

Each August since 1998, Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin has put out a list as their new students enter school in September. This list shows the cultural differences between those who are just entering college and those of us who are older than they are. For this year's list, we're talking about life before 1991, 19 years ago. Reading the list is a remarkable experience especially for someone who is much older than 19. It is easy to see how much has changed and what forces are creating the changes.

This year's list has 75 points to it. I have chosen 18 of those to read this morning. Some will make us smile, others will surprise us and all of them will point us toward the future whether we like it or not.

1. To the class of 2013, the Green Giant has always been a cartoon character named Shrek and not the one who sold us frozen vegetables.
2. They have never used a card catalog to find a book in a library.
3. Mexican salsa has always outsold ketchup.
4. Tattoos have always been very chic and highly visible.
5. Rap music has always been main stream.
6. They have never had to "shake down" an oral thermometer.
7. They never understood the meaning of 'R.S.V.P.'
8. The European Union has always existed.
9. McDonald's has always been serving Happy Meals in China.
10. Cable television systems have always offered telephone and internet services.
11. Bobby Cox has always managed the Atlanta Braves.
12. People could always reach for a Zoloft.
13. People have always been able to read books on an electronic screen.
14. We have always watched wars, coups, and police arrests unfold on television in real time.
15. Everyone has always known what the evening news was before the Evening News came on.
16. Natalie Cole has always been singing with her father.
17. Avon has always been available in a catalog and not just on our doorsteps.
18. There has always been blue Jell-O.

These changes can make us feel old, insignificant and invisible compared to the younger members of society. Most of these changes were brought about by the technological revolution in our world. Things move so quickly innovations are almost passé the minute they are introduced.

I saw a comic the other day. It showed a cemetery with three graves in it. One was already completed—the headstone said 'Myspace.' The second grave was just being dug and the headstone said 'Facebook.' And the third one had not yet been dug and the headstone was in the process of being

carved. It had only the letters, t, w, i, t written on it. The caption was 'The short attention span cemetery.'

In many ways this is the common thread that runs throughout all of these changes. Things happen so fast in our world that we can barely keep up with them. Speed seems to be the new god. Getting information as soon as it happens takes priority over everything else.

In addition, with this communication revolution, we know about other cultures that were almost completely unknown to us only a few decades ago. We see the results of this new knowledge with the mixing of these cultures as reported on this list: McDonald's in China, salsa outselling ketchup.

We also see that what used to be unacceptable is now not just acceptable but displayed proudly. Tattoos that used to be associated only with truckers and criminals are now sported by virtually everyone.

The statement on this list that really impressed me was that the 19 year olds don't know what RSVP means. This goes along with what I see as the demise of many norms of common politeness. Being in the South, as much as I had to get used to it, I really like the use of ma'am and sir. At first I thought I was called ma'am because of my age but now I understand it's simply about being polite. On the other hand in most of the U.S, 'man' and 'dude' are used instead, while curse words often take the place of perfectly good adjectives and adverbs.

I know I'm starting to sound like a fuddy duddy. (And as I write that phrase, I wonder if these 19 year olds would even know what it means.) I may sound old fashioned but I do think something is getting lost in our culture. I think we are forgetting the basics of human connections. When two people walk down the street together and both of them are on their cell phones, either talking to or texting someone else, something is wrong. Why aren't they talking to each other? Isn't that why they're together?

We certainly don't want to stop progress and there's nothing wrong with having access to the news before the nightly news program is on the air but if we lose our basic humanness then none of the progress matters.

At this time of year as we approach Yom Kippur, let's ask ourselves what are the fundamentally important things in our lives. What are the things that keep us connected to ourselves, to others and to God? These are things to welcome as much as possible into our new year and everything else needs to be used sparingly and with great consciousness.

*Shabbat Shalom.*