

## COFFEEHOUSE FRIEND

There is a person I see almost every day at the coffeehouse in the Loop where I stop on my way to CRC. He is my coffeehouse friend. Sometimes we only have time to exchange simple words of greeting and a hug; once in a while, we share the holy luxury of an extended conversation. Either way, on average of about four mornings a week, we connect with one another. Recently, on the morning after a long night of difficult meetings, my coffeehouse friend noticed right away I wasn't exactly my usual upbeat self. "You look terrible," he said to me with an honesty only one coffeehouse friend can impart to another. However, the very next morning, he looked at me, took note of my elevated mood and said: "You seemed to have gotten over whatever was dragging you down rather quickly! How'd you do that?"

My answer to my coffee house friend came quickly: the path of blessing. I had stopped to recognize enough life-affirming moments in the 24 hours that had lapsed since we saw one another (including holding my kids' hands as I walked them to school, including the 'you look terrible' encounter with my friend itself, including how the wind felt against my skin as I left the coffeehouse...), to turn my mood around. In Judaism, we are taught 'experiential' blessings, formulaic words to be said upon witnessing a sunset, happening upon a flower in bloom, being part of a large crowd, seeing an exotic looking animal, learning from a great teacher, and dozens more. Saying these blessings has the effect of forcing us to pay better attention to life. In the 'Benedictions of Prayer' from the CRC siddur, we recite blessings for the experiences of waking up and opening our eyes, moving from bed to the floor, and getting dressed. All of those 'daily miracles' occur before we've even walked out of our houses. If we do not stop to recite a blessing as we experience these moments, would we even recall that they occurred at all?

I do not believe it downplays the very real problems, sufferings; the *tzuris* that we all face, to say that when we take the time to soak up and appreciate all of the beautiful moments that occur everyday, we can lift our own spirits. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of blessed memory referred to this path as 'radical awe.' He said: "Humankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living."

As you receive this MEMO, we welcome a new Hebrew month, Adar. Because it contains the zany holiday of Purim, Adar is said to be the happiest, most joyous month of the Hebrew calendar. In fact, its motto is "When Adar comes, joy is increased." Willing yourself to be more joyous and to take notice of precious moments isn't a denial of reality; it is an attempt to alter your perspective on reality, a spiritual practice that perhaps allows you to tackle your problems, as well as the problems of the world, in a healthier, more holistic manner.

It is my deep hope that during this month of Adar, that especially those in our wonderful CRC community who have been immersed in the controversy and struggle of the moment, will attempt to find beauty and joy in one another and in the 'awesome' experiences that might ordinarily be ignored. That they may feel their spirits lifted and healed. As for me, I can't wait to see my coffee house friend tomorrow morning and begin another day on the path of blessing.

B' Ahavah (With love),

Rabbi Randy