

1st Day of Rosh Hashanah 5779/2018

“Han Solo Shot First”

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I want to begin today with a confession. The confession is this: as big a fan as I am of the Star Wars movies, I have not had the chance to see the latest movie: *Solo: A Star Wars Story*.

And yet, even though I have not had the chance to see the latest installment of the blockbuster series, I feel compelled, once again to speak about Star Wars. So, buckle your seats belts, here we go...

In May of 1977, the world changed. It was introduced to the epic stories of a galaxy far, far away. It's hard to believe that for over 40 years, these stories have been inspiring High Holy Day sermons for rabbis around the world... well, at least for this rabbi!

What few people know is that the original 1977 movie had a remake 20 years later. That's right, in 1997 the phenomenon that is Star Wars got a brand-new look for its twentieth anniversary. Thanks to the improvements in special effects, the creator of the franchise, George Lucas, was now able to add into the movie special effects which he was unable to add in back in 1977 when the film first debuted.

Now, most of these changes were small. A few extra background characters here and there thanks to C.G.I., explosions could be made bigger, and there are a few new scenes added that were originally edited out of the first

version. Most of these changes had absolutely no effect on the story.

But one did!! A change involving the character Han Solo. (And as I do every year, I was to apologize... but I'm going to geek out here a little bit). We meet Han Solo, the character played by Harrison Ford in this first Star Wars movie. Han is a smuggler, and we meet him in a cantina in the isolated town of Mos Eisley. You'll never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy as that cantina... ta tat tata!

Our Star Wars heroes meet Han Solo and they make arrangements for him to take them to the planet of Alderon, to take some secret plans to the head of the rebellion, the beautiful Princess Leia. Luke Skywalker leaves to go do some business and as soon as he leaves, a character by the name of Greedo sweeps in to capture Solo and collect the bounty placed on Solo's head. Greedo has a blaster gun in his hand and basically orders Solo to come with him.

Han Solo is just too cool for school.

He leans back in his chair, playing casual, while quietly unholstering his blaster under the table. And before he knew what hit him, Han Solo shoots Greedo - shoots him dead!

That's how it happened in the 1977 version. My friends... Han Solo shoots first.

But when the film was remade in 1997, George Lucas found it necessary to change that scene. If you watch the new version of the film, Greedo gets a shot off a split second before Han Solo shoots. He misses, and *then* Han Solo shoots him, making the roguish smuggler shoot acting only in self-defense.

Fans of Star Wars who follow every minutiae of the film went crazy at the change... not me, of course, but others...

This seemingly small change made them completely upset because Han Solo was a rogue, a scoundrel, a smuggler; he was the type of person who shoots first. And having him shoot in self-defense completely changes his story. How big was this change to Star Wars fans? So big that the Washington Post and the New York Times asked George Lucas about it.

When George Lucas was asked why he made the change he says and I quote: “I was thinking mythologically. Han Solo should be a cowboy.

He should be like John Wayne, a good guy... and John Waynes don't shoot people.” George Lucas went on to say that this was “a mythological reality that we hope our society pays attention to.”

Think about it: “**The mythological reality that we hope society pays attention to.**” What's that reality? That you are either good... or you are bad...?

If you are good, you behave consistently within that paradigm... the good guy always follows their moral compass and never compromises. They're consistently compassionate and wanting not for themselves, but for the good of the whole.

Bad guys are just the opposite; all they want to do is either destroy what is around them or take solely for themselves. Their loyalty is always suspect and their means are consistently ruthless.

Bad guys shoot first.
Good guys don't.

Why am I talking about Han Solo, Star Wars and mythological realities on this, the most holy day of the year? Because on this day, as we begin a new year and revisit the year that was, we deal not with mythological realities; **we deal with the real world.** In this season of introspection, we recognize that there is not one person sitting here today that is all 'good guy' or all 'bad guy.' Today, on the beginning of the ten days of repentance, we are reminded that as humans, as children of the Almighty, each one of us is both good and bad. The High Holy Days are a reminder that people can hold both the scoundrel and the hero within one purse in the story of life.

On all other days of the year, we can pretend to be all sorts of things. But during this season, we are confronted with the reality that we are not as simple as good guys and bad guys, that we are not John Wayne with the white hat, and not the bad guy with the black hat.

We are reminded that people are complex and very often paradoxical. And so recognizing that we not all good or all bad, I think the question we should all be asking ourselves today is **what do we pray for on this Rosh Hashanah?**

I would propose that while this day is about beginning the process of atonement and reconciliation today is a day when we pray for balance.

Balance is not an easy task to achieve. Some people spend their entire lives trying to find the balance between the different parts of life.

Our own faith talks a lot about balance. God in the Torah recognizes that life is not all good and not all bad. And on this day, as we begin to do a *heshbon hanefesh*, an inventory of our lives and our soul, we are asked to see how well we achieved that balance.

It's important to remember that balance is not trying to have equal parts of happiness and sadness... who wants equal parts happiness and sadness?

Balance is about recognizing that sadness and happiness are both ends of the same spectrum. That they are both needed; one to recognize that we have or lack the other. You don't have to have more of one than the other, but we have to understand that they are necessary for each other.

According to one famous writer, one of the traits of human beings is the ability to hold conflicting ideas simultaneously. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

One of my new rabbi superheroes that I learned about during my summer study in Israel is Rabbi Simcha Bunam (Bonhart) of P'sisch'cha (Przysucha, Poland) (1765-1827). He used to say, "Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need. When feeling lowly and depressed discouraged or

disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words:

"For my sake was the world created."

But when feeling high and mighty, one should reach into the left pocket, and find the words: "I am but dust and ashes."

These notes are not charms or amulets or magic formulas. They have no power of their own. Their only power comes from the meaning you give to them by using them in your life. The secret of living comes from knowing when to reach into each pocket.

The goal is to create a balance... a balance between not letting our goodness convert into arrogance and our failures turn into defeatism. A balance in recognizing that in fact, we are not all completely evil but yet we are not all completely good.

On this Rosh Hashanah, I would argue that it is not one or the other, but that we must maintain **both at once**. Perhaps, as human beings, we cannot have one without the other – it takes humility to find joy, and without joy, we cannot achieve humility. Our task is to find balance in life.

We actually find that very balance in the observance of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

On Rosh Hashanah we are given the sense of joy, of hope, of renewal. But we also realize that Rosh Hashanah must come first, for without the sustaining hope and joy that it embodies, we would not engage on Yom Kippur in the hard work of

introspection, looking ourselves in the face in that mirror and truly seeing who and what we are, and then working, to make ourselves better during the *Yamim Nora'im*.

Someone once described this search for balance as a dance, and it's this very dance that calls us to be fully human, to strive to be alive and aware and to exercise our free will, to make choices, to have hope... but to be realistic... that hope must be balanced with a sense of our responsibilities, and our weaknesses, as measured by our failures.

The goal is not perfection. As a human being, the goal is to find a way to maintain the balance. Like a circus performer, we must walk the tightrope.

I love the character of Han Solo, brash and selfish, yet brave and caring. When I first read the article about Han Solo and the two versions, I was torn as to which Han Solo I liked best; the Han Solo who shot first or the Han Solo that shot when attacked. I think that the Han Solo I liked the best, is the one in my mind, who like me, has constantly struggle to find balance in my life.

May this next year be a year where we recognize joy, because we have confronted sadness; a year when we celebrate life, because we have seen illness and death; a year where we reconnect with God, because we have experienced moments when the Divine has been hidden from us.

May each of us find balance, and be sealed for a year of health, prosperity, joy, and well-being, full of love and laughter. *Ken yehi ratzon* and May The Force Be With You.

Amen.