

HOLIDAY SERMONS FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM “SPIRITUAL ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER”

The Yiddish word for “holiday” is “der yontev”
A Jewish sermon is referred to as “der drosh”

By



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According to Bill Greer, “Many suffer from ‘spiritual attention deficit disorder’ (SADD). In a society obsessed with cell phones, instant messaging, and other techno-gadgets, we get bored in five minutes if we’re not entertained.” (Source: Inside Story: “Sermon titles You won’t soon forget,” Bobby Ross Jr., Christian Chronicle, Feb. 2008).

A rabbi once began his sermon by saying to his congregation: “I’m gonna tell you the same thing Elizabeth Taylor told all her husbands. And that is--”I’m not going to keep you long!” And then he told this humorous story about Hershel of Ostropov.

Hershel loved to joke (“vitslen zikh”). As he was weak (“shvakh”) and dying, the rabbi came to see him and asked if he was now ready to be serious (“ehrnst”).

But Hershel answered him: “Why start now?”

“But Hershel, in a few minutes the Angel of Death (“der malakh-amoves”) will come to you,” the rabbi tells him. He will ask for your name--and what will you say?”

Hershel replies, “I’ll tell him it’s Moses.”

“But he’ll know you’re not Moses--you’re Hershel.”

“Well,” says Hershel, “if he knows already, then why will he ask?”

“But, you know, rabbi, I do have one final request,” says Hershel rather weakly, and everyone leans in to hear.

“I ask simply this--that when you place me in the coffin, please, I beg of you--do not carry me under my arms.”

And with that, Hershel closed his eyes and died.

Everyone was silent at first--and then they began talking. What a strange request. Why? Oy, Hershel, why didn't you explain this? After a minute had passed, Hershel opened his eye and spoke to them all from the world beyond. "The reason is...that under my arms--I've always been a little ticklish." :-)

I have never been called upon to deliver a sermon at The Midway Jewish Center in Syosset, New York, even when Rabbi Rank had a "haldzveytik" (sore throat) or was called away on a "noytfal" (emergency).

But just in case this should happen, I've chosen several topics which should be relevant to the real needs of the audience. My guess is that many holiday sermons will be similar to the one given by Bret Stephens at the Huntington Jewish Center on Long Island. His timely topic: "How Will Israel Survive in 2015."

Naturally, I'll stick to the topic, I'll make it brief, and maybe "di kehile" (the congregation) will even give me a compliment.

My thoughts turn to these sermon titles:

"Office. Home. Starbucks. Do you really need a 'driter' (third) workplace?"

"Three things can't be hidden: love, coughing, and poverty." What do we do about the 45 "milyon" Americans living below the poverty ("oremkayt") line?"

"Kumitz: You Can't Do It Alone in New York"
("kumzitz" means "get together")

"Is 'Heeb' still an ethnic slur for a Jew?"

Are you a "camplaigner"? - a kvetch with purpose?
(Lizzie Skurnick coined the word "camplaign" (pronounced kam-PLANE))

"Is the THINNER [PERSON] the WINNER?"

"Are you the 'lets/letz' of the party?"
(In Yiddish, "lets"/"letz" means "the life of the party.")

"Where Harry Met Sally: The Jewish Deli in Pop Culture"
(Ted Merwin, lecturer, has actually given this talk!)

“How to Prevent Meshuggganicity: A general condition of lunacy which could be temporary, chronic, or triggered by unusual stress, for example, your mechutonim came for Shavout, and decided to stay till Rosh Hashana.

(Marnie Winston-Macauley unique Jewish diseases II). Note: Symptoms: Behavior varies in seriousness from odd bouts of wearing ones underwear inside out to becoming obsessed with inventing a square Hamanatashen.

“Don’t Forget the Kosher Birdseed.”

“Don’t Just Do Something - Sit There.”

“Is That Your Final Answer?”

“Zagat’s Guide to Restaurant Religion”

“If You Have Something To Say, Just Text Me”

“Velcro Kid”

“I Don’t Want to Be Called ‘Grandma.’ How About ‘GlamMa’?”

“Is It Safe For My Grandchild to Participate in the Taglit-Birthright Program?”

(Birthright is a non-profit organization which pays for 10-day educational trips to Israel for young Jews, the vast majority from the U. S.)

“How to Deal with the 89 Suspected anti-Semitic Attacks So Far This Year”

“It’s a fact: 20% of Jews who attend college will experience an anti-Semitic assault by the time they are seniors.”

Elissa Strauss (“The Forward,” Sept. 12, 2014) writes, “Or maybe we’d tell them to downplay their Jewishness. Straighten their hair, fix their noses and absolutely zero talk of summers at Camp Ramah. Oh, and best to avoid all displays of wealth, and heck, even asking a waitress if they can sit at a better table, because when they showcase their Jewishness like that, they are just asking for it.”

“No Apology Accepted, Rapper Macklemore!”

(Macklemore posted an apology on his website saying he didn’t mean to mock Jewish people by wearing a costume that some say was anti-Semitic during a performance in Seattle. Photos from the concert showed him wearing a black wig and beard and a fake hooked nose.)

“Husband/Wife-Hunting on the High Holidays”

(Rabbi Mark Wildes, founder and director of the Manhattan Jewish Experience, said, “It’s actually a huge mitzvah”--as long as it doesn’t interfere with praying.”)

“Who Would Believe It? - Halvah Is Now Available in Popsicles!”

“Was David M. Bader right? Honor thy father and thy mother, but screen thy calls.”
 (“The Book of Murray: The Life Teachings and Kvetching of the Lost Prophet”)

“How Judge Judy Deals with Dysfunctional Families (“A meshpokhe mit/af tsores” or “mit problemen.”)

“Bernard Madoff: “A miseh mayseh”--an ugly story

“How I become the Captain of the barbecue team titled, “50 Shades of Flayshik.”

MARJORIE GOTTLIEB WOLFE’s favorite story:

Rabbi Teichler stopped in the middle of his sermon and beckoned the shamus to the bema. “Look, Fourth row,” whispered the rabbi. “That heavysset man. Absolutely asleep!”

“So?” the shamus grunted.

“So? Wake him up.”

“I don’t think that’s fair (“orntlekh”).”

“What does that mean?”

“Rabbi, it was YOU who put him to sleep, so it should be YOU who wakes him up.”

Source: Leo Rosten...and others