

Thoughts on Nagypapa

Neil Heller, 24 April, 2013

I should be so lucky to bring peace on earth.
I should be so lucky to end world hunger.
I should be so lucky to make a difference in my community.

A few years back, my brother Steve and I were talking about some of our idiosyncrasies and quirks. I think the conversation had something to do with taking our blood pressure everyday, but I don't remember the specifics. Steve and I concluded that we were turning into our father. We had a good laugh.

That laughing moment ultimately became a turning point in my life. I began to learn more about my Dad not through my own eyes, but by really listening to his conversations with others and how they responded to my Dad.

When you came to my parent's home and met my Dad, my greeted you with a big smile, a warm hello and perhaps a welcoming hug. He made time to sit down and have a "conversation" with you. We used to joke it was more like an interview. But if you really paid attention to what was going on, it was a very intimate and focused encounter. When you sat down and spoke with my Dad, he was 100% percent absorbed in the conversation - there were no external interruptions, phone calls, or distractions. My Dad was truly interested in every word, idea and message you had. He wanted to know about your family, where you lived, how you engaged in your community, and how you applied your education to making the world a better place.

My Dad centered his life around Tikun olam - making the world a better place. His core belief was that people should not just tolerate one another and get along, but that must accept each other. It became clear that to accept someone, you had to invest the time to learn about them, understand their views, ask questions about their views, and most importantly listen to every word they said, without judgment or prejudice.

As children, teenagers, young adults, and even as more mature adults, we are often too self absorbed to see our parents as who they truly are or how everyone else see's them. We may hear their stories, lessons and messages, but don't really internalize the true essence of what they are telling us.

I've only just begun my journey, to embrace, internalize, and practice the many lessons my Dad gifted to me.

My Dad was a man who lived a fulfilling, exemplary and accomplished life.

Perhaps I won't bring peace on earth or solve world hunger.

But, I should be so lucky someday to become more like my father.