

## HOLIDAY STORIES

Note: I get an idea. I sit down at my computer and write. After I write, I reread what I have written and make corrections. It is called editing. Yesterday, I had an idea, and sat down at my computer and wrote, I had not finished. I wanted to check something. I left what I had written in the computer, and checked. When I returned to what I had written, it was no longer there. I searched and searched. I called a friend who knows a great deal more about computers than I. He asked if I had “saved” the piece. I said I did not. He said that it is most likely lost. I was very disappointed. It is very difficult to recreate what had been written. Nevertheless, I will give it a shot, but I doubt that it will be as good as the piece I started.

### A SUKKOS STORY AND A HIGH HOLIDAYS STORY

The High Holidays are over, and I just read a story by S Y Agnon called The Etrog. (I still call the thing that looks like a big lemon an esrog, with an “s,” and I call the holiday when Jews bentsh esrog, and put up a sukkah, Sukkos.) The story describes how very important it is to observant Jews to buy a perfect esrog, and how some rabbis who have very little money will nevertheless take all the money they have to buy the perfect esrog.

The story tells, in passing, of the Rabbi from Neshkiz who was about to do exactly that. As he was on his way to make the purchase, he passed an old man who was crying beside a dead horse. When he asked the man why he was crying, the old man explained that he is a water carrier, and the horse that pulls his wagon is dead, and now so is his livelihood. The rabbi gave all the money for the esrog to the man to buy a horse. What is the difference, he thought. The esrog is one of God’s commandments, but so is giving charity. Let someone else say the blessing over the esrog. He will bless this horse.

The High Holidays story is about a young man who had committed himself to lead services at a retirement community for the High Holidays, and who, on the day before Rosh Hashanah, had gone to the local Starbucks to study and prepare. He was immersed in study when a homeless man approached him and said he was hungry. He asked the young man for some money so that he could buy a banana. The young man reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. He only had a \$20 bill. He gave it to the homeless man, assuming he would go to the counter, take a banana, pay for the banana, and return the change to him. Instead, the homeless man took the \$20 bill and walked out of Starbucks. I do not know if the homeless man said thank you, or if he turned around and waved. My guess is that he pocketed the bill and left very quickly. The young man was surprised and taken aback. This was a different scenario from the one he assumed. He went back to studying and preparing for the High Holiday services.

I have been saying Yizkor on Yom Kippur for my father ever since my Bar Mitzvah. I say it in Hebrew and in English. For years, I have been uncomfortable when, after asking God to remember the soul of my father who has gone to his eternal home, I say, “I pledge tzedakah to help perpetuate ideals important to him.” The fact is, I have no idea what

ideals were important to him, and I have never once given tzedakah after saying Yizkor on Yom Kippur, even to support ideals important to me. I certainly give tzedakah, but it is unrelated to Yizkor. It would be dishonest of me to give tzedakah after Yizkor, that I give at another time of year, claiming that it is related to having asked God to remember my father's soul.

The young man's act of tzedakah got me to thinking. First, it is like the Rabbi who gave his esrog money to the poor water carrier. Second, it can also be considered something like "paying it forward." When the time comes to pledge tzedakah when saying Yizkor on Yom Kippur, (may it be many years from now) he can justifiably say he has already given.

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