

Yom Kippur Morning Family Service Sermonette
Saturday, October 12, 2024
Based on “Always Wear Clean Underware” by Rabbi Marc Gellman

You know, I have to tell you: I’ve been having a lot of funny dreams lately. Anyone ever have really strange dreams when they are about to do something hard? Well, I’m the same way. You see the High Holy Days is a tough time for us clergy. We have to make sure everything is just right so that you all find something of meaningful and spiritual in these services. For me, I want to make sure the prayers and the music is right, and especially today to make sure that I leave you with a good message in this sermonette.

My funniest dream is when I make sure everything is just perfect for the services: the choir is ready, the programs have the right page numbers, the music is all picked, the microphones are working, the Torah is rolled to the right place, and my Cantor’s hat tassel is still intact. And in the dream, I walk up on the bimah, ready to sing, and everyone is laughing at me because I FORGOT MY CLOTHES! I’m in my underwear!

Our dreams can really remind us of those things we subconsciously worry about. You see, my dream wasn’t really telling me to remember to wear clothes on Yom Kippur, but rather that I’m worried about making a mistake, as we all worry about sometimes, don’t we?

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the times when we look at ourselves in the mirror, and ask ourselves how do we look? And I don’t necessarily mean how does my hair look, is my tie straight, or did I zip up my fly? But rather, let me look through my spiritual mirror, the one that shows how I’m doing on the inside. Did I make good decisions this year? Did I upset people, or did I apologize to others I hurt? What really went well for me this year, and what didn’t go so well for me, and can I learn from those mistakes?

Yom Kippur is a time to reflect on what’s on the all-important list of life. All of us parents have a list of things that we want to impart to our children, so that they grow up to make the right choices. Things like: take out the garbage; look both ways before you cross the street; don’t go swimming right after you eat; always say please and thank you; tie your shoes. This is our list of life’s important messages. And there are some really important points on this list that are actually talking about bigger ideas.

So, on this Yom Kippur, I'm going to share with you 3 big ideas that are on the list, that come from a book by a Rabbi I know named Marc Gellman. The first is actually the title of his book: Always Wear Clean Underwear.

Okay, don't connect this with my dream that I told you about. But it is important to remember that if you do end up somewhere only in your underwear, like I did in my dream, I hope that it's clean underwear you put on that day!

So why is "always wear clean underwear" on the big list? Nobody sees your underwear, and yet your parents are always urging you to wear clean underwear.

If you ever ask your parents this question, they will give you answer #1: Dirty underwear is full of germs, and we don't want those germs jumping off your underwear and onto you."

If you tell your folks that you can wear underwear for a month before it gets really dirty, they will give you answer #2. This answer is so goofy that lots of kids just fall down laughing when they first hear it, but it's one of the most famous answers on the list: Any parents out there care to guess?

"You should always wear clean underwear because IF you ever get into an accident on the way to school or on the way home from school, AND an ambulance has to take you to the hospital AND the doctors in the emergency room have to take your pants off, if they see that you're wearing dirty underwear THEN they'll think that we're bad parents because we don't wash your underwear!"

I don't know where these answers came from. Like most things on the "List," they seem to have been around forever. I never heard of people getting sick from wearing dirty underwear. Maybe you could get sick from wearing somebody else's dirty underwear, but I just don't think you could get that sick from wearing your own. And I never ever heard of doctors in any emergency room saying, "Well we'd like to help this kid, but we just can't – he's wearing dirty underwear!"

So, there must be some deep reason behind why your folks care so much about your clean underwear.

Well, the deeper reason, and the reason "always wear clean underwear" is on

the list is this: **What people don't see about you, should be just as good as what people do see about you.**

We all try to look good outside. The hard part is to look good inside.

If you pretend to be somebody's friend but say bad things about them to other people, then it's a lot like wearing dirty underwear. If you are concentrating on your own test paper when your teacher is looking at you, but as soon as the teacher looks away, you sneak a peak at your neighbor's test, then you're wearing dirty underwear. If you act nice to your brother or sister when your parents are around but make them miserable when your parents are gone, then you're wearing dirty underwear.

The hardest thing in life is to be the same way deep down as you are on top. If you're always pretending to be something you are not, if you never say what you mean, if you never do what you say, then you'll be unhappy, and people will stay away from you because they don't want to have a friend who is clean only on the outside.

Of course, nobody's perfect. One of the differences between good people and bad people is good people **don't** try to hide their bad parts. They admit their bad parts and try to make their bad parts smaller. They take their bad parts to the laundry so that when they go out into the world, their insides and their outsides will both be clean.

And you know what? Wearing clean underwear isn't so bad after all. Once you get used to the feeling of being the same on the inside as you are on the outside, you won't want to lie about anything anymore.

The second item on the list is: **MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES.**

Do you know how much things cost? I know you see prices on the things you want, but that's not really what those things cost. What something really costs is how hard you have to work to get it.

So when you ask your folks for a new phone or an iWatch or the Mr. Beast Lab Mutator, or the newest Barbie Dream Besties, you should know what they really cost. That new iWatch might cost your mom or dad three hours of sitting in a traffic jam waiting to get to work. That Beast Lab Mutator toy might mean that one of your parents must work an extra hour or two at her job. The new bike you

really want might cost your folks eating dinner at home for 2 weeks instead of going out to eat at a restaurant. Things don't just cost money; they cost what you have to do to get the money.

This is why when you start asking for a lot of money to buy a lot of things, you'll hear this famous but silly-sounding thing on the list: "Money doesn't grow on trees, you know." When you first hear this, you might think your parents are kind of goofy for telling you such an obvious thing. What they mean, of course, is that you should not think that it is as easy to get money, as it is to pick apples off a tree. They want to teach you to respect the value of money.

When you're a kid, it's not your fault if you don't know what things cost. Most kids think everything is free as long as your parents have that little plastic card in their wallet, or that you get as much money as you want from those ATM machines around town.

But the big, deeper meaning of MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES is: you need to learn what things really cost. Nothing is free. Everything costs something.

Once you learn what things really cost, you will be able to make good decisions about whether you want to pay the price. If being popular at your school means that you have to do things that are against the rules, or even against the law, then it's too big of a price. If getting really good at gymnastics or skating or tennis means that you have to get up real early every day to practice before school, you may decide that it's too big a price to pay. If wanting a special piece of clothing, or electronics or toy means using up your entire allowance, you may decide it's too big a price to pay. Some grown ups have decided that if making a lot of money in a job means that they can never really spend time with their family, it's too big a price to pay.

Again, it's about choice. Knowing how to make good decisions in the world is listening to your inner voice, looking at yourself through that spiritual mirror. Some might even say that that is God's voice that you hear inside of you helping you decide right from wrong. Make good choices in life and you may end up having a money tree!

The third and final list item that I want to share with you from Marc Gellman's book is this: EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!

I bet you hear this a lot! No one knows why the stuff that's bad for you tastes so good and why the stuff that's good for you tastes like celery. God just created the world that way, and it makes things very hard for your folks around dinnertime. I bet your parents have never said this to you: "You better eat your chocolate ice cream with marshmallow sauce and whipped cream with the cherry on top, or there will be no television for you!" I bet you've never heard, "If you don't eat your pizza, you can't have any more broccoli."

But I will bet anything that your folks have told you a zillion times, "Eat your vegetables!" You will probably get told to eat your vegetables until the day that you move out of the house and get your own place. (Unless you have a spouse that nags you about it!). But once you go to college and make your own meal choices, then you can eat cold pizza for breakfast, chocolate for lunch, and things with names that end in "-itos" for dinner!

It's the great stuff in vegetables that explains why your folks think it's worth it to nag you to eat them. Veggies don't have any fat or sugar or salt or red dye number 92. They are full of stuff that makes you fast and strong and live a long, healthy life. That's the little meaning of why EAT YOUR VEGETABLES is on the list. But the bigger reason --- the deeper reason why it's on the list and why I want to share it with you is this: **WHAT YOU WANT IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU NEED**. Eating veggies is what you need, even if eating veggies is not what you want.

As you grow up you are going to have lots of other choices that are like the choice between celery and chocolate. You are going to have to choose between things you need but don't want, and things you want, but don't need. You may want to watch television, but you need to read books. You may want to play Hogwarts Legacy on your Xbox, but you need to go play outside. You may want to gossip, but you need to mind your own business. You may want to try a cigarette, but you need to stay healthy. You may want to play with your brother or sister's stuff, but you need to ask nicely first. You may want to buy, but you need to save. You may want to do what they other kids are doing in making fun of the new kid, but you need to be the one who befriends the new kid. You may want to eat things that come in cellophane wrappers, but you need to eat your veggies.

That's what it means to look in the mirror and take stock in what you see. Think about these three items on the big list when you look into that mirror. Are you

wearing your clean underwear? Do you know how much things cost, and did you eat your veggies?

When you look into that mirror, think about the decisions you need to make, and ask yourself: “did I make the rights choices this year?” If not, there’s time to ask forgiveness for the bad choices and make better choices in this next year.

The list keeps us on the right path to being a good person, treating others with kindness, and doing the right thing. On this Yom Kippur, let’s look in that mirror and check our underwear.

Shana Tova!