

Finding What Is Lost

Dear Chevre,

I came early one Friday evening for Kabbalat Shabbat having promised to be greeter for one of our special across faith services. This one was focused on Newtown, CT and gun violence. I have faith that we will be moving past the “we must do something” phase into actually doing something involving several faith communities here on Martha’s Vineyard.

But I digress.

So I arrived early and put my black fleece jacket on a chair in the sanctuary thereby reserving a seat allowing me to return to the lobby and my greeting “shift”. Let me digress once again. I enjoy greeting people to our beloved Hebrew Center remembering the first time Joy and I came to the Hebrew Center being warmly greeted by Arthur, of blessed memory, and Clarice Wortzel.

After my greeting duties were completed I walked to the chair I reserved and lo and behold someone was sitting in “my seat” and I didn’t see my jacket. I was thinking that it was under the one that was there and could retrieve it after the service. At the conclusion of the service I looked at the chair and my coat was gone! I thought maybe I was mistaken and I didn’t put the jacket on the chair. That sort of thing happens from time to time. I am sure you know what I am talking about.

So, I headed out for the oneg looking at everyone’s jacket. That must have seemed strange. I looked and relooked at all the obvious and not so obvious places. But, no jacket. Back into the sanctuary, still no jacket and convinced more than ever that someone inadvertently put my jacket on along with theirs.

I then made an announcement to all in their post service socializing that I was missing my jacket and wondered if anyone might have seen it. I was eyeing the people sitting in “my seat” while making the announcement but, no one mentioned having seen my jacket.

Thankfully it wasn’t that cold out but still.

The synagogue cleared out except for a few who were helping me look for the missing article of outerwear. We collectively decided to double check with the folks who were sitting in “my seat”, since stuff happens! We find the telephone number and, no answer. We found the couple’s address and Robert Herman offered to drive me there and then home. Oh, did I mention that my car keys were in my jacket pocket!!

Robert and I then leave for the couple’s home. But, wouldn’t you know we had the wrong address. Then, we figured it would show up, eventually!

Robert then drives me home and while on the way I manage to get the wife of the fellow sitting in “my seat”. She assured me, “no we don’t have your jacket, I am sure it will show up.” I thanked her and thanks to Robert, I arrived at home for Shabbat dinner with Joy.

I am at wits end. While I am sure my jacket and car keys will show up, I am worried. You see, my car keys also had electronic fobs that give me access to both the West Tisbury Fire Station and the Tisbury Emergency Services Facility! I am trying to calm down and when I am just about able to breathe normally, the phone rings.

“Hello, Alan, I have your jacket and I see a set a keys too!” Yes, it was the fellow who sat in “my seat.”! Clearly, I was relieved.

Once I got this information I called Robert to let him know that my jacket was located and I will be getting it shortly.

In thinking about this episode my thoughts initially dwelled on what I could learn from the loss and then the return of lost articles. Our tradition has a rich exposition on this subject including citations in the Talmud including this from Baba Metzia 21a:

“If an object is lost and the owner has given up hope of recovery, the object belongs to the finder.”

But in the end, I think the most valuable learning that I gleaned from this episode was the value of honoring others by offering help in times of need.

Here too our tradition makes a point of the essential value of honoring others as expressed in Pirke Avot 4:1:

“Ben Zoma was wont to say: ‘Who is deserving of honor? He who honors other people.’”

One of the things that drew Joy and I to the Hebrew Center was that first encounter with the community. When Arthur and Clarice greeted us so warmly. This seemingly small act was in fact a clear expression of showing honor to others thereby bringing honor to the Hebrew Center. We felt and continue to feel that this is who we are as a community where Robert’s shepherding me around was as natural as breathing.

Your comments are always welcome... president@mvhc.us

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