

Yom Kippur -- Yizkor "Smile, You're on Candid Camera"

Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ, 5775/2014

I have some good news and some bad news for you. But before I tell you of 'the news', I'd like to tell you about a somewhat embarrassing experience that I had recently. I'll tell you about it on the following condition; that you won't tell anyone else about it. Is that a deal? Good!

I was driving in Creve Coeur, turning left onto Olive, a four-lane street. >From the opposite direction at about the same time a car was turning right. I turned left into the lane closest to the center of the street, while the car turning right was supposed to turn into the lane closest to the sidewalk. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

But what I wasn't planning was that the driver of the car opposite me turning right -- a very sweet-looking, very small senior citizen barely able to see over his steering wheel -- I wasn't planning that he, the other driver, would be oblivious to anything other than s-l-o-w-l-y making a wide sweeping right turn, right into my path. Mid-turn, I blew my horn gently. Well, maybe not so gently. I didn't blow it for a long time. Well, maybe 3 ...4....10 seconds. OK, one really loud, long honk. Stunned by my loud, long horn-blast, my opponent -- I mean, the other driver -- pulled back into the curb-side lane, giving me time to zip by him, out of harms way.

The good news was, we didn't play bumper cars. It was a close call, but no contact. The better news was, the older gentleman didn't see who I was. And that was 'better news', because the other driver was a member of shul my!

I was so embarrassed when I realized that I had driven somewhat, shall we say, assertively, toward a shul member. C'mon, it wasn't road rage -- just 'assertive driving'! Funny things can happen when you get behind the wheel of a car. I was just so thankful that he didn't see who I was, and that the whole incident wasn't caught on camera.

You've all seen the type of TV series of hidden camera shows. *Punk'd*, the recent show called *What Would You Do?* And the show 'back in the day' -- *Candid Camera*. Nobody did it better than *Candid Camera's* Alan Funt.

Years ago on one *Candid Camera* show, children were used in an experiment about generosity. The children were placed by themselves in a room with a plate of cookies. On the plate were at least two cookies, there may have been more, but one of the cookies was very large. The adult left the room and the kids were allowed to take one cookie. Not surprisingly, they all took the big one. One boy was challenged as to why he took the biggest cookie. Alan Funt, the host, told the boy, "All you left me to eat was the little cookie. I would have eaten the little cookie and given you the biggest one."

Without a blink the boy responded, "Then you got the one you wanted."

The reason I'm talking about *Candid Camera* and shared my own driving story, is because I have a feeling that I'm not the only one who has had this type of experience. Am I right? The theme of my remarks today is: All of us are on 'Candid Camera' all the days of our lives, and therefore, we ought to live with the awareness that we are.

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Let me tell you the most bizarre example of being on 'Candid Camera' that I know. Perhaps you read the story, which appeared in the newspapers a number of years ago.

There was a wedding at a certain catering house in New Jersey. The father of the bride brought a great deal of cash with him with which to pay the caterer, the orchestra leader and the waiters. The money was in an envelope that he kept in the inside breast pocket of his tuxedo. The wedding was freilich and exuberant. Everyone danced enthusiastically, and as the evening wore on, they began to feel warm. The father of the bride took off his jacket and draped it over a chair. When the party was over, he put on his jacket, reached into his breast pocket ...and the money was gone.

What could he do? The father had no choice. He had to sit down and write checks to the caterer, the orchestra leader, and the waiters. And then someone remembered ...that the camcorder had been on all night. Maybe?

They played it back and looked at the tape. And sure enough, they saw none other than the father of the groom reaching into his mechutan's inside pocket, taking the money out, and putting it into his own pocket ...on camera! To put it mildly, the marriage got off to a very shaky start.

Why do I tell you these stories today? Simply to make the point that all of us would behave much better if we thought we were on *Candid Camera*. The truth is, though, that we are on 'Candid Camera' every moment of our lives. Isn't that what the *Unisana Tokef* prayer that we'll be reciting during Musaf says -- that there is a G-d, and that this G-d is a "*sofer umoneh va'ed v'yodeah umo'chiach v'kosayv v'chosem* -- that this G-d sees and hears and records and registers and counts and judges all that we do. That's what the *Unisaneh Tokef* says. How do we feel about this prayer? Do we believe it? Do we take it seriously?

I confess that when I was younger, I had a hard time picturing G-d as the great Scorekeeper or Accountant in the Sky, who not only knew everything we did, but everything we said ...and even everything we thought. As I became older and my thinking became more mature, I came to understand and accept the words of the passage in Ethics of the Fathers (2:1) that says,

"....Consider three things and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you: an eye that sees and an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in the Book."

I now know that G-d watches and records all that we do. But it's not only Hashem who is doing the watching.

Over the years I've learned that my own kids are walking tape recorders, and that they watch and record all that I do. They see me when I'm not 'the rabbi', and whether I remember or not, their 'tape recorders' are 'on' all the time. How much tzedaka do we give? They know. What kind of husbands and wives and fathers and mothers are we? They know. Do we complain about our bosses or our workers? They know. Do we make comments behind the backs of our friends? They know. What we do, what we talk about at the table, what we stand for, and what we fall

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for -- all are recorded by our kids. And it affects them for the rest of their lives. That's the bad news.

Now let me give you the good news. The good news is: the good we do is also recorded by our kidsand it lasts, too. I'm sure that each of you here recorded examples on your 'Candid Camera' recorder about your parents that have created indelible memories of some wonderful aspects of your parents lives, and they way they raised you.

I remember my father, z"l, once came home telling us that he gave \$5 to a man who he picked up hitchhiking, who said he didn't have enough to eat. Someone suggested he was a sucker. I'll never forget my father's response. He said, "So, maybe I am a sucker. But it's better to be a sucker, in case he really did need the money for something to eat."

I remember my mother, she should live and be well, getting up at 4 A.M on a cold, snowy Chicago winter morning (my first 11 years were in Chicago) to make my father breakfast and warm up his truck before he would go out on his delivery route for the bakery he worked for.

So....I began this morning telling you that I had some bad news and some good news. The bad news is: "*Smile, You're on Candid Camera!*", and that all of the vain and dumb and selfish and stupid and embarrassing things we do are recorded, whether we know it or not. The good news is: "*Smile, You're on Candid Camera!*" and that all of the good and noble deeds we do are also recorded, whether we know it or not. Hashem sees them, and our children see them. And knowing that the camera is always on often makes us act a little more kind, quiet, gentle and decent.

And not only do I have good news for you today, but I have some very good news. The very good news is: If we don't like what we recorded in the year that has just passed, we have the ability to 'edit the tape.' We can go out and simply splice out the bad things we did, through the process of tshuva. And tshuva is the essence of what Yom Kippur is about. Tshuva isn't 'repentance'. It means, 'return'. Returning to Hashem. Returning to the very best version of what we can be. And in the process, removing our old shmutz (dirt), and erasing the bad parts of the tape.

And not only can we cut out the bad parts, but we can insert our own edited version. We can turn a mistake into a stepping stone toward growth; from an avayrah (mistake) into a turning point, if we really want to. We can make our mistakes lessons that we learn and grow from. It's up to us to make such a decision, at this time - and if we do, we can live differently in the new year that begins now.

May this be a good year for each and every one of us. Good Yom Tov