WHO IS YOUR PERSONAL PERSON OF THE YEAR?
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December 22, 2016

Here's is an interesting parlor game to play on New Year's Eve, as you are gathered around your table with family and friends, imagine you have a time machine that can travel forward or backward in time, you can only use it once, ask those assembled which they would choose, would they choose to go forward into the future or backward to re-examine the past?

There is no right or wrong answer, expect that for each one of us there is an answer that feels more right than the other, but it is an interesting question, and supports a theory I have - that you could divide any group of people in two, those that prefer to look towards the unknown future and those who are guided by a reflection on the past.
Ultimately we are all probably just a little bit more of one than the other, but if we really think about it we are indeed more one than the other.

I'm a 'reflect on the past' kinda guy myself. For all of my interest in technology and innovation, I love history. I love the insight of hindsight, to draw lessons from past experiences, positive and negative. By looking backward I feel I can see ahead with more clarity. Maybe that is in part why I chose to become a Rabbi, we are the people of the book, but our book is a history book. It responds to the challenges of modernity through the lens of the experiences of the past.

That being the case this time of year, with all the year in review shows, end of the year articles, surveys and polls of what was hot and what was not in the past year is a treat that can only come in the final weeks of the year. You could say that I look forward all year to the time when I can look back on the whole year.

My favorite of these year in review articles is the Time Magazine Person of the Year. Usually around our American Thanksgiving table I raise the question who would you pick for person of the year? Aren't you glad

you don't have a rabbi at your thanksgiving dinner! Time machines, person of the year surveys – my family humors me a great deal.

The criteria for the selection process of the Time Magazine Person of the Year is powerful in its simplicity. It reads: **"the person or persons who most affected the events of the past year for better or for worse."** This year, as it does every four years Time Magazine chose the President Elect. Its hard to argue with the choice, for better or for worse he certainly had a dramatic and profound impact on the past year.

But as much as I obsessed over this election (and I am using the past tense here more as a sermon to myself, as I have not been able to tune it out still), The new president elect was NOT the person that affected me the most this past year. I'd like to make the question more personal, and instead ask who is **Your** Person of the Year? Who is the person that most affected you for better or for worse in the past year? Now you have something interesting, a question

worth exploring, indeed as they say in my line of work, now you have a sermon.

Think about it for a moment, who is the person or persons who most affected your life for better or for worse in this past year? To answer it we really have to do our own personal year-in-review show. To replay a montage of personal events on our minds eye, and pick those events, that when strung together were most impactful, when we find the events, we must then look deeper and find the common thread that was present for all or most of them. And then deeper still we have to attached a person to that thread, personifying that force for change, for better or for worse and giving it a name.

Just as there are two types of people in the world, those who look backward to the past and those who look forward to the future, there are four types of people that are candidates for a personal Person of the Year. They are:

1. The Anonymous Person
2. The Heroic Person

3. The Wicked Person
4. The Partner or Companion

By my estimation our personal person of the year will come from one of these four categories of people. And not surprisingly each has its own biblical example. Think again about the question, "who is the person or persons who most affected your life for better or for worse in this past year?"

Was it some anonymous person, whose name you hardly or never knew, who came out of now where and changed your life, your year in a profound and lasting way. Like the man that Joseph met when he was looking for his brothers in the field.

If we remember the story Joseph goes out searching for his brothers, and happens upon a man that is nameless in our tradition. The man says he saw the brothers on the way to the town of Dothan. Joseph heads in that direction, meets up with his brothers, which at first does not go so well for

him as they throw him into a pit, plot to kill him, but ultimately sell him to Bedouins who sell him to the Egyptians. There in Egypt, Joseph rises in power to become the chief advisor to pharaoh. Years later when there is a famine in Cannan Joseph is able to save his family and the entire Jewish people. The nameless man was certainly Joseph's person of the year, for had it not been for him Joseph, his family and all of the Jewish people may have died.

Was that the kind of person that most affected your life this past year, someone who you never knew before and may have had no contact with since. But in that moment, they changed the course of events, a doctor, a teacher, a care giver, a social worker, an anonymous person on the street that pointed you in the right director or kept you safe from harm.

Was your personal person of the year a Heroic person, a leader, a role model, that may not even known who you are but by there example and by their actions they inspired you

and shaped the direction of your year. A person like Moses who lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom. He freed a nation, but it was a nation made up of individuals, and we are commanded to view the event as though each one of us was personally freed by God through Moses from bondage.

Was the person of your year, that kind of person, a motivator, a personality bigger than life, but yet miraculously, not so big that they did not have a strong personal impact on your life this past year.

Was your person of the year a wicked person, an arch enemy or rival, who was successful in undercutting your dreams and desires. Or did they fail, and there for server as the positive negative motivation that you needed to seek a new direction. A person like Haman, whose desire to destroy the Jewish people resulted in unifying and defining them.

Or was your person of the year, partner or companion, a spouse or colleague, a family member a dear friend,

someone who has been there all along, but this year they were really there for you, this year they stood out amongst all the others, this year they reminded you, what you never forgot, why you have trusted them and relied upon them so strongly for so long. Were they like Jethro, Moses father-in-law who saw Moses working himself to death caring for the people and took him aside and gave him some sage advice. Told him to slow down, share the responsibility, not try to do it all and be it all to everyone all the time. Were they like Adam and Eve, who had a falling out, a breach of trust, who because of their closeness and their trust in each other caused the deepest pain and the most lasting hurt when that relationship fell apart, one fell and took the other down with them.

Who was your person of the year? If I was brave and if we were sitting around my thanksgiving table I would ask you to share it with each of us here. But the truth is I don't need to know who your personal person of the year was, but you do! Each of us needs to.

Maybe you don't like to look back to the past, maybe you are more about January 1st than December 31st. But I would suggest, as a student of history, a student of Jewish history that we can't know where we are going in this New Year unless we know where we have been. So let us resolve in these last remaining days of 2016, to look back on the past so we can look forward with perspective to our future.