



**Rosh Hashanah - Day 1 – 5778
Moving**

By Rabbi David Klatzker

My friends,

My wife and I moved here from New Jersey a few weeks ago. Although we have moved many times over the years, it is never a simple matter. Our move involved hiring a moving company, packing dozens of boxes, canceling our old utilities and signing up for new services, notifying everyone of our new address, and so on. Finally, we headed for Illinois, with a very confused cat in a cage in the back seat.

Moving from one place to another is probably the most stressful event a family can endure, with the exception of death or divorce. Nevertheless I have learned a few lessons from the experience that I'd like to share with you today — some Jewish lessons about moving. I hope you'll find my ideas relevant, even if you have no intention of changing your own address anytime soon.

To move from one place to another, some people rent a U-Haul truck and do it all by themselves. But most of us need more help to do it. I certainly needed help; there was way too much stuff for me to schlepp by myself.

Many years ago, you saw trucks on the highway that said "G.O.D." — Guaranteed Overnight Delivery — but that company went bankrupt. Yet G-O-D, God, is still available to do the spiritual moving for us. And that is one of the main messages of the High Holy Days. We don't have to do all of the hard work ourselves. There is help available from a God who gives us more confidence, more strength than we would ever muster without God.

The best proof I have of this is the example of a few people I've known, people who have truly done teshuvah; I'm talking about former alcoholics and drug addicts who managed to turn their lives around.

When I asked them how they did it, they told me that they were supported by twelve-step programs where they met people who knew what the struggle is

like because they went through it themselves. And, they told me, the biggest thing that helped them do teshuvah was that they learned to turn to their Higher Power, to give them the strength they needed and never had before.

Now I know that talking about a Higher Power makes some of you uncomfortable. Your doubts may be healthy. Chances are, the God that you do not believe in is the same God that I do not believe in. But I would like you to consider that may be other ways to conceive of God. I believe that we are born to be God-seekers. The soul yearns for God in the same way that trees grow in the direction of sunlight, pulled by an inner force that tells them to reach out for what they need. Their very lives depend on their ability to respond to this inward call.

What I want to suggest is that perhaps our goal for the New Year ought to be, not trying harder to change our lives all by ourselves — we've tried that, and it doesn't work — rather, our goal ought to be to invite God into our lives, and let God do most of the moving. We ought to admit our neediness, and then reach out to the sunlight, reach out to God, and let God be our helper.

Psalm 27, which is recited at this season, says: “*Adonai ori veyishi...Adonai is my light and my salvation.*” The psalmist doesn't say, “If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” Instead, he says, if you are to get any encouragement, it will come from outside of your fearful soul.

At the very least, I hope that you will acknowledge your need for other people, as those recovering alcoholics did. I recall talking to a very accomplished young man who was having trouble making a lasting relationship. I said to him: “Maybe you're trying too hard to impress others. Maybe you should admit that you're vulnerable.” “Ah,” he shuttered, “vulnerable.”

We are all vulnerable. Everyone is screwed-up, broken, clingy, and scared, even the people who seem to have it all together. So let's stop trying to be so self-reliant.

In short, the first lesson I want to offer this morning, a lesson of moving, is this: *Don't be proud. Reach out and let Someone Else help you do the moving.*

When I prepared to move, I packed family papers and photos covering several generations, along with old yearbooks, samples of my children's art work and other mementos. The packing took a long time, not because there was so much stuff to put in boxes, but because I found myself stopping to look at some things that I had not reviewed in years. The items I was packing brought back memories,

both happy and sad, of people I've loved and who shaped my life. I packed those memorabilia with tender loving care.

But not everything retains its usefulness. We found clothes that didn't fit us anymore, and tchackes that were not worth packing. Taking stock of everything in our drawers and on our shelves was a major undertaking. We often say to ourselves that we ought to sort through everything, but somehow we just never get around to doing it. It's amazing what most people keep that they don't need, and probably will never need. And there also things that we don't want to discard, but really don't want to use just now; on those things, we can put a sticker that says, "place in storage."

As your transitional rabbi, I want to tell you that Beth Judea also needs to take stock of itself. Not because it is in trouble. This congregation is not sick or dying. On the contrary, it is moving forward. But even a healthy congregation needs evaluation. If you're feeling good, would you never go to the doctor for a checkup?

This in-between time, this transitional period, is the right time to do that. Everyone knows that we live in a society that is constantly changing. The synagogue is no different; it is changing too. I think most people really welcome the new. But they object to losing anything that has personal value for them. So we need a thorough appraisal. Which of our programs and ways of doing things are still effective and life-giving? What things in the synagogue truly help people grow as Jews and as human beings, and what things are not fruitful anymore?

Over the next few months, I'll be asking a lot of questions, to help us discern what is truly of value to us. I'm going on a listening campaign. I want to learn: What first drew you to this community and what has Beth Judea contributed to your life? When have you felt the most engaged, alive, and motivated here? What are your hopes and dreams for the congregation?

To kick off this campaign, on Yom Kippur, in the afternoon, during the break, we'll have a conversation in the sanctuary. I'll ask you to share what you have found to be life-giving at Beth Judea, based on your own personal experiences. And there will be many other opportunities for story-telling in the year to come.

I believe that these stories will help us construct a bridge from the past to the future. These stories will help us discern what to leave behind and what to take with us as we move forward. When we hear the congregation's best stories, we

will become more attentive to its life and purpose. We will have a much better sense of who we are as a congregation, where we are going, and what we are called to be.

So the second lesson of moving is this: *You need to take the time to sort through all of your stuff, so that you can carry forward the best of what you have, and start to re-vision your future.*

Before they loaded anything on the truck, our movers carefully noted any existing damage to the items they were moving. Apparently, some people try to blame others for damages they themselves inflicted...Oh, I know you're shocked, shocked to hear that!

You've all heard these phrases:

Not my fault

It wasn't so bad

He deserved it

Everyone was doing it

It didn't hurt anybody

You're too sensitive

Now I don't want to discuss the apologies (or pseudo-apologies) of politicians, CEOs, and TV personalities. I want to talk about us—you and me. The truth is, we are all experts at stonewalling and deflecting criticism. I think the main reason we find it so hard to be honest and to apologize for our mistakes is that we think apologizing is a sign of weakness.

But that is *narishkeit!* A willingness to apologize is a sign of strength and courage, not of weakness. Do you think people are more likely to love or respect you if you claim that you can do no wrong? The opposite is true. Personally, I gain a lot of confidence when I hear someone say, "Gosh, I'm truly sorry about what I did. I take responsibility for it." It makes me feel safe and cared for.

I think we all have apologies waiting to be delivered to our spouses, children, parents, friends, and colleagues. It is simply not possible to live alongside

other people without causing damage. So why don't we pick up the phone, or send an email, or—better yet—speak to them in person this week? Think of the potential rewards for you and for them. You may wonder what words to say, but the secret ingredient in any sincere apology is your intention.

Our tradition says that this is the best time to apologize, these ten days of teshuvah. We support each other in doing it by coming together as we do today, starting the new year not by carousing, but with prayer and a reminder that we all need to make amends. Yom Kippur is but the culmination of the process that starts today.

So the third lesson of moving is: *Don't blame others for the damage that you yourself inflicted. Own up to it, apologize to them, show them how strong you really are.*

Finally, our move to Chicagoland was over. We cleaned up a little, ate, and started to feel at home. Although the cat spent the first night hiding somewhere, she eventually came out to explore her new home.

As Robert Frost put it, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to let you in." I hope that this synagogue can become that sort of place. A place that welcomes everyone: those who are married, single, divorced, gay, transgender, Jews by birth, Jews by choice, supportive non-Jews, abled, disabled, filthy rich, dirty poor, no habla ingles. Those who are over 60 but not yet grown up, and the teenagers who are growing up too fast. The fat and the thin, those who sing like Hazzan Weisberg or those (like me) who can't carry a note in a bucket.

But there is another way of looking at the synagogue as home. Imagine that someone asks you, incredulously, "What are you doing in the synagogue? You of all people!" How will you answer?

You might answer this way: "I'm in synagogue because I hear an inner voice, a desire to get back to my true self, the self I was created to be. The synagogue teaches me how to become more compassionate, more generous, more aware. I'm here because, with all its faults, the synagogue is a place where I can make meaningful relationships. When I come to shul and see friends and community members asking about their families, finding ways to reach out to one another, and trying to reconnect to the Source of Life, I am deeply moved. If all I did was watch TV, or go shopping at the mall, or sit by myself on a yoga mat, I would never experience that sense of connection. And where else can I go to give

my children roots, no matter where they might go later to explore in life? The synagogue is for them, too, so that they won't always float and feel that they belong nowhere. That's why I go to synagogue. Why don't you go too?"

So the fourth lesson of moving is this: *We need not a house, but a home. A place where we feel welcome and needed, a place where we find a deep and calm presence.*

Let me conclude with this prayer: As we move through life, may we let God and our friends help us with the moving. May we preserve and protect the relationships, activities and values that have deep meaning for us, and be willing to let go of anything that has outlived its usefulness. May we show how strong we are by apologizing for the mistakes we've made. May we remember that our aim is not to build a fancy house, but to create a spiritual home.

Amen.