Every year as I prepare for the High Holidays, one of the most challenging parts is deciding what to speak about.

What do I want to say, what do I have to share that is new, what do our people want to hear, and what do they need to hear this year. What happened over the past year that defined it in a specific way. What are we expecting for this coming year, and how might my words be an inspiration and help guide our community through that? These and more are the questions that I and my rabbinic colleagues ask ourselves and each other as we share our learning and struggles over the summer.

Most often, I find myself coming back to the same question - why are we here? what do we hope will come out from spending the next two days of Rosh Hashanah together, and then again on Yom Kippur, singing, praying, and being intensely in community.

Allow me to invite you into my rabbinic learning partnerships... here is how my friend, Rabbi Sharon Brous of Ikar Los Angeles tries to answer that question:

“I believe that we are coming here to access something bigger than ourselves. To get some distance from the wanton cruelty and dishonesty of our politics, from the mundane obligations of work and family life, from the endless pressures of bills and email and achievement and success, and instead tap into something timeless. Eternal. Some wisdom to help hold the enormity of this moment, to help acquire a different perspective on who we are, as a mother, a sister, a husband, a student, a boss. Who we
are as a community, a nation, a people, and what we are capable of. We are here because on some level we recognize that only by pressing pause and doing some *heshbon hanefesh*, some real soul assessment, might we be able to disentangle from the world as it is, and imagine ourselves even a little closer to the world as it might be.\(^1\) I hope that we can do that… that we can press pause this year and do the work of *heshbon nefesh*, of looking closely at our lives and our potential both as individuals and collectively as a community. I invite you to join me on a journey into that process guided by one word: *Hesed* (חֶסֶד), translated alternatively as love, loving-kindness, compassion, and mercy.

The song we sang a few minutes ago which we often sing at TBZ and will sing many times during this holiday season is based on Psalm 89, verse 3.

כִּֽי־אָמַ֑דֶהוּ תָּכִ֣יָּם שָׁמַ֖ה יִבָּנֶ֥סֶד חֶוֹלָם עַרְתִּיִּכֶּ֖ם:

Of course this can be translated in different ways. The word Olam means “Forever” but it also means world.

“For I have said: 'Love (or compassion) is eternally being established”

Or,

“For I have said, the world is built with love”

And the second part of the verse:

“In the heavens You establish Your faithfulness”

The words that we sing, take this biblical statement and mirror it with a personal human commitment:

I will build this world from love, And you must build this world from love And if we build this world from love, Then G!d will build this world from love\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Based on Rabbi Sharon Brous’s Kol Nidre sermon 5779, with a few small edits. 

\(^2\) Music and English Lyrics by Rabbi Menachem Creditor 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHp-jcPIK1Y

_Olam Hesed Yihane - Building this world with Love_  
_How are we doing as receivers of God’s love?_  
_Rabbi Claudia Kreiman_  
_Erev Rosh Hashanah 5780_
These words will frame our journey throughout the Yamim Noraim, serving as an overall theme. We will explore this theme through sermons, kavanot and personal prayers. We will ask what it means for us to live a life of חֶסֶד. We will explore the implications of turning towards ourselves, our friends and family with חֶסֶד. We will reflect on the ways in which חֶסֶד is and could further become the foundation of our community. We will think of חֶסֶד in the context of our ongoing commitments to social justice, to healing the world, to fighting for justice and fairness and as a response to hatred towards minorities and specifically towards the Jewish Community.

In 1955 Martin Luther King gave a sermon titled “The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore”. He ended that sermon with a story of a visit he and Coretta took to the southernmost point of India. As he tells it, one evening, they went out to the farthest tip of the beach. They sat together, surrounded and “enthralled by the vastness of the ocean and its terrifying immensities.” Facing west, they watched the sun descend into the sea like a great cosmic ball of fire. Then, just as it was almost out of sight... they turned around and saw the moon rising out of the same sea, “its radiant light shining supreme.”

Dr. King realized: Isn’t this what always happens in life? “We all have experiences when the light of day goes out and we are left standing in some dark and desolate midnight—moments when our noblest dreams are shattered and our highest hopes are blasted; moments when we are the victims of some tragic injustice and some terrible exploitation. During these moments our spirits are almost eaten away by gloom and despair; we feel that there is no light anywhere. But ever and again, when these moments come, we find ourselves taking the eastward look, only to discover that there is another light which shines even in the darkness.

This would be a miserable, terrible and unbearable world if God had only one light. But we can be consoled by the fact that God has two lights—a light to guide us in the brightness of the day when hopes are fulfilled and circumstances are favorable and a light to guide us in the darkness of midnight when frustrations are real and the

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slumbering giants of gloom and hopelessness are on the verge of rising up in our souls. Therefore we never need to walk in darkness.”

What are these lights that guide us in the brightness of the day and in the darkness of the night? These lights of God are the lights of *hesed*, of love and compassion.

In Avot De Rabi Natan⁴, an early rabbinic response to Pirkei Avot, we find a list of ten things that the world was created from:

בֵּעָשֶׁר דְבָרִים נָבְרָא עוֹלָמָּה:

בְּחֶסֶד. וּבְרָחָם. בְּחֶסֶד. וּבְרָחָם. בְּחֶסֶד. וּבְרָחָם. בְּחֶסֶד. וּבְרָחָם.

The world was created with ten forces:

- wisdom and knowledge
- understanding
- strength
- rebuke
- judgment
- process
- creativity
- love
- compassion

The text then continues to offer biblical verses that demonstrate the importance of each element on the list. We will focus on the last two elements of this list -hesed and rachamim, Kindness or Love, and Mercy.

How do we learn that the world was created with *hesed*?

As it is written: “The world is built from love (*hesed*)” (*Psalm 89:3*)

How do we learn that the world was created with compassion?

As it is written: “I will gather you in with great compassion” (*Isaiah 54:7*)

The sequence of verses creates the sense of existence driven and founded upon love. It reminds us that we, people are the recipients of God's love and that it has the power to bring us back from darkness.

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⁶ [מקהלת קסות מסכת אבות דרבי נמי וסחא ב פרק ב מז](https://ikar-la.org/wp-content/uploads/KN-hope-USE-THIS-ONE.pdf)

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*Olam Hesed Yibane - Building this world with Love*

*How are we doing as receivers of God's love?*

*Rabbi Claudia Kreiman*

*Erev Rosh Hashana 5780*
For me, the main call of this teaching is to open my heart to receive God’s love. It reflects a deep trust that God created the world so that God could enter into a loving relationship with its creatures.

For the next ten days as we make our way through the liturgy, we will be calling God the God of compassion and love again and again. We will ask for God’s compassion and kindness towards us, we will ask God to forgive us, to help us, and to guide us. The premise of the liturgy is that our relationship with God is the light that guides us during the day and during the night. That when our lives are bright and the world around us is sunny and sweet, God’s love and compassion holds us with a smile. And when it is dark, and gloomy and bleak and terrifying, God's love and compassion also hold us, and guides us with tears and brings us back.

Here a self-assessment question for the new year - How are we doing as receivers of God’s love? It is painful yet at the same time relatively easy to dismiss this whole thought - to say that the world is an uncaring place dominated only by power and luck. But if there is love in the world would you even know it? Are you open enough to allow any sense of love in your life, or are your defenses so secure, your convictions so strong, that you would not see it even if it came knocking on the door?

I offer this question as a practice, another way to help hold the enormity of this moment in the life of our nation and our planet. I offer this question as an additional perspective on who we are, as a way to press pause during this time, as a form of hesbon hanefesh, of soul assessment. I offer this question as one more tool to help us disentangle from what can be an overwhelming experience of the world as it is, and imagine ourselves even a little closer to the world as it might be.

My invitation to all of us for the next ten days is to experiment with allowing the love of God to embrace us. To sing not only the words of the song as a commitment, but also as an acceptance of being loved, by God.
Ahava Rabah Ahavtanu, we say before sh’ma, God loves us with a big and enduring love. God Loves us with an everlasting love.
May we all be able to open our hearts to receive that love during this season.