

Stand Where You Are and Serve with Love

Three strands to braid together, as I braid together the three strands of dough when preparing challah for Shabbat or a *chag*:

1. What it is like to serve while standing still after decades of serving by driving, flying, and moving almost constantly to fulfill my service as extension agronomist, foundation program director, or as founder and leader at Fair Food Network?

It does not feel as if I have reduced my effectiveness. I'm not sure how I ever had the energy to travel as much as I did. I now feel a life more filled with equanimity and joy.

As I gain years of life experience and deepen my learning and teaching as an elder, steeped in the work of Reb Zalman's Age-ing to Sage-ing™, I realize even more deeply the importance of slowing down the constant movement, harvesting the learnings and experiences that have come my way, and using it all to help forge a legacy for the future.

2. I am reminded of Shawn Zevit's words in his rendition of the Amidah – the great standing prayer. He asks us: "What do you stand for? What is your life's meaning?"

My beloved and I often listen to this as part of our Kabbalat Shabbat ritual on Friday evenings. It is humbling to be reminded weekly the importance of these questions in my life and in the collective lives we live and intertwine with each other. All of us.

On this most holy of days, at a moment of time in our lives, in the life of our country

and democracy, and in the life of our planet – can there be any more important question for us each to ponder than “What does my life stand for?” “How can I best stand right where I am and serve with love?” Or as Reb Zalman might have suggested, that we look inside to remember our deployment in this lifetime and recommit to the service we have been placed here to provide.

3. My deployment as earth healer and food system rebuilder was handed to me early in life. As life conditions shift for me and all of us, I simply pray that I remain up to the task and that as I stand more still I continue to hear the messages that can guide my thoughts and actions.

There is one additional deployment that has become profound and ever-present – deployment as a grandfather (“Grandpa O”). To truly be present with my young grandchildren, with whom we are now living in northern Michigan, requires both constant motion and standing more still to take it all in and serve them with love.

As I braid these strands together to continue a life of service – to family, to community, to our earth – may we all find ways in the coming year to find even deeper answers to the question “What do I stand for?” As the answers come, may we find ways to put our insights into action for the healing that is so deeply needed.

Oran Hesterman

September 28, 2020