

What a '65 Thunderbird Taught Me About True Transformation

Ever since I was 13 years old, I have wanted a 1965 Thunderbird convertible. Actually, the truth is that ever since I was 13, I wanted a 1965 Thunderbird convertible as a project car. The reason I have wanted that particular automobile for nearly 50 years is because I watched a family friend restore one.

I watched the process from the day the absolute wreck of a car was delivered on a flatbed truck until the day the car's restoration was complete. I watched as a rusted, dented, ratty looking pile of metal and cloth was transformed into a shiny beautiful showpiece.

I was there when the man started to disassemble the car piece by piece as he divided the parts into keepers and junk. He knew which parts were still usable as they were, which parts could be repaired or restored and which parts were too damaged or defective to be used at all. I watched as he painstakingly removed each piece of the car with care, no matter how bad the condition of the part was, so that in the removal process, he neither damaged the part being removed or the part or parts to which it was attached. I was amazed not just at the craftsmanship and knowledge my friend displayed, but also with the amount of different tools and precision required to disassemble the car properly.

But what amazed me more about this man's ability to properly disassemble a car and put it back together again in factory showroom condition was his ability to look at that pile of damaged junk and see in his mind what it could look like. He didn't just see the car in its fully restored condition; he could look at each piece, from largest to smallest, and see

that individual piece in its fully restored condition. That year, as I watched this car transform from a pile of junk to a showpiece, I learned more about G-D than any other experience in my life.

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I learned about my faith and my community from my family. I learned about my people, about Judaism and my history at my synagogue. But, I learned about G-D, specifically G-D's relationship with man, while watching my neighbor work on his 1965 Thunderbird convertible.

The truth is that I don't know if I would be a rabbi today if it weren't for my time watching that car's transformation in the hands of someone who could look past its dents, dings, rust, tears and broken parts and see it as fully restored, even before they turned the first wrench or removed the first bolt. While watching him restore that car, I learned that the value of something must be determined by its restored state, not its damaged state.

Learning that one lesson helped me to develop not only a love for 1965 Thunderbird convertibles, but also for people. Watching the absolute transformation of that car opened my heart and my eyes to see how many people around me had been similarly restored to "showroom" condition by the hands of a master craftsman far more skilled than my neighbor ever would be. I learned that year the true value of the people in my world was not how they were in their damaged or broken state, but in who and what they would become once their restoration was completed by G-D.

Three other things that I learned during this process were: First, only the one doing the restoration can truly see in his mind what the fully restored car would look like, just as only

G-D knows what you and I will look like when we are fully restored. Second, the only opinion about the value of the restoration that really matters is that of the one doing the restoration. Third, and most important, even though I watched as each step of the restoration took place, the person doing the restoration didn't need my help or advice.

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I learned more about the value of people and G-D's love for them while watching the restoration of a 1965 Thunderbird convertible than I ever did from any sermon or lesson I heard in synagogue. It was because I watched that restoration process from start to finish that I understand what was written in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, TLV:

"Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, those who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. That is what some of you were—but you were washed, you were made holy, you were set right in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and by the Ruach of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11),

Every one of us in some way are like that 1965 Thunderbird convertible the day it was dumped into my neighbor's yard by the flatbed truck. We are broken, dented, torn, twisted and rusted. Yet, G-D sees beyond that to how we will be once He restores us to showroom condition. G-D sees our true value because doesn't see what we currently are; He sees what He designed us to be. G-D isn't concerned if other people can see what He sees.

If we allow Him to fully restore us, we will be made holy and set right. In other words, like that 1965 Thunderbird convertible, we will be made new.

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