

On Erev Yom Kippur a Hassidic Rebbe sat with his three disciples trying to prepare them for the lessons of Teshuva, of repentance. To each disciple, he asked, "What were your sins this year?" Rebbe, the first disciple replied, "I know that I sinned one terrible sin this year." "Go then," the Rebbe said to him, "and find me one large stone." The second disciple said, "Rebbe, I sinned a few times this year." "Go then," the Rebbe said, "and find me four or five stones." The third disciple approached. "I sinned many small times, a little inconsequential things. I cannot remember each and every one." "Go, then," the Rebbe said to him, "and find me many small stones."

The disciples left, and went about their tasks. When they returned the Rebbe spoke to them. "Now go back to the street of streaming traffic???, replace the stones you have brought to exactly the same spot from where you took each and every one." The disciples ran out and also did this task; all but the third returned. He was gone all day. Just moments before the shofar was to be sounded, he ran into the shul. "Rebbe," he cried, I searched, and searched, all night and all day to find each exact spot for my many small stones. I simply could not do it." "_____ is with sins," the Rebbe taught. "The large ones are easy to remember, and thus, rectified. But you can never remember all the little and seemingly inconsequential ones; and the task of collecting each and every one is so difficult, it could take a lifetime. And you might never be able to fulfill that. That is why you must collect each as it happens or you will be left with the little things to burden your life and weigh down your heart."

Aha, the little thing! The phone call never returned, the letter not written, the visit not paid before the call before the funeral, the hushed word spoken and not taken back, the overlooked occasion. All of the tiny stones which can never be replaced. These are the little things that weigh us down; the things we never said or forgot to say, or were too shy or worried to say...the people we never thank, or took for granted, or used or overlooked...the goodbye not said before leaving or moving...the appointment not kept. All of the tiny stones which cannot be replaced.

Some of us might react, "I'm sorry." We never found the time to say we regretted the pain we caused, for rebelling against them, for contradicting them. We might be sorry because we may have disappointed them, failed to live up to their expectations, sorry because we were not there when they really needed us. We might also express regret that we were oblivious to their concerns, wrapped up in our own problems, insensitive to their hurts and pains.

What would we say to our parents that we never had time to say? Perhaps, we never asked them how we could make life a little bit more pleasant for them. Help lighten their burden. Support and sustain them.

Question number two: If our parents and dear ones came back, what would we wish they might have known about us? "I wish my mother or father had lived to experience my graduation from college, or law school, or medical school, an honorary degree, recognition, development of my business, reputation, activity in the community, our marriage, children, new home, synagogue, club achievements, interests, friends." What would we wish they had known about us that they never lived to see?

Question number three: "What would we not want them to know about us?" How many times have we said, "Thank God, my parents never lived to see this!" Scandals; "skeletons," trouble, problems with the law, the government; the community; foolish investments, a bitter divorce, bankruptcy; family problems, a failure in marriage or in business or profession, misunderstandings with siblings, husband, wife, relatives, rejection of causes that were important to them, failure to support what they supported – synagogue, federation, the home for the aged.

Question number four: "If our beloved came back, would they approve of our lifestyle and our activities? Would they approve of our way of life, our values, principles, goals, ambitions? Would they approve of how we spend our leisure time? Our pleasures, attitudes, hobbies? Would they approve of the house in which we live, the cars we drive, the clubs to which we belong? Would they approve of the way we spend our money?

The biographer of the Duke of Wellington researched his subject's papers and diaries and concluded, "I want to examine the stubs of his checkbooks, it's only then can we know the authentic man."

Would they approve of the way we are raising their grandchildren? Would they approve of our children because they are so well mannered, unselfish, so thoughtful and considerate, so quite and cooperative? Or would they react like Jacob in the Bible who first meeting the children of his son Joseph, exclaimed, "Who are these?" Would they recognize their own grandchildren? Would they approve of our identification with the Jewish people, our participation in Jewish life in the synagogue, Israel, the community? Would we have lived up to their expectations? Was it worth all of their struggles and hardships?

Let us proceed to question number five: Would we have changed any of our views and told them about it? Perhaps we might approach things differently now; politics where we disagreed with our parents; concerns about religion, Israel, child-rearing, education, culture or Jewish identification. Would we change any of our views about friends whom they never approved?

The sixth and final question, and perhaps this is the most important one of all; if our beloved would come back, would we treat them in any different fashion? After the reunion, the embracing, hugging and talking, would we be more patient, more understanding, more caring, concerned, sensitive? Or, after the shock wore off, would we again take them for granted? Would we soon be caught up in our own lives, ignore them, resent them? Would they be a burden? Would we react, "They're always nudging me. Must I always visit them on Sunday? Do I have to take them out to dinner? Why do they call so much?" Would we return to our old ways, the old merry-go-round? Would we have learned anything? Do anything differently? Be more considerate, understanding, tolerant – our would we complain that they try to run our lives?

One of the greatest of American drama is *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. There is an unforgettable scene of Emily who died young at the age of 26. She wants to return to her family for a short visit. She asks the stage manager, the narrator, if she can return for a brief visit. "You choose any day," he replied.

Emily chooses to return on her twelfth birthday. She returns home, her father back from a business trip ignores her. He's concerned about his business problems. Her mother, also unaware that Emily is to die at age 26 in childbirth, is busy cooking and pays no attention to her in the hot kitchen. But poor Emily looks at her father and mother and says, "I cannot bear it. Oh, Mama, just look at me just one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead! But just for a moment now, we are all together, Mama. Just for a moment, we are happy. Let us look at one another."

But her father and mother ignore her. They are too busy with their own problems to see her, so she leaves. "I can't! I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another."

Emily breaks down sobbing. "Goodbye, goodbye world. Goodbye, Mama and Papa. Oh, earth, you are too wonderful for anybody to realize you!" Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it...every, every minute!

Emily, in this monologue expresses that life is too precious to waste; to fritter away on trivia. We dare not squander the joys of everyday life. If we are fortunate enough to have parents and loved ones, then let us say it now! Let us do it now!

Let us analyze our priorities, our values, our lifestyles, our relationships with our loved ones. Do it now! And if our beloved are gone, they do come back, not physically, of course, but spiritually, emotionally, intellectually. They come back if their lives inspire us, if their deeds influence us, if their ideals guide us, if their beliefs and goals and aspirations are an inspiration to us, then they surely come back. If we follow their traditions, perpetuate the causes and the institutions to which they gave so much, relive the dedication of their lives, then death can never, never take them away.