

From the Rabbi's Desk @ Hillcrest Jewish Center

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Devar Torah for Yizkor

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"All of us want to impress. And you want to impress just as much when you're Internet dating as you do when you're going on a traditional date."

This is how Shawn Wilson opens his article, "What Do People Lie About on Internet Dating Profiles."

Similarly, OkCupid, one of the largest dating sites on the web, conducted research on "The Big Lies People Tell in Online Dating."

"I'm 6 feet tall."

REALITY: People are two inches shorter in real life.

"I make \$100,000 a year."

REALITY: People are 20% poorer than they say they are.

"Here's a recent picture of me"

REALITY: The more attractive the picture, the more likely it is to be out-of-date.

So what exactly do people lie about on their internet dating profiles or in their first dates?

People, especially men, lie about money. They look to impress by implying that they have more than they do. More people than you might think post photos on the Internet that are not of themselves at all. But a lot of others post photos that are 5 or 10 (or even 15!) years old, and don't depict them as they really are.

People lie about their occupation, their age, their height, their weight, their marital status, and even their hobbies.

In my office, I myself met couples who are still happily married, who confessed to me and to each other that they had slightly altered the reality (Jewish men and women don't lie) about themselves on J-date or even on their first dates in order to impress their potential mates.

When it comes to dating, it seems that physical appearance, financial independence, a respectable job, and interesting hobbies are essential if we want to make a good impression.

If we are applying for college or for a scholarship, we try to impress upon the reader of our application that we are good students, hard workers, good citizens and creative individuals.

While trying to get a job, we will re-write our resumes to reflect responsibility, reliability, teamwork and productivity.

Now, while most of us may not be actively dating, applying for college, or looking for a job, we all have an ideal image of how we would like to look, of how we would like to be perceived.

The dating profiles on the Internet focus indeed on physical appearance and income, but can we visualize a different kind of profile? Can we picture a menschlichkeit profile or a spiritual profile? Can we envision a generosity profile, a kindness profile? And can we pause for a minute to ponder how we rank in these profiles?

Lillian, a well respected member of my former congregation in Roanoke, Virginia, had turned 75 years old and invited me to her birthday party. Lillian's loved ones had prepared a wonderful celebration for her and her children, grandchildren, and friends spoke in turn about her virtues, her generosity, and her many gifts. I myself, as the rabbi of the congregation, said a few words as well.

When everybody had finished their speeches and it was Lillian's turn to respond, she opened her remarks with the good sense of humor that characterized her: "Wow!" she said, "It feels like listening to your own eulogy!"

Everybody laughed and I was among them but her comment made me ponder: What would I like my children to say and think about me when I am not in their presence? How would I like to be remembered? What is it that I value the most in the people I admire that I don't have in myself? And what should I do to get there?

The High Holy Days are different things for different people. For many, they represent an opportunity to come together with their loved ones, to share a religious experience and a family meal. For others, the holidays bring the opportunity to meet old friends and to rekindle relationships. For many parents, the Tishrei holidays are the perfect excuse to join a synagogue to educate their children and expose them to Jewish experiences, and for a few, these holidays are just a continuation of their yearly religious activities.

For me, however, the High Holy Days, and especially Yom Kippur, represent the yearly opportunity to review and change my profile.

Today, I look at myself in the mirror and I don't have the chutzpah to lie to myself, to others, or to God. I guess the heavily charged words of the machzor, the unique melodies of the High Holy Days and twenty five hours of fast; they all confabulate to knock down my pretensions of pretending to be who I am not and they force me to come face to face with who I am, with who I want to be, with who I ought to be.

It is no secret that our society values physical vitality, youth, beauty and money; in other words, things over which we have little or no control, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that many people would lie regarding these variables over which they have little or no control.

Indeed, it is not in our hands to be taller, or younger, or better looking. Our health is not in our hands either, and many times, as this last financial crisis so harshly showed us, it is not in our hands to have a job or to make a decent living.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about choices. I told you that most times we don't have the last word, that God forces His will on us. I also told you, on a less deterministic venue, that it is still up to us how to respond to God's challenges.

Today, while I did speak to you on the many variables we cannot change, I would like to conclude by talking about the many variables we can, and we should, change.

For example: I cannot change my height but I can change my disposition. I can decide how appreciative, respectful, genuine, sincere and sensitive I will be in this coming year.

There is not much I can do to improve my physical appearance but I can certainly work on my character traits. I can try to be more selfless, more patient, more positive, more sympathetic, and more generous.

I am afraid I have little control over the world economy but I should have better control over the time I spend outside my home, removed from my family, from those I claim I love the most.

I cannot control the passing of time but nobody can stop me from being friendly, polite and constructive. It is entirely up to me to grow in spirit, in Torah, in faith, in love, in kindness and in forgiveness.

Today, as we look at ourselves in the mirror of our soul, we have a unique opportunity, a God given gift to envision how our new profile will look in this coming year. I don't want to lie to others, I don't have to lie to myself, and I certainly cannot lie to God.

As we exercise our memory during *Yizkor*, remembering our loved ones, we should picture subsequent generations remembering us, and we should know that we still have a say in those memories, that we can review and change our profiles, if we wish to do so, if we are just willing to work on it.

As we remember those who preceded us in life and who are no longer physically with us, we are even more mindful of the many variables we cannot change, we are even more aware than before of how youth, strength, beauty, and money don't last forever.

However, as we recall our loved ones who passed away, we rejoice in their everlasting gifts, in the blessings of the spirit, in the gifts nobody can take from us,

and as a tribute to them, we should commit ourselves to work on the gifts we will bequest to our children and grandchildren, to our friends and to our society.

As we remember our loved ones who walk the earth no longer, we ask you, God, to help us reshape ourselves in this coming year, changing what needs to be and can be changed, so we will be remembered as a blessing, as we, this day, lovingly remember those whose lives endure as a blessing.