Reb Khaim, the maggid, an itinerant preacher, traveled to small towns and villages every week. There in the shabbat twilight - the shabbat witching hour - in between mincha and maariv - over a piece of smaltz herring, peppered chick peas and whatever schnapps was left over from Shabbes lunch Reb Khaim gave over his Torah teachings. Folks in these small towns flocked to hear these teachings - but perhaps to just play Jewish geography with the Maggid and to compare him to the one that was sent a week before. Perhaps news, not-yet heard, would seep in with the shabbat sojourner steps. Itinerant Maggidim were in shul every week and the townsfolk were grateful that the Rabbis didn’t preach every week. Fortunately the established rabbis were only required to give two sermons a year- on the shabbat before Passover and the Shabbat in between RH and YK and if any one of them was able to understand the Rabbi they fired him.

Most found that sitting and sighing together made the thought that shabbes was ending more palatable. The work of the new week would begin anew.

Fortunately, or not; due to either his nature or nurture- Reb Khaim had only one great teaching. It was about the
portion of Noah, truly one of the most dramatic stories of world culture.

So this is what he did every Shabbes afternoon. As he sat down in the study house surrounded by the amcha- the everyday people in that synagogue - he would settle himself on one of the hard wooden bleacher benches and begin a slight cough and that cough would grow until was full-blown- pitchers of water are brought Reb Khaim takes a sip into his glass, then standing up abruptly he knocks all of the pitchers on the table in front of him. The crowd is taken aback – don’t worry- Reb Khaim shouted - it’s only water. It’ll dry up.” As he sat himself down on bench again he leans forward to the assembly and says - you know this little accident reminds me of the story of the flood.

Without the pretext of shattering pitchers I present this teaching.

Noah, as the new Adam, is given more instruction than was given to Adam and Eve. While Adam and Eve were told of their responsibility to be fruitful and multiply and avoid eating of the tree of knowledge - which they
transgressed- it wasn’t enough guidance to establish a civilization that wasn’t ultimately doomed. The Flood represents the end result of leaving Eden gorged on innocence -soon to unravel as Cain kills Abel and the downward spiral of corruption and violence without communal institutions; without the means to combat it. The Flood represents the obliterating of consciousness. So many of our doings in the world are performed without consciousness. We resort to areas of our brain and heart that are often a shield from the challenges of facing reality as it is. This loss of consciousness ultimately leads to loss of conscience.

Last week I spoke about the first part of parshat bereshit - the grandeur of the universe and its majestic creation story that is summed up with the words tov me’od- it was very good. I spoke of the essence of the creation story as the victory of Cosmos over Chaos. This is a universal challenge. Yet, as we shall see, Jewish tradition has an important role to play in meeting this challenge.

The story of Noah is a story of our efforts to re-establish Cosmos out of Chaos after the destruction of civilization. In the sevenfold path or covenant of Noah we have a prime example of what Yom Kippur is all about- our
drowning and our resuscitation, our endings and new beginnings. The essential underpinning of Yom Kippur is to die and to be reborn. We re-emerge from the muddy amniotic sac of the Deluge. We are lifted from the muck to dry land. We arise to see the world anew.

The Seven Fold Path, or covenant of Noah derives from the interpretation of the paragraph in Genesis 9:8-17 -the one where God promises as the Divine organizing principle of reality that the rainbow will be set in the sky amidst the clouds as a sign that the Earth would no longer be subject to annihilation through water. In that paragraph the word *brith* -covenant is used 7 times. With that in mind- and also that the number 7 is indicative of the natural world the Rabbis set about to compile a list of 7 laws that will permit civilization to survive and prosper. These laws are our side of the covenantal contract. They are:

Do not murder
Do not steal
Do not blaspheme
Do not be an idolater
Do not engage in exploitative relationships-especially sexual ones
Do not eat a part of an animal that is still alive and number 7 –
the imperative to establish systems of justice to govern these laws.

The Rabbis believed that individuals and societies that observed these laws would maintain civilization. Those who follow this path are righteous people and they hold life sacred.

Why do I bring this up tonight on Kol Nidrei.

When the Israelites entered in the covenant they were told that they should be a mamlekhet kohanim - a Kingdom of Kohanim - and the goal of our mission was to help the world to enter the covenant of Noah - to advance and maintain human civilization. This is what letaken olam bemalkhut shadai - to repair the world in the kingdom of the nurturing Almighty - is all about. In the eyes of Isaac Luria this tikkun is achieved by releasing the nitzozot, the Divine Sparks that are imbedded in all material things. When all the world observes the Seven Fold Path of Noah - we will not perish from this earth. Those who follow this path are considered to be the righteous of the world

The High Holidays are the most universal of our holy days and the place of b’nei noakh in our community has
occupied my thoughts over the years. How does this time honored category manifest itself in our communities, especially when so many of our families are made up of people from all sorts of background. I have recently begun to design wedding ceremonies for Jews, who desire to be part of the Jewish community, and their prospective partners from different backgrounds. These are not traditional Jewish weddings, nor are they secular weddings, but rather b’nei Noah weddings. The acceptance of the seven fold path of Noah within a Jewish rubric by those partners from different backgrounds strengthens the mission of Sinai.

The essential prerequisite for these types of unions is, I repeat, is the commitment of the Jewish partner to be explicitly Jewish and to contribute and participate in the continuity of the Jewish people wherever they dwell.

When couples from different backgrounds approach me to officiate at their wedding this is usually the motivation of the Jewish partner. It is not uncommon today for marriages between two Jews not to have rabbis as officiants at all.

There is no mitzvah to be a Jew but once born a Jew our tradition teaches that this identity can only be shed by
specific acts of betrayal, even here there are differences of opinion.

We do not seek converts and that is why I have always been careful to avoid conversion of non-Jewish partners for the sake of a Jewish wedding ceremony.

Marrying a Jew has traditionally not been seen as a reason to become a Jew-by-Choice, I have guided, over the years, many Jews-by-Choice who have wished to enter the Covenant of Sinai and its capacity for spiritual transformation, but these, for the most part, were individual journeys not based on the sociology of wishing to embrace a Jew, or to assuage familial anxiety. To be Jew-by-Choice is a personal journey that takes on obligations that B’nei Noah are not obliged to do.

That is precisely why we must be more knowledgeable of the b’nai Noah route into Jewish life.

Those who enter this seven-fold-path of Noah are considered righteous people. Observers of these laws are called God Fearers or God Reverers - yirei hashem - and they are the mainstay of the world.

Those b’nei noakh who will want to live among us will be recognized as gerei toshav - sojourners dwelling among
us. This status is found in the Torah in connection with participation in Jewish observances and the demand of not discrimination of the *ger* in our legal system mentioned in the Torah. The Torah adjoins us to love the stranger -the Sojourner who dwells among us over 30 times.

If you will, these *gerei-toshav* have Green Card status in our community. They are resident aliens who enjoy privileges and have obligations and there is *always* a pathway to citizenship that some may choose to take.

These b’nei Noah wedding ceremonies provide an honest way to emphasize our commitment to Jewish continuity as a spiritual tradition and for the *ger-toshav* -the Sojourner in our midst, the child of Noah, to be supportive of it and to join us in the adventure of creating a Jewish future we all hope to forge.

If you would like to continue this conversation please call me and we’ll set up a time to talk.

How do we emerge into new consciousness- the desired end result of the *teshuvah* process?
On Rosh HaShanah we were awakened by the blasts of the shofar and on Yom Kippur we are asked to open up to new awareness by altering the everyday patterns of our lives.

The Torah tells us:
...on the tenth of the month, you shall afflict your souls and do no work at all...for on that day God will forgive you and cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before God. It is a sabbath of sabbaths -shabbat shabbaton, a solemn rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls; it is a statute for ever. (Leviticus 16:29-31).

How does one “afflict one's soul”? The oral law enumerates the following five restrictions:

Fasting (No Eating or Drinking) - From sunset on the eve of Yom Kippur until nightfall the next day, it is forbidden to eat or drink.
Washing - During the fast, one may not wash for pleasure,
Anointing - It is forbidden to anoint oneself with oils and perfumes.
Wearing Leather Shoes - During the fast it is forbidden to wear leather shoes.
Marital Relations - It is forbidden to have marital relations.
It may seem that refraining from the above actions would make one focus on the body, due to hunger or thirst, or the discomfort of not washing. However such discomforts are temporary and, in fact, turning one’s attention back to the importance of the day and the fact that we can transcend physical discomfort in order to connect with the spirit of the day.

Every one of these prohibitions are actually a prescription for living our lives during the remaining 364 days until next Yom Kippur. By emphasizing these as afflictions, the rabbis observed what was necessary for us to live our lives to the fullest. Our so-called afflictions spark the new awareness of the everyday we have forsaken today. The impact of Yom Kippur is to fortify ourselves to emerge into the world as a particularistic people dedicated to a universal ideal.

We can only impact the world as we impact ourselves— as I said on Rosh HaShanah —liberation of the other demands first the liberation of the self. On Yom Kippur we are liberated of our bodies and can focus on the fragile parts of our soul that have been clouded over during the year. We can wipe away our blind spots.
As we rebirth consciousness on Yom Kippur what do we do to bring and sustain it in our lives.

Each of the actions we refrain from on Yom Kippur serves as a touchstone to bring ourselves back to the task of renewing our consciousness.

1. Fasting and Feasting

The Noah portion deals with both food and wine. Noah and his descendants are permitted to eat animals and Noah is both the first vintner and the first abuser of the grape.

Eating is vital to life and many of us do it to satisfy all the senses and to bring pleasure to our lives. Many of us overdo it and some of us use it to fulfill a myriad of psychological needs.

Our fasting today is a prompt to conscious eating the rest of the year. Aside from a few other fast days in the Jewish calendar, our Jewish tradition is always about food. We celebrate with food - shabbatot and holidays are special opportunities to feast. The Pesach seder is the most prominent example of this phenomenon. The only different between fast and feast is the letter “E” This evening I’d like to suggest it stands for elohim- the
God aspect of boundary and judgment in our kabbalistic system.

The Zohar, the mystical commentary on Torah, says: *Bread should be eaten on the edge of a sword.*

The Chassidic masters explain that if we eat with the intention to serve our Creator with the energy derived from our food, the very act becomes sanctified. On the other hand, if we eat thinking only of our base desires, we have simply indulged our weaknesses.

Eating with the proper intentions is a constant struggle. Our better half is battling our weaker self for mastery of our thoughts at that time. This is the meaning of the Zohar; when we come to the table, we should have our swords drawn, and make sure that we are ready to win the war. (see Likkutei Torah Balak 72a)

Our Teaching, the Torah, is very explicit on the necessity of guarding our bodies- *ushmartem et nasfshoteychem.* Nefesh is that part of the soul that animates us as humans and is understood as our bodies.

So important is our relationships to our bodies that we developed the concept of *pikuach nefesh*—doing all we can to save a life. Even Shabbat and Yom Kippur do not override this circumstance. One is not only allowed to
transgress the orderly path of our special days -but one is obligated to do so in order to save a life.

Our tradition prescribes that we begin our days with recognition and gratitude for the return of our soul to our bodies- *modeh ani lefanekha melekh khai ve-kayam shekhazarta bi nishmati* -I am animated again upon waking. We express gratitude for being alive and created in the Image of the formless and faceless God that is without body -our bodies perform God’s will. I often tell folks that God’s feet are at the bottom of your legs and his hands at the bottom of your arms. This is particularly true when we come to conscious eating. We imbue these mundane associations of food with the Divine spirit.

First and foremost, are we choosing what we eat with *kavana* - directed intention. Do we read labels? Do we think ahead to the consequences of eating certain foods? Do you check to see if there is a large amount of high fructose sugar in our foods, especially in juices and drinks? Do we provide healthy alternatives, especially for those who may suffer from digestive disabilities? Do we consider the possibility of choosing foods that may be kosher?Veganism and vegetarianism have helped make these choices much easier. Even if we eat meat from a non-kosher sources -do we consider that not eating it
with milk products is observing one of the central kosher laws derived from the verse “not to seethe a kid in its’ mother’s milk”

Do we eat creatures that upset the natural cycle of nature- predators or scavengers? Refraining for these is also a mitzvah.

Do we occasionally buy something special -a treat for one who will delight in it?

Do we feed the hungry? The Jewish Family and Children’s Service kosher food bank, permits us yet do this mitzvah through our donations to Family Table.

Conscious eating impacts not only positively on our bodies but to the health of the planet.

A second step in conscious eating is utilizing a remarkable *mitzvah*- a way of connection. Before we eat- we say a *bracha*, a blessing.

*A Sunday School teacher asks, “Now, Johnny, tell me frankly: do you say prayers before eating?” “No sir,” little Johnny replies, “I don’t have to. My Mom is a good cook.”*

Gaze at our food while saying *bracha* with directed attention, with *kavana*. Our eyes begin the pleasure we are about to enjoy. The look and smell activates our salivary glands. We stop for a moment to ponder our
food’s origins and all the hands that have come together to allow me this enjoyment.

Isaiah tells us: Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. **Isaiah 55:2**

When we say a *beracha* we are not only blessing God but the capacity of humans to derive food from so many wondrous sources in our world.

Many of us say the *motzi lekhm min ha’arezt* over bread-. Eating bread constitutes a meal. Eating without bread is considered a snack. It is bread that is vital for human sustenance. It is a staple for basis of many cultures. **Ecclesiastes 9:7** tells” Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart. I’ll get to wine in a minute.

Whether our bread is dry flat shmura matzo or a beautifully braided loaf of Rosenfeld’s whole wheat hallah (my apologies to the Cheryl Anne’s fans) we bless bread as one of the earliest successes of human culture and agriculture.
Wine - I love a good wine. Wine gladdens the heart - but it is also a source of indiscretion. A Talmudic sage (Eruvin 65) playing on the Gematriya, or numeric value, of both Yayin and Sod - Secret - which is 70:

Yud = 10  Yud=10  Nun = 50
Samech = 60  Vav = 6  Daled = 4:

Thus, Nichnas yayin - yazta sod- wine goes in and secrets come out. So wine is both good but can also be too much of a good thing. Wine serves not only a social lubricant but as conveyor of sanctification - of kedusha. Every Shabbat and Festival is announced with a toast - a raised cup - to l’chaim. We”ll raise that toast tomorrow evening at Havdalah as we exit Yom Kippur.

We’ll make a l’chaim to life with a new spirit -

You may know that I encourage a vibrant l’chaim when I invite people to join in the kiddush here at TBZ - We do it to remind us that we are truly alive today. As I said on RH - hayom, hayom, hayom - today is first day of the rest of your life - you are truly alive today.
Washing

We cannot get rid of our misgivings and missing the mark by washing it away on the surface—anti-bacterial soap or Purell can’t do it. So we don’t go through the futile motions of washing on Yom Kippur. Yet we adhere to the aged axiom that cleanliness is next to Godliness. In our generation this cleanliness goes far beyond washing our bodies. It points to our extreme ecological concerns about the health of the planet. Our own physical needs are deeply connected to the needs of our ecosystem. Clean water and air are not luxuries— but necessities for our survival.

Refrain from washing on Yom Kippur and activate yourself for the next 364 days of the year to doing whatever we can do to clean up our planet.

Back in Genesis 9 from where the sevenfold path of Noah I mentioned earlier we read:
12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I
have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” The sign of the covenant is a rainbow in the sky.

But every covenant has two sides: Nature will continue of its normal course – as I mentioned on Rosh HaShana this is how God manifests as the organizing principle of reality. There will be clouds and rainbows, there will be droughts and floods -as we look at the way things really are- Reality -but now it’s time for us take on the challenge of what’s going to uphold the rainbow covenant -to do what we can do to prevent the earth being engulfed in water.

Anointing
-rededicating ourselves to a mission
kings and kohanim were anointed with fine-olive oil
it dripped down from their heads and eventually enveloped them  -at the same time they are enveloped with mission and calling.
We have no more kings and no more Kohanim. we anoint ourselves to find our place in the world- to do what we are our equivalent to thr sacred roles in ancient Israelite society.

We cannot fake our special mission in the world -as a mamlechet kohanim -a Nation that serves the world. We must become integrated human beings in an integrated world.

**Wearing leather shoes** -how and where to walk -what direction are we taking how to walk in another person’s shoes wearing out the shoe leather walking a path- it’s a path that leads us from Abraham to this very day. This trail of Jewish values and experience is being create where will trail lead? Where are we on that trail?

Wearing shoes also means that we have comfort to walk -alone, with someone, holding hands, to walk is to able to stroll, or skip -Mostly what wearing shoes can do is to help us come together in community. We have such a large spectrum of opportunity for strengthening our caring and compassionate community. We can *spatzir*, stroll- on the Boardwalk of innovation, openness and continued creativity we haven’t seen in many a decade.
Folks my age are proud of the walking we did in protest marches in the late sixties- Rabbi Heschel on the Selma march said “he was praying with his legs: with all of the mishigoss of those times we opened Judaism up to a new generation that has been raised on these values and have taken seriously that there need not be any split between using their talents as Jews in walking the walk.

**Sensuality**
Our intimate relationships are essential and dangerous.

We all are sensuous beings. This is the stuff of life -in all ways it can be understood. We each expose our sensuality in our own unique and individual ways. This sensuality is revitalized by our encounter with the Divine in our lives. So often do our Sages and philosophers compare the Lover and the Beloved to the love between heaven and earth. Akiva’s defense of the Song of Songs, a highly sensual shepherd poem as the Holy of Holies is indicative of our potential sensuality. This scroll is read on Passover -the time of new sensuality arising from the storms of winter.
On Yom Kippur afternoon we will read Lev 18: and we’ll accompany it with a dvar torah on how, once we leave this room after Yom Kippur , we alter our perceptions of the other differently.

We fight for the rights of individuals to create committed relationships - folks of all orientations. Finding one’s bashert is fantastic. In many cases new chosen families are forming all around us. The variety of human experience is not excluded from our faith or people, on the contrary.

In shul tomorrow afternoon and we’ll read Leviticus 18’s description of homosexuality as an abomination. Like Jews everywhere, some will stand and some will sit in protest. We will once again struggle with the irony that what is called an aberration - to’evah - is also the word used for eating shellfish. I haven’t yet witnessed evangelic pickets at Legal Sea Food.

It is not surprising that the LBGQT &A alliance has the rainbow as its symbol. For all of us it is a promise to face reality and accept people as they really are. We are all products of our essential nature. To must hold up our side of the covenant of Torah and work as best we can to save us from the flood of prejudice and rancor that still exist in our fractured country. Much progress has been
made. There is still more to do, especially in the transgender community. The Covenant of Noah opens us to the world. For Jews, the covenant of Sinai opens up into the doorways of our self-perception and expands our horizons while being deeply connected to Torah and mitzvoth - both teachings and actions in the world.

As I said on Rosh HaShanah. facing reality, observing absorbing, and embracing it with fascination and joy is the takeaway of the High Holidays that will conclude with the sensuality of Sukkot. The joy of the fall harvest and the understanding of the fragility of life that Sukkoth represents offers us, as winter looms, the glimmers of rainbows amidst the clouds.

*Gmar khatima tova*
May we all seal ourselves in the Book of Life.

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