

The Superman Paradox

RH1

Some of you might have heard that I'm a bit of a Batman fan...not the newer angry, rough speaking Batman, but the real Batman, Adam West!!

In previous years, some of you have even heard me speak about why I think that Batman is the ultimate superhero. In a nutshell, Batman is the ultimate superhero because he is the only one that does not have any superpowers! (Except maybe a boat-load of money). Think about it, with the right funding, you or I can become Batman!

But this year, something has changed. Please don't get me wrong, I am still a huge Batman fan, but this year, I learned to admire Superman!

What changed?

What caused this radical shift in my universe?

Well, the answer is quote simple...the catalyst to this shift is a new TV series called Superman & Lois.

The premise is actually quite simple: Clark Kent (shhh that's really Superman) and now his wife Lois Lane return to Smallville with their sons Jonathan and Jordan and try to live a "normal life". Well, normal for Superman. During part of the time, Superman is a normal person, dealing with the pressures of family life, while during the rest of his time, fighting for..come 'on, say it with me, truth, justice and the American way! I just save you from having to watch the first two seasons...

But, during this current 3rd season, Clark Kent's life is upended...because now Superman has to not only deal with negotiating their two teenage son's sibling rivalry (one inherited dad's powers and the other didn't), dating and absent father issues while juggling world-threatening supervillains, you know, typical stuff for superheroes, but now, for the first time ever, Clark Kent AKA Superman is powerless due to, not kryptonite but due to something more powerful and dramatic...real life.

As I watched this superhero confront this new enemy, my thoughts turn to something I've started calling The Superman Paradox.

The superman paradox embodied was in a passage I read many years ago from science fiction writer David Gerrold (yes, the same David Gerrold who wrote Star Trek's "The Trouble with Tribbles" episode),

David Gerrold once wrote — and I'm paraphrasing here:

“Watching a superhuman tackle problems isn't interesting, because, well, Superman always wins. But watching a regular guy tackle a superhuman problem — that's where really great stories are found.”

My friends, I bring this up today on this first day of Rosh Hashana because the series Superman & Lois has offered one of the most compelling solutions to The Superman Paradox.

As the show aired its season finale, the series gave Superman a massive challenge: Superman, the man of Steele, the hero who can jump a tall building in one leap, was turned into an average guy with a battleship-size nemesis.

What happened? How did it come to this?

Well, Lois Lane, superman's love and wife is diagnosed with cancer.

And suddenly, a man who never gets ill and rarely feels pain has to try helping the person he loves most survive a life-threatening illness.

In a particularly poignant episode called "Of Sound Mind," Clark Kent is avoiding a therapy group with relatives of patients fighting cancer, because it is so difficult for him to admit that Lois might die. After rushing into a confrontation with a supervillain that nearly kills him and his superpowered son, Clark has to admit his inability to process his helplessness — which every relative of a person fighting serious disease feels intensely — is throwing him off.

"I realize, Superman says, that for the first time I can't keep you safe," he tells Lois, tears filling his eyes. "I feel really powerless."

And this, my friends, is what brought a surprising change in this 60-something comic-book-nerd-turned-rabbi — to not only watching Superman & Lois but to even admiring the Man of Steele.

Today on this RH, we recognize that we are in many ways, like
Superman, powerless:

Read the paper, what can we change?

Confronting illness, what can we do,

Children growing up, plant a carrot, we have no control

ON RH, we are like Clark and Lois's Superman, with all sorts of
abilities and strengths, and yet we are powerless..

On Rosh hashana, we show up, with tzures...and for many of our
problems, powerless...

So what do we do? We come, we pray, we think, we resolve..but is that
enough?

As I think about this Superman Paradox, I would like to offer you today
three more tools for your "powerless" toolbox.

Three ideas on how to deal with powerlessness:

1. We repent, and recognize that we are not perfect

I'm sure we have all heard that admitting we have a problem is the first step towards resolving that problem? This is no different.

We, like superman, have to confront the stark reality that we are not perfect, we sin, we misstep, we fall. On this Rosh Hashana, as we look at our lives and our world, we must deal with our powerlessness with the humble admission that we are not perfect.

The story is told of a rosh hashana service in a wealthy synagogue, the rabbi got carried away. Falling to his knees, forehead to floor, he said, "Oh God, before thee I am nothing."

The cantor, not to be outdone, also got down, forehead to wood, and said, "Oh God, before thee I am nothing."

Seeing this, The shul president in the back row left his seat, walked through the aisle, fell to his knees, forehead to floor and he, too, said, "Oh God, before thee I am nothing."

With this, the cantor elbowed the rabbi and sniffed, “Look who thinks he’s a nothing!”

That’s a bit too drastic, we are not nothing, but what we are needs a little work. Admitting this helps us begin dealing with the Superman Paradox.

2. We pray and recognize God in our lives.

In his classic **2000 Year Old Man**, Mel Brooks played a character who has lived for 2000 year old man with an old-school Yiddish accent and Carl Reiner interviewed him as the straight man.

In this amazing “interview” they explore the origin of faith:

INTERVIEWER: Did you believe in anything?

OLD MAN: Yes, a guy – Phil. Philip was the leader of our tribe.

INTERVIEWER: What made him the leader?

OLD MAN: Very big, very strong, big beard, big arms, he could just kill you. He could walk on you and you would die.

INTERVIEWER: You revered him?

OLD MAN: We prayed to him. Would you like to hear one of our prayers? “Oh Philip. Please don’t take our eyes out and don’t pinch us and don’t hurt us....Amen.”

INTERVIEWER: How long was his reign?

OLD MAN: Not too long. Because one day, Philip was hit by lightning. And we looked up and said...”There’s something bigger than Phil.”

I love that story because it reminds me that there is always someone bigger “than Phil”. The second step is solving the Superman Paradox in our lives is the recognition that sometime we need to, as our Christian brothers and sisters say, “Just throw it up to God”.

Does that make you feel uncomfortable? It shouldn’t...after all, that is part of what rosh hashana is all about.

We wish each other Shana Tova, right? How do we know? Are there any guarantees? Are there any assurances that we will have a shana tova?

We all the know the answer to that one...and so, we pray and we “throw it up to God”. We solve the Superman Paradox by recognizing the power of prayer on ourselves and the listening heart of a loving and caring God. That is #2.

And finally, and perhaps the most important:

We love, we love our faith with all its rituals, we love our worshipping community, and we love each other.

The fact that you are here tells me already that you all find comfort in this worshipping, caring community. So let’s build on that together, shall we? Let’s support each other, let’s be humble together, let’s pray and rexongize together that there is “someone bigger than Phil”....Let’s solve the Superman Paradox together by humility, belief and love.

Superman & Lois depicts a couple whose super heroic status doesn't come from any amazing powers or abilities. Instead, they're sustained by an enduring love that conquers all — even foes beyond the powers of the

Man of Steel. On this Rosh Hashana, let us all be more like Superman
Lois.

Shana Tova