WATCH ONE, DO ONE, TEACH ONE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – Temple Sholom
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A midrash teaches that when Abel was killed by his brother Cain he was lying in a field and his parents Adam and Eve came and sat by the side of his body. They cried and they mourned for him for this was the first death that they had ever known, the first death that the world had ever known. And because it was the first for them and the first for the world they didn't know what to do with Abel's body. A raven, whose companion had also just died (so maybe it was the first human death) said: "I will teach Adam what to do." The raven took his dead companion, dug up the earth as Adam and Eve watched, and buried him in it. Adam said to Eve: "We will do as the raven has done, and together they took the body of their son and buried him in the ground." (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 21)

How do we know how to do anything? If we have never done it before; how do we know how even to begin?

For Horatio and Jackie this weekend is the first time they have been parents of a Bat Mitzvah, they've never done this before – how will they know what to do?

For many here tonight this is the first time they are saying kaddish for a parent or a spouse. All our lives we have watched others stand and say kaddish and tonight we stand, for the first time and intone the words to which we were only listeners for so many years.

For others the coming weeks will mark new beginnings, a first child will graduate from secondary school and go off to University. It will be new for them and new for parents who imagined this day with pride and trepidation.

How do you do something you have never done before, how do you do something for the first time.

I guess for some tasks we just jump in and try, perhaps the stakes are not so high or our confidence level is such that nothing seems impossible. Indeed, many of us have work benches and garages littered with our failed attempts at assembly or repair without reading the instructions as we applied this jump-right-in approach. I could build an entire Ikea book case with the extra parts they always put in the boxes of furniture I assemble.

But for others, like Adam and Eve on discovering the death of their son Abel the lack of prior experience (thank G-d) or a reference point can be paralyzing. And so we just sit there stuck, scared, alone and unsure of how to proceed. Were it not for the raven, those parents might still be sitting there by the side of their son, head in heads, tears streaming down their cheeks not knowing what to do. And were it not for the teachers in our lives, formal and many more informal, we would be doing the same in the context of our own first times.

Every person does everything they every do in life for a first time ever, that only happens once for any given thing, moment or experience. But likewise each of us will be the Raven, will model for others how do something many, many times based on our own personal experience, knowledge of what to do in this moment for our own often failed early attempts.

The midrash teaches that the pinnacle of the human experience is to be perceptive; that Torah/ learning exists everywhere in the world if we pay attention and follow the good example of others. It reminds us that we must study and learn a task so that we can fulfill it correctly, efficiently, successfully. Our tradition continues that after study we must move to action, to doing - because we know that to have only the theory without the application is not enough to make it part of our skill set. Once we have studied it and applied it then our empathy for others motivates us to teach the skill to them so they will not feel the same sense of hopelessness we felt.

In the medical world, this philosophy is known by the mantra, "Watch one, do one, teach one." It is a comforting thought that as my dentist takes a drill to my molar he has watched others do what he is about to attempt, that I am not the first he has tried this on, and in fact he has so mastered the procedure that he can teach it to others.

The same philosophy applies in Jewish tradition, indeed the very idiom "Jewish tradition" acknowledges that these are practices and insights passed down l'dor v'dor from generation to generation.

Think of the Bat Mitzvah girl who studies, leads the service then tutors her classmates in preparation for their own.

Think of the son or daughter who is caring for an aging parent and cleans them and washes them in the way they intuitively know that same now frail parent cleaned and washed and

cared for them when they were young and similarly depended on the help of those that loved them.

This Shabbat marks my 16th year as a rabbi. It was 16 years ago this week that I stood on the bima of the historic Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati Ohio and was ordained as a rabbi. The Rabbi that ordained me was many years my senior, the age of my own parents, but a lifetime before he been just like me. Young, naive, scared, excited, humbled by the awesomeness of the moment. He made me a rabbi by invoking the priestly blessing:

May the God bless you and keep you, May God's face shine upon you, May God always be with you and grant you peace.

Now it is a blessing that I will offer to Sophia tomorrow morning and have given to more than a thousand Bar and Bat Mitzvah students before her. I'd never done it or anything like it

before that moment and now, now I am privileged to model it for others.

One day one of those B'nai Mitzvah students may very well bestow it upon their own students if they too choose to follow this path and become a rabbi. No pressure Sophia, but I think you'd be awesome.

We are all students, we will all become teachers. Through our entire adult life we will actually be both simultaneously. May it never be said we have nothing left to learn and may we also never think we have nothing left to teach

Were it not for the raven, were it not for the teacher, were it not for the good example, the foot prints in the sand that mark the path forward, the encouraging voice of wisdom and experience that comes from our circle of family and friends who have done this before we would be stuck. Everything is easier when you have a teacher to guide you.

Who are your teachers, who are your students, what have you learned that you can share with others?