

David and Cliff Swain-Salomon

D'var Haftarah — Shmuel I 1:1-2:10

The Journey of a Thousand New Beginnings

CLIFF

As several of you know, a couple months ago, we brought home our baby girl, and had I guessed eleven years ago how we would get here, it wouldn't be this story. Pretty shortly after I met David, we decided that raising a family was important to both of us, including having children. The problem was, David was fresh out of college and yet to establish himself in his career, and financially we didn't have the resources to adopt. Not to mention that the state we were living in had a law on the books that prohibited same-sex couples from both being the legal adoptive parents of the child.

So we began doing the only thing we could do. We knew that we might have to relocate somewhere, but in the meantime, all we could

do was build our skills and work experience in hopes that someday it would help us financially support a family... elsewhere.

DAVID

Then a window of opportunity opened, that at least in California, we could have a legal wedding ceremony, even if it wasn't recognized where we were living. But just a few months after we were wed, we were hit with a double whammy. First of all, Proposition 8 in California and its counterpart Proposition 102 in Arizona both relegated us to being second-class, unmarriageable individuals. Second, an Arizona law was passed giving married couples—that is, straight married couples—full preference in all adoption cases. Feeling no longer welcome at all in Arizona, we decided to buckle down on furthering our careers, and set our sights on moving to California, where at least we had a fighting chance to realize our dream. For the next three years, I took on seemingly endless work assignments, spending weeks, sometimes months at a time in Cupertino, alone,

away from Cliff, trying to find a way through the door to a permanent job transfer.

CLIFF

As we're talking, it would be really easy to continue with all the road blocks — me getting injured, unable to work and in physical rehabilitation for three years — moving to California and figuring out how to even make ends meet, while I was still injured — finally finding an adoption agency and spending our life savings, only to field our way through emotional scammers, financial scammers, a match that withdrew at the last minute, losing that life savings when the agency declared bankruptcy, another birthmother who expected that we should illegally buy our way toward adopting her baby through a shady adoption lawyer — and so much more.

If we had focused on all the roadblocks, it could have been quite devastating if we had let it. And at times, we were pretty crushed.

But, as I stop and reflect, I'm reminded of the final marquee of a movie theater that went under in my neighborhood during college: "Experience is not what happens, it's what you do with what does happen."

As Rabbi Tarfon told those who were overwhelmed at the thought of studying Torah: "It is not for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." If we look at our path toward having a child, it could seem pretty daunting, just like setting out to deeply learn all of the Torah and all of its teachings. The journey isn't the end goal, it's all the new beginnings we had along the way—all of the lessons, all of the hidden blessings, and all of the experience we gained. When we sit with it that way, it helps us get past the sour moments.

DAVID

To quote the late 90s song “Closing Time”—which if you listen, is actually a song about having a child—“every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.”

When we look retrospectively at Hannah, we see that, before she was able to reach the new beginning of having her child, there were other new beginnings she needed to experience. First of all, she couldn’t stay stuck—she had to move, to get up and go a place, both physically and emotionally, where she could pray, unguarded. She had to make a sobering realization—that to ask of G-d for her Child meant to promise that child to G-d. And when she did, we are told that “she was bitter in spirit” and that she wept—so sorrowfully that she couldn’t even speak and Eli thought she was drunk. But he doesn’t just affirm that her prayer will be answered — he commands her to **“go in peace.”** Ultimately, she had to let go of the sadness on her face—a new beginning in her countenance, before she could be ready to bear her child.

For me, after three years of long-distance projects, three prospective job positions, thirty-seven interviews that all led to outright rejection—including a job position that I myself designed—it would have been very easy to walk away bitter. Sure, I cried, I questioned, I vented—but I trusted that every “no” was preparing me for that one “yes” I needed. Because they were — those three rejections were secretly preparing me—at winning interview number forty-eight—for a job position that didn’t even exist when I started looking — a job so perfectly suited to me that I excelled into the promotion and bonus that set us up financially to pay for our adoption.

CLIFF

From my injuries, not only did the settlement pay off a significant portion of our major debts, but part of my rehabilitation therapy trained me in a new skill that allows me to earn money while being a stay-at-home dad.

For both of us, each hiccup on our path was almost as if G-d was asking us, “are you sure you want this?” And when we answered with a resounding “yes!” all of these blessings fell into place that prepared us for the phone call we received on July 10th, that there was a little girl whose birthmother had chosen us. Two hours later, all the new beginnings with Moriah began — the first call from her birth-great-grandmother, saying “Daddy, I’ve got your little girl here”. The first meeting, first time holding her, first bottle, first diaper. And as we sat there with her, experiencing all these firsts, the resounding thought is, had this happened eleven years ago, when we started our life together in Arizona... had this happened two years ago with the other adoption agency... had this happened at **any other moment**, we wouldn’t have been as prepared as we are now, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. We wouldn’t have learned all the tough, important lessons to help us navigate this adoption and be good parents. Had this happened eleven years ago, we would have a different appreciation.

DAVID

But most importantly, we wouldn't have **this** baby Moriah.

Looking back eleven years ago, we would never have guessed that this is how we would have gotten here. Your journey may not be what you expect, today, tomorrow, next year. As Steve Jobs said, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." Perhaps someday you'll be able to look back and see how all the roadblocks were really just detours or hiccups. Perhaps you'll be fortunate enough to see that all the delays were working together to put you right here, right now in this very moment. But no matter what, as we approach the year's new beginning, may we all be given wisdom to see the little new beginnings that compel us toward our dreams.