RABBI'S MESSAGE

Be the Butterfly

The term "butterfly effect" was coined in the 1960s by Edward Lorenz, a meteorology professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who was studying weather patterns. He devised a model demonstrating that if you compare two starting points indicating current weather that are near each other, they'll soon drift apart – and later, one area could wind up with severe storms, while the other is calm. With a mathematical formula, he noted that anything that happens in the world can affect the whole world. This is a very simplified summary of the theory, but it contends, for instance, that when a butterfly flaps its wings, the entire weather system can be affected, which has ramifications on agriculture, economics, people's moods, etc.

Do you ever wonder what kind of impact you have on the world? Sometimes, it is apparent and noticeable, but more often, it remains a mystery. How seemingly insignificant encounters (or significant ones for that matter) make a difference? Most of us rarely have the opportunity to find out how we have made a difference, and often, it may not be apparent to those who were affected.

As a rabbi and educator, every once in a while, I encounter a former student who shares with me that I made a difference. I am humble enough to know I might have been a VERY small part of that person's growth, but it is very exciting, nonetheless. The key to making a difference, I believe, is in partnership. I remember very early in my rabbinic career; a congregant who did not attend often wrote to me before High Holidays. He said, "Rabbi, I've had a very difficult year. I will be coming to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and I need some real inspiration to help begin a new year with hope". I felt quite a bit of pressure. If things were so difficult, how could my words really make a difference? Words will not cure cancer, improve financial problems, get someone a new job or solve marital relationships. I asked myself, "what is this person hoping for?" I put him in my heart throughout the holidays, catching a glimpse throughout the services, praying I could somehow be helpful. When the holidays were over, I got another note: "Rabbi, thank you. I got just what I needed." I responded, "Whatever you got, it was because you were open to receiving."

We all have different gifts that can make a difference in others' lives and in the world. It could be a gift of food, a phone conversation, an email, a greeting card, or even just a smile. Often, just showing up is huge. When we let others know that we care, it's immeasurable how that can make an impact. One of my rabbinic colleagues gave a High Holiday sermon on the expression, "It's the thought that counts." He contended that thoughts are nice, but they don't *really* count until we act. What good is it to think about calling, or sending a card, or giving *tzedakah* if we don't follow through?

I am reminded of the famous story of the starfish in the sand. A man was walking along the beach after the tide had washed hundreds of starfish that could not make it back into the

water. One at a time, he picked up a starfish and tossed it back into the ocean. An observer asked why he was doing it, and he responded, "They can't get back into the ocean on their own. If I don't toss them into the water, they'll die." The observer was incredulous. "This is a foolish waste of your time," he said. There are hundreds of starfish on this beach. And what about the other beaches nearby? You can't save them all! You can't possibly make a difference!"

The man picked up another starfish, tossed it into the water, and said, "Made a difference to *that* one!" The observer smiled for a moment, chuckled, and began picking up starfish himself.

When we make a small difference, we can set an example and be an inspiration for others. The impact is infinite. YOU can be that butterfly! Flap your wings! You may never find out the impact you might have made, but it doesn't really matter. Your presence in the world makes a difference.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon