

YOM KIPPUR DAY - 5780

Last night, we explored the importance of hope and today I want to look at the connection between hope and love.

At its core, Judaism is a religion of hope. As it says in the Torah: “Behold, I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life, so that you and your children may live.”¹ We are told to “choose life” and to recognize that the future is ours to write. As a people, we have not only survived, but thrived in the face of centuries of adversity. And despite all the pain and suffering, the Jewish community has always upheld and work to achieve our vision for a better future for us and for all people.

Hope is foundational to Yom Kippur and to the work of Teshuvah, repentance. Hope is the belief that Teshuvah is possible, that we can change, that we can do better, that we can make amends and create lives that we are proud of. Hope isn’t a feeling, but a way of thinking, a strategy for achieving a goal.

However, to do Teshuvah, the work of repair, we need to believe that we are worthy of change. We need to know we are loved, that we are redeemable, that we are worthy of healing. Because without this knowledge of our own worth, we are unable to have the strength to admit our mistakes and the courage to make change.

If we don’t love ourselves, we can lose sight of the fact that people love us. If we don’t love ourselves, we risk turning our critical eye to others in ways

¹ Deuteronomy 30:19

that can be deeply and profoundly destructive. We need to know that our lives matter, all lives matter and that because all of our lives matter there is great risk that we might harm others. It is the inevitable reality of intimacy that we risk hurting the people we love despite our best efforts, but repair and forgiveness are always possible.

As we engage in the process of Teshuvah, repentance, it can sometimes be difficult to find hope. We might believe that the mistakes we've made are too grievous to be forgiven, or that we are far too broken to ever be repaired. People can carry such deep shame about the mistakes they've made, shame that can become a barrier to spiritual repair.

I'd like to share with you an insight I gained from the years I spent running spirituality groups at an in-patient psych hospital. Many of the people in my groups had a dual diagnosis, meaning they had both a mental health challenge as well as an addiction problem. Most felt they had reached the bottom: they had hurt themselves and others, burned bridges with their families and engaged in crimes to feed their addictions. The folks in these groups were seriously engaged in the process of Teshuvah.

One day, I met a young man in one of these groups who was a recovering heroin addict and as he spoke about some of the things he had done while living on the street to survive. He was filled with despair about whether he could ever move beyond those terrible decisions and experiences. He was stuck. He believed he had done too much bad to ever start over.

As we sat together, I reminded him that his actions did not define him, that while he would need to take responsibility for their impact, that was not all of who he was. I reminded him that at his core, he was a beloved child of God, that God loved him and wanted nothing more than his return. As I spoke these words, he began to cry. He had forgotten this basic truth, that he was loved and redeemable.

In truth, this insight is important for each of us to remember. We are loved. We are worth of love. We are capable of love. As it says in the prayer before the Shema, Ahavah Rabbah Ahavtanu, we are loved by an unending love. Knowing we are loved is essential if we are ever going to change.

Over the Yamim Noraim, the High Holidays, our tradition emphasizes this message of love in the chanting of the Thirteen attributes. The words of love and forgiveness that God recited to Moses on the top of Mt Sinai. The words of intimacy and acceptance that see all of us, the broken and the whole, and welcome us home.

Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum v'Chanun. Adonai, Adonai, God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, willful sin, and error, and Who Cleanses.

Love, hope, change. All of these are possible. All of these are available to us.

As we talked about last night, hope doesn't just appear. It needs to be cultivated and one way to cultivate it is by sharing our stories of how we have found hope in difficult times. We help each other - teach each other - as we share the ways we find and create hope in the face of pain and loss. We need to hear each other's stories to inspire us and give us new ways to cope when we feel hopeless and can't find our own.

Sometimes all you can say to yourself is: 'Have Hope, be strong and find courage.'

קִוְיָה אֶל־יְהוָה חֲזַק וַיֵּאמֶץ לְבָבְךָ וְקִוְיָה אֶל־יְהוָה

"Have Hope, be strong and find courage." And when you don't have your own hope or courage, look to the person next to you, the person next to them, the ones you love and draw them close.

Now I'm going to read some cards from last night. And we'll weave together these strands of hope and love. We'll chant the Thirteen Attributes, read some quotes about hope, and chant again. We'll do this a few times - rinse and repeat. The invitation is to just sit in this mikvah of tikvah, the bath of hope, the healing waters of hope and love. Take in the experience, the words, the music. Immerse yourself in the messages of hope and love, that can give us strength for the challenges in our lives.

- Adonai, Adonai - Adrienne chants (words p.767)

- Read passages
- Adonai, Adonai - niggun
- Read passages
- Adonai, Adonai - Adrienne chants (words p.767)

Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum v'chanun, God of kindness, God of Mercy, God of forgiveness, may we truly know that we are loved. May we have hope for the future. May we create the lives we want and the worlds that we know are possible.

And may the words of Psalm 27, stay close:

קוֹה אֶל-יְהוָה חֲזַק וַיֵּאמֶץ לִבְךָ אֶל-יְהוָה

“Have hope, be strong and find courage in your heart.”