

RH II  
2020  
Har Shalom  
Savoring Our Faith  
Rabbi Irving Elson

What is your perfect meal? Is it pizza? Is it salmon? Is it hamburgers and hotdogs? Perhaps brisket? For me, that answer to that question is fairly simple; My perfect meal is a **thick steak, a good glass of wine, and of course a great cigar.** I've actually thought about this a lot. During my first combat deployment to Iraq, my chaplains assistant and I would sit on the desert floor near the wheel of our HUMMVE, and as we ate our battle ration for that meal, we would often speak about "our perfect meal": **a thick steak, a good glass of wine, and of course a great cigar.** To me that is the perfect combination for my senses. If you close your eyes, can you just feel the sizzle of the steak, cant you? Smell the bouquet of the wine? Almost taste the spicy blend of the tobacco? The perfect combination for our senses.

During a recent fishing trip to Alaska, a non-Jewish friend of mine and I were sitting by the banks of Nugashak river, smoking a great cigar after a long day of fishing, when the conversation turned to a relative new TV show called "Elevator Pitch". Here is how this show works:

*Elevator Pitch is a show where YOU have 60-seconds to pitch a business idea or product to a board room of investors. If the investors are impressed, the entrepreneur is invited into the board room to make a deal. If the pitch fails, elevator doors stay closed and the entrepreneur is sent down.*

The conversation quickly turned to our respective faiths and what would be our own faith's elevator pitch. I quickly mentioned that famous story of Rabbi Hille and Shamai, (tell story). But he then challenged me a little further and said; what is YOUR Elevator Pitch?

After a few minutes of thinking about it, I simply said, "Judaism, is like **a thick steak, a good glass of wine, and of course a great cigar.**"

Not the answer you were expecting is it? It certainly wasn't for him, but allow me to explain:

When most secular people think about Judaism– or, more often, some mischaracterization of it – I doubt anyone would list such a delightful series of sensory metaphors as a **a thick steak, a good glass of wine, and of course a great cigar..**So why did I give that answer?

My friends, we live in age where religion is not in the forefront of American life, and in a time where the large portion of Gen X,Y,Z, think of faith and religion as tired and boorish I wanted my friend to understand that Judaism in the form of sensory images that illuminate the mind, is far more complex, profound and USEFULL, than any intellectual argument or pitch.

And so today, as we are on the threshold of a new year and we are bombarded with issues, and problem, and challenges for the year to come, I want to take a few minutes to talk a

little about our faith, about Judaism and how, during these times, we can use to help us not only get thru, but enjoy it much like (common say it with me...) **a thick steak, a good glass of wine, and a great cigar.**

Let's begin:

First and foremost: Judaism is something that first needs to be *savored*. The truth of our **Torah** and heritage is as a juicy, thick, perfectly cooked steak – something you could really sink your teeth into. We need to envision the beauty of our **rituals** as a fine glass of French burgundy – something delicate, robust, and timeless. And certainly during these times of strife and unrest, we need to seek out **God's Goodness** as the smoky taste of toasted tobacco – something mystifying, and captivating.

*The combining of these savory smells and tastes, mixing them, placing them in our minds, our hearts and in our daily lives elevate our understanding of our faith and makes us see it not only as something worth cherishing, enjoying, sharing, and especially, savoring, But as something that provides us the strength and resilience we need during these hard times.*

So how do you savor our Jewish faith? Allow me to share with you a roadmap.

Step one: You savor Judaism first and foremost by *knowing* it.

In our tradition there is certainly something for everyone and for every situation. Be it art, culture, music, food, archeology, medicine, biology, ethics. It's all here within the boundaries of centuries of Jewish texts and traditions.

I promise you that if you work through diligent to study of our faith, you will be rewarded with incredible treasures and joys. One who studies and searches genuinely our tradition will find their questions answered, their hearts set on fire (as our Hasidic masters used to say), and be shocked and wonderfully amazed at the depth and breadth of Judaism's understanding of life, with all its problems....A study of Jewish history and our sages' response to previous crisis for our people, will teach us that we are not the first to live thru a pandemic, and will show us how the richness of our philosophy, our liturgy and our holy writing have brought comfort to our people and can do so again.

**In order to savor Judaism we need to learn about our Judaism.**

This brings us to the second step to savoring our Judaism. A wise rabbi once said: "The Judaism abounds with savory trails, but the main highway is built on the Mitzvot" on our commandments.

He continued: "Want to ponder the inner life of God? Want to know the secrets of Creation? Want to have inner peace, and rest face to face with the Lord at his heavenly banquet? The secret is right in front of us: follow God's commandments. Shabbat, kashrut, gmilut hasadim, bikur holim. Every single one of the "thou shalt" engages the body as much as the soul.

During these times where we cannot travel, observing the mitzvah or shabbat **is** the island we seek, that island in time, of rest, and peace. When the TV is flooded with acts of hate and violence, a commandment to "love thy neighbor as

thyself”, focuses us, refreshes us and guides us. When the problems of a complex society overwhelms us, how beautiful and how simple it is to hear the words : Love thy neighbor as thy self. It’s not hard...as Nike commercial says: just do it!! And the list of commandments and rituals goes on and on....

I am often impressed with how the sheer beauty of the commandments can overwhelm the senses. Judaism is such a visceral experience, engaging the full array of the senses, elevating the heart and mind to spiritual heights; Clouds of challah smell, echoes of chanting on shabbat, waving of a lulav, lighting shabbat candles, penitential fasts, and joyous feasts are essential dynamics and foundations of our faith. And the list of commandments and rituals goes on and on.... Like a thick Steaks, a good wine, and great cigars, Judaism’s rituals and commandments, reflect sensory experiences that are also worth savoring and that center us, that bring us calm and quiet in a turbulent and loud world and that give further meaning and structure to our lives, especially now when one day flows into the other, and before you know it, another week has gone by.

Our mitzvot fill out senses and give purpose to our actions much like a thick Steaks, a good wine, and great cigars, fill our stomachs and out pallates.

Study our faith

Live the Rituals and commandments

And now the 3<sup>rd</sup> step:

Judaism – like **a thick steak, a god glass of wine, and a great cigar** – is something to be made as part of our day to day life, not just a few times a year. ( I know my cardiologist will disagree,).

Our Tradition beckons us: Ase Toratcha Keva

**Make Your observance of the Torah, Kevah, Something to be practiced every day.**

Pick a Jewish ritual, any ritual, practice it, make it part of your routine, every day, and see what happens. A daily practice of one of the many aspects of our faith will open up for you a new window into the world. You will see your life enriched in ways you cannot imagine. And when that happens, start another one..., and another, and another one, and soon You will soon find how much richer your life is. You will see how How an hour, or a day or a week becomes another opportunity to encounter God, and to reflect HIS goodness and compassion. I don't need to tell you, this world needs more compassionate and good people.

On this Rosh Hashana, on the eve of a new year, where the future seems to unclear and our lives continue to be upended over and over, I want to remind you that the treasures of our faith, **study, mitzvot, and daily practice** are things that should be savored in order to guide us.

The real delicacies of Judaism are right in front of us. The wisdom of the ages thru study, the sweetness for our lives thru the **mitzvot, and the warm embrace of God**, thru the daily practice of His will. They are fully ready for any Jew who seeks them.

So, as we celebrate Rosh Hashana, go and kiss your spouse, go play with your your kids or grandkids, watch the sunset, and savor a a thick steak, a good glass of wine and after the

holy day, smoke a great cigar, and thankfully savor all that  
God has given us.

Shana tova