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Bechol Yom Tamid Ma'asey bereshit-Every Day Creation is
Renewed

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Gut yontif. Good morning. It is good to see you all here. We are about 1/2 way through the 24 hours we are spending together this year for Yom Kippur. For some of us, one day may go very quickly. For others, one day, like today, may seem eternal. I think that in the scheme of things, especially as we mature in life, we become aware of how short a day, 24 hours really is. And at the same time, I am also amazed at how much can occur in only one day. Yom Kippur, is one day, 24, hours when we pause from regular life and rhythms of life. Over the past year, I have thought a lot about the blessing of today. This awareness grew from awakening to the fragility and brevity of life. How many of us would give the world to have one more day with that one special person. How powerful to realize that you can do that today, even now. Deep within our Jewish heritage is the appreciation for the gift of living. Many of us are familiar with the idea that Judaism focuses primarily on this life, this dimension, and on how we act toward one another. There are a number of circumstances that brought me to this awareness now, it has been part of a personal awakening for me and I would like to share a few insights with you.

Before I share my personal journey, let me frame the idea of an awakening within the Jewish ideology. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber published a ground-breaking book called *I-Thou* in 1923. In it, he presents his theory of the power of the enlightened moment of connection within life. How as a human in this world through personal dialogue, one can develop a greater sense of being. Buber called this the “I-Thou” moment. He said, "I believe that the key to creating [meaningful] society that is nourishing, empowering and healing for everyone lies in how we relate to one another." “I-Thou”, the awareness of the power of now can also be present in a momentary encounter with those around us.

Similarly, in our traditional morning prayers, there is a phrase *bechol yom tamid ma’asey bereshit*-- Every day creation is renewed. Every day has infinite possibilities. I love it when science and Judaism agree. This simple idea -- there is an endless unfolding of creation even into this moment in time-- is like the theory that astrophysicists now believe there may be infinite universes. In other words, on any given day, there are endless possibilities of what can happen and since anything can happen—do not let it pass you by. Psalm 48 teaches us, “A human being is like a momentary breeze. A person’s days are but a passing

shadow.” Or as one of my favorite philosophers John Lennon wrote, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” Life is short and moments of connectivity, of holiness, brings meaning to our existence.

To help us focus on the idea of living today as if it was our first or last day, I would like to present a few short stories. At the heart of each story is the power of now. Yom Kippur is thought of in Jewish practice as the quintessential day. In Hebrew, this day, Yom Kippur, is called, *Ha-yom*, The Day. A day when we are challenged to think of the power of today as the power of any day. And we have a prayer, well known for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur called *Hayom*, “This Day,” as these days are are most intense, most mindful, most focused of days. Today-- *Hayom*. What if we were mindful on each of our days like we are today? That is a challenge. We need the “I-Thou” moments to know the humanity on every day in everyone. These heroes in the story are examples of the power of living each day to its fullest. To living a meaningful life.

The first story highlights the rapid speed our lives are spent and the value in slowing down. It is about the loss of a good friend's wife. It was a story I had not known until recently even though I

have known him a long time. This is the story of a man who had everything in life. And the story sounds a bit like the biblical character of Job. He had a job, beautiful spouse, a young child, and an apartment. In Israel, to make your way slowly up the chain is a miracle in and of itself. But life in Israel, like anywhere, can be hectic. People rush everywhere often with little time to slow down. It is an environment that can test your patience, especially when it comes to the driving on the roads. Anyone who has visited can probably attest to this statement.

This friend of mine, who lived at the time in Israel, let's call him Ofer, was not a religious Jew per se. He had slowly begun to build his life in business with one small business leading to a slightly bigger one. Over a series of months he had a bad premonition. He had vivid dreams unlike anything he had experienced before. He had a vision of the death of his wife and child, and could not articulate it to people around him in any way that seemed reasonable. Ofer wrote out his fears creating songs, poetry, trying to get the feelings out of himself, so he could live life with his baby and wife. Ofer worked hard and one day while at work, he heard on the news that there was a bus accident and a woman and baby had been killed in a passenger car. Ofer knew inside himself that it was his family. Turning to his co-workers, he said, "I need to go, I

will not be back for a while.” Upon getting home, he received a phone call from the hospital informing him that his wife and child were at the hospital. Ofer approached the nurse’s desk and was told that they were no longer alive, but had died upon arrival.

It took him a few years to find his way again. To pick up the pieces and carry on. Today Ofer has a new family. He has four children and a successful business. But when we were sharing our heart stories together, he said, “You know every day is a blessing. Life is too short. People should slow down. Drive slower, eat slower, live slower. You never know when it will be you. And now,” he said, “right now, is the most important moment.” This moment of connectivity. Ofer helped me gain a deeper appreciation for the small gifts in each moment and a better understanding of the philosophy of Martin Buber’s “I-Thou moment”, the moment that a person finds holy connectivity to another part of creation, and even as a moment, it is a gift. It is the “portable Mt Sinai” we carry with us, the moment of holiness from our past to help propel us to a promising future.

Connectivity to the people we meet in this world is powerful. There are people that we meet and interact with, love and enjoy, and though we may not see them often, the connectivity remains,

is even deepened by the separation. And the second story demonstrates how we can learn, even from the youngest in our society, of the gift of life and of today.

The gift of life also comes with the gift of healing and the gift of grief. Earlier this summer I was listening to a radio program called The Moth on NPR. The program had a piece about a chaplain who worked in Maine for the forest service and who assisted families primarily in the death of their loved ones. She told the story of a young girl named Nina, who was five, who wanted to visit her cousin Andy, four, who had died. And Nina insisted on seeing her now deceased cousin's body before cremation. The chaplain explained that she thought to help support bereaved people, you should help fulfill their desires, especially to view or care for the body directly. Interesting that this is similar to the Jewish idea of *tahara* or ritual washing to prepare for burial. Young Nina insisted to her parents, even when explained to her about the body, that she visit and see her cousin.

When she was finally able to visit her young cousin, Nina spent some time inspecting the table. She touched the cloth over Andy, checking to see that he was all there. Inspecting each side and aspect. Her parents asked if she was ready to leave, obviously,

they were. But Nina said, ‘No, I’m not ready yet.’ Then she talked to Andy and sang a few songs to him, and placed a small telescope in his hands. “So Andy can see anything he wanted to see,” she said. And then she said, “I love you, Andy-dandy; goodbye.” Her parents, the funeral director, the chaplain were awash in tears and amazed. Young Nina’s 2 gifts to this group of adults was to live today for yourself and we humans are amazingly resilient. You can trust a human being with grief, for grief is just love squaring up to its oldest foe. And love can overcome. Love can overcome.

The third story I want to share with you is how grief is a powerful and necessary emotion. One that in its evolution can develop within us individually that peace of heart, that peace of love. I lost a friend this year who helped me understand the power of love and connectivity. Neely Snyder, *zichrona livracha*, may she rest in peace, was killed in a car accident about 6 weeks ago. She was the wife of my friend and colleague Rabbi Josh Snyder who is the Hillel director at Goucher College in Baltimore, MD and mother to Shalva, Ayelet, and Shachar. Neely was an amazing person, loving partner and mother, gifted Jewish educator, energetic, and a *gute neshama*, a good soul dedicated to *tikkun olam*, repairing our world. Among her jobs, Neely worked last as the program director at the Pearlstone Jewish Retreat Center in Reisterstown, MD.

Over the years that we had known one another, most recently we had worked for two summers as faculty at Camp JRF for a week. Her love of Jewish life, and working with teens was pretty contagious. She was a positive person who shared her many gifts with many people across the Jewish spectrum.

On her way to work early one morning she was hit by a truck and killed. She was not ill. She was not on a busy road. Neely is just gone. And when I heard the news I was shocked. I couldn't believe that the person who I had known, worked with closely at camp, was no longer here. Her family is picking up its broken pieces. Supported by an amazing Jewish community, they are beginning to find their way. Rabbi Josh is actively blogging about his life and grief so that everyone can know and healing through sharing may emerge. Neely's ability to be open to the wide variety of Jewish practice and to the way that we can create new and vibrant communities today are inspiring.

Neely had a great passion for life. When I heard the news, I really could not believe it. Once again I was awake. Really awake. We had shared a few moments working together of deeper spiritual connection. Call it an "I-Thou" moment. How amazing to create a spark together with another teacher that inspires students, or in

this case Jewish campers from around the world. In attending the shiva for Neely and in conversation with her family and friends, I have come to appreciate her developing legacy; Don't let life pass you by. Do not take today for granted. Hug your children. Love your friends. Be a part of community in all the various parts, good and bad, challenging and rewarding, easy and difficult. Celebrate each day. Celebrate each other.

The final story is from my personal life. I learned the value of the "live each day" first from my maternal grandparents, Rose and Jack Najman, of blessed memory. I have mentioned my Papa and Grandma from this bima in the past. Their story of surviving the Holocaust has left a lasting impression on me and my family. I grew up listening to my grandfather and grandmother sharing their harrowing stories of escape from Nazi Europe and the Holocaust. Each moment, each person who helped them, provided food, shelter, or protection, and the righteous Gentiles who reached out and did what was right, embodied true godliness that can exist in the world even at the darkest times. Their legacy to me has been the idea of living life for today because you never know what tomorrow will bring.

Despite tragedy, family destruction, obstacles, and hardships, my grandparents found the blessing of life and living with positivity each day was an amazing elixir to the bleakness of their early years during the Shoah. Certainly my grandparents had their pain and suffering; that grief in a way could not ever disappear. Each Shabbat as my Grandma Rose would light the candles, she would say to herself the names of her family and remember them with tears and say “*the kinde, the kinde*” or “How could innocent children die?” It was her sanctuary moment. Only she and her brother survived out of her family of seven. She was the second youngest in the family. The loss of her young nieces during the Holocaust, forever imprinted on her memory. My Papa took the responsibility all of his deceased family to say Kaddish regularly since we did not know the date of death to mark the Yahrtzeit, and during Yizkor services for all his family that were killed. “There is no one left but me to say the Kaddish for them,” he would tell me. My grandparents had a profound way of relating to us that we, those who are here, must live life in love, peace, and happiness. Life is too short for hate and anger. Their survival was due to many acts of kindness on each day by strangers. Not only in the Holocaust, but again when arriving in the U.S. as new immigrants, helped by so many who went out of their way to assist two foreigners, who spoke broken English. As refugees, as

people fleeing persecution, their hope fell onto the good within people.

Their miracle wasn't survival in general— the miracle was that at any moment many things could have transpired otherwise.

“Micahle,” My Papa would say, “Every second I did not die when I was in Europe was a miracle, every second. Not one miracle— a miracle at every moment.” They allowed me to understand that we need laughter and chocolate, hugs and community to survive this world that can be cruel and harsh. Another one of my Papa's favorite phrases, that he learned from his grandmother, Bubbe Miriam, was “Do today what you want to wait to do tomorrow and eat tomorrow what you want to eat today.” It was his way of saying *carpe diem*. Seize the day.

Live the life you want to lead now, today. You have my permission, it is Yom Kippur so we have the time and opportunity to do that work now. What is the one thing you have been waiting to do? Perhaps today is the day to take that leap of faith for yourself and for life. There is no better time to begin a change or shift than on a day like today. We are not in a regular work-a-day schedule. When we take ourselves out of regular patterns of thought and behavior, and connectivity and begin a change in

perspective, a paradigm shift is even more potential. One day can lead us one step to a few days and then to a week and if we are successful, further.

These stories that I present to you today in the hope that it will help lead us to know that we should not leave today without any words of love, kindness or forgiveness to anyone. You only have today. And you decide the moment of hope or despair. Nina, Ofer, the Snyder family, my grandparents-- all knew the way to say yes to now. There are no reasons to hold back from saying I'm sorry or I was wrong. There is no better time than now to wake up to see the brevity of life and the blessing of right now.

Some of us may recall the film *Dead Poets Society* with Robin Williams playing the role of John Keating. There is a powerful scene when the students are charged with the idea of *carpe diem*. To live today as if it were the last. Speaking of the great poets of the past, he says, "Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen, you hear it? - - *Carpe* - - hear it? - - *Carpe, carpe diem*, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary."

Turn to someone next to you. Look into their eyes. See the humanity in the person next to you. And today or tonight on the way home, maybe let someone in at a stop sign who is in a rush. Maybe say thank you to our car attendants and police officers; to our volunteers who serve the community and those on the TBE board. Find the people with whom you share your life, regardless of what that shared relationship has been, and let them know you are present, that you care. There is only today.

For the memories of those who were murdered or fled the persecution of hatred in the Holocaust. For the memories of those who die in an instant without a warning. The lessons of those who are no longer here with us is that we cannot say “I’m sorry” or “I forgive” and receive an answer. There is no better time than the present to repair a tear in our relationships. It takes some bravery, some real strength to face anyone and say, “I was wrong and I hurt you. I am sorry.” And to be able to reciprocate when you are one approached. Trust yourself for love can triumph.

Today is the beginning of something new. Today, *hayom*, will never return once it is gone.

I pray that we all find our way to be sealed in the Book of Life this year and that we all are able to find our way to living each day to its fullest.

Good morning and Gut yontif.