

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 8/10/18

Parshat Ekev - 5778

Please find the person sitting closest to you. I want you to look at them and tell them the following:

When I look at you, I see _____.

Now, I would like you to look into their eyes. Look even deeper. Look into their heart and mind. Look into their soul. Now look deeper. Look inside. Think about what your answer would be. Here is what I would like your answer to be: "When I look at you, I see me". What does this mean? I want us to try to stop looking at people on the outside and focus on their inner qualities. It can be difficult to look at someone who does not look like you and instead look at their insides and see yourself in them!

Many of you know that sleep typically eludes me at night and you may wonder how I pass the time. Recently, I was watching Goalcast when I came across a motivational speaker for youth named David Flood. He talks about life lessons that he has learned from his son who has autism. I could totally relate to his talk. It reminded me of one of the many lessons I have learned from my beautiful Rebecca: Label jars not people!

We all could use those reminders. We all need to open up our eyes and see people's insides.

Recently, a Broadway actor wrote a letter in support of a child with autism who interrupted a performance of "The King and I." The audience was angry about the interruptions and some even demanded money back. They needed to be reminded to look at this child on the inside.

This week's Torah portion, Ekev, reminds us that even though we ALL face hardships, we have a choice in how we react. During my introduction to the Torah reading, I mentioned the verse from today which is the basis for Birkat HaMazon, the blessings that we say after we eat.

The parasha continues by telling us that being grateful for food alone is not enough because man does not live on bread alone. There is so much for which we need to be grateful.

On Tuesday morning, my day began with a devastatingly phone call to let me know that one of my dear colleagues had suffered a massive heart attack and died.

Cantor Ilan Mamber wasn't ill. He was in the middle of a workweek. He was not expecting to leave unfinished business. I imagine, like many of us, he probably had lists of tasks to accomplish. I would venture to guess that he had stacks of work on his desk. Piles to get through. Emails to answer. Phone calls to return. Appointments lined up. Torah readings to fill. B'nai Mitzvah students, wedding couples and hospital visits on his endless list. He left this world unexpectedly. Unplanned. Unfinished.

Later that day, we sent the Baruch Dayan Emet announcement out to my colleagues. The emails, text messages, facebook posts, and calls came flooding in. I was struck by how they praised his inner qualities; his giving soul, his inspirational teaching, his moving voice, his kindness, and his passion. On Thursday, at his funeral, his shul opened up with High Holy Day seating, packed to standing room capacity, filled with so many loving tributes.

As I listened, I began to wonder. How many of us live our lives as if each day was our last? Are we living the way we want to be remembered? Are we living our personal legacy? Will we leave behind meaningful memories? Are we truly making a difference? Are we being our best selves? Are we allowing others to see deep into our inner selves and are we finding the inner beauty in them? Are we telling them while they are alive?

As Katherine Hepburn famously said, "Wouldn't it be great if people could get to live suddenly as often as they die suddenly"?

My message to you this Shabbat is Uvacharta BaChayim! Choose Life! Live life! Love life! Enjoy life!

I love that you are all here today in shul with our Beth El family. I am asking you not just to attend services. Be present at services and please rise in body or spirit as we join together for musaf.