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US\$1.25  
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# THE DEATH OF A HERO AND THE COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY

WHAT

## THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN!

CAN TEACH US ABOUT  
BEING A HERO



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# THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

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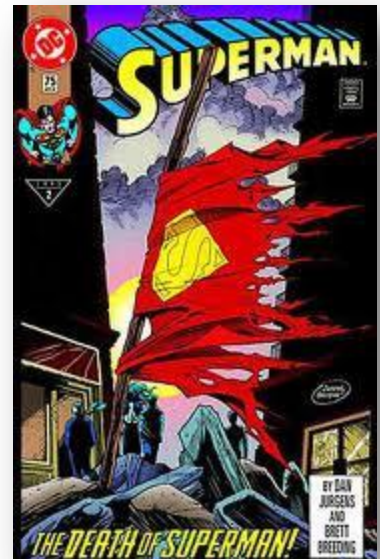
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## INTRODUCTION: THE DECISION

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In 1992, DC comics killed Superman. In a story that spanned several issues, Superman was finally killed off by a villain known as Doomsday. The issue, Superman no. 75, sold out all three million copies on the day of its release and the event received attention in all major news outlets.

While he was brought back to life after a protracted story-arch, his death had a profound impact not only on the legacy of Superman, but more importantly on the notion and perception of what makes a true superhero.



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## THE REACTION: THE WORLD MOURNS FOR SUPERMAN

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News of his death was discussed throughout the media. In an op-ed for the *New York Times*, Frank Rich discussed how the death of Superman was representative of a larger phenomenon: the death of the superhero.

He wrote ("Term Limit for the Man of Steel: Yes, It's Time for Him to Go," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1992):

*But Superman was also the victim of a larger phenomenon: the death of the all-American hero as he has been defined for much of the 20th century. In the post-cold war world where America's role as superpower is certainly shifting in substance and tone, what need is there for the old macho derring-do of Superman? Even the phone booth in which Clark Kent did his quick change is an anachronism, an archaic symbol of a vanished all-mighty America...*

## THE END OF COMIC BOOK\$?

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**T**he hype surrounding the story of the death of Superman changed the comic book industry forever. While movies based on comic books remained profitable, the comic book industry itself came crashing down.

When Superman no. 75 was released, copies were snatched up throughout the world. As Frank Rich recounts, this, more than the actual story, was much of the focus:

*The teen-agers who lined up at the nation's newsstands and comic book stores on Wednesday had dollar signs, not tears, in their eyes. The issue of Superman in which the superhero from Krypton is killed by Doomsday, a villainous escapee from a cosmic insane asylum, was bound to be worth more than its face value of \$1.25 someday. Or so its publishers would have young consumers believe...*

However the death of Superman had the opposite effect on the comic book industry: It killed it. The value of the Death of Superman comic has not increased dramatically as collectors had hoped. In fact, all comic books from this era have failed to yield any significant investment return.

*Why would the Death of Superman cause the Death of Comics?*

## OUR OBSESSION WITH “EVENTS”

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**C**huck Rozanski, the CEO of Mile-High Comics, one of the largest comic retailers describes the negative effect that the Death of Superman had on comic books as a whole:

*Where things went wrong, however, is that this particular promotion seemed like a sure bet to those members of the general public who had come to believe all the hype during the early 1990's about the investment value of comics. When these new comics consumers/investors tried to sell their copies of SUPERMAN #75 for a profit a few months later, however, and discovered that they could only recover their purchase price if they had a first printing, their bitter disillusionment did much to cause the comics investing bubble to begin bursting...*



As the famed comic writer, John Jackson Miller, explains the Death of Superman storyline created an obsession with “the next big event,” which ultimately crippled the comic book industry:

*But it was The Death of Superman, a storyline in DC Comics titles, that was the watershed. Promoted heavily by the publisher as a major news event, it evidently caught many networks on a slow news day. On Nov. 17, 1992, DC shipped between 2.5 million and 3 million copies of Superman #75. They vanished from stores, as the issue brought more new customers into comics stores than ever before...The few thousand retailers shared in what may well have been a \$30 million day for the comics industry.*

*Understandably, perspective became difficult to come by.*

*Such gimmicks as signed-and-numbered comics, zero issues, comics with premiums, and comics with special-effect covers were introduced by publishers to meet this new demand for specialty items, the net effect really only being an increase in price that lingered long after the gimmicks were gone. ..*

*Speculators turned their attention to new products as quickly as they could hit the ...New companies hit the market with little information, and many were talked of by speculators as “the next big thing” even before they went to press. At least one price guide was found to be printing after-market prices on comic books that hadn’t even been published yet.*



***Ultimately, the subsequent disappointment of Superman no. 75 heralded a new perspective on true “value” in the comic books, and in greater, the way we perceive value in our heroes.***



## WHAT MAKES A TRUE SUPERHERO?

There are many questions to consider:

- ❖ **How did the Death of Superman affect of comic book industry?**
- ❖ **What are the components of a true superhero?**
- ❖ **What does the story of the Death of Superman and the aftermath tell us about our conception of being a hero?**

# HOW IS A TRUE HERO MADE?

## WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT VERSE IN THE TORAH? A LESSON IN CONSISTENCY

### INTRODUCTION TO EIN YAAKOV

The Introduction to Ein Yaakov cites a Medrash in which the Rabbis try to debate which verse encapsulates the values of the Torah the most:

Ben Zoma said, "We find a verse that encapsulates the ideas of the Torah, namely 'Hear, O Israel the Lord is your God, the Lord is One!'"	בן זומא אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא שמע ישראל וגו'
Ben Nanas said, "We find an even better verse, which is even more all-encompassing, namely 'And you shall love your fellow man as yourself!'"	בן ננס אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא ואהבת לרעך כמוך,
Shimon ben Pazi said, "We find a verse which is even more inclusive, namely 'One sheep you shall offer in the morning etc!'"	שמעון בן פזי אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא את הכבש אחד תעשה בבקר וגו',
One of the rabbis stood on his feet and declared, "The verdict follows the opinion of Shimon the son of Pazi!"	עמד ר' פלוני על רגליו ואמר הלכה כבן פזי....

### DEVARIM 6:4

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.	שמע ישראל ה' אל-ינו, יהוה אחד
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### VAYIKRA 19:18

<b>18</b> Thou shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.	לא תקם ולא תטר את בני עמך, ואהבת לרעך כמוך: אני, יהוה
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### BAMIDBAR 28:4

[The order of the Daily Korban Tamid is as follows:] The one lamb should you offer in the morning, and the other lamb you should offer at dusk.	את-הכֹּבֶשׂ אֶחָד, תַּעֲשֶׂה בֶּבֶקֶר; וְאֶת הַכֹּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי, תַּעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים.
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## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

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- ❖ WHAT DO YOU THINK THE RABBIS ARE ARGUING ABOUT?
  - ❖ WHAT DO YOU THINK MOTIVATED EACH ONE TO CHOOSE THE VERSE THEY DID?
  - ❖ WHY DID THE RABBI CONCLUDE LIKE SHIMON BEN PAZI WHO CHOSE THE KORBAN TAMID? WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS VERSE?
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## TRUE GREATNESS: QUIET CONSISTENCY

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### BRACHOS 58A

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#### תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף נח/א

רב ששת סגי נהור הוה קאזלי כולי עלמא לקבולי אפי מלכא וקם אזל בהדיהו רב ששת אשכחיה ההוא צדוקי אמר ליה חצבי לנהרא כגני לייא אמר ליה תא חזי דידענא טפי מינך חלף גונדא קמייתא כי קא אוושא אמר ליה ההוא צדוקי אתא מלכא אמר ליה רב ששת לא קאתי חלף גונדא תנינא כי קא אוושא אמר ליה ההוא צדוקי השתא קא אתי מלכא אמר ליה רב ששת לא קאתי חלף תליתאי כי קא שתקא אמר ליה רב ששת ודאי השתא אתי מלכא אמר ליה ההוא צדוקי מנא לך הא אמר ליה דמלכותא דארעא כעין מלכותא דרקיעא דכתיב צא ועמדת בהר לפני ה' והנה ה' עובר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבר סלעים לפני ה' לא ברוח ה' ואחר הרוח רעש לא ברעש ה' ואחר הרעש אש לא באש ה' ואחר האש קול דממה

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**R**AV SHEISHESH WAS BLIND. EVERYONE WAS GOING TO GREET THE KING; RAV SHEISHESH ROSE AND WENT WITH THEM. A CERTAIN SADDUCEE MET RAV SHEISHESH AND SAID TO HIM, "WHOLE PITCHERS GO TO THE RIVER. WHERE DO BROKEN PITCHERS GO?" (MEANING: WHATS THE POINT OF A BLIND PERSON GOING TO A PARADE?)

RAV SHEISHESH ANSWERED HIM, "COME AND SEE THAT I KNOW MORE ABOUT THE KING'S PROCESSION THAN YOU DO."

THE FIRST TROOP WENT BY. WHEN IT BECAME LOUD, THAT SADUCEE SAID TO RAV SHEISHESH, "THE KING HAS COME!" RAV SHEISHESH SAID TO HIM, "HE IS NOT COMING."

A SECOND TROOP PASSED BY. WHEN IT BECAME LOUDER, THE SADUCEE SAID TO RAV SHEISHESH, "NOW THE KING IS COMING." RAV SHEISHESH SAID TO HIM, "THE KING IS NOT COMING."

A THIRD TROOP PASSED BY...

WHEN IT SUBSEQUENTLY GREW QUIET, RAV SHEISHESH SAID TO HIM, "IT IS NOW CERTAIN THAT THE KING IS COMING." THAT SADUCEE ASKED



HIM, "HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS?" HE ANSWERED HIM, "FOR THE ROYALTY OF EARTH IS A REFLECTION OF THE ROYALTY OF HEAVEN. FOR IT IS WRITTEN: GO OUT AND STAND ON THE MOUNTAINS BEFORE HASHEM. AND BEHOLD, HASHEM WAS PASSING AND A GREAT POWERFUL WIND, SMASHING MOUNTAINS AND BREAKING ROCKS, WENT BEFORE HASHEM; HASHEM WAS NOT IN THE WIND. AFTER THE WIND CAME AN EARTHQUAKE; HASHEM WAS NOT IN THE EARTHQUAKE. AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE CAME A FIRE; HASHEM WAS NOT IN THE FIRE. AFTER THE FIRE CAME A STILL, THIN SOUND..."

## CULTIVATING CONSISTENCY: A PRACTICAL PATH

MISHNAH PIRKEI AVOS 3:15

<p>All is foreseen, and freedom of choice is granted. The world is judged with goodness, but in accordance with the amount of man's positive deeds</p>	<p><b>משנה אבות ג:טו</b>  הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה ובטוב העולם נדון והכל לפי רוב המעשה:</p>
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## COMMENTARY OF THE RAMBAM

<p>The greatness of giving is not calculated by how <b>much</b> you give, rather by how <b>many</b> times you give. One acquires and sets a foundation in giving by contributing over and over again and not by one big giving.</p>	<p>אחר כך אמר, שהמעלות לא יושגו לפי שיעור גודל המעשה, אלא לפי רוב מספר המעשה. וזה, שהמעלות אמנם יושגו בכפול מעשי הטוב פעמים רבות, ובזה יושג הקנין, לא בשיעור האדם מעשה אחד גדול ממעשי הטוב, שבזה לבדו לא יושג קנין.</p>
<p>A parable to this idea is of a man who gives a large donation to one person and another who gives a smaller sum of money to many people. The latter is given the title "giver." Each time he provides, he creates a foundation of giving, and transforms himself into a giver. The former, on the other hand, only donated out of a moment of inspiration and as soon as this inspiration leaves, he will no longer give.</p>	<p>משל זה, שהאדם אם יתן למי שראוי אלף דינר, בפעם אחת ולאיש אחד, לא תושג לו מעלת הנדיבות בזה המעשה האחד הגדול, כמו שתושג למי שיתנדב אלף פעמים באלף דינר, ויתן כל דינר מהם על צד הנדיבות, לפי שזה ייכפל על ידו מעשה הנדיבות אלף פעמים, ויושג קנין חזק, וזה פעם אחת בלבד התעוררה הנפש התעוררות גדולה למעשה טוב, ואחר כן פסקה מזה...</p>
<p>This is what the rabbis meant when they said: "But in accordance with the <b>amount</b> of man's positive deeds."</p>	<p>וזה הוא ענין אומרו: לפי רוב המעשה אבל לא על פי המעשה</p>

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## WRAP UP

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***A hero is no braver than an ordinary man,  
But he is brave five minutes longer.***

***-Ralph Waldo Emerson***

**T**he mistake DC comics made with the death of Superman, was an overreliance on gimmicks and big events, instead of focusing more on the smaller stories and conflicts within a heroes life. *The Death of Superman*, the series, is what in many ways killed comic books. A true hero knows that it cannot just be about sensationalism and gimmicks. A true hero has a quiet consistency that allows him to finish the job. And make sure its done: By staying those five extra minutes...

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### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ❖ WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF BEING A HERO WITH QUIET CONSISTENCY?
  - ❖ HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE SOMEONE WHO IS JUST A HERO FOR THE SENSATIONALISM AND ATTENTION?
  - ❖ WHO IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU KNOW WHO EMBODIES THE TRUE MAKINGS OF A HERO?
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***"A hero is an ordinary individual  
who finds the strength to persevere  
and endure in spite of  
overwhelming obstacles"***

***-Christopher Reeve***

