Jewish Tribune – Rosh Hashana/YK

**Clowning Around**

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells the story of a traveller who arrived at a motel very late at night. The proprietor told him there were no vacancies. The traveller begged him to check the register again.

Upon second examination, the proprietor found there was one empty bed, but the room already had an occupant. “Look, you can go into that room and use the spare bed but be careful not to wake up the other person in there. By the way, he happens to be a professional clown.”

The traveller thanked him and told him that he needed to catch a plane very early in the morning. “Can you please wake me up at 4.30am?” he asked the proprietor.

“Sure, no problem.”

At 4.30am the proprietor nudged the traveller awake. Groping the dark, since he didn’t want to turn on the light and risk waking his sleeping roommate, the traveller put on his clothing, but due to the darkness he inadvertently put on the clown suit.

Without noticing what he had done, the man walked out of the motel and flagged down a cab. The cab driver gave him a strange look and drove him to the airport.

When he got to the airport, the traveller noticed people were looking at him oddly. Finally, looking at one of the mirrors in the terminal, he saw a clown staring back at him.

“That irresponsible motel owner,” said the traveller. “I asked him to wake me up and instead he woke up the clown.”

People are always struggling to find their own identity. Many identify themselves by what they do for a living or by reference to another person. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur remind us who we really are.

Rosh Hashana is also the first day of the asseres yemei teshuva and yet there is no reference to teshuva during Rosh Hashana. Our lengthy and beautiful davening seems to omit any mention of repentance.

Why?

Perhaps the answer is that the first step in teshuva is to know who we are and what we are here for. Our focus on Rosh Hashana is to proclaim HKBH as Melech, to coronate the King of Kings, and to remind ourselves that our core purpose is to make Him the centre of our lives. To declare the immortal words of Yona HaNavi - “עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי”.

A man from New York once visited the Brisker Rov in Yerushalayim. The Brisker Rov asked the visitor his name and who he was. “I am so and so and am a lawyer from New York”, he replied.

“And who are you?” asked the Brisker Rov again?

Perhaps he didn’t hear the first time thought the man. “I am so and so and am a lawyer from New York” he repeated.

“And who are you?”

“This is the great Brisker Rov?” thought the man. Interrupting the man’s thoughts, the Brisker Rov explained: “I heard what you said the first time, but that is not how a Jew defines himself. Don’t define yourself by your occupation, don’t describe yourself by the means through which HKBH sends you your parnosso.”

The Brisker Rov said this is one of the important lessons from Maftir Yona, the last public reading of Yom Kippur. Wanting to know the origins of the sleeping passenger, Yona is awoken and asked a series of questions. In response, he simply states: “עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי”. I am a G-d fearing Jew. Indeed, this is the answer to most of life’s questions regarding how we should respond to any given situation.

At the beginning of parshas Noach, Noach is described as an **איש צדיק** (a righteous man) and ends the parsha as an **איש אדמה** (a man of the field). In contrast says the Medrash, Moshe Rabbeinu begins life as an**איש מצרי** (an Egyptian man) and ends it as an **איש האלקים** (a G-dly man).

But Noach was a farmer even before the mabul (flood)!? Indeed, Rashi tells us at the end of parshas Bereishis that Noach (which means “to ease”) was so called as a portend of a major future achievement. Noach would introduce industry changing innovations to the world of agriculture, making farming much easier.

So why was Noach described an  **איש צדיק**at the beginning of the parsha and only as an **איש אדמה** at the end?

The answer is that after the mabul, agriculture became the primary focus of Noach’s life; previously he was a tzaddik who happened to be involved in agriculture.

The lesson is clear. How do we define ourselves? What is our primary focus? Yona Hanovi’s response ofעִבְרִי אָנֹכִי and the Medrash’s contrast of Noach and Moshe should guide us and help us not make clowns of ourselves.

**Rabbi Golker is the** **Menahel of Hasmonean Boys School and Hasmonean Girls School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**