

**Sermon/Drasha "Lessons From the Best Ads of 2014"**  
**Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 3-jan-2015**

He was born in 1886 near Cincinnati, the son of an insurance salesman. He left school in the 6th grade for a book publishing business and rose within the next 10 years through the ranks to advertising manager -- at the age of 22. In 1912, he was invited to become a copywriter at the Cincinnati office of the prominent J. Walter Thompson ad agency. In 1917, he went to New York as a vice-president. A year later he ran the Western division of all J. Walter Thompson offices.

You may not have heard of him, but by the end of his career in the late 1940s, James Webb Young had received many awards and honors and is still today considered one of the great figures in the history of American advertising.

Jim Young had an uncanny knack for understanding the mind of the consumer.

In 1919, he wrote a then-controversial ad for deodorant Odorno with the headline, "Within the Curve of a Woman's Arm." The headline for the Odorno ad cleverly avoided mentioning a word that at the time was taboo: *armpit*. The ad itself also drew women in with copy stating that,

*Persons troubled with perspiration odor seldom can detect it themselves.*

The Odorno campaign ran in the Ladies Home Journal. During that time the Journal and the American Medical Association warned that the product could be dangerous. Women, who saw the ads as being offensive and disgusting, cancelled their subscriptions to the Ladies Home Journal. Yet amazingly, even in the light of 200 cancellations, Odorno sales went up an incredible 112% in that year.

There's a lot to learn from marketing and advertising!

As we turn the page on the calendar year, I'm sure you've noticed the many End-of-Year lists. The top 10 stories. The 10 best stories. The 10 worst stories. Earlier this week I came across an article that listed some of 2014's best and worst ads. I'd like to share three of the best ads with you, with a focus on the lessons we can learn from each ad.

1) If you have a social media presence on Facebook or Instagram, this past summer you probably noticed a daily influx of people dumping buckets of ice and water over their heads. But there was no need to worry - it wasn't a reaction to the effects of global warming or people trying to deal with not taking showers during the 3 Weeks. This viral phenomenon was called the "Ice Bucket Challenge," which was taken on by huge numbers of men, women, and children to help bring awareness to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

It all got started when a golfer in Florida, created a video that showed him dumping a bucket of ice water on his head. He posted it on social media and challenged others to do the same within 24 hours or donate \$100 to ALS. (Many people did both) It wasn't long before an Internet

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sensation was born, with such famous participants as George W. Bush, Justin Timberlake and Oprah.

There were some incredibly creative ice bucket challenges: A professional hockey player stood on a mountain, while a helicopter poured gallons of ice water on his head. In case anyone thought Bill Gates wasn't doing enough to save the world, his video showed him being challenged by Mark Zuckerberg, with Gates then building an ice bucket-dumping contraption. It seemed hard to complete the challenge incorrectly, but Justin Bieber managed to get it wrong when he poured a small pot of water on his head — no ice.

One lesson we can learn from the Ice Bucket Challenge is the power of the 'Ripple Effect.'

Before the Ice Bucket Challenge craze the *New York Times* reported that only half of Americans even knew about ALS. But at the conclusion of a grassroots campaign that took off like wildfire, the organization said that it raised \$115 million from July 29 to Sept.15, in sharp contrast to the \$5 million it raised in the year-earlier period.

An early Torah source expressing the power of the the ripple effect can be found in Ethics of the Fathers (4:2):

*One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah .... for the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah*

How does this ripple effect take place?

- a) You inspire others who witness your mitzvah.
- b) You create healthy spiritual habits and a propensity to do more mitzvos by regularly performing mitzvos.
- c) Hashem leads you in the way you want to go. Show Hashem that you are a 'mitzvah-doer', and from Heaven, you will be given additional opportunities to perform mitzvos.

The Ice Bucket Challenge was a stunningly effective campaign that demonstrated the power of positive actions being able to influence others to do the same.

2) American soft-drink consumption has been in a decade-long fizzle, due to growing concerns over obesity. But Coca Cola hit the jackpot with its "Share a Coke" campaign this past summer. The ad campaign featured 250 of the most popular names among teens and Millennials on 20-oz. bottles and cans. You could find out if your name made the cut either by searching an Internet site (surprise - *Ze'ev* didn't make it), or looking through bottles at a store to see if your name was a match.

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Coke's U.S. soft-drink volume rose 0.4% for the 12 weeks through August from the same period a year earlier - and its Share a Coke campaign generated wide, positive publicity. The campaign began in Australia, where Coke sold more than 250 million named bottles and cans in a nation of just under 23 million people. The campaign made its way around the world, reaching more than 70 countries, including China and Turkey. A young Australian named Lucie Austin was one of the architects of the ad campaign, which was originally called 'Project Connect'

Lucie said that the challenge Coke marketers faced was that Coca-Cola was big and iconic, and many felt they were not talking to them at eye level. There's a phrase in Australia called "tall poppy syndrome"; if anyone gets too big for their britches, they get cut down like a tall poppy. By putting first names on the cans and bottles, Coke was speaking to its customers at eye level.

A big surprise was that people bought Cokes to show people they cared for them and that they missed them -- from soldiers overseas, to loved ones in hospitals, to long-lost friends. Coca-Cola hadn't anticipated the bottles and cans being used in this emotionally powerful way. One billboard sign I read had the following moving message:

*My husband (picture of Coke bottle with the name Josh) is in the military and we are apart. I sent him a picture of two Coke bottles with our names on it, saying, "Can't wait to share these in December"*

Why was 'Share a Coke' such an international success? Lucie Austin said:

*At the end of the day, our name is the most personal thing we have. It's our fingerprint... our identity... in one word. We gave consumers an opportunity to express themselves through a bottle of Coke, and to share the experience with someone else. The fact that your name is on a Coke bottle, it can't get more personal than that!*

We Jews have a 'Project Connect.' It is called *V'ahavta l'rayech k'mocha*, Love your friend as yourself. And with only a slight twist on the "Share a Coke" slogan, we can say the fulfillment of this most fundamental mitzvah involves a campaign of 'Share Your Attention' with others.

- a) Become a better listener. Pay attention to what people are saying.
- b) Acknowledge others to make them feel welcome. It's been said that the four most common words visitors to a synagogue are greeted with are, 'You're in my seat.' Why not try something like, 'Hi there, it's wonderful to have you with us!'
- c) Remember people's names. Remembering and using a person's name communicates the non-verbal message, "You're important to me."

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3) During the Academy Awards, host Ellen DeGeneres pulled together a group of celebrities, including Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence and Cooper, to take a "selfie." The move wasn't entirely unplanned; Samsung's ad buyer had negotiated to have its Galaxy smartphone integrated into the award show. Ellen tweeted the selfie and challenged viewers to make it the most shared tweet of all time. The tweet was retweeted more than 3.3 million times, more than four times as many times as a tweet sent by President Barack Obama's account after he won re-election in 2012. Quite a return on investment for a selfie filled with smiling faces!

In a related passage from this week's parsha (Vayechi), Jacob gave his son Judah the following blessing:

*"Red eyed from wine, and white toothed from milk" (Genesis 49:12).*

The Talmud interprets this verse as follows: Showing your teeth to your neighbor [in a broad smile] is better than giving him a drink of milk, for it says, "white toothed [I'ven shinayim] from milk." Don't read I'ven shinayim, "white toothed", but libbun shinayim, "showing the teeth" [i.e. smiling] is better than milk. Showing someone your smile can be more nourishing and supportive than you can imagine.,

For those who don't know how to smile, Ethics of the Fathers offers a three step program of 'Smiling for Dummies', using the expression '*saver panim yafos*':

1) *Sever* - Your face has to express sever, which means sevara, or thought. When you focus your face on another person, he has to be able to see that you are thinking about him. You notice him. You appreciate that this total stranger, no matter what his color, ethnicity, culture or religion, was created in the image of G-d just as you were, and is therefore worthy and important enough for you to concentrate on him, even for a split second's time.

2) *Panim* - This is the Hebrew word for "face". You have to turn your face to that person, not your ear. Look directly into the face of the person as you greet him and give him the full attention he deserves.

3) *Yafos* - It is not enough merely to show your face when you greet another person, it should be yafos - a pleasant, beautiful face. Give him your best smile. Show him that you are happy to see him.

We began today with the story of advertising maven Jim Young, and the thought that one can learn quite a bit from marketing and advertising. Let's close with a final classic 'Jim Young' story.

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Once Jim Young had to fill a large order of apples that had been ordered in advance, sight unseen. When the apples reached him, they were covered with brown spots caused by severe hailstorms. He knew the customer wouldn't be pleased with the order, so he found a way to make spotty-looking apples more appealing. In each box of apples, he put a card that said:

*"Note the hail marks which appear as minor skin blemishes on some of these apples. These are proof of their growth at high mountain altitude, where the sudden chills from mountain hailstorms, which these apples receive while growing, help firm their flesh and develop the fruit sugars which give them their fine flavor."*

The customer kept all the apples!

We can learn something from everything -- even from the world of advertising.

From the "Ice bucket Challenge", we can learn the power of a ripple effect. One mitzvah can bring in its wake many other mitzvos. The "Share a Coke" campaign teaches us to share of ourselves with others. And from the Samsung 'selfie' ad, we can learn the contagious, nurturing effect of a simple smile.