

Shana Tova.

We will spend much of the next 10 days talking about *T'shuvah* - most often translated as "repentance," associated with the act of apologizing and making things right. For many of us, the next 240 hours or so will include a significant amount of time spent pondering what we've done wrong in the past year, and how we can try to undo our failings - or at least how we can fix our relationships with those we have wronged.

But *T'shuvah* has another meaning, one more common than the weighty connotation assigned to it by the Holidays. Perhaps a more accurate translation of *T'shuvah* is "return" - a return to G-d, to our friends, to the blank slate of opportunity that we were at this time last year.

With this meaning in mind I want to share with you a story of *T'shuvah* across generations; one that shows that there's not such a gap between "repentance" and "return."

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This painting, which as of recently is usually found hanging in my office, is by the artist James Grashow. His daughter, Rabbi Zoe Klein Miles of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, offered me this print, along with an invitation to share her family's story.

In September of 1970, Barton's Continental Chocolate Shop (which you might know better by this canister) took out a full-page ad in the New York Times to wish its customers a Shana Tovah. Barton's commissioned James Grashow to make a print of "Abraham, the first Jew" for the ad. It was a powerful and beautiful woodcut, and was accompanied in the ad by equally moving words. James, who was 27 at the time, made 100 prints, signed and numbered each one.

A Swedish art dealer saw the ad in the newspaper and fell in love with the work. Someone put him in contact with the artist, and the dealer came to New York to meet James. A very handsome and charismatic man, the Swede said he absolutely loved the print, and that he wanted to represent James in Europe.

The Grashows (James and his wife Lesley) look back at that time and remember it with a sense of naiveté. They were young and trusting; they

kept one print and allowed the dealer - who promised to send the money - to walk away with the remaining 99.

As the dealer left the apartment, James admired his keychain which had a small fold-out scissors on it. The dealer gave the keychain to James and left - and was never heard from again.

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James Grashow went on to have an incredible career. His prints have appeared regularly in the New York Times and virtually every well-known periodical and publication throughout the country. The original Abraham print, the one that Rabbi Klein grew up with, hangs in her office. Whenever her father would visit, he would comment that looking at the print made him wonder what happened to the other 99.

Last year - forty-seven years after the dealer walked out of their apartment - James received an email from someone in Norway:

Dear Mr. Grashow.

My father was in the art business in the early 70s. He passed away a couple of years ago. Now my mother also passed and we found a series of "Abraham" when cleaning out their estate. It's a series of 100, and we've got lots of them.

We are three siblings that live in Sweden, Norway and California.

We would love to have your input, and look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Cathrine, Christer and Charlotte

James and Lesley were obviously stunned and wrote back immediately. They commented that the trio had just solved a 47-year-old mystery and told them the story, as they knew it.

James wrote:

We were very naive at the time and often laughed how foolish we were at the time to let so much go for what turned out to be only a keychain.

I would personally love to have some of the Abraham prints because your father had all of them.

Catherine, Christer, and Charlotte were mortified. They said that their father had been in the art business for only about three years - after which he quit to become a minister. They had loved the print; they had grown up with it. In fact, it was framed and hanging over the mantle of their

childhood home. They had no idea there were all of these copies in their father's belongings. When they found the prints, they researched James on the internet and saw the extent of his work. They had contacted him to find out what they were worth, assuming that their father had purchased the artwork from the artist years before.

When they found out how wrong they had been, all three siblings had the same instinct - to return the artwork to the rightful owner and undo the wrong that their father had done. And they wanted to do it in person. Although the siblings lived in Norway, Sweden, and Santa Barbara, they arranged a date, flew into New York, and took a train to Westport, Connecticut to meet James and Lesley.

From the minute the three siblings stepped off the train on April 14, 2018, with their big battered suitcase, they were beaming. They met James with smiles and big hugs, and in return, James harbored no ill will. Once back in his studio, together they opened the suitcase. Wrapped in a yellow and white quilt was the original cardboard box, and inside were 87 prints. As soon as the box was opened, Lesley burst into tears. It was a moment of true, redemptive teshuva. It was a literal "return."

T'shuvah typically refers to repairing a mistake or a wound *that we have caused*. But this isn't a story of a redemptive moment between the art dealer and artist. This is not a moving story about the dealer confessing his mistake, seeking forgiveness, and returning the paintings.

Instead, we see three people who saw that someone had been wronged and set about to correct it. This wrongdoing was committed outside of Cathrine, Christer, and Charlotte's control - possibly before they were even born, certainly without their knowledge or consent. How did finding the artwork and learning the full story make them feel about their father? We have no way of knowing. Did it confirm something they had always suspected about him? Or did the idea that their father was someone other than the person they knew him to be shake them to their core and challenge their self-identity? Even as we wonder that, we know that this isn't the point - they felt compelled to make the situation whole again, to do T'shuvah in their father's name.

We don't often correct other people's mistakes. Large or small, the mistake was not our own so we often abdicate responsibility for fixing it. But Judaism teaches that we live by a set of standards - and it is our responsibility to work towards the achievement of those values. Pirkei Avot teaches, "Lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor, v'lo ata ben chorim l'hibatil

mimena" - it is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to abdicate responsibility either."

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So why did I hang this painting in my office? For a few reasons: first, because it's a beautiful tribute to our forefather Abraham. Second, to honor the wish of the Grashow family, who would like the paintings to be seen again - 47 years after they went missing. The family gave them away to 87 rabbis and cantors, to hang in synagogues and clergy studies across the country, in order to share the story and message of T'shuvah.

Barton's intended the message of this artwork to be about Abraham's devotion to God. But the physical piece of art instead teaches us that every single person has the power to bring T'shuvah and wholeness to the world. Cathrine, Christer, and Charlotte took on the uncomfortable role of admitting their father made a mistake - and then they fixed it.

As we spend the next 10 days pondering our opportunities for T'shuvah - repentance - from this past year, we should also take care to consider what we can do to set things right through T'shuvah - return. How can we give back what we have taken from someone? Perhaps more importantly, how can we give back what was taken from someone, even if not by us?

As we ponder these big questions, I wish you a sweet new year, full of family, health, happiness, and a renewed focus on bringing a sense of peace to the world.

Shana tova.