

A jogger running down a country road is startled as a horse yells at him, "Hey! Come over here, buddy!"

The jogger is stunned but runs over to the fence where the horse is standing and asks, "Were you talking to me?"

The horse replies, "Sure was. Man, I've got a problem. I won the Kentucky Derby a few years ago and this stupid farmer bought me. Now all I do is pull a plow, and I'm sick of it. Why don't you run up to the house and offer him \$5,000 to buy me. I'll make you some money 'cause I can still run."

The jogger thinks to himself, "Boy, a talking horse!" Dollar signs start appearing in his head. So he runs to the house and finds the old farmer sitting on the porch. The jogger yells to the farmer, "Hey, old man, I'll give you \$5,000 for that broken-down old nag you've got in the field." The farmer replies, "Son, this has happened before. You can't believe anything that horse says. He's never even been to Kentucky."

You see, there are miracles all around us, but all too often, we don't even recognize them. We are looking in the wrong places and don't see them when they are right in front of us. We are too busy focusing on the wrong things!

I have had several conversations in the past few weeks about faith. What does the word mean? When do we have it? Why might we lose it? Immediately after crossing the sea, when the people of Israel saw FIRST HAND the wondrous power of Gd, the Torah says “*Vayir’u Ha’am et Adonai Vaya’aminu B’Adonai uv’Moshe Avdo*...they feared Gd and they had **faith** in Gd and Gd’s servant, Moses. They had faith AFTER witnessing this great miracle and they sang the Song at the Sea that we chanted this morning.

Sadly, that faith didn’t last...it seems almost immediately, they began to *kvetch*. I am reminded of the story of the mother who buys her son two neckties; a red one and a blue one, for his birthday. A week later, he comes over for *shabbes* dinner wearing the new red tie and she complains, “What? You didn't like the blue one?!”

Why did they lose their faith so quickly? Why do we? What if we don’t have it to begin with? Sometimes our faith just dwindles and we feel a sense of emptiness.

Perhaps the reason comes from sickness, relationship problems, financial troubles, loss of job, rising gas prices, sinking housing values or a

thousand other stressors which combat us from every angle, every day. But, the bottom line is, more often than we care to admit, we feel empty. Our faith, which is supposed to carry us on wings like eagles, doesn't seem to be able to even lift us off the ground.

How do we deal with it? We can deny it. We can walk around with a false smile saying, "I'm fine, thank you". We can turn to medication for depression or join a support group, both of which have their appropriate place in health and healing. But I would like to suggest that adding prayer to our days and seeking healing through music can bring about spiritual peace and hope.

Our great psalmist, King David, found that music ushered in real interaction, even intimacy, with Gd. The One who created our hearts truly understands our every need and emotion.

So, when we feel lonely, empty, or depressed, we can acknowledge our feelings, confess our fears, or cry our tears in the presence of the only one who truly understands. During the times when we notice an emptiness in our soul, those are the times when we most need to draw near to Gd in *t'fillah*.

I would venture to guess that almost everyone in this sanctuary longs for something, or has suffered, or has gotten confused or stuck or lost. That is what it means to be human. How are we supposed to have faith when we feel this way? We have all had varying degrees of trials and tribulations. We can not always choose the events in our lives, but we can chose how we react to them. What I think I have learned from the difficulties in *my* life is perhaps one of life's most important lessons: Either we live on purpose. Or we live by accident. We can allow the *tzores* and challenges of life to define us; to derail our lives or we can choose to fashion a life of blessing and light even when darkness encircles us.

Believe me, I know this is easier said than done. You might be wondering HOW to do this. Perhaps you don't know how to pray. Maybe you are uncomfortable with the Hebrew or with singing out loud. Sometimes, when I am feeling particularly sad or unspiritual, I focus on a favorite passage or psalm and I allow those words to wash over my spirit and I pray for faith, for peace, for hope...for whatever I need. My greatest spiritual connection, even when my total being is depleted of energy and life, is through music. I believe that music is one of Gd's most precious creations; and our ability to create it or to appreciate it, can be a direct pathway to Gd's presence. Music is the quickest way for me to pray, to

renew and to heal. I have always found that when I push deeper into prayer, I find comfort and a greater sense of serenity. Sometimes, you may notice, I stop singing during services. It is then, while I listen to YOUR voices in prayer, that my spirit is renewed....hearing your voices gives ME strength!

During our choir rehearsal last week, while practicing **Heal Us Now**, I had one person on each part while the rest of the choir listened intently. Each of the voices was exposed and clear. Upon finishing the prayer, one member, through tear stained eyes, said, “wow, this was powerful to sing, but listening was even more spiritual!”

I was once asked, what is the difference between wishing someone *Mazal* or a *B'racha*. In the former, either you have *Mazal* or you don't and no amount of work, wishing, complaining or begging can change that. As for *B'racha*, you create your own blessing and work at it, and be your own blessing. We need to understand that life will never be painless, but we have the choice whether life will be meaningless.

Later in the Torah portion, we read the description of *manna*, that substance that fell down like dew when the children of Israel were wandering in the desert. *Manna* was nourishment from Gd in the barren desert.

The Torah says something very remarkable about *manna*. Moses tells the people, Gd sent you *manna* in order to test you. I always thought of it as a divine gift. What's the test?

On day 1, *manna* looks like a real miracle. On day 2, it still seems quite miraculous. On day 30, *manna* is getting seriously boring. By day 60, *manna* seems like some sort of punishment. The *manna* test was the test of the normal. Every miracle, if you're blessed and lucky enough so it lasts in your life and you get to keep it, becomes normal. We all have so much *manna* in our lives, so much of it, we don't even realize it is there anymore.

The events of these past few weeks have once again brought that message home all too clearly. We just found out that my youngest brother is very sick, and my mom had the first of two major surgeries on Tuesday. It has been a challenging week and yet, I find myself counting my blessings. I feel so blessed to have been raised in my loving family and not a day goes by that I don't appreciate that. I have found that every time I am confronted with a difficult situation, I become even stronger and more steadfast in my faith. I pray more. I pray even harder. It is my faith that helps me get through.

I am often known by my catch phrase that I use with all of my students: LOUD and PROUD. But, the catch phrase that I would like to say share today is “**Have faith!**” Look at the life you are living, count your blessings, recognize the miracles which surround you and be in this awesome moment. Use your faith to keep you strong!

When *b'nai yisrael* crossed the sea, Miriam and the women took timbrels in their hands and sang to Gd. In that moment, they were counting their blessings!

*Mah Norah HaMakom HazeH.* How awesome is this place and this very moment? So, even if you’ve never been to Kentucky, open your eyes to the miracles all around you.

***Shabbat Shalom!***

Hazzan Alisa Pomerantz-Boro