

Kol Nidrei October 2016 - 5777

Kol Nidrei, Yom Kippur, the day of atonement; the day we gather once more looking inward, figuring out our place in this world, our place within our own life, trying to figure out our personal balance, test our foundation stones, evaluate our strengths, measure our feelings of peace and wholeness.

It is challenging to find internal peace in a world that does its best to wrap us up in all of its craziness. The debates, the elections, work, school systems, corrupt politics, climate change, global economy, world conflicts, holy wars raging out of control. How are we supposed to find peace when this is the world we face on a daily basis?

Some people find peace by reminding themselves “Not my monkeys, not my circus.” Others find peace by focusing on the events and environments they can influence and can control: peace at home, peace at work, creating peace within our local community. Others find peace by being part of something bigger than themselves: teaching, volunteering, donating to good causes, working in some small way to make the world a better place.

I read recently how “the sun that is shining today is the same sun in the same sky as when we were growing up. Yesterday is only different from today because the world seems different. We tend to lose our perspective. We confuse the happenings on television in the newspapers, on radio...the wars, the hatred, the suffering...with the reality we actually live day to day. We live good lives, but all the visions surrounding us show us all the work we should do to help make the rest of the world as good as our lives. The stars at night, so far away, so tiny in their place in the sky, remind us how our lives are ephemeral. The starlight we see in the evening sky most likely comes from stars and worlds that no longer exist, or that are disappearing toward the edge of the universe, but it is the same light and the same patterns that our ancestors saw thousands of years ago, and probably will be the same light that humans will be staring at thousands of years from now.”

The vastness of the universe reminds us of how small we are within our galaxy and how lucky we are to live together on this incredible planet of ours. Our lives are blessings. This world is ours to thrive in. We as humanity need to work together to find the common threads between all of us, to find our commonalities, we need to focus on our

similarities rather than our differences. We need to focus on the oneness of humanity and not our differences and all the things that pull us apart. We as Jews need to stick together as a people, as a culture as a religion in order to be here to make the world a better place, in order to use all of our collective intelligence to continue making the world a better place and safer for all Jews and all people in the world.

Yom Kippur is about atonement, but if you tear that word apart its root is about examining our At ONE Ment. Our oneness, our uniqueness, how we are all connected, one humanity, one world, one universe, every atomic particle all connected by proximity to one another. Do we not all hurt when we see the pain and agony of our fellow humans suffering throughout the world? How many of us attach ourselves to organizations that try to bring more peace into the world, cure more diseases in the world, cure hunger, poverty and as many social ills as possible in the world? As Jews we've spent our history trying to secure our rights to our identity while trying to convince the world that we are all one and can all get along. We have always been pulled in so many different directions.

Vadim Zeland calls our world experiences, those that pull our attention and our emotions this way and that, the global pendulums. Every

system that tries to pull you this way or that way, to get you to pick one side in a system is a pendulum. Our political system, pulling the entire nation this way or that way trying to convince you that one side will destroy us, but if you join the other side you can be victorious and usher in a new age...just pendulums that keeps our entire nation divided, in disagreement and fighting. These pendulums cause us to forget that we are one nation, cause humanity to forget that we all live on the same singular, unique planet.

Sports from pee-wee leagues to professional teams are just pendulums between nations, states, cities, colleges and high schools sending our local warriors to create mock battles to prove false supremacy on a weekly basis. They are outlets for our competitive emotions that make us feel better while accomplishing little. Don't get me wrong I think youth sports are an incredible teaching tool for our youth in regards to teamwork, sportsmanship and work ethic. But why aren't there all of our professional athletes teaching strong values to our youth these days in gratitude for the success they've achieved?

And of course religion...multiple pendulums that pull us all in different directions, convincing their adherents that they have all the answers and only if we kill off all the competition can we rule the world with our beliefs

and ideologies, creating a world only in our image at the cost of all other ideas in the world. Even in Judaism, if you read the fine print, God always says “If you move away from my mitzvot, my commandments, you will be punished severely for your transgressions.” All just pendulums to pull us this way and that to keep the world populations divided, fighting pointless holy wars.

And yet here we sit on Kol Nidrei, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of our year, the day we ask for forgiveness for the promises we will make tomorrow that we will fail to keep. We pray for our future selves, that we will be forgiven for our humanity, for coming up short, for making promises we can't keep. We pray that we will find enough unconditional love within ourselves to forgive ourselves for our future failures while we try to be forgiven for our trespasses of this last year.

In Judaism, Yom Kippur is the day the pendulums of our souls are meant to stand still. It is the time of year where we ask those in our lives for forgiveness and offer our forgiveness in order that we may find ourselves cleansed of all worry, fear, anger and resentment. It is the day we lose 100 pounds of frustration and guilt so that we may once again feel what it is like to be weightless in our souls, our minds and in our hearts.

What does it mean to you to be one with yourself? What does it mean to be at peace? Does it mean to obtain complete silence of the soul? Does it mean confidence in your ability to handle anything that comes your way? Does it mean feeling fulfilled in all you've accomplished and satisfied with who you are and who you have become? Or does it simply mean that you accept yourself for who you are, flaws and all, and just be ok, unconditionally loving and forgiving of your true self?

This Kol Nidrei I'm begging you to let go of the things you can't change. There is too much out there for us to feel we can personally deal with it all. There is already too much in our lives, too many plates spinning above our heads for us to feel we can save the whole world. This year I ask you to focus on your inner peace and health. This begins with forgiveness of self and acceptance of self. Atonement is for the wrongs you've committed against the people in your life. At ONE ment is accepting yourself for being human and to embrace your true self.

You are all good enough. God, prayer, your Judaism, your history, your culture is not here to punish you for being human and for being overwhelmed by life, family, work, parenting, being. Your Judaism, your history, your culture, this day of At ONE ment is here to remind you of your

strength, to help you embrace who you are and to remind you to clean your slate so you may gather your spirit and strength as you enter this new year weightless and cleansed. If you cannot learn to love and forgive yourself how are you expected to be gracious and forgiving with those you love dearly who surround you in your daily life?

This year I give you ten things to do to help find balance

1. Breathe. Our breath rejuvenates us every time we inhale and exhale. Remember to breathe and feel comfort in how such a simple act keeps you alive day in and day out.
2. Laugh - Many say laughter is the best medicine. Laughing reminds you how to have fun and how to be silly. When we can laugh at life we can figure a way around any situation. Remember to laugh with your whole body to remind yourself not to take it all so seriously.
3. Be Forgiving. People are human. We make mistakes all the time. Be forgiving of yourself and of those in your life. If you can see the little things for what they are and see the smallness of most mistakes in your daily life it will allow you to forgive quickly and move on.
4. Be understanding. This connects to being forgiving in that if you are understanding it prevents you from being critical and always seeing

the flaws in yourself and the people around you. By being understanding you allow enough room to accept yourself for who you are and to accept all the people in your life.

5. Find fulfillment in your life. Tony Robbins points out in his recent documentary that there is a big difference between being fulfilled and being accomplished. Being fulfilled in all you've accomplished allows you to be both grateful and happy in what you've done in your life. People who only feel accomplished often feel empty because they lack inner fulfillment. Find fulfillment in your life and appreciate what all your hard work has accomplished.
6. Find balance in your life. You will never accomplish everything. Once you accept that create a list of all the things that are most important to you. Make a list of the things you do that add the most balance to your life. Now make a list at the things that disturb your balance. Now figure out how to make changes to those things and which things you can let go of to remove imbalance from your life. Balance in our daily lives is as easy or complex as we make it. Reminding ourselves that we know how to create balance is the first step in bringing more peace to our lives.

7. Pull your real friends closest. We cannot do this alone. No matter how independent we think we are we cannot handle all life throws at us on our own. Good times or bad we need our closest friends there to both celebrate our lives and support us when our life takes hard turns. If you don't cultivate close, meaningful friendships then how can you learn to be a close and meaningful friend. Real friends remind us of our strengths and our abilities and support us when we need them the most and feel our weakest.
8. Be grateful for all the blessings in your life. Too often we don't count our blessings enough or say thank you for the day we just experienced or the day we are about to experience. When you are being grateful there is no room in your emotions for anger or fear. Gratitude is so powerful that it prevents those emotions from taking over. We must always remember how fortunate we are to be alive, to live in a country such as ours, to be free to be Jewish and express our personal Judaism, to live in a world where Israel is a beacon to all the nations. Gratitude changes everyone it touches, changes the world, makes it possible to envision a planet where peace reigns

everywhere. Gratitude acknowledges all the blessings we receive everyday.

9. Love those closest to you and remind them how much you love them as often as you can. We can never express or accept love enough in our lives. Love is the most powerful emotion in the universe. God created the universe out of love and love changes the world in so many good ways every day. Saying or hearing I love you changes our lives in many immeasurable ways and helps remind those closest to each of us of how important they are in our lives.

10. And the most important for last - Love yourself unconditionally. When you learn to love yourself unconditionally and stop being so self critical it allows your love to overflow to everyone in your life. We must learn to take care of ourselves in order for us to share our best selves with our world and those we live with every day.

Yom Kippur is the time of year to come back to yourself and remember who you really are. Loving God or being angry at God you must still know who you are in order to truly live through your days and be aware of the blessings that surround you in life.

This Yom Kippur I wish you all peace. I pray that we are all written in the book of life for a year of health. I hope for you the ability to see this year through fresh eyes, that allow you to see the beauty and potential of your world surrounding you.

Thank you all for being a part of Har Shalom. I ask your forgiveness if at anytime I've let you down or not been there for you when you needed me.

May your fast be easy.

L'shanah Tovah