

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Another Twist

January always brings with it a sense of newness. We've turned the calendar and we're writing "2016" on our documents. I saw a clever post the other day: "May your joy last longer than your New Year's resolutions." Many of us find ourselves challenged with the same "new" goals on January 1st that we had abandoned by Valentine's Day.

They say, "nothing succeeds like success;" progress inspires and motivates. Of course, that also means that nothing is more discouraging than when we fall short. It's often quite easy to measure how well we've lived up to our goals because there is a number attached: pounds lost, days at the gym, new friends made, clients engaged, money invested, etc. Perhaps, if we were to find success in some of the less tangible goals, it would brighten the year in a different way.

While I think of myself as a positive person, hardly a day goes by when I can't find some kind of complaint. Bothersome, annoying things stand out, and sometimes can ruin otherwise wonderful experiences. I know that thinking more positively will add to my happiness. If more of us looked first for what's going right than what's going wrong, we would all be happier. Not only would we feel better inside, but more people would be inspired to also see the good side of things. Complaining, we know, can be contagious; so can compliments.

I sometimes wonder if people would feel better about religion if the terminology didn't seem so restrictive. The Ten Commandments, our most recognizable teaching, is filled with "don'ts" and "Thou Shalt Nots" (especially the second five). What if these Five Commandments emphasized what to DO rather than what NOT to do? For instance:

6. Thou Shalt Not Commit Murder could be Honor and Respect Human Life.
7. Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery = Be faithful to your promises.
8. Thou Shalt Not Steal = Respect other people's property.
9. Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness against your Neighbor = Be Truthful
10. Thou Shalt Not Covet Anything Belonging to your Neighbor = Be happy with what you have.

Many find the last commandment the most difficult because it legislates a feeling: jealousy. Our Talmudic sages address that by saying "Who is rich? The one who is happy with his lot." From the time we left Egypt, and were called by God "a stiff-necked people," we've been used to complaining. But the New Year gives us an opportunity to think differently. I believe when we replace complaining with positive thinking, it will make a difference to us and those around us. Am I sure? I'm positive!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon

To see previous monthly messages from Rabbi Dan Gordon, visit
<http://temple-beth-torah.org/our-rabbi/rabbis-monthly-message-archives/>