

Yizkor Derashas For Shavuot 6/14/05
 "Live Like You Were Dying"

I'm not much of a Country Music fan. I don't listen to it often. I don't have it set on my car radio presents. I don't even know if New York has a country music station. But, as the Mishnah says in פרקי אבות (*Pirke Avot*), the Ethics of the Fathers, "איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם," *who is the wise, the one who learns from everyone* (4:1). There is a country song that has become popular enough that I hear it often on the stations I listen to. And the words are so moving, that, if its auther wasn't a rabbi, perhaps he missed his true calling. The song is "Live Like You Were Dying," by Tim McGraw. And I'd like to read you the words:

He said I was in my early forties
 with a lot of life before me
 when a moment came that stopped me on a dime
 and I spent most of the next days
 looking at the x-rays
 Talking bout the options
 and talking bout sweet time
 I asked him when it sank in
 that this might really be the real end
 how's it hit you when you get that kinda news
 man what'd you do

and he said
 I went sky diving
 I went Rocky Mountain climbing
 I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named FuManchu
 and I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter
 and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
 and he said someday I hope you get the chance
 to live like you were dying.

He said I was finally the husband
 that most the time I wasn't
 and I became a friend a friend would like to have
 and all the sudden going fishin
 wasn't such an imposition
 and I went three times that year I lost my dad
 well I finally read the good book
 and I took a good long hard look
 at what I'd do if I could do it all again

and then
 I went sky diving
 I went Rocky Mountain climbing
 I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named FuManchu
 and I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter
 and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
 and he said someday I hope you get the chance
 to live like you were dying.

Like tomorrow was a gift and you got eternity to think about
 what'd you do with it
 what did you do with it
 what did I do with it
 what would I do with it'

Sky diving
 I went Rocky Mountain climbing
 I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named FuManchu
 and then I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter
 and I watched an eagle as it was flying
 and he said someday I hope you get the chance
 to live like you were dying.

This song tells a story that I think that we have all heard. The story of a person who finds out what they should have known all along - that their days on this earth are numbered. And now that the person has found out how finite those days are, the person starts to think about how best to use those days. His choices I think fit very well within Jewish values. Let's look at what he does.

First, the person starts to fully enjoy some of the beauty, and some of the wonderful things the world has to offer. He goes skydiving, and Rocky Mountain climbing. He goes 2.7 second on a bull named FuManChu (only a Country Music singer would think that that's a great way to spend time . . .). He watches an Eagle as it was flying. Now, some might think this time was wasted. But our tradition teaches that we should take time to enjoy God's world. In the Jerusalem Talmud, the great sage Rav teaches: " עתיד אדם ליתן דין וחשבון על כל מה שראת עינו ולא אכל *in the future a person will have to give accounting for everything that his eyes saw that he didn't enjoy*" (JT Kiddushin 4:2, page 66b). Taking time to enjoy God's creations is an important part of our religious experience.

The hero of the song also takes time to study Torah and to think about his place in the world "well I finally read the good book, and I took a good long hard look . . . "

He also does מצוות (*Mitzvot*), good deeds. "I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying. . . I was finally the husband that most the time I wasn't and I became a friend a friend would like to have."

Why is death such an inspiration for us? More people show up to shul for yizkor than anything else. We have lots of meaningful holidays. We dance and celebrate on *Simchat Torah*, and have lots of revelry on *Purim*, yet it's Yizkor that brings people to shul. Why? I think in large part it's because death gives us a sense of finality. It reminds us that we may not get another chance. That soon enough, like Rav, we're going to have to account for how we spent our lives. In the words of the song: Tomorrow is a goft, and "you got eternity to think about what'd you do with it what did you do with it, what did I do with it, what would I do with it"

The truth is, however, we should live every day as if we were dying. - Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus said, "Repent one day before your death." His students asked him, "How is it possible for a person to repent one day before his death, since a person does not know when he shall die?" He replied, "Exactly. All the more reason is there that a person should repent every day, lest he die the next day. Thus, all his days will be days of repentance." (Talmud Avot de Rabbi Natan 15)

We don't know when our day will come. So, those of us who are waiting for some day in the future to start living our lives better - we may never get that chance. If we put off repentance, we may never make ourselves the better people we hope to be. So the question is, What are you going to do NOW?!

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I went Rocky Mountain climbing
I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named FuManchu
and I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter
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to live like you were dying.

When will each of our times be up? We don't know. Indeed, today is a gift and you got eternity to sit with your loved ones, past and present, even with those who gave us our very lives, and we have an eternity to think about:

what'd you do with it
what did you do with it
what did I do with it
what would I do with it'

None of us knows how many tomorrows we have. But we do know we have today. That precious gift, that precious opportunity - to finally read the good book, to study Torah, and perform mitzvot, to take a good long hard look what we can do, not if we could do it again, but because we have our lives to live right now.

Some of you will walk out the synagogue doors today, and not be back until Yom Kippur. Some will be back tomorrow. I don't judge. I don't know who has found favor in God's eyes. I hope everyone finds their spiritual path, their place in this world, with God, with Torah and with Mitzvot. But I say this. Today, is a gift, and tomorrow you will have an eternity to wonder,
what'd you do with it
what did you do with it
what did I do with it
what would I do with it'