

## *The Top That Wouldn't Stop Spinning*

*A Children's Sermon by Rabbi Herbert Baumgard*

Once upon a time there was a beautiful palm tree which grew by the side of the road. The palm tree had beautiful green branches which swayed in the wind. When the branches swayed, it almost seemed as if the tree was waving "hello" to people who passed by. Everyone who saw the lovely palm tree thought of it as a very friendly tree and liked it very much.

There was also a dog in this same city who used to lie down beneath the palm tree. The dog, who wasn't very handsome as dogs go, used to like the shade underneath the tree and, especially when it was hot, the dog would lie down and dream. Since very few people played with this ugly dog, he used to dream about people patting him and saying nice things like, "My, what a pretty dog"!

On a certain day, the palm tree was busy waving "hello" and the dog was busy day dreaming, when a strange thing happened. They saw a little top go spinning down the road right past them. The top did not stop to say "hello" to the friendly tree, which surprised the tree, and the top didn't slow down to pat the dog, which made the dog very unhappy. But, the amazing thing was that within just a few minutes, the top came spinning back and again passed the tree and the dog, again without a word and without slowing down.

Many times throughout the day, the top repeated this trip. Going up and down the street, down the hill and up the hill, around the corner, around the shopping center, through the grassy field, past the lake, across the farm and back pass<sup>T</sup> the tree and the dog. Everyone who watched the spinning top could not understand what the top was doing. Why didn't it ever stop? Why was the top in such a hurry? Where was it going?

About five o'clock in the afternoon, the top finally stopped. It ran smack into the farm house, and its spin was halted. The top lay on the grass breathing heavily, trying to get up and get going again. When the top stopped, it looked around and saw some unusual things. It saw young children running around playing games. The games looked like fun. The children saw the top sitting there panting, and they said to it, "Hello, Mr. Top, would you like to join in our game"?

"I think I'd like to," said the top, "but I have to be going now". Without further ado, the top was "back on its feet," back on the road and running around the city.

All night long, the top ran around the town, spinning on its way, never resting, and never stopping to see anything or to talk to anyone. Around noon time the next day, when the sun was very hot, the top came to another halt. This time the top hit the palm tree and bounced over on its side. "Ouch", cried the palm tree. "Why did you hit me, Mr. Top?" "Oh, I'm very sorry", replied the top, "it was an accident". At this moment the top suddenly noticed that it was much cooler under the palm tree than it was in the hot open road. "How nice it is here in the shade", the top thought. "Would you like to stay here for a while", the palm tree asked? "My friend and I would be glad to have you". But the top didn't even take time to look at the dog who was lying beside him. "Thank you very much", said the top, "I'd like to, but I can't rest here. I have to keep spinning".

The tree wanted to ask the top why he had to keep spinning, but by the time the tree thought of the question, the top was way down the road. The dog had hoped that the top would pat him on the head, but, as usual, the dog's hopes were not fulfilled. "Nobody loves me", thought the dog.

Night fell again and the top kept spinning. It was almost as if it were afraid to stop

spinning. The stars came out, the moon sent its soft light upon the earth, giving everything a feeling of magic. The top did not pause to admire these heavenly lights. The top was “doing its thing”, spinning. But no journey lasts forever, and soon the top’s journey came to a sad end. A car tried to pass it on the road but crashed into the top and broke it in two. The car hurried on its way, but the top could spin no more. They buried the top on the side of the hill that overlooks the center of the city. No one came to the funeral, because, you see, no one really got to know the top. He was always so busy. He didn’t have time to make friends or to play games or to help people in trouble.

I know some people who are just like this top. They think that life is made for being busy, for going on and on without asking why or for what purpose. They are so busy, they don’t see the beautiful things all around them. They don’t stop to say “hello” to the waving palm tree or to pat the lonely dog on the head. Some people don’t even have time to pat their children on the head or to kiss their husband or wife. Some people are so busy having a good time, that their whole life passes them by and they have not accomplished anything worthwhile or made any lasting friends.

The Bible tells us that Isaac, the son of Abraham, would go out into the field every day at sundown and talk to the birds and the flowers. The Rabbis, who were the teachers of old, used to say, “If you are always busy, you can’t see God”. If you are always busy, like the top, you don’t have time to read books to learn about the wonderful things in life. The Rabbis taught that if you are always spinning around, you don’t have time to read the Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible. If you don’t read these books, you can’t learn what God wants us to do in the world.

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So the message of the story of the top is simple. If you really want to see the world around you, you don't have to run fast or travel long distances. Look closely around you, in your own house, in your own neighborhood; look closely at the tree in your yard and at the dog on your block. Look in the sky above you. There is enough to see in these places to last you a life time.