

Erev Rosh HaShanah 5784

Another Take

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Narrator: The scene is a movie production lot with trailers, outdoor sets, and long buildings containing indoor sets. The Director is standing outside in the middle of the lot, making notes in a movie script. A pile of books sits next to her on a makeshift shelf. The time is five hours ago. No one else is there...until *he* shows up.)

Ploni Romyid: (Walks onto bimah and speaks into mic) Is this your movie set?

Director: Yes, I'm the Director and this is my set. Who are you?

PRY: I'm Ploni, Ploni Romyid. (looking around) Did everyone else go home already?

D: Well, you know, production had to shut down for awhile. It's taking some time for all the actors to make it back.

PRY: It must be great to be making movies again, right? Last month I saw my first movie in a theater in years.

D: How was it?

PRY: Great show. I'd forgotten how vast the big screen feels. But I also felt like I was hoping for something that didn't happen there.

D: You mean in the movie?

PRY: In the whole experience. I realized I wasn't the same as I had been before, but the movie and the routine of going to the theater hadn't changed. Has your movie lot changed at all from before?

D: Nah, I've been working on this lot for years. I went through a few other lots a long time ago and scrapped them. Anyway, now that we're back, my movie's gonna be different. This time no plagues, no floods.

PRY: Why the change?

D: We lost focus before. I kept repeating myself. Do this. Don't do that. Over and over. The actors got very cranky. This time I want the actors to take charge more. I think that way I just may get the movie of my dreams.

PRY: What's it called?

D: My movie's called "Wonder."

PRY: What happens in it?

D: I don't know yet. It's about wonder and amazement. What we take for granted. A cute lady bug. My dog barking when she knows it's dinnertime. That we can heal each other by getting closer. That the universe is expanding and the sky hasn't fallen. That we sweat when we need to. That we can imagine the unimaginable. That you showed up—even if you won't tell me your name.

PRY: I told you, my name is Ploni Randomyid.

D: We both know that is not a name. Ploni is a Jewish John Doe. Ploni Randomyid means John Doe the random Jew. I'd love for you to tell me who you really are. But if you want to be Ploni for now, fine. I'm happy to keep talking.

PRY: What's your name— Wonder Woman?

D: Well, I suppose some people call me that.

PRY: Cool. So, Wonder Woman, what problem drives the plot of your Wonder Movie?

D: There is one conflict after another and people get jaded. They become less compassionate. They want to connect, yet they're afraid to trust. And Wonder gets further and further away.

PRY: Have you thought of writing in a Superhero to fix the problems so they can get to wonder?

D: All the characters are superheroes. But they have to figure that out over the course of the movie.

PRY: It sounds like a very long movie.

D: It's turning out to be way longer than I'd expected.

PRY: Do you have the right actors?

D: In auditions they were great at improvising and expressing emotion. When we started the movie they trusted me and each other. I still have faith in them but I am getting concerned.

PRY: Hmmn.

D: Also, I don't know if you can tell, but the set's starting to crumble. The crew thinks I should stop filming so we can all work on saving it. It's a gorgeous and intricate set and I'd hate to lose it.

PRY: Yikes, could it collapse when the actors are on the stage?

D: The thought does keep me up at night.

PRY: Aren't you frustrated, what with all the conflicts and the set falling apart?

D: Patience is one of my virtues. Well, not always. But I really want to make this movie.

PRY: Why don't you push harder, then? You're the Director!

D: I used to get more involved but the impact didn't last. I thought if I gave the actors more agency there'd be more investment. So, now I'm more of a resource and a support. If this movie comes out well, it will be amazing and totally worth it.

PRY: What keeps you going?

D: I love my actors.

PRY: (Looks at his watch) I've taken a lot of your time. I should go.

D: Don't worry about *my* time. I wish more people would spend this much time with me.

Narrator: Ploni Randomyid starts to walk away. He notices a book on top of the Director's pile.

PRY: Hey, are you reading this?

D: Yeah, I'm reading an interview Carl Stern did for NBC News way back in 1972 with Abraham Joshua Heschel. Stern asked Heschel what surprised him lately. Read what he said.

PRY (reading out loud): Everything surprises me. This may be my weakness. You know, you once quoted a statement from the Book of Ecclesiastes: "There is nothing new under the sun." And I disagreed with that statement. I would say there is nothing stale under the sun except human beings, who become stale. I try not to be stale. And everything is new. No two moments are alike. And a person who thinks that two moments are alike has never lived. The secret of it is a very profound principle of philosophy....Do you know that among a billion faces in this world, no two faces are alike? The other day a person complained to me that he went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and he was bewildered because no two paintings looked alike.

D: There's nothing stale under the sun, that's what I'm trying to get across. But people are afraid of wonder.

PRY: Hey, I really like this (Reading): As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Humankind will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder. (*God in Search of Man*, p. 46).

D: Exactly! He really got the idea.

PRY: May I ask: Does your cast argue over meaningful stuff or are they just acting like jerks?

D: Sometimes I want to throw the book at them, People of the Book—my script—that they are—but I have to say that most of what bothers them is significant. Everyone's looking for answers.

PRY: You think they can get to Wonder?

D: Like I said, if they let their guards down and figure out how to trust again, they can get to Wonder.

PRY: I've got some ideas for that.

D: *You* can stick around if you want.

PRY: Actually, you already hired me over Zoom. I start right after Rosh HaShanah.

D: Wait, what? You're in the cast of Wonder?

PRY: I'm an extra. I wouldn't expect you to remember me.

D: I don't have extras. I will remember you when you tell me your real name! Seriously, what's with the alias?

PRY: I have Director issues.

D: Be that as it may, let me be the first to wish you a Shana Tovah.

PRY: L'shanah tovah. May it be good. I mean it. And with good reviews.

D: And may it be sweet. I mean it, too.

PRY: Amen.

D: Amen.

(Both laugh)

Narrator: Ploni Randomyid puts the book down, and the Director walks off the lot. But Ploni was not done.

PRY (returns to the mic and looks around): Wait—I didn't even get her name!...That was amazing!...Wonder, let's get to work!

Narrator: Ploni Randomyid leaves the lot. Having not gone far, the Director returns.

D (returning to bimah): Where'd he go? Just when we were starting to connect! I can really use that Ploni Randomyid! I'll write *his* name in my book.