

From the Rabbi's Desk @ Hillcrest Jewish Center

Rabbi Manes Kogan

Devar Torah for Yizkor

5776

On That Day, What Will You Say About Me?

(A D'var Torah in Four Acts)

First Act

While preparing this dvar Torah, I came across the website <http://www.memoryslideshows.com>. The website advertises:



Tell your story through our custom Memory Slide Shows! We put together custom Memory Slide Shows from your photographs. Your Memory Slide Show will be custom built, and you can add photographs as well as video clips and music. The following are just a few ideas for a custom Memory Slide Show: Wedding receptions, vacation memories, anniversaries, and memorializing a person's life to show during a viewing. Any occasion can be turned into an awesome tribute! Please check back for Memory Slide Show examples as well as our pricing information.

Although we don't have viewings in the Jewish tradition, the idea could easily be seen through a Jewish lens.

How would I like my life to be summarized in 20 minutes and 15 pictures? What pictures would I like to be included in my slide show? What would I like to leave out?

One of my colleagues, a well know rabbi in the East Coast, prepared a recorded message to be played at his funeral. It included words of comfort for his loved ones and his own reflections on his life. It may sound eerie to some of you, but it is being done more and more. If you don't want your lasting impression for posterity be left in the hands of amateurs, you might be able to do something about it. After all, who knows you better than yourself?!

On that day, what will you say about me?

Second Act

Three men died and went to heaven for an orientation. They are asked, "When you were in your casket, and friends and family were mourning over you, what would you have liked them to say about you?"

The first guy said, "I would have liked to hear them say, 'He was a great doctor of his time, and a great family man.'"

The second guy said, "I would have liked to hear them say, 'He was a wonderful husband and school teacher who made a huge difference in many children's lives.'"

The last guy said, "I would liked to hear them say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

I know many of you heard this joke before. Like many jokes, this one also contains kernels of truth, the first one being that most people want to live a long life, and the second one, that we do care what other people think of us, as we wish to leave a good lasting impression on our children and grandchildren.

The question "When friends and family are mourning over you, what would you have liked them to say about you?" is not a new one. The Talmud (Babylonian Talmud Moed Katan 25b) relates that *Rav Ashi said to Bar Kippok, the eulogist: "On the day when I pass, what will you say about me?"*

In ancient times, eulogists were paid professionals and Rav Ashi wanted to know what was Bar Kippok would say at his funeral.

Although the rabbis chastise Rav Ashi for wishing to hear his praises while being alive, we can hardly blame him. I don't know about you, but in general, I do care what people think and say about me, and I always care about what my children think about me.

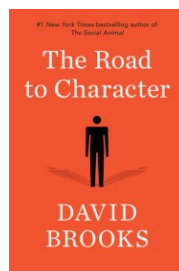
On that day, what will you say about me?

Rabbi Manes Kogan was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He held a degree in Psychology from The University of Buenos Aires, as well as a Masters in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and received his rabbinical ordination from the Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano, the Conservative Seminary in Buenos Aires. Rabbi Kogan was a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem as well as a graduate of the seventh rabbinic cohort of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. Rabbi Kogan served as the spiritual leader of Hillcrest Jewish Center, in Fresh Meadows, New York, a 400-family congregation in Eastern Queens.

Not bad. After all, this is what you will learn about Rabbi Kogan on the Hillcrest Jewish Center website. However, could this paragraph and a 15-minute slide show summarize my life? Somehow, I am not happy with it. It doesn't sound right.

On that day, what will you say about me?

Third Act



There is a book I must read: "The Road to Character," by David Brooks. It is on my night table, and even though I haven't read it yet, I would like to tell you about it.

Published in 2015, the author says, "*I wrote it, to be honest, to save my own soul.*" According to *The Guardian*, Brooks decided that he had spent "too much time cultivating," what he calls, "the résumé virtues – racking up impressive

accomplishments – and too little on ‘the eulogy virtues,’ the character strengths for which we’d like to be remembered.”

*"So I've been thinking about the difference between the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues," says David Brooks. "The résumé virtues are the ones you put on your résumé, which are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that get mentioned in the eulogy, which are deeper: who are you, in your depth, what is the nature of your relationships, are you bold, loving, dependable, consistency? And most of us, including me, would say that the eulogy virtues are the more important of the virtues. But at least in my case," concludes David Brooks, "are they the ones that I think about the most? And the answer is no."*ⁱⁱ

David Brooks got his inspiration for his book from another book that should be on your books-to-read list: "The Lonely Man of Faith" by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. Quoting Rabbi Soloveitchik, David Brooks reminds us that "we live in perpetual self-confrontation between the external success and the internal value. And the tricky thing," he says, "about these two sides of our nature is they work by different logics. The external logic is an economic logic: input leads to output, risk leads to reward. The internal side of our nature is a moral logic and often an inverse logic. You have to give to receive. You have to surrender to something outside yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer the desire to get what you want. In order to fulfill yourself, you have to forget yourself. In order to find yourself, you have to lose yourself."ⁱⁱⁱ

On that day, what will you say about me?

Fourth and Final Act

On that day, would you recall my accomplishments? Would you read my résumé? Would you list the books I wrote, the jobs I held, the countries I lived in?

On that day, what will you say about me?

I am afraid, the only answer to the questions "what will you say about me," "what will my loved ones think of me," "which everlasting impression will everybody get from me," is simply: "me."

Unless I leave my own cosmeticized version of me to be played when I am not around anymore - which, by the way, nobody can assure me it will be used - what you will say and think about me is what you see in me, day after day.

Manes Kogan, a patient, appreciative, respectful, genuine, sincere, soft spoken, and sensitive individual. Generous, kind, selfless, moral, and compassionate. Polite, fair, peaceful, charitable, and forgiving. All his academic degrees, the positions he held, the congregations he led, the books he wrote, and the famous people he met, helped Manes pave the road to character. He will live forever in the people he touched.

I like it. It is not me, at least not yet, but I like it!

Dear friends: there are no shortcuts on the road to character. There is only one way to be remembered as patient, appreciative, respectful, genuine, sincere, soft spoken, sensitive, generous, kind, selfless, moral, compassionate, fair, peaceful, charitable, and forgiving and that is to **be** patient, appreciative, respectful, genuine, sincere, soft spoken, sensitive, generous, kind, selfless, moral, compassionate, fair, peaceful, charitable, and forgiving.



At the end of the day, what our loved ones will say and think about us is only what they see. What do you see in the mirror of life? How happy are you with your self-reflection? If you were to google your name in the search engine of life, what would be the first hit? Would you be happy with it? If the answer is not quite, you can, and should, do something about it. The good news: God is giving you a whole new

year to recreate yourself, to put together a new slide show, centered on your character, focused on what really matters.

And so we pray:

Master of the Universe! Remember our loved ones in your eternal embrace and help us draw strength from their lives. Give us the courage to change what needs to be changed in our own lives, so our children and grandchildren, our friends and colleagues, will see in us the best version of ourselves.

May we feel Your kindness, Hashem; may we experience Your compassion; and may all of us and our loved ones be granted a year of health, and physical vitality, a year of sustenance and peace, a year of joy and meaning, a sweet and good year.

Amen

ⁱ http://www.ted.com/talks/david_brooks_should_you_live_for_your_resume_or_your_eulogy/transcript

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid.