

It's always hard to know whether or not something in your family is something universal or just your family. Right? So I take with a bit of a grain of salt this phrase, I mean, this story or anecdote, like, in my family, maybe you have someone like this in your family, in my family there's always someone, there's one person in particular I'm thinking of, but there are a few of them, who get off the phone whenever they're speaking with me in a very abrupt way. Gotta go.

Anybody have a gotta goer in their family? Gotta go. It can happen right in the middle of a sentence, could be like there's a trailing end of my sentence, always feel like there's someone who's gotta go. Gotta go. Gotta go. We're always going somewhere, I mean, Jerry Seinfeld said this very beautifully in one of his dress shows, sermons, we're always going somewhere, always on the move, gotta go, gotta go. And especially at this time of the year, we're all going, or maybe not.

But if you are going somewhere, maybe like me, packing is not your favorite thing to do when you're going somewhere. Because in my world, and again, I've studied a lot of spiritual systems and psychological systems, IFNPs and EFNPs and HR, and all of that. All of the various systems, the Myers-Briggs and the astrological and the tarot. But in my world, I'm more and more seeing that basically the world divides into two people, two kinds. The ones who love to plan, and the ones who hate planning. And I'll tell you something, as a recovering non-planner, I get it. Packing and planning, thinking ahead. I was always Ish Hoveh. Ish Hoveh. I am a man in the moment. Anxiety about the future. Thinking ahead, calendaring ahead. Planning vacations ahead.

And then I married my wife. And was introduced to the world that I had never before been exposed to. I was exposed to things that were mind-blowing. That completely threw me. I think I needed therapy just to think through what does it mean to buy tickets for an event in London in a year and a half's time? What is that? I don't even know what that... A year and a half? I'll tell you what I'm doing tonight and tomorrow morning. Planning? Planning. And here's the thing, no matter where you're going, no matter what you're doing, no matter where you are going next, and we're always going somewhere next, even if it's on the level of out the door this morning, or this week, or this month, no matter what the going next is, whether it's a stage in your life that you're at, whether you're going into college, graduating from grad school, whether you're changing jobs, whether you're getting married, or you're about to, who knows? Whatever it is, every change from the micro to the macro is stressful. Moving from status quo, from stasis to some other place, is always stressful. And it doesn't matter if where you're going is exciting or not. It's always stressful to make a change. And some people like to plan for that.

Some people like to say, okay, there's going to be a change, let me think into it tonight because tomorrow morning, you know, it's going to be crazy, let me think ahead. And some people, we'll just see how it goes. And neither, right, not blaming or casting aspersions or saying it's bad, but if you're like me and you kind of came late to the game about planning or packing, there's one other phrase that you get to hear more and more, and then when you inculcate it, you integrate this phrase in your life, it can wreak havoc and also bring blessing. I call it just in case. Everybody know just in case-itis? So now that I'm a planner and I'm leaving the house, whenever my kids, you know, take this just in case. And now planning that way and packing that way can wreak havoc, right? Just in case, you never know, you're going to Florida, but you might need your parka. You don't know. You never know. Could be unseasonably cold and, you know, make sure you bring your parka. It's been known to snow in Florida. You don't want that. Just in case-itis.

Just in case. For the ones who become planners, those who weren't planners, but then who become planners, like it can be crazy making just in case. Your planning can lead you to places that can paralyze you. You never know. There are so many possibilities that are available from the minute you are changing your stasis into the moment. Who knows? Just in case-itis.

How is it, and here's the question, how is it for each and every one of us that we can discern between just in case, in the event of, that is on a low level, that is not our priority, that is something that we can, okay, I didn't bring my galoshes, I didn't bring my umbrella, but what about the just in cases in our life that really matter? The just in cases that really, really matter. The contingencies and the preparations that we make for things that really are coming down the pike, that aren't actually a question of whether or not we might, it could be who knows, but just in case, what about absolutely in the case? Remarkable to think that when it comes to planning in our lives and planning in general, we give as much weight often to whether we bring an umbrella out the door as we do to whether or not we have life insurance. Some of us.

Some of us think more about the contingency of their career and whether or not they should be changing their job, which is of course important and maybe just in case and putting things on the side and who knows and having other connections as we do to planning what is without a doubt absolutely true will take place for each and every one of you and me. No one gets out alive from this place. Each and every one of us, whether we're planners or not, we stink when it comes to planning the great not just in case but it will happen end of our life. The end of our life is absolutely incontrovertibly going to arrive at some point. We don't know. Thinking about it is a little bit depressing, maybe. In fact, the psychologists have defined a whole school of thought that says one of the preeminent

things that we have to repress all the time is that in the next 10 minutes one of us might not be here in 20 minutes.

We live that way and that denial of death is absolutely fundamentally important to us. We couldn't get out the door. We couldn't get out of bed. Not knowing whether we will live or die in the next 10 minutes can absolutely paralyze us. It can keep us in fear and dread, anxiety. And so we push it out and it's so important that we do it one day a year. We have Yom Kippur and it's one day a year. But what if we had some wisdom on how to have that conversation? What if we had some wisdom, some good advice, somebody said here's what's happening to me and here's a suggestion for you that you might want to take up. What if there was a way? What if there was some story that we might draw from? Well, we have one. What good news. Tomorrow morning we got a good story.

Thank God for Jacob because Jacob, our great patriarch, was ahead of his time. Tomorrow morning, Jacob in the story of Jacob and his life. For those of you who don't remember Jacob, Jacob is the one who again every week we remind ourselves runner, runner, runner. Talk about someone who was on the go. He is on the go from the moment he is born. He doesn't stop going. He goes and he goes and he goes. In fact, his name is Heel Guy because maybe the last thing you see is always his heel running away. He runs. He's always on the run. He runs away from his home or sent away from his home then he runs away from his father-in-law. He's got life. His life is up and down. He runs but he also experiences life. He suffers immensely. He knows what it is to have pain and loss. He knows what it is to have success. He has the full gamut. In our language, he's the commercial in mind. He's everything. Everything is wrapped up in Jacob's life and we are named for him.

But one thing about Jacob's life which is fundamentally powerful tomorrow morning is that when the Torah comes to tell us about the end of his life, something remarkable happens. At the end of Jacob's life after having reunited with his long-lost favorite son Joseph and all the family has now gone down to Egypt, the Torah tells us tomorrow morning, And at the end of Jacob's life, it came time for him to die. And he called to his son, to Joseph.

And here is the great Maimonides, the Spanish commentator, on this moment. What is the meaning of Jacob calling out to Joseph? The meaning of this is that when the time for Israel to die came, he called his son in the final year of his life. He felt his strength fading. He was becoming weaker. But he wasn't ill. But he knew that he would not live much longer. Therefore, he called his son, Joseph, and told him, If I don't come now, I won't finish my business. I won't finish, I won't complete my story. In the framing of Maimonides, tomorrow morning, when Jacob will call Joseph and say, I have to tell you and give you directions.

He's going to give him directions. He's going to say, When I die, don't let me be buried here in Egypt. Don't let me bring my bones with you out of Egypt. He'll give him directions, what's called in the literature, advanced planning. He'll tell him what he needs to do and what he isn't to do. In another rendering of this story, Jacob will become sick, of course, and the Torah tomorrow morning will tell us, Jacob will get sick, and the second time, he'll call the brothers again and give even more explicit directions, saying, I want to be buried, not here, but in the cave of Machpelah, in the cave of our ancestors.

There's even one Midrash, a ninth century text, that says that before Jacob died, before he got sick, excuse me, no one ever got sick before, but Jacob came, and here's the language of the Midrash, Jacob came along, he made a claim, he said, I want to be sick. Why do you want to be sick, Jacob? Why do you want to be sick, Jacob? God asked him. He says, I want to be sick. He says, If I get sick now, that will really impress it upon the kids that now is the time to come and hang out with me. And resolve issues. You see, there are hard conversations to have.

There are very hard conversations. We all know difficult conversations. We know difficult conversations with our siblings, with our parents, with our children, we know about the birds and the bees, but maybe dotting I's and crossing T's is more profoundly difficult. Dotting I's and crossing T's, bringing children in and saying, you know, we had the bird and the bees conversation, but can we talk about what's next? Can we plan what's coming down the pike? Because I know it's gonna make you stressed and it's stressing me, but if I have to be sick enough to draw you in so that you'll sit with me, that is worth it, says the Midrash. Jacob says, I need you to come to talk to me. I need to speak to you. We need to have this conversation. Birds and bees, great, but dot I's and cross T's. Let's finish what needs to be finished because it will come and we won't be ready.

And I wondered to myself when I read this about Jacob, I wondered what was it in Jacob that might've compelled him to do something so profoundly important, and so something so modern. He gave directions to his kids and told them where to bury him. And it wasn't long before, of course, my heart and mind went to his beloved Rachel. Jacob had a love of his life. And there they were together on the road leading to Ephrat. And the Torah tells us that when Rachel, his beloved wife, gave birth to her second child, her last child, she died on the road. And when Jacob comes to tell Joseph about his mother's death, he says these great and unforgettably, profoundly, dripping with pathos words. Meta alai Rachel. My wife died on me. Unprepared, no conversation, no directions, no clarity, no finishing, no business that was unresolved. Meta alai Rachel says, Jacob, she died on me. How could I have known? She was giving birth to Benjamin, Ben-Oni, Ben-Yemini, my son, my wife.

And Jacob will come and say to Joseph, Meta alai Rachel, your mother died on me. And in the very next week, Jacob says to Joseph, come now, let's come together now, let's come together. I have to tell you what my wishes are. I have to explain to you. I have to resolve with you. We have to finish our business. We have to have advanced planning. We have to have advanced directives. I can't let this inevitability just be just in case. It has to be absolutely airtight. Airtight, not just in case, but absolutely the case. Birds and bees, dot I's and cross T's.

When we plan our lives, we have to plan our death too. And that's not an easy conversation. So here's what I want you to do. Tonight's Shabbat, I'm not expecting anyone to go home and immediately call up and say, hey, I need to have a conversation with you. That would be awesome. Maybe some of you are gonna walk out tonight and say like, oh, that's interesting. Nice little death talk. I'm gonna have a little challah and hang out and watch a movie. That could be cool.

You know, when you're packing, if you're not a planner, maybe you'll pack tomorrow. And maybe somebody will say, listen, I'm not into the whole planning thing and I'm still in that place. And even if I am a planner, you know, it's not gonna happen anytime soon. I can be rest assured. I'm good. My parents are good. We're all good. It's all good. Thank you for the nice, good advice, Rabbi. I'll see you next Shabbat. Maybe some of you are packing and are planning to reduce stress in your lives and are actually thinking ahead. Maybe some of you recognize that just in case is not such a great philosophy when it comes to death, meaning it is great just in case, like just in case.

But here, let's be honest with everybody. You really, it's definitely gonna snow in Florida. It's not just in case. It's not at all up for grabs. There's no doubt whatsoever, not anyone in this room has any idea what will take place tonight, tomorrow, Sunday, Monday, none. So plan your wardrobes accordingly. It's good.

But tomorrow, we'll be having a panel conversation which will be a good first step. An amazing advanced care planning is part of an amazing What Matters initiative at the JCC of Manhattan. And we are blessed to have representation in that initiative through our lay leaders who are gonna be on the panel discussion tomorrow afternoon. Advanced care planning means just having a conversation with someone about health proxy and about establishing in the event that you haven't made clear where you want to be buried and that you be buried and how you would like the end of your life to look, that you can have a conversation if you can have that conversation. That's available tomorrow at 12.30. We have at the Romemu office available specialists and those who have been trained to listen about advanced care planning and advanced care directives just to have a conversation.

So maybe after Shabbat, after coming tomorrow and listening to the panel, you'll take out your planner. Maybe you'll take out your phone, your calendar, and you'll pencil in an hour to have this conversation. It's not Yom Kippur. It's not death day, but it is packing day.

May God bless each and every one of us with being planners. May God bless each and every one of us with thinking deeply into this conversation that is not birds and bees, but crossing T's and whatever I said, dotting I's and crossing T's.

Because just in case, just in case, please rise.