

Yom kippur sermon 2017

The value of braking and taking it slow

In the spring, when my 2006 Honda Accord was at the 300,000 kilometres and counting, parts started going, one after the other. Until then, I'd been happy with my car, and wasn't really thinking about replacing it. Until a member of our congregation, Marc Vejgman, steered me towards a new car, pun intended. And not just any car.

Marc asked me how much I spent on gas each month, driving my Honda. About 350 dollars, I told him. He asked if I'd be interested in a car that uses no gas, with monthly payments less than 350 dollars, the amount I'd been spending on gas. I scoffed, said that was impossible. Marc smiled and proceeded to tell me about the exciting technological advancements in electric cars, and the subsequent lower prices. In fact, to encourage the growth of electric cars, the federal government offered a new incentive on electric-only cars in March, right around the

time my Honda was starting to need major work. It's a 14,000 dollar rebate on select models. Enticing.

I looked at the Ford Focus, mainly because Marc recommended it. (He happens to work for Ford, after all!) When I arrived at the dealership, there was just one Ford Focus available. It had been built in Flint Michigan and was on its way to Oakville. There were no options, no choice of color, which suited me fine. I don't like having to make too many choices. I just wanted a car that wouldn't be too expensive to drive.

The salesman told me my monthly payments would be exactly what I pay each month in gas, 350 dollars, exactly what Marc had said. And there was additional government rebate on an electric charger for my home – I was over the moon. I handed the salesman my credit card, and picked up my new electric Ford Focus a few weeks later. The salesman got in the car with me to explain all the gadgets and how the battery worked. To my surprise, he told me I'd

get around 220 km on one charge, depending on how fast I drove, and on how well I braked.

What was that again? How I braked?

He nodded his head and explained that whenever the brake is pressed, the car is recharged. In other words, when you slow down, you'll go farther. If I stopped completely, the battery charged even more. This blew my mind!

Apply the brake, slow down, get more mileage, go farther.

What an amazing car, what an amazing way to look at life, and.. what an amazing idea for a sermon for the high holidays!

This is a fast world. We eat fast food and buy fast fashion. We drive fast to get places. We try to fast-track through school, we get the nexus pass to go faster through airport lines. We drive in the express lanes, we expect and demand high speed internet, we want LTE fast cellular phone service, and we want to speedread. At Canada's

wonderland, we want the fast-pass to get on the Leviathan roller coaster, because it's the fastest ride in the park.

Speed is king.

Even our food is getting faster. Instant oatmeal, because who has time to let water boil. Or how about the ubiquitous pop tart? There are directions on the Pop Tart box, two sets of directions. One is for toasting. Take the pop tart out of the package and put it in the toaster. But if that isn't fast enough, take out the pop tart and put it in the microwave for 3 seconds. 3 seconds! If you only have three seconds to make your breakfast, you need to re-examine your lifestyle and choices. Yes, life moves pretty fast, but if you don't stop to look around once in a while, you could miss the most important moments. My electric car can go very fast, but it works more efficiently if you slow down to get more out of the charge, more out of the performance, more out of life.

Baseball is a sport that also reminds us to go slow. Do you know how long a typical baseball game runs? Nobody has the answer because the game is not based on time. It ends after 9 innings, as long as one team has more runs than the other. If it is a tied game, they keep playing. This can be frustrating. Some people watch the game and can't believe anything happened at all because of the slow speed. But there is a lot going on, and there are a lot of lessons to be learned through this particular sport. A year ago, baseball fans witnessed one of the most dramatic world series ever played, between the Chicago Cubs and Cleveland Indians. While Toronto fans understand patience, waiting for our Leafs to win the Stanley Cup, which hasn't happened since 1967, we can't hold a candle to the Cleveland Indians who haven't won the series since 1945. The Chicago Cubs hadn't been champs since 1908, back during the Ottoman Empire.

Cubs broadcaster Jack Brickhouse used to say, any team can have a bad century. But in the fall of 2016, the team was young, playing great and had made it through to the world series. They had fought back down 3 games to 1 in the best of 7 series and then it was game 7, the deciding game in Cleveland. The Cubs took the lead by 3 runs heading into the 8th inning and Cubs fans around the world were counting down the outs. Suddenly, the weather took a turn and storm clouds appeared. Against Aroldis Chapman, one of the most fearsome pitchers in the game with 104 mph fastball, the Indians got a single, a double, and an impossible home run to tie the game. Minutes later the skies opened up and it began to pour. For those who like a fast game, this one took its time. I remember Jacob trying to stay up but it was past midnight and he had fallen asleep.

Theo Epstein, the General Manager of the Cubs, headed from his seat to a meeting inside the stadium to get an

update on the weather. He related this story as his commencement address last spring at Yale University.

He said that as he passed by the Cubs clubhouse, he saw all 25 guys on the team squeezed into the weight room, shoulder to shoulder. It was an unusual sight, they never met there, especially during a game. As he got closer he saw Chapman in tears. The guys were consoling him. The catcher, David Ross, 38 years old about to retire after the game, gave him a hug and said, "We wouldn't even be here without you, we are going to win this for you, for each other". Jason Heyward spoke up. He had the worst season of his whole career and was mired in a slump, but said, "we are the best team in baseball, we've leaned on each other all year, we've got this". Then, first baseman Anthony Rizzo, who survived pediatric cancer said, "nobody can take this from us, we have each other". And then, 23 year old Kyle Schwarber, who spent 6 months recovering from an injury with physiotherapy, and miraculously making it back

in time for the world series said, “we win this right here” and grabbed a bat. Sure enough, the rain cleared and shwarber got up to bat and got a hit. Then Zobrist doubled down the line and the Cubs took the lead. At 12:47 am Kris Byrant fielded a ground and threw to first base Rizzo for the final out and 5 million Chicagoans danced in celebration – in ecstasy and relief.

What was the message that Theo Epstein took from this historic achievement? In that players’ meeting, time stood still. No one rushed to try to get the game restarted. This team connected to each other by instinct, no one told them to have a team meeting. Theo said,

“a lot of times in life we put our head down and focus on our craft and our task and keep to ourselves, worrying about our numbers or our grades, pursuing the next objective goal, building our resumes, protecting our interests. But others go through our careers with our heads up, as real parts of a team, alert

and aware of others, embracing difference, employing empathy, genuinely connecting, putting collective interests ahead of our own. Keeping our heads down is safer and more efficient. Keeping our heads up allows us to lead and every now and then, to be part of something bigger than ourselves and to truly triumph. We will all have our rain delays. When we are slowed down, forced to brake when we want to go fast. There will be times when everything you have been wanting, everything you have worked for, everything you have earned, everything you feel you deserve is snatched away it seems like a personal or unfair blow. That is called life. When these moments happen **will** you be alone at your locker with your head down, lamenting, passing the blame? Or **will** you be shoulder to shoulder with your teammates, connected, with your head up, giving and receiving support?

Don't wait for the rain delay. Don't wait to brake.

Things can happen, a ground ball takes a bad bounce.

But when players, people, know each other well and come together and trust each other so they can open up and be vulnerable and connect to each other they can lift each other up. You've already won, no matter the outcome on the field.

There is a wonderful midrash about Moses that reminds us to slow down and keep your head up. Moses was a go-fast person, because he was born into a fast paced world. God said go quickly to Egypt and free the people. When Pharaoh finally agreed after the 10 plagues, they had to leave quickly for fear of Pharaoh changing his mind. They didn't even have time to let their bread rise giving us our matzoh. When they got to shore of the Red Sea and God parted the waters, they had to quickly get across before the Egyptian chariots reached them and the water closed over them. Moses had to move fast, always be at the front of the

group. But going through the desert is not always quick, especially with 600,000 people.

In the desert, someone was always crying, someone was always fighting, someone was always slowing the group down. A few people were older, others had to limp along or be carried. The blind needed assistance, little children walked slow, and many were scared of what might come and didn't want to move at all. It was a slow moving group. Moses complained to God, who told him, each person is unique and goes at his or her own pace. When they finally arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses rushed up to get the Torah, but God made him wait for 40 days and 40 nights.

Meanwhile, at the foot of the mountain, people had made a golden calf and were dancing and singing around it. Moses was furious and smashed the tablets into a thousand pieces. Moses went back up to God. He was not prepared to immediately give Moses a new set of tablets; what if he smashed them again? God told Moses "first go and put all

the pieces back together”. Moses said, “I can’t pick up all the pieces myself”. So God said, “find a thousand people to each pick up one piece”. Most of the Israelites were ready to move on and were in a hurry to get to Israel, the promised land. Moses began working all by himself but soon he noticed people were helping him. They were the folks who walked slower, who limped, who were elderly or very young, who were scared or nervous. They didn’t like to hurry, and had plenty of time to find all the pieces. Slowly but surely, they started to put the pieces back together, day by day. Some were starting to give up that they would ever finish, but Moses said, the 10 commandments are the best thing God ever gave to us. I broke them in anger. It doesn’t matter how long it takes, we have to go slowly and find each piece and put the tablets back together.

When God heard these words, he called Moses back up the mountain where He’d prepared a second set of

commandments. God instructed Moses to build a golden ark to hold the new stone tablets. It took a long time to make the ark, but nobody complained and no one wanted to go too fast. When it was finished, Moses put the new stone tablets in the ark, as well as all the broken pieces – they are holy, too. No one is a broken person because of their age, their sight, their feelings and especially their speed. People of all abilities carried the golden ark, and although it caused them to go a little slower, nobody complained. Moses walked along with those at the back of the line, “we are all going to get where God wants us to go, he said, there is no need to rush”.

So, during the important moments of your life, remember that slowing down can actually help you get ahead. Slow down, you move too fast, gotta make this moment last.

When traffic slows you down, remember as you apply the

brake, you are using less gas, or less battery and you **will** eventually get where you are going.

Remember Moses and his rush to get to the finish line, before he realized its the journey, not always the destination, that matters, and the people you meet along the way that make it all worthwhile. Sometimes the back of the line is okay.

And think about the 2016 cubs, and the rain delay. The team wanted the game to finish. They wanted to win the world series, and they did, by slowing down and connecting to one another. In our own lives, the best moments often happen when we're stuck. We all want to aim high and achieve the most we can, but when it rains and things go wrong, and that will happen to all of us, gather your teammates together, keep your head up, rally around each other, and support those who need it the most. You'll end

up raising the spirits of everyone around you, as well as your own. Shana Tovah.