

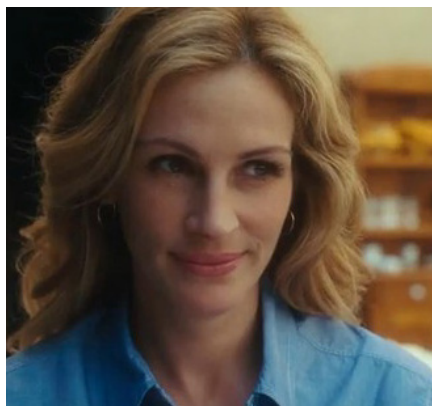
Starting Over

A sermon given in Sydney Australia
Rosh Hashanah 5771
9 September 2010
By Bob Mendelsohn

So many global situations cause us to ache. And to worry. And to wonder. And to wish we could start over.

- For instance, each week the last 2 years our ears have been hoping to hear the words, “The Global Financial Crisis is over.” But the pundits and our wallets remind us, the crisis is not over and won’t be over for a long time.
- BP would probably want to do it all over again with their spot-checking on the Caribbean blow-out preventer in their oil drilling rigs.
- Nine years ago, on September 11 the ugliness of terrorism hit the West, in a harsh airplane-cum-torpedo crash against the towers of the World Trade Center and the US Pentagon. And arguments persist to this day about the use of the area for a mosque or a memorial to the 2900 who died. Starting over is crucial for that neighbourhood.
- Every week since maybe forever, we Jewish people and so many others hope for peace in the Middle East and so far, even if Presidents Bush or Obama so declare the military mission over, there is little evident peace. Even though the large statue of Saddam Hussein fell, I’m guessing the people in Afghanistan or Iraq are wishing seriously to start over as well.

So what is it about starting over which so captivates us? I actually pondered presenting my talk today starting badly, and then literally starting over. But that would be too cute, you know?



Come 7 October you can go watch Julia Roberts in the movie, *Eat, Pray, Love*. I won’t be recommending that movie as the morals are too weak and the conclusions too shallow, but the theme is visible and tangible. It’s the story from the book by Elizabeth Gilbert, of a middle-aged woman who has a crisis and goes on a search, a search to start over. It’s a coming of age story, but a different age than the usual Hollywood teenage coming of age. There are so many ages, and so much coming...it’s hard to keep track.

(For those online, read this hysterical review/parody from Pete McMartin in Vancouver, Canada:

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/entertainment/movie-guide/Bleat+flay+loathe+search+Cineplex+screen/3436679/story.html>)

There are so many movies and books and much of our lives are spent on the theme of starting over. It’s when one world ends and another takes its place. Last year when Denzel Washington in the movie *The Book of Eli* walked and walked across America, he was starting over and helping the world to start over. (IMDB describes the movie as “A post-apocalyptic tale, in which a lone man fights his way across America in order to protect a sacred book that holds the secrets to saving humankind.”)



The story is not a new one. Reba McIntyre sang Dolly Parton's 1980 song "Starting Over again" and references Humpty Dumpty and the inability of all the king's horses and all the king's men to put him and the older divorcing couple together again. Brokenness is a tough reality, when the world is broken, when the life we had is gone, when nothing seems in place and there seems no hope, no solution to help us get back to the Garden.

This week, we've finally seen our government self-organize. We have a 2nd chance to follow Julia Gillard, in her 2nd season as Prime Minister of Australia without being elected by the people. We had little to say about it, as voters, but hey that's representative government for you.

When you want to start again, it's good to hear the words of life coaches like this lady from the US, Barbara Waxman MS/MPA, for her insight into handling change, gaining confidence and how to deal with starting over at any age.

Q: What is the most important tip you'd give someone about starting over?

A: Be sure to have closure to whatever chapter you are ending. Recognize what you will miss and acknowledge it. Think about how you will want to add that back in at the appropriate time. Think about what lessons you've learned and what you won't repeat -- be conscious of this step because as you know, many of us repeat past mistakes. Once you've experienced closure then you are ready to begin creating your next chapter. Not starting over -- but adding on to your life story.

(<http://advice.eharmony.com.au/article/starting-over-5-important-tips.html>)

Today's reading from the Bible may be a good place then to hear more. It's the story of the birth and beginnings of Samson. It's recorded in Judges chapter 13. (For those online, the chapter is in full at the end of this texted sermon)

Here we see the typical biblical yearning, the longing of a family for its own future. This is a time of captivity, similar to our Egyptian sojourn that preceded the Exodus, similar to the times of the Roman occupation in the First Century. The Jewish people were aching, longing for help. We longed for freedom from foreign invaders. We longed for God to be our King.

As if that situation isn't bad enough, we see a family with no hope for making a difference. Into that situation this little family comes into view. Headed by Manoah and his unnamed and sterile wife, a baby is actually born. We find out later in the rest of the book of Judges, that this son will save the Jewish people by decimating the Philistines.

That's pretty amazing. Darkness of gloom and despair. Darkness of sterility and hopelessness all around. And into that darkness comes the light of hope, in a baby. Born in Zorah.

The name "Samson" is derived from the Hebrew word "shemesh", which means the sun, so that Samson bore the name of God, who is called "a sun and shield" in Psalms 84:11; and as God protected Israel, so did Samson watch over it in his generation, judging the people even as did God. Samson's strength was divinely derived (Talmud, Tractate Sotah 10a); and he further resembled God in requiring neither aid nor help. [Zorah is also the name of an Egyptian sun god which is in line with other sun-worshipping villages in the area, Esh-Taol (valley of fire) and Beit-Shemesh (house of sun).]

In licentiousness he is compared with Amnon and Zimri, both of whom were punished for their sins. Samson's eyes were put out because he had "followed them" too often.

Friends, I tell you the story of Samson for our learning. In the book of Hebrews, chapter 11.32 we read of his name in the list called the Hall of Faith. "For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets."

Samson is a story of starting over. And it's a microcosm of the people of Israel as well. Now, don't let me lose you. You may have heard a 'starting over' sermon 20 years ago, or last year. And if that be so, you may be growing weary of it. But think about what God is saying to you.

Every year we start over at Rosh Hashanah. We kindle candles and eat round foods. You know, the round challot and the apples and honey remind us of the circle of life, the cycles of years that start and end and keep on coming. And each year, we add another digit to last year's total making today 1 Tishri 5771. We buy new calendars and it appears to be new, but this is not true. We are hoping for things to be really re-newed.

The story of Samson shows us a man born in time, in desperate times, needy times for the Jewish people. He gives us hope, not because he will usher in a new heavens or new earth, but he will lead us into conquest in the midst of the situation of Philistine enemies in the same dust and dirt of Gaza.

We don't start a brand new calendar, but have a continuity. We are not creating a new diary, but continuing the old one. Don't see that as hopeless; this is supremely hopeful.

Hundreds of years later we move along Jewish history and see another era of occupation and Jewish angst. We are looking for a hero, a deliverer. And that's when Y'shua arrives, in equally unusual circumstances as Samson. He too has a name given by an angel. He is named particularly for his mission to come.

Y'shua lives his life in Galilee and then one day he steps into public view. His career begins officially when his cousin names him "The Lamb of God" and describes what he will do as taking "away the sin of the world."

Now that's unusual twice.

Then Y'shua steps up on the stage of Jewish history and like Samson performs miracles and feats beyond himself. There is no attribution to hair or something so natural. Y'shua says this is all due to His Father allowing Him to do such things. It's not about nazarite vows, but there is something heavenly about the power to perform.

Fast forward to the end of three years of public ministry.

Friday was a tough day, in the last week of Y'shua's life. The night before he had Passover seder with his friends, and disciples, and then all hell literally broke loose. A friend dobbed him in. A kangaroo court ensued. Justice, whatever that was, followed. The Romans ordered the crucifixion of Jesus.

The world for him ended. The world for many ended. Hopes of a messianic age and a redeemer to knock over Rome...shattered at once. The skies turned black. The earth shook, some titled it a tremor, others an earthquake. They had no Richter scale in those days, but it was massive. And darkness shrouded the land of Israel. It was over.

But for God it wasn't over. The ground received the blood of Messiah. The earth received his depleted body as loving hands readied him for burial and themselves for the crushing reality of Shabbat without The Man. But God knew what would happen.

On the 3rd Day, Y'shua rose from the dead. He started over, and for nearly 6 weeks he encountered his own and others and shared with them the depths of the Kingdom of God and how to really live a new life, how to live a life that starts over. Then he ascended, or some say flew, into the skies and his followers stood gazing into the heavens. Their disorientation continued until the Holy Spirit fell on them and the ministry of Y'shua burst into their lives in a rich and real way. They started over. As a unit and as an unstoppable unit at that.

Listen, the world as we know it continues, through its floods in Victoria and Pakistan, through the seismic disruptions in Christchurch and Chile and Haiti, through economic downturn one after another.

All the while, God is holding out His hands to us. He longs to give us eternity as well as capacity to live a heavenly life on earth. We must choose to start over. We must live in the power of the One who literally did start over, as a resurrected Saviour

The rabbis teach us that the power to make our lives new is in our hands. We must act differently and amend our ways. I have nothing against their instructions. But they are weak. They are man-centered. The way to repair our lives is not human. The stories of Samson reminds us that human fervor and human effort is not the way to save the nation.

Only Y'shua is our Saviour. Only He can save us as individuals. In the strength of faith in Him, as the writer of Hebrews says, can any of us ever please the Almighty.

So let's make 5771 a new year. A time to start over in confidence and love, to support each other, to make the name of the Lord known in our workplace and in our neighbourhood. Then for many, it will be a new year. For them and for us, we can all start over.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO or CONSIDERING THIS FAITH:

Perhaps you are new to this idea of Jewish people believing in Jesus as the Messiah. If so, we welcome you to our website and to this page. I hope you will consider what He did, in dying for our sins, and in rising from the dead. Jewish people all over the world are believing, one by one, in the person of Y'shua as our kipporah. Please come back to read/listen to our Yom Kippur message and this will all be clearer.

If you are ready to respond to God's invitation, and receive Y'shua as your messiah, then right where you are, stop and look up to heaven. Ask God to forgive you for your sins, the things you have done wrong, and for rejecting him before now. Ask him to make you born again to a living hope. Ask him to lead you and to be your shepherd, your Saviour, your Lord and your life. And he will!

Then tell one of us, won't you? We want to rejoice with you. Thanks and shalom.

TEXT of the SERMON

Judg. 13.1 ¶ Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

Judg. 13.2 ¶ And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.

Judg. 13.3 Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman, and said to her, “Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son.

Judg. 13.4 “Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.

Judg. 13.5 “For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

Judg. 13.6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name.

Judg. 13.7 “But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

Judg. 13.8 ¶ Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom Thou hast sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.”

Judg. 13.9 And God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her.

Judg. 13.10 So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me.”

Judg. 13.11 Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to the woman?” And he said, “I am.”

Judg. 13.12 And Manoah said, “Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy’s mode of life and his vocation?”

Judg. 13.13 So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Let the woman pay attention to all that I said.

Judg. 13.14 “She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.”

Judg. 13.15 ¶ Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a kid for you.”

Judg. 13.16 And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD.” For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.

Judg. 13.17 And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?”

Judg. 13.18 But the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”

Judg. 13.19 So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on.

Judg. 13.20 For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.

Judg. 13.21 Now the angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah or his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD.

Judg. 13.22 So Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.”

Judg. 13.23 But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time.”

Judg. 13.24 ¶ Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him.

Judg. 13.25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.