

A Torah Thought, Rosh Hashanah and my Uber Awakening

Who is ready for Rosh Hashanah?

I sure wasn't. Work, family obligations and a recent medical procedure totally threw off my Rosh Hashanah game. That was until I read this week's parsha and took a very unexpected Uber ride

"You are all standing firmly (nitzavim) today, all of you together, before God, your God -- the leaders of your tribes... to your wood choppers and water-drawers."

Parsha Nitzavim mentions wood choppers and water drawers. But it should also include Uber drivers. Let me explain:

I Uber a lot. Maybe a dozen times a week. Seldom do I pay attention to my driver's name. It's all one big blur. But this week in San Diego, one driver's name stood out.

It was unmistakably Israeli. And he was unmistakably Jewish.

So after settling into my Jewber (get it;) and making some small talk, I asked what brought him to California. It was a good thing I was wearing my seat belt because he story shook me to the core.

He said he grew up in an Ultra-Orthodox family where everything was black and white, literally and figuratively. There was little room for questioning or self-expression.

Then, as we pulled into my hotel parking lot, he pulled out a picture of himself as a young Yeshiva student. Since he carried the photo in his wallet, I assumed he had fond memories. But the only memory he shared was how he was expelled from Yeshiva for playing basketball on a Friday afternoon, even though it was a day off from learning.

That was it. He has gone. Not just gone from Yeshiva. Not just gone from Israel. I mean gone. So gone, he says he'll spend Yom Kippur eating a cheeseburger on the beach.

Now, I know there are two sides of every story. And maybe he left out some details. But that's not the point. The point is: Here's a guy who will be alone during the most special days of the year.

How can that be? If we're all supposed to be standing together with the wood-chopper and the water carrier. Why is no one standing with my Uber driver?

He wished me L'Shana Tova. Then he sped away. And it hit me. That Uber ride wasn't a coincidence. That Uber ride was a wake-up call.

It's my job to stand with the Uber Driver.

Guess what? It's your job too. It's everyone's job. It doesn't matter where he came from, what happened in his past or how he got here. It doesn't matter what kind of Uber he drives. All that matters is that we stand together. Period.

That's the message of Parsha Nitzavim. No one should be standing alone this holiday season. We need to open homes and make sure everyone has a holiday meal; open our mouths and make sure everyone has a place to pray; open our wallets and make sure everyone has what to wear.

Most important: Open our hearts – and not judge anyone.

Judging is God's job, The rest is ours. And if we do our job then we'll all be Rosh Hashanah ready