

Metaphor in the Time of Corona

One occupational hazard of being a rabbi is that as the week draws near, everything seems to be fodder for a sermon. The book that one reads, the movie that was just watched, and the news on television. Much of life itself becomes viewed as a metaphor teaching life's truth. A "sign" isn't just a sign; it's a message. A passage of Torah isn't just random; it's a lesson to be learned. A random act of kindness, isn't just random; it's a course correction in life.

Within this context, the sad, tragic situation in Florida with the collapse of the Surfside condominium can be viewed through a similar lens. Literally, the loss of life, the ruination of many lives is the result of a building that I suspect will have been found in dangerous disrepair. Built decades ago, it seemed strong, and vital. But with each passing day the building was inching towards collapse. No human could have predicated the exact date and time, but even now we know that some inspectors warned that repairs were urgently needed and hadn't taken place. *It is an unbelievable tragedy.*

Beyond the literal lessons to be learned, I offer here a rabbinic metaphor of a life lesson: Our lives are foundational. Whether it is our work, our family life, our friendships or our scholastic learning. Over the years I have talked with many young people who want to start at the top without paying their dues. Eager to contribute, but impatient to take jobs that initially are not what they want to do in order to gradually progress in their careers. Or the person who ages over time and doesn't keep up with the computer skills needed to do the job. Or the husband/wife who feels that everything is ok when daily the foundation is crumbling bit by bit because over time, they have become strangers to one another.

The Time of Corona has revealed stresses in many a relationship. It has brought technical challenges to workers trying to adapt to this new time of zoom. Financially so many have lost their jobs, but now realize that they don't want to return to how things were.

Our lives are spinning and with it, decisions need to be made. It will take courage to make them. But the root comes back to the foundational elements of our lives. Have we been emotionally available to our spouses? Have we kept up our work skills? Have we maintained our friendships or taken them for granted? As parents, have we nurtured the building blocks of life; resiliency, courage, integrity, sharing, laughter and love?

Eventually Surfside will return to whatever its new normal will become. In the short term, surrounding condominiums will be inspected and changes will be made. The debris and destruction will be removed, and in its place at first will be...nothing. Nothing but sadness and grief. But with time, something new will be built. And it will be built with new wisdom and concerns. Whatever is built next, that is where hope will live for a better building and foundation. And yet, the truth is, that new building will have its own hidden issues and challenges. Some cracks will appear soon, but many won't appear for many years. That's why the foundation is so important; whether it is a building or the very lives we lead and too often take for granted.

As the Talmudic sage Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya taught:

Life is for love. This is the message of the Torah. The essence of life is love. For this we are called to build a world of connection through our Torah and our mitzvot. Love is the entire Torah.

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