

The Opposite of Boredom  
*Rosh Hashanah 5770 Family Service, Rabbi Zoë Klein*

This has been a week...  
Wow,  
School began for many of you,  
Either this past week or the week before,  
For many of you,  
Your school journey began  
nearly a month ago,  
your journey into new discoveries,  
new accomplishments...  
and the High Holidays come  
significantly at the beginning of that journey,  
some time in the beginning in order for us  
to take a step back  
and survey what we are about to do,  
survey where we are about to go.

So imagine...  
That instead of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur  
Being the *Days of Awe*...  
Let's consider that we have entered the PLACE of Awe.  
And I don't mean literally, that Royce Hall is the Place of Awe,  
Although it is beautiful,  
I mean imagine...  
Imagine you are going on a trip...  
We have packed up our cars,  
we have filled our tanks,  
checked our oil,  
pulled into the highway of experience,  
surrounded ourselves with so much noise,  
imagine, the ipod's docked and the music is loud,  
and under the music:  
the humming of the tires,  
the whirring of the fans,  
the thoughts in our head,  
the landscape whisks by us  
in our great rush to get this journey underway.

And then we see a sign on the side of the road.  
It says:

## SLIDE: *View*

“View.”

So we pull over,  
take out our camera,  
\*frame the picture,\*  
and slowly we lower the camera from our eyes as we realize that we are  
witnessing,  
*right now*, the most beautiful dawn we have ever seen.

Put the camera down.  
Turn off the engine.  
Lean against the car and look.  
From here you have the most extraordinary, picture perfect view...  
of your self.

*This is the Place of Awe.*

From here,  
from this mountain top  
we can see all of the hills and valleys of our daily life.  
We see the road of our years winding its way,  
now through the bright, clear stretches of our worthiness,  
now through the tangled jungle of our failures.

The air in this place is clean and fresh.  
The view ... spectacular.  
From here, from this Place of Awe,  
we can chart out the course we want to take on the map of our selves.

From here we can figure out where we want to go.  
From here we can reacquaint ourselves with the meaning of it all,  
we can reacquaint ourselves with God.

The High Holidays are the long-awaited oasis in our journey through the desert.

We are somewhere between slavery and freedom,  
between Egypt and the Promised Land,  
dependence and independence...

Wandering in the desert, at first glance,  
the land is barren,  
the sky is as bright and hot as a metal dome,  
and the silence is heavy and uncomfortable.  
We enter an uncharted region of ourselves  
where we might encounter loneliness and vulnerability.

We look around in the desert at the moon-like craters,  
the frozen crests of chalk and sand,  
the shimmering of the heat,  
and we pray that we might know how to live in this place,  
how to *really live*.

Then we come to this Place of Awe,  
to this oasis,  
and we see the desert in a new way.  
We start to see its stark, vivid beauty.  
We start to realize that it is actually teeming with life.

We see it as an inspiration for personal creativity,  
for wasn't it from that place in the desert,  
that place in transition,  
that we received our most sacred gift, the Torah?

Sigmund Freud wrote that "We are lived."  
"We are lived" meaning that we do not live our own lives,  
but that the forces and pressures  
and expectations around us puppeteer us,  
live our lives for us.

But today,  
in this Place of Awe,  
we see that our destiny is our self,

that our most important journey is the one that leads us to fulfill our truest potential,  
and that our truest potential is not always in winning the gold  
and earning the best grade or the most money,  
but often in living a menckite life,  
one of goodness, honesty, authenticity, and gratitude.  
It is about appreciating what you have right here and right now,  
And not always coveting what is just out of reach.

Let me tell you about a man... There once was a man who had given up on life. He found no joy in his work, his family, or his community. And so he prayed to God to let him leave this world. "Show me the way to Paradise!" he begged God.

God asked him, "Are you sure that's what you want?"

The man replied, "I am sure with all my heart."

"Very well," replied God. "You want to go to Paradise? It's that way."

As it turned out, Paradise wasn't very far away – just a few days' journey from the man's village.

So late one afternoon, he set out on his way. He walked until nightfall and then decided to rest beneath a leafy tree.

Just before he fell asleep, it occurred to him that in the morning he might become confused and forget which was the way to Paradise, and which was the way back to his village.

## SLIDE: *Tree, shoes*

So he left his shoes by the roadside, with the tips pointing toward Paradise so that in the morning all he'd have to do was jump into his shoes and continue on his way.

But, sometimes unexpected things happen. Somehow the man's shoes got turned around.

## SLIDE: *Shoes turn around*

Was it an angel? A squirrel? An imp? Who knows?

In the morning, the man rose feeling rested from his sleep, ate from the fruit of the tree, and prepared to set off on his journey. He

went to the road, stepped into his shoes and began walking – unaware that he was in fact returning home.

## SLIDE: *Blank*

By noon he could see a village on the next hillside, and his heart leapt. “I’ve arrived in Paradise!” he thought. He ran down into the valley and up the hill, not stopping until he had arrived at the gates of the village.

“What a beautiful place is Paradise!” he thought. “My village was always so crowded, so noisy. This is different, so filled with life and joy!” He sat down on a bench in the square and witnessed the life of the village. He heard the songs the children sang at school and the sounds of the adults at work. He felt the vitality, the energy, and the love that filled the village. He sat in the square all day. In the evening he heard the joyful sounds of families reunited at home and smelled the meals that were being enjoyed by each family.

And he began to feel hungry.

He thought, “Since Paradise looks so much like my village, I wonder if there is a street in Paradise like my street.” And so he went to look. Just where he thought it might be, there’s where he found it.

Then he thought, “I wonder if there is a house in Paradise like my house.” And just where he thought it might be, there it was! Just as he was wondering at this marvelous coincidence, a woman came to the door – a woman who bore a striking resemblance to his wife! The woman called his name and asked him to come in for dinner.

His heart leapt. “They know me in Paradise! There is a place set for me here in Paradise!”

“I don’t know what’s in Paradise,” the woman responded, “but your soup is getting cold at home.”

He entered the house. This house in Paradise was nothing like his house in the village. That house was always crowded, cluttered, filled with commotion. This place was cozy, and homey and filled with life. He sat at the table and ate the best meal he’d ever had. He complimented the woman on her heavenly soup. Afterward, he went up to his bedroom and entered the deepest, most restful sleep he’d ever know.

In the morning the woman who looked like his wife handed him his tools and sent him to work. At first the man was surprised. Who

ever heard of working in paradise? But then it occurred to him that even in Paradise there were tasks to be done. And he found this work was different from the work he'd done before. Not dull or tedious, it filled him with a sense of purpose. And that night he returned to the same warm and loving home.

Do you know that in all the years that followed, no one could convince the man that he hadn't made it to Paradise! Every one of his days from then on was filled with more wonder, more purpose, more joy, and more life than the day before.

Now I think about this story,  
and I think about my own home,  
my own family, my kids.  
I think about how sometimes  
we'll do a kind of trip,  
like a road-trip to see the Hoover Dam,  
with a side of Vegas  
and Cirque du Soleil,  
a day of fun and funnel-cake at Hurricane Harbor,  
and at the end of the latest adventure we come home,  
parents deliriously tired,  
mom and dad collapse on the couch  
happy to just lay there  
until we fall asleep  
with a half-read newspaper over our faces,  
feeling content with the day of fast-paced fabulosity we've provided,  
certain that our children  
will be buzzing with gratitude for days.  
But within minutes of arriving home...  
*within minutes...*  
this is what we hear,  
"I'm bored."

Boredom is a slithery epidemic,  
numbing our senses and disconnecting us with the world.  
Boredom is a lonely experience, lost in a wasteland.  
It is also perhaps one of the most unsacred emotional state to be in,  
for when we are bored,  
we close our eyes to the miracles we are drenched in every moment,  
even the quiet soft moments,

when your poor overworked, overstressed parents,  
are trying to steal a nap.

When we are bored,  
We have stopped being grateful  
for the constant metronome beating out our precious pulse,  
or the rise and fall of our chest as we breath.  
We've shut our mind from remembering  
the feathery clouds drifting overhead  
and the finely wrought lace of a determined spider in the corner.

The man in the story was bored.  
He was annoyed at everything and everyone.  
Nothing filled him with wonder, and awe.  
Nothing was *awesome*.  
So he left.  
But then he returned to the very same place, *thinking* it was Paradise.  
And suddenly,  
it was *full* of wonder.  
Even the same old soup, instead of *ugh, this dumb soup again*,  
The broth was savory, *magnifique*, divine.

Do you know what the opposite of boredom is?  
You might think that the opposite of boredom is excitement,  
Or adventure, or thrill...  
Nuh-uh.  
The opposite of boredom is:

**SLIDE: 'Judaism' in Vegas lights**

Judaism.  
I know that sounds strange. But it's true. It's Judaism!  
**RABBI RICK BLOWS THE SHOFAR**

**SLIDE: Fireworks**

To find the world interesting is the heart of Judaism...  
to be a Jew of faith is to be anything but bored.

To be a Jew is to stand  
“slack-jawed in amazement at the world of possibilities,  
and to rise with excitement toward its realization.” (Schulweis)

Watch *this*:

*And then Queen Esther told Haman...*

**BIMA SITTERS SWING GROGGERS!**

Judaism is about engagement,  
about noise, about using your voice to fight evil...  
that's what \*this\* is, it's not just fun and games,  
it is about drowning the name of evil,  
about finding your voice,  
and raising it, to make a difference,  
to stand up for your rights  
and the rights of those whose voices have been stifled.  
Yes, Judaism is about justice,

**GET READY TO LIFT ROCKY ON CHAIR, DARA  
GETS GUITAR**

And it is also about...

**LIFT ROCKY ON CHAIR**

joy!

**DARA PLAYS GUITAR SINGING “*siman tov*”**

Judaism is about taking notice...  
it is about *WITNESSING* the world  
in all its beauty and glory,  
noticing the miracles all around.  
Don't let me move through this world with eyes shut,  
let me be attuned to the symphony of sound,  
the mantra of textures,  
the artistry of creation,  
the majesty of living.  
Judaism, Judaism,  
And our history,  
Oh *man*,

Talk about heroes,  
Talk about survival,  
Talk about beating all odds...

## SLIDE: *blank*

The shofar says,  
“Wake me up, o God,  
rouse me,  
let the hair on the back of my neck stand up like a troop,  
*alarm* me with the blast of a shofar,  
wake me up lest my days sail past me and I notice nothing.”

Boredom is the most unsacred place to be.  
Aaron Zeitlin wrote a wonderful poem  
in which it is written:  
“Praise Me, says God,  
and I will know that you love Me.  
Curse Me, says God, and I will know that you love Me...  
Sing out My graces, says God,  
raise your fist against Me and revile, says God,  
Sing out graces or revile,  
reviling is also a kind of praise...  
But if you sit fenced off in your apathy,  
if you look at the stars and [shrug],  
if you see suffering and don't cry out,  
if you don't praise and you don't revile,  
then I created you in vain.”

We learn from this poem  
that even anger is a form of praise,  
for it shows how deeply we care.  
To be angry at God is to care about God's creation.  
However, to shrug at the stars,  
that is to dismiss the creation entirely.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:  
“To pray is to take notice of the wonder,  
to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings...”

It is all we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live..."

Next time you find yourself feeling bored,  
take a walk around the block and count the living things you see.  
Turn over a rock and watch the roly pollies scurry about.

## SLIDE: *Rolly pollies*

Go home and look up roly polly, or pill bug on the computer  
and learn some of the wonderful attributes  
with which God endowed this little creature.

Eat a peach slowly.

Jump through a sprinkler, or, if you are tired,  
just sit and watch the little particles of air  
swirl into spirals in your breath,  
little galaxies of dust,  
and know that God's fingerprint is there too.

To be a Jew of faith is to be anything but bored.  
To be a Jew is not to shrug away one's life,  
but to stand slack-jawed in amazement at the world of possibilities,  
and to rise with excitement toward its realization.  
It is to say:

Wow! Yes! I am here! I am ready! Yes!  
And look at this messy, chaotic place,  
    this home of mine,  
        this classroom with all its assignments,  
            this job with all its stress...

Not somewhere else, *this, here...*

The kids screaming,  
phone ringing  
Dog barking at the mailman bringing  
That stack of bills, overdue...

Half hour,  
Quick shower,  
Take a drink of milk  
but the milk's gone sour

Still it's our home,  
one dream,  
wouldn't trade it for anything  
And I ask the Lord every night  
For just another day in paradise

During the Days of Repentance we do what is called *Tshuva*,  
translated as repentance,  
*T'shuva* literally means 'return'.  
We return to our selves.  
This is the destiny of our journey.  
A return to the self.  
A return to our home, but with eyes open.  
And when we return,  
Within minutes we are saying –  
not "I'm bored",  
but... how great is this place!  
Dorothy was right,  
There's no place like it!

And when we gather as a community in our Temple home,  
how much like Paradise it is!

Have you ever been hurt?  
Have you ever had an injury or been sick?  
When you aren't feeling well,  
then *normal* isn't boring.  
*Normal* isn't ho-hum.  
All you wish for is to be able to sit upright,  
to be able to take a walk,  
to breathe normally,  
a clean deep breath would be reason to praise,  
a regular heartbeat would be awesome,  
to move without back-pain,  
to lift a glass of ice water to your lips and drink it down,  
to see, to hear...  
when you aren't well you realize how much you took for granted when you  
were...

Judaism is all about taking the mundane and making it sacred.  
Lifting it up, like the boy on the chair...

Practicing mindful eating,  
Mindful speaking...  
waking up in the morning, singing *modei ani lifanecha*,  
I stand in gratitude before You...  
It is about not being bored,  
But being floored  
By the wonder of it all.

*Mah tovu ohaleicha Yaakov! Mishkenoteicha Yisrael!*  
How *goodly* are your tents oh Jacob, your dwelling places oh Israel!  
*Hinei mah tov u'ma naim...*How *good* it is for us to be together...

In Psalm 139 it is written: I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made; Your work is wonderful, I know it very well.

Know it well, look, feel, witness...engage, invent, read, write, love, live,  
breathe and bless God for breath, and yes, revile, and raise your voice  
against Haman

## **SWING GROGGER**

and speak up!

And sing, and let people take naps once in a while,  
And if you feel restless,  
turn your shoes around and *redirect*,  
turn your mind around and *rethink*,  
because Paradise is where you let it in,  
so why are you waiting to let it in?

*Modei*

*ani lifanecha,*

*Melech Chai V'Kayam...*

*Shechechezarti bi nishmati*

*B'chemla...*

I stand in gratitude before You,  
Living and Eternal God,  
For returning my soul to me this morning,  
For inviting me to be part of this

*SLIDE: pan out of earth to edge of  
universe*

Majestic, dancing, dizzyingly mysterious,  
Dazzingly radiant,  
Splendid, soulful,  
Graceful, exquisite,  
Shimmering,  
Shining,  
*Awesome*  
World.