

President's Perception. . .It is to Laugh!

I'm writing this commentary a week after the death of Joan Rivers. I'm hopeful it still has some "legs" when you read this in October, but I felt a loss after her death and that of Robin Williams. Whenever we lose an entertainer who makes us laugh, I feel a little extra sting. Of course, the death of a relative or friend is a totally different level of loss; but many of us also remember our close ones by recalling something humorous in their lives.

There has been much written about the deaths of Joan Rivers and Robin Williams. Both were at the top of their game when they passed away. Both had extreme personal highs and lows that were embodied in their humor. The loss of both of these entertainers left a hole in the hearts of many of us. I, for one, am a little sadder not seeing Robin Williams shooting manic one-liners over the airwaves or hearing Joan Rivers' cringe worthy commentary on the human condition.

When I was growing up, I listened to comedy albums and tried to catch the comedians of the day on television. I appreciated music, but as my friends were more into dissecting the lyrics and music of the singers and groups of the time, I was more interested in figuring out the comedy. Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Sid Caesar, Milton Berle, Bob Newhart, Rodney Dangerfield, Bill Cosby, and many more comedians that graced the airwaves. I became a Marx Brothers addict in college.

Today, give me a Jerry Seinfeld or Lewis Black live appearance. And I am still a sucker for the sketch comedy of Saturday Night Live, good or bad, and for outrageous as well as thoughtful comedy.

So, what does any of this have to do with Anshai Torah? I firmly believe that part of what makes us click as Jews, and as a congregation, is our ability to laugh, even in the face of all the troubling news we see regarding the rise in anti-Semitism and attacks on the legitimacy of Israel. I see so many happy people when I attend a synagogue function. Even when we discuss "shul business" there is a sense that we take our business seriously, but not ourselves.

So, as we begin 5775 let's continue to joke, laugh, and have a good time as we pray, learn and socialize. Joyfulness has always been part of the Jewish experience. Let's make our shul more welcoming by making everyone feel that humor is part of our congregation life. For Jews, this has been part of our history and for Anshai Torah it should be part of our psyche.

Howard