

Shanah Tovah

When I was younger, much younger, I spent many summers going to work with my dad. My dad is a self-employed diamond setter who works in a tiny office in Downtown Miami. The office, no greater than 20 feet by 20 feet is densely packed with old tools, polishers, saws, files and hundreds, if not thousands of little envelopes which enable the transfer of jewelry from one person to the next.

During those summers in his cramped office, he would set up a chair next to his workbench and together, he and I would spend hours working side by side talking and listening to the radio. While my father, meticulously carved out channels to inlay diamonds and soldered pieces of gold together, I would try my best to cut Abraham Lincoln's head out of a penny using a coping saw. And while I now know that it is illegal to deface national currency – in retrospect, it was a great idea. If I ever messed up, it only cause a penny to start over!

Every now and then, my dad and I would leave the office to visit a supply store or deliver a finished item to a customer. We would visit these massive showrooms and stores. You can probably imagine what happens when a curious 10 year old boy walks into a room filled with larger than life machines and thousands of shiny and very expensive objects – I wanted to touch everything.

But like the angel who guided Moshe's hand in Pharaoh's palace as a child, before we would enter any store, my father would lovingly and gently grab my hands, place them behind my back, and say – no toques nada – don't touch anything!

After years of, no tocando nada, not touching anything – I became accustomed to putting my hands behind my back wherever and whenever I would look at something closely: when looking at gadgets in Best Buy, when inspecting underneath the hood of a car, or even when figuring out what cookie to get at kiddush.

And every now and then, when my dad and I are together, from a distance, people comment that we look like twins – we both have bushy eyebrows, we're both about 5'6" and we are both standing in the exact same posture.

While we may be the most advanced and analytical species in the world, a simple trip to the grocery store reveals that in many ways, we are merely creatures of habit, and not of active decision making.

Which brand of pasta sauce do you buy?  
Which fruits and vegetables fill your shopping cart?  
What brand of Matzah do you buy on Passover?

I am willing to bet that most of us do not fully explore all the options at the grocery store.

We don't enter the pasta sauce aisle, ready to examine every jar of sauce and compare ingredients, look at the pictures and weigh the merits of each product.

Rather – we find a brand we like and we mostly stick to it - and the more we buy that brand, the less likely we will be to be open to trying other brands. In other words, it becomes part of who we are. The repetitive nature of the experience makes it a subconscious part of how we live our lives.

And, barring the item being discontinued or an incredible coupon. We would simply go on shopping.

Our trip to the supermarket, in many ways, echoes how we live our lives. We follow the same paths, make the same decisions, and live in the same routine. And it is true, these patterns make life easy and less complicated.

But as Socrates says, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

Rosh Hashanah comes to challenge the assertion that we should live these lives. The Shofar awakens us from the routine.

These High Holy Days force us to reconsider our ways and evaluate what makes life significant. How are we excelling, and in what ways are we not living up to our full potential.

Perhaps we will find that certain habits don't really matter. Trying to change the way I stand in the supermarket isn't worth my time.

But there are habits worth investigating.

How do I relate to my family?

How do I speak to others?

Do I do enough for the world around me?

These next 10 days are an opportunity for self-reflection. To look at the habits of our lives and make sure we are the people that we want to be.

These next ten days aren't always fun. They aren't easy. But, for over 2000 years, we as a people have used this time as an opportunity to clean house and take inventory. And I can say without any hesitation, that these ten days are a habit worth repeating.

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