

## So, What Do You Do?

*Rabbi Mo Koval / Parshat V'etchanan / August 13, 2022*

I was talking to a friend of mine who works in the unemployment office and I told him that the most ironic part about working at the unemployment office is if he gets fired, he still has to come in the next day!

But it is interesting how much we are defined by our jobs. One of the more common questions that comes up when you meet someone for the first time is “So, what do you do?” And of course, we are all referring to our chosen profession. Accountant, lawyer, doctor, teacher etc... (or in my case, “semi-professional ramble-rouser”). I always feel there is a certain emptiness to the question because if you stop and think about it, there is so much profound depth to a person that it's almost a shame to describe someone by their occupation!

At the risk of sounding corny, maybe the best response to the question “What do you do?” *should* be, “I give charity, I get involved in my community, I set aside time for Torah study, I'm a devoted spouse and parent, I try to avoid speaking negatively about others and, overall, I try to be the absolute best Jew that I can be...” Granted, that might be an easy way to lose friends and, at that point, the other person might turn around and walk away. But in reality, that is “what we do”!

This point really hit home with me recently. Last week an American icon, the great Vin Scully, passed away at the age of 94. Known most notably for his 67-year career as the play-by-play voice of the Brooklyn, and then Los Angeles, Dodgers, Mr. Scully was a legend in the sporting world. As news of his passing spread, I couldn't help but notice how the world mourned his passing. By all accounts, Vin was a wonderful man and in no way is this meant to diminish his life accomplishments in any way. Yet, it struck me how much of the admiration and feelings of loss centered around his job as a professional announcer. People the world over extolled his ability to tell stories about baseball like no other and the praise of his play-by-play capabilities was worshiped and revered across the sports media landscape. As great as he was at calling baseball games (and, as a baseball fan, I can assure you, he was fantastic), that shouldn't be our dream epitaph.

No matter how much we strive to excel at our individual profession (and we should), what we really ought to be remembered by is how good of a person we were. How wonderful a spouse, child, parent, friend, colleague we were. We are on this world for a very limited time and, whether we like it or not, a disproportionate amount of our time needs to be spent earning a living. It's the way God designed this world. God told Adam, the very first person ever created, “By the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread.” Mankind was destined to work (and, in most cases, work hard), in order to feed his or her family.

But our true mark of greatness and success in this world should not be dependent on how well we did in the stock market, how many insurance policies we sold or how skilled we were at painting a home. I recently saw a picture of a tombstone from a dentist named John Denby who passed away in 1927. The inscription on the headstone reads "I'm filling my last cavity." Not a bad one-liner! But after we move on to the next world, what will really count is how we filled up our days, not how many cavities we filled.