

## Rosh Hashanah Morning – 2016

I want to share one of the most profoundly positive stories I have ever read. I found it in the NY Times a couple of years back. I thought it was a heart-warming story, but then it reappeared in a piece a colleague had written a few weeks back. Especially in the current climate, it struck me ... it screamed "SHARE ME."

The story speaks of a graphic designer in Portland named Justin Horner who had borrowed a friend's car, but wound up getting stuck on the side of a freeway, where he waited quite a while for road service to show up. He was feeling very let down that no one even bothered to stop to help or to ask him if he was alright. He put a large sign in the window that said "NEED a JACK," but not even tow-trucks came to his assistance. So he was getting ready to hitch a ride when suddenly a Hispanic family pulled up behind his vehicle.

An immigrant man stepped out, and quickly sized up the situation and called for his daughter, who spoke a little English. He conveyed through her that he had a jack but that it was too small for the Jeep, so we would need to brace it. Then he got a saw from the van and without being asked, cut a section out of a big log right there on the side of the road. They rolled over the log, put his jack on top of it and then, just as they got the wheel off, his collapsible jack snapped and broke in two. But no worries! The

immigrant ran to his van and handed the tire iron to his wife, and she was gone in a flash down the road to buy a new one.

Back 15 minutes later, the two men finished the job with a little dirt on their hands and a lot of sweat on their brows. The man's daughter brought them a jug of water with which to wash up and feel human again. Then Justin tried to put a \$20 in the man's hand, but the immigrant man refused it, so instead Justin went up to the other side of the van and gave it to the man's wife surreptitiously. Justin thanked them personally and asked in the best Spanish he could muster, where they lived, thinking maybe he'd send them a gift.

The daughter responded in English. She said they lived in Mexico but were in Oregon so that her Mom and Dad could pick cherries for the next few weeks. Then they were going to pick peaches, and then go back home to Mexico. Justin nodded his understanding of their situation, said his goodbyes and started walking back to his friend's borrowed Jeep, when the girl called out and asked Justin if he had eaten lunch. Then she ran up and handed him a tamale she carried in foil. This family, undoubtedly poorer than just about everyone else on that stretch of highway, working on a seasonal basis, took two hours out of their valuable time to help a strange guy on the side of the road, and now they were feeding him lunch! So Justin was overwhelmed. He thanked

her profusely and walked back to the car. But when he opened the foil on the tamale to take a bite, what did he find inside? His \$20! He whirled around and ran to the van and the guy rolled down his window. He saw the \$20 in Justin's hand and just started shaking his head no. The immigrant man just smiled widely and, with what looked like great concentration, said in English: "Today you, tomorrow me." (NY Times Sunday Magazine, March 6, 2011)

Today you, tomorrow, me. This is the most Jewish story I have ever had the privilege of writing into my Torah. Each of us belongs to a covenanted people commanded to write our own Torah. Each begins with our own versions of creation, as we begin looking at life's meaning. As I look over the past several years, I know that the chapters I have written are diverse - some are blessed and some challenging, but I am who I am because of the experiences through which I have lived - this is my Torah.

Each of us has our own Torah, and brought here together - they make up the ultimate story of this congregation. Our culture is not driven by the rituals we perform or the name of our prayer book. The personality of this congregation is the sum of each of our life stories. We have seen so much ... and this congregation is the product of the sharing of our stories. We are a people of faith.

Every day as we interact with each other; every day in which people write a check, lend a hand, make a call, or involve themselves here in any way, we are witnessing our faith in this congregation - in its historic past, in its vibrant today, and in its hopeful tomorrow. We are embarking on a plan for our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We have a unique history. We are, as Leviticus calls us, a Goy Kadosh - a kingdom of priests. We are the people who inspire each other.

We are the living, organic Torah that breathes anew each time we discuss it in our sanctuary, our library, our classrooms ... at McLoone's, Coffee Corral, the Count Basie, the Asbury Boardwalk, or Dean's Bagel Oven. The blessing that we share on this day is quite simple - even while we add new chapters to our own Torah, in sharing these moments, there are places where we will forever know that our lives intersect. Every step we take beginning this new spiritual journey, we take together. We are forever linked because of moments like these, moments when we pour our hearts in prayer, moments when we celebrate in song, moments when the power of the day strikes at our core - knowing that we are here on this most awesome day ... and knowing that this moment could not be ... had we not been here to share it together.

“Today, you. Tomorrow, me.” We serve together. We serve members of our congregation in times of celebration and need. We serve the wider community in its times of celebration and need. ....

“Today, you. Tomorrow, me.”

My mother never misses an opportunity to tell me how much she hates the new music for worship. I have to keep reminding her that the “NEW” music she refers to ... Debbie Friedman a’h”, Danny Friedlander, etc, is now two generations old. Debbie, Danny, and Jeff Klepper revolutionized Jewish music in the 60’s ... 50 plus years ago. Even Dan Nichols, Rick Recht, Julie Silver, and Steve Dropkin are somewhat “old school” in Jewish music. She wants the music that Moses sang on Mt. Sinai. I repeatedly have to share with her that the music to which she refers - not only did it not come from Mt. Sinai, it was the “NEW” music to her father, and much of it is really nothing more than an adaptation of a German beer drinking song (Bayom Hahu – the Farmer in the Dell).

For the most part, we use ancient words in prayer. The context evolves them, so that they speak differently today than they did in yesteryear. The melodies change, so that the music is relevant in our lives. Especially Reform Judaism honors the 5<sup>th</sup> century demand of Talmud to live one life at all times. Who we are in the sanctuary should be who we are in the marketplace and the playground. Dina d'malchutah dina. The law of the land in which we live is the way in which we live. This also means that for worship to be relevant it can't be a foreign experience. Hebrew is meaningful. It links us to thousands of years of our people. English is important for it allows us to understand our prayer. Music, if dissonant to the ear, cannot lead our hearts to change. The problem? The music one generation loves is dissonant to another. Today you, tomorrow me. To walk out of a service saying, "I did not like it," while others thrived in it, ignores our need to be a community. If ritual moves others today, tomorrow you will get the service that speaks to you. We really have a variety of experiences through which we rotate, and together, we will celebrate a congregation and tradition that serves our entire family. Some of you have heard me talk about Harriett Rose from Lexington. She would come up to me and tell me that she hated the prayerbook. She hated the music. She hated when we read Torah on Friday nights. Harriett just turned 96. She would follow

up her complaints by telling me how much she loves THAT we do all these things because the congregation to which she has belonged most of her life continues to grow and thrive as ritual evolves. Quite literally, she loved Saturday morning study. SO Friday night YOU, Saturday ME.

“Today, you. Tomorrow, me.”

We have a lot on our calendar. Some complain that there is too much, and yet, each event brings in an enthusiastic group. Some are large, some are ... less large, but I hear from folks who attend the studies, the 92street Y events, the social events (we had 180 for dinner a month ago!), religious school programs, etc how much they enjoyed the experiences. Not everything on our calendar is for everybody. I love that there are different people at these different events. I see that we are providing meaningful experiences to a nice broad cross section of this congregational family. When someone looks to join, I tell them to find their niche, and it works because we have great volunteers who program across the board, and really ... our office deserves a lot of credit for the nuts and bolts of all that gets done. So, some things are for you, some will be for me ... but our lives are made more full because of our MRT family.

“Today, you. Tomorrow, me.”

We do a lot for each other and for the wider community. We are the social justice congregation of the area, and we earned that reputation because of the many ways in which our members show up in the lives of other member families and in the needs and celebrations of the wider community. We take care of each other selflessly. Yes, we know that our community will be there for us in the future when we have needs, but we serve, first ... it's what we do. It is what our tradition demands, it is the ethic that will heal the world in which we live. Whether it is the annual major food drive we embark on today, the Mitzvah Day work, the many volunteer opportunities and service hours that fill our days, the projects spearheaded by our Sisterhood, "Gan Mazon," Men's Club, youth groups or religious school, or the many projects that our members report and share, we do a lot. Today you, tomorrow, me ... even while we each grow from every engagement with another, our service work focuses on the people or cause to be served, and these needs keep us grounded. You know the phrase, "If you save one life, it is as if you saved the world." We have saved a lot of worlds.

“Today, you. Tomorrow, me.”



The focus of this holiday is teshuvah. Some people translate this word to mean atone. It really means to return. We presume that we are good people that sometimes get a little lost. Sometimes we forget Torah's call to take care of each other. Talmud teaches us "Col Yisrael aravim zeh b'zeh." Sometimes we get stuck in our own needs, and trust me, we all have needs to share, but our MRT family thrives because we keep reminding each other, today you and tomorrow me. We are each responsible to and for each other. Tshuvah means to return ... today, it means return to involvement and investiture in our congregational family, to tradition and Torah, and to each other.

May the teshuva in which we engage on this day ... every day ... see us turn our hearts towards each other, openly welcoming each other into our souls and into our lives. May we find ourselves writing this year's chapters about the growth we share and the blessings we bring and take from the moments that we share. May it be a year of joy, a year of growth, a year of prosperity, and a year in which we mold the world that is, into the one for which we pray. Tomorrow is ours. Amen and amen