



HAR SINAI - OHEB SHALOM CONGREGATION

Dear HSOSC family,

Some of our members selected to receive ten spiritual messages in the last few weeks, in order to make Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur more personally fulfilling and meaningful. The received the following ten spiritual messages with a Jewish text to ponder, reflect on, and think about. These texts were provided by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and Hebrew Union College (HUC). Click [HERE](#) for the ten texts.

Our goals for this project were twofold. The first was to provide meaningful Jewish passages to explore during the High Holiday season. Our second goal was to share our wisdom with the community through our personal reflections of these Jewish texts. Below is the collective wisdom from members of our community. By sharing in this way, each of them have chosen to help to strengthen this community.

As autumn begins and the High Holidays approach, I become more pensive. I find that I reflect back on earlier years- what my concerns were and their status now, who I celebrated with and particularly who I have lost. It is a bittersweet time. I also reflect on recent past and take the chance to recenter my priorities to be a more productive, happier and better person.

Everyone makes mistakes. I can give you chapter and verse on the missteps I've made in my life. Some mistakes were made because I was young, didn't know any better and lacked guidance. Some mistakes were made because I took what appeared to be the easy way - a short cut that wasn't. Some mistakes were made thru lack of knowledge. The list could go on and on.

It isn't so much that I made the mistakes; mistakes are what people do. The trick is to learn from the mistake, not repeat it, say I'm sorry if I hurt you and then like in the song – let it go. To quote that great philosopher Mel Brooks: As long as the world is turning and spinning, we're gonna be dizzy and we're gonna make mistakes.

I find that nature helps me to feel spiritual. During a walk with nature, I will frequently feel spiritual and have a conversation with G-d. I also feel spiritual when with my family in the sanctuary during the high holidays. As I pray, I remember year after year and how my life has changed over time. I also remember those who are no longer with us. I think it appropriate, but will be sad to miss being with the full congregation this year.

I always ask G-d to make me worth of the good life that I have been given and think that this is a form of asking what I should do. This year in particular, given the pandemic and civil unrest, I find that I am also asking G-d if all will be okay and to keep me and my family safe.

This is difficult for me. Of course I see God in the wonders of nature around me. I trust in God to help me in decision making. I believe God has played a role in the family and close friends who are there to help in that decision making process, and who are there to support me. But I feel more that God has given me the choice in making decisions and choosing friends. I don't look for signs or messages in dreams. Meditation is not my thing. I have a long memory that makes forgiving and forgetting difficult. But I do believe in God as my best sounding board!

I think I try to connect to my spirituality more when I'm upset and down on myself. I think I start to talk to G-D more then because I want his guidance on how I should handle the situation and ask what path I should take next. Also when a friend or family member is sick I go to g-d for answers and prayers. However when everything is good I don't talk to G-D I don't thank him for the good times I just assume he knows. I need to try and connect with him in good times and bad.

If I could ask G-D one thing I would probably ask him why are there so many bad people in the world? I've been watching a lot of 2020 episodes lately and I just don't understand why they behave that way. I know it's a psychological thing that causes them to perform those acts however g-d created us in his image as they say. So did he created psychological problems in the brain as well? Or is just something that happened beyond his control and he lost those souls due to mental illness.

I have never felt that I have a personal relationship with God. My Christian friends talk about their relationship with Him, but I've never felt it. Just a desire to live by the precepts that I've learned through the years from my parents, rabbis and other teachers. Good deeds lead to other good deeds and are often their own reward. My father taught me the importance of acquiring a good name. Isn't that what holiness is all about?

I have felt the presence of God especially in nature when I am struck by it's awesome beauty. I feel a sense of peace when I am at services. I believe that comes from God.

I am much older now, but clearly remember my confirmation class, which was taught by our Rabbi. At one point, the Rabbi did not agree with me on something that I had said and noted that I was adjusting G-D to my needs. Then, and now, I still am unsure if that is inappropriate. I pray every night and while I have in my prayers about the greater good, I also have in my prayers to keep me and my loved ones safe and happy - with specifics as appropriate. I also thank G-D because I know that I have been very fortunate and hope to be worthy of the good life that I have been given. I am comfortable with what I am doing, but do not really know if this is the correct purpose of prayer.

I do find myself doubting G-d sometimes now that I'm an adult. As a child I believed in a lot of things. I felt protected by knowing someone up there was watching over us. I wanted to go to Hebrew School and become a Bar Mitzvah. However as an adult I started questioning things. Like was the path that I am chose by me or did G-d put me on this path. We're all my struggles and hardships and depression moments part of his tests. Or was all this something I created but failed at? Why do all these bad things happen? If there is a G-D why does he allow natural disasters happen or global pandemics. Why does he give great people fatal illnesses Like cancer. Why are bad psychotic people exist. Like serial killers and stuff. Why do young people die. I pray to G-d every night still but sometimes I wonder if there is someone actually there listening. I love being Jewish but it has been tested. I have been filled with doubt.

When I attended Hebrew school We learned Hebrew prayers by rote, no discussion of how anything related on a personal level. Even so, at home, I talked to God all the time. I believed he heard me. As I neared my thirteenth birthday, I somehow convinced our rabbi to let me write a group Bat Mitzvah service in which four of us participated on a Sunday. It made our religion very personal to us. And I know God smiled down on us!.

Despite our long history of persecution as Jews, we are still here, we are still growing. And despite our small numbers, we have had an enormous influence in the world and made so many grand contributions to the benefit of the world, outside of ourselves--tikkun olam, to repair the world. I have always felt proud to be Jewish. Many Jews, but maybe not enough, need to remember the many discoveries and contributions Jews have made to the world in science, health, economics--everything! We are over represented as Nobel Prize winners and other prizes as well. I have often been astounded at the level of ignorance about our people in so many

countries. I see this passage as very clearly delineating our relationship with G-d, no matter what. We are inextricably connected so that we don't exist without G-d, and G-d doesn't exist without us.

My relationship with G-d is communal. I think that is one reason Jews have survived. As a Jew, living what I hope is a good enough life as a Jew, I think we all do this together as Jews. I don't see our existence as an individual entity trying to establish a personal relationship with G-d, but as a community of people, in many lands, whose mandate is to take care of the world and be good and kind to each other and to others as is possible given our human limitations. Somehow, being intertwined with G-d, we are more formidable. To pray together is the most meaningful for me and for many others as well. This pandemic has been so difficult in so many ways, but since it prevents us from praying together--here is where I find it most difficult. My strength and hope derives from being in the community and practicing reverence for life, for community, for the well-being of the earth. It is very hard to do this alone day after day. But, looking back at our history, it is more than comforting to know that "these things too shall pass."

I feel like my relationship with G-D is like a friendship. Friends are always there when you need them like G-D. Sometimes you fight with your friends like sometimes I fight with G-D but just because we fight doesn't mean the relationship goes away.

The last several months with Covid have given me more quiet time for introspection and thought. This has allowed time for more personal growth. I increasingly appreciate my relationships-but can see how I could be more thoughtful. Also, I realize that I need a creative outlet and am figuring out what that outlet may be.

I talk to God the way I talk to my late parents. I share good news, ask for guidance when troubled, and try to make God proud. Just as I can no longer see my parents, but feel they are watching over me, I take comfort that God is with me as well. They are all very integral parts of my life.

We are not just for ourselves, actually not even just for our children who follow us. We are responsible for repairing the world. Indifference is not acceptable. We cannot sit by and not react when something goes against all we believe in. We learn ethics from Pirkei Avot, and we should follow these guidelines. We often ask ourselves if just a small action can make a difference. If we act and encourage others to do so, we hope we can help bring justice to our world. It is incumbent upon us to set an example and not sit idly by, leaving the work to others.

I definitely used the quarantine to try and better myself more so academically. I spent a lot of times reading to advance my professional development. As far as personally and spiritually bettering myself I still have a long way to go.

I think now more than ever we need to do mitzvot. I know I'm one to talk because my funds are limited so it's hard for me to send those who need food and shelter money but I do try to and give money to charity when I can. Covid has effected all of us and we need to come together and help those who are need of assistance that lost their jobs and not just temporarily due to this pandemic and we should help them. I definitely want to be inscribed in the book of life knowing that I did all that I could.

I have become much more aware of the fragility of life, grateful for each day. Connecting with friends and family keeps me going. Superficial things have lost importance. Lots of prayers for our future.

I've done a fair amount of reading and study looking to understand the role G-d plays in my life. I am truly a life-long learner looking for an answer.

I don't believe G-d and I really know one another well, although, surely, we have 'a familiarity'. My friends / family tell me of their personal relationship with G-d. They know that G-d hears their prayers and is with them in stressful and happy times. They tell me they feel 'blessed -- to use a current word -- to carry G-d with them.

But, I do not feel G-d's presence surrounding me in the same way.

When I was a young girl starting Hebrew school, I was taught that G-d is all knowing, all seeing and in charge of my life; this G-d frightened me. I found no comfort or consolation from this G-d when things went wrong. So today, perhaps, my inability to feel the presence of G-d or to recognize G-d's voice is a case of my envisioning that early version of G-d. Maybe G-d is actually with me but I am unaware. Maybe the G-d I still look for is the Hebrew school G-d instead of a more mature spirit; I need to think about this carefully.

I believe that people who do good deeds, practice acts of kindness are infused with a spirit that, perhaps, comes from G-d but may also be due to good role modeling from parents. I feel that for the most part, people are good and want to do the right thing; I include myself with this group. I believe that hatred, anger and spite can be replaced by love, patience, generosity and kindness. I am happy when something good occurs in my life and am content to take the moment to see a beautiful sunrise / sunset / beautiful sky. I like kind people and suspect that the world would be a better place if we could (1) truly share ourselves (2) be aware that everyone has a contribution to make (3) honor everyone's humanity.

I believe the G-d in spiritual message 10 can recognize my attempt to be a better person through both action and study... so perhaps, G-d is more aware of me than I sense. My plan is to study more and I will listen and hear with more intent.

Indifferent means without interest, concern, care or preference. Being indifferent puts emphasis on the inability to affect someone's core beliefs and behaviors. Is indifference always negative? Well, indifference is probably better than obsessing to the point of self-harm.... but is indifference any way to live a life? Really?

Indifference can occur for many reasons: (1) Overstimulation: we are surrounded with a 24 / 7 news cycle, our cell phones are never off to work and family. We may shut ourselves down as a coping mechanism. (2) Being overwhelmed: we feel powerless to affect change in what we see. We notice but move on. (3) Group indifference: we go along with the crowd and don't step out to offer assistance. (4) Indifference due to mental health issues and substance abuse. One is unable to help one's self much less others.

Additionally, society is increasingly selfish. Personal fulfillment often takes the place of reaching out to another... and while personal fulfillment may serve a purpose, it should not be at the expense of social action / help to others. Moreover, one may choose to help only his / her own group; the 'right people deserve help and are worthy'. But, in reality, each person can impact a situation – however small. Each person has to really notice and be willing to step up to affect change. Judaism teaches us that every person has dignity and worth simply because they are human.

Hillel the Elder: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for myself, what am I?"

Years ago I found an on-line list of behaviors that encouraged good work habits. I printed the list and posted it in my work station. The words .concepts stayed within my sight line as I talked on the telephone or did paperwork. I hoped the concepts would keep me focused on doing the right thing, i.e. saying the correct phrase to ease someone's anxiety and fix whatever needed fixing in a gentle way. It wasn't always so easy despite my good intention. I'm still a work in progress.

Here is my 'to do' list of behaviors and interactions / author unknown.

1. Words. Be kind and gentle in what you say and how you say it.
2. Look for needs and opportunities. Simple everyday kindnesses and actions often help in great ways.
3. Let it go. Letting it go is one of the easiest ways to extend grace to others and to one's self.
4. Be There. Sometimes sitting quietly but being REALLY present is a gift.

5. Forgive others and yourself. Learn to ask for forgiveness; it's harder to do than it appears.
6. Just answer the question you were asked.
7. Gratitude.

Thank you to the spiritual message group

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