

# Rosh Hashanah

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Shana Tovah.

As we enter into this season of transformation, there is an almost alchemical possibility of something new and unknown to blossom forth from the compost of our past year. We have an opportunity to cultivate a deeper sense of self observation and compassion... to break into new personal territory and to emerge transformed with a richer sense of self and a fuller capacity to see and receive others in our families and communities.

Standing between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we hold a template for these 10 days of Awe to do the serious work of self reflection, reassessment, repair and renewal. Teshuvah, Tefillah and Tzedukah are the basic ingredients necessary to guide us from our inner brokenness to our greatest offerings to the world around us. Simply put... Teshuvah /Return/

Response requires us to take things personally... to respond to the brokenness and come back to wholeness. Tefillah/Prayer, can take many forms and lets us align ourselves with the process of transformation and to connect ourselves to a higher good, and Tzedukah/Righteousness encourages us to look for opportunities to give back. The recipe is simple... but the work is profound and it needs to start with us.

How do we do the essential personal work that is fundamental to the larger work that our community calls us to do?

To reach in and allow ourselves to travel unknown paths, to untangle chronic patterns and to open ourselves to new ways of moving in our lives?

We are called on to directly face our flaws... to take responsibility, to clean up unfinished business and bring to consciousness the ways we have been hurt and the ways we too, have hurt others. Its a time to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. This is not a pretty process. It requires a sense of courage and trust. We are expected to jump into unfamiliar territory ... into the abyss of our deep and unworked out chronic behaviors and stuck

relationships. Who knows what the outcome will be?

For a true transformation we need to break ourselves open and let go of the familiar, to let go of control and expectations and be receptive to whatever is to come. Cynthia Ocelli says it well..." For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone...the shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth it would look like complete destruction. " This raw and challenging inner work is messy.. but is essential, and it is our training ground to cultivate self compassion, and to prepare us from the core of our own disrepair, to bring compassion to ourselves and to meet and empathize with another person's brokenness.

While many people speak about this being a time of atonement.... I like to take the onus off the process of Teshuvah, of doing the repair work, and reset the narrative. Can we bring a sense of grace and compassion to ourselves and consider this time of inner wrestling not one of beating ourselves up for the ways we have missed the mark... but as a welcome

gift...a time to notice, to take responsibility, to come in direct contact with our shadow side, clean up our unfinished business and come into a state of wholeness...a state of “at one ment”?

For myself, I’ve found a few ways to dip in and engage with this challenging inner encounter. Meditation gives me the opportunity to slow down and go inside and the quiet and spaciousness provide an open space to refresh... and to consider my issues. Both Qigong, a Chinese healing practice, as well as art making provide tangible and creative ways to feel my way to wholeness and repair.

We each have our own process or style... Consider what ways are best for you.

Let’s dip in with humility and curiosity and allow ourselves to change, to deepen and grow. We can start with accountability for ourselves and allow that to inform and refine the ways we show up for others.

In the mode of social justice advocate, Rabbi Art Waskow, “connect what

we see with our eyes to what we do with our hands.”

Let this time spark an opportunity to birth a new vision for ourselves... to realign with our core values, and to recommit to using the shefa, the overflow, of our personal healing work for the good of our community.

And it is this work that comes to play when we look at the Haf Torah portion we read earlier today.

How do we bring our hearts to what we see?

The story of Channah challenged the perceptions of her time.

Longing for a child, Channah looked at her despair straightforwardly and did not turn away. Peninah, with whom she shared her husband, was the mother of many children and this created conflict and jealousy in their family. Heart broken and full of passion she found herself in the Temple and her raw unfiltered prayer came through... her lips were moving, her body trembling but she was silent. Even though it was highly unusual, she stayed true to her need to pour out her heart and express her deepest

emotions.

Until that time no one prayed alone... no one prayed wordlessly and no one prayed with great emotion. It is said that in this moment Channah initiated the silent prayer style that we practice today.

In the Temple that day she certainly must have looked altered and unlike anyone usually in the midst of prayer. So, Eli, the priest, mistook her for a disrespectful drunk and insisted that she leave. Only when she explained the reason for the intensity of her prayer did he soften and offer his blessing. It was when Eli stopped, listened and was able to take the time to hear her story and sense her humanity that he was able to move beyond the challenging outward expression of her grief and begin to bear witness and affirm her prayer.

How often do we see or hear something disturbing or ugly and avert our eyes or close our hearts because it is too unusual or painful? It reminds me of how, when faced with the unending and devastating realities of our day to day news stream, for example, that inertia or denial or a sense of

overwhelm quiets what should be a passionate response.

Our eyes are open... but what are we taking in?

These days, tents and makeshift encampments of the houseless have been springing up in our downtown and on residential streets. Like in Channah's case, we have a tendency to see our homeless neighbors as a generalized blur of humanity, not recognizing that each person, like us, comes with a full back story that we cannot possibly know. In so many cases life circumstances have conspired against them and the downward spiral makes moving toward repair very difficult.

For many years I've been actively engaged in community efforts to provide basic needs to people who are living without shelter in Lane County.

During the Homeless Point in Time, an annual day dedicated to counting our local homeless population, I have had the opportunity to speak directly to Houseless folks on the street. With a survey in hand, I was able to ask... and almost everyone could tell me, the initiatory moment of their

homelessness....a terrible accident, the loss of a job, a divorce, escaping an abusive household, war trauma, a time in jail. All have come to where they are honestly. Once people have experienced the trauma of losing housing security they are disoriented, and accessing the larger systems and limited services available to help them recover, becomes a complex, and for many, an almost impossible task.

Last month at the 4th Sunday Homeless Breakfast at 1st Christian Church a small waif like woman in a lavender pullover came up to my serving window. It was hard to tell how old she was... I guessed somewhere between 40 and 60. She was noticeable in the sea of over 300 guests in that she was covered in a mysterious soft grey fuzz that clung to her hair and her clothing. She eventually cycled back through the line and stood about 5ft from the window...wide eyed and starring, though seemingly unfocused. She remained there for about 5 minutes quietly taking us in .... and then disappeared into the crowd. There was something about her that was familiar... that I recognized, and her presence and image were firmly



imprinted in my mind.

A day or two later I read a devastating post from Rev Dan Bryant. It was about a homeless person from the breakfast who had been run over by an early morning garbage truck .... while sleeping in an alleyway near the church.

He wrote... and I quote....

"She arrived with a down sleeping bag full of holes, feathers floating around her like fairy dust. Our janitor, bless him, brought out a garbage bag for her so that hopefully she could contain the feathers. She did not especially like that idea...as if that was somehow containing her spirit floating freely with the wind."

There was no question... this was the down covered woman from the breakfast line.

Who by fire? Who by water? Who by homelessness?

Let's remember her...let's uplift her name, Annette Lorraine Montero. A

student leader, a wife, a mother, a dancer and a homeowner who lost her house, who lost her children, who lost her bearings and found herself on the streets of Eugene.

What does it take for us to see each other? Annette was invisible to us until her death, and the revelations of her life story in the recent Eugene Weekly woke us up to her humanity, and reminded us that everyone comes with their own multilayered history.

These days we are overwhelmed by the enormity of the need around us.... because there is such enormous need.

I can find myself slipping into numbness and despair and yet the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estes bring me back to center.

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an

enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small determined group who will not give up during the first, second or hundredth gale.”

There is much we can mend that is within our reach.

And, when we are ready, there are things we can do to assist the houseless today. A simple warm and respectful greeting to folks on the street can go a long way. Warm clothing, winter jackets, gloves, socks and hats as the winter season approaches are always welcomed and can be dropped off at any warming center. If you’d like to have a more direct approach....I keep gloves, hats and hand warmers in my car and dollar bills in my dash board to hand out to people on the corner.

There are opportunities to help out in a number of ways at the 1st Christian Sunday Breakfasts, Food for Lane County, the Burrito Brigade, and Shelter Care and to assist in the construction of Conestoga huts, small individual

dwelling...Take a look at the one in TBI's parking lot. All these organizations and more welcome volunteers.

Throughout Eugene and into Springfield there is a network of faith communities that serve as Egan Warming sites. At almost each location you'll find Temple Beth Israel congregants well represented in the volunteer teams. We are greeters, kitchen leads, cooking and clean up crews, supervisors and security providers.

And now TBI has committed to being part of that gesture of repair. This winter we too will become an official Egan Warming site. When the weather dips below 30 degrees freezing, we will open our doors and provide hot meals and a warm safe place for our houseless neighbors to stay. What better way to walk our talk... to manifest our primary Jewish values of welcoming the stranger and doing our part to mend and fix our broken world?

If you feel drawn to supporting this effort please attend a warming center training listed on the Egan website and sign up to help as a volunteer.

So, our challenge is to look with clear eyes at a world filled with injustice.

How do we stay awake in this time of overwhelm... stay awake not only to ourselves, but to the subtle cues and deeper messages around us? How do we maintain our commitment and vital engagement with the outsider and exiled communities..... as well as continue to dialogue with the parts of ourselves that we exile and struggle with?

First, we must not turn away. We must keep our hearts and our eyes open. Take breaks as needed but return, and return again....stay committed and engaged. If we want to see goodness ... we must do the work to bring goodness into the world.

Perhaps during the year, remembering back to this intentional time of reflection and repair, we can use it as a spark...as the impetus to reset our center and our senses when we are out in the world?

We each need to show up at the table ... The gifts and experience and stories and skills we bring are all needed and necessary.... but we can't do this alone. As a congregation we can be a vital part of that small

determined group responding to the brokenness around us by harnessing the fullness and strength of our community to do the ongoing work of tikkun olam...fixing the world. Let's continue to add, add to, and add more as we tip toward an enduring good.... healing our planet and care taking each other.

May the work of your hands and your presence be welcomed as a source of healing and justice.

And may this be a time of revitalization and alignment of heart and purpose as we move forward in the year that awaits us.

Gamar Hatimah Tovah.