

Pesach Yizkor 2017

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 4/18/17

I think one of the boldest moves in technology over the last couple of years has been the Apple Watch. It was a risky move in my mind because I don't know many young people today who actually wear a watch. Most of the time they just look at their phones. So Apple knew that if the Apple Watch was going to work, it would have to be tied in with the I-Phone - and it is. And it gives you more information than you could get with a regular watch, like your heart rate and the weather, your appointments for the day, as well as who is calling you on your phone, and all kinds of information you can use now, like the time. And I can see why it has become popular. But, I'll tell you this: I will likely never own one. I don't think there is anything wrong with them, and I am not disparaging of them, it's just that the Apple Watch is not for me, and I'm a watch guy. I really like watches. In fact, my prize possession is a watch. It's the gold Baume and Mercier watch that my mom gave to my dad as an engagement present in 1955. It still keeps good time (in the bank). Another one of my most prized possessions is a watch that my father-in-law made himself shortly after college when he was toying with the idea of becoming a watchmaker himself. It does not have a brand name because it was likely made from spare parts. Another watch that means a lot to me is the pocket watch that my grandfather gave to me that I, in turn, gave to Alex for his bar mitzvah. All of those watches will be around for a long time to come. I'm not sure that most Apple Watches being worn today will have the same staying power.

One of the most famous watch brands in the world is Patek-Phillipe. Patek Philippe & Co. is a Swiss watch manufacturer founded in 1851, located in Geneva. It designs and manufactures timepieces and movements, including some of the most complicated mechanical watches. I don't think I'll ever own one as they are very, very expensive, but their slogan illustrates what I am talking about. Their ads say, "You never actually own a Patek-Phillipe. You merely look after it for the next generation." That's what I am talking about. Why are watches like Patek-Phillipe, and the ones that are so precious to me, still around? It's because they were designed for the long-term. They were designed to last. I don't think Apple Watches were designed to last, any more than my Apple computer was designed to last. I bought my Apple computer six years ago and it's overdue for a replacement. And yet, even with built-in obsolescence, the Apple Watch continues to sell well. Why is that?

Well, I'd like to suggest that it's because most of us are more prone to think about the short-term rather than the long-term. We want solutions now and so we grasp at things that meet the needs and solve the problems we are having at this very moment. We have a hard time thinking about the long-term future because it is, well, so very far away. So we grasp at easy solutions that are close at hand. We come up with quick fixes that will make our lives easier in the short-term.

Not long ago, Alex and I were out to dinner, and there was a family with two small children at a table across the way, sitting behind Alex. I was trying to concentrate on what Alex and I were talking about, and the couple seemed to be trying to do the same thing with one another, except the kids were making a lot of noise, fidgeting as kids do. And as if on cue, each of the parents reached into their pockets and took out their phones, opened up to some program on it and handed it to the kids, who immediately stopped fidgeting - and talking - and communicating with the family. It was quick and it was simple. It was certainly simpler than engaging the kids in conversation. It was certainly easier than taking out paper for them to draw on and seeing what they came up with. Problem solved. And, I suspect that most people would have thought that that was fine and dandy. But, here's the thing: A big part of my job is hearing life stories. Every week I sit with a funeral family and ask about their memories of their father or mother for whom they are mourning. And, what they remember most are the times they spent together. Not

simply in the same room, but really being together. And I think how different those memories would have been if every time they fidgeted, every time there was a problem or an issue, every time there was a challenge the parent opted for a quick and easy, short term solution. Where would meaning and memory come from?

Don't get me wrong - I don't think less of this couple for doing what they did. I'm not sure if the technology was there twenty-some years ago I would not have done the same. But, now that I am a bit older - OK a lot older - I see life in the long term. I am more conscious of the fact that meaningful life is more like Patek-Phillipe than Apple Watches.

We are part of a People with a very, very, very long history. We are still celebrating life the way our ancestors did long, long ago. Fads and short-term fixes have come and gone, but there is no substitute for the long established Seder we sat at earlier this week. Those ancient stories remind us that we are still living lives that were based on decisions our ancestors made long ago. The Seder was designed to create encounters and meaningful discussion amongst families and friends. It was designed to get us to really BE with one another. We still do the Seder the way our ancient ancestors did because it works. It brings us together and makes memories that last.

Judaism encourages us to take the long-term view of life precisely because the short-term view comes so much easier. And, Yizkor functions in very much the same way. Today we remember those whose long-term outlook led to their making sacrifices on our behalf. They wanted our lives to be good ones; easier and more successful than their own. They wanted us to rise higher than they could. And, so they took the long-term gifts that were bequeathed to them, and passed them on to us. And, in remembering them we can be inspired to do the same for those who will follow after us. As Jewish people we know that we never really own those values and ideals, we merely look after them for the next generation. We look deep into our past so that we can look long into the future. That is the meaning of the Yizkor memorial prayers - That is what it means to have inherited this sacred Tradition - That is what it means to be a Jew.