

Do You Live Your Resume or Your Eulogy?¹

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In a Ted Talk given by NY Times journalist David Brooks, he asked the group, “Do you live your resume or your eulogy?”

So I will ask you the same question - “Do you live your resume or your eulogy?”

You might ask, what is the difference between a resume and a eulogy other than timing? They both describe who you are but focus on different aspects of your life. A resume describes what you did and a eulogy describes what kind of person you were. What are the highlights of your resume? What would you like to be the highlights of your eulogy?

And which better describes the life you are living now? Is it a long list of your accomplishments and achievements, or a long list of your virtues – meaning who you are in your depth, the nature of your relationships, the way you deal with others, family, friends, and strangers? Or some from each list? And if so, which list is longer? And what do you think should be the longer list?

We all have different sides to us. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explained these two sides through the lens of the two creation stories in the book of Genesis. ²

In Chapter 1, God commands the first human being – אָדָם A-dam – “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the earth.” Humanity is given domain over the earth. Soloveitchik calls this first description of human beings, “Adam the First.” He sees Adam the First as aggressive, bold, and victory minded. One who strives for success. He is that aspect of us that is bright, creative, and competent. Adam the First is the worldly, ambitious, external side of our nature. He wants to build and create - create companies, innovate, create structures.

In Genesis Chapter 2 we read, “God took the אָדָם A-dam, and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it... God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a sustainer beside him.” This is Adam the Second. He does not seek to subdue the world. Rather, he and his companion care for the world and seek refuge and comfort in one another.

Adam the First is called to a life of dignity and respect by gaining dominion over the world around him. Adam the Second seeks a life of redemption by recognizing that being in relationship and knowing his limits reflects who he is as a human being. Adam the Second is the humble side of our nature. He wants not only to **do** good but to **be** good, to live in a way internally that honors God, God’s creations and our possibilities.

¹ Do You Live Your Resume or Your Eulogy? April 14, 2014 David Brooks TED TALK

² From an essay by Rabbi David Ellenson in MHN pg. xxiii

Adam the First wants to conquer the world. Adam the second wants to hear a calling and obey the world. Adam the First savors accomplishment. Adam the Second savors inner consistency and inner strength. Adam the First asks how things work. Adam the Second asks, “Why are we here?”

These two aspects of ourselves are expressed in the poetry and imagery of the High Holy Day liturgy. We are asked to examine – “What have we accomplished?” and “What are our relationships like?” Are we able to acknowledge that while we can be strong, powerful, and in control, we are also at times frail, needy, and limited in what we can do.

In this context, let's see how our resumes and eulogies compare. We probably would agree that the virtues of a eulogy are more important in the big picture, that those of a resume, but which do you **focus** on the most? Wanting the recognition you need from others, or searching for recognition from God?

David Brooks explains that these two ideals of human beings work by different logics. “The Adam I external logic is an economic logic: input leads to output, risk leads to reward. You want to receive back what you give out. The internal side of our nature is a moral logic and often an inverse logic. You have to give to receive. You have to surrender to something outside yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer the desire to get what you want, in order to fulfill yourself. You have to forget yourself, lose yourself, in order to find yourself.

We live in a society that favors “Adam I,” and does little to encourage us to find our “Adam II.” Society teaches us to seek outside ourselves for affirmation but it is when we look inside, that we can find a more meaningful affirmation of who we really are.

When you live your resume, your focus is on tasks that can be completed. When you live your eulogy you realize that some of the work you do cannot be completed in your own lifetime but it is still important to do the work for future generations.

There is a wonderful Talmudic story about Honi the Circle Maker. He saw a young man planting a carob tree and the “Adam I” in him remarked, “Why are you doing this? It takes 70 years for the carob tree to bare fruit. Why bother?” Then Honi falls asleep for, yes, 70 years. When he awoke he saw the same man by the tree but Honi was confused. The tree was filled with fruit. He went over to the man to inquire, “I just saw you plant this tree. How did you get the tree to grow fruit so quickly?” The man replied, “You must be thinking of my grandfather. Sadly he did not live long enough to enjoy its fruit but he planted it for me.” The man who planted the tree was using the Adam II part of who he was.

Society helps us to develop our “Adam I.” The Yamin Noraim – these Ten Days of Awe, help us to strengthen the Adam II that is in all of us. Adam I is developed by building on our strengths. That is usually where our focus is. Adam II is developed by fighting our weaknesses. You go into

yourself, you find the wrong doing which you've committed over and over again through your life - your signature sin out of which the others emerge - and you fight that urge and you wrestle with that action, and out of that wrestling and that suffering, a depth of character develops.

So are you living your resume or your eulogy? Most of you have probably written a resume in your life. I would imagine that few if any of you have written your own eulogy. As a rabbi I have written many eulogies in my career. I often do funerals of people I have never met so when I get together with the family I try to find out as much as I can about the deceased to know what to say at the funeral. I asked them to tell me about their loved one. Often, what I get is a **resume** – Where they worked. What organizations they volunteered for. What they **did**. And try as I might, for some, is hard to get much information about what they were **like**. What kind of spouse, parent, sibling, or friend they were. What was special and unique about them?

Sadly, this happens more with men. The earlier generation of men were taught that their value was their job. Often men were too busy “working” and building their resume, to be able to live a life that would add the personal, deeper touches as a father, husband, or brother.

So as you review the past year during this High Holy Day season, think about which is longer, your resume or your eulogy. Now don't get me wrong. We still need to build a resume. As the Talmud says, “*Ayn Kesef, Ayn Torah.*” If you don't have money to provide for the essentials, you won't have time to pursue the values of Torah. Both are important. But when you compare them, which is longer? Which is more meaningful, more important to you?

During these High Holy Days we speak of God as judge, but we are also asked to judge ourselves. To explore our regrets, to atone for what we should have done differently, to make peace with those we have wronged, to make a better world, to search the deepest recesses of our soul for what it means to be a human being in this world. As we do this work over the next ten days, let's get to know the Adam II in all of us.

How do we do that? I am going to give you a homework assignment to start the process. When you get home today, sit down and write two eulogies. The first one should be an accurate description of you and your life up until now. Then write a second eulogy - the eulogy you want to be read at your funeral. What would you like people to say about you after you are gone? How different is the second one from the first one? If they are both similar, you are in good shape. If not, I encourage you to spend the next week reflecting on things you need to change, to live up to the second eulogy.

May God grant us the ability to truly examine ourselves, to do *teshuvah* –enabling us to return to the path we would like to be remembered for.

Amen