

Lakh

In some Asian cultures, the number 100,000 is uniquely special. It's important. It even has its own word – usually some version of the sound “lakh.”

I was reminded of this as my car passed 100,000 miles this weekend while I was driving to a Federation event. And it felt monumentally significant for a fleeting moment – until the odometer moved on to 100,001.



Remember when hitting 100,000 miles on your car was a threshold? It was a sign that your car was probably worn out and that you'd soon need to buy a new one. But now (I hope) it increasingly means something different. In our present day driving culture, as well as in English and Hebrew, it's not so special. If anything, it's a sign to take stock and check things out. Where are we? How are we doing? What needs tuning up, maintenance, a good examination?

I realized that I've put many of those 100,000 miles on my car driving from corner to corner of Greater MetroWest. We're a massive community, so I drive a lot. We're the largest non-city Jewish community in North America, spread over five counties, some 60 towns (and police departments), and 90 synagogues. This makes a difference in how we define our Federation and our community, and the maintenance, or occasional “tune-ups,” that we need to keep everything running well.

We're constantly tightening this and adjusting that... here are a couple of things we're currently tuning up:

First, we're working much harder on our brand, our messaging, and our relevance.

Second, we're looking at ways to decentralize and, in modern jargon, hyper-localize.

And third, but I think most importantly, we're more and more getting in our cars and driving. We're meeting people where they are, not necessarily where we'd like them to be right now. So, we've heavily invested in outreach, in engagement, in innovative programming like PJ Library and JTEEN and Chaplaincy and Security. Because that's the nature of our community. It's a community made significant, made strong, by the sum of its parts – our people, our needs, our interests, and our impacts are widespread and diverse.

When you look at 100,000, it's not a uniquely different concept from 999,999 or 100,001. When you break it up into its constituent parts, it's just 100 parts of 1,000.

It's just another mile.

It's just part of a journey.

And that's important too.