

Yom Kippur Morning

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Since the pandemic, all aspects of our lives have changed dramatically!

I now spend hours on my computer—particularly on zoom meetings. Every morning at 9:15, Monday through Friday, I see the beloved faces of the staff of Suburban Temple-Kol Ami --each in their own square. From that meeting on it's not unusual for me to be in and out of Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings the rest of the day—and sometimes into the evening. It's like an endless version of Hollywood squares, or the opening song of the Brady Bunch!

Off the screen, there are so many changes, too: rather than going into restaurants—we get food delivered, or we pick it up in bags and boxes. I buy so much online rather than go into stores. In my home, it is a very common occurrence to hear: “Another box came!”

But there is even more—I feel “boxed in” (sorry, couldn't resist!) by the many problems in our country. Massive wildfires are tearing at the west coast and yet another hurricane threatens the gulf. Our most needed and revered

political institutions are being targeted. And, of course, while the COVID numbers are down in Ohio, we continue to face a pandemic with no known end. That's just a few examples...

I'm overwhelmed, for sure. I also know that I am not alone. I've spoken with you, texted with you; direct messaged with you. So many of us feel besieged.

Something interesting happens when we're dealing with so much. When we are faced with an overwhelming crisis, or in our cases, multiple crises, it can feel less real. And even more so when the crisis is on a large scale. Paul Slovic, a psychologist at the University of Oregon, has been studying the limits of human compassion for decades. He has learned that when we are faced with groups of people suffering, or struggling, we actually become much less sensitive.

This is what's happening to us. Daily, we are barraged with massive numbers and data.

It's been shown that there is a disconnect when we are pummeled with facts and data. We disconnect. We desensitize. It has a name: it's called psychological, or psychic, numbing. It makes sense, that, when faced with statistics and data, we become numb.

I simply cannot wrap my head around 862,00 acres. Or the effect of 23 named storms, 8 hurricanes, and 2 major hurricanes. Or 7 million people who are sick with COVID 19. I feel detached.

Mother Theresa—yes, I’m quoting Mother Theresa in a Yom Kippur sermon—famously said, “If I look at the masses, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.” She intuitively knew she needed to think about one person, one story at a time.

We can do the same. In an interview just this past August, Professor Slovic said, “it’s the individual in the experience, how they are experiencing it, how they are coping, and dealing with it...” this is how we, too, can-must-combat the numbness.

Just a few months ago a terrible video became viral. The video—8 minutes and 46 seconds—gave us one story that captured the vast problem of racism in the United States. With this one story—one horrible, heinous crime—our emotions were ripped open. We felt outrage. We felt anguish. We felt shock. We could finally begin to comprehend the depths of racial injustice.

It became real and personal. Racism was no longer a statistic; it was an individual suffering, dying, from the injustice of systemic racism. We were

no longer numb. We rose up for George Floyd. We rose up for justice because we could no longer ignore the personal story.

Friends—we live in a country where crises are everywhere. Where heartbreak is in every community. We're hurting all the time. It makes sense that we feel like we're in a box; covered over with too much. When looking at the sheer size of our challenges—we wonder, how might I be of use? We may think to ourselves, "How could my one phone call actually make a difference?" or "How can my actions actually help climate change?"

Even our ancient rabbis worried about this! Rabbi Tarfon, in the Mishnah, wrote: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." We cannot fix everything. But we can make a difference, and we must try.

When we are feeling boxed in by all the crises in our world; when we are boxed in by the changes in our lives due the pandemic; when we are feeling numb and overwhelmed because of the sheer numbers of people hurting; of acres burned; incidences of injustice: connect. Find a story. Focus on one

“box”. Find one person. Find a cause. Do something – one thing. Your actions matter. You matter. You can make a difference.

"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

Yes. We are overwhelmed. No, we cannot fix everything. But we must know: we can, and will, make a difference. One story, one connection at a time.

OUTTAKES

I am reminded of a child who gets a new toy, and instead of playing with the toy, plays with the box. The child sees endless opportunity in the open container.

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died. An icon to women, to justice and the law, she was named by both Forbes and Fortune as one of the most powerful women. Justice Ginsburg was a beacon of grace, strength, and intelligence. Part of what made her beloved was that she was able to see possibilities. In her book, *My Own Words*, she said, “So often in life, things that you regard as an impediment turn out to be great, good fortune.”

Justice Ginsburg reminds me to look at some of the ways we have overcome feeling boxed in, and even found ways to thrive. Like the young child, we’ve taken the box and figured out what was possible, and beautiful. Here we are—online, at home, for High Holy days. We visually explored our prayers through art, interactive experiences and intentional design. Over 60 temple members, in one way or another have been involved in services—whether a quick photo, an Aliyah, or speaking in Journeys. Between Rosh Hashanah

and Yom Kippur we have recorded 13 videos and provided 11 audio tracks. For the first time, our professional choir and Kolot Kol Ami sang together. We opened the box of spiritual creativity, growth and beauty.

Let me start with something we've probably all been a part of—have you become a walker? A biker? A hiker? Did you try to purchase a bicycle in the spring—and couldn't find one? We've opened the box to discover our magnificent metro parks, which are busy with walkers and hikers and bikers; our local paths filled with neighbors.