**Have a Heart**

**Drasha Second Day Rosh Hashanah 5779, 2018**

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It’s a hashtag – A word or phrase preceded by this hash sign # used in social media (especially Twitter and Instagram) to promote a message or idea. So you get:

Hashtag #BlackLivesMatter

Hashtag #MeToo

Hashtag #RUOK

Hashtags are part of our lives today, a phenomenon of our Social Media Age. They’re a great way to boost your message, to sell a product and to reach people beyond your followers. They reach millions of people, are often punchy and sharp. They’ve brought people into the streets in Turkey, Iran and across the USA, but they are also arguably short-lived in their capacity to change and rearrange the world. A passing fashion, a transient trend.

They’re just 11 years old. On the other hand we Jews have been thinking internet, hashtags and connections for centuries. Technically Moses was the first person with a tablet (he actually had two) downloading data from the cloud… #Big10RulesForLife, although today he’d probably have to call them 10 Suggestions for Mindful Being

I think you could hashtag virtually every Mishna in Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, Judaism’s collected sayings and wisdom of our sages. They’re pithy, they’re popular, they’re timeless and they have the capacity to reach beyond our people and speak to so many. Just think:

#IfNotNowWhen

#IfIAmOnlyForMyselfWhoWillBe4Me

Today I want to share with you 5 hashtags suggested by the five preeminent students of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.

Rabbi Yochanan be Zakkai lived through some of the darkest days in Jewish History. He was in Jerusalem as it faced destruction around the year 70CE. He lived through the agony of the disaster. He felt the tectonic shift in Jewish life. He lived the loss of the then State of Israel. He understood despair and hopelessness, he knew fear and anxiety. He would have felt fear in a ‘handful of dust’ (TS Elliot). He knew what is was to face a confused and confusing world.

One day he asked his five chosen students: What do you think is the most critical quality for a good life, the most essential characteristic of a meaningful life, that elusive dimension that will help us face the challenges of life? Their responses are recorded in one of my favourite Mishnas in Avot. They each suggest a different quality.

R. Eliezer said hashtag  עין טובה – #GoodEye which, for me, means seeing the world in a positive way with a good attitude, a generosity of spirit. Mayo Clinic researchers have found that those who scored high on tests for pessimism have a 30% higher risk of later developing dementia. It was Churchill who said a pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty, notwithstanding the cynical Hubbard who retorted the pessimist is the person who’s been compelled to live with an optimist... Incidentally, the most essential ingredient of a good eye is a sense of humour. Gandhi said “If I had no sense of humour I would have committed suicide long ago.” And Seinfeld or Sasha Baron Cohen would have answered “Amen.”

Truth is, attitudes shape our lives and emotions and give us the capacity to cope. Whether an עין טובה is a positive or simply a realistic approach it helps shield us from the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’. Victor Frankl, the great therapist and survivor of the Shoah, identified why some were able to survive the Shoah: he said it was their attitude to life. Quoting Nietzche, he noted “He who has a why to live can live with almost any how.” If you have a purpose, a sense of meaning, it gives you hope, it gives you direction- a framework for living. That is of course what religion still provides in a cynical secular age; we all hunger for meaning. That’s why the Kotzker suggests that the punishment of the Eden serpent was that it didn’t have to hunt for food –it was readily available in the dust and earth .It’s  a curse because it didn’t have anything to hunger for ;we all long for substance, yearn for significance .

The second disciple Rabbi Yehoshua said חבר טוב hashtag #OnlyConnect. Have and be a good friend, חבר is from the Hebrew חבור connection – it’s one who connects to us. And being a good friend, making connections and standing by others, or having a good friend who is always there for you is one of the most nourishing, sustaining life-forces. The Talmud puts it או חברותא או מיתותא – either friendship or death. A friend is often what stands between us and death, between us and despair. And that’s why the betrayal of a good friend cuts deeper than most wounds; it’s a kind of death or loss itself. If there are two things that most cut into my heart over the past year: one was loss of one of my closest friends, the second was the treachery of one of my oldest friends.

So “Only Connect” is Rabbi Yehoshua’s advice. Pay attention to your partner who’s hopefully your best friend. In fact, Rabbi Akiva said “Love your neighbour” applies firstly to your spouse. Attend to your partner, listen out for your kids. Pay heed to your friends. Switch off your mobile and open your mind to them because as Michael Fox says “Family isn’t an important thing, it’s everything.”

The third student of Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Yossi, pondered and said: Yes these (good eye and good friend) are true virtues and compelling hashtags, but I think what gives us resilience, the capacity to get through tough times is community, is a good neighbour שכן טוב or שכונה טובה good neighbourhood - #BAGoodNeighbour. Do remember, he says: It’s all very, very well loving your friend or neighbour but you’ve got to choose your neighbourhood! Belonging to a community holds and moulds us, after all we’re social animals and as in the African proverb, people become people through people.

Today our neighbourhood has expanded to Facebook, group apps and blogs, and we need to be mindful not to pollute the “common”, the public square, or poison the well that we all drink from. The world is riven apart today by two competing narratives, the populist, conservative largely on the right, and the liberal agenda primarily on the left. Both are shrill and combative; both have legitimate gripes and it’s surely healthy to have some political disruption challenging the extremities of political correctness. But what’s more disturbing is the lack of neighbourliness, lack of appreciation that we need to live together and work together for the common good. We need to remember that we end every Amidah with a heartfelt cry for civil, respectful conversation: “My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech.” It continues calling for restraint and not reacting to every provocation: ‘’To those who curse and insult me, let my soul be silent.”

We urgently need to restore the civility and civil discourse to the neighbourhood. We need to begin at home and in our very congregation where there’s often a disturbing disparagement of others.

In Andrew Marcus’s previous Gen Y research he identified the stands that weave together a Jewish identity for young Jews in Melbourne: (1) Jewish schools (2) Jewish family/home (3) Jewish youth movement (4) Connection to Israel and (5) Belonging to a Shul. Family and community are both undergoing huge changes. Large shuls like ours especially need to reinvent themselves which we are doing – despite the sceptics who think all we have to do is daven harder.

And reinventing yourself in an age of change is one of the most formidable challenges. It’s exactly what the 4th student of Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Shimon recommended when he said you need vision to cope רואה את הנולד. We translate this as see the birth, but as Rabbi Hirsch says it literally means one who sees not what is being born, but what’s already born. That takes perception and insight Hashtag #HaveVision. Seeing the change, catching the zeitgeist, realising that you’re living in a time when things have changed utterly irrevocably and that you can never go back. We all need vision. Have a why to live, be it your kids, your work, your passion.

We are in the middle of the biggest transformation since the Industrial Revolution – The Internet Age – and it’s transforming and transmuting everything including the way we navigate our Halacha and live our lives as Orthodox Jews. It’s shattering the paradigm of unassailable rabbinic power and veto. Joogle or Rabbi Google today has more knowledge and power than almost any local suburban Rabbi.

God says, I have given you a heart to listen, eyes to see, ears to hear. A good heart, a לב טוב. A listening heart, a caring heart is the ultimate weapon in a wounded world. It’s the ultimate piece of advice given by Elazar. It’s the unrivalled emoji, the quintessential hashtag #HaveAHeart. Listening with heart is about being respectful of different views, holding civil discussions about the politics that divide us, be it Israel, Trump, or Australia.

When Rabbi Yochanan supreme leader and teacher, a visionary himself, responds to these five superlative students and their optimal hashtags he singles out Rabbi Elazar saying: Your advice combines all the others. Your advice – is what we’re about as a people. We all hunger for meaning and spirituality. At the end of the day being Jewish isn’t about structure or scripture alone, it’s about how the Torah lives in your veins, how it beats in your heart, how it connects you with compassion, how it energises your empathy. A good heart includes positive attitude, connection, civility and vision. If you want to live your life with care, live it with heart for that’s what makes us human, that’s what makes us Jewish. If you want to travel with heart then care for the kids abused in a family by a trusted friend or teacher, care about local and global hunger and poverty and pain, the growing gap between rich and poor, care for your planet that is ailing and failing.

There are times that try men’s souls. There are times that try our faith, challenge or influence and sap our sense of security.

These are the times. Let’s meet them with boldness and belief, toughness and tenacity, love and caring.

Let’s Hashtag:

1. #GoodEye
2. #OnlyConnect
3. #BAGoodNeighbour
4. #HaveVision
5. #HaveAHeart