

Most of you still remember paper maps, the kind that you could pick up at AAA or buy from a gas station before taking a road trip. AAA would prepare a triptik to guide you to your destination road by road, but they would also supply the large maps, the regional map of the United States, the individual state maps and the city maps for your destination. While riding in the car, before the GPS or smartphone could pinpoint your location to within several yards, by watching the highway signs or street signs or other landmarks you could play the game of finding yourself on one of these maps, imagining a small dot with a “you are here” arrow pointing at it moving across a big piece of paper. On such maps, you could see yourself relative to the surrounding landmarks -- lakes, rivers, historical sites, nature preserves, museums and botanical gardens, downtown. The paper map gives a bigger picture than its electronic cousin. You could explore the streets, trace their paths from beginning to end, see how they curve in relation to the physical landmarks.

Paper maps have all but been replaced by the convenience of the navigation assistance of the GPS or the smartphone. You don't need to know anything about the area any more. The GPS guides you one street at a time from where you are to where you need to be. It is very efficient, but you lose the context of where you are going in relation to the big picture. When we set out on a GPS-guided journey, we typically have an exact destination. If we know what time we need to arrive, the GPS will supply the precise time that we need to leave. No time wasted getting lost.

My colleague Daniel Goldfarb wonders whether the GPS has made it too easy to get from here to there without knowing anything about the journey. This can be a problem. With unpredictable regularity, a GPS inexplicably begins directing its user off course and the Smartphone loses its connection with the network. Without being aware of the big picture, the moment the navigation aid goes offline, you're stranded and completely lost.

If you are aware of the big picture and have a sense of where you are, then your internal compass can continue to navigate, albeit perhaps imperfectly, even without the external guidance. The smart driver never sets off on a journey without at least a vague sense of the big picture.

This depiction of moving around in the physical world is also a metaphor for how we move through our lives. The big picture of our lives, the landmarks around us, are our parents, siblings, children, spouse; friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and the people who serve us coffee and check out our groceries and handle our banking business. It's also the institutions of our lives, the places we go for shopping, employment, education, spiritual enlightenment, the places we volunteer our time to serve others. And it's the places that we go for refuge and entertainment, the bars and restaurants and movie theaters and our workshop or craft room or any one of the numerous screens that litter our lives.

The big picture map is the way which all of these things relate to each other and how we divide our limited time each day, week, and month among them. It is the question you might ask yourself -- at this precise moment, where are you? What is your relationship to the landmarks around you? How could you better connect with this set of people? What are you doing in your professional life and how could you be more engaged? How are you handling your retirement, and how could you be contributing more, giving something back to your community?

Most of the time, we don't ask ourselves these questions. We live our lives as if guided by a GPS going from one destination to another, from one place to another, from one relationship to another, oblivious of where we are on the larger journey of life.

Author Diana Trilling ([The Beginning of the Journey](#)) wrote, "We lived the whole of our early lives under the rule of postponement: life was not in the present, it was always ahead of us. Somewhere in the future we would be the people we intended to be."

At every stage of life, we look forward to the next stage when it will be easier. We imagine that just around the next corner, the traffic will disappear and we'll speed directly to our final destination at some fabulous vacation resort. However, infants in diapers give way to runaway toddlers, who turn into needy children who become rebellious teenagers who become struggling college students who become young adult living back at home. Professional life means working hard to earn a living and support a family, but retirement opens up far too many hours with not enough to do to fill them. Growing old together and taking care of each other turns into the loneliness of losing one's partner in life. The relief of not worrying about raising children is replaced by worries about how our children are raising our grandchildren.

Our tradition teaches that when Jacob was settled in the land where his father had lived, finally, Jacob thought that he could live in peace and tranquility for the rest of his years (Gen 37:1 and Rashi on 37:2). Rashi comments, "Jacob wanted to live in tranquility. but Joseph's trouble sprang upon him. The righteous want to live in tranquility, but the Holy Blessed One says, 'It's not enough for the righteous to look forward to what is prepared for them in the next world, they also want to live in tranquility in this world?!' " The midrash seems to say, "How dare any of us expect that just because we've worked hard that we have earned an easy life."

It's a realistic tradition, suggesting that we not over-idealize any given period of our lives. The journey of our lives, from the start to the finish, takes place over sometimes rough terrain. We can't always predict what will be around the next bend, because the map of our lives doesn't include the obstacles. We might and should have goals and destinations in mind, but the old Yiddish saying, *men tracht und Gott Lacht* reminds us that while we may make plans, God, behind the scenes, may be laughingly messing them up, perhaps because God has other plans in mind.

I spoke about my friend Rabbi Ronnie Cahana on Rosh Hashana. Before his stroke, Rabbi Cahana was known for his boundless energy. After his stroke, as he was beginning to recover some of his ability to control his body, he said: "[God] has given me the extraordinary gift of learning how to live in a new dimension. [God] has taught me to live in slow time. There's no more frenetic pace, no more [urgency] to be somewhere else."

Perhaps last week's sound of the shofar was God's way telling us that we should be "recalculating" our life's GPS. Are we spending too much time chasing the short term and not enough time enjoying the journey or looking at the longer term goals? Perhaps we are spending too much time rushing from one activity to the next and not enough time connected to the landmarks of our family and friends along the way. Perhaps the recalculation is to consider how much we are contributing to the civic, cultural, or religious communities we travel in and among. In pursuing your goals, are you leaving people stranded behind?

During the Yizkor service, we might remember both those whose lives blessed our own as role models and those whose lives blessed us by teaching us something quite different - how we don't

want to live our lives. Yizkor provides us with an opportunity to review the path we have taken and to consider making changes. Yizkor as a religious service is backward-looking, but as Rabbi Harold Schulweis observed, Judaism is more typically a forward-looking tradition. To paraphrase him:

Our tradition thinks in terms of *ought*.

Not what is a Jew, but what *ought* a Jew to be.

Not what *is* a synagogue, but what *ought* a synagogue to be.

Not what prayer *is*, but what prayer *ought* to be.

Not what ritual *is*, but what ritual *ought* to be.

‘Is’ is the trip from here to there, but *ought* is how that trip fits into the larger landscape of our lives.

Refocus from *is* to *ought*, and our mindset is affected. *Is* faces me toward the present; *ought* turns me to the future. *Ought* challenges my creative imagination and opens me to the realm of possibilities and responsibilities to realize yesterday’s dream. *Is* is being, *ought* is becoming. *Ought* is the freedom of spirit, emancipating me from status quo thinking.

May our memories during Yizkor help us transform from what we are to what we ought to be; may the rough edges of our lives, the things for which we atone today, be transformed into the smooth surfaces of *ought*; may the compass of our lives guide us with wisdom, paying attention to both the landmarks of our lives and to its larger purpose and direction.