

Leaning Into Yom Kippur is about leaning into our growth edges. Rosh Hashanah lifts the veil to reveal our inadequacies. Noticing where we've failed, missed the mark, becomes our opportunity to notice where we can make adjustments, recalibrate, do better.

Yom Kippur Is about shedding the layers of the past that no longer serve us as we make choices in the here and now that impact our future. Our liturgy for the next 23 or so hours articulates our sins over and over again: our errors in judgement, our culpability in whatever challenges we face in work or relationship, our repeated failure to focus on what really matters.

Through Kol Nidrei we engage in a ritual release of the promises we made to ourselves and others, but failed to keep. Through fast and communal gathering and reflection, we wipe our slates clean, so to speak, emerging at twilight tomorrow with our attention fully directed... on our growling bellies... or as I like to acknowledge, firmly engaged In the present moment.

Yom Kippur is about making the transition from focusing on the past and the future to paying attention to the here and now. Yom Kippur is about transforming our regret into optimism.

Who writes more about turning lemons into lemonade than the early chasidim? Rav Nachman of Bratislava teaches:

Try to be constantly happy and bubbling with life. Turn all depression and stupor to joy and enthusiasm. Accept everything with love, and don't allow yourself to fall into despair. Instead, encourage yourself with your good deeds and special qualities when something spiritual bothers you. If the cause of your troubles are physical, then find comfort and joy in the mere fact that the suffering is not worse than it is. [See Likutei Moharon 195 and 282]

In preparation for Shema this evening, I share what I learned from a recent Bat Mitzvah, Sarah Feldman: "Maybe Shema Is an early Jewish expression of mindfulness."

Consider the idea:

Hear O Israel, YHWH Is our god, YHWH Is one.

Listen...Pay attention...

YHWH. An infinite and causative form of the verb "to be."

This infinitely unfolding force of life is our god.

This infinitely unfolding force of life is one...

Or as Maimonides teaches, this infinitely unfolding force of life is ultimately all there Is....

KOL HAOLAM KULO

Curating our lives is evidence we are privileged. How do we stay connected? How do we share with one another what matters most to us?

Opening ourselves to one another in such a manner invites vulnerability. Sometimes we may find what we think is wrong. We might get embarrassed about being wrong. And we might learn something and improve our lot.

So we are aware of our privilege and make a decision to share the creative energy we expend curating our lives to engaging with others in a meaningful way. What concerns do we share? What can we do together to address those concerns and do something about them?

Along the way we begin to notice all the ways in which we have contributed to the problems that keep us awake at night. We begin to notice that the selfishness we despise in others has consumed us, at times. We begin to notice that while we find ourselves repulsed by heroin and fentanyl addicts, we rely on our own pain relievers: drinking, smoking and vaping, gambling, eating, starving, hoarding, disengaging.

While obviously dangerous and self-destructive behaviors must be addressed head on, often we integrate what most bothers us about ourselves into a low grade albeit chronic self-loathing we keep just beneath the surface. I imagine that is why realizing we are wrong triggers responses laden with shame.

Another approach to that which we don't particularly like about ourselves might be to deliberately nurture a more ideal version of ourselves through practice, the practice of behaviors that demonstrate the values we hold dear.

Reb Nachman instructs us to find even the smallest points of light in the other, the smallest decencies, and set our attention there. We have the power, in relationship, to positively reinforce the good in others. And, Reb Nachman says, once we master reaching for the best in others, it is on us to turn to the best in ourselves.

Feed the good. Starve the bad. Cancer chemo — fasting regimen.

Leadership conference on importance of speech that reflects what a team can do rather than feed what the team cannot do. "Whatever you do, do not stand up." Close to half the crowd stands, or begins standing and pretends to be shifting in their seats. "Please remain seated." Nobody moves.

WWJD? What would Jesus do?

WWMD? What would Moses do?

Enough with the saviors and messiahs. Role models are important and often powerful influences on thought and behavior. But if there is anything the last couple of decades in politics has taught us, the processes and containers of democracy are essential to the advancement of civilization.

The question can no longer be what would so and so, the great sage, the great leader, do? The question must rather lead each and every one of us to the values that hold us together in community, local, regional, and global. Democracy makes America great. Democracy is a value-pack of values we hold dear: fairness, access to resources and information, a public good, free speech, and institutions that serve as checks and balances designed to protect: fairness, access to resources and Information, public safety, and freedom of expression.

What are the values we hold dear? How do we live them? How do we connect with others around them? How do we call on them when we are up to our necks in the mundane or in moments of crisis or trauma?

Having a plan helps. The work of Yom Kippur is to transform the regrets of last year, or the regrets of a lifetime until this moment, into a commitment, a new vow, to aim higher this year, beginning right now.

Maybe In the morning we wake to reflect a minute or two on a value we hold dear. Let's say, lovingkindness. I want to be perceived as a loving person in my family. What can I do today to demonstrate my love? Say good morning? Notice something about my partner or kid? Invite someone to dinner, or a coffee or tea. Look clerks and customer service folks in the eye and wish them a pleasant day, for real.

What if each morning we thought about an exercise or two that would strengthen our practice of a value that we hold dear? And then we did that practice? And maybe even journaled it in a notebook at the end of the day?

Would we see any change in the way we feel about ourselves? Would we experience fleeting connections in our relationships and appreciate each other a little more?

Look we all are gathered here on this holy night because we feel something Jewish in us needs to come out. We are here after all. The truth of the matter is that the liturgy of the season focuses on triggering our awareness of the worst we have to offer as human beings. The idea is to help people notice a need to improve.

What if we in Temple Beth Tikvah began helping one another improve, grow in awareness and in social connection seriously.

We all know synagogue life is changing. We all know that what attracts us to synagogue life is not what our children and the next generation find equally as attractive.

Basic synagogue life assumptions that are no longer true: Jews will engage to make social connections among other Jews, Jews need the synagogue and rabbi for life cycle events and holidays

Young Jews are less concerned with the need to make Jewish friends. It is perfectly acceptable to invite non-Jewish friends to a Chanukah party or a home seder. Our Judaism that once made us feel different today is an asset, it makes us interesting. Our non-Jewish family and friends love our food, our rituals, our humor, and recognize our shared values.

Jews no longer need the synagogue for holiday celebrations or information or life cycle events. All can be accessed by internet. Teachers, rabbis for a single event, how to articles and videos, creative ideas for parents at home with their kids.

What can the synagogue offer that local Jews can't find on the internet???

I don't know. I really don't know. I have many ideas, but I don't know.

One of the values I am choosing to practice this year is Kavod, Respect. I think I am generally respectful of others. And...I think I rely on 25 years of service to the Jewish people to make decisions about synagogue programs that have worked in the past and must therefore work here and now.

For me this year, practicing respect, kavod, is about shedding the assumption that I know what will make Temple Beth Tikvah meaningful and important in the lives of our members. Again, I have many ideas. But the value of kavod calls me to respect our members by asking you and learning from you.