

Yom Kippur 5771 (September 17, 2010)
Congregation Beth Shalom – Kol Nidre Drash
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Yom Kippur 5763. My first Yom Kippur. It immediately became my favorite holiday I was/and still am so moved by this idea that G-d is acknowledging that we are being asked too much. We are humans being asked to act G-dly, but without falling into the trap of becoming arrogant or thinking we are G-d. We WILL and HAVE faltered and here is our opportunity to take stock, learn from our miss-steps and move forward. Rabbi David Ebstein, in his Yom Kippur Sermon last year quoted The Talmud (Yoma 86b), stating it acknowledged this same idea when it said: "Great is teshuvah for because of it "*sin*" can be counted as *benefit*."

Yom Kippur 5767. I had lost everything. We had worked hard on building a family only to have the adoption disrupted 3 months into the placement. Because of the terms of my husbands employment, we moved almost immediately across the country from Delaware to Tucson and the strain would result in the end of my marriage 3 weeks later. I was standing in a shul I had only been to once or twice before, completely devoid of any hope. I did not want to be there. I didn't want to be. There was a moment when Kol Nidre began that I felt a pang of guilt at having not prepared, but in my obstinate bitterness, I told G-d that he'd simply have to be content with my presence in shul. I was angry, I felt I understood Yom Kippur and if my belief was correct, then all of the tragedy I was facing was about me not being good enough. This line of thinking was unbearable. So I simply showed up, even though I felt my pain left me marked with a Scarlet "S" for Sinner.

Over the next 25 hours, my obstinance and bitterness turned to tears and I started to cry, and cry. And while I had done no Selichot (made no amends, and offered no forgiveness), no Tashlich (casting off my miss-deeds), G-d heard my silent plea, maybe seeing the act of faith in my showing up at all and through my lovely human ability to shed tears, offered me a "Tashlich of the Soul". And those tears created space for Selichot, the beginning of my self-forgiveness. At the end of the Neilah service, when the Shofar sounded, there was no bolt of lightning, no great revelation, just a tiny spark of hope that started to work its way into that knot of self-affliction. I started to see that who I am is not measured in how well things work out for me, but in how I am in the world when they don't and I resolved not to punish others for my disappointments.

Yom Kippur 5771. Over the last four years, with the help of this "Tashlich of the Soul," tragedy has turned into a softening and expansion of my heart. And these tears have expanded to include an expression of my deep connection to the moment, be it grief, joy, sadness, love, anger, humility, awe... and are a reflection of a full and wonderful life, that includes many challenges and many, many more blessings.

For this Yom Kippur, I have prepared, maybe more than I ever have and in a very different way. I feel humble, already aware that I haven't done it all, yet comfortable with this inkling that I have done what needs to be done and that forcing isn't the way. I have asked forgiveness from those I am aware of having wronged and have offered my forgiveness both directly and through the Selichot liturgy. I will be asking G-d to forgive me for a variety of miss-steps, as this year, I ranged from being Shomer Shabbat, to outright defiance in the face of disappointment and now back to somewhere in the middle. I am ready for the Al-Het, the statements of our miss-steps and humanness, and tomorrow night, when we hear the sound of the Shofar, I hope for the feeling of renewal that will come. I am ready. For what? I have no idea. I keep thinking I know what I can handle, what I need, but G-d keeps proving me wrong, so I thought this year, I would simply show up, with loving focus and attention, and see what happens. I must admit though, more than any time since I chose it, my Hebrew name has settled over me with a warm comfort much like when I wrap myself in my Tallis and I feel it is mine now more than ever: My Hebrew name? Tikvah. In English, Hope.

Why tell you about these 3 experiences? Other than to share myself with you, my wonderful Beth Shalom community?

To say this: within the Liturgy & Tanach, within these walls and within all of our hearts, there is room for us to be wherever we are. If you have done it all, prepared diligently and feel completely ready for the work we must now do toward Tikkun Olam, repairing the world, Great! If you are here because you are answering to a higher authority - a parent, a spouse, Rabbi, G-d. Wonderful. If you are here, broken, and you are just hanging on. Adonai has a special love for you. For all of us in this room tonight and tomorrow, we all have this one act of hope in common: We are here.

So, for the next 25 hours (give or take), I invite us to set aside whatever we have planned for how this day will look and build on our common act of Tikvah, our common act of hope. I ask you to join me as I try to forget what I think I know about the High Holy Days, about Torah, about G-d, about Beth Shalom, about the person standing next to me, about myself. Let us Open our hearts, our souls to the experience and allow G-d to give us, through community, exactly what we need.

As for me, I hope there is a lot more kleenex out there.

I wish you an easy fast and may you be inscribed and sealed in the Book of life for a blessed and sweet New Year.

G'mar Cha-ti-mah To-vah