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Rabbi David Gutterman tells “the story of Laura Shultz.... Several years ago I heard the story directly from one of the participants in the drama. Shultz was a grandmother living in the Orlando, [Florida] area and on this particular day she was busy in her kitchen preparing some of her grandson’s favorite foods. He had come to visit and though the weather was rainy and inclement, nothing was going to stop this young boy from being outside and playing in the woods near her home. But as she was in the kitchen, [Laura] heard an ominous sound of skidding tires and somehow, intuitively, she knew that her grandson was hit by a car. This sixty five year grandmother made a dash for the door, sprinted toward the street, and tragically confirmed her fears. He was pinned under the car. Rather than run back to the house to call 911, she ran to the car and with the strength that comes with adrenalin and the heroism that no doubt comes through necessity, she did something virtually impossible. Shultz lifted up the car allowing her grandson to be extricated.”

Rabbi Gutterman continues. “A reporter from the Orlando Sentinel, from whom I heard the story, heard about this unbelievable feat and desperately tried to contact Mrs. Shultz to do a human interest piece. Perplexingly enough, she refused to be interviewed. But as a reporter is wont to do - he kept persisting in trying to “get the get” and Laura Shultz kept refusing. It seems that she was even more adamant than he was stubborn. In time, this reporter left the Sentinel and left Orlando. Some years later, now a prominent motivational speaker, he returned to Orlando for a speaking engagement. He decided to finally find Laura Shultz and ferret out the real story. He went to her home unannounced and introduced himself as the man who kept trying to get an interview. She turned cold. But after some time, and a few cups of tea, the reporter brought up the issue one last time.

“Mrs. Shultz, I truly don’t understand,” he said. “Why are you so set against having your incredible story in print?” he asked. Listen to Laura Shultz’s reason for refusing to be interviewed ... ‘If I, a sixty five year old grandma at the time was able to lift up that car — can you imagine what I could have done with the rest of my life?’ I am skeptical if this really happened, but the lesson is real enough.

Our tradition is insistent that one of the key questions being posed to us during this holy period of the year is not, “why am I not like Moses, ... [Einstein or Laura Shultz] — but ... am I ... the person that I am supposed to be?”

Isn’t this really one of the central questions of the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, the High Holidays? Am I fulfilling my individual potential as a human being? If not, as I evaluate myself, do I have the strength of mind to make a decisive change to move in a better direction – that is really what *teshuvah* is all about.

And isn’t this also part of what goes through our minds as we recite Yizkor? We remember loved ones, some loved more and some loved less, who gave us life, or who profoundly influenced our lives; what memories do we have in those few moments as we recite an *ayl maleh rachamim*, or words of our own? Don’t we flash on their essence – did they really love us; did they show it and did we show it to them; what fleeting memories speed by – a childhood event, a bar or bat mitzvah moment, perhaps a wedding or the birth of a grandchild? Do we passingly admire their careers or their giving to charity or do we bemoan that they did not do enough, either professionally or personally? Did they make the most of their lives? And, of course, as we stand or sit

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here, the clear question is: are we making the most of ours? What will our descendents think about some day, hopefully far off, when they remember us?

Rabbi Janet Marder notes: "Each year about 2,300,000 people die in the United States. Each year, about 4 million babies are born. 'At the moment of birth,' writes Russell Baker, 'each tiny howler is all potential. He may become Socrates; she, Cleopatra. She may become Catherine the Great; he, Al Capone. Anything is possible at the instant these new people greet the world. Each new life begins an exploration to discover what its potential may be... when reading an obituary we have turned to the end of the book to see how it comes out. Death is the end of all that awesome potential that the infant brings into the world, and each obituary is a tale about how well someone fulfilled it.'

For more than a year The New York Times published a daily snapshot of a life: A small photograph, a paragraph of commentary, and a headline

summarizing a life that was lost on September 11, [2001]. 'She was really tough' - the headline summing up the life of Karen Hagerty, 34 years old, who was loud and funny - a take-charge kind of gal - and crazy about horses. ... 'Handyman and lawyer'-describing Captain Walter Hynes, a firefighter who put himself through law school at night, father of three daughters, who had "no free time," as a family member said, 'because he was always doing for everyone else.' And 'Sisters, Always Together,' summing up the lives of Lisa and Samantha Egan, 31 and 24 years old, who were the closest of friends and worked together at Cantor Fitzgerald. ... Each one was once a newborn baby, a vessel of infinite possibility. Each is now a rounded and finished tale, whatever its length, of potential thwarted or beautifully fulfilled. ... "

In the Torah reading two weeks ago, "The Lord said to Moses: "*Hen karvu yamecha lamut* - the time is drawing near for you to die."(Deut.31:14) "Parshat Vayelech, ...centers on the question of how to go on without a person who is essential to our lives..." as Moses was to his generation. For many of us, we are reminded of this question at Yizkor – how do we go on when a parent, or spouse, or – God forbid – a child of ours dies? As we contemplate and subconsciously evaluate the lives of loved ones, are we not simultaneously evaluating the potential of our own?

It struck me in the last few weeks that two men must be engaged in this evaluation of meeting the potential of their lives: former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Jimmy Carter has drawn much public attention on two occasions in recent years, without implication that he has not been involved in other significant activities. In November 2006, President Carter's book, Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid hit the bookshelves and became a bestseller. I do not want to review all the criticism of the book, but merely to remind you that one of the chief critics of the book and its author was Alan Dershowitz who had been an early supporter of Jimmy Carter when he first ran for the presidency. Dershowitz wrote extensively detailing factual errors and pointing out the former president's close financial connection to Shiekh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan and to Saudi Arabian oil money. The Shiekh was known as an anti-Semite.

Then, about two weeks ago, "former president Jimmy Carter told NBC's Brian Williams in an interview ... that he believes race is at the core of much of the opposition to President Obama.

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He said: "I think an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man, that he's African American, ... And that racist inclination still exists. And I think it's bubbled up to the surface because of the belief among many white people, not just in the South but around the country, that African-Americans are not qualified to lead this great country. It's an abominable circumstance, and it grieves me and concerns me very deeply." Carter made the remarks in Atlanta. He was interviewed in connection with his 85th birthday; ...

The day after President Carter's comments, news services reported "The White House says President Barack Obama doesn't believe he's being criticized because of his race.

Spokesman Robert Gibbs said Wednesday that Obama — the nation's first black president — doesn't think that criticism of his policies is 'based on the color of his skin.'"

Surely, if President Carter was unhappy with the White House response, he could not have been looking for comments like the one in the Toronto Sun on September 23rd by PETER WORTHINGTON,

"If a case can be made that Jimmy Carter was the worst U.S. president in living memory, it's indisputable that he's the worst ex-president in America's history.

In a life filled with gaffe's and catastrophic decisions, his most recent observation that 'an overwhelming proportion of the intensely demonstrated animosity towards President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man,' is pure twaddle.

Worse, it is mischievous, divisive, unsupported by evidence and ill-behooves a former president whose very position attracts attention of those whose greatest desire is to hurt America."

It is easy to understand that at 85 years of age, Jimmy Carter wants to prove that he is still able to fulfill his potential. But misguided causes, poor scholarship, and dubious financial supporters seemingly will prove to future generations that he failed to enhance his legacy in these areas. That is not to say that there is no racism in this country, but as we are all too aware, there is still anti-Semitism as well. Neither Jimmy Carter, nor anyone else, will bring an end to either any time soon.

In contrast, former President Clinton seems to have found a much better use of his time and talents. President Clinton founded the Clinton Global Initiative. This description of the project comes from the website. "President Clinton and the **William J. Clinton Foundation** established the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) in 2005 to turn ideas into action. A non-partisan initiative ..., [the] CGI moves beyond discussion, fostering a sense of shared responsibility to address major global problems. From presidents to academics, from the boardroom to the classroom, CGI members from all walks of life are effecting positive change. ...

Does the Clinton Global Initiative have any political affiliations?

CGI is a nonpartisan initiative, bringing together a carefully selected group of the world's best minds and most distinguished problem solvers to focus on practical, effective measures that can be taken now. These leaders come from a wide variety of political, ideological, religious, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds, and include current and

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former heads of state, top business executives, preeminent scholars, and representatives of key non-governmental organizations.

What makes CGI unique?

CGI is unlike other world conferences in one respect: it is determined to change things now, by discussing some of the world's most pressing problems; detailing successful responses to them; seeking the best new solutions; and most importantly, requiring each participant to make a specific Commitment to Action."

"Since 2005, commitments made through CGI have already affected more than 200 million lives in 150 countries."

Is President Clinton trying to improve his image, his legacy? Doubtless he is. I guess that he is also trying to fulfill his potential in ways that he might have fallen short during his time as the sitting president. I suspect that President Carter has identical goals, and perhaps his work for Habitat for Humanity falls in the same category, and he might have done well to stay focused on that effort.

But it is not only past presidents who need to be concerned about their legacies or fulfilling their potential. That is a task for each one of us. We are each blessed with certain gifts, talents and interests, both professional and casual, that could benefit others as well as ourselves. Part of the reason we remember the past is to learn from it. What is the best that we can learn from those whom we remember at Yizkor? What is it that we want to change in ourselves to make the most of our potential? We do not have to be a past president, nor wait, like Laura Schultz for a tragedy to act decisively to fulfill our unique potential. We cannot let past failures or years haunt us. We could be ever mindful of the stumbling blocks of many including these three individuals: Thomas "Edison was a poor student. When a schoolmaster called Edison 'addled,' or slow, his furious mother took him out of the school and proceeded to teach him at home. "As a freshman in high school, [Michael] Jordan joined his school basketball team.... a year after joining the team, as a tenth grader, he was cut from the varsity team."

Albert Einstein probably did not fail math as a child, but his "life after college was nothing to brag about. ... He could not find a job.... Einstein went jobless for over eight months after graduating from the Zurich Politechnikum. Then in June 1902, Einstein got a job at the Swiss Patent Office in Bern with the title of 'Technical expert third class."

We are never too old to express love or friendship; we are never too old to help others or to inspire them; we are never too old to seek and bestow forgiveness or to reconcile with a long cut off relative or acquaintance. While we are able to think, there is still time for us to strive to fulfill our individual potential in some area of life. If these issues are not a large part of what we contemplate when we sit here over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, then we need to reexamine not only the liturgy, but the value in being here.

G'mar tov.