

REPAIR, RETURN AND RENEW

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Each year, Jewish tradition calls us to celebrate the turning of the calendar by embracing both the joy and the solemnity of the season, and the happiness and the hurt we feel in our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with God.

In many ways it is the season of contradictions.

Nowhere is this better seen than on Yom Kippur morning when in the midst of our fast, we read a passage from the prophet Isaiah questioning the practice of fasting unless it actually changes our behaviour the rest of the year:

“Is this the fast I look for? A day of self-affliction? Bowing your head like a reed...?”

After this provocative challenge to our supplication, the prophet then goes on to exhort us to feed the hungry; to support the afflicted in our midst; to undo injustice; and to not hide ourselves from our kin who are in need.

So what then is expected of us at this season? Action and activism, or prayer and contrition? The answer is both! And it is in this contradiction that our High

Holy Days so aptly capture the human experience.

The rabbis and sages who arranged our High Holy Day liturgy did not plan for our hasty departure from our places of worship on hearing Isaiah’s prophetic words. Rather, they expected us to remain standing or sitting, perhaps uncomfortably, as these words sank in. They expected us to embrace the contradiction.

The goal is simple but the task is hard: to purposely trouble ourselves and revisit our misdeeds of the previous year in the hope that we emerge with a sense of renewed purity and peace.

Ideally, we turn inward and scrutinise our own hearts, and end up with a greater sense of active commitment and connection with those around us.

The work of spiritual renewal, of re-balancing our lives and relationships, can be both painful and joyful. This work makes demands on us. There are often internal and external obstacles, breaches of faith or trust, fears and self-doubt, resentments, hurt and anger to overcome.

We must acknowledge our shortcomings, adjust or let go of certain habits, expectations, even dreams. We must also put our feelings and commitments into action.

This, like hearing the shofar, shakes us. After this incredibly challenging year of isolation, in which many of us were homeschooling, unable to be with our overseas family members, or alone, we need to connect back with ourselves, with God and with others, more than ever.

At TBI, it’s been a difficult year. We haven’t been able to see many of you from the bimah. We’ve been isolated from each other, and our relationships have been tested and challenged. This has been hard on all of us. We’re working to repair and return, so we can move forward, together.



In recent months, I have personally and publicly taken responsibility for both the things I did and didn't do over the last 18 months that have caused pain and hurt to others. In so doing, I sought to reset myself and my rabbinate out of the physical, emotional and spiritual isolation that manifested as a result of the global pandemic.

It takes time to reconnect with the ones we love, with the community we belong to, and with the larger movements of which we are a part. It takes time to reconnect with God, with life's positive energy, with the wholeness and holiness of our own selves.

For me, as I am sure it is for many of you, finding balance is about accepting

broken at the very same time.

I, for one, am trying to use the power and purpose of this season to heal the brokenness that overcame me and I hope the congregation, individually and as a whole, will join me in this sacred task.

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We are all repenting, we are all returning, we are all improving together. We are all looking to revive hopes, reconnect lines of communication and rediscover meaning and joy.

Along the way, I have been constantly reminded that as humans, we continually straddle conflicting impulses — between hope and despair, action and lethargy, generosity of spirit and destructive selfishness.

I have also been reminded that this process is not a race. Just as we praise God in the 13 attributes for being *erech apayim* - slow to anger, so too do we need to be fundamentally patient with ourselves as healing takes time.

that none of us will ever be wholly selfless or perfectly righteous. Finding balance is about committing to learn from our mistakes and engaging in the meaningful work of *t'shuvah* — a return that allows us to go back in order to repair, restore, and move forward.

Like the paradoxical challenge of the Yom Kippur *haftarah*, the *t'shuvah* and the healing we seek this season requires us to embrace the contradiction that we are both fully whole and disparately

together. We are all looking to revive hopes, reconnect lines of communication and rediscover meaning and joy.

I pray that we will be successful in that effort, just as I pray that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts throughout this High Holy Day season bring greater peace and healing, joy, and sweetness to us all.

L'Shanah Tovah uMetukah