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Kol Rinah
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Progress, Rest, Purpose

Today is Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Tishrei, 5782. A new Jewish year!
And yet...

It seems like we're making no progress. It feels like we're dealing with so many of the same things as we were last year. As soon as we overcome one obstacle, there's always another challenge waiting, often something even harder.

Have you ever told yourself, "If I can just get through this next week, then everything will be ok?" (For rabbis, it's *this week*). If I can just get past this major project, or challenge, or health issue, or busy time, then it will be smooth sailing.

And maybe things will be calm for an hour, a day, a week. But there's no real, lasting peace and calm, and we just keep trudging along.

I ask myself sometimes, why am I doing all this? Wouldn't it be easier just to take care of myself, to worry only about me, to focus on my own, personal happiness. What effect can I, just one person, have, anyway?

I've felt each of these things in the past, but I'm feeling them together now, more this year, more this fall, than I ever remember.

So I want to share with you some of the Torah that is keeping me going, that I hope will keep me, and you, and us, going through this new year.

Let's talk first about progress. It's been a year, and we're still dealing with Covid. We have a vaccine, and it's available, at least in America, but now we need to reduce vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccine acceptance, and we need a vaccine for kids, and then for young kids.

Here at Kol Rinah, we've started construction on our Early Childhood Center, and finished construction on it, but we still have to finish our campaign to pay for it, and we also still need to find the resources to build out kitchens, and to build out the rest of our Early Childhood Center, the area under this sanctuary.

And each of us has personal things in our lives, character traits, habits, we're struggling with.

But ask yourself, "Am I, are we, dealing with the same exact things as last year?"

We've actually accomplished a huge amount--we have an effective vaccine for Covid that we've managed to distribute, despite needing to be kept chilled at super-low temperatures. We've built the first and main phase of our new Early Childhood Center. The things in me that I'm working on this year are not exactly the same as what I was working on last year.

Progress is solving certain problems and addressing the next set of challenges. So we are making progress.

The Torah itself is a story of challenges--challenges God faces, challenges individual people face, challenges the Israelites face. And once one challenge is addressed, the next

challenge arises. Adam is alone, so God creates Eve. The world is corrupt, so God sends a flood. The people want to build a tower to the heavens, so God confuses their language. Notice that in the solution to each challenge are the seeds of the next problem, which is so often the case. We could look in literally any part of the Torah and notice challenge after challenge.

Noticing the evolving challenges is noticing progress. We are making progress. You are making progress.

Let's talk next about the neverending treadmill, the journey that has no end, the sense that there's no destination, and not enough rest stops.

Our tradition imagines, indeed yearns for, a time when the eternal treadmill will stop, when we finally get to rest, when we actually arrive at our destination. We call that *yemot hamashiach*, or *olam haba* - the days of the messiah, or the world to come. But ours is not a tradition of arriving at destinations. Even when the Israelites do arrive in the Promised Land, the work is not done, and really has only just begun. The dream of the early Zionists of a free, independent, socialist, secure, Jewish Israel has been more or less realized, except for the socialist part. But Israel is still dealing with security issues, with the nature of its democracy, with its Jewish character, with environmental and economic and cultural and political challenges. In the land of milk and honey's it's not all milk and honey.

We do have rest stops though. We call them Shabbat, and *chagim*, holidays. To put my phone down for 25 hours every Shabbat, or 49 hours during Rosh Hashanah, is a gift that sustains me. Because we can't keep going nonstop. As Jews, we're not "allowed" to rest. We're *required* to rest. That rest sustains me, because there always is a day of vacation to look forward to. (Even as a rabbi who "works" on Shabbat.)

So what's the point of this all anyway? Why do I, why do we, have to keep overcoming these challenges, why do we have to keep marching, keep moving, knowing we'll never "get there?" I'd like to just focus on me, and not deal with all these problems, of other people, other groups. Can't I just focus on making myself happy?

For some of us, just taking care of ourselves, and dealing with the obstacles life brings us is enough, or way too much. For all of us, there are times where we can only be for ourselves.

But most of us have, now, or God-willing, in this new year, some time, some energy, and/or some money, that we could spend not on ourselves.

The overarching goal of Torah, of Judaism, is not our own happiness. Rather, it's doing mitzvot--serving God, and God's creations--people, being God's hands at work in the world. We are here to heal our shattered world by picking up, by fixing, the broken shards of holiness. We are here to love our neighbors as ourselves, to walk in God's ways by clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick. We are here to be stewards of the earth that God has created, and God and we know, that we could be doing a much better job at that. We have a mission, a purpose. *Lo alecha hamelacha ligmor, v'lo ata ben chorin lehibatel mimena*. We don't have to complete the mission, but we can't duck it either (Pirke Avot 2:17). This is what it means to be a Jew, to be a human.

As we begin 5782, remember:

If we're dealing with different problems, we're making progress.
We'll never arrive, but we can rest on the way.

And the world needs you, and me, and all of us. We have work to do.

May it be a year of progress.

May it be a year of finding rest stops on our continued journey.

May it be a year of rededication to purpose, to service, to mitzvot, to building our world.

This year may not be easy. But may it be at least a little sweet.