

**SHEMINI ATZERET
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Seth Goldstein, age 17, a senior at Cooper Yeshiva High in Memphis, Tennessee was on the second loop of his cross-country race when he voluntarily fell behind to save the life of a runner on a rival team. This runner from a rival school in Germantown, Tennessee suddenly collapsed in front of Goldstein. Seth was the only one who stopped to help the boy.

Goldstein told *Knox News* that “his lips were turning blue and his eyes were rolled back in his head. I was terrified. But then I thought to myself, freaking out isn’t going to help any here.” He immediately called his parents and told them to call 911. By that time, the rival runner had begun to regurgitate blood. “He had bitten his tongue and was bleeding pretty bad,” Goldstein told another newspaper. “I feared he was going to choke on his blood. I rolled him on his side so he wouldn’t asphyxiate.”

A mother from the fallen boy’s school ran up to the pair just as the student began to have seizures. She heard Seth tell the boy as he started to come out of it, “You’re going to be okay. We’re here with you. You’re going to be okay.” The EMTs arrived shortly and took over the care of the injured runner. When it was clear that the runner would recover, Seth stood and asked if he could finish the race. It was only then that the mother and the EMTs realized that Goldstein was just another participant.

“The EMTs looked at me kind of funny,” Goldstein said. They’re like, ‘you’re racing? Well, sure, go ahead. I guess you can finish the race.’” He finished the race with the slowest time, but when he reached the finish line he was treated like a hero.

In our society winning seems to be the most important thing. In athletic competitions, in movies, in music, TV, and the media, coming out on top is always most important. Only recently we watched the Olympics and it was clear that the gold medal was the goal of every single competitor. Rarely did you hear that an individual was happy just being at the Olympics and not disappointed that he didn’t do better. Even second place never seems to be good enough.

Seth Goldstein was not the winner of the race, but he is indeed a winner. He understood that, in this case, the value of a human life was much more important than winning the race. It is no use wondering what we would have done under those circumstances, because it is difficult to put ourselves in his place. Yet, Seth is truly a winner and a hero. Seth, at least made it to the finish line. There are many others who don’t even get that far, and yet are still winners.

Tomorrow morning we will read the last section of the Torah informing us of the death of Moses. Moses, our greatest prophet, did not reach his goal. He wanted to cross the Jordan River and step into the Promised Land. He was not allowed to do so. Instead he climbed Mount Nebo and looked across the land knowing that he would never walk on its hills and valleys. Because he did not cross the finish line, was Moses’ life a failure? Certainly not. We continue to learn from his legacy and to recognize that Moses, our lawgiver and teacher, is still very much alive whenever Jews read or study Torah.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah reminds us that “no man dies with even half his wishes fulfilled.” We all have dreams that are never fulfilled; we have hopes that never come to pass; we have wishes that are simply never obtained. Sometimes it is critical to understand that the manner in which we look at life is the way we judge our own lives and that of others.

It is possible to look at life from the perspective of Ecclesiastes, Kohelet, the book that we read on Sukkot. It is an extremely cynical view of life and human existence. In the third chapter the author states: "For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as one dies so does the other, and both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both come from dust and both return to dust." This type of attitude will lead us to despair, frustration and suck meaning out of our lives. What can we attain if we know our time is finite on the face of this earth? Perhaps all is not lost if we see life as a challenge to be met and a journey to be taken.

A story is told concerning a king who had the most magnificent collection of jewels in the entire world. Hour after hour he would admire them and enjoy his jewels. One night he had a dream. He dreamed that somewhere in the world there was a ring, the most precious ring in the world which had special power: When a person was sad, it could make her happy; when a person was giddy and drunk, it could sober him and bring him back to himself; and when a person was joyful, it intensified and heightened her joy. When the king awoke from his dream he knew he had to have the ring and offered a fabulous reward for the one who might find it. Each of his advisors and ministers searched for the ring, but none could find it. Years went by and though they scoured the world, the ring was never found. Before he would confess his failure to his master, the king, one servant stopped one last time at a shop close to the palace. He described to the owner what he was seeking and described, too, all his trials of the past years.

The owner simply smiled. "I have the ring," he told the minister. "Come let me get it for you. It was given to me by a wise man many years ago. No one has ever appreciated its remarkable magic. Here, I will get it for you."

He brought out the ring which was neither gold nor silver, nor adorned with gems and handed the ring to the servant. The owner asked for nothing in return, only that the king treasure it.

The servant rushed to the palace informing the king that the ring was found. As the king opened the box he found a plain, unadorned metal ring. Could this be the magic ring? Then he saw that three Hebrew words were engraved on it, *Gam zeh y'avor* – "This too shall pass."

Over time the king came to realize the magical power of the ring. When he was sad, he would look upon it and it would remind him that "this too shall pass," and he would be consoled. When he was giddy and drunk, he would look upon the ring and be reminded that "this too shall pass," and he would be sobered and brought back to his senses. When he would experience true joy, real happiness, the ring reminded him that "this too shall pass." He learned to hold on to and appreciate those precious moments. He soon realized that this ring was the most valuable one in the entire world.

It is important that we put life into perspective and recognize that there will always be moments of success and also those of desperation. There are moments when we think we are winners and feel good about ourselves. And there are times when we can never even reach the finish line. This is what life is about. No one has ever been promised that their wishes, hopes and dreams will all be fulfilled, but we dare not ever stop dreaming and striving to fulfill those dreams. In his book, *Winners Never Cheat*, John H. Huntsman writes that "decent honorable people finish races – and their lives – in grand style and with respect."

A 20th century explorer, Ernest Shackleton, wrote that, "Life to me is the greatest of all games. The danger lies in treating it as a trivial game, a game to be taken lightly, and a game

in which the rules don't matter much. The rules matter a great deal. The game has to be played fairly or it is no game at all. And even to win the game is not the chief end. The chief end is to win it honorably and splendidly."

In a few minutes we will recite our Yizkor memorial prayers and recall all those in our lives who have allowed us to participate in the race of life. Some of them may have been winners, and others not. Some may have come close to the finish line and others may have lagged behind. While we do know what end awaits us, hopefully, our attitude will allow us to recognize that winning isn't everything and along the journey of our life we should keep in mind what the king learned from the magic ring - "this too shall pass," for while everything is temporal and finite we can learn to appreciate each moment of the journey.

Rabbi Harold Kushner in his commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* writes: "Life, if you will, is a work of art, and if we have paid loving attention to its details, we will be able to take pride in the finished product. How can an artist paint a picture or shape a statue, knowing that some stranger will buy it from her and she will have no way of knowing how much pleasure it gives its new owner? How can an author write a book which will be read by strangers living hundreds of miles away, and he will never know the impact it has on them? When we know the answer to those questions, we will understand why a person works so hard at living, at making something of his life, knowing full well that one day his life will be taken from him, and only other people will remain to remember how good it was."

Without a doubt, Seth Goldstein won the race, whether he received the trophy or not. He understood what is important and what is fleeting. Let us hope that when the story of our lives is told that we will have been judged to have participated in the race and to have run it honorably.