

Our Broken Hallelujah  
Yom Kippur 5778  
Rabbi Hal Rudin-Luria

Now I've heard there was a secret chord  
That David played, and it pleased the Lord  
But you don't really care for music do you?

We each enter Yom Kippur pretending that we are prepared to apologize, to ask for forgiveness, to pray and to remember- but like the song Hallelujah, we are cynical. Protests and diatribes, twitter wars and hurricanes of words and winds, floods of water and hate- it is not so easy to stand here pleading for our own lives as our world seems to be spinning out of control. We have been beaten up by the year that has just ended, and yet, here we are today.

Baby I've been here before  
I've seen this room and I've walked the floor  
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah.  
There's a blaze of light in every word  
It doesn't matter which you heard  
The holy or the broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah gives voice to our resilience with vulnerable honesty.  
Hallelujah begins with despair and ends with deep hope.  
Hallelujah expresses our gratitude and appreciation, and reminds us that we each have the strength to persevere.

In the style of Tehillim- the Biblical Psalms of King David which we recite each morning, music legend Leonard Cohen, *zichrono livracha* who died earlier this year, captures our feelings, as it is so difficult to live in this incomplete world, where so much is broken and we feel divided. We stand here crushed by the storms brewing in our country and tired from our own struggles of the past year; still, we are here and we are prepared to continue our mission of self-improvement and repair.

How can we still be hopeful in our prayers? How do we gather the strength to do our part to patch together our broken world; to begin to heal our fractured relationships?

The Holy Rebbe of Tzanz told this story:

'There were two people lost in a forest. One of them was going alone and he was lost for many days. He had no idea which was the right direction to get out of the forest. Suddenly he saw another person walking toward him. A great joy rose in his heart that now, finally, there would be someone to show him the correct way out of the forest. When they came to each other, he asked, "Brother, tell me. What is the best way to go? I have been lost in this forest for so many days."

He answered, "I am sorry but I cannot tell you the proper way. I have also been lost here for many days. However there is one thing I can tell you. The way that I have been going you should not go. It is NOT the correct way. Come let us together choose a new way." '

When the Rebbe finished the story there were tears in his eyes. Then he said, 'I am not able to tell you anything except this. The way in which we have been going until now we should not follow any more. This way is an error. Let us try for ourselves a new way.'

Today, we must find new ways to repair and relieve our situation: Relief from the divisiveness that is tearing through our own families, community and country and support for those suffering all around us.

There's a blaze of light in every word  
It doesn't matter which you heard  
The holy or the broken Hallelujah

In ancient times, Yom Kippur was a moment of unity- bringing together the broken and the holy. The entire Jewish people- sinners and saints, rich and poor, all standing as one when the High Priest would utter G-d's holiest

name aloud- the four letter name- YHVH- which we intentionally no longer pronounce- forgotten and lost to us. The rabbis teach that since the destruction of the Temple, when our world first became broken and we were exiled, a part of G-d has become hidden. We are left with just the first half of G-d's most holy name- Yah described simply as breath and a breeze of wind. When we say Hallelujah with each breath we take, we activate that part of G-d within us and when we exhale, it reminds us to reach out to others- to begin to mend that brokenness.

Now I've heard there was a secret chord  
That David played, and it pleased the Lord

Our secret chord is our desire this Yom Kippur to come together again as one family and community, Am Echad B'Lev Echad- one people one heart. At Kol Nidre, we began by asking permission to stand in prayer with the "avaryanim"- translated as the sinners in our midst, but the word "avaryan" can also be understood as "all those we pass by who are hurting and we do not stop to help."

The story is told about a person walking down the street, when suddenly he falls into a huge 20 foot hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out. First, he sees a woman quickly walking by the hole and the man stuck in the bottom shouts, hey, can you help me out? She was a doctor so as she briskly walks by- she writes a prescription and drops it down the hole. But what help is that to him?

Then a rabbi comes walking by and the guy shouts, Rabbi, I am stuck in this hole, can you please help me out? The rabbi writes out a prayer, throws it down the hole and moves on. But what help is that to him? Then, a friend walks by and he shouts, "Hey, Joe- it's me- Frank and I am stuck in this hole." What does his friend do? Joe jumps right down to the bottom of the hole with him. Frank is dumbfounded and asks, "How are you going to help now that you are stuck down here with me?" Joe, replies, "Do not fear, I've been down here before and I know the way out."

Yom Kippur is a day of Encounter, when we let our guard down. Today, we have to jump into and across chasms; reach out to bridge the gaps with those whom we may disagree, listen to them, to try to understand their position and find what we share in common- we have to begin to remove those walls- In the end- we can agree to disagree but we need to remember that we are family, friends and part of the same community so that we can once again work together to make this next year a year of blessing for all of us.

We need some ground rules, boundaries and protections for this is vulnerable work. The rabbis teach “Eizehu Mechubad? Who is an honored person, HaMekhabed et habriyot, An honored person is one that honors every person.” We can re-engage and repair our relationships with kavod- respect, dignity and honor. Above the holy ark of the Covenant were crafted two golden cherubs. Tradition teaches that when the Jewish people would live with shalom bayit, peaceful harmony- the angels would face each other spreading their wings and G-d’s presence would hover among the people. However, when dissension and intolerance filled the world, the angels would turn away, not facing each other- and G-d’s presence would leave our world. We must strive to bring respect to our relationships and bring peace to our community. Today, we need to begin anew by turning towards each other once again.

We also need a break and relief from the endless news cycle. We check our smart phones on average 85 times each day. I do it, too- and this is not healthy for any of us. We have no off switch to power down our brains, hearts and souls and recharge- except on days like today, called in the Torah, Shabbat Shabbaton.

Yom Kippur is the ultimate Shabbat, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, a day of respite- the day to turn inward, evaluate ourselves, reconnect with family and community, and remember those no longer with us.

How many of us use Shabbat- called the gift of the Jews to the world- to its fullest? Shabbat is one day each week to breathe, find relief from the commotion and division in our world, to study and gather united for a higher

purpose in what the rabbis call a slice of heaven or in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, a palace in time. Six days a week, we are filled with worry and strain, iPhones, Twitter and Facebook, busyness and business; all the tensions of our world. For one day each week, powering down helps open our eyes to truly see each other, talk, reconnect, and recharge.

Hallelujah is Leonard Cohen's most famous song but originally it was a dud destined for the cutting room floor. His record producer called Hallelujah an abomination refusing to release it. Over time Cohen was able to get it released but the song went unnoticed, and Cohen kept rewriting new verses to improve the song. Some years later, it became a fan favorite after someone else sang it. The story of the song itself is our story, how we all feel today, embracing the reality of both despair and hope in our lives in these most tumultuous times when the world seems utterly imperfect. We strive to perfect ourselves, rewriting the composition of our days and our hearts, striving to change, correct and improve through teshuvah. We also have to be honest with ourselves and identify our mistakes and anger, and work to change in order to find forgiveness.

Our world was not created perfect, filled with light and whole. Bereshit- In the Beginning, our Torah opens with G-d in a dark world filled with chaos- Tohu v'vohu- and then Ruach- the wind of G-d blows- and G-d brings light and it was good. In Hebrew, the word Ruach has many translations- it means spirit and soul, wind and breeze, relief and breath. Judaism teaches that we have the responsibility to follow G-d's example and continue the divine project to move our world and ourselves from a place of degradation to dignity, from darkness to light, from narrowness to possibility, from brokenness to wholeness. We are G-d's partners in this most holy endeavor. How can we fulfill this mighty task? By committing to live with purpose, integrity and compassion.

We can come together and change for the better. Learn from Michael and his amazing story of transformation. Michael was a violent white supremacist and neo-Nazi. Swastika tattoos covered his body and he proudly told all that he refused to work with anyone "different than him,"

meaning not white. Serving prison time, Michael was assigned African-American Tiffany as his case worker and later parole officer. A virulent public hater of Blacks and Jews, he woke each morning saluting the Nazi Swastika flag that hung above his bed. Tiffany provided Michael a strong support system and instilled in him a belief that he had the power to change, to replace symbols of hate with positivity. Michael learned to see Tiffany not only as a mentor but also most importantly as a friend.

Over time, he literally replaced the swastika above his bed with a smiley face and underwent the painful procedures to remove his swastika tattoos from his body. Now, he proudly works for a company that promotes diversity and honors Tiffany for giving him the courage and the strength to improve his life and renounce his life of vile hate. If this rabid neo-Nazi can change, so can we.

As Jews, we are reminded that we have control over our lives and the choices that we make. We know when to rise to action and when to raise our voice. We must lift ourselves up to improve our community discourse. Rebbe Nachman taught that before people can rise up, we must first experience a fall. The whole purpose of that fall is to prepare for their ascent to levels that they could never before have reached.

The Jewish mystics believe that our world was created with the shattering of vessels unable to hold G-d's most holy light- called Shevirat HaKelim. In our broken world, we have a mission to find, recover the shattered pieces through Tikun Olan- the repair of our world. We must reach out to help heal the shattered pieces of our world. Today, the victims of the most recent Hurricanes, Earthquakes and Floods need us. Our world more than ever needs us to stand up and open our hearts and our wallets to provide emergency relief to these shattered communities. Donate to the Federation Emergency Relief Mailboxes and help fill our semi-trailer with much needed supplies for all ages to be driven directly down to Houston and look for more opportunities in the coming months to help other affected regions. By giving tzedaka and helping others, we are G-d's hands in this world.

In just a few moments, we will chant the Yizkor memorial service. Yizkor is our opportunity to reconnect with those no longer with us, seek comfort, honor and cherish the values held highest by our parents, spouses, children, siblings, grandparents and friends. We remember them with love and yearn to have them back with us. May their memories continue to inspire us to better our lives and our world.

May G-d bless all of our broken Hallelujahs and grant us all a Shabbat Shalom and G'mar Chatima Tova- to be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life for a year of communication and understanding, a year of health and peace, and a year of inspiration and love. Hallelujah.