

Has anyone ever heard of a “geo-cache?” It is a concept that was only recently introduced to me. Essentially, it is a high-tech treasure hunt. You see, people - any one who wants to - can hide treasures all over the country and then report the exact latitude and longitude of its location. Using a GPS, you track down the treasure.

GPS - stands for Global Positioning System. Originally designed for the military, the GPS communicates with at least 3 satellites orbiting the earth, and through triangulation, determines exactly where you are on the planet. This is the same technology used in car navigation systems.

So, anyway, you enter the coordinates into your GPS and it guides you directly to the treasure. People hide all sorts of things in geo-caches, ranging from a simple pad and pencil (to leave a note saying that you found the geo-cache) to large ammunition boxes filled with fun chachkas that you are welcome to take (provided that you leave something of your own in return).

This past weekend a friend and I spent many hours of our camping trip looking for geo-caches. The easy ones were right on the side of the road, hidden under some rocks. The harder ones involved strenuous hikes alongside streams with no definitive paths. We got scratched up by branches and underbrush and got dirty and wet, but we had a blast!

The hardest hike we faced in our quest for the geo-cache treasures was a 3 mile hike straight up a mountain. Once we had climbed up over 1600 feet and reached an altitude of 6500 feet above sea level, we were winded and exhausted, but determined to find our treasure. We followed the GPS to exactly where the treasure was supposed to be... but it wasn't there. We looked all around the area, but it was nowhere to be found. Having just about given up, we decided to explore the rest of the mountain top.

It was then that we found the true treasure. Straight out of a mystical story, we found a blind man sitting on top of the mountain. To be sure, he was no ordinary man. Our first indication was when he introduced himself as “Crazy Dave.”

He proceeded to tell us his life story and I was captivated. He had been an alcoholic and addicted to drugs, and his life was quickly going downhill until he moved up into the mountains. He regularly makes that climb that exhausted us. He says the mountains healed him. He was now living a clean and sober life, and enjoying every minute of it.

My focus shifted from this remarkable man to the inspiring vista, and back. Too often during our conversation I wanted to remark on what an amazing view it was. Fortunately, I was able to catch myself each time. I had to remind myself that he wasn't up there for the view.

It was getting late and my friend and I mentioned that we needed to get going to reach the bottom of the mountain before dark. That's when his simple words really reached deep inside me. He stated plainly that getting down the mountain before dark wasn't an issue for him. In daylight or darkness the journey was the same.

As we raced down the mountain to beat the setting sun, his words echoed in my head. For me, especially when camping, daylight sets the agenda and guides our actions. Meeting this blind man reminded me of how much I took my vision for granted, and at the same time, helped me to realize how dependent I was on it. Dave, in some ways, was liberated by his lack of vision.

As we continued down the mountain, I kept thinking about him. I instinctually wanted to go back to help him down the mountain. I had to remind myself that he was much more comfortable on that trail than I was. If anything, he could help me more than I could help him.

And in fact, he already did. He helped me to realize that the treasure I'm looking for, isn't always the treasure that I'll find. And sometimes, even if I can't always get what I want, I may get what I need.

Even though the Rolling Stones wrote a song to that effect, there is also a great Jewish text that conveys a similar, and even more profound message. If you'd like to read along with me, please open your siddur to page 23. At the top is a selection from Pirke Avot, "the Chapters of our Fathers." It reads: Rabbi Ben Zoma says:

Who are wise? Those who learn from all people.

(I certainly learned a valuable lesson from this self-proclaimed crazy blind man.)

Who are strong? Those who control their passions.

(This is also translated as controlling their impulses or desires.)

Who are rich? Those who rejoice in their lot.

(After all, if we are always happy with what we have, how could we want anything else?)

Who are honorable? Those who honor others.

(By respecting the words of this socially unique man, we received the highest honor.)

This text is one of my personal favorites, and now through my experience, it has gained an even greater sense of depth for me.

Although a good portion of my weekend camping was spent in search of treasures, I realized that the true treasures lie inside myself and those who I meet on my journey. We may not have found the geo-cache treasure on the top of that mountain. But we certainly found a treasure much more valuable:

we found a blind man who taught us to see.

Shabbat Shalom.