

In 1978, Diana Nyad attempted her first swim from Havana to Key West. However, dangerous ocean swells and strong currents pushed her off course, forcing her out of the water after 42 grueling hours.

Diana kept swimming and she was setting records. She swam 102 miles from the Bahamas to Juno Beach! But still, she dreamed of swimming from Cuba to Florida.

After four failed attempts, due to an asthma attack, venomous jellyfish stings and raging storms, she began her fifth and last attempt from Cuba to Florida in 2013. Keeping on course by following a line dragged in the water by a support boat, she hummed her favorite songs in her head helping her concentrate. For part of the journey, she wore a bodysuit, gloves, booties and a special mask to protect her from jellyfish. After nearly 53 hours in the open water, the 64-year-old successfully swam to Key West, where she staggered ashore and was greeted by a crowd of supporters.

She cried out to the amazed crowd:

“Never ever give up

You are never too old to chase your dreams

It looks like a solitary sport, but it is a team sport”

Believe it or not, Diana and I have a few things in common, no I haven't swum from Cuba to Key West but we both grew up in South Florida, and we both graduated from the Pine Crest High School in Ft. Lauderdale, and her advice to all of us resonates deeply within me. It inspires me and helps me reflect on the most meaningful and memorable moments in my life.

First - Never ever give up

You are never too old to chase your dreams

It looks like a solitary sport, but it is a team sport

I will never forget my first-time visiting Israel when I was 16 years old. While I grew up surrounded by a vibrant South Florida Jewish community, I had not fully comprehended what it meant to be Jewish, to have roots going back thousands of years. Just like Abraham who is commanded in the Torah to walk the land of Israel, each step I walked there, introduced me to people and places that would shape me. From the bustling streets of Tel Aviv, to the winding alleys of the Old City of Jerusalem, to the incredible hikes in the Negev - each step added a layer to what was becoming a life changing experience.

I believe real change happens slowly, day by day, habit by habit, step by step. I made my way back to Israel, trip by trip, studying one year at a time. Somehow looking back, I spent 15 wonderful years in Israel, earning my degrees, serving in the IDF and finding my wife, my bashert!

And what I realize today, as I think of Diana Nyad, is that there was no easy path, or pass, to achieving my goals. Everything took more time than I expected and did not come easy- learning to type in Hebrew, getting my driver's license in Hebrew or even understanding that if you want to order french fries you need to order "chips" - all that took *HARBE ZEMAN* - lots of time.

But this slow and steady journey helped me realize that some of the best things in life are done slowly. A really good brisket can't be microwaved. A good shmooze can't be rushed. Maybe that's why tonight, as we welcome a new year, we take 10 days to work on ourselves before Yom Kippur. You see, real change takes time, and these 10 days of Teshuva, of repentance, honors real change and acknowledges that self-reflection and yearning to be our best is a process, not a resolution.

Ten days might not seem like a lot of time to change, and while that is true, these 10 days are plenty of time for us to reflect on what we need to change and how we will get there. In 10 days from now we will hopefully clean our slate, open a new page and begin a new journey based on the **character traits** we have come to develop in the next 10 days.

And for those sitting here today, those who already gave up on trying to change, because you tried many times before - and failed - I encourage you **DON'T GIVE UP!**

Remember - Diana jumped in the water for the fifth time, at 64 years old, and one kick at a time, for 53 hours, and swam her way to Florida.

As we enter this new year, may we be blessed with the time, the energy and the encouragement to never give up on our **belief** that change is possible, that by **'living courageously'** we can achieve our goals no matter how long the process takes.

Next ... *You are never too old to chase your dreams*

According to our tradition, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when their dream came true, when Isaac was born. Shimon Peres, the late prime minister of Israel once commented,

“You're as young as your dreams, not as old as your calendar”.

It was a dream of mine to become a rabbi. Though deep inside I wanted to become a rabbi, I tried everything else first - I tried law school, computer engineering and even thought about becoming a professor. Each of these experiences served me well to affirm what I knew, deep inside, that being a rabbi was my true calling.

And so here I am, finding myself speaking tonight in front of this amazing community that has become my family and home over the last year - Temple Judea.

And while my **baby face** might be deceiving, I am actually in my forties, and sometimes, especially at the end of a long day, I can feel pretty old, but never too old to dream. And as some of you may know, I have many dreams and tonight I want to share one dream with you.

I have a dream, that the Torah belongs to all of us...each and every one of us. This means that you don't need to have a PhD, be a rabbi, or speak Hebrew, in order to engage in the wisdom of our rabbis, the tales of the Torah or the traditions. The rituals and traditions can enhance our lives in so many ways. Jewish values inspire us to dream, to accept challenges, to help one another, to learn something new, to be who we are meant to become.

This year - may we dream together, celebrate together, and yes, let us study together and share life's great joys and oys together. I look forward to hearing your dreams about how you see your future, how you see our joint future.

By 'living courageously', -we can dream together.

Finally,

It looks like a solitary sport, but it is a team sport

I was surprised to hear that swimming was a team sport, but I learned that: Diana needed help the entire time she was swimming at an estimated cost of about half a million dollars! Diana needed a boat with a crew to navigate

her and feed her! She needed a medic, in case she collapsed in the water.

[Living courageously flourishes in a supportive community.](#)

On Rosh HaShanah, we tap into the power of being part of a supportive community. Though a person can pray on their own, make amends on their own and learn to blow the shofar on their own, - there is a tremendous power in celebrating the holidays together. Those of us who are here, are here because we are so grateful to be part of this vibrant TJ community.

In fact, one of the main reasons Abbie and I wanted to be part of Temple Judea is the sense of community we experienced from the first moment we stepped through the doors on Hood Road. I immediately knew that here - with you - I can be the rabbi I want to be, that I was called to be. I believe in TJ's motto - that joyous Judaism leads to action. I believe in the incredible power of being part of a healing community. I believe that a congregation that sings together lifts us all up. I believe that integrity and speaking from the heart enters the heart.

Since this is technically our second Rosh HaShanah here, Temple Judea is already our home. Although it is not new, I am overcome with excitement for this new year in person! My vision for us is that we continue to celebrate life's precious moments through song and prayer and that we find strength in community and wisdom from the Torah to help us navigate our lives. I plan to get to know you, what keeps you up at night and what gets you up in the morning. I am so jazzed up about all the new families who are joining and able to experience the joy of Judaism in the most wonderful ways. I am over the moon seeing our Temple youth and young families in person, learning, building friendships and discovering for themselves the gifts of being Jewish.

I am here to always remind us that we need each other and can lift each other up, we can find strength in community! Take a look around... or think of someone who has lifted you up when you needed it and reflect on those who you were able to help, comfort, and encourage.

And I want to finish with a Jewish teaching that came to mind when I read the incredible story of Diana -

It's a teaching about swimming

According to the Talmud, our rabbis say that

“A parent’s obligation to one’s children involves teaching them Torah, assisting them in getting married, and helping them learn a profession”. Some add, a parent is also obligated to teach children to swim.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that our rabbis advise us that it is a mitzvah to teach our children how to swim. This is of course to ensure their safety, but I believe there is another message here as well. I believe they want us to [live courageously](#).

Sometimes we will have to jump in the water. When we can’t rely on moving forward on dry land, where we do not have firm footing, we may need to dive in, headfirst.

As we say goodbye to last year and welcome in 5782. Let it be a sweet new year. Let us have the courage to dive in. Let us have the courage to make amends, let us have the courage to forgive. Let us have the courage to try new things, let us have the courage to try things again. Let us have the courage to never ever give up. Let us have the courage to chase our dreams and let us have the courage to work together and lift each other up. As Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright and founder of modern theatre said, “Oh courage... oh yes! If only one had that... Then life might be livable, in spite of everything.”

Shana Tovah!