

Doing What Is Important



During my sermon on *Kol Nidre*, I spoke of the five young people affiliated with our community who made *aliyah* as part of *Garin Tzabar* over the summer, and who are enlisting in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Three of them grew up in our congregation and were *bar mitzvah* and confirmed at AJ —

Rafi Glantz, son of **Hazzan Howard and Dayna Glantz**; **Aaron Smerling**, son of **Morey and Terry Smerling**; and **Benjamin Weitz**, son of **Dr. Howard and Barbara Weitz**. Two of them are grandchildren

of congregants — **Mollie Goldstein**, granddaughter of **Dr. Elliot Kane**; and **Rebecca Richman**, granddaughter of **Arthur and Arlene Rubinstein**.

In reflecting on the commitment they have made, I quoted from Ben Weitz's blog. I was particularly struck by his comment that "(for better or worse) I have the attitude that in life, I want to do the most important thing I can think of." What I think is the most important thing in the world is the defense of Israel and while there are many legitimate ways to defend Israel from America, I feel like for me at this point in my life joining the IDF is the best way to help."

As I read this reflection, I was reminded of an Hasidic teaching based on the life of Rabbi Moses of Kobrin. It is said that after he died, one of his disciples was visiting another of the great Hasidic rabbis, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. Rabbi Menachem Mendel asked the disciple of Rabbi Moses, "Tell me, what was the most important thing to your Rebbe?" The disciple pondered for a moment and answered "Whatever he happened to be doing at the moment. That was the most important thing."

Now what can that mean? How can whatever we are doing at the moment be "the most important thing." Life is filled with so many little tasks that we do routinely, mindlessly, and others that we can't wait to be finished with. Surely they can't all be important. They can't all be equal.

In *Pirkay Avot*, the Ethics of the Ancients, a tractate in the *Mishnah*, we are taught "Be as careful in the observance of small *mitzvot* as you are in the big ones. For one never knows the reward that comes from any *mitzvah*." In other words, we never know what is important and what is not. We can't rank *mitzvot*, and we can't rank deeds. We never know what experience is going to have a consequence that will change our lives and the lives of others, and which will simply be lost in the noise of every day living. Lives change because of some of the seemingly least important events of the day.

It is a message to strive to be as conscious as we can of each moment of our lives. That was the lesson the disciple learned from Rabbi Moses. He strove to be present in every deed he did, and treated each one as if it potentially held meaning.

When one lives with that kind of mindfulness, it also requires that we make choices. We become conscious of each moment and we try to fill it with meaningful activity. We choose meaningfulness over meaninglessness.

I admire the self-conscious choice that Ben made in doing "the most important thing" he could think of. It is a model for all of us to seek to make good choices with our time.

At the same time, we also need to live with a sense of intentionality that recognizes that any event, planned or unplanned, major or minor, chosen or serendipitous, anticipated or dreaded, could be the most important thing in our lives, and so, like Rabbi Moses, we need to live as if every moment could be "the most important thing."

This type of conscious living elevates our spirit and reminds us of the potential for meaning that is present in every day life, and makes it grand.

CONGREGATION
ADATH JESHURUN



7763 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027
215.635.6611
www.adathjeshurun.info