

BEHIND THE SCENES

Being of Service

By Sara Yakira Heckelman, Administrator



When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say, "I used everything you gave me." -- Erma Bombeck

I never imagined quoting Ms. Bombeck, but she expresses exactly what I'm feeling after my first High Holy Days as Administrator at BIJ. Let me draw from another source...

The very end of the Torah, which we just read on Simchat Torah, contains a report of Moshe Rabbenu's death. It describes his death, how the people mourned, and the passing of wisdom to Joshua. The Rabbis asked, if G*d gave the Torah to Moses to write (the theory of multiple Torah authors is a recent perspective) and Moses is dead, who wrote those last verses? And their consensus was that Joshua did. But there's always a dissenting opinion: Rashi thought that Moses himself wrote them "with his tears." The common understanding of Rashi's view is that Moses wrote them with tears in his eyes, but the Rashba (a student of Maimonides) had yet another view: that Moses wrote them with actual tears, not ink. This teaching was related as part of a dvar torah given by Rabbi Gottlieb on Shemini Atzeret, when we joined with B'nai Emunah. Rabbi Gottlieb continued with his own commentary: Moses took the tears of his memories and experiences, and was able to use them as ingredients to fashion something of beauty, to transform his pain into a message that could help us move forward with our lives. (Thank you, Rabbi Gottlieb!)

The connection? Seems to me that Moses stood before G*d at the end of his life, having used all his talents, nothing left but tears, in the service of his people.

This concept of service is beginning to take hold in me. I've had aspirations to illuminate the human condition to audiences in my theatre work (and perhaps I did), but truthfully, I always felt that I was stretching to imbue the work with a grander meaning. But after all the effort that went into the outreach and running of our High Holy Days, I really do feel like I've used all my talents, and I have been of service. It's not glamorous, not showy or grand, and so much done behind the scenes

(hmmm, isn't that what this page is called?) And not unrewarded – acknowledged and thanked by many, valued by others. But it's the knowledge that I have made an impact, assisted in creating a sacred space for our holy community, that makes me feel I have been of service.

It came at a price – many long and stressful hours in the months before Rosh Hashanah. And the knowledge that I would be "working" on the Holy Days, something I'd never done before. My father z'l was a rabbi, and I watched him prepare for and work on many Shabbatot and holidays; I watched, I didn't work. This was the year that I prepared myself; a switch clicked inside which enabled me to make the leap, and be available for whatever and whoever had needs to be addressed.

I found out some things about myself. Other than standing for hours which really taxed my back, I enjoyed it! I was amazed at how many members I actually knew, and was able to put names to voices and faces. Hostess, coordinator, juggler, and Miss Fix-it – these are talents that I have and all were put to use. Think about the times that you've gotten to use your talents fully, and see the impact they have. Doesn't it feel terrific???

And I was very grateful that we celebrate two days of Rosh Hashanah, that the second day is lightly attended, and therefore I had one day of the Holy Days where I could just be a congregant. I davened, chanted the Torah portion, sat with my beloved Elie and with friends. Josh Goodman and Neil Bronstein even had a bet going — whether I could NOT work the whole day (I think I succeeded). In honor of Elie's birthday, I sponsored the Kiddush (trust me, I ordered in), sat down, ate and relaxed. And I was grateful we joined B'nai Emunah for Shmini Atzeret, as the yizkor service that day that made up for my being unable to enter into a prayerful space on Yom Kippur. Both my parents are gone, along with other close family and friends; I needed that yizkor.

So what differentiates using our talents and "being of service?" Is there a difference? Or is it like Moshe Rabbenu, caring enough to create from the depths of his heart not for himself, but for us.

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