

## The Next Place on the Journey

By **RABBI JON ADLAND**



**B**eyond my life and work as a congregational rabbi I have two passions. During the fall and winter I turn my attention toward woodworking, and in the spring and summer I look to water with the hope of catching a nice largemouth bass. Both of these hobbies include intensely imagining beyond the moment to see how things could be.

A woodworking project, no matter how closely it's tied to project plans, involves seeing in your head the finished product as well as the next step. I find that when I'm involved in sawing, shaping, and sanding a new piece of furniture, I tend to take it with me wherever I go. Some might call this daydreaming, but I prefer to view it as visioning. What have I done to get to the place where I am, and what will I have to do to move on to the next phase in the project? The picture is in my head along with my shop and the tools needed to move on.

Fishing also requires imagination. There's a corner of my garage where the poles are kept and the lures are stored. I believe that I have a little of everything that is needed, but it's much too much to take with me when I go stand on the shore of a pond. What do I take with me and what do I leave behind? I look at the sky, the temperature, and the world around me, and imagine what I need to throw that day to catch and then release a fish. Sometimes when the day is over and I relive and rethink the experience, I see the lure hitting the water and wonder if I had moved it a little more to the left ... Or I think about the one that was on the line, and I couldn't bring it in.

Through imagination a vision is produced of what I want or hope to happen—that aspect is tied to my woodworking. Imagination also is about hope, and

that part is connected to my fishing. So, too, do I have concrete visions within my clergy life. Like the rabbis who have preceded me, I see study, worship, and acts of social justice as the means to a better world. These are the project plans that must be thought about and then implemented. But I also have the imaginings that pass through my mind like clouds passing across the sky. They aren't concrete, but ever-changing, and encourage me to consider a new path, direction, or opportunity that will help me as a rabbi and help me serve my congregation. This is the fishing part where every cast is a possibility, but not a probability. It is hope—never defeat—even when it means another cast.

Over my more than 25 years as a rabbi, I have learned that imagination is only part of the journey. I can imagine a full sanctuary on a Friday evening or perfect attendance for every child in religious school or parents who place religion as the highest priority on their scale of life's activities, but my imagining—or even writing, speaking, or urging about this—doesn't make it happen. It takes the hearts, minds, and souls of people who really care to make a difference.

We live in a time when there are so many choices of things to do. We survey the opportunities and often choose what makes us feel good right now and not what can sustain us through tomorrow. Fishing and woodworking might be imagination's stimulants, but the nutrients that sustain my life are found in the soul of Judaism, through its values, ethics, stories, holy days, and celebrations. I cannot imagine my life without the rituals and routines that my religion offers me. I can try and imagine new ways to infuse these moments, but fulfillment in my spiritual God-centered life comes not from the vision, but from the doing on a regular basis.

I don't think imagination has changed my life, but it has encouraged me to think beyond the proverbial box. I hope that I will always have the ability to imagine a new way to get to the next place on the journey. In the meantime, I'll continue to imagine the next cast, the next project, and the next step for me to take.

*Jon Adland is senior rabbi at the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation.*