**UNTIL 120**
**RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ**
**SHABBAT TSHUVAH – SEPTEMBER 11, 2021**
**TEMPLE SHOLOM**

This morning we read the following in our Parasha:
"Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel, and he said to them, I am one hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in."(Deuteronomy 31:1 – 2)

Rabbi Michael Gold from whom I learned this bit of Torah reminded me of the classic Jewish riddle of a man called to testify in court. The judge asks, "Sir, how old are you?" He answers, "I am seventy-five, until one hundred twenty." The judge says, "Please answer the question, how old are you?" "I am seventy-five, until one hundred twenty." Now the judge is starting to get angry. The bailiff says, perhaps I can help. "Until one hundred twenty, how old are you?" The man answers, "seventy-five."

Anyone raised in a traditional Jewish home will recognize this joke. We Jews believe the years of our lives should be one

hundred twenty. We do not give our age without adding the words, “till one hundred and twenty,” ad mea v’esrim, biz hundert un tsvantsig. The Torah teaches towards the beginning of Genesis, “The Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for he also is flesh; yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3).

Last week, the day before Rosh Hashanah I turned 51 years old. As birthdays go; I’d rather have one than not have one, but it was a bit of a non-event. Fifty, which obviously occurred the year before was a big todo; even with COVID preventing a party friends and family gathered on zoom, incredible and thoughtful gifts were arranged and delivered. It was a milestone for sure.

Fifty-one is an even greater achievement when you really think about it. Our tradition teaches through the example of how we light the hanukkah candles that we ascend in holiness, so it would follow that each successive birthday we celebrate should likewise grow in significance not just candles. But if we go back

to our Jewish riddle, where I began, it's all relative to the goal of 120 – you're further down the road but you have not arrived at your destination. As an aside, if ever you could make an argument that it is about the journey it would be in relation to the Jewish view on aging.

According to this week's portion, Moses lived until one hundred and twenty. Of course, that would mean that he stood before Pharaoh and led his people out of Egypt at the age of eighty. A few months later he climbed up and down Mt. Sinai several times to receive the Torah. Add this to the fact that Abraham had a baby when he was ninety-nine and his wife Sarah was ninety; no one should ever say they are too old.

We Jews wish people the blessing that they live until one hundred twenty. Yet, it does seem a bit of exaggeration. I have known many people who have made it well past one hundred, but I have yet to meet anyone who reached one hundred ten. For too many of us, the book of Psalms seems closer, "The days

of our lives are three score and ten, if granted the strength four score" (Psalms 90:10). The Psalmist says between seventy and eighty years. Certainly, with improvement in medical care, many of us make it past that. They say that seventy is the new sixty-five. But even if you are one of the lucky ones who lives past eighty, the bad news is that you will not live forever. Perhaps I should have prefaced that last statement with a Spoiler Alert

Why did God not make us so we can live forever? As Groucho Marx once said: "Why should I care about posterity? What's posterity ever done for me?"

We will all die, even if we can get close to the Biblical one hundred twenty. I think of forever as an awful long time. It would probably get boring after a while. But there are two reasons our days are numbered, one physical and one spiritual.

The physical reason is entropy, the tendency of everything in the universe to fall apart. Everything, the earth, the sun, the entire universe must eventually die. To quote the poet W.B.Yeats, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” All things must end. No matter how careful our diets or how often we go the gym, we are not built to last forever. Our bodies will wear down.

The spiritual reason is a powerful one. As Rabbi Gold teaches, “We have things we must accomplish during our brief time on this earth. Our mortality is a powerful reminder of our mission. That is the message of Yom Kippur, which begins next week. On Yom Kippur we relive our deaths. The Torah reading speaks of the death of Aaron’s sons, and yizkor (memorial prayers for the dead) come in the middle of the day. We wear white, not unlike the shroud we use to bury the dead. We avoid eating, drinking, washing, sex, anointing with oils, and wearing comfortable shoes. On Yom Kippur we separate from the material world and

enter a spiritual world. It reminds us that our time in this physical world is limited.

The High Holiday liturgy teaches, “We are like a fragile vessel, like the grass that withers, the flower that fades, the shadow that passes, the cloud that vanishes, the wind that blows, the dust that floats, the dream that flies away” (untaneh tokef). Yom Kippur reminds us that time is short and there is much to accomplish.

Look, I’ll be completely honest with you, this is essentially the same sermon I gave on Shabbat Shuvah last year, and the year before. I’ve given this sermon, on this topic probably once a year. It’s a message we need to hear again and again, because we get distracted, we think we have unlimited time; we can always put off to tomorrow what we really should have done today. This period between these New Year and Yom Kippur, these 10 days and the message of Yom Kippur is to remind us that we are wrong. We don’t have to 120, all we have is now,

the present they say, it is a gift. Every day you are alive is your birthday, unwrap it, open it up, use it – don't waste it. You don't have time.