

Who Is Sitting At Your Table?



We all face obstacles that at times seem hard to overcome. Who do you turn to?

Recently, Rabbi Benjamin Scolnic gave a sermon about this topic. These are his wise words:

“I don’t know how grief feels to you. All I know is how it feels to me. Over the years, as I’ve lost more and more people, I find grief has become very real, actually physical. I feel the grief in my stomach, in my chest. I may not feel it every minute, but there are times in the day when it gets unbearable. And, yet, we must bear the unbearable, go on and live, and be happy despite these depressing and horrible feelings.

“We all have our ways to cope, and I’d like to tell you about one of mine. I go to the table in my head.

“Picture yourself at a dinner table with all of your most beloved people. They could be cherished family members or very close friends. They could be alive or dead. They are the people, whether they still walk this earth or not, who are the most important in your life, and if you could have an hour or an evening and you could be with them, who would be sitting there?

“When things get truly impossible, I sit at that table in my mind, and it helps at least for a few minutes. This exercise can help clarify who really is important to you. Someone asked me, ‘How many people can I have at the table?’ and I was tempted to give them an arbitrary number like 10 or 12, but I stopped myself and told them that it’s their table. Still, if you have an unlimited number of seats, you won’t be honest. And rock-bottom honesty is required here.

“You see, the truth is that we are usually not honest, even with ourselves, about whom we really care about. There are people that we are supposed to care about and care for, and we do, but that doesn’t mean we love them or even like them in our heart of hearts. And it’s

our heart of hearts that I’m trying to get us in touch with here.

“The results can be surprising. I have someone at my table that I never met, someone who predeceased me and yet who is so dear to me that I need him at my table.

“A friend told me, ‘Of my grandparents, there is only one who gets a seat at my table. He was the one who talked to me, one on one, who didn’t treat me like a kid, but asked my opinions on issues like I was an adult.’

“Think about it: He is saying that the people who make it to his table are the people who paid attention to him. I want to know if the relationship is real, if you spend time with, and energy on, each of those people, if you pay attention to them.

“Of my children, it was my son Josh who would come into my room and talk about something, and sometimes he’d say, “You’re not listening.” And, I would tell him that I was listening, but of course he was right. He knew my mind was on other things. This is what a lot of our relationships are like. We talk to each other all the time. We help each other all the time. But, we can go on for years without knowing what’s inside the other person.

“I come back to the people at the table in your head, the ones who are alive. If you love them enough to have them at your table, then I want to know if you know their hopes and dreams and fears. Do you know who they really are? Do you know what their concerns are? Are you helping?

“There’s a story about an old man going through boxes in his attic and he looked at one of his diaries, and in his own handwriting were the words: ‘June 4th. Wasted the whole day fishing with Jimmy. Didn’t catch a thing.’ He then saw his son Jimmy’s diary, when Jimmy was only six, and something made him look up the same date. Large scrawling letters pressed deeply in the paper read: ‘June 4th. Went fishing with my dad. Best day of my life.’

“I don’t want you to be that old man, who could only think how wrong, how stupid he was for not paying attention to his son. I want you to pay attention now.”

So, WHO IS SITTING AT YOUR TABLE?

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