

High Holy Days



Judgement to Curiosity

We have a challenge today. Actually, lots of challenges. But one specifically when it comes to Rosh Hashanah.

Tomorrow morning, we will read from the Torah. And the verses we will read contain a story that is more than just a little problematic. Cantor will chant the *Akedah* in which we're told that Abraham is being tested by God, who has commanded him to sacrifice his son. We're told that Abraham listened. He set off with Isaac and two of his servants to complete that task.

None of us can imagine ever sacrificing a human life, let alone our own child. It's unfathomable! And yet, every year, Jews around the world will open our Torah scrolls and repeat these verses.



Rabbi Daniel A. Schwartz

Erev Rosh Hashanah
1 Tishrei 5781

Do we read this story to remember the sacrifices that our ancestors were willing to make? Or to demonstrate what true faith to God must look like? Or even, as the text implies, that we have to prove our fear of God?

We're told that everything in Torah has meaning. Every letter, every word, every story – they're all there to teach us something. The same must be true of this story.

So, as we read it this year, I want you to think of it a little differently. Later in Torah, when we are given laws to follow, we know that they didn't come out of thin air. If it says don't, we know people were doing them. Don't

murder. Don't steal. People needed to be told what was wrong.

And if it says do, like setting up a justice system that is fair, then we know they weren't. These laws are there because people were acting in a way that needed to be corrected.

The same must be true for this story. This isn't simply about Abraham's faith. It is about teaching us to distinguish ourselves from our neighbors through a set of laws.

You see, we know that other nations would sacrifice their children. We have accounts in the Bible describing the Canaanite worshippers of Moloch throwing children into fires. The *Akedah* was to teach us – we don't do this.

We are to set ourselves apart and act differently than the people around us. We are to have higher standards by which we hold ourselves accountable. And that's the lesson I want to share with you tonight.

Because, every year at this time, we are supposed to think of our actions and do a *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of our souls. We are to think about our family, our community, the state of our nation and our world, where we are and what is happening.

It's been a hard year –
Coronavirus and quarantines;
Racism and Remote only connections;
Flaming forest fires and funnels of hurricanes;
Disputes on science and debates about politics.

I think of a recent Bar Mitzvah who was worried that his father was talking politics with us rabbis. As they entered the parking lot, the bar mitzvah boy said privately to his father, "Dad, you can't tell them who you're voting for, they might not like us anymore."

These challenges have divided us, they've divided our communities, even our homes. We don't allow for disagreements. Instead of thinking someone's idea is wrong, we switch it and think something is wrong with the person.

Tonight we ask ourselves, how do we get out of this slump? How do we lift ourselves up? How do we maintain or mend these relationships? The answer is from our Rosh Hashanah Torah portion. Just as we learn from the *Akedah*, we have to act differently.

There's a story from a local school guidance counselor who I think gives us the first step. Last winter, there was a teacher who was annoyed by a family. Every day, one of her favorite students would come to school with buttons missing. Shirt buttons, pants buttons even his coat buttons. "I know they have the means, why can't his parents send him to school looking neat and clean?"

Meanwhile, back at home, the child's parents, too, were quite annoyed. Every day they would see their son getting off the bus looking a little disheveled. And upon closer inspection, they would notice buttons were missing from his clothes.

"What on earth do they do in that kindergarten? Why can't they send our son home looking neat and clean?"



Judgement to Curiosity Cont'd



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The third perspective? The child's, learned by the guidance counselor after hearing complaints from both the parents and the teacher. On the bus ride, when no one was looking, the boy amused himself by plucking off the buttons. Why? Because he got to sit with them as they sewed the new buttons back on. He just wanted to sit with his parents – it was as simple as that.¹

We have a tendency to be like the parents and the teacher. We're quick to react, to make assumptions and to judge others. We blame, discredit, put words in others' mouths which they never said, and then look down on them.

At a conference in early March, speaking to a group of Rabbis, Lisa Eisen, the co-President of the Schusterman Family Foundation, posed a question that I want to share with you. Because I believe that question, if adhered to, will distinguish us and will help us begin to move in the right direction this year.

The question? "What would it look like if we exchanged judgement with curiosity?" Think about it for yourself. What would it look like if you exchanged judgement with curiosity?

We all have times we've wrongly judged someone and put up walls. I remember early this summer when my wife Elana and I took the kids on a trip around Lake Michigan.

We were on the border of the UP and Wisconsin and pulled into a gas station. The plan was to fill up the car and make a pit stop, so we got the kids out of the car. A woman pulled up to the pump behind us and got out of her car. "Can I buy your kids a candy bar?" I was a little taken aback. It's not every day when a stranger asks to buy my kids something.

I could say that it was because of COVID that I politely declined, as we were doing our best to avoid contact with others. But truth is, I made assumptions about her. Her appearance led me to believe that she needed the money more than our kids needed a candy bar.

And I assumed that she had a motive, too. Was this her hook to talk politics? Was she going to buy the kids something and then begin to testify and talk religion?

I replied to her questions with short answers. But then, knowing that we would be leaving soon, I started to ask her questions. Turned out

that almost 30 years ago one of her children was kidnapped. The neighbor who was responsible was later caught and her daughter's body was recovered. Since then, as a way of remembering her daughter, she buys small treats for kids with their parents.

Because I moved from judgment to curiosity, I had a powerful conversation with this woman and her story has stuck with me, all which I would have missed if I had continued to dismiss her.

What would it look like if you exchanged judgement with curiosity?

Instead of assuming the worst and distancing yourself from someone, it would force you to ask questions and engage in conversation. And that discussion would lead to getting to know someone and where they are coming from. You'd gain insight into their line of thinking and may even gain an appreciation for how they reached their conclusion.

It doesn't mean that you'll always agree with that person. You may disagree. You may disagree often. But instead of immediately judging them, making assumptions and distancing yourself, you may be drawn closer through your discussion.

And learning by asking questions, it's a very Jewish thing to do. More than observing Jewish law, or eating traditional Jewish foods, or even being a part of a Jewish community, the majority of Jews in the US in a survey a few years ago believed that being intellectually curious was essential to being Jewish, that it made us distinct as a people.

We're told that on this day, God opens the *Sefer Chayim*, the Book of Life, and judges each one of us. Let's leave the judging to God. The rest of us have an obligation to be curious, to have conversations and learn from each other. To learn about experiences that shaped our identity and the way that we see our world.

As we celebrate this new year, may it be filled with many questions. And may those questions help strengthen our relationships and bring us closer to one another.

¹Website. *The Other Side of the Story Archives*. 3/2/12.

Knowing Our Story, Creating Our Empathy



Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz

Rosh Hashanah
1 Tishrei 5781

Being here today, on this holy and unique time in all of our lives, got me to thinking about a story from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, the great Hasidic master. It's about a family who found their son convinced that he was a rooster, and doing the things that roosters do. He removed his clothes. He sat clucking beneath the family table. He refused to eat human food. He even refused to speak.

The parents were beside themselves. They called in doctors, therapists, healers. But no one could help. Finally, they invited the rabbi. He assured them that he could help the boy, but it would be unconventional. The parents agreed immediately.

So the rabbi took off his clothes down to his boxers, descended under the table, began clucking like a rooster and eating the chicken food. The parents were astonished. Now, it seemed, they had a pair of roosters in their home.

The rabbi and the boy spent the day together, clucking and eating what chickens eat. And at one point the rabbi turned to the boy and said, "It hurts my throat to speak this way. Wouldn't it be better to speak like people?"

"But we're roosters!" exclaimed the boy.

"So we'll be roosters who speak like people," responded the rabbi. And the boy agreed. And their conversation ensued.

The rabbi then said, "It's cold here with no clothes. Wouldn't it be better for us to dress like people?"

"But we're roosters! Roosters don't wear clothes," said the boy.

"So we'll be roosters who dress like people," responded the rabbi. And the boy agreed, and he dressed. And the rabbi said, "I don't like this chicken food, wouldn't it be better to eat like people?" And the boy agreed.

Finally, the rabbi said, "My back hurts. Wouldn't it be better for us to stand and walk the world like people?" And the boy agreed. They rose from beneath the table, and the boy was cured.

Sometimes, as strange as it seems, that's all we need. Someone to meet us where we are, to come to our level, to not merely experience what we're experiencing, but to let us know they feel it, too. It's empathy, the highest form of human connection, of authentic understanding. There are those who believe such awareness is innate. Yet I'd suggest that it's a skill. It's something we work on, that we can practice and even get better at.

Our New Year is asking us to do just that. We are to take a chesbon hanefesh, literally an accounting of the soul. In other words, it is our annual needs assessment. What do we see within ourselves that demands attention? What behaviors? What's lacking? The ancients' hope was that the prayers we say are to move us to change our ways.

There is a very practical reason we do this introspection on Rosh Hashanah – for this is the day in which we celebrate the creation of our world. And while it may be the anniversary of when the world came to be, more importantly, we celebrate creation so that we understand the ability we have to re-create. Or, as Elie Wiesel taught, it is not merely that we get to begin, but that we get to begin again. As difficult as our world is today with

Knowing Our Story, Creating Our Empathy Cont'd



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everything that is swirling around us, ours is the tradition that not only gives us another chance, but demands that by looking within and re-creating, we can make our lives, and our world, better.

You don't have to look too far to realize it is the essence of our faith – that rooted in our identity are both the commands and the memory that inspires to empathy – to be there for others. Rosh Hashanah is saying it's up to us own the vision. Over and over in Torah we read that you should know the feelings of the stranger. Why? Because you were once there, too. You were strangers in the land of Egypt. 36 times we are told that message. You think our ancestors wanted to make sure we heard it loudly and clearly? 36 times.

And then the message is made even more emphatically. When a stranger resides in your land, you shall love him as yourself (Lev 19:34). The one who is radically different than you, love him, as if he is you – again, because you know how it feels to be different, to be an outsider, to be without. It's the empathy needed.

But here's the most intriguing and even inspiring part of who we are. Our story is one about a people once powerless who became powerful. Yet that's not what Jewish memory is about. And it sure isn't what the Torah or Jewish law made into our holiday themes. Is there any holiday when we commemorate the monarchy solidified by King David or the vast and expansive kingdom of Solomon? Nope. Instead we all know the mantra - the nine-word adage for every Jewish holiday: They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat.

Because our traditions are about remembering our slavery and, from

there, our freedom. Our memory is one of the most powerful tools we've been blessed with, because it shrinks the gap between us and the past. We are to be carrying the stories of the ones that came before. The more connected we are to that story, to our collective history, to knowing who we are and what we have been through as a people, the more connected we will be to other people's stories. The more inherently we will care.

And ultimately, that is why we need to connect with one another, why we need to connect with our congregation, our community, and why you're here with us right now – because through our relationships comes learning and through this learning we know our past. And in knowing, understanding our past, we have empathy for others.

No doubt this world we live in can be confusing. And there are times, I'm sure, we feel a little bit like we don't belong, maybe even like a child who thinks he's a rooster, confused under a family table. But we will sit together and listen to each other. We'll be nourished by our traditions, clothed in the wisdom woven into it, so that we know who we are and where we have come from. And we will get up and appreciate, not only that we're very much a part of this world, but that we have brought a little more empathy into it as well.

It's up to us to call ourselves to task....

Amen v'Amen



President's Address



Keith Lublin

President

Rosh Hashanah
1 Tishrei 5781

Thanks, Rabbi. And welcome, everyone, to this first-ever one-time-only YouTube president's report. As there's no one else actually here at Temple right now, I'm saved the anxiety of speaking in front of a crowd. But I'd happily take the nerves if only we had an effective corona vaccine to permit us all to congregate together once more.

In the meantime, I want to let you know the three main reasons Temple is succeeding to navigate these crazy times so well.

First and foremost, it's thanks to our phenomenal clergy, our Rabbis and Cantor, who have worked countless hours in moving services and teachings online. Together with our professional staff, led by Brian Fishman, they have seamlessly transitioned to a virtual working environment. And together with Andee Liberman and Marsha Mitnick, who developed multiple options for the coming school year for our religious school and our preschool so that each family can participate no matter their particular situation, it's been a tremendous effort by everyone on the team.

Second, thanks to our underlying fiscal conservatism. We achieved three significant successes this past year – the sale of the Corners building, the receipt of an SBA PPP loan we expect to be forgiven, and the receipt of a very low interest EIDL loan which we used to pay down our mortgage and thereby redirect our cash flow not toward bank payments, but instead toward education, programming, and social action.

Finally, thanks to you, our members, for several reasons. When they said we had to enforce social-distancing, you refused. You said, we may need to be physically-distant to fight this virus. But we're staying socially-connected. You called each other to check in. You Zoomed. You connected with your fellow congregants to make sure no one felt isolated. And when Rabbi Moskowitz's 25th anniversary celebration with Shir Shalom could not be held in person last April, you told us to postpone it until next April, as a celebration not only of Rabbi Mike, but also as a testament of our desire to be physically together, to celebrate all mitzvahs, all good times and bad as one connected community. And you generously donated to Temple in two primary ways – to our endowment, and to our annual appeal.

Thanks to several significant gifts and prudent investment returns, our endowment has already grown to nearly one million dollars. And it is invested to provide significant recurring interest, every year, year after year, to fund programming and scholarships for our Temple community. Our testamentary campaign is part of this, established three years ago and originally named "Vision 2020." And so now, to honor all those who agree, before the end of this 2020 calendar year, to remember Shir Shalom in their will, we will include your name in the list of Charter Members. Help support Jewish education and programming for future generations. Simply include Temple in your estate documentation. I've done it myself. It's easy and it feels great.

Separate from our endowment, we wish to assist those members who have lost work during the current pandemic and are suddenly having trouble affording their child's Jewish education. In response to this urgent need, I am thrilled to report that we received a tremendous \$175,000 donation this past summer, from a member who wishes to remain anonymous, to assist with the urgent needs fellow-members are faced with as a result of this awful coronavirus. Our board has already stepped up to help contribute. And I ask for you to donate as well. Fully one-third of our SHORESH students are on some form of financial assistance. And we count on your support.

Please, donate to Temple. Click right there on your screen. It means so much to our community. A group of committed Temple members have once again agreed to match every donated dollar that comes in for this Covid-19 Emergency High Holiday Appeal.

Finally, please continue to let me know what I can do to support you, our members. Keep calling and emailing me at klublin@hotmail.com. My cell phone number is still the same, 248-227-8659. I'll put my phone number and email in *The Scribe*. Keep talking to me. Let me know how we can improve.

And with that, physically- but not socially-distant, I wish you and your families, and all of us, as one large congregational family, safety, good health, and all the best this coming year. *Shana Tova*.



Speak Up!

Shana Tova!



Abby Samson
SSTY Religious
Vice President
Rosh Hashanah
1 Tishrei 5781

In today's Torah portion, G-d uses G-d's voice to create the creatures and beings on Earth. This is a very important part of the portion because it is through G-d's speech that humans (along with everything else in the world) were made. We are taught that every single human being who ever lived was created *b'tselem elohim*, or, in English, in G-d's image. Sometimes, there are people who do not understand this concept. Our responsibility is to use our voices to help those people see the beauty in all of G-d's creations - just as G-d's voice was used to create us.

Speaking up and using our voices is incredibly important, especially in this day and age! In society today, discrimination is a very big issue. Discrimination is when we treat people differently because of who they are or what they look like. We need to use our voices and speak up against this issue, because as the Torah states, we are all created in G-d's image and therefore we should not single out one another.

One of the most common forms of discrimination we see today is racism. Sadly, many people are judged and even hated just because of the color of their skin. Fortunately, there are great people who are raising their voices and working to try to change that problem in our world. James Rucker is one of those great people who has inspired me, and I think he'll inspire you too.

After seeing a different set of standards in the justice system being applied to a group of black teenagers than it was for white teenagers, he knew he had to respond in some way. He saw a wrong that needed to be righted and set out to do something about it, which led to him co-founding Color of Change.

Color of Change is a group that is using modern technology, like social networking, to address racial issues. Over the years Color of Change has challenged racist state

policies and has helped change laws in different states that have had racist policies. They have boosted black voter participation and they have lifted the voice of Black Americans. While doing that, they have become the "largest online racial justice organization in the U.S. with 1.7 million members."¹

Today, in and out of our Shir Shalom community, we can all be inspired by Mr. Rucker, and use our voices to help people see the beauty in all of G-d's creations, no matter who they are, what they look like, or what they believe in. Just as Elana Arian shares in her song, we all have voices, our voices are powerful, and our voices can create change!

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year. This time of year can mean something different for everyone. For me, Rosh Hashanah marks a fresh start. I like to make goals for the new year -- almost like New Year's resolutions! This year, my goal is to use my gift from G-d, my voice, and to speak up if I do not agree with something, whether it is as small as an argument with my siblings, or as big of a topic as racism. I intend to make my voice known, and to stand up for the things I believe in, and I encourage everyone to do the same! We may not end up with 1.7 million followers, but we have to start somewhere.

I hope you also reflect on your past year (I know there is a lot to reflect on). Think about the ways in which you used your voice. Did you use it in a negative way, maybe in a fight with a friend or a parent? Did you use your voice in a positive way, to cheer up those who needed some joy in their lives? As we start the new year, create a fresh start and think about how you can use your voice to make a positive impact on others! *Shana Tovah!!!*

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/06/07/19-of-the-most-influential-civil-rights-leaders-of-the-21st-century/111907158/>



A Crisis is a Terrible Thing to Waste



Rabbi Dannel I. Schwartz

Kol Nidre
10 Tishrei 5781

According to certain Jewish traditions, if you do Kol Nidre correctly with what they call kavanah (intensity), then it should be about looking at yourself through the magical mirror of mindfulness. That's why it's supposed to be sung three times. First for **revelation**, then **confrontation** and **lastly resolution**. Each time a little louder. Each time more expressive. First: **Revelation**. Softly. Because at the beginning of the process it's just about the ironies of life. The little white lies, the inconsistencies. What you've told yourself and maybe to others were, at best, conveniences, fictions, fabrications...fibs. And there's the realization that it is no longer **what** you've become that is important but **who** you've become. And really, truthfully, do you like what you see?

Second time, a little louder: **Confrontation**. How authentic have you been? The ancients say that meaningful life is all about reputation. That it's not always about being right but being kind. That it should never be about how cunning or clever you are but about how good you can get.

Third time...last time. Kol Nidre is sung loudly. Because it's all about **resolution**. We don't have to have the answer or the fix but we can resolve that we will struggle with it honestly this time around. It's no longer about live and let live. Something must change and if it ain't broke... sometimes we've got to break it in order to think outside the box, get a new perspective, and shake things up.

Ironic isn't it, that not that long ago I wondered what suit I'd wear for this service. Then months ago, I speculated should I stay with the Holy Day motif and wear a white mask or go bold with polkadots? But now... now rather than being a slave to fashion, I'm going to keep you guessing as to whether or not I'm wearing pants.

Ironic, isn't it, not that long ago we were so afraid that there could be a terrorist attack on any given Kol Nidre. For years we got calls... should I come to shul? "Don't worry," we counseled, "we've got the police with cars out front! Got plain clothes cops inside; dogs that sniff for bombs. Metal detectors like in the airports at every entry. Don't be scared. Come to shul. We got this-- you'll be **safe**." Now we say "Stay home... wear a mask." Safe? **No one**

is safe....

And perhaps it's ironic that this year more than any other in my lifetime, it's not about the vows we've vowed that didn't come true. It's all about complaining, accusation and unhappiness. A story... of course there's a story -- a Florida story-- all about a grandma whose four-year-old grandson has been cloistered by Corona for weeks. She takes him to the beach, letting him play on the water's edge. As she watches in wonder, a large wave comes and takes the little boy away. "Oh God," she cries, "I beg of you, bring back my little boy." As the next wave hits the beach the grandson comes with it safe and sound. The grandmother looks at the boy, looks at the sky and yells, "He had a hat!"

Who can blame any of us for complaining? The Corona isn't fair. But then again when was life **fair**?

Sure, little kids don't know this. Which is why little kids run around pointing out (usually quite loudly) every violation they spot against life's rule of fairness until they learn that the only rule governing fairness is that there **is** no rule governing fairness. But of course, there are a lot of people who don't understand this because they may have grown older but haven't grown up. After all, this is the age of quick fixes and Law and Order where every excess, protest, grievance and wrong-doing should take no more than an hour to be solved. That's why a lot of us tend to listen to the extremes because they always seem have immediate answers: they're the persona with the panacea, the extremist with the elixir, the radical with the remedy. Just ask them... they're the only ones in the know. Just ask them: they've got the truth with a capital T. Well, let me let you in on a little secret. The greatest evils of all time have been done by those who can convince you that they've got all the answers.

Kol Nidre... when we are really real with ourselves we see the irony. In an age where there is so much vulnerability, so many at risk... just look at the beaches, marches, rallies and riots and you will see people who must be convinced they're bullet-proof! Maybe that's why the Marvel brand is so popular and super heroes are the rage. Because we want to be invulnerable. We got super-powers.



A Crisis is a Terrible Thing to Waste Cont'd



Rabbi Dannel I. Schwartz

Kol Nidre
10 Tishrei 5781

Well, I got a secret! Superman isn't really real. Ahh, a story... and I heard it's a true story... Heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali, in his prime, boarded a plane and the stewardess asked him to fasten his seatbelt. Ali looked up and said with a smile: "Superman don't need no seatbelt." To which the stewardess responded: "Superman don't need no plane!" My rational self understands the psychology of the other side, too. A seemingly incurable virus that goes on and on; a pervasive racial divide that doesn't go away...can make anyone on any side of the political and demographic spectrum feel out of control and when you lose control, when you're restricted on guesses that may be right or wrong or just capricious, it causes fear... and fear is the darkroom where negatives are developed. It immobilizes, paralyzes and makes us more than a touch self-absorbed.

There's this saying I've heard in Maine: "Don't curse the wind-- trim the sails." You can't control nature and you can't fix stupid. We just have to make it all work for us. What did that economist say? "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." Can't change the facts on the ground but you can bend them to our advantage and make our personal world, our institutional world, a better more satisfying place to be.

Old saying: never ask a barber if you need a haircut. Never ask a rabbi how to make his congregation the best. We designed Shir Shalom to be a building that was warm, welcoming, with a perfect feng shui. It used to be the ideal place for our people to go; now it has to be an entity that goes to our people. So I challenge this congregation not to be a building but to be different. What does the Torah say: a Kingdom of priests and a holy people.

There's a tradition that every Jew, not just professional Jews, visits the sick, the endangered, the at-risk, at least once a week. In Hebrew it's called *Bikoor Cholim*. Now here's the thing... I will even put skin in the game and I'll teach a course for our members to become Jewish chaplains and I challenge our rabbis and board to form a chaplaincy corps who will reach out and touch those who are alone, who are in need, who are at risk. To be Jewish Chaplains professionally, personally

and with a *Yiddishe Tam*, a distinctly Jewish feel. Our board and rabbis will call you, not for a contribution this time, but for contacts. I challenge our membership to let us know whomever you know who is in need, whether they are members or not; whether they are Jewish or not; whether they are Republicans, Democrats or Independents or not. Everyone knows someone who is hurting now. If they need a job, if they are losing their business, let us know. If they are alone and need a support system, maybe we can be the catalyst and help. All you have to do is give us their name and number and let us do the rest.

And it's time -- You don't have to come to us for a *Yiddishe Kupf*. We will come to you. I challenge the Rabbis and Board to create new Jewish Zoom courses for any member who will want it. New courses that will make you marvelous. I will put skin in the game and teach a four week course on the great Jewish Philosophers from Maimonides to Me. A course on best new Jewish films, to give you something to watch during the pandemic, on the condition that Rabbi Moskowitz teaches a new and different course and Rabbi Schwartz the Younger and more Improved Version teaches a new and different course and at the end we will all give parting gifts for perfect attendance.

I can't take the virus away. But if I'm going to go out I'm going to go out in a blaze... and have fun doing it. What I want to do in the middle of this mishigas: I want make Jews and memories and make me and my life better in the process.

Kol Nidre. This is my resolution, this is my promise. We are going to beat this virus and have fun in the process by making this Temple more than just a building, making us more than just members, by making you more and me more because a Crisis is a terrible thing to waste.

From Suzi and me-- *Gmar Hatima Tova*. May this craziness not get us down but lift us up and let us finish it well.

Amen



Knowing Our Needs



Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz

Yom Kippur
10 Tishrei 5781

This day, Yom Kippur, **it's all a metaphor.** Everything about it. We ask to be inscribed for blessing in the *sefer hachaim, the book of life*. We greet one another by saying, *g'mar chatimah tova* – may you be sealed in that book for goodness. We dress in white – like the garment worn at death, in which we will be buried. We fast, removing the most basic of needs, denying ourselves of what we believe we cannot live without. If we can control this most essential desire for one day, the **metaphor** is that we can control all those desires that might influence us. Even the Torah portion we just read. God has placed it all before us, blessing, curse, life, death. Choose life. Again, the metaphor in our lives, you have got to make a choice. What do you need? What do we want to change about ourselves?

But this year, it feels different. There are a lot more questions the events of our world have raised. We're anxious and overwhelmed, worried and unsure. Imagine giving a sermon to an empty sanctuary. It would be as absurd as playing NFL football or NBA basketball with no crowd. Oh right, new realities. Changed world. It's awkward. It feels hollow. Everything looks different.

Actually, it seems we all look different after these past six months. Reminds me of a story. Morrie was an observant Jew. Went to shul every Shabbas, loved his faith, his people, his identity. But one day, God spoke to him and shared some difficult news. "Morrie," God said, "I'm afraid you only have three months to live." At first, yes, he was shocked, but within a few moments, Morrie decided he would make the most of the time he had. Went out shopping, got himself the nicest suits imaginable. Visited the plastic surgeon, tightened things up a smidge. He went to the hair stylist and left perfectly groomed. He trimmed his beard ever so fashionably. Found the alligator leather shoes he always dreamed of wearing.

And then in his new shoes, walked

outside feeling wonderful and looking as dapper as ever ...and bam, hit by a bus, killed on the spot. Entering heaven, Morrie was incredulous. Running up to God, he screamed, "How could you do this? I had 63 more days. You told me three months. What happened?" "Morrie, Morrie? Is that you? Yikes," said God, "I didn't recognize you. That's a nice suit though."

It's true. We look different than how we did back in February. Yet more than our looks, we feel different. We're not the same anymore. The world has changed us. Didn't necessarily have a choice in that. But Yom Kippur is saying, now we do have a choice – and it's all about how we can look at things differently. To choose what is really most important to us. **That is the real metaphor.** The needs over the wants, and to be crystal clear about the difference between the two. Because the wants are the stuff, the things for show. It's what we fall back on and convince ourselves we have to have. Being forced to slow down, though, maybe it's helped us gain some perspective. This virus has sharpened our vision of what joy is, what love really is.

What are the wants? People getting married and planning a 200 guest wedding? What was orchestrated a year ago to be elegant and inviting suddenly is not possible. April, May, June, July. They were all held in the balance. But then folks got impatient. And the reality of all those wants, the perfect venue, the 16 piece band, the dozen passed hors d'oeuvres, the number of tiers on the cake, none of it seemed important anymore. Suddenly the reality recognized was less is more. Simple. Scaled down. 10, 20 family members, friends in the backyard. Beautiful. Because we've learned. We understand what matters are the people around us. **Needs over wants.**

Strangely, it's even occurred with funerals. Difficult yes, mourning in the midst of a pandemic. No doubt it exacerbates the pain connected to loss. And these days, funerals are forced to be intimate, with



Knowing Our Needs Cont'd



Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz

Yom Kippur
10 Tishrei 5781

family and just the closest of friends. At first the rule set by our community was only 10 people could attend, just a minyan. But in time we learned, it was possible to socially distance outside, so with the guidance of Rabbi Daniel Schwartz, the President of the Michigan Board of Rabbis, the number grew. 20 seemed too small. 50 too large. So the compromise was made. Double chai. 36 could attend. But no one was really going to notice the precise number.

And then, in the midst of a funeral service, I looked up from my prayerbook, and noticed exactly 36 people. There's a legend. A teaching about the need for this world to have 36 purely just and righteous people. They're called ***lamed vavniks***. Strange name, I know. ***Lamed vavniks*** – it merely represents the Hebrew number 36. As the story goes, no one knows for sure who they might be.

But these people are so humble, they don't even know who they are. Only God knows. However, maybe there are times we have sensed it in someone. We've noticed. The people who have felt their love know it. The old souls we encounter in life. The kindest, most sincere, generous, thoughtful, loving. They are our saints and according to this teaching, they are needed to hold up our world.

Can you name 36 people in your life that you need? Your saints. Those truly good *neshamas* in your world. Who are the 36 you want to be there for you? Make the list. Now think about your responsibility in this equation. What can you do for them? How can you celebrate them? Let them know they matter, that you need them in your life. That's personal and important. That's the need, the love, the connections we have made that support us. That's what we have to bring more into our world, even when we're not physically together.

Last night, the gauntlet was thrown down. Rabbi Dannel Schwartz gave us a challenge. He dared us to think differently. To recognize that it's not about

the building. It's never been about the building, as beautiful as it may be. But to know we can make ourselves better as a community, as a people. There's a need here.

We can be an even greater congregation of learners. The classes we created these past months have been filled, best numbers we have ever had. (*Shout out to my followers on Monday Morning Musings.*) But we can do more. We love teaching. It's in our blood. But you have to give us the course you want to learn, the classes you want to take. You want one on new Jewish literature of this past year? Great. Israeli history? Wonderful. The Jewish lens for our world today? Perfect. Commit to learning with us – and we'll teach every time you give us a minyan.

And let's hold the elder Rabbi Schwartz's feet to the fire. Here's a man who was a chaplain at Beaumont Hospital for over 40 years – and he wants to teach you how to be a chaplain. We need that. We need people who are not just the professional, official Jews. But again, it doesn't work without the names, without you sharing with us the list of people who are in need.

Everyone knows someone who has been affected by the pandemic. Whether they're sick or out of work or having trouble making ends meet, there are things we can do. A phone call. A connection. An opportunity. We want to be in the business, and here's the link, **of making *lamed vavniks*, of helping one another help one another**. Our faith demands that people need people, connected in that circle of 36 for each other.

This day, Yom Kippur, it's all a **metaphor**. It's telling us to get off our tuchases and make choices. Recognize what we really **need** every day. And here's what I've come to realize – it's all about the love we can share, the connections we can make, the community we create. In other words, what we really need is for us each to be a mensch.

Amen v'Amen



Making the World A Better Place



**Rebekah
Weiskopf**

SSTY President
Yom Kippur
10 Tishrei 5781

I want you to use your imagination for a moment. If it helps to close your eyes, you can. Picture yourself walking over to a group of people your age. Maybe they are playing a game or sport you like, maybe they are sitting at a lunch table at school, or maybe they are in the breakroom at your office. You ask if you can join them. They say, “No.” But they don’t just say no, they refuse to let you join them. Because you are Jewish. How would that make you feel? That wouldn’t make any of us feel good because none of us want to be excluded. I think all of us would want to be treated equally. It shouldn’t matter our religion, the color of our skin, or our abilities. It’s a lesson I’m sure you’ve heard over and over again: treat others the way you want to be treated.

In preparation for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, we have spent the time since Rosh Hashanah being introspective and repentant, and are ready to spend the day of Yom Kippur making amends and asking for forgiveness for things we have done that have been hurtful to others over the past year. Yom Kippur is a time that we, as Jews, reflect, ask God for forgiveness and to inscribe our names into the Book of Life. At this point, I usually ask forgiveness for being sassy to my parents or being mean to my brothers. For today’s service, we decided on the theme of ***making the world a better, more inclusive place.*** Making the world a place we believe God would want to be a part of.

The song “In This Place,” by Alan Goodis, brings about the idea that every person must do their part to help make the world a better place by not only **DOING** but by including. That sounds familiar, and it should! In Judaism, we say *Tikkun Olam*, which means just that: do your part to make the world a better place.

As you all may know, this past Friday Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed after a long battle with cancer. Justice Ginsburg fought for so many people, especially women, for their rights, equality, and for their freedoms.

She exemplified “treating others how you want to be treated.” One of her quotes that struck me was “Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” She was someone people of all ages could look up to. The Notorious RBG was someone who helped to make this world one that God would most definitely want to have a part in. While we ourselves may not have the ability to make the same widespread impact that she did, we can all do our part to better the world, starting in our homes and within our communities.

Every little thing we do each day, whether it be by making a donation, giving a compliment, opening the door for someone, or even just smiling at a stranger walking by, are all ways to make our world a better place.

The past six months have had many challenges for all of us during these unprecedented times. We should all appreciate how inclusive and friendly the Rabbis and Cantor have been able to make the High Holiday services for all of us. I’m hoping that even though we can’t be together in person for services, you will be able to find it in yourself to start off the new year finding small ways, every day, to make the world around you a better place. One that is inclusive and compassionate.

In this New Year, I hope all of us can make that vision of kindness and inclusivity a reality because in doing that, we not only make our world better, but we also make it, as our theme song teaches, a place in which God would want to live.

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for the good that you do. *L’ Shana tova*