

**“What’s Your Motivation? Wait, It Doesn’t Matter:
Struggling with the Complexities of Relationships”
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After many days of analysis, discussion, critique and evaluation, Senator Edward, “Teddy” Kennedy was finally laid to rest, and in this case, the phrase “laid to rest” seems even more pronounced. Since his passing, we have listened to a constant recounting of not only his passing, but also of Chappaquiddick, his cheating while attending Harvard, a drinking incident in 1991, and his escapades in 1982 after his divorce from his first wife, Joan. There has been some analysis about the correlation between his failed run for the presidency and some of these events. There has been discussion about why he was so driven as a politician. There were comparisons to John and Robert. There has been speculation about Teddy’s father and his style of parenting because it may have fostered intense competition between his sons. There has been much speculation on how that played into Teddy’s psyche, as he was the youngest of the three boys. Although I thought the funeral would bring a close to all of the speculation, analysis, and theories about Teddy’s life, it doesn’t appear as though that will be happening any time soon.

Recently, the *New York Times* reported that a memoir of Senator Edward M. Kennedy entitled “True Compass,” will be published. The book was scheduled to be released in 2010 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the election of President Kennedy, but because of our thirst for answers and the desire to seize the moment, the publication date was moved up. Once again, the announcement of the book gave license to drum up the stories and these questions. Why did it take him ten hours to report his involvement with the tragedy at Chappaquiddick? What was he thinking on that night in 1991 in Palm Beach Florida. Why did he really bow out of the presidential bid? Why did he not speak more forcefully at the Clarence Thomas nomination? Why? Why? Why? So many questions left open. Sure, we all have our theories. Some believe the worst of him, while others believe the best, but the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. However, the real truth is that it doesn’t matter. As the great philosopher Ben Sira taught, “When the dead are at rest, let their memory rest and be consoled when the soul departs.” Senator Kennedy, the lion of the Senate, has passed away but his contributions in legislation, civil liberties, and public service cannot be denied. Let’s not focus on the whys, let his legacy be the what is, as in the quiet coalitions he built on both sides of the aisle.

His legacy leaves hundreds of laws with his name on them, many powerful and moving speeches, his advocacy for every Massachusetts’ family and the countless funerals he attended of soldiers lost in war. We could spend far more than the 532 pages of this memoir trying to figure out all of the whys. Who was he trying to please? Who was he trying to replace? Who was he trying to make it up to? Actually, his motivation is almost irrelevant. I can’t fault the media, though that is a favorite past time of mine. Each of us long to know why people behave the way they do. We want and demand answers, not just about what happened, but why. We generate countless hypotheses and test them rigorously. When some fail, we keep creating new ones until we believe we have it right, until we are satisfied with the answers.

That is why I was so bothered by one sentence in this week's Torah reading. Let me share my frustration with you. Upon entering the Holy Land, the Jewish people are instructed to bring their first fruits and make the following declaration. "*Arami Oved Avi*," "A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; and the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard slavery; and when we cried to the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression." (Deuteronomy 26:5-7)

We make this declaration because we bring the first fruits and because God felt for us. God heard our voice because God cared. We bring these gifts, not out of an altruistic drive to bring gifts, but out of repayment for a divine act of grace. The motivation is powerful because God was with us in our slavery. God did not sympathize but God empathized, as much as that is possible. Listen to the language again. "The Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression." Moses was teaching – "You will arrive in Israel and the land will be divided up evenly, each will get a parcel of land. Be grateful for what you have. Some will get bigger sections and some smaller but be grateful for what you have." Over time, the inequity will probably grow, but if you bring the first fruits each and every year, you will practice a behavior of gratitude and that pattern will become ingrained. Moses was teaching and the Jewish people were listening.

However, this is strange because the original Divine motivation was a little different than Moses emphasizes. The original version of the exodus has a little different focus. In Chapter 2 of the book *Exodus*, the Torah recounts, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." (v. 24) Yes, God heard their cry but he wasn't moved by it. God, in that text, doesn't seem to care about the suffering, the pain, or the anguish of life spent in slavery. After all, they had been slaves for hundreds of years. No, God heard the cry and that reminded Him they were still there. The buzzer went off and God rushed in to take the burning supper off the stove. I can imagine God sitting back and saying, "Oh my God, I forgot all about them – I better get them out." I realize this is a little irreverent, but you get my point. God "brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness, and with signs, and with wonders." (Deuteronomy 26:8) He promised to do so and not because he identified with our suffering.

Honestly, I don't care why God took us out of Egypt and I don't care why God relieves the suffering of those in pain. Yes, I would like to believe God hears the call of the widow, the stranger, and the orphan, because they deserve better treatment or because they have done something for which they have merited special handling. I don't care why, I just care that God does. Does God care? No question, the answer is "Yes." Why? No question, it doesn't matter. This is also true of our relationship with God and each other.

I always think it acceptable to ask the first question and we are naïve to think that we can understand the second. In fact, we should demand that those in our lives care. We deserve it, we are worthy of it and we have earned it. However, we cannot insist that the motivation be pure or even what we want it to be. We can request that those who love us show this love and treat us in a way commensurate with that care, but we can never require a specific motivation. For when we

stipulate to the second, we risk the first. The Talmud teaches so brilliantly, *mitoch she'lo lishma ba lishma*, (Pesachim 50b) the proper intentions come, but it is not the beginning.

This year, Andre Agassi, my all-time favorite athlete, was honored for his accomplishments off the court, at opening night of the US Open. I enjoyed the clips because they showed his final appearance at the Open, as well as his heartfelt words that night. In as much as I applauded that he has built a charter school in Las Vegas, it is this sentence that resonated most loudly in my ears. "Life's blessings have been handed out unevenly. My definition of caring means 'doing.'" How true. How perfect.

Recently, we celebrated Labor Day, a day devoted to those who comprise our work force. Senator Ted Kennedy worked tirelessly for those who do not have a voice. Ted Kennedy was just one of many who spoke out on behalf of those who work, and those who work hard in dangerous conditions. I recognize how complicated the issue of workers' rights can be. I am not so naïve as to think of the subtle differences that can easily be ignored between the language of living wage and that of minimum wage. I am not so unsophisticated that I miss the point in the discussion about unions and free market. I am not so simple as to ignore the difficulties of issues of illegal immigration and migrant work forces. However, I am still painfully aware that there are those in our society who are taken advantage of. There are those who work hard to make a living, to provide for their families, and because their spokesperson is flawed, their cause is ignored. It is just too easy to critique the motivations. It is just too easy to discount the message because of the flaws in the argument. I pray their efforts have not been for naught. I pray they have not labored in vain. So, today, I teach what I believe Moses was teaching, "Life's blessings have been handed out unevenly." My definition of caring means "doing" or, as Ted Kennedy said to his 10 year-old grandson, "Little Teddy" – "We may not be the best, but we can work harder than anyone."