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# YK 2019

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As we heard earlier this morning during the Haftorah, the meaning of Yom Kippur includes learning how to lead an ethical life. To that end, as parents, many of us try to teach our children to take responsibility for their actions. This starts very early in life and as a result, most of the wrongs for which they are apologizing are to a fellow member of the family.

The staring down at the shoes and muttered, “sorry” doesn’t cut it. We try to teach them to look the aggrieved person directly in the eyes and earnestly say, “I’m sorry.” This concept of owning our wrongs, both intentional and unintentional, both deliberate and accidental is part of why we’re all here today.

My name is Lisa Roday. I am a past president and current trustee of Congregation Or Atid. If I have hurt you, offended you, or wronged you in any way, please accept this apology with the earnestness and humility with which it is intended; I am truly sorry.

I start my remarks this morning with this heartfelt apology for two reasons. First, because it is only by owning my wrongs that I can fairly ask forgiveness for them. And second, because I want to strengthen Or Atid by respecting its members both individually and as my community.

It seems straight forward to care about each individual, but why care about the community? And what makes us a community anyway?

It's not groundbreaking news that people are drawn to other people who are "like" them. But in an ever changing and highly charged landscape of what it means to be "other", the ramifications of this irresistible draw toward people "like" us feels more consequential now.

Growing up in New York, there was a 13% chance that the very next person I met would be Jewish like me. Chance encounters, meeting new roommates, blind dates, and nearly every other form of social interaction included at least one round of the popular game of Jewish Geography.

Played worldwide upon discovering that a newly encountered human is a “member of the tribe”, the game of Jewish Geography seeks to build instant bridges. This comfortable and comforting relationship starter has often been the sole nexus of my initial connection to someone and I have played it or seen it played literally thousands of times.

Within seconds the two former strangers—now instantly attached by their shared Jewish heritage—begin the eons-old ritual of narrowing down just how closely their geographic circles overlap.

Usually it starts with, “so where are you from?”

“New York.”

“Where in New York?”

“The Island.”

“Where on the Island.”

“The South Shore.”

“Where on the South Shore?”

“The Five Towns.”

“Oh, my gawd,” exclaims the inquisitor, “me too!” Now she can’t resist — “I’m from Hewlett.”

“Lawrence!” cries the other, naming the neighboring town — the geographic circles have touched.

A who’s who of each town usually follows — “do you know so and so” until they hit upon a mutual acquaintance, friend, or best result, a relative, which will create an instant and impenetrable bond between the two.

This scene plays out over again in the course of the wandering Jew’s lifetime. I don’t remember anyone ever teaching me the rules; do you? But seemingly everyone knows them.

1. Establish mutual Judaism.
2. Begin with the open-ended question, “where are you from”.
3. Subsequent questions should always incorporate the answer to the previous question and require the subsequent answer to yield a somewhat narrower geographic location than the prior answer.
4. Respondents should never directly name the town they grew up in in answer to the question, “where are you from”; that would ruin all the fun;

5. Always end the game by saying, “small world”, no matter how geographically close you got to the other player’s hometown.

Jewish Geography has helped me throughout my life. I credit it with being the cultural ice breaker that in the early days of college was a terrific cure for homesickness. After playing the requisite game of Jewish Geography upon meeting my two Jewish roommates, it turned out that one grew up a few towns north of where I grew up and the other had a brother who went to the same summer camp as my first cousin.

Small world!

For the first month of college that single common thread of shared Judaism made us inseparable. We were each away from home for the first time—an island of three Jews on an otherwise homogeneous campus in Upstate New York where the nearest synagogue was 50 miles away. Whatever else we *didn't* have in common—which turned out to be nearly everything--our common religion fueled us.

Many cultures, ethnic and religious groups have a version of “fill in the blank” Geography and it’s easy to understand why. We gravitate toward people who resemble us. This natural attraction seems magnified when we are members of the non-dominant group. “Other” can be a cold and solitary place that gets instantly warmed by finding commonality.

So, what does all this have to do with Or Atid?

Every year I struggle to decide which colorful family member to talk about, what personal anecdote to tell or sports analogy to share, all designed to make you want to give your time and treasure to support Or Atid. This year I want to talk about us and the gravitational pull of commonality...

Why this desire to seek out others who are “like” us? What is it that makes the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel and her family return to the same place in the Poconos every summer? How come so many of us schlep down to E. Grace Street to eat the matzo ball soup and hot corned beef on rye at Perly’s? And whose idea was it to have a bunch of hungry, thirsty, caffeine-deprived people,

dressed in their holiday finest sit together in the same room for seven hours? And why in the world do we willingly do it?

I'll tell you why. Because we are all seeking connectivity.

“Connecting community with spirituality” is not just Or Atid’s tagline—it’s our formula for growth well into the future.

Modern life is filled with choices. Many of them are either/or.

But at Or Atid we strive to be both/and....both spiritual *and* social, both learners *and* teachers, both introspective *and* extroverted, both a closely knit family *and* an outward facing community, both true to our traditions *and* openhearted to the creation of new ones, both honoring our founders *and* filling our newest families with a sense of true belonging, both sharing our time and treasure to meet our existing needs *and* allocating a portion of our legacies to anticipating our future ones, both buying a plate on our Wall of Remembrance *and* coming to a Shabbarbeque.

Spoiler alert—this is the appeal part of the Yom Kippur Appeal. If you have already given to Or Atid this year, thank you. If you are able to, please give again. If you have not yet given to Or Atid

this year, please do. And after you do, if you are able, please give again!

Now you can use our convenient chip reader to make a secure credit card gift and earn those longed-for frequent flyer miles! And remember, it's not how much you give but that you give. And that those of us who can give more, do so.

Some year I hope to stand here and tell you we have the wind at our backs. This isn't the year! But we're getting there.

We have over \$2,000,000 in the endowment and the income we earn on the endowment principal now fully pays our rent. With focused and deliberate giving, we can grow the endowment principal so that the income we earn is large enough to pay both the rent and...pick something....teacher salaries, the electric bill...whatever additional income we earn puts that much less of a burden on each of us to fund this community in the future.

People often ask me should they give to the endowment or to the general fund. The answer is yes!

If you have a dollar to give, consider giving 50 cents to the endowment and 50 cents to the general fund. Half for today's needs and half to meet future needs. And by the way, your sustaining share is not intended to be the only way you support Or Atid. We still rely on and need additional donation dollars from each and every one of us to keep the headwinds at bay. Endowment income and sustaining share contributions account for about 85% of the funds necessary to meet our budgeted needs. That other 15% (roughly \$50,000) needs to be raised. Whether it's through High Holiday donations, gifts left in the jar for a Shabbarbeque, funds given in honor of a simcha or in memory of a loved one, or simply your way of saying thank you for welcoming you as our guest during the holidays, that additional \$50K will need to be raised between now and the end of our fiscal year in June 2020.

Of course, there is another way to raise additional funds—by bringing in new members who pay their sustaining share and who otherwise contribute to the financial health of Or Atid. Membership growth will not only help us financially meet our needs; each new member adds a unique and increased richness to our community.

We can only hope to attract *and retain* families if prospective newcomers both see *and* feel people “like” them in our midst. This requires a thoughtful and deliberate two-pronged approach to growth.

First, we need to continue to seek out and welcome those people who have a desire to be part of our community. Attracting *additional* members will be partly attributable to them encountering people “like” them who have already been welcomed here.

The second prong, often overlooked but essential to success, requires us to more broadly define commonality. If we limit our concept of commonality to egalitarian, Conservative Jews, we do

so at our peril. Diversity of thought, expression and experience are essential to our growing community.

It seems paradoxical that establishing the warmth of the familiar is a prerequisite to achieving a broader based community. However, when we widen the circle by more broadly defining what makes it a community, the resulting mishpacha reflects both/and.

Seeking and finding commonalities enables us to better live, learn, love, work, play, pray, or govern our shul together. They tie us powerfully to one another so that we can innovate, create, teach, grow and think in ways we could never do alone.

Playing Jewish Geography taught me many important lessons, but none more important than this: finding out that the other person was Jewish made for an instant feeling of community, but it was just the anchor we both latched onto to safely explore the sea of differences between us. So whether it's Jewish Geography, Long Island Geography, or college-geography, or summer camp geography; we are seeking to establish common ground to stand on together.

If I asked you to turn to your neighbors and say, "I'm sorry", would that create one of those awkward audience participation silences where nobody participates? Or would most of us embrace the potential initial feeling of discomfort and express sincere humility to one another?

Rather than try that experiment, how about asking yourselves why you are here today. Are you here to confess your sins and to seek forgiveness for them? Are you here because you want to be part of and strengthen this community? I hope the answers are both/and.

Because it's only together as a community that we can grow and flourish from generation to generation.

Shana tova!