

NAME

God Shaped Hole MP3.mp3

DATE

April 3, 2022

DURATION

32m 7s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation.

[00:00:05] Speaker2

So who thought when you came to WellSprings this morning that you were going to get a tutorial in the Yiddish language? Guess what you are. And by tutorial I mean you are perhaps going to learn two additional Yiddish words. Which some of you probably know already. One of them is Tsuris, which roughly translated means worries, aggravations, anxieties. The other is nachas, which autocorrect loves to make into nachos. And nachos actually fits with nachas, at least because I love nachos. Nachas means intense feeling of of gratification, joy of blessedness. All right. Tsuris meaning. Good enough for the goyim. Sorry. It's not all of you. I know. Nachas meaning. Awesome. So my dad, who died last November 2nd. At the age of 88. He joked, although not entirely joking, said that he had been working on a play over the last couple of decades, which turned out to be the last couple of decades of his life. Think of it as kind of a Jewish-American, upper middle class story of a husband, father, grandfather. Kind of like Fiddler on the Roof. But with one song and not just one song, but really just a verse of a song. And the play was called Tsuris. Now, before I show you the lyric of Tsuris, I want you to know that the. The first act of the play tsuris ends like this. Hey, Dad, guess what? I'm going to be a Unitarian Universalist minister. That's that's the one scene that my dad established in Tsuris. This is the lyric.

[00:02:44] Speaker2

tsuris, tsuris, tsuris That's all I've got today. tsuris tsuris tsuris When will go away? Tsuris, tsuris, tsuris What hath my God wrought? Tsuris, tsuris, tsuris, nachas can't be bought. "If I Were a Rich Man", it is not. But it's not bad. By Sanford Beldon. My dad had some insight into himself. He was pretty good at making light of some of his challenges in this life. And my dad lived with an awful lot of tsuris. Worries, anxieties. Aggravations that got kind of under his skin that at least part of him knew. He would rather they didn't. But they did. That's the not funny part of this. There are reasons. That my dad was very familiar with tsuris. Not just as his son, but perhaps even more so now as a full time mental health practitioner. I understand the reasons. An early childhood that was marked by certain kinds of developmental trauma that led to a lifelong, not terribly close relationship with his parents and estrangement from his younger brother. The untimely death of my mom. When she was 47. A number of traumas that led to my dad being beset by anxieties. And it was a big one. It's actually the one that I knew the least about. It's the one that my dad hid the most intentionally. My father was a veteran of the Korean War. And as I've shared a little bit over the years, I'm going to share a little bit more about today. He for years did not convey the truth of what his involvement in that war was.

[00:05:09] Speaker2

For years. The story went that he was drafted, helped him get some GI Bill money, helped him progress, reach prosperity in this life. But the truth is, my dad did see conflict. And fighting in the war. And it left him. As much as I can tell. Pretty deeply scarred. Part of what has happened in the time since his death in little bits of drips and drabs, a little conversations with friends, stories shared in some cases 30, 40, 50 years ago, a conversation shared, I believe, in 1967, even before I was born. Over, as was my dad's. Want a few too many drinks? The story came out that. The commander of his unit. His battalion was killed. My dad being forced into a firefight, took out a number of the enemy and actually was awarded with a medal citation for that. Again, this conversation happened so many decades ago. Part of what I'm going to do this summer when my ministry is over here is dove into that history and to see what it is that I can actually find out. But my dad never told any stories of medals or heroism. My dad didn't tell any story at all about that to me. One other piece that we've been able to find out. And again, it leaves a hole or an outline, but not a full story. Is that after my dad was discharged from active service, the Korean War.

[00:07:02] Speaker2

He came back to Washington, D.C.. And stayed there for several months. And what? I might and my family might assume is some form of 1950s PTSD treatment. Again? Don't know exactly. I share all this with you. Because there was a hole in my dad's soul. Some of you on Facebook. Friends with read the obituary we posted for him. My dad had tremendous accomplishments. Rodale Press, an organic gardening magazine in prevention magazines and gardens that he built, cooperating with a certain number of high profile political personalities and people for folks who were unhoused or whose capacity to access food and shelter was challenged. My dad did all these things. And it was never quite enough for him. It was never quite enough for him. There was this gnawing anxiety. That he lived with. And perhaps some of you. Know that experience. And perhaps some of you love. People here still living or dead with that experience. I know I am not alone in this. As being related to someone who carried painful burdens. I've been thinking a lot about my father. Particularly in connection with this message series. Which are calling the great integration. And takes as one of its inspirations, this movement. That we're seeing now, kind of not so much a movement as a trend. Well, it's called the great resignation. Of people perhaps looking for deeper wholeness or work life balance. Or more integrity in their relationships. More places where their lives might sync up. More perhaps yearning for wholeness.

[00:09:34] Speaker2

We don't know what it means yet because we're in the middle of it and we won't know what it means for quite a while. I see it in my mental health work. The sense that although I don't share this with clients. I can see part of their story as my dad's story as well, too. This yearning for wholeness that has not been addressed. And that certain ways that we have organized this culture, this society, this economy. Well, kind of reminds me of The Matrix. Not Life in the Matrix, but what the Matrix is. Which is essentially a system of extraction for energy. Based on trauma. So many of us. Are still making sense. Of what the last two years have meant. And we'll continue to for such a long time. In connection with this series. It's caused me to look more deeply within myself. And so in some ways the timing is perfect that after today I only have three more messages left here before my ministry comes to the close to close at the end of June. I am someone who absolutely wore his busyness as a badge and counted the number of double digit hour days. As a source of pride. And please hear this. I don't regret everything I did, especially in the early days of WellSprings to help WellSprings Come to thrive as a community. But I now do have a different perspective on that pride of busyness as a badge. Because the truth is.

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There was something underneath that. Which was this gnawing sense that unless I was productive. My unworthiness would show. This is something familiar to many of us. It is a burden I have intentionally set out in my own healing process to work with and to relieve myself of. This is the recovery within my recovery. Recovering from alcohol use disorder. I got to say, it was much easier. Then the recovery from the feeling of my unworthiness. It's been relatively easy for me to go 16 and a half years without a drink. To wake up with an inner feeling. Of love and peace within myself. If I'm not doing a good job at my job. That is not so easy for me still. But it is healing. Part of that healing is sharing the story with you. I have a confession to make here a little bit. And it might. I recognize land differently depending upon what our experience has been over the last two years. So I'm not asking my experience to be yours. As we've had the two year anniversary of the start of the pandemic. I've noticed myself yearning. Yearning for this first couple of weeks of the pandemic. I am not praising the means or the mechanism of the virus. Please hear me on this. It is saw as cause such tremendous disruption and suffering right from the get go. So I'm not praising that. What I'm finding myself yearning for is something akin to the days of the weeks.

[00:13:54] Speaker2

Even closest analogy I can think is after 911. Something perhaps as close as we might ever get in this culture in this country towards a sense of unanimity. Or feeling as if our eyes were directed, our hearts open to a sense of normalcy. Being put to the side. And something more like care. Coming to the fore. The opportunity to care for those most vulnerable. The opportunity to care for those who are the carers. That's what I most in addition to the disruption and having to relearn my job onto a computer versus being in person. That's what I remember for those first few weeks, and it didn't last long. And I'm not saying we should have gotten stuck there or stayed there. What I remember in that shaking of the foundations. Was a glimmer. Of a different world. A more compassionate and honest way of being. The most consistent guide and reading that I've held within myself is I'm going to read you right now. You won't even see it up here. It's by Pablo Neruda. Was the poem keeping quiet? I've used it actually as a source of meditation and contemplation, and I wanted to read it to you right now. I'm going to ask you to go inside with it, maybe just close your eyes and see how it lands with you today. Now we will count to 12 and we will all keep still. For once on the face of the earth. Let's not speak in any language.

[00:15:50] Speaker2

Let's stop for a second and not move our arms so much. It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines. We would all be together in a sudden strangeness. Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales, and the man gathering salt would not look at his hurt hands. Those who prepare green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire, victories, with no survivors, would put on clean clothes and walk around with their brothers in the shade doing nothing. What I want should not be confused with total inactivity. Life is what it is about. I want no truck with death. If we were not so single minded about keeping our lives moving and for once good to nothing. Perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death. Perhaps the earth then could teach us as when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive. Now I'll count up to 12. And you keep quiet. And I will go. I adore that poem. Especially now two years in. When at some point in the next month. We will reach a milestone. Of 1 million people in this country dead. Where is that grief? It's the loss. The collective mourning. It is largely. Save for a few public expressions absent. And this is not new, by the way. There is an Atlantic article. One of my favorite go to sources over the last couple of years. Article from The Atlantic magazine. They said, How do we think I'm paraphrasing the title, how is this normal? Talking about the death.

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And it's not new. From that article said this After the 1918 flu pandemic, there was no large scale effort to memorialize the substantial losses. It was tied up in over one. And President Woodrow Wilson tried to avoid projecting weakness by even acknowledging the ravages of the pandemic. I'm not trying to shame any of us around this. Because shame won't help us grow. What do we do with all this grief and all this loss? I mean, if two years ago, before the word COVID 19 was on our lips, we just said a million people are going to disappear now who are alive. And yes, some of those people were sick. And yes, all those caveats, which are things that we say. To push the grief away. What do we do with the grief and the loss? What do we do with the weakness, quote unquote? Last few months, I've tried to understand, as many of us have, what the hell is in Putin's mind? For this madness and this horror that we are seeing in Ukraine. Maybe you've heard this quote from Putin. And perhaps it's not that far from us. Or at least it's on a continuum. The lesson Putin said that he took from the post-Soviet world is that we demonstrated weakness and the weak are beaten. It is not easy to show weakness and grief, although I think it is profound.

[00:20:06] Speaker2

Strength is in fact. Seen often by the world as a weakness. And so to not show it. Not expressed loss or sadness. In ways that hopefully feel safe. Sadly, it's been a part of America since America's been America. Right. Some of you know the name Resma Menakem. African-american trauma treatment specialist. Who has asked those of us with white skin. He came or his ancestors came to this country. Essentially as colonizers. To look into the pain of our lineages. The people that we came from who fled. Horror and suffering. When I read Resma Menakem, I take him seriously. What I started to see is this so called Protestant work ethic. Even for those of us who aren't Protestant. What if it's a mental health symptom relabeled as a virtue? It's kind of a controversial thing to say. Well, maybe not. There were moments in my dad's life. In my case in which I could see something trying to break through. He would sit and listen to the song. Amazing Grace. Over and over again and cry. Back when people were still making like, burned CDs. Remember when we all used to do that? I made him a CD with 25 different versions of Nothing but Amazing Grace, and it was one of the favorite, favorite gifts he ever received from me. My dad, like so many of us, experienced what is often known in recovery circles as a god shaped hole. That he tried to fill with all that achievement.

[00:22:16] Speaker2

And yet it never was quite enough. Now my own use of that word. God, I want to be careful here has changed a lot in the 17 years I've been here. Wellsprings. You might notice my preaching. I don't talk about God a lot anymore. It's not because I'm an atheist. It's just that I don't think talking about God as a concept does all that much. And even the word God I actually find pretty unhelpful these days because it comes with a whole bunch of baggage. For me. Tick, not Han. He of blessed memory and continuation and said it best. The concept of God can keep us from touching the God of non fear, wisdom and love. That is a pointer. Towards what it is to fill the God shaped hole, but not as a content once and for all, but as a kind of relationship with this life. There's some really great pointers that help me. Paul looks great sermon. You are accepted. Accepted by that you may not know the name of, but simply can we accept acceptance? It's been my biggest, biggest burden. My life. Mary Oliver, there's a. There's a podcast, a story that she told years ago in an interview that she did, she blessed memory in which she simply said, Nature saved me. There's the God shaped hole being filled. But you see it's relationship. It is a relationship that fills the God shaped holes within us. Of ourselves. With ourselves. Of ourselves with each other.

[00:24:06] Speaker2

So a story I want to tell you right now. Is a story that didn't happen to my dad. And I really wished it would happen. I really wish it would happen. But stories like this exist. And they are real. It comes from this book. Rebecca Parker, who is a Unitarian Universalist and United Methodist minister. And Rita Nakashima Brock, who is a disciples of church, disciples of Christ, excuse me, theologian and minister herself. It is one of the most profound, both personal and theologically enriching. Epix I want to call it book doesn't quite capture it. Argument against the idea. That violence can ever be wholly. And that suffering is somehow a sign. Of God's will for us. Rebecca, who I know somewhat professionally I've met a few times over the years, tells a story of one of her congregants named Bill. Bill was married to Martha. Who was on the board of. Rebecca's church. Bill was nearing the end of his life. Losing his battle with brain cancer. And Bill asked if Rebecca would come see him. He said, I'd like you to hear my testimony. And they sat together and build hard, started to tell a story. About his service in the Korean War. He said. I was a young man serving there and we were in the jungle for months and we were exhausted. I was there with my best friend Joe, and all the rest of the people in my unit. And we were given an order that I knew would be a suicide mission to take this particular hill in the jungle.

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And I argued with my commanding officer about it. And still we had to do it. And nearly every man in my unit was killed. And I held Joe. The sweetest and most honest man I ever met in my arms as he died. After that. I felt done. I felt as if I had failed as a soldier, as a man, as an American. And I came home and I drank for 20 years. At this point, Rebecca said. Bill took his arms around him and he started hugging himself and rocking. He said. And then with Martha's love. I found recovery. I found people who would listen to my story and not tell me I was right or tell me I was wrong, but would simply listen. He said, Now what? I know. And he started. Beating out the time of his own heartbeat. Hand on chest. That this is my manhood. That I can love. That I can grieve. That I knew what was right. And that I can share this with you now. Bill took Rebecca's younger hands in his old. Wrinkled and worn hands. He said, This is my testimony. And I just needed you to hear it. I'm just going to sit with that testimony for a second. And I will say, Dad, that was for you. Thank you all for witnessing that. There's a quote. That's attributed to the Dalai Lama that perhaps you have seen social media.

[00:29:20] Speaker2

Dalai Lama didn't say it. Bill or excuse me, David or set it. The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers. Healers restore storytellers and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it. It's not either or, right? Won't have to stop being successful to live this way. My dad lived a lot of this way. He did. I just wish she could have felt it a little bit more. But his son does. I can see from your faces that you do to. In whatever ways we can today. May we be among the healers and the storytellers. And the lovers of every kind. Even if it is just. Attending to our own holes in the soul. Amen. May you live in blessing. Would you pray with me? God whose name is not God, but something even greater. And yet as intimate as this very breath. May we invite ourselves to be among those. Who do the work of the Hebrew tikkun olam. The healing, the mending of this world. We invite ourselves to be those who allow ourselves to grieve when grief is called for. Because scratching the surface of grief, we find their love again. And it is love that heals us. Amen.

[00:31:55] Speaker1

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