Delivering an Effective Sermon: Meeting the needs of an audience with attention and auditory processing challenges.

Jonathan Rothstein-Fisch

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Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

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Advisor: Rabbi Richard Levy

Abstract:

Rabbis are the teachers of their synagogue or community and just like teachers in the classroom who adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of their students, so should the rabbi. One of the very many roles a rabbi takes on is that of a preacher, and is it not the responsibility of the rabbi to preach about various topics in ways that individuals with different learning styles will understand? This thesis addresses this very need: how can rabbis deliver an effective sermon, while meeting the needs of an audience with intentional and auditory processing challenges.

Through understanding various preaching styles, researching effective communication, and watching over 100 hours of TED talks, I have created a thesis that focuses on the tools and the ways rabbis can alter their sermons to meet the demanding needs of a community of diverse learners.

Just as the old saying goes: “There is no such thing as a stupid question,” there is no such thing as a bad sermon topic; there is just bad delivery. Delivery of a sermon is really the essential aspect of the sermon. If a sermon topic is good but the delivery is poor, then people will be lost, and it becomes a forgettable moment. However, if the sermon is delivered following basic principles of preaching outlined in this thesis then the community will walk away having heard, understood and remembered the thesis’s main point.

Acknowledgments:

A thank you page does not do justice to all of those who have helped me reach the completion of this project. There is not enough amount of time or words to describe how grateful and blessed I have been to work with Rabbi Levy on this project. If it weren't for his guidance, advice, compassion and his keen eye for grammatical errors this thesis would look a lot different. He has been my support and for that I truly thank him!

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Introduction:

"A sermon should be like a tree…. It should have deep roots: As much unseen as above the surface, Roots spreading as widely as its branches spread, roots deep underground, in the soil of life's struggle in the subsoil of the eternal Word." (H. Grady David, 1958)

Have you ever heard a rabbi preach and remembered walking away thinking "WOW, that was amazing!" Or maybe you remember leaving a sermon feeling pumped, excited and moved about doing *Tikkun Olam*, or wanting to learn with the Rabbi after she gave a compelling speech about the importance of *Torah lishmah*. For sure, in your life, you have walked away from a sermon feeling agitated, that maybe the topic was not as clearly defined as you would have liked. There could have been too many messages, or not enough stories. It could have been that the preaching was not the problem, rather the issue was that (maybe) you are not an auditory learner, and therefore having to sit and listen to a sermon or lecture is not the best way for you to learn. Your mind could have been cluttered with lots of life's challenges.

Preaching is an art form, an art that takes lots of time and practice to develop the right skill to know what should be said, when, why, and how. Public speaking, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, is one of the most difficult and frightening tasks that people have to face on a day-to-day basis.[1] More than 70% of Americans feel a fear of public speaking, whether they suffer from speech anxiety, social phobia or have a fear of crowded or public spaces. But this fear of speaking, also known as glossophobia, should not be the reason why a preacher cannot deliver the right sermon for the right audience.

[1] "Fear of Public Speaking Statistics." Statistic Brain RSS. November 23, 2013. Accessed December 02, 2013. doi:http://www.statisticbrain.com/fear-of-public-speaking-statistics/.

Sermons, now more than ever, must be created and delivered in a manner that communities can receive. Two years ago, I was in a student pulpit in Victorville, California. Every month that I visited the small shul, I would prepare an eight-minute sermon and a five minute story. I would tell a story at the beginning of the service as a warm up and an introduction to the theme of the service. Each story was an opportunity to leave the lectern and break the space that traditionally separates the rabbi from the congregants.

I would begin my story in some creative fashion, either by asking for names of the characters in my story, to using voices to distinguish between the different characters. As I began to speak, I would get more excited and more energized, which would lead me to start walking up and down the aisle telling my story, and engaging with the youth, the elderly and individuals on the aisle seats. My interaction with them, and the words that I shared always left an impression on the congregants of the community. My message was delivered effectively because I would create vivid images in their heads by my choice of words, aided by creating a scene that was clear and understandable. The synagogue was always receptive to my sermons, but it was my stories and their messages that they remembered and looked forward to most often. Stories are an effective way to engage the community, especially if the community has learners of different abilities.

A synagogue should be a place that welcomes any person seeking out God, Judaism and study. Especially during services, the rabbi and all synagogue leaders should make every effort to create a space that is welcoming and understandable, and should provide services to ensure that people's needs are being met. Within the last 20 years many synagogues have made great efforts to provide all types of people, able bodied and disabled, with the means to get them into the synagogue, on the bimah, and in and out of the bathroom. Synagogues

have either installed lifts or ramps so that people in wheelchairs or the elderly are able to participate on the bimah in front of the Torah. These steps to accommodate those with physical handicaps are an important part of Judaism. Many of these changes came about because of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) through which the government mandated these changes.

Isaiah 56:5 tells us, "For my house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples" – all people, including the *Cheresh*, *Shoteh*, and *Katan*, (as mentioned in Talmud Chagigah 2), that is, the individuals who are either deaf/mute, mentally ill, or children,[2] should be considered when preaching; after all, they are part of the community. It is the rabbi's job to create a service that meets the needs of the individuals that make up the synagogue. Doesn't everyone deserve a strong Jewish education, and is it not the responsibility of the rabbi to teach? Despite this, "in the sages' system, persons with hearing, speaking and mental disabilities (i.e., persons without *da'at*) were deemed unable to receive, retain, and retrieve the *sacra* of the culture[3]" and therefore in the past have been neglected.

Many synagogues have gone through renovation campaigns and have addressed these issues and concerns and in doing so have altered bathrooms so that they are ADA compatible. Playgrounds are now made so that people who are severely handicapped know the feeling of what it's like to be pushed on a swing or to have fun on a slide. These achievements are steps in the right direction in ensuring that every person who wants to be involved in a synagogue can do so.

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[2] Abrams, Judith Z. Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1998. 125.
[3] Abrams, Judith Z. Judaism and Disability, 127.

One area that also has improved is education. There are organizations that help out those who need assistance in understanding Judaism such as TIKVAH, a program run throughout the Jewish Federation, also known as AJMI (Advocacy for Jewish Mental Illness) as well as private tutoring so that all children and adults have the opportunity to learn in an environment that is specific to their needs. Organizations and individual synagogues are making changes to their curriculum or the physical structure of their shul, and they are creating ways of learning and teaching that are more acceptable for students with learning challenges. One of the areas of synagogue life that still needs to change are the structure and delivery of sermons.

What is the problem?

Sermons are a powerful tool to teach and guide a community. They need to be changed in order to be understandable to a variety of learners. Not all congregants are the same; some learn best with visual aids, other learn best with the help of note taking, and others learn best when a vivid story is created. Even individuals who are undiagnosed with specific learning challenges still have needs, and the rabbi needs to change or rethink how a sermon is delivered.

What I plan to do in this thesis. This thesis will explore how rabbis can begin to rethink how to create and write effective sermons for an audience of learners of different levels. My focus is primarily a look at two types of learning challenges, and although the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders -5 has hundreds of categories and subsections about different disorders, I am focusing on Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

and Attention Deficit / Hyperactive Disorder (formally known as Attention Deficit Disorder, ADD) or ADHD[4].

In the paragraphs to follow I will explain how to create a sermon or speech that will effectively forge a memory with individuals who suffer from APD and or ADHD. There is a chapter that focuses specifically on how memory works and what rabbis could do to create a desired message to resonate with the community.

Throughout this thesis I will explore ways in which rabbis can create and deliver sermons that are easily understandable to a community of divers learners. Through understanding how the brain functions and how memory works within the minds of individuals with learning challenges, as preachers we can create sermons that are comprehensible. By researching the brain, how the mind works and what makes an effective sermon, rabbis can create sermons which effectively communicate their message to individuals who learn differently from the norm.

[4] The definition of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has been updated in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to more accurately characterize the experience of affected adults. This revision is based on nearly two decades of research showing that ADHD, although a disorder that begins in childhood, can continue through adulthood for some people. Previous editions of DSM did not provide appropriate guidance to clinicians in diagnosing adults with the condition. By adapting criteria for adults, DSM-5 aims to ensure that children with ADHD can continue to get care throughout their lives if needed.

Chapter One / What is a Sermon – Traditional Preaching;

What is a Sermon? Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a British Particular Baptist preacher who was known as the "Prince of Preachers" and is viewed even today as one of the greatest preachers in the Baptist church during the 19th century. He wrote, "College lectures are colloquial, familiar, full of anecdote, and often humorous; they are purposely made so, to suit the occasion. At the end of the week I meet the students, and find them weary with sterner studies, and I judge it best to be as lively and interesting in my [sermons] as I well can be. They have had their fill of classics, mathematics and divinity, and are only in a condition to receive something which will attract and secure their attention, and fire their hearts. To succeed in this the lecturer must not be dull himself, nor demand any great effort from his audience."[5]

What is a sermon? What is a speech? Is there a difference? What are the goals of the sermon, and do these goals change with different messages? What should the content of a sermon be and how does one gauge what a sermon needs to make it relatable, understandable, and accepting to a community of different learners?

When asked what a sermon is, people have explained it with either a boring tone in their voice or with lackluster emotion. Those whom I have asked describe it as the moment in services when praying stops and the Rabbi begins his or her speech, usually lasting between 8-15 minutes. I asked different aged individuals ranging from 12 years old to 88 years of age, and all but two responded that a sermon either taught a moral obligation or a message to the congregants of the community. For this thesis, I am defining a sermon as "a

[5] Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, 5.

religious discourse delivered in public usually by clergy as a part of a worship service" and, or "a speech on conduct or duty."[6]

Sermons are messages that preachers teach to the community. They allow the preacher to explain, share, create and educate a congregation on topics of importance. "Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial and abundant."[7] Rabbis should never preach from the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; rabbis cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. There must be substantial messages, words of wisdom, and moving addresses. The range of subjects is endless, the teachings from the Torah and other ancient texts are endless, and therefore there is no excuse for a rabbi's discourse to be devoid of substance. There must always be a message, a clear and concise message.

A Brief History of Sermons: According to a Merriam-Webster dictionary a sermon is a speech that deals with conduct and/or duty. The history of sermons plays a significant role in Judaism. Sermons were common on Mondays, Thursdays, Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Festival days. The three main days for sermons (Monday, Thursday and Shabbat) comes from Exodus 15:22-27, where the Israelites wondering in the desert were in need of water. Water is often equated to Torah (Isaiah 55:1) and the sages explained that "the Torah should be read on the Sabbath, Monday and Thursday, so that three days would never elapse without Torah (*Mechilta.*)[8] During the days that Torah was read a rabbi would also preach about the Parsha and other subjects in the language that most people would understand. The rabbis met the community in the market place to ensure that people would hear and engage in words of

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[6] Merriam-Webster Dictionary. "Sermon." Accessed October 1, 2013. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sermon.

[7] Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, 73.

[8] Scherman, Rabbi Nosson. The Chumash: The Torah, Haftaros And The Five Megillos With Commentary Anthologized From The Rabbinic Writings. New York: Mesorah Publications, 1998.

Torah. Mishnah Megillah 1:1 explains the importance of Torah reading and preaching. "Villages and large towns read (Torah) on the fourteenth but the villages advance to the day of gathering."[9] Monday and Thursday were the days that rabbis would gather around the village markets and the Courts to read Torah and teach (enacted by Ezra).[10]

Preserved sermons from history. There are very few sermons preserved from Jewish preachers, as Rabbi Marc Saperstein explains in his book "Jewish Preaching 1200-1800, An Anthology." Although the texts of sermons have been preserved, little can be said about tone, delivery style or what was actually said versus what was written. However, a great deal of information can be obtained. Sermons were in the language of the community, stories were told, and humor was used. Much of the information about sermons and preaching in the 16th century comes from Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, a traveling man. He visited Jewish communities in Italy, France, and Holland, frequently recording information about the sermons he had heard. "Even where he does not discuss their content in detail, his travel diary contains precious information about structure, rhetorical technique, language, length, and circumstances for sermons not otherwise known."[11]

Few Sermons are preserved from a long time ago. Marc Saperstein explains that the earliest documented sermon given was from the 13th century. "The need to preserve the written texts of sermons, even those of the same rabbi who wrote responsa, was far less compelling. Few of the sermons delivered are available to us today, especially from the early

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9 Kehati, Pinhas, *The Mishnah, Seder Moed Vol.5: Megillah* (Jerusalem, World Zionest Organization, 1991) 5-7.

10 Kehati, 6.

11 Saperstein, Marc, *Jewish Preaching: 1200-1800, an Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 10.

centuries."[12] Even with the help of Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, one will never know the preaching style of the past, but this need not affect our appreciation of the importance of historic Jewish preaching for our own time.

Jewish preaching is not new: Preaching has been a part of the Jewish people for centuries, and it has been an important step in creating community, expressing ideas, educating congregants and explaining Torah and other Jewish texts. Some of the greatest speeches ever given come from Torah: Moses preaches to the People of Israel about their conduct after the Golden Calf[13], instructing the Levites to act upon God's decree. His words are powerful, to the point and certainly create change, although bloody and harsh.

Preaching is an important symbol of continuity in the synagogue and in Judaism, and has been for hundreds of years. Preaching is one of the defining roles of the rabbi. It is the job that he or she takes on. The basic aspect of preaching today is no different from what preaching looked liked centuries ago. Text was introduced, stories were told, current events were explained and controversy developed. The goal of preaching and sermonizing was the same: teach a lesson and create a memory.

The rabbis who created sermons wanted to instill a memory, a distinctive and well thought out memory. This memory is the "so what" of the sermon. It is the message, the theme, the "go out and do X, Y and Z." These memories that most of us take away from hearing incredible sermons, or even speeches, move us, and bring us to action. This is the goal of sermons.

The challenge of today is not how to write a sermon; it is how to create a memory for different types of individual learners. The best way to do this is to meet the congregants

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12 Saperstein, Marc, *Jewish Preaching: 1200-1800, an Anthology*, 5-6.

13 Exodus 31

where they are. Even around the 6th century, Rabbis were physically meeting Jews where they gathered. They would leave their homes and schools to preach to Jews, wherever the they were, whether locally in shops and town centers or in far away lands. This idea of meeting the congregant wherever he or she is has been lost in the sermons of today. Rabbis no long have to venture far to preach their message; because congregants now come to the rabbi. The difference is that rabbis of today must preach in a way that delivers a clear message to the various individuals of the community with learning challenges.

Poor sermons are a waste of time! Pastor Spurgeon relates preaching to food, arguing that it was the job of the preacher to feed the congregants. He writes, "the abounding of empty declamation, and the absence of food for the soul, will turn a pulpit into a box of bombast, and inspire contempt instead of reverence."[14] Pastor Spurgeon is explaining how important it is that a message be filled with juicy bits of text and strong arguments which can feed the soul of the congregant, who will leave the house of worship feeling nourished. For many, poor sermons devoid of substantial Jewish thought, wisdom and textual insights are nothing but a missed opportunity to teach, engage, and challenge the community. Sermons need to pique the interest of the community in order for people to find meaning in the message.

[14] Spurgeon, Lectures to my Students, 72.

Chapter Two: Brain as a whole / How People Learn:

More and more people are actively engaging in research and buying products based on that research that support their brain's activity. In a recent search on Google for apps that improve memory over 380 million results came up within 0.28 seconds. There is even a market for people to improve their memory by playing games on their computer, phone and tablets. People are concerned with their memory and are actively stimulating it to help ensure a healthy brain for many years to come. In a recent study on the Huffington Post, Ariana Huffington wrote that research has shown that even volunteering has helped maintain a healthy brain and delay the effects of memory loss.[15] Within the past decade the world has seen an abundance of findings on cognition suggesting how we as a society can improve our mental performance. These changes help the advances in neuroscience, which create new notions of performance and cognition and reshape the discussion of social justice in learning.[16]

Just as teachers need to think creatively when trying to engage their students, so too should a rabbi think creatively about how to engage the brain. Rabbis must engage the brains of their hearers with information that the rabbi deems important. A sermon should stimulate and intrigue a community, not bore them. Therefore it is the job of the rabbi to connect his or her words to each congregant's ability to process information.

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[15] Huffington, Ariana. "How to Immediately Improve Your Life." Huffington Post. September 10, 2013. Accessed September 10, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/how-to-immediately-improv_b_3895912.html.

[16] KnowledgeWorks Foundation and Institute for the Future. *2020 Forecast: Creating the Future of Learning*, 2008, 7.

There are eight key ingredients to learning.[17] These are the neurodevelopmental frameworks of different varieties of minds. In the book *Schools of All Kinds of Minds* authors Barringer, Pholman, and Robinson explore how teachers can work on lesson plans, curricula and other material to better meet the needs of different types of learners. "The framework used by All Kinds of Learners is an organizing structure through which all learners, including those who struggle, can be understood."[18] If teachers are the leaders of the classroom and their students, so too then are rabbis the teachers of the synagogue, making congregants the students. Therefore, a rabbi, like a teacher, must also create an environment that meets the needs of the different kinds of students.

Each of the eight key ingredients of learning (attention, higher-order cognition, language, memory, neuromotor function, social cognition, spatial ordering and temporal-sequential ordering) will be explained along with how it relates to preaching from the pulpit.

The first ingredient and one that is most important is attention. Every person has an attention span. Some have the ability to pay attention longer, while others have a shorter span. Attention spans change as people age, and each person differs greatly regarding when attention is at its peak. "Attention is not a single entity, but rather three different systems that maintain alertness, orient to sensory events and process incoming information, and regulate output and behavior.[19]" Each person has an attention profile, regardless of whether he or she meets the diagnostic criteria for ADHD.[20] For example, even someone with good

[17] Mary-Dean Barringer, Craig Pholman, Michele Robinson, *Schools for All Kinds of Minds.* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 33-65
[18] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 35
[19] Michael I. Posner, Mary K. Rothbart, *Educating the Human Brain.* (Virginia, Amer Psychological Assn., 2007).
[20] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 37

attention could have trouble staying focused for a 25-minute sermon without any breaks, humor, questions, or visual aids.

Flows of attention. "The mental energy controls regulate the initiation and maintenance of cognitive energy flow for learning, work, and behavioral control. They are the brain's fuel tank and are represented as a fuel gauge on the attention dashboard. Everyone experiences low mental energy at times and knows how difficult staying alert and vigilant can be at the end of a long day, late at night, and very early in the morning, and so on."[21] Barringer, Pholmean and Robinson have found in their studies that physical activity can stimulate mental activity. In other words, for those individuals who find concentration hard for an extended period of time, movement will help create attention as well as help build on their memory.

In a recent sermon delivered on Rosh Hashanah, a rabbinical student incorporated body movement into his sermon to help create a unique memory and image. This rabbinical student had congregants raise their left hands if they had ever given *tzedakah* to either an organization or individual. While keeping their left hand raised high, he then asked them to raise their right hand if they had felt good about their act of charity. With almost 100% participation, the rabbinical student had the people take a moment to look all around the *kahal* to see how impressive it is that they were surrounded by people who give *tzedakah*. Not only did the rabbinical student incorporate movement, but also a "break" in the sermon for congregants to change their focus from the bimah to the community. This action creates memory and it is reinforced by the visual aid of everybody participating.

[21] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 38-39

Attention is often limited, because of over stimulization of information. All learners grapple with a huge amount of information every day and there is a need to focus on the detail that surrounds everybody daily. Those with weak processing controls often have difficulty picking up details, which can affect other constructs, including language and memory, understanding and remembering something that is difficult, new, foreign and abstract.[22]

There are many solutions for those who have difficulty paying attention. There are many solutions to the problem of creating a memory for those with attention challenges, especially late on a Friday night, after a long day at school, work or being home caring for children. One possible solution is to write a sermon that incorporates a little body movement, like the Rosh Hashanah sermon mentioned above. After services many congregants came up expressing how much they appreciated the movement in a service that is usually long, and the only movement seen in synagogue is standing and sitting when prompted. A few even said that they enjoyed seeing everyone paying attention by raising their hands.

There are many attention solutions that enhance the sermon. One way to maintain concentration, attention, and focus is by engaging with the community through asking questions, allowing wait time, and even asking for input. In Bloom's Taxonomy[23], a guide to thinking about learning and education, the idea of questions helps students / congregants grapple with the material that was just covered. For example, a question to see whether congregants understood the message would focus on their ability to restate, discuss,

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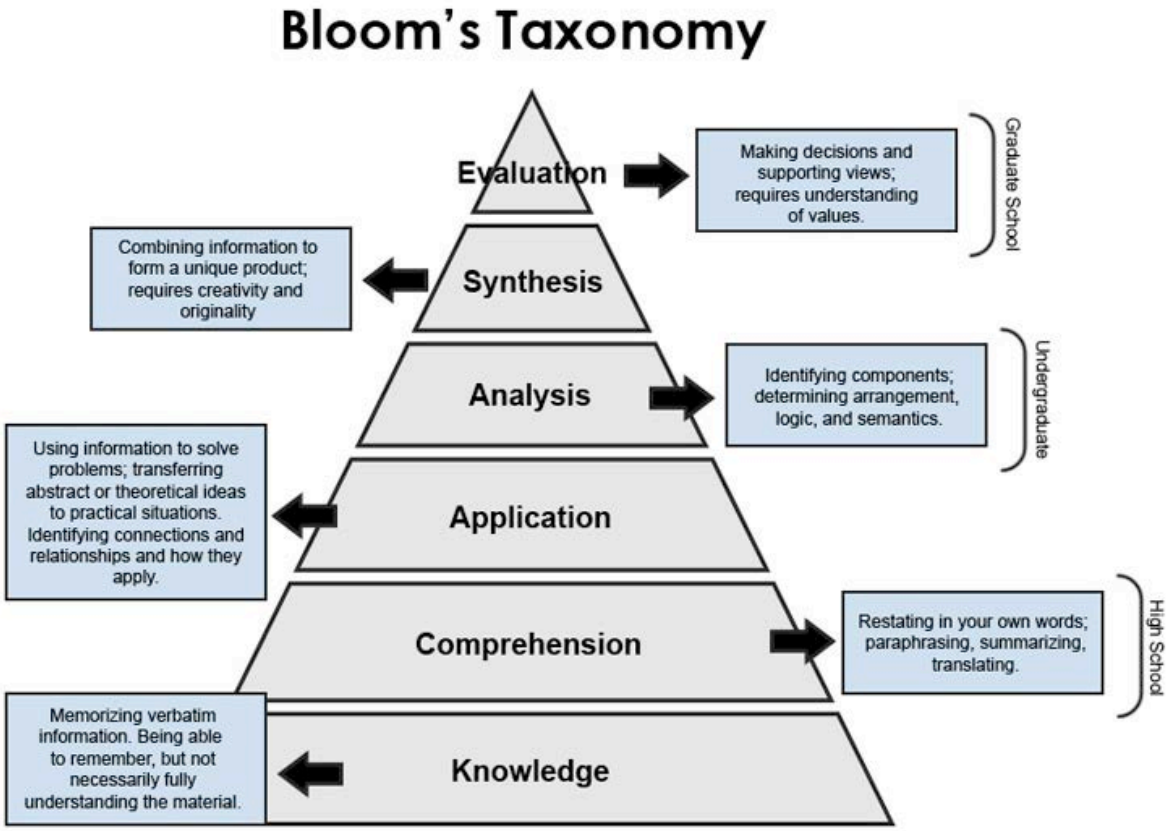
[22] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 39-40
[23] Bloom, Benjamin (ed). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.* Vol. 1: Cognitive Domain. (New York: McKay, 1956.)

describe and explain what had been said earlier. Although not the highest category on Bloom's chart, it is nonetheless a good way to measure what has been understood. Equally important is that the sermon is no longer about a rabbi preaching but now it is about a rabbi who is calling on congregants to offer their thoughts and words. (See Bloom's chart below for a detailed description of how each level of engagement can offer the congregation a deeper level of understanding.)



(http://metamediausa.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/BloomsTaxonomySized.jpg)

Hearing the rabbi speak is great, as he or she is trained in preaching, but allowing others to speak about the same topic or theme is yet another attention solution. Altering who is speaking in the middle of a sermon helps keep the concentration and focus of the congregants. It allows people's ears to rest from hearing only one voice and perk up when they don't know who is going to speak next. By diversifying the speakers, the community becomes alert again and will continue to be engaged.

On Friday, November 29th 2013, Chanukah and Shabbat were united in a night of candle lighting. Congregation Or Ami led services to a full house of young families, adults, children, teens and the elderly. The sermon was replaced by a story about Chanukah. The head rabbi, assistant rabbi and rabbinic intern decided to tell a story together, each reading a different part. The outcome was a story that was not only interesting to hear but always had the community on their feet to see who was going to read next. Thus they kept the interest of the congregation and provided an interesting variation to the traditional story of Chanukah. Keeping a community guessing what is going to happen next is just another way to keeping people's attention longer and more acutely fixed on the information that a rabbi wants to address.

The second aspect of learning is higher-order cognition as another way the brain processes information. Higher-order cognition, which refers to complex and sophisticated thinking, is one of the most important constructs for lifelong success.[24] Its components include: applied reasoning, evaluative or critical thinking, complex decision making, brainstorming and creative thinking, and conceptualization. "In essence, higher-order

[24] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, Schools for All Kinds of Minds, 41.

cognition is about deeply understanding things, not merely memorizing or regurgitating them."[25]

Higher-order cognition helps individuals string together different layers of information, and then allows them to process this information later. Individuals who suffer from higher order cognition issues will struggle with making connections from different sources, for example, connecting two or three different commentators' ideas, or connecting messages from different stories. They will also have challenges with problem solving, with inference or reading between the lines, and they will have trouble understanding new things without considerable support. Creating clear and concise messages allows congregants to focus on the message rather than struggle to figure out what the message is.

Many people, not just those who are diagnosed with ADHD or APD, deserve to have messages made clear and organized. For example, if a rabbi were going to preach on the importance of *gemilut chasidim* (acts of loving kindness) then it is important to offer examples of what *gemilut chasidim* is and why it is important in order for people to understand.

Another example while delivering a sermon that would help those with both attention deficit disorders and higher-order cognition issues, would be allowing the congregants to problem solve. Having a community listen to a sermon and then asking them to engage with one another would allow *chevruta* (partner) time, and would give people a break from the rabbi's voice so that they could voice their own solutions. Problem solving is difficult but not impossible for individuals who have issues with higher-order cognition. Let them solve

[25] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, Schools for All Kinds of Minds, 42.

the problem suggested by the rabbi. Ask for examples, and group learning will occur. Create a memory and ideally some laughter. This example may not always fit into every sermon and should never be used all the time, but it is a good way not only to create conversation, but to form friendships, and helps build community while also allowing people to process what the rabbi has already said.

The third aspect of learning, one that relates mostly to the rabbis' preaching, is language. "Being able to understand and utilize language is central to success in school,"[26] in the synagogue, in a job, and in life. Language is among the most multifaceted of the constructs because it includes so many abilities related to communication, such as being aware of word sounds, pronouncing words, comprehending written symbols, understanding syntax, building sentences, telling stories, extending thinking through discussion or writing, and so on.[27] There are two aspects to language according to Mel Levine from www.allkindsofminds.org. First there is receptive language, the ability to process, understand, and comprehend sentences and their structure. The second is expressive language, the output side, which includes writing and delivering sermons, composing emails and even sending text messages. It is the production aspect of language, whether written or oral.

Language is the key to understanding one another. It is also what many congregants have said they dislike most about sermons. If a congregant cannot follow the sermon, or understand the message, or even understand the language being used, e.g., Hebrew, then the rabbi has not effectively conveyed his or her message. Rabbi Jeffrey Marx

[26] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 43.
[27] Cohen, Nancy J. *Language Impairment and Psychopathology in Infants, Children, and Adolescents.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.)

once said that adding Hebrew in the middle of a sermon makes the rabbi feel rabbinic and the congregation feel lost. In other words, if a community has little Hebrew background, and will not understand the Hebrew, then adding the Hebrew is pointless, unless the sermon itself can teach the Hebrew being used. Say it in English once, and then in Hebrew, so the community will be able to follow along. This will save time, and the congregants' mental energy, because many of the congregants may try translating the word used or be stuck on a word and miss the message of the sermon.

Repeating a message is necessary, not repetitive. In delivering a message, regardless of whether it is a rabbi speaking, the President of the United States, or a CEO of a large company, repetition helps the audience remember what the speech was all about. When a rabbi begins to preach, the first few paragraphs should invite the listener into the sermon, conveying a topic, a message and a theme. If the message is the need to give more *tzedakah*, then throughout the sermon, the message should be stated, demonstrated, and explained using different words and expressions. Not every person will relate to the giving of money; others may relate to giving of time, or of resources. It is still considered *tzedakah*, but just explained and demonstrated differently than the tradition of giving money. The idea of language is to "rinse and repeat." Say something once, and then continue saying it so that all will remember what the topic of the sermon was. The only time that repetition becomes repetitive is when the same words or phrases are over used. However, when done correctly, congregants walk away with a clear message, that may even be hard for them to erase from their minds.

The fourth type of neurodevelopmental framework that helps congregants is addressing memory. "Long-term memory is comprised of two processes – storage of

information and retrieval of information – that can vary in effectiveness for the learner.[28]" Active working memory is the brain's workspace that processes[29] both auditory and visual information.[30] Barringer, Pholman and Robinson created an analogy that helps explain what memory is. They compare active working memory to a computer's RAM, (where software runs), and long-term memory to a hard drive (to which information can be uploaded and downloaded). Memory is the key component that holds information in and keeps it around for retrieval.

Memory. Sermons need to have a message that is easily remembered, can be easily explained, and doesn't take a lot of processing to understand. If a message can have all three of these aspects then a sermon's main idea will be transferable from the congregants who heard it to those who ask, "What was the rabbi's sermon about?"

If a rabbi is going to give a list of ways to do certain mitzvot or any type of list, then those who have trouble retaining information either in their short-term or long-term memory would benefit from a handout, or a visual aid that lists those steps. Visual aids help not only those with Auditory Processing Disorder but all visual learners. Many people will forget information given at the beginning of the sermon by the time the preaching reaches the end, therefore summarizing the message and all key points at the end will help many congregants. According to a study by University of Missouri Extension, "we are inefficient listeners." The study has shown that after immediately listening to a ten-minute oral presentation, the average listener heard, understood and retained 50 percent of what was just said. Within just

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[28] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 45.
[29] Ashbaker, Margaret Howell. *Individual Differences in Working Memory and Reading Comprehension in Adolescents with and without Learning Disabilities*. 1996, 206-213.
[30] Denckla, Martha B. "Result Filters." National Center for Biotechnology Information. April 17, 1996. Accessed October 13, 2013. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8727849.

48 hours the percentage of what is remembered drops by 50 percent, leaving the listener with only 25 percent efficiency. "In other words, we often comprehend and retain only one fourth of what we hear."[31] Luckily there are already many synagogues who address this very issue by publishing the sermons in either an electronic copy or as an audio file, so that many people can re-hear, or use it to review what the message was. By allowing those who forgot or could not process the information the first time to re-listen and re-learn the information, we/the rabbi provides them another opportunity to get the message.

The fifth form of the neurodevelopmental framework is the neuromotor function. Neuromotor functions are an important aspect to learning. Many of the challenges that face people who are diagnosed with neuromotor difficulties include fine motor skills, which do not play a large role in grasping and understanding sermons.[32] Important, but not necessarily relevant to preaching to a community of diverse learners.

On the other hand, the sixth form – social cognition- also does not directly apply to sermons, but has a lot to do with processing what the Rabbi is preaching. Social cognition is extremely important for the preacher to understand. It is "the capacity to navigate interactions with others (including verbal and nonverbal tactics), to perceive and monitor social information for a wide array of careers and life activities."[33] Social cognition is important for the rabbi to understand while preaching because he or she can gauge from

[31] Lee, Dick, and Delmar Hatesohl. "Listening: Our Most Used Communication Skill." University of Missouri Extension. October 1993. Accessed December 22, 2013. http://extension.missouri.edu/p/CM150.
[32] Neuromotor function is an important topic, but it does not address the concerns of this thesis. Many signs of those who are diagnosed with challenges in this area relate to sloppy handwriting, trouble with athletic skills and difficulty learning new skills requiring manual dexterity. All are important but not related to this topic.
[33] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 49.

the faces, posture, and even the responses from jokes, questions or statements whether or not the community is paying attention, alert, and processing what the rabbi is preaching.

Exercising the ability to recognize how others perceive a message is a skill that takes time and lots of practice. Contemplate a social cognition that you had with a recent congregant, rabbi, lay leader, friend, or student. What were the verbal or nonverbal signals that you detected? How did you use that information to make decisions during your interaction? How effective were the choices you made and how did you know? For example, when a teacher is presenting new material in a religious school class, and there are a few students who are looking around the room, unfocused, unengaged, or sitting with their heads on the table, what does this say? The teacher needs to home in on the information that the students are expressing. The teacher has a few options: offer a break, create some off the cuff fun to increase their energy and increase their levels of engagement or continue to proceed as planned and drive the students to boredom or exhaustion.

Social cognition is important while preaching. While preaching, a rabbi must always be engaged with the text while simultaneously engaged with the community. If people are drifting into sleep then the rabbi must create a spark of excitement, and regain their attention. Social cognition can be taught, and be used to ensure that congregants are staying engaged and are following along with the sermon.

There is an abundant amount of research on social cognition. Researchers have identified several aspects of verbal pragmatics including: selecting appropriate conversation topics[34], transition to new conversation topics[35], handling miscommunication[36], taking turns

[34] Prutting, Carol A., and David M. Kirchner. "A Clinical Appraisal of the Pragmatic Aspects of Language." Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders, no. 52 (May 5, 1987): 105-19. doi: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3573742.

when conversing[37], and inferring intentions and feelings from gestures and facial expressions[38]. The importance of social cognition is high in almost all jobs, but especially in the pulpit. If a rabbi were to talk about loss of life and the meaning of death, and did not notice a congregant sad, weeping, or crying in the back, and did not go up to her, then the rabbi missed a huge counseling moment.

For example, during the *Mi Shebeirach,* the blessing for healing, there was once a congregant who became very teary eyed. The rabbi was standing on the bimah leading the blessing along with the cantor and noticed this woman who was becoming more and more emotional. The rabbi stepped down from the *Bimah*, and quietly, without bringing attention to himself, he sat down beside her and comforted her while she was saddened. Only a rabbi with a level of social cognition would be able to notice a person in distress during services to give attention and time. This act, although small, comforted a woman in a time of need, and the congregation recognized him for his ability to counsel and touch the lives of many congregants. Relationships are important on and off the pulpit, and having the ability to recognize how a person is doing will greatly affect the sermon, and the sermon experience for the community.

In a synagogue recently a rabbinical intern had prepared a sermon for the community that centered on the importance of attending adult Torah study once a week. As services began, the intern realized that the majority of congregants in attendance were under the age of 13. The rabbinical student made a decision that it would be more beneficial for the

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[35] Prutting, Kirchner, 1987.
[36] Cohen, 2001.
[37] Prutting, Kirchner, 1987.
[38] Blake, Randolph, and Maggie Shiffrar. "Perception of Human Motion." Annual Review of Psychology, 73rd ser., 58, no. 47 (December 12, 2006). Accessed October 13, 2013. Http://www.annualreviews.org/.

community to hear a story than to hear a message that pertained to less than half the community. Recognizing who is in attendance at the synagogue, and making sure to speak at their level while also addressing all the other community members can be challenging, but everyone's needs should be addressed.

The seventh form of neurodevelopmental framework is spatial ordering, which although important, is not specific to preaching. Spatial ordering is important especially when thinking about maps, driving directions, laboratory experiments and drawing or copying images. Spatial ordering does not play a significant role when preaching.

The eighth and final part of the framework is temporal sequential ordering. Temporal-sequential ordering also doesn't play that large of a role in sermons. However, anytime a sermon includes a list, or puts in order information that the rabbi would like for his or her congregants to understand, then the preacher should consider providing: visual aids, handouts or charts and graphs. Many times people who struggle with order, or the steps of a procedure, will have significant struggles hearing the A, B, C's, of a sermon. Special consideration should be taken for individuals who deal with this on a regular basis.

For example, handouts, although distracting if passed out during services, can lead those who suffer from Auditory Processing Disorder to follow along when a lot of information is given in order of events, or based on dates. The key to handouts is to make them reflect what is being said, and should be clear to follow with large print so everyone can read them.

What's the point? These eight learning types make up the majority of learners in a community. Some may struggle with social cognition, others with attention. Some may have challenges in multiple categories, but because they are congregants of a synagogue,

they too deserve to understand the message of a sermon. Therefore rabbis need to be aware of the ways that different minds think so that they can educate all of their congregants.

There are many different types of models for understanding thinking and the way the brain functions. The *All Kinds of Minds Framework* is just one way of looking at it. Thinking and organizing a sermon, lecture, adult education class, or "Tot Shabbat" with this model will greatly affect how a sermon is heard and understood. Metacognition is the point! "Metacognition is simply thinking about thinking."[39] Rabbis need to begin to consider how others think. How do people process information? Is their ability to process information different on Friday night (*Erev Shabbat*) compared to Saturday morning (*Shacharit*)? It includes one's knowledge about learning as well as insight into one's own learning strengths and weaknesses. Congregants will gratefully benefit from a rabbi who understands thinking, processing, memory, language, social cognition, ordering and attention. If a rabbi can understand these ideas, then change and learning will become easier for many congregants.

[39] Barringer, Pholman, Robinson, 49.

CHAPTER THREE Considering Hearers: How should sermons change depending on who is listening?

There is a need, when discussing the content of sermons and how to sermonize, to also take into consideration the importance of rabbinic insight regarding the matter of learning challenges. Therefore, this chapter will focus primarily on rabbinic sources that explain what makes a person a *shotef*, a person with special needs.

Getting to know the congregation. Within any synagogue there are diverse groups of people, from those who are educated to those who are deeply invested in Israel, young and old, observant, and those who only come four times a year – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and two other times for *yartzeits*. A community should be inclusive, and the more open a community is the more diverse it is going to be. When a community is eclectic and heterogeneous, the more likely that there will be Jews born into Judaism, converts, Jews by choice and non-Jewish spouses. But even more important is that within the synagogue, regardless of the educational level, income or worldly insight, learning challenges affects everybody. It is the job of the rabbi and community leaders to understand who is in their community and to begin to address their challenges.

Every person in the synagogue makes up part of the fabric of the congregation and therefore is one of the target listeners. It is unrealistic for the community to expect that their rabbi try to address the needs of every single person in the synagogue. It is unfair for the rabbi to speak only to the lowest common denominator. Rabbis, like Christian preachers, are encouraged to speak to all people even though one will not succeed all the time.

Even though the Holy Temple no long stands, sacrifices for the betterment of the community are still the responsibility of the rabbi. "When we fail to speak to the entire

cross section of the church (synagogue), we resemble the doctor who knows only how to set a broken arm; if a patient complains of a bellyache, the doctor breaks his arm so he can set it.[40]" Reaching the broader audience means that we have to focus our attention on the people sitting in the pews. We should be in touch with who the congregants are, and what their needs are. Speaking to a broader audience, as Robinson explains, means that the preacher has to talk about that which interests the community. If for example the preacher is an avid cyclist, and knows a lot about the cycling community, but very few of the community members know much about the sport, then maybe it is not a topic that the preacher should speak on at great lengths, even if it relates somehow to the parsha of the week. "Sacrificing what comes most naturally to us is what gives us a platform to speak. Just as Jews wouldn't regard Paul as credible if Paul ignored the law, so many women, for example, won't regard a preacher as credible if he shows zero sensitivity to their issues. Why go to all this trouble? Because it is right and because it is wise."[41]

Sensitivity is critical when approaching the lectern to preach a sermon. Just as God was sensitive to the needs and fears of Moses, rabbis too must be sensitive to congregants' needs. "But Moses spoke up and said, 'what if they do not believe me and do not listen to me…'"[42] "but Moses said to Adonai, 'Please, O God, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' And God said to him, 'who gives you speech? Who makes a person dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, God? Now go, and I will be with you as

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[40] Robinson, Haddon W., and Craig Brian. Larson. *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005,) 115.

[41] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators,* 116.

[42] Exodus 4:1

you speak and will instruct you what to say.'"[43] The greatest Jewish hero of all time, the one man who was closer to God than any other person had his own challenges. Although stuttering (which many identify as Moses' affliction) is not a psychological problem (though it can have psychological consequences) or a sign of reduced intelligence, motor weakness, or neurological injury[44], it did cause Moses pain and fear.

Not only with Moses do we see a struggle about being "different." There are other biblical characters who suffer from challenges. Miriam was inflicted with *tzaraat* for her comments towards her brother Moses and his Kushite wife, and Isaac becomes blind. While neither of these characters had a mental disorder, they inspire significant discussions in the Talmud about what constitutes a person who is a *shotef*, defined as a person with mental disabilities[45].

In *Brachot 15a*: "If one recites the Shema without hearing what he says, he has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Jose says he has not fulfilled it."[46] Within the Talmud there are disagreements over whether a person with special needs is as obligated as others for performing mitzvot. In *Brachot 15a* the rabbis were unable to come to a conclusion whether a person is obligated just because he is unable to hear his own words. As a result texts still debate the question of whether a person who is not of sound mind is obligated to do mitzvot.

Another source of guidance for dealing with individuals with special needs may be found in *Chagigah 2b-3b*. This text addresses the question of who is a *shotef* and whether

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[43] Exodus 4:10-12
[44] Molt, Larry, Phd. "Causes of Stuttering." National Stuttering Association. Accessed January 16, 2014. doi:http://www.westutter.org/who-we-help/causes-of-stuttering/.
[45] Although the Hebrew word *shotef* is defined as a "deranged person" this term is offensive. The term that I will be using is a person with special needs.
[46] Simon, Maurice, M.A, trans. Berakoth. Edited by I. Epstein, Dr. London: Soncino Press, 1984.

the laws and commandments obligate the person with special needs or a person with mental issues. It also talks about what makes a person a *shotef.* *Chagigah* 3b-4a helps rabbis understand that people with mental challenges have been a concern for communities for hundreds of years. The issue now is not whether they are exempt from mitzvot, rather how can rabbis include them in service, help them fulfill mitzvot, and teach them.

The *Chagigah* passage begins with the statement that there are certain groups of people who are exempt from performing the mitzvah of *re'iyah,* appearing in the Temple courtyard on Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot with their offerings. Those who are exempt are a "deaf-mute, a mental illness person a minor, a person of undetermined sex, a hermaphrodite, women and slaves, the lame, the blind, the infirm, the aged, and the one who is unable to ascend by foot."[47] Rashi explains that there are three categories that are not only exempt from this mitzvah but all of the mitzvot of Torah, "deaf-mute, mentally ill person and a minor." Each one of these categories can be its own thesis; therefore, this chapter will try to understand who and why the rabbis concerned themselves with the *shotef.* The rabbis discuss at length what actions deem a person with special needs, and what do the rabbis think of such a person?

Talmud mentions a person with mental challenges (*shotef*) in Chagigah 2a-4a. In Chagigah 3b the *gemara* describes what a person must do to be considered a *shotef*ˇ.

In Chagigah 3b, a statement is made about what qualifies a person to be unfit for the mitzvah of *re'iyah*. The question really is what makes a person unfit to perform mitzvot, i.e., who is exempt from the commandments. "The Mishnah taught that a [person with special needs] is exempt from the mitzvah of *re'iyah,* as he is from all mitzvot of the Torah." It is now the responsibility of the Rabbis of the Talmud to determine what the degree of what mental condition a person must be in order to be exempt from certain mitzvot.

As explained, taught, or answered by the Rabbis (תנו רבנן) a person with mental issues

47 Translation: Artscroll Chagigah 2a

is an individual who performs three different activities. Each of these activities is explained, and interpreted differently. They are: A person who goes out at night alone (היוֹצא יחידי בלילה), one who lodges in a cemetery (והלן בכית הקברוֹת), and one who tears his garment (והמקרע את כסותוֹ). Each one of these helps identify who is exempt from not only mitzvot but also "punishments, and who has no legal capacity to buy or sell."[48] Essentially it creates a person who will forever be bound by the generosity and care of the community.

What strikes me most about these three symptoms is their obscurity. For example, in my opinion a person who goes out at night should not be considered a person with special needs. Did business not require people to travel at night, even sometimes alone? Were friends never walking to and from one house or another at night? What about Shabbos meals, or Chagim when people needed to walk to and from shul? The first symptom of a person with special needs could very well be disputed, as it seems likely that most people in their life would, at some point, walk alone, at night. However, the second issue of a person sleeping in a cemetery seems odd and random.

Cemeteries have one purpose and this to lay to rest those who have departed. They are mentioned throughout the Talmud in different ways. For example, in Sanhedrin 96b Jewish graves were to occupy a higher plain than royal palaces, thus giving them more importance than the dwelling place of a king or queen. Again there are special graves for people who have been executed by the court as explained in Sanhedrin 6:5. Cemeteries have great importance in Talmud and Torah, as noted in Genesis chapter 23, when Abraham buys a grave for his wife Sarah. Already in Torah and in Talmud there is great importance put on the necessity for proper burial, location and rules.

While cemeteries have a special role for the dead, it is the living who have to abide by the rules regarding how one should act in a cemetery, and sleeping in one is not allowed.

48 Rashi on Chagigah 3b.

Proverbs 17:5 says "whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker..."[49] Performing mitzvot on cemetery grounds is not only forbidden because of the shame it causes the dead but also because the land is unholy. Therefore, laws have been instituted about putting up a fence to keep people out and to secure the safety of the tombs and markers of Jewish graves. So why is the land of the cemetery unfit to sleep in? I think because the dead are buried there, and the flesh and blood of the dead is unclean, and therefore unfit for a place to dwell or rest. Regardless of what Talmud says about cemeteries, I know that sleeping by a grave is pretty creepy! Maybe that is the answer. Sleeping by or on a grave might have looked to others as though a person was trying to do witch craft, or summon the dead, which are forbidden in Judaism. Perhaps that is why it is forbidden to sleep in a cemetery. Possibly it is also the reason why the rabbis suggest that a person who does this is considered a *shotef*.

The third way in which a person could be classified as *shotef* is if he or she rends a garment. For example a person who for no reason decides to tear the shirt on his or her back could be considered an individual who is mentally challenged. But even the rabbis don't like this as a gauge to tell whether someone is mentally capable of performing mitzvot or not because the rabbis suggest in the next *baraita* that all three of these would have to be done in order for a person to be considered unfit.

In this passage there is a dispute between Rav Hunah and R' Yochanan. Rav Hunah says (עד שיהו כולן בבת אחת), one is only considered *shotef* if all three actions have been done at the same time. However, according to the Artscroll Talmud translation, Turei Even says that it would be impossible for a person to do all three of these actions at once, and therefore Rav Huna means that all three have to be committed by one person. R' Yochanan, on the other hand, said (אפילו באחת מהן) that even if one person committed only one of them he or she would be considered a *shotef*.

The *Gemara* clarifies the argument by asking whether is it possible that a person could do any one of the three examples and not be considered a *shotef*? Alternatively, could

49 JPS translation

a person be deemed a *shotef* by doing other things not mentioned in the *Gemara*? The *Gemara* states that a person who performs the actions in a mentally ill capacity would only then be considered "insane." This responds to my first question of whether a person would be considered "unfit to perform mitzvot," by just walking at night from one house to another. Furthermore, (דלא עביד להו דרך שטות אפילו כולהו נמי לא) if he did not perform these actions in an insane way, then even all of them would not make him deranged. Essentially the question regards the motive behind the actions.

For example in Genesis 37:34, Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. Was he a *shotef*? Again, in the story of Job, Job rose and tore his robe in 1:20. In these examples tearing clothes does not make a person mentally unstable, rather it identifies a person who is in mourning. Also in Megilat Esther, Mordecai "tears" his clothes after hearing the fate of the Jews. Tearing clothes or ripping garments is a tradition that still exists today. A *shotef* must therefore not be mourning, but rather tearing out of insanity. Tearing clothes by itself is not an act of mental instability, but it could be perceived as such, which is why I think Rav Huna is correct in saying that all three of the actions must be performed at one time. Maybe Rav Huna wants to give people the benefit of the doubt which is why he insists that all three actions be done at once, thus limiting the potential of calling the majority of the people in a community unfit for mitzvot.

Rashi agrees with me, or rather I agree with Rashi! Each of these actions performed even two or three times, would not qualify a person to be a *shotef*, since each bizarre action could have a rational explanation. The only action that truly seems bizarre would be sleeping in the cemetery at night. I cannot think of one reason why that would be a good idea, or a reason why people would want to do that in the first place. The *Gemara* agrees.

Rashi explains the reason why a person would want to sleep in a cemetery: "he did it for the purpose of conjuring up evil spirits for magical purposes, or to receive

communications from them."[50] There are several examples of rendering clothes in TaNaKh, as there are a lot of examples of walking at night, but nothing that I know of demonstrates that cemetery sleeping was condoned or observed by Jewish people.

Within the *baraita* the rabbis suggest two examples for the two other actions, going out at night alone and ripping clothing. Neither of the examples makes sense because the examples appear to be removed from reality. Regarding going out at night by oneself, one could say that "lycanthropy[51] seized him."[52], (ס אחדיהוהיוצא יחידי בלילה אימור גנדריפ). According to Rashi, "lycanthropy is a type of melancholy, which comes from worry. Alternatively, he was seized with fever and went out for some fresh air."[53]

With the lack of help to clarify how this makes a person a *shotef*, I am left to my imagination about the possible location in which an individual would tear his clothes. If a person was so deep in thought that he felt a necessity to rip his clothes off in a market place or shul, than that would be grounds to consider him deranged. Even then it seems a bit of a stretch. If a person just started to tear off his clothes regardless, and without reason or rhyme, than again he would be considered deranged. I also wonder how naked a person would have to be after ripping clothes their off. Did a person become fully nude or only partially nude, and does it matter if the person was male or female?

The rabbis begin to give an analogy of what the person would be like if he were to do all three of the actions: walking alone at night, tearing off clothes, and sleeping in a cemetery. The person who does all three is compared to an ox who gored another ox, a donkey and a camel and becomes a *muad* for all other animals. This is explained in Exodus 21:35-36 "And if one man's ox hurts another, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide its money; and the dead ox also he shall divide. Or if it is known that the ox used to

50 Rashi Translation: Hebrew-English edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Hagigah, London Soncino Press, 1984.

51 גנדריפס - A translation was hard to find for this word, and therefore I used the translation from both Artscroll and Soncino to try to understand what this word means.

52 Translation taken from Artscroll Tractate Hagigah 3b.

53 Rashi, Translation from Artscroll, Tractate Hagigah, 3b.

gore in times past, and its owner has not kept it in; he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead shall be his own."[54] In other words, a person who does all three of these actions is as if he has been warned once before but continued to act on his own will, or impulse. The *Gemara* reads: (כיון דעבדינהו לכולהו הוה להו כמי שנגח שור חמור וגמל ונעשה מועד לכל) "Once all three occurred at the same time it is as if an ox gored an ox, a donkey and camel, and thus becomes a *muad* for all animals." The key to this is the term מועד because it implies an action that occurred once before, with penalty, and now a second time.

After reading this text, I have two questions on which I would like to seek further information. First, I wonder what rabbis prior to the Enlightenment would say about people who have learning disabilities, e.q., Auditory Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Autism or individuals with Down Syndrome. I ask because orthodox families who have children with special needs have spoken with me at great lengths regarding Hashem's love for their child. There is no doubt that Hashem loves people who are mentally challenged, but I wonder what their role is in Jewish society if they are not fully "accepted" by the community. If they are neither allowed to own or sell products, how do they make a living, how will they get married, and how will they make a life for themselves that is not dependent on society? Not that it is impossible or unheard of in today's society but 600 years ago when these diagnoses, although called other things, existed, how would a community treat and take care of a person of this nature which means that they cannot be agents for others who are obligated, such as being counted in a minyan?

Second, the *gemara* never suggested what the outcome would be if a person was found to be mentally unstable, other than he or she would not be required to fulfill the *mitzvot* of the Torah. Is there a punishment or a ban on such a person if he or she committed all three of the acts? I sure hope not! Thinking about it more closely, the Talmud does a great service to the Jewish people, in explaining what defines mentally unstable people, and not putting barriers before them. In other words, if the Talmud were to say that an unstable

54 Translation: JPS Tanach, Exodus 21:35-36

person should be shunned from the community, then the Jews and the rabbis of the Talmud would be considered hateful, rude, and unjust. Rather it is good that the rabbis stick to defining what makes a person mentally unstable. . Also I find it interesting that although they are exempt from the mitzvah of *re'iyah*, they are nonetheless still allowed to do mitzvot; they just aren't obligated like the majority of the other men in the community.

This helps the rabbis of today understand that just because people may have processing challenges, it does not mean that they should not be part of the community. Actually on the contrary, they are part of the community but are not counted on as much as if they were of able body and mind. Therefore people (rabbis) should treat every person with challenges the same way, showing compassion, concern, patience and care. Even more so a rabbi must engage these individuals differently, because they are part of the fabric that makes up the community.

Just as rabbis of the Talmud were sensitive to people's needs and situations, rabbis today need to carry on with those same concerns. A rabbi's sensitivity to people's learning difficulties shows the rabbi as a compassionate, caring and supportive person. There was a story about a rabbi who decided to speak about the importance of tzedakah. In the rabbi's speech, she made a reference to a family who was currently in financial hardship. Although for many members of the community the sermon came off without a hitch, to some who knew the family, it was painful to sit through. One congregant, a young boy, confided to his friends that the rabbi really hurt his family's feelings and immediately they lost their trust in the rabbi. Their trust was gone and their membership was over.

Rabbis should be sensitive to issues. When a rabbi knows that a family is struggling financially, should a rabbi use that information and preach about it from the pulpit? Without consent, the answer is No! The same applies to special needs. Rabbis who show sensitivity to delicate issues of the community and individuals are viewed as

compassionate rabbis. Recently a rabbi was welcomed back on Friday night services after a three month leave of absences because she had a child. Upon her return she was asked to give a sermon for the upcoming Shabbat. Her sermon was well received and the topic was, *What I learned about Judaism from being a parent for only three months!* She spoke about a topic that could, for some, be touchy and even emotional. What about the congregant who could not conceive or a parent who lost a child at a young age? These were all considered in her sermon and she made sure to address those concerns. She was sensitive, supportive and caring throughout her sermon.

Rabbis need to be sensitive not only to the issues but to the individuals as well.

CHAPTER FOUR More than Words Can Say - engaging the *kahal* with more than just words!

There is a lot of information available online, in books and articles about the power of preaching, effective story telling, and how to deliver speeches. The point of this section is not to compete with any of these over populated categories, rather to offer ways to alter sermons to meet the needs of the diverse community in synagogues.

Before humans developed speech, body language was used to convey a message. The ability to communicate with spoken language separates humans from all other animals in the world. Animals use body language to convey their emotions and feelings. A dog will let you know that he is happy to see you by barking with excitement, wagging his tail, and if not properly trained will jump on you. However, if an intruder were to come to your home, the same dog would bark and snarl, showing teeth. All animals are able to convey messages just by their body movement. A bull will lower its head, a snake will coil to show that it will attack if you don't move, a puffer fish will fill up with air expanding its body to show that it's afraid.[55] Body language is an effective way to communicate, even more so when coupled with proper rhetoric.

As a speaker, we too must use the right body movements to convey a message. "Researchers have estimated that a person is capable of twenty thousand distinct gestures, each of which has its own meaning. This vocabulary, if we can be justified in calling it that, dwarfs the working vocabulary of the typical English speaking person."[56] In other words, Rabbis who effectively convey their message by using hand, face and body gestures will be able to communicate their ideas to those who have challenges in processing information

[55] Dowis, *The Lost Art of the Great Speech*, 210.
[56] Ibid, 210-211.

merely by listening. For individuals with Auditory Processing Disorder, this is a game changer.

Important statistics about nonverbal communication. "According to *American Speaker*, a program for speakers and speech writers, research by leading communications experts has shown that the visual impact of a speech accounts for an astounding 55 percent of the audience's impressions. This compares with 38 percent for the vocal impressions – the speaker's tone of voice, range, enunciation and so forth – and only seven percent for verbal impressions."[57] There is great significance placed on verbal, vocal and visual impressions to help create an effective, memorable speech. Words are important when explaining a message, but the body can articulate emotion, passion, that the speaker is not able to do through words alone. Body language at times may help the congregants understand the message more than just by the words.

Defining body language. "Body language," which is defined as gestures, mannerisms, and movements helps convey certain messages. For example, speaking with few hand movements could convey that the speaker is not engaged with his or her own speech; it could mean a lack of passion. A speaker who is pounding his fists on the lectern may convey a sense of aggression or may convey a sense of infectious passion and charge in the speech. There is not one body sign or movement that is universal in all aspects of speaking, but using the right movement at the right time will keep the eyes of the listener engaged, and attentive. This is especially true when talking to people with low attention spans. By engaging an individual with hand and body movements the speaker not only says

[57] Ibid, 211.

something important in speech but is animated as well, thus keeping the focus and attention of his or her audience.

Gestures such as body and hand movements have a vocabulary all their own. The difference between a speaker who is good or great largely depends on the fluency of their vocabulary. "The Spanish painter Goya charged as much to paint the hands as to paint the face, because the hands are the most difficult of all parts of the body to paint."[58] Hand positioning tells a story. Hands placed on the lectern convey a message, as do speakers' hands that do not naturally flow in sync with the words being spoken. For a community of learners with special needs, this is an important point. Visual engagement, not just auditory processing, will help convey the message, tell the story and keep their attention.

Gesture naturally. "What should I do with my hands?" is the most common question speakers ask, according to Akash Karia, author of *How to Deliver a Great TED Talk*. He suggests using hands in the most natural way possible. Akash offers some specifics as to how one should use one's hands in order to convey an effective message: Don't cross your arms; don't put your hands in your pockets; avoid using hands to cover private parts; don't point at your audience; and use hands to show what you are saying.[59]

Eye contact is as important as the words spoken. Eye contact is important as a way to connect with the community. However, it is even more important for the speaker to get a sense of how the community is reacting to his or her words, ideas, and stories. This is especially true when preaching in front of a community of diverse learners. If only a handful

[58] Smith, Fred. *Mastering Five Overlooked Fundamentals of Clear Communication, How To Be Heard*, p. 145

[59] Karia, Akash. How to Deliver a Great TED Talk: Presentation Secrets of the World's Best Speakers. San Bernandino, CA: CreateSpace, 2012, p. 178-179

are nodding to a statement that should be clearly understood and agreed upon, then the speaker is not doing his or her job of connecting with the community.

The speaker's goal is to connect with the *kahal,* and make the message clear; eye contact is the thermometer that indicates this. Eye contact is like sonar for a submarine. When a submarine is locating other subs, ships, or aircraft carriers they send out a signal that will ping or bounce off of other vessels and return to the sub. This ping lets them know if others are out there. Eye contact is the speaker's sonar that indicates whether or not people are engaged, agreeing, disagreeing or are bored, and unengaged.

Saying it once may not be enough; you may have to say it again. When a speaker is looking out into a crowd, two things should be on her mind: am I being heard, and are they following along with me. Social cognition as mentioned before is the ability to read how others are doing with or without speaking directly to them; in other words, a person can look at social cues from the bimah and ascertain whether a person is understanding the topic, whether people are bored, and even whether people are agreeing with the subject matter. By looking up and noticing the body language of others, a speaker is able to understand whether a message is being understood. According to Dr. Thomas E. Brown, Associate Director of the Yale Clinic for Attention and Related Disorders, many individuals with ADHD syndrome have a chronic problem with slow processing speed. Although an outsider may never know what is going on inside the brain of another, by keeping a close eye on those with ADHD, he or she may be able to tell if they are not following what is being said. In other words, by keeping an eye out, the speaker will be able to gauge whether or not information is being processed. And then, one can make a decision as to whether it is best to go over the material again.

The Talmud has something to teach us on just about every topic, and the inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities is no exception. We learn in the Babylonian Talmud that once there was a student who probably had ADHD and that there was an extraordinary teacher who invested the time to patiently and caringly teach this student. "Rabbi Peridah had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could master it. One day someone interrupted the lesson and asked Rabbi Peridah to do something as soon as the lesson was over. Rabbi Peridah continued to teach the student in the usual way, but the student could not grasp the lesson. Rabbi Peridah asked, "What's the matter?" The student answered, "from the moment that we were interrupted, I couldn't concentrate." Rabbi Peridah said, "Give me your attention, and I will teach you again." And so he taught the student another four hundred times. A heavenly voice issued forth and gave him a great reward."[60]

Repetition is the key to not only teaching but also preaching. By the time a sermon is over, congregants with mild to moderate learning challenges have forgotten what was said. Within four days most people, including those without serious mental handicaps, have lost a staggering 80% of what the rabbi has discussed. The question then is how can a rabbi make his or her sermon memorable, so that when congregants leave they have a clear understanding and are able to retain the message?

Repetition is the key to building memory! One of the best ways to ensure that a message gets remembered and repeated is to boil the core message down into a single, catchy phrase that can be repeated several times throughout the sermon. This is called a power phrase. A power phrase should be less than ten words, for example, Martin Luther King's,

[60] Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54b

"I have a dream" speech has withstood the test of time, because of his key phrase, "I have a dream." There are four ways to help make a power phrase a catch phrase: contrast, chiasmus, rhyme and alliteration. These four rhetorical devices can help make a sermon "stick" or last longer than just four days. Here are two examples of each one of these rhetorical devices:

1. Contrast:
    a. "No one **rises** to **low** expectations." - John Leslie Brown
    b. "It is our **light**, not our **darkness** that most frightens us" - Marianne Williamson
2. Chiasmus:
    a. "Ask not what **your country** can do for **you** – ask what **you** can do for **your country**." - John F. Kennedy
    b. "People the world over have always been more impressed by the **power** of our **example** than by the **example** of our **power**." - Bill Clinton
3. Rhyme:
    a. "What the mind of a man can conceive and believe, it can achieve." - Napoleon Hill
    b. "Trust is a must." - Ryan Avery, 2012 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking
    c. "If the glove don't fit, you must acquit." - Johnny Cochran
4. Alliteration
    a. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the **c**olor of their skin, but by the **c**ontent of their **c**haracter." - Martin Luther King.
    b. "If you can dream it, you can do it." - Walt Disney

Repeating things, repeatedly. Aside from making a catch phrase stick, another aspect of communicating effectively is the repetition of such message. Say it once, is great, say it twice is better, repeating it often in a creative ways, is best. Congregants who have learning challenges, or have just had a rough day so that their mind is focused on other areas of life, need to hear things many times for a message to stick.

Repetition is the key to creating and instilling a memory, just as it is for throwing a ball, or teaching someone how to swim. Practice, or rather repetition, of a certain skill or body movement, helps create a lasting memory. Repetition makes it stick. Repetition is the

weapon of the speaker. If a message is repeated over and over again, people will understand what the speaker is trying to convey. The trick is then not to sound like a broken record but rather to create a message that can be expressed creatively through different mediums and continue saying it. For example, if a rabbi wanted to convey the importance of keeping Shabbat, a catch phrase could be, "Keeping Shabbat, keeps you _____" (fill in the blank). The message here is that keeping Shabbat keeps you: sane, healthy, motivated, in awe of God, with family, energized and the list goes on. When people walk away from this catch phrase of a sermon, they will know why keeping Shabbat is important, Jewish, and fulfilling. It is easy to do and is the key to connecting with people who have learning challenges.

While catch phrases and repetition are great, stories do something different; they create images in people's heads. Stories are a great way to captivate an audience, of mixed ages, generations, and learning abilities. Children love stories, parents love stories, and the older community enjoy listening to moving and relevant stories. What separates a good story from a stunning story? There are three important factors that help a story go from good to great: use specific, concrete language, bring characters to life by providing specific details, and focus on turning stories into mental movies for the community.

Great stories are always remembered and often repeated. Aesop wrote some of the best stories that have ever been told. "Aesop's fables are some of the stickiest stories ever written."[61] Aesop wrote many stories that have been told over and over again for more than 2,500 years, such as, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," and "The Tortoise and the Hare." These stories all have one thing in common; they are concrete, and therefore provide images

[61] Karia, Akash, How to Deliever a Great TED Talk, 100.

that make the ideas come alive in the minds of those who hear them. The fact that they are short and to the point, with a clear message, also doesn't hurt.

"In speeches and presentations, provide specific, sensory details about characters to make them come alive in audiences' minds. Follow the principle of showing rather than telling."[62]

The secret to turning a story into a mental movie for the congregation is to make sure that the scene is rich in sensory inputs. There are four senses that should be covered: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Olfactory/smell (VAKS).

Visual – what could be seen in the story? Could you see a boy crying wolf in the story of the "The Boy Who Cried Wolf?" If you were to tell the story could a person see the boy sitting on the grassy ground watching the sheep eat and rest on the same ground?

Auditory – What could be heard in the scene when the boy is crying wolf for the first, second and third time, when there isn't, in fact a wolf, compared to the final and last time when the wolf appears? Could the congregation hear the difference in the voice, the tremor in the call for help? Could the community hear the boy thinking, or maybe hear the boy's inner dialogue?

Kinesthetic – What could be felt? Could you communicate the story effectively enough to feel the sheer playfulness of the boy crying wolf the first three times, and the terror in the townspeople running to save him. Would the congregation feel the townspeople's disappointment and frustration when they realized the boy duped them three times? How much more effective would the story be if the congregation could feel for one moment the

[62] Ibid, 104.

playful humor in the boy's voice, actions and demeanor, and then a split second later, the fear in his voice when a wolf really did appear?

Olfactory/Smell – Could the fear and trepidation of the boy who finally did cry for help be smelled, could the open and fresh air of the field around the sheep smell like pastures? In what way could this story create an internal smell?

In the story of the boy who cried wolf, and many other great stories, brevity is important. According to the website CNN.com in their Fortune category, Money, A Service for Fortune & Money explained that people nowadays have an attention span of 5 minutes.[63] In 1990 the attention span was 12 minutes.[64] These numbers are staggering and show how limited people's attention spans are, regardless of mental health challenges, or learning disabilities. Therefore in order for a rabbi to effectively communicate a sermon, it must be brief, engaging and even at times entertaining.

Stories were the very first form of effective communication. Since the time of cavemen , stories have been told around camp fires, or on walls, to depict history, emotion or conversation. Stories have always been a primal form of communication.

Stories are about collaboration and connection. They transcend generations, they engage us through emotions, and they connect us to others. Through stories we share passions, sadness, hardships and joys. We share meaning and purpose. Stories are the common ground that allows people to communicate, overcoming our defenses and our differences. Stories allow us to understand ourselves better and to find our commonality with others.

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[63] http://management.fortune.cnn.com/2013/07/10/public-speaking-attention-span/
[64] Harald Weinreich, Hartmut Obedorf, Eelco Herder, and Matthais Mayer: "Not Quite the Average: An Empirical Study of Web Use," in the ACM Transactions on the Web, Vol. 2, No. 1 (February 2008), Article #5.

Stories are how we think. They are how we make meaning of life. Call them schemas, scripts, cognitive maps, mental models, metaphors, or narratives. Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities, and define and teach social values.

Stories provide order. Humans seek certainty, and narrative structure is familiar, predictable, and comforting. Within the context of the story arc we can withstand intense emotions because we know that resolution follows the conflict. We can experience with a safety net.

Stories are how we are wired. Stores take place in the imagination. To the human brain, imagined experiences are processed the same as real experiences. Stories create genuine emotions, presence (the sense of being somewhere), and behavioral responses.

Stories are the pathway to engaging our right brain and triggering our imagination. By engaging our imagination, we become participants in the narrative. We can step out of our own shoes, see differently, and increase our empathy for others. Through imagination, we tap into creativity that is the foundation of innovation, self-discovery and change.

"Whenever you create questions in your audience's minds you've got them hooked into your speech because you've aroused their curiosity."[65] But it is not just good questions that make for great change, or creating a community to act, rather it is about building their emotion up so that the community will want to act, will want to give, will want to listen to more. "Your story isn't powerful enough if all it does is lead the horse to water; it has to

[65] Karia, Akash, How to Create a Spellbinding Story.

inspire the horse to drink, too."[66] Stories enable the listener to feel something that mere words strung together can't always do. Listeners can feel for characters, they can empathize or relate to people who are being discussed. Story telling, especially in today's society, must look different. Rabbis need to embrace a community with a short attention span, who is used to seeing stories played out on the television. Their imagination needs to be engaged, and even more so for people with learning challenges.

In a world that is overfilled with stories, posts, tweets, likes, and texts, everywhere we look there is a person trying to either sell, or share a story to others. We are over storied! "Content for the sake of content is pointless. Tone-deaf posts, especially in the form of come-ons and promos just take up space, and are justifiably ignored by most of the public. Only outstanding content can cut through the noise."[67] There are six rules that can help create a story that is filled with content that is relatable and desirable, after all rabbis should focus on preaching outstanding content. The six rules are: It's native, it doesn't interrupt, it doesn't make demands – often, it leverages pop culture, it's micro, and it's consistent and self-aware.

It's Native – knowing what works in a synagogue helps the storyteller best tell the story. For example, would the synagogue allow for a projection of slides to further demonstrate the message or would that be too invasive? Knowing the "environment" or the platform in which a rabbi preaches will allow for creativity and for ultimate connection with the *kahal*.

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[66] Vaynerchuk, Gary. Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook: How to Tell Your Story in a Noisy Social World. New York: Harper Business, 2013, 11.
[67] Ibid, 16.

"Content is king, but context is God."[68] Content is only as good as the platform that it is on. For example, visual aids that are packed with lots of words that are hard to see, does not serve the purpose of connecting with the community. While people are trying to read what is being projected, they in turn will not be focusing on the content, thus missing the message, or getting lost.

It Doesn't Interrupt – Gary Vaynerchuk explains in "Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook," that people don't want to be interrupted to be told something. For example, people don't watch TV commercials any more, and therefore, advertisers must now advertise in the show, by product placement. People don't want to be interrupted to be told something; rather, a rabbi should try to incorporate a message throughout the service not just during the "time" of the sermon. If people are caught off guard they are more likely to listen and really hear the message. By giving the sermon in the beginning of services, it catches people when they are most fresh.

It Doesn't Make Demands-Often – Lets face it, a rabbi's job is to help lead, guide and even SELL Judaism to Jews. There is a need to create a Judaism that is not only vibrant and exciting but also inviting and fun. Leo Burnett, a famous advertiser said, "Make it simple. Make it memorable. Make it inviting to look at. Make it fun to read."[69] The final point that is missing from Mr. Burnett's advice is "Make it for your audience, not for yourself." Mr. Vaynerchuk explains that the majority of people want a person who is going to be generous, informative, funny and inspiring, characteristics that people want in their friends. If a rabbi can deliver sermons keeping in mind these important aspects, then a community of diverse learners with different needs will be able to relate to the rabbi. And not every sermon should

[68] Ibid, 17.
[69] Ibid, 21.

be asking people to change, give, donate or rebuild their world. Sermons that are always focused on creating change will shortly fall on deaf ears.

It Leverages Pop Culture – "Generations are defined by their pop culture, and without it, they're lost."[70] Every generation at this point in time is connected, even tethered, to the internet via phone, tablet or computer. This is not a threat to rabbis. It is a source of content. Rabbis can use this to their advantage. Show the congregation that you, as the rabbi love the same music, books, TV shows, or films. Talk about the latest tweet from a person that most people know of. This not only builds relationship but it also creates a connection between the rabbi and congregants. Creating content that reveals your understanding of the issues and news that matter to them, creates a better story, build reputation, and for most people, who are consumed by the world of news around them, will be nice to hear from a rabbi. It may even make congregants think that their rabbi is hip, cool or informative in more ways than just Torah.

It's Micro – Messages don't have to be long, or even take up lots of time. Often the best message is just a short one-line sentence. In this case nothing needs to be sold to congregants, no charge has to be made, just a clear message. For example, one message that needs little explanation is "Stand tall, stand proud, stand with Israel," or "Judaism is about the struggle with God." Although these are simple messages, they carry great weight, and leave room for the rabbi to discuss it further at length. Messages are short and simple, and although most rabbis will give longer than a one line sermon, it does not have to be lengthy or cluttered with extras. Get to the point, repeat it, and end.

[70] Ibid, 24

It's Consistent and Self-Aware – People like people who are constant with who they are, as Gary Vaynerchuk explains. "No matter how you tell your story, your personality and brand identity must remain constant, too."[71] This is the key to creating a story, to creating a relationship with people who struggle with ADHD. The content shared on Shabbat is important but even more so is how the rabbi lives his or her life. If rabbis teach about being fair to others and then acts unfairly to people with whom they work, then the teaching on Shabbat was worthless. People with ADHD learn visually by seeing examples; there is no greater way to share the content of a sermon than by acting it out in every day life.

Note: Stories are most successful when the congregation can learn from the story not taught a lesson from the speaker. "People like to learn but they don't like to be taught."[72]

Stories are a great way to create a message and memory and to get people thinking. There are so many different ways to tell a story, and no two people will tell it the same way. While one person may be more animated and enjoy telling stories others may prefer to share their message in a more formal way. Both ways are important especially when there are congregants in the community with special needs. Regardless of the preaching style, one constant remains: people with slower IQ's or minds which tend to wander, posing the problem or question ahead of time helps prepare the community for what the rabbi will be talking about.

There are five points that will help guide the rabbi during the beginning stages of the sermon. First, remember that the beginning and the end are the most important parts of your sermon because congregants will remember the first and the last thing they hear. Second, keep the key phrase to less than seven words to make sure that it's short enough to be

[71] Ibid, 28
[72] Akash Karia, Storytelling for Electrifying Presentations, 105.

remembered. According to research, most people can only remember seven units of information. Third, write out the question in less than 20 words. If it takes you more than 20 words to summarize the main question of your sermon, than your question is not clear enough. Fourth, in your speeches and presentations, present the problem immediately, if it is a problem that congregants can relate to, you will immediately have their full attention. Fifth and finally, make a point, then tell a story. Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed it best: "Put the argument into a concrete shape, into an image, some hard phrase, round and solid as a ball, which they can see and handle and carry home with them, and the cause is half won."[73]

[73] Akash Karia, Storytelling for Electrifying Presentations, 83.

Conclusion: Follow these directions to a T - Rinse and Repeat!

H. Grady David said that a sermon was like a tree, in that it should have deep roots. Psalm 1:3 says something very similar, "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season; its leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." A rabbi should be like a tree, providing for those in need of Torah sustenance, in need of knowledge, wisdom and truth.

Not all trees need the same soil, let alone the same terrain. Some need a desert atmosphere to survive, while others need to have cool and moist climates. These differences matter when thinking about which plant is best suitable for the conditions of the environment. There is a reason why Napa and Sonoma Counties are known for their grapes: they have both the correct conditions and the soil to meet the needs of the grapes and vines. Rabbis are like the rancher, or farmer, having to know what the community needs. How much water, how much sun, which seeds to plant in the soil? The rabbi needs to be one with the people, as a farmer becomes one with the land. This is the point of reshaping sermons to better meet the needs of a diverse community of congregants.

A sermon is more than just words. Words are one way of creating the connection between content and listener, but there is more out there for rabbis to explore than just making statements, speaking eloquently or even telling stories. Although all of these are tools that a rabbi uses to express a message, there is more than what meets the ears. "If the brain is such a powerful visual processor, we designers [the rabbi] of learning want to make learning as visual as possible. One way to accomplish this is to incorporate visual aids."[74] People with mild to severe learning challenges will be able to connect better to a sermon that

[74] Norris, Joye A. From Telling to Teaching: A Dialogue Approach to Adult Learning. North Myrtle Beach, SC: Learning By Dialogue, 2003, p. 98.

had something that visually stimulated them. For example, have you ever listened to a script reading? A script reading is when actors get together and read the script without acting it out. It is similar to a book on tape. One main reason that the majority does not partake in this is because after 8 minutes of just listening to a person speak, the listener gets tired from having to imagine on his or her own what is happening. People with ADHD or Auditory Processing disorder would have an even greater difficulty doing this.

Visual stimulations are a part of our daily life. Can you think of one newspaper or magazine that is only words? The answer is no! Publishers and owners know that the majority of the people who purchase magazines or read online articles are people of a visual age, meaning that people want and need to be visually stimulated. Why should rabbis be any different?

Rabbis need to incorporate more visual aids, more opportunities for creative speaking. Rabbis are on the front line of Judaism, and it is not fair to equip rabbis with only a speaking tool and not a visual aid resource. Dr. Joye Norris says that the most important thing a teacher can do when speaking is weaving participants into the teaching, or in the rabbi's case, the sermon. "Without waiting, affirming, and weaving, the dialogue will quickly become a monologue, and the airtime will be inhabited primarily by you."

A dialogue approach to teaching, to learning, to speaking and to sermons is another effective way to deliver sermons. Why is it that people love questions, especially if people have an opportunity to answer them? People love being part of a dialogue, not listening to a monologue. This is not just an issue for rabbis; cantors face a similar issue. People want to participate in prayer, not listen to others pray. That is why, given the opportunity, questions that are open and get people thinking are the best way to go. Use

questions like: “in what ways can you…?” or “What are some examples of…?” Open-ended questions coupled with letting people process what they heard is a great way to get people to listen, think, and even express their ideas.

People want to speak, they want to voice their opinions, While a service may not be the appropriate time to allow an open forum, a “forum sermon” when done correctly, with rehearsed and guided speakers, would allow for an exciting presentation, one that would not be forgotten. This is the key, maintaining freshness, and creative ideas. A Friday sermon should never be the same week after week, and neither should the method with which one preaches.

Crain Brian Larson, chief editor for Christianity Today's PreachingToday.com says there are three things that make it hard for listeners to escape a sermon: Emotional Energy, Intellectual Energy, and Vocal Energy. Emotional energy is the connection that happens when the speaker’s heart touches the hearts of those around him or her. The speaker appeals directly to the will of the congregant, when the sermon offers an inspirational story of love, hope, mercy perseverance, courage, faith overcoming obstacles.

Intellectual energy is the creation of thought and meditation connected to the words of the preacher. One of many jobs that a rabbi has is to provoke curiosity, to teach, and to excite people. Intellectual energy is not just speaking; it is being creative. “Imaginative elements ignite bottle rockets in the mind. Insight thrives in the realm of image and metaphor. This does not require Mensa-level genius.”[75]

Vocal energy is an equation: Volume + Pitch + Rate + Emphatic Enunciation = Variety in speaking. This is the trick that Larson explains is the key to connecting with

[75] Robinson, Haddon, Larson, Craig Brian, The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching, p.708.

others. Rabbis have a tool, their voice. Dentists have a tool, their hands. Painters have a tool, their hands. Dancers have balance, every profession has a skill set, and a rabbi has his or her voice. Knowing how to use the voice not only takes time and training but it is the key to successful preaching.

A silent disability is more difficult to address than a disability that is visible. Too often people hide their learning challenges, for fear of what others may think, what others may say or how they may be judged. A synagogue is a safe place, a place that many would say is their second home, which is why, even more so, it should be a place that is accommodating to all people. Within every synagogue, in every country, there are people who have challenges, some going their whole life not knowing that they might have it. This is why changing the way rabbis and clergy sermonize is so important. All rabbis should meet the needs of the community; this is why changing the style in which rabbis preach is so important.

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