jumped off a rock and began to conquer my fears; at 39, I married Holly; at 40, I started having children. Today at 43, I am standing in front of this congregation to answer the Rabbi's question, “How has my life changed?” My life has changed because I now feel present within it.
From my mid twenty's to mid thirty's, I was dating aimlessly, trying to get into the new hip restaurant and, EXCLUSIVE of work was generally uncertain where my life was headed. It sounds like fun, and at times it, was but I asked myself, is this all there is to life? I was always looking at my past and missed opportunities. At 25, I wished I were 18, at 32, I wished I were 25, living the supposedly "good times.” The truth of the matter was, for the most part, those “good times” weren't so good because no matter how old I was, I wished I were younger. I would put up mental roadblocks so I wouldn't be able to be in the here and now.
For instance, when I saw a dramatic play, like Death of a Salesman, I wasn't able to enjoy it, because I was looking at my watch wondering when the play was going to be over, or I would be thinking about work or a hundred different things because I didn't want to throw myself into the emotions of the characters.
This probably contributed to my love of musicals.
If I couldn't even experience a play, how was I going to experience life? I was biding my time.
I thought again, is this all there is? You're born; stuff happens; you die!
I didn’t conduct my life, life conducted me.
To remain in this shallow state took a lot of work but it seemed to be Ok since I didn't have to face the nuances of life happy or sad.
When I was 37, I was in a serious car accident. I walked away, but I remember being unfazed at what had just happened. I was numb. In fact, I almost had no reaction except I was frightened that I wasn't frightened.
I didn't like being numb. I HAD to attempt change. I knew changing would take hard work and determination, and I had nothing to lose. I just needed a catalyst and the accident, acted as one. Two weeks after the accident, I decided to take a vacation.
I walked in Central Park everyday. I sat and read by the great lawn, watched the animals at the zoo, walked by the carousel and looked at the children at the lake with their remote controlled sailboats.
Unlike my times at the theatre, I took off my watch.
A month after the accident, having walked the park for two weeks, I remember going on a week-long trip to the Adirondacks with my best friend Izzy. We canoed until we came to a giant rock in the middle of the water. We climbed the rock and, before I could say anything, Izzy jumped in the water. Now, I am afraid of heights, and water has never been a real friend of mine. I stayed on top of that rock for at least an hour. The water was calm and the rock was 15 feet high. I tried to gather up enough inner strength to jump off and fall into the water. While I looked over the edge hoping the water was getting closer or the rock lower, I realized that jumping into the water was, for me, a leap of faith; I have never been particularly good at leaps of faith. I realized at that moment the leap into the water was a metaphor. I jumped into the water and guess what, I didn't die. I was scared, frightened and terrified but I took that running leap. I decided to incorporate this metaphoric leap into my life. Unlike the accident I was glad to be alive. When I find myself slipping back to that floating stage, I use this memory to prove to myself I can accomplish anything.
There was Sam Pre-Rock and Sam Post-Rock.
After that trip, my life began to change. Coincidentally, I met Holly. I KNEW I had to change. A BIG opportunity had presented itself.
I married Holly. We had two children, Charlotte and Noah, and now have a third on the way.
The love and joy that my family gives me allows me to open up and love in a way I never knew existed. I needed to learn how to love and to accept love because love comes with great responsibility and the possibility of loss. Now, all be it imperfectly, I face fear; I face love; I face responsibility.
The day I realized I am in the present and how really scary it can be is the day Charlotte looked into my eyes and the look pierced through me.
I felt the love only a parent can feel. I might never have had the opportunity to feel this unique love if I hadn't made a decision to live in the here and now. I feel very lucky because I was 39 and established professionally when Charlotte was born. This gave me the maturity to understand what everyone with children had told me,
BE PRESENT WHEN YOUR KIDS ARE GROWING UP BECAUSE THEY GROW UP TOO QUICKLY.
It also allowed me the freedom to take some mornings off from work and take Charlotte to school or to be with her during the separation period or to take Noah, my one year old, to the bubbling baby’s swim class on Thursday's.
I understand why I didn’t want to be in the present. Living in the present comes at a price. In addition to experiencing the fun of life, the humor, and the love, I also realized I would have to experience the pain, deal with disagreement, acrimony, anger and worse than all, loss.
In January 2006, my aunt Harriet died. The floodgates opened, and I couldn’t control my feelings. 5 1/2 years ago, I would not have allowed myself to grieve so deeply, and it still hurts.
I am working all the time to experience life's moments as they happen, and with each passing year it gets easier. I used to think I couldn’t wait to find the magic secrets of life, so I could have all the answers and start living my life, but if even if it were possible to have all the answers, I wouldn’t be able to experience my journey.
When my children were born, I decided to put tefillin on every morning so that I could thank G-D for the gifts he has given me-my family.
When the Rabbi asked me to speak today, I started to think about the questions, and I understood for the very first time the saying, "The important thing in life is the journey.”So, I thank you Rabbi for helping me crystallize my thoughts. In writing this paper, I understand I found not a silver or gold lining in life but a platinum one. Now my journey is spending as much time with my family as I can, telling them every single day how much I love them.
What have I learned over the past five years? I have learned that looking at a painting one of my children has made makes me happier than looking at a Monet or a 2nd century Roman marble torso of Artemis. I have learned that I can love the people who are close to me, and it is okay to be angry at the people who have hurt me. I have learned that there is nothing better than hearing my daughter say, "I love you, Abba” or seeing my son stand for the first time.
What is better than that?
Thank you.
Shana Tova.
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