

Out behind North High School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin is a most unusual section of sidewalk. It is covered with names and handprints. While that would normally cause distress among school administrators, in this case when the school district renovated the area, they sold squares of opportunity for anyone who wished to leave a greeting in the cement.

Okay, the high school parking lot is hardly Grauman's Chinese Theater, but the idea was related, no doubt. Everyone wants to make an impact, to leave something for all time. Cement at the parking lot is a concrete way to demonstrate that the world was different because this person lived. The square of concrete proved someone left an impact in life.

No one wants to go through life unnoticed. Someone should remember us, someone should recall who we were, that we were, and that we had some impact on a life. We're here now at the יזכור service, to give ourselves a chance to remember.

Do people always make a lasting impact? Unfortunately, no. Earlier this year a comment was made to me: there are some people who walk through life but don't leave any footprints. It was a terribly sad, but still an apt description. A person can walk through life and not leave any footprints, any record of having gone through life. There are people who do that. The wording was stunning; the thought behind it magnificent. It was the truth; it was terribly sad. Sad because when a life comes to an end, it's nice if those who review the life of one who died can find at least a footprint or two, some kind of record which indicates the world was impacted because the person they remember was.

How we walk through life is up to us. No matter how we live, we can leave footprints as we go through life. We make choices which determine how and when and where we make footprints. Aside from the unavoidable circumstances of life, we have the chance to leave footprints, when we want, how we want. Indeed, we have the choice if we will try to leave footprints in life at all. But, really, is there anyone alive who would choose not to be remembered?

Therefore, we have to consider what kind of footprints we leave. We determine where we walk and what the record of our journey will be. We can leave footprints on the world, even if not large ones. Ultimately, the size of the footprint we leave is not as important as is the path they indicate that we have followed. Where we leave our footprints will show what was important to us. Where we leave our footprints can serve as a guide for those who remember us to know the path we would like them to follow.

Some people are content with, if not proud of kicking sand in people's faces, rather than leaving footprints. Some people, some running for office, seem to live by the words "any publicity, even bad publicity, is better than no publicity."

Where do we leave our footprints? Will those who follow find our footprints in the garden of Judaism and the flowerbed of Torah? Will they see we walked regularly amid the blossoms of our heritage? Will they see we went there repeatedly to learn and to be refreshed? Will they know that the Jewish part of our life was something we felt was beautiful, that we valued and want others to value? Will they see the dancing footprints marking the celebrations of Jewish life? Or will the only Jewish footprints they see be ones of sadness leading to the cemetery or for reciting yizkor?

Will our footprints indicate that the path we chose was focused on personal glorification and personal gratification? Will our footprints be found near items of lasting value? Is our choice of where we tread guided primarily by how much attention we will get or how much money it will make for us? What a terrible thing if our footsteps will be seen only at places where personal gain is involved. We have the choice of the kind of footprints we leave.

We leave footprints when we make the world a better place to live by tikkun olam. Isn't that what we did last night when we brought food for the food drive? Does a can or two of food cure world hunger? No. But the footprint is left when our children and members of the congregation see us care enough about someone else's hunger to bring food on this fast day. Yes! Footprints are left by bringing food to the collection box which is here all year around. Small footprints, perhaps, but one which shows others what is important to us. Isn't that a place we would like our footprints to be seen?

We leave footprints by giving reusable clothes and furniture to organizations which make use of them. We leave footprints when we donate items to help refugees find a new home in Syracuse. We leave

footprints when those we love see us provide tzedakah, not just money but time and involvement, to Jewish causes. That is a case where the footprint left is measured by the regularity and commitment.

If we choose to do tzedakah by giving, but our giving is accompanied by kvetching, it degrades its value. And that leaves a footprint. If we give only when coerced or asked; if we give yet complain that giving keeps us from having what we want, that, too, leaves a footprint ... in concrete.

We leave footprints in the lives of our families. The kind of footprint we leave is determined by *how we live*. As I've met with families before a funeral, we look at the footprints person who died has left. I'm often told that being Jewish was important, but the footprints only show Jewish friends of the deceased, but there were no footprints by any Jewish activity.

Of course I've heard it said over and over again, "Rabbi, family was so important." Of course, people must think I expect they will say that. So they say it. Even when it's not really accurate. We know by looking at their footprints. We see that when reviewing the person's actions, well, they often show a very different path having been taken. Family was important, but not as important as: time at the gym, time at work, time with friends. There were footsteps near family, but never footprints which showed involvement with family.

If we want our footprints to show a family path, we have to walk the walk. Are times for family sacred? If there's a choice between business and family, what's our choice? We choose between going to Synagogue with our kids or dropping them off or that none of us go; what's our choice? Are times we make for being with the family as important, as sacred, as a business appointment? Look for the footprints. We know it's true. Who has ever spoken to someone in their last days who says they wish they'd spent more time in the office? When we say family's most important, do we leave footprints, or just voiceprints?

To leave footprints for our families we don't have to give them a Porsche. Better to give time to help with homework. A smartphone's a great gift, but not as important as talking with them about their lives, their concerns, their hopes and dreams. Buying them Jewish books is a start, but taking an active interest in their Jewish education will leave a real footprint.

The spiritual footprints we leave in life are more important to those who follow than is the stuff we collect. If a new car or new clothes mean more to us than trying to understand ethical and moral issues, footprints are made. If we'd rather talk about technology than the election and the serious issues it raises, that leaves a footprint. If the measure that we use in judging another person is how much stuff that person has, is how we measure a person's value in life, footprints are left. Do we want all our footprints to appear by a bank vault? We should leave some in the chambers of a heart.

We leave footprints when we help those we love with the problems in their lives. Sometimes we have to leave a footprint on someone's behind, helping them to realize their anti-social or addictive behaviors are not acceptable. But we help when we show them, with love, that their footprints are headed towards personal destruction and collapse. We help when we help them to see the reality of their choices and show them the path to help. We leave footprints in life when we say, and mean it, that we will help them to a new future, that we will not hold up past mistakes they have made up for ridicule, but that they have to take the first steps to doing it.

We leave footprints when we show real concern for others. That means choosing our path which take into account feelings beyond just ours. It means thinking about other's feelings and taking them seriously, understanding that others, too, have feelings, desires and needs which may be different from our own.

Leaving footprints is something we always do. To leave worthwhile footprints, well that's a bit harder. It takes consistent effort and readiness to do. The right footprints and the paths of those footprints will show those who come after us what was important to us. From our footprints they will know our path; from our footprints they come to know us. And it shouldn't be hard.

Is it really worth it to put that much effort into footprints? Yes, it's because of the footprints left in our lives that we gather here now. Because we can look at the footprints of those we remember, and find out

much about them. We know what was important to them. We know where they went and what they did. And we can do the same.

Even the footprints on the backside can be helpful, if we choose to focus on the message and not the pain; if we consider the *meaning* not the *mean* spirit. From those we can learn where not to leave our footprints.

When it comes to leaving footprints in life, will the best we can do be to buy a square of cement and step in it? Will our footprints help guide those who see them towards good things in life?

We should live so others will want to follow our footsteps.