

Saving Our Best for the Everyday – Shabbat Rosh Hodesh

In an episode of the TV show *Friends*, one of my most favorite programs of all time, married couple Monica and Chandler are preparing to host Thanksgiving dinner at their apartment when Chandler suggests that they set the table with their wedding china. Monica initially demurs, arguing that such precious dishes are supposed to be saved for something very special – like, for example, a visit from the Queen of England – and worrying about the possibility of breaking an item from the expensive set. Chandler, in return, points out that the Queen of England keeps passing them by and, besides, what is the point of having nice things if they can never be used? Naturally, this being a sitcom, the couple finally agrees to put out the china only to have one plate – and then eventually the entire box of dishes – shattered in a series of comedic mishaps. When the Queen of England comes to call she'll have to eat off of ordinary porcelain!

We can all laugh a bit at Monica's uptight ways in the scene just described, the futility of owning something never to be used out of fear that it will be ruined and thus come never to be used. But there's another element of folly in Monica's thinking – the idea that special things should be saved only for the extraordinary moments and never for the ordinary ones. While in certain ways it makes good sense to reserve special treatment for special times or occasions – splurging on a vacation, for example, while being more careful with day-to-day spending – focusing on the exceptional at the expense of the everyday can also have its pitfalls. If most of us were asked, it would be the regular and constant people present in our lives – our parents, children, spouses, and friends – who most deserve our patience and dedicated efforts, yet we often store up these reserves for others instead whether it be the bosses around whom we're forever trying to ingratiate ourselves or the casual acquaintances with whom we seek to make a good impression. If most of us were asked, it would be the regular and constant

moments through which we live out our days – the tucking of children into bed each night and bringing our spouses coffee in the morning – that ultimately have the greatest meaning, but we often tend to overlook these rituals of the everyday to instead focus on grand happenings and events. One could argue that wedding china should be saved for Thanksgiving to make the holiday elevated and unique or one could argue that wedding china should be used more regularly because, really, what is more special and important than a family sitting down to dinner together on an ordinary weekday evening? Perhaps we should more often be saving our very best not only for the exceptional but also for the everyday.

Judaism, too, is a religion that cares deeply about the holiness of the ordinary. And in fact, it is a day such as today – a Shabbat which is also Rosh Hodesh (the holiday of the New Month) – which helps to illustrate our tradition’s hierarchy of values which ultimately privileges the more common over the less so. On Shabbat Rosh Hodesh, when we greet our friends and neighbors, it is proper to say “Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov” – essentially Good Shabbes and have a great new month – mentioning Shabbat over the holiday of the new moon. The particular example is small and somewhat trivial but it makes a larger point; one might think we mention Rosh Hodesh first, as it comes but once a month and is thus more unique than Shabbat, but rather it is just the opposite. And it’s not just when Rosh Hodesh falls on Shabbat! When Rosh Hashanah coincides with Shabbat we refrain from blowing shofar in order to maintain the traditional prohibition against carrying; likewise, when Sukkot falls on Shabbat we don’t wave lulav and etrog for the same reason. Even when Yom Kippur, arguably the most sacred day of the Jewish year, comes on Shabbat we don’t recite the iconic *Avinu Malkenu* because of its petitionary nature from which Shabbat calls us to refrain. In all of these examples, Shabbat comes first! The rabbinic principle underlying these observances, found in a number of different places throughout the Talmud, is “*Tadir v’sheayno tadir tadir kodem* - If a more frequent occurrence coincides with a less

frequent one, the more frequent one takes precedence.” It is an argument for the everyday over the exceptional.

The principle of *tadir v'sheayno tadir tadir kodem* also finds expression in a number of examples separate from the sometimes conflict between Shabbat and a holiday. When we put on the ritual garments of prayer each morning we wrap ourselves first in *tallit* and then in *t'fillin* as *tallit* is worn everyday – including on Shabbat – while *t'fillin* is wrapped only on weekdays. When Chanukah and Rosh Hodesh Tevet fall together each year, we read first the full Torah reading for Rosh Hodesh and then an abbreviated *maftir* for Chanukah as the new month comes more often than the Festival of Lights. In Mishna Megillah (4:2) we read of the various numbers of *aliyot* apportioned out on various days of Torah reading, ascending to the most sacred moments on the Jewish calendar, with six *aliyot* assigned for Yom Kippur and seven designated for Shabbat. Here again, we see that Shabbat ultimately trumps the High Holidays when it comes to levels of holiness. While there is sanctity in the exceptional, there is even more so in the common and mundane.

“Tadir v'sheayno tadir tadir kodem - If a more frequent occurrence coincides with a less frequent one, the more frequent one takes precedence.” Or, in other words, we should save our best dishes and certainly our best selves not only for visiting dignitaries like the Queen of England but rather for the everyday people who take up residence in our homes and in our hearts. How often do we carefully walk through our work days, showing grace and patience under pressure, only to immediately lose our temper over a minor grievance the moment we walk through the door of our house? How often do we say “yes” to a peripheral friend for fear of being judged poorly, even while knowing that this will create a subsequent “no” for someone we care about more deeply? What would happen if we took half the effort we put into cleaning for Passover and instead used it to make Shabbat dinner once a month?

Why is it that we often reserve our best behavior, our best efforts, and our best attitude for the ones who know us the least well?

The principle of *tadir v'sheyano tadir tadir kodem* is not always an easy one to live by. For not only does it require that we prioritize the familiar over the less so, but it also requires that we privilege consistency over the occasional spectacular showing of effort – it requires sustained energy rather than sporadic bursts of initiative. Rabbi Haim Jachter illustrates the challenge of this dictum in the parable of a father who spends much time traveling but, when he infrequently returns home, comes bearing many expensive gifts and engaging in a few days of non-stop family fun. He compares this individual with a second father who is available day in and day out for his children, rarely lavishing them with an overabundance of presents or concentrated time spent together, but rather functioning as a strong and steady presence in their lives more regularly. Writes Jachter, “Everyone would agree that the second father is a dramatically superior father than the first. Consistency beats flamboyance by all standards and measures.¹ As we all know, demonstrating steady, unwavering commitment to a person or a cause is far more difficult than making occasional dramatic displays! And yet, this is exactly what Judaism requires when it comes to our relationships with one another and with God.

This morning we welcome Rosh Hodesh Tammuz, the new month during which we will eventually inaugurate the 3 weeks before Tisha B'av – a period of national mourning for our people. Rosh Hodesh is, in some ways, a mini-Yom Kippur whereby we have the opportunity to attain forgiveness and start over again fresh. As we recite in the Musaf Amidah for Rosh Hodesh which we will begin together in just a few moments: “Lord our God, lovingly have You given us Shabbat for rest and New Moon festivals for atonement...Renew our lives in this month for goodness and blessedness, joy and gladness, deliverance

¹ <http://www.jewishlinknj.com/features/12733-hashems-favorite-baseball-player>

and consolation, sustenance and support, life and peace, pardon of sin and forgiveness of transgression.”² Rosh Hodesh is a time to take stock of our lives and our deeds, hoping to do even better in the month ahead.

As we enter into the new month of Tammuz today, may we bring special attention to the lesson of *tadir v'sheayno tadir tadir kodem*, hoping to save just a bit of our best selves for the every day. And perhaps taking out those china dishes every once in a while for a regular weeknight meal.

Wishing you a very peaceful Shabbat Shalom! Chodesh Tov!

² Traditional Musaf Amidah for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh