

Walking along the streets in the old city of Jerusalem you might happen upon a little silver shop with a jeweler who loves to tell the story of King Solomon.

King Solomon had many servants but one servant, Benaiah ben Yehoyada, the captain of the Palace Guard, was his favorite servant of all. Solomon made this preference quite obvious to all the others, and because of this, the other servants teased Benaiah. So Solomon decided that Benaiah needed a lesson in humility. The king summoned Benaiah and a few of the other servants and gave them an impossible mission to fulfill. He figured they would all fail equally and then Benaiah would no longer be teased for being his favorite.

“I have heard rumors of a fabulous ring,” said King Solomon. “It has a unique power. When a sad man gazes upon it, he becomes happy. But when a happy man gazes upon it, he becomes sad. Find this ring and bring it to me.”

Benaiah set out in search of the ring. He traveled from town to town, inquiring as to its whereabouts. But no one had ever heard of such a ring. He was about to give up when he spotted a junk shop, whose proprietor was sitting out front. Benaiah approached the man and described the object of his search.

“A ring that cheers the sad and saddens the cheerful?” said the junk dealer. “Come inside.”

They entered the shop. From a boxful of baubles the junk dealer took a plain, silver ring. He engraved some words on it and gave it to Benaiah. Benaiah read the inscription, nodded sagely, and headed back to the palace.

Solomon summoned all the servants that had taken on this mission. The first came up empty handed, the second brought a ring made out of gems. When Solomon summoned Benaiah, he was expecting an unsuccessful—and humbled—Benaiah. So when Benaiah strode in and handed him the ring, the king was taken aback.

Inspecting it, he read the inscription—and let out a melancholy sigh.

King Solomon removed his costly rings and slipped on the ring from the junk shop instead. “It was I who needed a lesson in humility,” he said. “This ring has reminded me that wealth and power are fleeting things.”

For the inscription on the ring read GAM ZU YAAVOR--“This too shall pass.”

At that moment, Solomon realized that all his wisdom and fabulous wealth and tremendous power which he thought would take him beyond the boundaries of mortality. were but fleeting things, for one day he would be nothing but dust. It was the humble merchant who knew that nothing was permanent.

That thought--“Gam Zeh Yaavor”--interrupts us in the midst of the life we are living to tell us that nothing lasts forever, neither joy nor sorrow.

In hard situations these words provide a glimmer of comfort. Some one receives a terrible diagnosis; someone is going through a divorce. Deep down we all know that the pain will subside and that the worst will one day be behind us. It might not be soon. It might be after 20 weeks of chemo, a terrible court battle, or the worst possible outcome, but the severe pain of that will also pass with time.

Quite honestly this phrase is not always comforting, but sometimes for me it is more comforting than anything else. 6 years ago, my husband Adam had a grand mal seizure that jolted us from our sleep, then thrust us into a nightmare of tests and surgery. I remember leaving Adam's hospital room in the middle of the night. I was unable to sleep because quite honestly I was truly terrified to go to sleep. I found an empty waiting room and called a friend who was already up on the east coast and bawled... I remember talking about mercy- and about memory. Eventually, I could remind myself that, no matter what the tests showed, or what the surgeries accomplished, time would pass and I would be able to sleep again. Young as I was, I could recall that our memories fade with time. The immediate fear would one day subside, my recollection of the scary events would fade and with time I would be able to sleep. We are lucky the tumor was benign and Adam's most recent scans show the residual has not grown.

Sometimes I lose perspective and obsess over a troubling situation that seems to require all of my time and focus. I act as if every other area of my life is solid and secure. Yet every time I do, without exception, a situation I thought was completely under control explodes. It's at these moments that I am also reminded to take a deep breath and realize Gam Zu Ya'avor- This too shall pass.

I like that in the story of King Solomon and Benaiah this shattering truth appears on a small ring-- Gam Zu Ya'avor can be incredibly jolting, almost too harsh to look at all the time. As a rabbi my job is to comfort the agitated and agitate the comfortable. But can you imagine if we went around the room on a Friday night and as people called out their good news from that week, instead of our joyful "Mazel tov" we said with a smile, Gam Zu Ya'avor. This too shall pass. We are celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary, Gam Zu Yaavor, Our first grandchild was born, I just got a great new Job, I am able to retire....Gam Zu Yaavor. It is definitely not the correct response in every situation.

But even during the most happy, significant, exciting times in our lives we need to pay attention--we must enjoy these good times while we can. Gam Zu Yaavor. Children can demonstrate this saying, in fast forward speed, because no stage in their development seems to last very long. If your infant wakes up every night at 2 am, just wait--this too shall pass. If my three year old is sweet and cute one moment, I'm confident it's only a matter of time before he has a serious case of the "NOs!" or the "Whys?" Instantly my social son can turn into a selfish, name calling temper tantrum throwing terror. I say this with the deepest love! And we all know that the moments of our children being little and cute are only moments. If my son is anything like me, soon I will be having fights with a strange-seeming teenager, or watching as he travels off to far away places. Gam Zu Yaavor.

Ellie Weisel, once a prisoner of the concentration camps, reminds us that "Judaism is not the pursuit of happiness; it's the pursuit of meaning." It's up to us to make the

moments of our lives count, because good or bad, happy or sad, they won't last. *We can learn to preserve the memories of joy as a bulwark against sadness, and let our sadnesses help us appreciate our joys even more. How can we do this? Try keeping touching cards you receive, and remember to pull them out during hard times. Make a point to take more photos to remember the good times. Pursue opportunities to find more meaning—study, read, share with friends.*

On Yom Kippur, the day of atonement- the most holy day of the year we are interrupted from our typical rhythm of life. In services together, when we hear the sound of the shofar, we can reflect together. Gam zeh ya'avov. Our lives begin again now, as the gates are closing. How shall we build our lives anew for the coming year? What designs fit the blue prints of the world we want to see? Thinking about this honestly takes deep courage.

Great success and high achievement might give way to disappointment and loss. But despite everything we do, we can't avoid them and their accompanying sorrows. The great singer/songwriter Debbie Freedman sang and taught, "those who sow in tears, will reap with song of joy" (Psalm 126). She wrote this as a dear friend of hers suffered with mental illness. Debbie taught that you cannot appreciate or recognize joy unless you have felt true sorrow. But you must consciously sow the tears, in order to reap life's joys. Debbie herself suffered a debilitating neurological disorder for twenty years, one which hindered her ability to move freely, and sometimes even move at all, yet she was able to keep singing and performing and inspiring others. And with an awareness of Gam Zeh Yaavor, she left behind a beautiful legacy. Among the many songs she gave us is the Mishebeyrach we often sing, the prayer for healing. It asks, "May the source of strength...help us find the courage/to make our lives a blessing."

Elie Wiesel was right, after all; I'm not surprised. Happiness doesn't last. Neither does sorrow. But, meaning does. It's found in the blessings we find in all the times of our life, if we practice the courage and intention to notice them.

This year, I pray for me and my family, and for you and your families, that you will have what you need and desire. But remember King Solomon, who aimed to teach Banaiah a humbling lesson, and ultimately learned for himself from a lowly merchant that "all his wisdom and fabulous wealth and tremendous power were but fleeting things, for one day he would be nothing but dust." Great or small, we all need to embrace Gam Zeh Ya'avov.

Let Gam zeh Ya'avov jolt you from your complacency, and enrich your life. Don't waste a moment! Be gracious for your miracles, find fortitude in your sorrow, and make your moments count towards the world you desire.

G'mar Hatima Tova- May you be inscribed in the book of life, for a year filled with happiness, health, and peace.