

Hello! I hope you are all doing well today. It is a great honor to be able to give this Dvar Torah. Thank you so much Rabbi for allowing this to happen and your help in preparing this Dvar and Jay Siegel for recommending that I give a Dvar when I asked about it towards the start of the summer. Also thanks to all my family here today to support me. I hope you all enjoy.

To me, this week's Torah portion is really a lesson in boundaries and how they affect and mold our lives. Typically, boundaries are lines we cannot or should not cross, like a road closed sign. When you come upon such a boundary, if you desire to move forward you have to find a different path. First it is important to learn where the boundary is and how far you can go. And second, you have to determine whether if what you were pursuing is worth finding a different path for, either out of necessity or desire.

This week's parsha contains many boundary laws. Whether it is an actual property boundary between us and one of our fellow men teaching us to honor, protect, and preserve others' boundary lines, or the boundaries set when we wish to make a connection with Hashem such as when building an altar for prayer, or even setting a boundary when fighting a war to make a call for peace. These are only a small sampling of Hashem's teachings about boundaries throughout the parsha. In summary to be able to set up judges and courts of law, the meaning of Shoftim is Judges after all, we need boundaries not only to set up the do's and do not's of life but also to give guidelines on how to live out our lives when things are not so clear.

With the parsha discussing boundaries, it got me thinking about the boundaries I have faced, what they mean to me, and how they really have been the savior in finding myself throughout these last two years. At the end of the day my boundaries over these last two years served to challenge me to look inside myself and determine what was really important to me, not only helping me learn how to get to my end goal, but also teaching me an important life lesson that I, and hopefully all of you, will remember forever.

As you may know I am going to go to graduate school very soon in Human Factors Engineering, but you may not know about my journey to this point, or even what Human Factors is, so before we get to the life lesson let me tell you a bit about my story. In May of 2019 I graduated with my undergraduate degree from Lehigh University in Mechanical Engineering and Philosophy. Towards the end of my junior year, I was sure I was interested in going into manufacturing and took a summer internship in this field. However, the internship taught me that I really desired a more human side to engineering than what I found within manufacturing.

At the time I was not sure how to maneuver around this boundary or if it was even worth doing so. So to complete my degree, I continued along the path I was on throughout my senior year, but in the back of my mind I started to look at options to expand out and worried that the degree was not going to serve me. I came to the conclusion then that I might want to go back to grad school, but I didn't know exactly what I wanted to study and also knew that grad school is expensive and I couldn't afford to waste the time or money.

I had no idea how to maneuver around this boundary either. So, I decided I would hold off and first figure out what I was interested in. This is where some basic necessities like food and housing came in and set up boundaries for my path to come, thank you so much mom and dad for allowing me to stay at home throughout these last two years.

I realized that eventually I would need money for grad school, creating a monetary boundary for me. This boundary led me to set up my next immediate goal, looking for a job. Initially my job search went as well as you can assume for someone lost in their career path and with not a lot of experience; nothing panned out. Either the job didn't feel right to me, I wasn't qualified enough, or it was more of the same type of engineering work I was trying to avoid. Ironically, all of these wrong opportunities ended up creating a boundary that would shape my path even more.

Eventually after not finding a career path opportunity in the fall, I ended up taking, then a seasonal job as a retail associate at It's Your Move, which is a board game and novelty toy store in Park Meadows mall. In this position I have discovered a few important boundaries which have further set my path in motion. First, even though it was only part time, it ended up being a steady stream of income, and since I got called back to be a permanent employee, that concern was fixed, getting rid of the monetary boundary, and opening up new opportunities of what I can achieve. Second, the job was only part time creating a boundary that gave me time to continue my search. And third, I was able to see a whole new perspective on the working-class world.

I learned when you clock in and clock out each day and earn minimum wage, life is tough. I had it easy, I was living at home and saving my money to go to grad school and change my trajectory. But for my co-workers, this was their path — they were single moms trying to provide for their children by working three jobs, they were young adults who were helping their families survive and trying to hold on to dreams of college, and much more. Being in this environment and seeing their boundaries helped me gain a more human understanding which played into my grad school decision process.

Now that I was not tied down by a monetary boundary, I was able to focus more on finding out what I was interested in and did just that when I wasn't working at the store. Soon after I started this search, we all got hit by the boundaries caused by the virus and during the extra time I had during quarantine I was able to home in on my path, triggering my grad school search in earnest. However, it was not just the extra time boundary created by the quarantine that fed into my decision; there were other boundaries too.

Two other major boundaries that I faced affected my grad school decision. One is my drive to make a meaningful change in the world. And the other is how my time at It's Your Move and my disability, for those that don't know I have a undiagnosable muscle disorder and am on the autism spectrum shaped how I see the world.

These two boundaries along with my desire to engage in the more human side of engineering led me to find the field of Human Factors, the perfect field for me.

Human Factors Engineering is engineering design with the human ‘engineering psychology’ perspective taken from the beginning of the design process. For example, you might have seen the ads for a new walker that people use standing up that came on the market during the holiday season of 2019. This walker allows people to walk seeing the world in front of them which helps with their attitude among other things. A Human Factors Engineer probably designed this. This field will allow for the meaningful human impact I am looking for within engineering design.

In addition to the extra time the pandemic has provided, the boundary of not gathering in person has made so much more available remotely. This means that over the course of the last year and a half, I have also had more access to people, programs, and information within the Human Factors field. I have spent time with all these resources and connections, diving deeper into this field, and allowing me to find what I am truly interested in. Specifically, I want to focus on disability product design within Human Factors. I believe my practical experience and the boundaries I have faced will help me make meaningful changes for the world which I now understand is something that I need out of a career. This period of time has also helped me realize that now is the time for Graduate School because I finally have a good understanding of what my boundaries mean, letting me know I can make the most impact possible out of this next chapter of my life.

As I tell you this story about my last two years of life, it is easy to see the significant role boundaries play in our lives, but I have to admit, initially I couldn't really ascertain any lessons from my story. That is until I came across an article from the Wall Street Journal last month that left me with an aha moment about boundaries. Let me summarize the article briefly.

The article is about this Jewish guy whose grandfather practiced his religion and attended a synagogue about 12 miles southeast of Moscow, a synagogue that has a history of facing anti-Semitism. Despite being really close to his grandfather, the man knew next to nothing about his family history or why his grandfather left Russia for the United States. After his grandfather died in 2013, he desired to explore his heritage, and, after seeing friends lose loved ones throughout the pandemic, he committed to explore his heritage sooner rather than later. While exploring, he learned that the synagogue was rebuilt in 2010 after a fire burned it down in 2005, the fire was believed to be caused by anti-Semitic arsonists. However, the rebuilt synagogue only had one Torah, so he donated a new Torah to the synagogue in honor of his grandfather. When donating this Torah, he learned that his grandfather's brother's grandson attends the synagogue to this day, extending a continuum for his family back almost a century. They prayed together over Zoom to honor the installation of this new Torah.

This story showed me that despite boundaries – the fact that his grandfather never shared why he came to the United States, and the pandemic which drove the guy to research his heritage, this man's Judaism could shine through.

He now has a renewed family and religious connection to his Russian Jewish heritage and is better for it.

For me, reading this story led to the aha moment about my own boundaries. This aha moment not only helps explain more concretely how I was able to find my way into the perfect graduate program for me but also gives the important life lesson I talked about at the start of my Dvar.

This lesson is that **the things that you believe in strongly know no boundaries.**

The article from the Wall Street Journal helped me realize that my Jewish identity will live on without any boundaries because just like the man in the article, I strongly believe in my Jewish identity leaving a shining light to guide me through life. The pandemic and not being able to come to shul helped me see this reality and realize how much each of you, this congregation, and our shul is a part of me and will always be. Similarly, through all the boundaries I have faced these few years, I know that my desire to make a difference in the world, helping create a better world for others using engineering and human factors, will live on without any boundaries. This is because just like my Jewish identity, I too believe strongly in where I am at, that I am on the right path, and my desire to make the change I want.

I know that I will have to set new boundaries for myself in the next few years with my studies, and I am almost certain new boundaries I cannot imagine at this moment will be set for me;

however, my Jewish identity and my desire to make a difference will shine through because I believe in them strongly and I now know that those types of things know no boundaries.

Thank you so much for listening to my Dvar. Before I end I want to especially thank my Zaidy, who not only helped me with my speech but has helped me every day throughout these last two years overcome my boundaries and find my path. I hope you all will remember this lesson about boundaries and how the things in your life that you believe in strongly will guide you through the obstacles/boundaries you face for many years to come. I want to wish everyone a Shabbat shalom and Santova, a happy and healthy new year.