

Just do it!

• BATYA L. LUDMAN

The haunting words of one of the central prayers of the High Holiday services triggered all sorts of memories.

September 2, 1998 – 19 days before Rosh Hashana. Swissair 111 crashed over Nova Scotia, killing all 229 people on board. Working with the families, rescue workers and the community, it was a defining moment for me. Having previously discussed making aliya, this gave us the impetus. It was a reminder that life is short. Do what you want to do when you want to do it.

September 11, 2001 – 9-11. One week before Rosh Hashana, I conducted a series of psychological “debriefings” for the American Embassy and Consulate here in Israel. Another reminder that life can change in an instant.

Rosh Hashana, 2014 – Back in June, three young boys had been kidnapped and two days later I was diagnosed with breast cancer. On Erev Rosh Hashana, I finished my last radiation treatment. Gratefully, two years later, I remain cancer free: we never know what tomorrow may bring.

Rosh Hashanah, 2016 – A young woman married for just months loses her policeman husband, shot dead by a terrorist. Who shall live and who shall die?

As I sat in synagogue that dramatic refrain of “who shall live out his allotted time and who shall depart before his time” was a stark reminder once again to wake up and make each moment count, because we never know what tomorrow will bring. Over the past year, this country has faced numerous shootings, stabbings, ramblings and other terrorist attacks, yet we have responded with resilience. Now, after the holidays, it’s so easy to fall back into our old routines which, while comforting, don’t necessarily help us grow as we would like. This time of year presents the perfect opportunity to look after ourselves and achieve good mental health, putting meaning into our lives and imbuing them with purpose, striving to be more motivated to achieve our goals and to enrich our relationships with those we care most about.

True growth requires sustained effort, patience and time. Everything worthwhile is worth working on, so whether it’s developing a plan for achieving good health through adopting a healthier lifestyle, investing energy in helping your children concentrate more effectively, decreasing their “screen time” and developing good study and sleep routines, or focusing on getting an important relationship back on track, as one famous advertising slogan decrees: “Just do it!” Do it now, this minute.

A great deal of my professional work involves trauma and loss, and sometimes I am direct with my clients. A grown-up child sits in my office complaining about a sibling or parent with whom they no longer speak

My message rings loud and clear: If that person were to die tomorrow, what would you want them to know or to have told them? Are you really okay with not being on speaking terms forever? Before the opportunity is taken from you, how can you make amends?

A couple comes into my office. They’ve been fighting bitterly and are on the verge of breaking off their relationship, separating, or divorcing. My thought-provoking question is usually met with tears. If you were to learn that your life will end three hours from now,

estly and out loud, reframe them more positively, and start to tackle them.

3. What’s preventing you from getting started now? What would be helpful in enabling you to take that first step?

4. What baby step will bring you closer to achieving your goal? Be realistic and think small for success. Big goals, not broken down into small achievable steps, often feel overwhelming and we then abandon them and end up feeling worse.

5. Take life one day at a time and reward yourself for each step you’ve taken. Reward your efforts, not just your ultimate success.

6. Success is more likely when you write down your goals and a daily action plan to implement those goals. A visual time line can help show how far you’ve come.

7. Don’t just count the moments, but make every moment count. Live for, enjoy, and make the most out of each and every moment.

8. Are you just marking time and seeing life as one big set of negatives: burdens, obstacles and large hurdles, or are you positively enthusiastic and working up to your potential? Look at the messages that you tell yourself. Your “mind talk” can either be really positive, in which case you might not be reading this column, or negative, causing you to tell yourself you can’t do something before you even get started.

9. Do you appreciate your senses fully, and mindfully relish each opportunity to experience everyday events fully? Do you watch a beautiful sunset, hear the birds, smell the salt air? Do you waste your time, with minutes or hours that you will never get back, unaccounted for in mindless activity or oblivion to other people and the things around you? Do you get caught up in everyday “stuff” to the detriment of relationships?

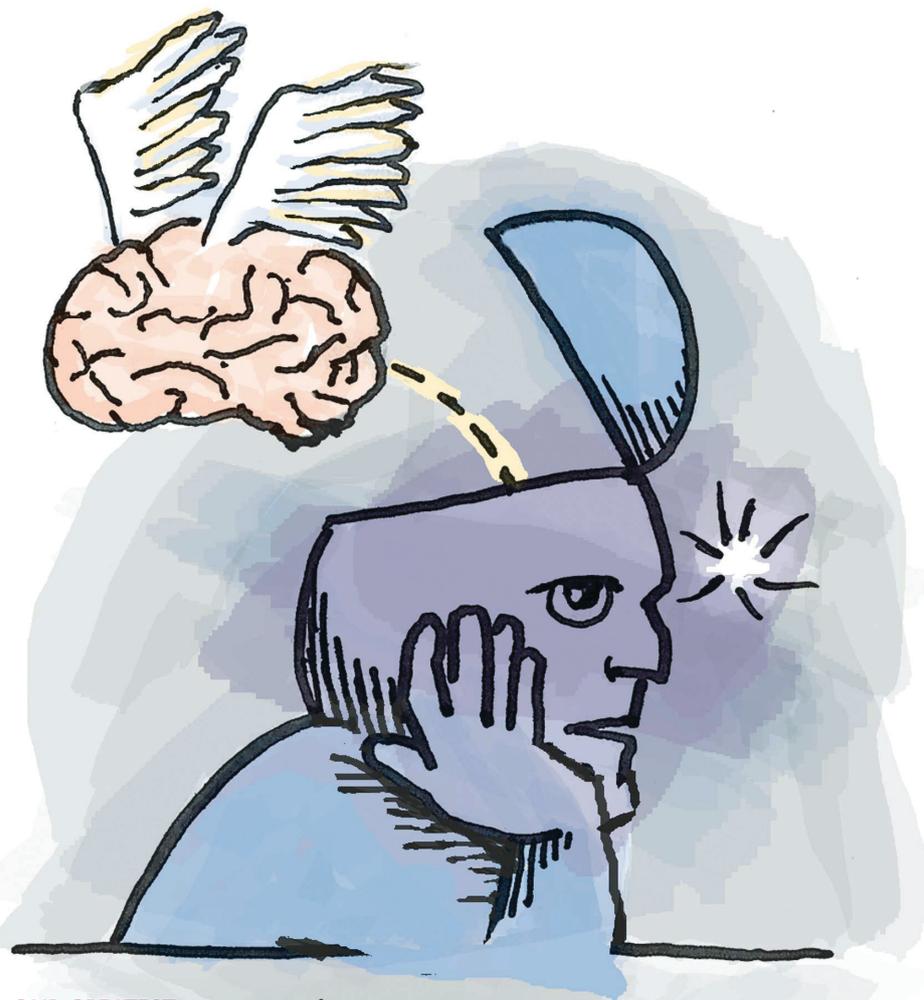
10. Do you appreciate what really matters? Do you go to bed angry with your partner, children or other loved ones? Do you say your “good nights” to those you love as if it could be the last time, telling them that you love them and knowing that when this chapter is closed, you can turn the page with no regrets, because you

spoke with kindness and worked to resolve any disagreement?

11. Work hard and don’t procrastinate. While that may have been okay up until now, one day you just might regret it.

Leaving you to settle down and accomplish both the easy and more challenging work that has been put off, with a week that finally has no holidays, I remind you that “just doing it” can feel wonderful in itself. Good luck! ■

The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Ra’anana, and author of Life’s Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts. Send correspondence to ludman@netvision.net.il or visit her website at www.drbatyaludman.com



OUR GREATEST regrets are often over what we didn’t do, not what we did do. (TNS)

with whom and how do you want to spend this time?

Our greatest regrets are often over what we didn’t do, not what we did do. Figure out what your dreams and aspirations are, with whom you want to spend your time, doing what you want to do, and then work as hard as you can to make that happen.

Here are a few thoughts to help you get started:

1. If anything were to be possible what would you like to have happen? Visualize it and allow yourself to enjoy this dream for a few minutes. How can you help make it possible?

2. When something is difficult to do, it is easy to make excuses for not taking that first important step. Write down and acknowledge your challenges hon-