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Hope will find you

One of the perks of my job is receiving new books for review, sometimes arriving before they become available to the public. Many come by mail looking enticing, but I could not possibly read them all.

Recently one caught my attention with the title, *Hope Will Find You: My Search for the Wisdom to Stop Waiting and Start Living*. I couldn't ignore it, and once I started reading, I couldn't put it down. It's easy to read and the story moves at a fast pace. The author, Naomi Levy, takes complicated biblical texts and also simple everyday experiences and turns them into meaningful teachings that are easy to understand.

The book is about how Levy, her husband and their older son cope with an enormous challenge of raising a daughter who is disabled. The worst part is her doctors weren't sure whether or not what she had was degenerative and eventually fatal.

One of the key teachings of the book is that while most people have a particular goal for themselves and that is good, what happens is they put their lives on hold waiting until that goal is reached before they allow themselves to live fully.

Levy writes that as a rabbi, the most common human condition she helped to guide people through is "an overwhelming feeling that life hasn't yet begun." People would say to her, *My life will begin when...I lose weight, when I fall in love, when I get a job, when I get married, when I have a baby, when I buy a home, when I get divorced, when I quit my job...and so forth.*

In the book, Levy describes how she also does this while waiting to see if her daughter will get better, but it is her daughter who makes her realize that she doesn't need to wait, that hope will find her. And it does. Levy is finally able to resume striving for her goals that she had put on the back burner.

Levy writes, *...when you open yourself to it, hope is everywhere.... Once I started believing it, I started seeing it. Hope comes in the form of helping hands. It comes when someone offers the words you need to hear just at the moment when you need to hear them most. Hope arrives in all sorts of disguises.*

One of my favorite scenes in the movie *Eat Pray Love* is a perfect example of the exact opposite of waiting to live fully. This movie is based on a true story about a woman from New York, Elizabeth (Liz) Gilbert. Julia Roberts plays the lead role of this woman who had divorced her husband but jumps right into another unhappy relationship.

Never having lived alone, she decides she needs some time to herself. She takes a year off dividing her time traveling to Italy for the delectable cuisine, India for prayer/meditation, and finally to Bali, where she finds love.

In the prelude to the scene Liz is spending the day in Naples with a female friend whom she met in Rome. As they were purchasing new jeans in a clothing store, Liz admires a beautiful negligee she sees on a mannequin next to the cash register. Her friend asks her if she is going to buy it. Liz who is single at the time replies, "For whom?"

They leave the store, return to Rome and go their separate ways. Just before Liz reaches her apartment, she sees another gorgeous negligee on a mannequin in a store window.

In the next scene, Liz is in her apartment wearing that negligee from the store window, cooking herself a gourmet meal. She then sits down on her living room floor and slowly savors every bite. She obviously decided not to wait until she has a man for whom she will look attractive and for whom she can prepare and present a colorful and delicious meal.

My favorite scene from the book takes place one morning when Levy's daughter, Noa, wakes up with a terrible bout of ataxia, an inability to keep her balance. It was always worse in the morning, but this time it was so bad Levy had to hold her up so she could eat her breakfast without falling over. Levy suggests that she stay home from school that day.

It was the second week of second grade, and her daughter wouldn't hear of it. Noa said, "If I pray for a while, I'll be okay."

Levy writes, *She picked herself up, held on to the wall, made her way to her room, stood before the mirror, and started singing her morning prayers in Hebrew. She sang with great joy and purity. I was watching from a distance, not wanting to disturb her or make her feel self-conscious. A serenity started to flow through her body. I could see it. Her mood changed, her posture changed, her expression changed. When she was done singing, she walked straight up to me with strength and steadiness and said, "I'm ready for school now." And she was.*

What inspired me about this scene is that it demonstrates how simple, easy steps can make a big difference. This action taken by Noa could be done by anyone with a voice, even someone who cannot carry a tune or someone flat on their back. If one does not know Hebrew or the specific prayers, one can sing directly to God in their own words.

Several years ago, I wrote about a similar experience I had when I was feeling pretty sick, but after singing Shabbat Zimerot (usually joyous songs praising God) for about 45 minutes nonstop, whatever I had was gone.

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