



Discovering the Bible

Learning By Exploring Biblical Heritages

OCTOBER 2020

Choose Life! Do TOV!

By Jim Myers



Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor

On the morning of September 16, 2020, I received a call I was not expecting. My longtime friend and associate Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor had unexpectedly and suddenly passed away. Rabbi Leynor was ordained as a rabbi in 1989 and came to Richardson, Texas to take a position at *Congregation Beth Torah*, where he served for 16 years.

He also taught classes at the Jewish Community Center, became a Chaplain for Plano Police and Fire Departments, and a Victim Chaplain with Dallas Police Department. He was a Pastoral Care Specialist, Suicide Intervention Trainer, a PTSD De-briefer, a Bereavement Counselor, and most recently a hospice chaplain for Legacy at Willowbend. In addition, he was actively involved in our work at the Biblical Heritage Center. We were Co-Founders of the TOV Center, Inc.

He is the first Jewish person I personally knew. As a matter of fact, I had been doing research on the Jewish Jesus for about five years when I realized I knew a whole lot about Judaism and the history of the Jewish people – *but I did not personally know a Jewish person!* My wife Susan suggested that I enroll in a class at the Dallas Jewish Community Center. I did and guess whose class I ended up in – *the class of Rabbi Leynor, the new rabbi in town.*

One of the first things I learned was that Jeffrey descended from a long line of rabbis, however his father was a doctor. Later I discovered that before becoming a rabbi, Jeffrey was a singer and acoustic guitarist in the rock 'n' roll band Stanky Brown. He loved playing multiple musical instruments, writing songs, studying the Jewish Scriptures, doing Jewish rituals, and celebrating Jewish holidays -- but most of all Jeffrey loved his family, especially his children – *Keri, Perry and Austin.*

“My dad told us every single day how much he loved us and how much he believed in us,” said Perry. “He was our biggest supporter and it wasn’t just ‘Dad talk.’ His very best qualities were how he always listened, and how he was always there.”

I want to share some of Jeffrey’s articles -- *and will let him help us in this difficult time.*

When Nothing Will Ever Be the Same

(As I processed the news of Jeffrey's death, I scrolled through articles he had written for BHC and the TOV Center. The last time I spoke to him it was about things we were planning to do together for the remainder of the year. I was thinking about how his death would touch so many lives and plans that included him. The article below caught my attention. It was published on April 26, 2017 and contains a very meaningful and powerful message for us now.)

In my professional and personal experience with "Grief/Loss/Returning to Life," one of the toughest issues is realizing that everything you knew, everything you planned and hoped for, everything you trusted in will never happen. We feel lost, rudderless, unsure and afraid of what will be. We ask, will life ever be "normal" again? Will we ever laugh again, have joy again and celebrate again? How can we respond when, "*Nothing will ever be the same again?*"

I always encourage my clients to exercise the only control we have, which is choosing our response to what life gives us by making decisions that empower us, help us grieve, move us forward and help us find SOME comfort, healing, peace and strength.

Even before my beloved wife Karen passed, the fearful specter of the unfamiliar haunted my thoughts. What will happen with my kids, my career, my life? Throughout my studies, there are certain sayings and words which I carry with me.

First, from the *Wisdom of the Sages*,
"*Daya Le'Tzar'arah B'sha'atah*"

Aramaic for "*It's enough to worry about your problem in its own hour.*"

Practically, if we worried and had anxiety about everything, it would be like a T'sunami, so *we take one thing at a time, one day at a time, then the next.*

After a while, I was aware of the fact, that even though nothing would ever be the same, *It Would Be Different.*

*Different can be scary, unsettling, unfamiliar,
but not necessarily Bad, just Different!*

I can't tell you why these things happen, but my observations are that, most people never change anything, move or grow unless there is a crisis, trauma or death. Those things ensure that nothing will be the same.

My father of blessed memory always said, “*Life is not static, it’s dynamic, ever changing.*” The Chinese word for “**danger**” is also the word for “**opportunity**.” In the midst of the losses we all face are opportunities as well.

When things will never be the same, that is also freeing. We do not have to continue to live our histories. It enables us to re-imagine our lives and reinvent ourselves. I have watched a number of people who end up following their lost passions along the way, others find new meaning and purpose following what tugs upon their hearts.

I am reminded of the story in the Torah after the Israelites left Egypt, they are trapped by the Sea Of Reeds, the Egyptian chariots are bearing down, Moses is crying out to God, who responds, “***Why are you always crying out to me JUST MOVE FORWARD!!!***” The first person enters the water and the sea splits.

When nothing will ever be the same, we have the power to decide “*what making it different*” will be. Even in grief, sadness, and loneliness, ***take each problem in its own hour, and just move forward.***

Choose Life & Do TOV!
Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor

Rosh Ha'Shanah and Yom Kippur 5777: Downsizing Reflections

(Rosh Ha'Shanah, the Jewish new year celebration and beginning of the High Holy Days, would begin at sundown on Friday, September 18, 2020. It would be the beginning of the year **5781** on the Jewish calendar. That was also the morning of Jeffrey’s funeral service. The article below was published on Friday, September 30, 2016. Rosh Ha'Shanah would begin at sundown Sunday, October 2, 2016, and the year 5777 would begin.)

Well, Here I am. My kids are grown and moving out and on with their lives. (Thank you Lord!) The home for the last 16 years is being readied to go on the market. We just don't realize how much "stuff" we accumulate over the years, PLUS, all the "important things" we've shlepped around with us from before! This period of my life was at once one of the happiest and saddest, highest and lowest. Everything accumulated here had a special meaning. This was Karen's home, I moved in when we married. This was "HOME!"

For many, going through all those "things" is a drag, for others, a nightmare, for others still, a trauma of letting go of anything! For me though, this experience was one of growth, wonder, pleasure and pain. I would say that the whole episode was cathartic, freeing and even spiritual. Bags and bags of recycling, shredding, garbage, selling off items and giving away what I didn't, or never used. It was like taking a huge, deep breath from my soul and expelling that breath, with all the things that needed to go.

One of my most awesome finds was a set of journals covering various years from 1982 to the 2000s. Reading through these was like traveling through time. I'm amazed at how many things and people I'd forgotten. In so many ways, I'm still that person from 40 years ago, but in other ways, now totally different.

It's an interesting exercise shedding things that at one time were so important, but now just extra un-needed baggage, projects, even dreams hopes and relationships. I've forgotten more people than I remember! I held on to a few letters and cards where the feelings gushed with thanks and praise from admirers and also letters which tore me a new one! A great balance.

Over these years, I learned the meaning of real love and learned (still learning) to be more patient and forgiving (except when I drive), to acknowledge when I damage a relationship and take responsibility for repair and reconciliation when possible, to finally let go and divest those things I have no use for, or that no longer serve me. I know what I do well and now am able to do those things on a daily basis. I feel more hopeful, thankful, appreciative and grateful for my myriads of blessings and I am enjoying my life and looking forward to what awaits in a new place, with new adventures and experiences teaching and bringing people together to create TOV (*Protect Life, Preserve Life, Make Life More Functional and Increase Its Quality with Transparency*)!

Rosh Ha' Shanah concludes with a beautiful ceremony called TASHLICH, usually people come with bread to a stream, pond, river or ocean and toss the bread into the water to symbolically cast away "sins", the "baggage", reading the words of the Prophet Ezekiel. This is a time for renewal of commitment to Life, To TOV, to Loving more and growing more, to help do TIKKUN OLAM, REPAIR THE WORLD AND REPAIR OURSELVES!

To everyone, L'Shanah TOVAH! A Good, Healthy, Successful and Happy year to come!
Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

(I am writing this newsletter on the day Yom Kippur will be begin, September 27, 2020. Rabbi Leynor wrote this article about Yom Kippur in 2014.)

This Friday (October 3, 2014), as the sun goes down, the **Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)** begins. As I have mentioned before, it is our responsibility to repair and reconcile relationships. The three most important relationships are the one we have with ourselves, the one we have with our "Higher Power" (whatever that might or might not be), and the ones we have with the rest of creation. All the work seems to be on us and rightfully so, because of all of creation, humans are the one creature that always needs improvement.

The word "atonement" breaks down into, "**at-one-ment.**" On Yom Kippur, we recognize and accept responsibility for actions on our part that destroyed relationships, broke a trust, ruined a reputation, cheating in business, greed over good, and on and on. These things separate us from our highest self; they separate us from the love of others. The process of Teshuvah (repentance), *literally turning oneself around*, helps bring about a change of heart, and a regenerated personality. It reminds us to view ourselves as a being created with the "*spirit of the Creator*", that our real selves reflect the divine image, and that our actions and choices should be guided by values which reflect those of the "*spirit of the Creator*" – **Tov Values**.

Tov Values are "**Life 1st Values.**" When we adopt Tov Values as our highest values we choose to do acts that:

"protect life, preserve lives, makes lives more functional, increase the quality of lives – and that enhance, nourish and nurture lives."

We create relationships with others who share Tov Values. Tov acts are good and pleasing to the eyes of the Creator and people too. Many times, the meaning in life is measured in the victory we achieve in disciplining our baser self and bending it to serve a higher purpose.

On Yom Kippur, we remove ourselves from every aspect of the mundane world. We fast, turn off our cell phones and other appliances. We open our ears, eyes, hearts, and souls to reconnect with ourselves and with others. We refrain from indulging our physical appetites for a limited period not to deny our physical appetites, but to subsume them to a higher set of values and the need of putting our desires in their proper place and context.

The customary greeting for this Holy day is "**G'Mar Chatimah Tova**," – *“may you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of Tov, a year of health, a year of peace and a year of life.”*

The prophet Isaiah (chapter 58), which is read on Yom Kippur states;

"Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high . . . No, this is the fast I desire: to unlock the fetters of wickedness, and untie the chords of the Yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him . . . Then shall your light burst through like the dawn."

This year -- Do Tov, Choose Life!

Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor

Finding Ourselves in the Middle of Nowhere

Once we are thrown out, or walk out of our "Egypt", what is known, what is familiar, what is habit -- *is wiped away*. We wonder, where are we, where do we go, what will happen now? In the Biblical context, we enter the *Midbar, Wilderness* in Hebrew. What's interesting is that in the Biblical context, when many important individuals and groups encounter their Higher Power, a Deity, or their Highest Self – *regardless of which* -- everyone and everything is changed – *everything is different*. The trajectory of life goes in another, unexpected direction.

My observation is that we all go through this process in our own way – on our own journeys. It allows us the freedom and courage to begin again, even in the middle of the Midbar! Sometimes, we find ourselves in the middle of nowhere, *and it's right there in the middle of nowhere that we find ourselves!*

The toughest and most painful thing I do is, work with people who've lost a child, and worse, their only child. All the future dreams, hopes, wishes, expectations and anticipations are smashed to pieces. *Their role of "Mom and Dad" no longer seems to apply.* That is like being in the middle of nowhere!

In my research and observations, I'm many times amazed by the choice of response to these terrible traumas. Not only the courage to move forward, but the creativity and dedication to telling their story and finding meaning and purpose in life again -- *by making a difference in the lives of others*. I want to share a story gleaned from one of these recent books.

A man lost his twenty-two year old son in an automobile accident. Over the course of his grieving, he wrote a collection of poems about his journey through his loss. He published them in a book called, "Life As a Novice." When asked about his choice of response, he said writing the book was "*the best way of keeping his son's continued presence in his life.*" For him, it was "*In the Middle of Nowhere*" – "*the Place Where He found Himself.*"

In Jewish tradition, our custom is to say, "*May Their Memory Be for a Blessing.*" The best way of doing that is to let the loss lead us through the Midbar -- *to do Life giving, Life changing, Life enhancing actions in the name of, or in memory of the one we have lost.* It motivates us to find a way to trust in life again. Not everyone will choose these types of responses. Each person must search and be open to whatever it is that tugs upon their heart and soul -- *and be willing to follow it.*

Though we all struggle with the loss of our loved one in the physical world, *we keep alive their continued presence in our lives by doing some of those things they loved and thought were important.* It gives us a sense of purpose and keeps those who are no longer here closer to us. So, the next time you find yourself "*In the Middle of Nowhere,*" you just may "*Find Your Way and Yourself!*"

Doing TOV and Choosing Life!
Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor

Now I will quote from the closing of Jeffrey's obituary.

From cradle to grave, from simchas to shivas, Jeffrey was always there to lead the way. He underestimated the number of people he helped, and the many people who loved him as a result. He helped so many. His sage advice always offered a different perspective. He was a gentle soul and will be missed tremendously.

May his memory always be for a blessing to others.

In closing let me share the words that really caught my attention from his articles above.

***"Nothing will ever be the same.
It will be different!"***

I think that would be his message to us along with the words below:

Choose Life, Do Tov & Things Will All Work Out!

October Memorials

In Loving Memory

**JEWELL G.
PATTERSON**

March 14, 1907
October 1, 1995

*May you dwell under
His wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

CALVIN P.

1914
October 17, 2003

*May you dwell under
His wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

When We Remember Them

*May their memories inspire us to seek in our lives
those qualities of mind and heart
which we recall with special gratitude.*

*May their memories help us bring closer to fulfillment
their highest ideals and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to each other
and to those things which cannot die –
faithfulness, love, and life giving values.*

*We are blessed by our memories of them!**

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. If you would like to add a loved one, send their information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Share your memories about those who mean so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

* Inspired from prayers found in **Yitzhor Reflections** - *The New Mahzor* - The Prayer Book Press