

Jewel of Elul #4, Posted on August 14, 2010

Rats by Eli Roth

As many of you know Eli Roth is an Jewish American film director, producer, writer, and actor. He portrayed Donnie Donowitz in *Inglorious Basterds*.

I'll never forget the rat infestation in my apartment on 25th Street in New York City. I was 25 years old at the time, working as a production assistant for \$100 a day wherever I could. The building next door was under construction, and ripping up the ground dug up all the rats that came with it. Suddenly they were everywhere. I'll never forget the day we spent wearing breathing masks and rubber gloves, scrubbing our apartment from head to toe, tossing the rotting carcasses into a trash bag. At one point I looked at my brother and said 'I'm 25. I have \$300 in a bank account. Most of my friends have professional degrees, houses, and health insurance. And I'm cleaning up dead mice in a sweltering walk-up on 25th Street.'

My brother looked at me and said, 'Yeah, but you won't be for long.'

Six months later I moved to California, and after another three years of asking everyone I ever met for money, I raised the financing, and I was directing my first film, "Cabin Fever."

But I'll never forget that moment I bottomed out. Looking back, it was the best thing that could have happened. I think in life we tend to expect things to happen for us because we want them to, and you need moments like that to remind you that simply wishing for your dream isn't enough. You have to take responsibility and make things happen for yourself.

It took me six years to raise the money for "Cabin Fever," but I did it and eventually sold the film for double its cost. I'd like to thank those rats. Their rotting carcasses gave me the final push I needed to take matters into my own hands and create the future I had always dreamed of.

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Eli Roth is not alone in his experience. In fact, we often hear about people who as Eli says, hit bottom and are able to pull themselves up again. Most of us know, and many of us are, people who began with very little and created a comfortable and successful life. We know people who suffered great hardship as children or adults and were able to rise above them. These people are inspirations for the rest of us. They give us the courage and strength to keep moving forward when we feel our path is permanently blocked.

As we face these hardships and obstacles, it's often difficult to know when we come up against situations that are truly insurmountable and when it just feels that way to us. It's often difficult to sort out the assumptions and the reality of the situations we are facing. And we frequently need help from others to accomplish our tasks.

It's also often even more difficult to overcome an emotional or spiritual dilemma than a physical, economic or educational one. It's usually easier to identify

ways to approach something that is more concrete, easier to make a list of actions to take and people who can help us take them, easier to put the items on that list in order of importance and then check them off as we complete them.

It's often much harder to overcome an emotional or spiritual hardship. Many of us try to push our feelings down and just keep on going, hoping that these feelings will eventually go away. Maybe we are able to cry and turn to those around us for comfort. But for most of us allowing ourselves to feel as much hurt, fear, shock and pain as we need to is just too hard.

The problem with that approach is that these feelings, that we've never really resolved, don't go away. They stay with us and affect our actions and reactions in our lives today. They get in our way of opening our hearts to all those who need our attention whether they are in our lives regularly or not.

At this time of the year, while we are looking back over the last year to see how we have missed the mark, let's take time to look at the emotional scars that we carry around with us. We can take the time to write, talk, pray, even cry about the events that caused those scars.

Perhaps there is someone we could contact and apologize to or ask for an apology from. Perhaps we could simply give ourselves the time to experience the feelings we still have in order to really let them go. By keeping current with our feelings, as well as with our actions and reactions, we will be able to fully engage in our lives right now. And isn't that what the High Holidays are all about.

Shabbat Shalom.