

## **Rosh Hashanah Day 2**

### **The Treasure Is Under The Stove**

There's a master story that exists in almost every religious and spiritual tradition. It is a story of searching and finding, a story of learning the true value of things. It is a story of revelation.

Our version is one that was frequently told by the Hasidic master Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshishca.

*Once upon a time there was a poor Jewish man living in an impoverished village outside Krakow. We'll call him Reb Itzik.*

*And one night Reb Itzik had a dream. He dreamed that he was digging at the foot of a bridge in Warsaw. And in the dream, as he dug, treasures came pouring out - gold coins, jewels, silver chains, priceless gems.*

*And the next night he had the same dream. And the next, and the night after that.*

*And so Reb Itzik set off one day to journey to Warsaw. It took him days and nights; days where the sun beat down on him and freezing nights in which he shivered and shook. But he got to the capital city and as night fell he began to dig under the main bridge.*

*He felt a presence looming over him and saw...a guard! The guard asked what he was doing, and Reb Itzik explained his dream. The guard burst out laughing. "Hah!" he chuckled, "I had the same dream that a poor Jew from a village outside Krakow had priceless treasures hidden under the stove in his kitchen. But do you see me making that journey?! You are a fool..."*

*And Reb Itzik understood. He picked up his shovel and he got himself home as fast as he could, and began digging under the stove in his kitchen. And of course, there was the treasure he had dreamed of. And he became a rich man, a benefactor to his community and a philanthropist. And he lived happily ever after.*

I think that one of the challenges of the second day of Rosh Hashanah is to find something new. We already sat through all of the services; we already heard the sound of the Shofar; I already gave a Rosh Hashanah sermon. What can there be here for us today?

I believe the story I just told offers an answer, and also, perhaps, a direction for our growth during this newly new Jewish year.

But let me first ask this question:

What is keeping us Jewish?

It can't be our numbers. We are a tiny minority in the world. In preparing my notes for the comparative religion section of our teen curriculum this year I was reminded of the numbers: about 32% of the world is Christian, a further 23% is Muslim, about 8% is Hindu - we Jews figure as less than 0.2% of the world's total religious population.

Is it that we are a homogenous group? Hardly: there are multiple Jewish denominations both in this country and in the world at large. And we all know that consensus and agreement...let's just say, it isn't one of our national strengths.

Is it that we hold ourselves apart from the rest of the world? That can't be true either. Think of the Jewish authors, Jewish scientists, Jewish entrepreneurs, Jewish philanthropists who have contributed, and continue to contribute so greatly, to the societies around them.

But yet, here we are.

I suspect that every person in this room would have a slightly different answer to the question, "What keeps you Jewish?" One person might say that it's a sense of having a collective history. Another might say that it's a conviction about *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Another might say, "It's just something I feel deep inside."

Indeed, many answers to the question “What keeps you Jewish?” do get expressed with the language of emotion. I have a sense, a conviction, a feeling...it’s the language that we human beings use when something is so real but at the same time so elusive that we can’t seem to get our arms around it.

But in the Talmud [Shabbat 31a] we find a powerful parable to contemplate along with those feelings:

*Rava said to his servant: “Did you bring the wheat up to the roof? Did you spread the preserving agent on it? If not, then all the wheat will simply go to waste.”*

Those feelings we have about our Jewish identity, however deep-seated they are, are also subject to the fact that human beings are ephemeral. Feelings feel real, but they can change. They need a preserving agent in order for them to endure.

And feelings are sustained by actions. Our Judaism is sustained not so much by what we feel, however real that is. Our rabbis and teachers have always understood that we need something more practical. Our Judaism is sustained by what we do. So we need to ask: how, in our daily lives, do we manifest our Jewish identities? What actions keep us Jewish?

I’m not only talking about collective Jewish ritual. While I am sure that many of us have felt close to our Jewishness today, with the rich liturgy and the blowing of the Shofar, we instinctively sense that there is more to our practice than just that. On some level we know and have never forgotten that we come from a tradition that speaks to every aspect of our lives and our behavior, and has wisdom to offer for every aspect of the human condition. The fact that we join with Jews all over the world today is just one example of how durable those ideas and behaviors can be.

But our lives are pulling at us. Our relationships are pulling at us. The culture around us is pulling at us. And we forget.

We forget that the treasure is under the stove.

Will this be the year that we remember?

Perhaps this will be the year that we find something new in our Judaism.

Maybe it will be with our food. If we were not brought up keeping kosher, we might decide to learn something about it; or we might increase our existing level of kashrut. Or we might just commit ourselves to preparing a traditional food - hallah for Shabbat, cheesecake for Shavuot. Something new.

In our quiet moments, as we wake and before we go to sleep, we might find some words - from our tradition or of our own - that remind us that we belong to that precious 0.2%. Or we might notice, as we pass through the doorways of our day, whether they bear mezuzot - or if we would like them to. Something new.

As our days evolve into weeks, our weeks into months, our months into years, we might commit ourselves to noticing not only secular but Jewish time. As the sun sets on Friday nights, how will we mark Shabbat? As the stars appear in the sky on Saturday night, how will we transition back to ordinary time? When we look at the moon in the sky, can we name the month we are in? Something new.

And in our private and our family lives, can we observe special moments in a Jewish way? There are traditions for baby naming, for marriage, for death - but we can create or reclaim other rituals too. Last year I was at an 'upshieren,' a first haircut; at a mikveh where a five year old child joyously proclaimed the Shema; by a bedside, singing Ose Shalom and watching someone apparently sleeping smile and mouth the words in response. Jennie Lavine and our children have created a beautiful new, sung ritual for putting on their tallitot on Shabbat morning. Something new.

And in our searching for wisdom and our attempts to listen to the voice inside us that calls us to connect to something greater - all we need to do is reach out for the information. We live in an age of unprecedented access to Judaism. Daily or weekly emails, internet reading or even - gasp - an actual book can steep us in the wisdom of both our past and present. A teacher, a family member or a friend can guide us and advise us. Something new.

Doing these new things might mean making a change in our lives; and change can feel challenging. But who would not want to find buried treasure? And who would not benefit from that richness?

The contemporary author Cynthia Ozick writes:

*If we blow into the narrow end of the shofar, we will be heard far. But if we choose to be Mankind rather than Jewish and blow into the wider part, we will not be heard at all.*

Let this be the year that we blow into the narrow end of the Shofar. Let this be the year that we joyously dig under our own stove to find the treasure that was there all along.

And may it enrich our lives, and the lives of those around us, and the life of the world.

Shanah tovah.