

Finding Blessings in Letting Go

Posted May 25, 2014 by Judith Z. Abrams. Copyright © 2014 Judith Z. Abrams

BH

It's the season for letting go: graduations, weddings, and all sorts of transitions come around this time of year. The semester is finishing up and so is the programmatic year for synagogues and schools. For the ones graduating, it's a move up to a new place in life.

For the teachers and parents, graduations and course endings are times to say goodbye. It's time for us to let go. The students move on to new classes. The children say goodbye to their native families to start their own, new families. But there's no denying it: letting go can be bittersweet.

Many of my classes are coming to an end and my recent back surgery has put a premature stop to the semester. But I did find one blessing in letting go of the semester early. I have one class this year that has been meeting five days a week since the fall, learning Bavli Berachot in Hebrew/Aramaic. We use technology that allows us to see each other. The class spreads from the East to the West coasts and from Canada to Texas.

When I finally had my wits about me enough to contact the class, I learned they had kept going in my absence. That brought me so much joy! I would never have known they would/could do that if I hadn't had to let go.

Moses was much on my mind in the hospital. I saw him up on that mountaintop, retreating from leadership and life. And I was reminded once again how good God is to give us death. There is an end to pain. We could be in a system wherein the pain never ends. God gave us this enormous bless

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had to let go and then found something surprising and good as a result? Tell us what happened.
2. The kabbalists might call this "tsimtsum", retraction. Just as God retracts and makes space for us, we, as parents/teachers, have to retract and make space for children/students to do more and more. Does it help to think that you're imitating God when you retract and leave the next generation more space?
3. I know people don't like to think about death, but I confess I find this strange. People will spend months planning a bar mitzvah and years planning a wedding. They'll engineer their careers with consummate care but they spend no time at all planning their deaths. So, difficult exercise though I know it will be, I want you to spend some time thinking about how you'd like to die. Do you want to go in a hospital? Would you rather spend time with your family than with medical professionals? Think about how to arrange that.

I guess I what I'm urging is that you don't fall into death the way most people do. There's a cutoff point where you can tell the doctors, "No, thank you" and walk away. Think carefully about all the things they don't tell you. For example, surgery is almost never just surgery. Surgery is surgery PLUS a whole lot of physical therapy. Don't get me wrong. I love physical therapy and believe in its ability to heal. What I'm saying is, before you jump into surgery, look at it as a total package: surgery plus months of rehab. Or, if you're dealing with cancer, surgery plus radiation and/or chemotherapy. Be creative. Think it through. Practice letting go of life so that when you actually have to do it, you have a plan.

And for those who put themselves in harm's way for our country, who had the bravery to face death long before they should have had to do so, I salute their memories and their bravery.

As always, looking forward to your insights and answers!