



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

MS-915: Joshua O. Haberman Papers, 1926-2017.

Series A: Sermons and Prayers, 1940-2016.

Subseries 1: High Holidays, 1941-2016, undated.

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Sermons and notes, 1990-1999.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
American Jewish Archives website.

Notes Oct 1990

Rosh H - Changing from Object to
Subject - assuming initiative
in life.



הגות / פירוש / פירוש / פירוש Theme

John Kippam : Relationships
with God

Change spiritually

What kind of Jews shall

we be? Personal Faith, Belief

תשובה - Go back to God, to
our sources - Bible -

Wisdom of Sages

Miscell. Ideas

① 4 different New Years
representing different areas
of conduct & responsibility

Rosh Hash's uniqueness: the
focus on internal life;
the private & personal domains

Vienna High Holy days

SILCHOT RECEPTION

Study Sessions on Hilchet Teshuvah
~~THE FAST - High Holy Days For Apostate Jews~~

~~Book of Jonah - All Torah
& Haftara readings~~

Preaching Themes:

① PARAN PARC | 2 MIN

Rosh H. - making a beginning
~~implies~~ capacity for change
We can change our life by
changing ourselves and our
relationships; with it goes responsibility
A time for accountability

② PARC | 2 MIN - Moral change
2 ways: ① Confession - self-judgement
② Forgiveness in judging others

② What explains or justifies the "hopefulness" of R.H.?

(a) Reject fatalism. You can start a new life. Birthday of world → Power to create, include a new self.

③ Vienna Reform - under L.N. Mannheim

④ Judaism is living under control - an orderly life.

Steering vs drifting

⑤ Add to #3: Judaism with its numerous customs & M3N is like a Piano with many keys. If you discontinue this & that key, are you not diminishing the instrument?

5-cont) — unless you create
new keys as substitute,
As to change: Every piece needs
new tuning periodically; so
Judaism needs adjustment,
correction but not discard.

Personal autonomy = choice
vs Communal loyalty.

⑥ WE AND OUR CHRISTIAN
NEIGHBORS

⑦ WE & ISRAEL
WE & WORLD JEWRY

Yom Kippur Day
September 25, 1993

WHAT JEWS BELIEVE IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING

By Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman

To most observers, the synagogue never looks better than on Yom Kippur: vast crowds, great music, huge amounts of prayer. But, a deeper look below superficial appearances forces us to admit, in all candor, that we have a formidable problem. A veteran journalist, Leonard Fein, describes the scene from the perspective of rabbis who apparently told him how they felt facing the High Holyday congregation:

"Come the high holidays,
they look out at a sea of
people who sit there and
say, 'Show me.' There is
less an air of expectancy
than a brooding skepticism.
Strangers have come

WHAT JEWS BELIEVE IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING

Worshippers or Spectators?

No theol. consensus - 4 congreg within one: Believers
Skeptics
Non Believers

"Gates of Prayer" 10 Sabb. Services

We do not need a new prayerbook for every nuance of faith
but a renewal of faith.

Indifferent Ones

2 Indispensable articles of Belief

1. Exist. of God

2. Relat. bet w. God & Man

שאלות לדיון Discussion

CASE FOR GOD as Personal Being in relat. with us

Norman Lamm

Steven Katz

Holocaust

— I believe in the sun

Louis Jacobs

Experiencing God

Else L. Schiller

Bostoner

Shomsky

Fischer



Positive

Negative

Leap of Faith

YOM KIPPUR

MORNING SERVICE

ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה
מעבירין את-רע הגזרה.

*But REPENTANCE, PRAYER, and CHARITY
temper judgment's severe decree.*

כי כשמה בן תהלתה, קשה לבעס ונוח לרצות. כי
לא תחפץ במות המת כי אם בשובו מדרך-ו. וקה.
ועד יום מותו תחכה-לו, אם ישוב מיד תקבלו.
אמת כי אמה הוא יוצרם ויוצר יצרם כי הם בשר
ודם.

a flower that will fade,
a shadow moving on,
a cloud passing by,
a particle of dust floating on the wind,
a dream soon forgotten.

*But You are the King,
the everlasting God!*

This is Your glory: You are
slow to anger, ready to forgive.
Lord, it is not the death of sinners You seek,
but that they should turn from their ways
and live.
Until the last day You wait for them,
welcoming them
as soon as they turn to You.

*You have created us and know what we are;
we are but flesh and blood.*

אדם יסודו מעפר וסופו לעפר. בנפשו יביא לחמו.
משול בחרס הנשבר, בחציר יבש וכצאיץ נוכל, בצל
עובר ובצענו בלה, וכרוח נושבת, וכאבק פורח,
ובחלום יעוף.

ואמה הוא מלך אל חי וקים!

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and dust is his end.
Each of us is a shattered urn,
grass that must wither,

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together, for a wide variety of reasons, from a wide variety of backgrounds, and the poor rabbi knows that this is his annual opportunity to work a piece of magic that he must charm, educate, inspire, convert. 'Be charismatic' the audience (for it is not a congregation) says; 'you've got two hours, or three, to defeat the massed forces of secularization, of modernism, of alienation and assimilation. Make it happen.'" Fein adds: "And that's the best of the assembly; the rest just want out as quickly as possible."

Are we a congregation or an audience?

Are we Jews united in worship, or spectators?

In the sixth century, Yannai of Palestine wrote a poem still found in the traditional prayer book: *וְיִנְיָאן בְּיָדֵינוּ*

"All of us believe."

In 22 stanzas this poem affirms all the basic Jewish beliefs which for the following 13 centuries formed a Jewish religious consensus. Such a consensus no longer exists. I am not only referring to modern Judaism's division, *three major groups*, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, whose doctrinal differences are well known, but to the lack of consensus even within the same congregation. Whatever prayer we recite is likely to reflect the thinking and believing of only a minority of people assembled in worship.

Within each congregation, you will find four distinct groups:

1. Believers
2. Skeptics
3. Non-believers
4. The undecided and indifferent ones, perhaps the majority, who care not enough to think about the beliefs of Judaism.

The Reform Prayer Book, "Gates of Prayer," takes account of our theological diversity by including no less than ten different Sabbath services, each with a different God concept, one of which doesn't even contain the word "God" and was written for humanist Jews who are uncomfortable with the idea of a transcendent supreme being.

Personally, I doubt very much that a different prayer book for every nuance of faith will vitalize the synagogue. **What is needed is a genuine renewal of faith, a long**

sustained and sophisticated teaching and preaching program to deal with the doubts of the skeptics and challenge the indifferent to think through the propositions of faith.

Actually, only two articles of faith are indispensable for vital and meaningful Jewish worship:

1. The existence of God.
2. Belief in some form of relationship between God and man.

As for the existence of God, however God may be defined, religious opinion polls in America show overwhelming belief, in the high 90 percentiles! But whether God has a relationship with us, whether God reacts to human affairs and how He reacts, -- is highly debatable.

I would expect sharply different opinions from this group in response to the most typical High Holyday prayer which is recited both on Rosh Hashanah and Yom

Kippur. It was composed some 600 years ago on the assumption that God and man maintain a close relationship, that God is aware of every event in our life, even of every thought, and that God reacts and responds to our deeds in shaping our destinies. This

prayer is the solemn

as "Let us proclaim,"

but literally meaning

"We mightily affirm."

תקן ותקן תקן translated in our books

Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day:

it is awesome and full of dread.

For on this day Your dominion is exalted,

Your throne established in steadfast love;

there in truth You reign.

In truth You are

Judge and Arbiter, Counsel and Witness.

You write and You seal, You record and recount.

You remember deeds long forgotten.

You open the book of our days,

and what is written there proclaims itself,

for it bears the signature

of every human being.

YOM KIPPUR

וּנְתַנָּה תְּקֵף קְדֻשַׁת הַיּוֹם כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאֵימָה. וְבוֹ
תִּנְשֵׂא מַלְכוּתְךָ וַיִּבּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד בְּסֶאֱף וְתִשָּׁב עָלֵינוּ
בְּאֵמֶת. אָמֵת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא רֵדָן וּמוֹכִיחַ וַיּוֹדֵעַ וְעַד,
וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה, וְתוֹזֵר כָּל-הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת,
וְתִפְתַּח אֶת-סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרוֹנוֹת, וּמֵאֱלֹו יִקְרָא וְחוֹתֵם
יָד כָּל-אָדָם בּוֹ.

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה רַקָּה יִשְׁמַע.
וּמִלְאָכִים יִחְפְּזוּן וְחֵיל וְרַעְדָה יֵאֱחָזוּן וַיֵּאמְרוּ: הִנֵּה
יוֹם הַדִּין. לְפָקֵד עַל צָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין, כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ
בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין. וְכָל-בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנֶיךָ בְּבִגְדֵי
מְרוֹן. כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה עָדְרוּ, מֵעֵבִיר צֵאנוּ תַּחַת
שְׁבָטוֹ, כִּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנֶה וְתִפְקֹד נֶפֶשׁ כָּל-
חַי, וְתַחֲתֶיךָ קִצְבָה לְכָל-בְּרִיָּה וְתַכְתֵּב אֶת-גִּזְרוֹת דֵּינָם.

*The great Shofar is sounded,
the still, small voice is heard;
the angels,
gripped by fear and trembling,
declare in awe:*

MORNING SERVICE

*This is the Day of Judgment!
For even the hosts of heaven are judged,
as all who dwell on earth
stand arrayed before You.*

As the shepherd seeks out his flock,
and makes the sheep pass under his staff,
so do You muster and number and consider
every soul,
setting the bounds of every creature's life,
and decreeing its destiny.

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן וּבִיּוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתְּמוּן.
כַּמָּה יַעֲבִרוּן וְכַמָּה יִבְרָאוּן, מִי יִחִיָּהּ וּמִי יָמוּת, מִי
בְּקִצּוֹ וּמִי לֹא בְּקִצּוֹ, מִי בְּאֵשׁ וּמִי בַּמַּיִם, מִי בְּחָרֵב
וּמִי בַחֲזֵה, מִי בְרֶעֶב וּמִי בְצָמָא, מִי בְרֶעֶשׁ וּמִי
בַּמַּגָּפָה, מִי בַחֲנִיקָה וּמִי בַסְּקִילָה. מִי יָנוּחַ וּמִי יָנוּעַ,
מִי יִשְׁקִיט וּמִי יִטְרַף, מִי יִשְׁלֹוּ וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר, מִי יַעֲנִי
וּמִי יַעֲשִׂיר, מִי יִשְׁפֹּל וּמִי יָרוּם.

On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
on Yom Kippur it is sealed:
How many shall pass on, how many shall come to be;
who shall live and who shall die;
who shall see ripe age and who shall not;
who shall perish by fire and who by water;
who by sword and who by beast;
who by hunger and who by thirst;
who by earthquake and who by plague;
who by strangling and who by stoning;
who shall be secure and who shall be driven;
who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled;
who shall be poor and who shall be rich;
who shall be humbled and who exalted.

YOM KIPPUR

MORNING SERVICE

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Man's origin is dust,
and dust is his end.
Each of us is a shattered urn,
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Do you believe in such a God? If not, why not?

Can a case still be made for a God who is not merely an idea or blind power, but a personal Being, aware of our human condition, reacting to our needs, even guiding and helping us and exercising judgment and management of our destinies?

I decided to explore the question of God's relationship with man in my new book to be published in January or February by MacMillan, "The God I believe In." It is based on two to three hour long interviews with 14 of the most eminent and thoughtful Jews in America, Europe and Israel. Again and again I asked, do you believe in a caring God? How has the holocaust or your personal life experience affected your faith and your concept of God? "Is it conceivable," I asked Professor Norman Lamm,

President of Yeshiva University, "that the ultimate power of the universe could be aware of the myriads of living beings and care about a single person, a mere speck of dust in the cosmos?" Professor Lamm answered:

"It all depends on how big a God you believe in... I believe in a very big God who can be concerned with everything, even a speck as apparently insignificant as my own life in this vast universe."

Note Professor Lamm's words "apparently insignificant." We equate size with importance. But nuclear research has taught us to respect the power of the infinitesimal. The atom with its particles represents a cosmos of its own and of mind-boggling complexity. The visionary William Blake was awe struck by the possibilities contained within the tiniest fragment of

reality:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your
hand

And Eternity in an hour

Might not God have at least as much
vision as William Blake?

Professor Steven T. Katz of Cornell
University answered simply:

As for the mystery of God...if I
could understand God, I would be God.

The Kotzker Rebbe once said:

'a God that any Tom, Dick or Harry
can understand, phooey, I don't need
such a God."

As for the holocaust, studies so far
suggest that while this horrible experience
of human savagery has turned some Jews into
Atheists, many became more religious as a
result of their suffering or in spite of it.

After the war, an inscription was found on the wall of a secret underground shelter in Cologne where a group of Jews had been hiding out for a couple of years:

I believe in the sun when it is not
shining

I believe in love when feeling it not

I believe in God even when He is
silent

The holocaust has not destroyed faith in God. It only deepened God's mystery, even as it accentuated the mystery of man. The Bible asks:

Can you by searching find the
deep secrets of God? Can you conceive
the purpose of the Almighty? It is high
as heaven, what can you do? Deeper than
the nether world, what can you know?

(Job 11.7)

The psalmist declared flatly:

"His greatness is unsearchable."

(PS 145.3)

Rabbi Louis Jacobs, England's foremost theologian, echoes this limitation of human reason while emphasizing man's total dependence upon God:

"Dear God, for as much as without Thee
We are not even able to doubt Thee
Lord, give us the grace,
To teach the whole race
We know nothing whatever about Thee.

Since the rational approach to God, leads to a dead end, many would rather rely on the experiential approach. "Have you ever had a God experience," I asked a number of the people I interviewed. I kept thinking of the yearning for such an encounter so beautifully expressed by the poetess Else Lasker-Schüler in her poem, "Oh God":

If only once I could grasp
God's hand ...

Oh God, Oh God, how far am I
From thee!

How does one get "in touch" with God or,
as the poem puts it, "grasp God's hands,"
that is, experience God?

I got three kinds of answers.

Some, like the Hassidic Rabbi Levi
Yitzhak Horowitz, known as the "Bostoner
Rebbe," rejected the idea of experiencing
God in direct encounter as an impossibility.
In his view, God Himself cannot be an object
of experience: "Torah and Mitzvot represent
in this world the elements of God, the
elements of faith. These are the
instruments by which we are able to
experience what God means." He pointed out
that through various ritual acts, one may
gain the special feeling of being connected,
of being linked up, but, clearly, this
feeling of being "connected" with God is far
less than a God experience.

However, several other persons affirmed experiences in their life which for them became encounters with God. I was especially impressed by Natan Sharansky's personal testimony of his God experience in his prison cell. This most famous Russian dissident and "refusenik," who was raised in the spirit of Marxist atheism, had a powerful religious experience in connection with his reading of the psalms. He discovered the spiritual reality for which his materialistic ideology had made no allowance:

"God came to me to support me..

Even when you are left alone, there is still a force upholding you."

He was puzzled by his inability to make pragmatic compromises with his oppressors which might have eased the conditions of his many years of imprisonment. Prudence would have persuaded him to yield, but an inner

force commanded him to resist. He discovered, as he put it,

"That spiritual world which was giving me the strength and purpose to survive."

In response to my question, "Do you believe it is possible to experience God?" Sharansky recalls that moment of exaltation when one is supposed to feel the presence of God. However, with a healthy dose of skepticism, he pointed out that he "wouldn't overestimate the importance of such single moments." He then explained:

The experience which I went through in prison was much deeper...It was not one moment of revelation, but years of revelation. In those years, I gained the realization that life, the principles of life, are dictated by some higher authority. The *single moments of revelation can*

always be explained through one's own mood or inner state of mind."

Another *understanding* of the experience of God was explained to me by the philosopher Emil Fackenheim. When I asked him whether he believed it possible to have a God experience, he answered with a question of his own: What do you mean by experience? It is a slippery word. Do you mean a feeling? A mood? How can we be sure that what we experience is really God? The most we can be sure of is expressed in a Talmudic statement which is often inscribed over the sacred ark in our synagogue:

KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU ARE STANDING

יָדַע לְפָנֵי מִי אַתָּה עוֹמֵד

We do not encounter God in a way that enables us to describe Him or even define His attributes. In other words, we do not have a direct experience of God, but we may

be absolutely sure of being in God's presence.

A sense of God's presence can come upon us in two ways:

First, positively, through some emotional peak experience, a moment in which nature reveals its grandeur or the starry sky, or the wonder of a child's birth--any number of experiences can convey to us, *indirectly*, a sense of the presence of God.

The second way is something negative, namely, the realization of our human finiteness, or even nothingness; the certainty of our extinction and annihilation in death.

Our High Holyday prayer ends with the question, who are we? Does human existence by itself make any sense? Is not our life, the life of all mankind, a mere speck of dust in an infinite universe? An absurdity?

If you confront the reality of human

existence, knowing as an absolute fact that we shall be no more, that we shall vanish as though we had never been, perhaps tomorrow, or next year, or in the decade or generation ahead, -- and ask, what is it all about? Why was I put into this world? What point or purpose is there to biological life.?, Is it no more than the reshuffling of the earth's chemistry, without any sense, meaning or purpose?

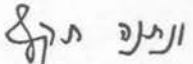
It is at this point that some of us make their "leap of faith," -- an existential jumping away from the unbearable thought of cosmic meaninglessness, a gut-reactive denial of the absurdity of human existence.

The astrophysicist Arno Penzias told me:

"By looking at the order in the world, we can infer purpose and from purpose we begin to get some knowledge of the Creator, the planner of all this."

Penzias is aware that his concept of a purposeful Creator may be just a "security blanket" but to believe otherwise, he finds impossible: "How can I face the world?" -- he asked.

When the evidence of reason or science falls short of an absolute proof of God's existence and care for us, the only remaining choice is between the cynic's "vanity, vanity, all is vanity" -- or responding to our Creator with trust that the God who put us here has a relationship with each of us. It is an act of faith without which life has no meaning.

NOW, HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE ENDING OF THE GREAT AFFIRMATION THE  PRAYER. CONTEMPLATING HUMAN EXISTENCE BY ITSELF, WITHOUT ITS CONNECTION WITH GOD, WE MUST REALISTICALLY SAY;

"MAN'S ORIGIN IS DUST AND DUST IS HIS END. EACH OF US IS A SHATTERED URN, GRASS THAT MUST WITHER, A FLOWER THAT WILL FADE, A SHADOW MOVING ON, A CLOUD PASSING BY, A PARTICLE OF DUST FLOATING ON THE WIND, A DREAM SOON FORGOTTEN."

HOWEVER THE PRAYER DOES NOT POINT TO DESPAIR, BUT IN A LEAP OF FAITH IT PROCLAIMS GOD IN WHOM WE HAVE OUR BEING;

"BUT YOU ARE THE KING, THE EVERLASTING GOD!"

At Preaching Seminar for Rosh Hashana of WBR - June 14, 1995

A JEWISH APPROACH TO FAMILY VALUES

Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman

The Valedictorian at a high school graduation in Apple Valley, Minnesota as reported in the New York Times, said recently:

"As demonstrated by the terrible bombing in Oklahoma City, the greatest threat to our national security lies not in any external enemy, but rather from the enemy within -- in our loss of strong, moral family and community values."



This applies with special relevance to the Jewish condition in our world today. We are more threatened from within than we are by enemies about us. The innermost core of Jewish strength that enabled us to survive all kinds of historical vicissitudes has been the exceptional purity and integrity of the Jewish family. For many centuries we could boast of the lowest divorce rate, respect for the elderly, mutual helpfulness. The family's care for their own less fortunate kindred was our most effective welfare system. We were virtually free of the scourge of drunkenness and were distinguished by an incredibly ^{low} crime rate.

The Jewish family was patriarchal. Everyone knew his or her role and responsibility. Parents possessed and exercised authority over their children's education, conduct, leisure time activity and marriage. Youths were married early, often too early; singlehood was rare and considered a calamity. Children respected parental leadership, even when they resented it.

The typical Jewish home housed an extended family of three generations. There was a sense of all for one and one for all.

Today this picture is a relic of the past. Jews account for the largest number of singles in proportion to their numbers. Youths leave the home right after high school graduation, returning only on vacations with bundles of laundry. Parental authority is challenged as early as the primary grades. Parents have substituted suggestions for commands and prohibitions.

With affluence has come "too much, too soon" and excessive freedom not matched by responsibility. The rite of entry into adulthood is not the Bar Mitzvah, but the sixteenth birthday with the receipt of the drivers license and a set of car keys.

Our divorce rate is climbing ever closer to the national average. So is alcoholism and drug addiction. The roles of family members are confused. With typically both parents working, neither has the time or stomach to be boss. Moreover, from an early age our children are raised by caretakers in day care centers or by teachers in schools or, even more so, by the television screen, with peer groups rather than parents supplying models for behavior.

Parents who once knew or seemed to know what was right and wrong, now are morally ambivalent or tongue-tied and unable or unwilling to impose standards on their children. Parental control of the child's choice of a mate has vanished long ago, with intermarriage now at a rate of 50% or higher. Sexual mores have sunk to general levels of casual promiscuity.

We do not have specific statistics, but my impression is that the majority of Jewish families in America are no longer able to transmit to the new generation the moral fiber, faith, stamina and inner security which were the source of Jewish success and survival in the past.

The questions before us are:

1. Can anything be done? Should anything be done to change the direction in which Jewish family life is developing?

2. If so, how?

THE NEED TO REDEFINE PARENTAL ROLES

The reconstruction of the Jewish family must begin with a redefinition of the role of parents. It is not enough for parents to be providers or even friends of their children. The primary role of parents is to serve as models and moral guardians of their off-spring.

Make Parent Education the Rabbi's Priority

Culture is memory, the memory of lessons learned from thousands of years of human experience, the memory of "sancta" -- a sacred tradition learned and observed at home, in the school and synagogue; a clear distinction between what is permitted and forbidden, between the do's and the don'ts, preserved in our people's religious and moral consciousness.

If parents are alienated from that tradition and neither know nor practice it, and therefore cannot appreciate its worth, they cannot possibly fulfill their role and function as transmitters of Jewish values. Parents must know what we Jews stand for. Therefore, parent education, Jewish adult learning should be our highest priority.

This raises the question of the rabbi's agenda. Where in the hierarchy of our priorities is our teaching of adults?

Are we not pulled in ever so many directions which absorb most of our time and energies? Instead of trying to save the world, we should work to save the Jewish home. Instead of

getting agitated by Bosnia, Rwanda and other distant problems, by the politics of the left or the right, by the war of words between liberals and conservatives, we should focus our attention upon the condition of our families and be the professional transmitters of those beliefs, principles and morals parents should absorb, exemplify and pass on to their children.

Launch the Year of the Jewish Family

Rosh Hashanah would be an excellent time to launch the year of the Jewish family with a comprehensive teaching program of Jewish family values. Why let Evangelical Christians and right wing politicians monopolize this issue? Don't we have a concern of our own in this crucial matter of Jewish survival?

The Home and Synagogue Must Reinforce Each Other

If the home and synagogue do not reinforce each other, the current unraveling and disintegration of the Jewish community will make the specter of the vanishing Jew a reality.

The Culture War

The problem is actually much bigger than our own Jewish community. We are in the midst of a culture war. Moral anarchy is spreading throughout the western world. Paganism is having a resurgence. In Norway, satanic cultists are burning ancient churches. In Europe, church attendance is at its lowest historical level. In America, pseudo religious cults are mushrooming and filling the spiritual vacuum created by inadequate religious education of both Christians and Jews.

Our ranks are swelled by purely nominal members who lack even the semblance of vital religious experience and ^{are} incoherent in stating their beliefs.

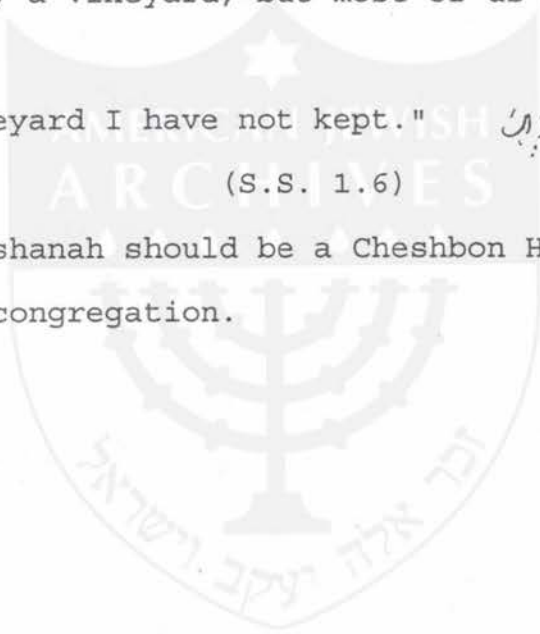
As their rabbis and spiritual leaders, we are not without responsibility, even blame. We have not been lazy; rabbis work harder and longer hours than most professionals. In fact, we have been overactive, involved in countless causes and projects. We have tended many a vineyard, but most of us should say with the Song of Songs:

"Mine own vineyard I have not kept."

(S.S. 1.6)

כַּנְתִּי אֶת-עֵצֵי הַיַּיִן לְעֵשֶׂה וְאֶת-הַיַּיִן לְעֵשֶׂה

This Rosh Hashanah should be a Cheshbon Ha-nefesh both for the rabbi and the congregation.



-3-

THE COMEBACK OF GOD

Rabbi Joshua J. Haberman

Having delivered about 20 book-and-author lectures in various cities on the subject of my book The God I Believe In, I have been impressed by the seriousness of theological questions members in the audience have raised. Is it possible to reason for the existence of a personal God? Why should God be interested in so infinitesimal a thing as a human being in this vast universe? Where does evil come from? Did God let the holocaust happen because:

- (a) He could not act?
- (b) He did not care to act?
- (c) He did act in ways unknown to us.
- (d) Or is God dead, i.e., there is no God?

Can we still believe in a chosen people? And what sort of God is it who chooses one people in preference to another?

The question which best reflects the new yearning of God is:

How is it possible to have a personal God experience?

Numerous ^{books} and articles have recently been published relating personal experiences of transcendence, of life transforming experiences of the presence of God and you will find that many of our people will speak of such experiences if encouraged to share their religious feelings and speak of these very personal things. Martin Buber and countless Jewish and Christian thinkers after him have popularized the phrase "encounter with God." Is there a way of facilitating such an experience?

I would like to contrast two Biblical sentences, one reflecting the pagan mind and the other the Hebrew spirit with reference to God.

In Bamidbar (Nu. 23.3) we read that the pagan magician Balaam said to King Balak who hired his services for the purpose of pronouncing a curse upon Israel:

"Stand there -- I will go, perhaps God will meet me."

Balaam in typical pagan fashion leaves it all to chance. The theology of paganism is fatalism. If you know the proper incantation or charm, you might luck out and God will come face to face with you and do your bidding.

Balaam, in other words, is casual in his approach to God. "Perhaps God will come to meet me." Some of our Midrashim see chutzpah in Balaam's attitude. He'll go for a walk and maybe God will trouble himself to meet him.

Compare Balaam's words with those of the prophet Amos who challenged his people:

יִשְׂרָאֵל, תִּפְּקֹד לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ
"Prepare to meet thy God, O' Israel"

(Amos 4.12)

The Jewish approach to the encounter with God has always included "spiritual preparedness." A little dabbling in ritual here or there is not enough. Dropping in for prayer once in a while is insufficient. Opening the Bible for a page and then closing it, will not do. Those who expect the annual exposure to major observances such as the High Holydays or the Pesach Seder to become genuine religious experiences in which the presence of

God is felt will often be disappointed. Nothing less than a constant state of spiritual alert will prepare us for the experience. You are probably familiar with that beautiful Midrashic parable based upon Kohelet 9.8.

"At all times, let your garments be white and let your hair be well groomed." כבד את אלהיך בכל ימי חייך וכל ימי שבתך וכל ימי חייך וכל ימי שבתך

The parable tells us that a king announced that he intended to invite the citizens of a certain town to a huge royal banquet. Immediately, some of the citizens cleaned their best garments ready to wear for the occasion and made sure that they were properly groomed. Many others, however, went about their business as usual saying to themselves that there would be plenty of time to get ready whenever the banquet would be announced. As it happened, the announcement came, those who were prepared rushed to the palace and were admitted and, shortly afterwards, the gates were closed and those who had not prepared for the occasion came too late and were left standing outside.

How can we prepare for the encounter with God for any kind of experience of the presence of God?

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM MY BOOK:

The Bostoner Rebbe

Natan Sharansky

Cynthia Ozick: -- "Sometimes brought to tears and sometimes God seems to be flying out of the pages of the prayer book." Teaching the congregation to pray with Kavanah.

Emil Fackenheim's point: "Know before whom you stand."

Encounters with God need not be tremendous experiences in which the sky opens up and we have some sort of supernatural revelation. Such experiences may be of a very common kind in which we gain sudden, deeper insight. The author Dan Wakefield ~~has just published his~~ ^a book: Expect A Miracle: The Miraculous Things that Happen to Ordinary People. The book was extensively reviewed in ~~a recent issue of~~ The Washington Post. Wakefield, in the course of his turbulent life, became a total secularist and agnostic, a successful writer and an alcoholic. Not too many years ago, he recovered his religious faith and, ever since, has made references to personal religious experiences. He tells of one such experience which occurred during his time of therapy at the Center for Religious Development at Cambridge. There, one of

his spiritual counselors told him to find a tree and study it for twenty minutes a day for two weeks. Wakefield thought that the assignment was silly, but he began to meditate on a huge tree. Then he turned to blades of grass and started to take notes. At one point, he looked up and found himself eye to eye with a squirrel, "I got this feeling that the squirrel and I were made of the same stuff, -- it was a terrific feeling."

Many of us have had this sense of total identification and oneness with all life around us, a marvelous sense of inseparable belonging to a larger context of life than our own. I have had that kind of experience and, ~~I would like to suggest that congregants would love to hear from their rabbi relate anything of his own religious growth or personal religious experience.~~

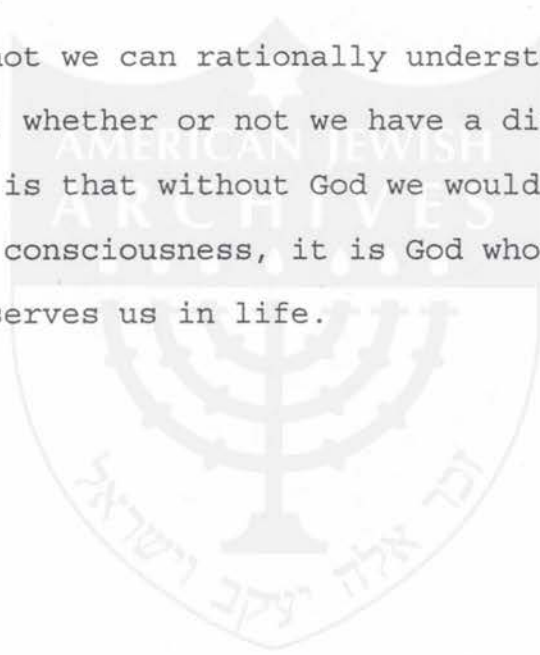
The search for the living God is certainly not something new. Throughout the centuries, people have sought reassurance of the presence of God. There is a delightful Midrash telling of a father taking his little boy to the market. Walking a long stretch of the road, the boy grew tired and so his father picked him up and let him ride piggy-back. When they got into the town and the crowded market place, the boy grew terribly excited seeing magicians, jugglers, strange animals, hearing all these sounds and seeing all these sights he temporarily forgot just where he was and not seeing his father, the little boy broke into tears and asked a passerby, "Have you seen my father?"

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Thereupon ~~the~~ father slapped the boy's leg and said, "You rascal, I've been carrying you around all this time and now you ask, where is my father?"

So are many of us who are God seekers. Here we are carried and sustained by God's power and care in life every day and every moment and just because we cannot see God face to face, we wonder where is our God?

Whether or not we can rationally understand and prove the existence of God; whether or not we have a direct encounter with God; the reality is that without God we would not exist. Despite our lapse of God consciousness, it is God who carries us, sustains and preserves us in life.



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There is a radical difference between the High Holy Days and all other Jewish holidays. All of our holidays and festivals deal with great moments in our national history; they are historical and national. Rosh H. and Y.K. are exceptional by dealing entirely with the private and personal life of the individual. The exclusive agenda of these High Holy Days and the days in between is the *לשון קודש* ACCOUNTING OF THE SOUL, taking stock of yourself, examining your life critically and trying to correct what needs to be corrected.

The value of this accounting of the soul, this self-evaluation, hinges on what you are measuring. Suppose you ask, how successful have I been? Success in what? Financial gain? Maintaining good health?

Personal relations? Making friends? Winning the respect of people? Being loved and having someone to love?

Look at yourself not in terms of your role or occupation --- as lawyer, doctor, teacher, administrator, manager or whatever ---but focus on your inner, naked self. Ask, who am I really? What do I want in Life? Am I approaching or deserting my ideal self-image? And the question of questions: Am I happy? Am I satisfied? And ~~to what extent~~ have I tried to gain happiness and contentment at the expense and to the hurt of others?

It is impossible to make an honest review of one's life, or even of a single day, without noting some things that have gone wrong, efforts that fell short, ^{good} intentions unfulfilled, plans that were scuttled and promises to yourself and others that were broken.

Every life has an undercurrent of regrets over flaws and failures. No matter how many lessons we take in self-esteem, we know our blemishes. Somehow we must cope with nagging feelings of self-reproach, even self-rejection ---- which explains the enormous appeal of the Kol Nidre because it is the most perfect musical rendition of the troubled conscience, the lament of guilt, the song of sighs.

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Repentance and regret are the theme of Kol Nidre according to Lenau. Being a poet and not a theologian, he uses both terms, repentance and regret, as though they meant the same --- a mistake which nearly all laymen make.

There is a vast difference between these 2 terms.

Regret, my dear friends, is something we can experience any time. Is there a day when we don't feel sorry about something we said or should have said, something we did or should have done ?

Is there a day when we do not reproach ourselves because of work left unfinished, duties neglected, people we offended or actions which dishonored us ?

But these regrets should not be confused with repentance which is a rare occurrence and, of course, a much more profound experience.

Regret, despite its sadness, is a lightweight among man's inner experiences. It is no more than a state of feeling, a sense of acute discomfort --- but it has no direction and gets us nowhere.

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Familiar as an old mistake
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The person who merely regrets, *is it*
George Bernard Shaw's sparkling words;

"A man who thinks that he is moral, when he
is merely uncomfortable"

Even sharper than the sharp-tongued Irish genius was a Hasidic master's comment on regret:

"Dwelling on feelings of regret is like sweeping dirt this way and that ---the broom does not become any cleaner thereby. The important thing is not to wallow in dirt but to get clean."

Repentance, my friends, is the cleansing process.

It begins where regret ends, and aims at the ethical transformation of the person. It is among the great life-time achievements, certainly much more than a state of feeling.

The Hebrew term for repentance TESHUVAH brings out much better than the English how much more it is than regret.

Teshuvah means literally "coming back," "returning."

It means a break with your own self, a drastic turn-around to the best within you.

At this point, many of you might raise an objection: Can one really change the basic pattern of one's character overnight ?

Can an hour such as this, or a day such as Yom Kippur, un-do what a life-time has done in shaping one's personality ?

Believe it or not, this is the claim, the urgent contention, the promise of our religion. Yom Kippur's Torah portion

includes the ringing declaration:

SEE, I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY, LIFE AND GOOD, AND DEATH & EVIL
This very day, you should decide between two ways of living....

The course of one's whole life may be changed through an hour of Teshuvah. BUT THERE IS A BIG IF. Teshuvah is not as simple as regret. Only if you can do 3 things, will you experience genuine Teshuvah:

First, the disintegration of the old self.

It begins with remorse to the point when one appears disgusting in one's own eyes and one rejects a part of oneself.

This mood is called CONTRITION; it means being crushed and shattered inside and the classic Biblical example is the 51st psalm in which a guilt-stricken David throws himself at the mercy of God:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit
A broken and a contrite heart O God
Thou wilt not despise."

What is a broken spirit? It is a fracture, a split within. The rabbis describe this split or inner conflict through the image of the Yetzer Ha-tov --the good urge, wrestling with the Yetzer ha-ra, the evil urge. And the first sign of victory of the Yetzer Ha-tov, the good urge, is the verbal confession.

The moment we drag our corruption out into the open and, ^{in so many words} acknowledge the evil we want to get rid of, at that moment we begin to purge ourselves. When I confess my wrongs, I reject them and prepare to change what must be changed.

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But, this is only the first step. Words are cheap. The second step is paying the price; I mean an act of undoing the wrong we have done, including restitution and compensation for the harm we have inflicted on others.

If the harm done was financial, obviously restitution must take the form of money. But, most of our wrongdoing is in the area of inter-personal relations, *by putting down*, by causing embarrassment or shame, by demeaning words, words of disrespect, ridicule. How can you undo such wrongs? What would be an appropriate restitution? An apology would be a start but more telling would be some act of reversal, --- giving special attention to whom we have hurt by neglect; expressing respect for one we have bad-mouthed; doing a special favor or offering help to anyone we have harmed in any way whatever.

There is a third step in the Jewish ethics of repentance, and that is the culminating point in that great penitential Psalm 51 to which I referred earlier:

"Create me a clean heart, O God

and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

*THE GIFT OF
A NEW SPIRIT!*

"Now, wait a minute, "--- you might object ---"Is God the one to produce a moral turn-around, a new attitude, a new spirit, or, is it the culprit's ^{own} responsibility to achieve a drastic change of mind?"

The answer is that both God and the sinner cooperate in one's moral rehabilitation.

When we truly want a change within, we are not alone.

God helps us. That is the point of all our prayers,

to connect with the divine spirit to *lift* us up to a higher *Self*.

The ultimate hypocrisy is a Yom Kippur observance of superficialities, of trivial pursuits, turning the day into a mainly social experience, people watching, looking around who's there, or an endurance contest in fasting.

As Isaiah in the Yom Kippur Haftara castigated a Yom Kippur crowd for making a show of their external ritual observance without the slightest moral or spiritual change within, so we, today, ^{we} must tackle the really

hard job of cleansing the corrupt self within on ~~that~~ holiest day of Yom Kippur.

The story is told about the Besht, founder of Hasidism, that one day, close to Yom Kippur, leaders of his village urged him to keep a certain villain out of the synagogue on Yom Kippur: "That man is a scoundrel, a traitor, and a sinner, a danger to ~~the~~ whole community"

"No, no," said the Besht; "Impossible, every person has some spark of goodness."

"But rabbi, even your great heart must recognize that a rotten branch must be cut off"

"On the contrary," replied the Besht, "as long as that branch remains attached to the tree, there is yet hope for it to be cured."

The story suggests a paradox about Yom Kippur.

Although Yom Kippur is the most personal of our holy days, which focuses entirely on the individual and his moral and spiritual condition, the day is observed collectively in company with the largest crowd ever to fill the synagogue.

Theoretically, every person is improvable, but the reality is that the individual rarely undergoes a significant character change in isolation. We need the example, the pull and push and contagion of the group. ~~Every parent knows that~~ Moral persuasion on a person-to-person basis cannot measure up to the impact of a peer-group, ~~upon the child~~. Our standards need to be upheld by a reinforcing environment.

This highlights the importance of bonding every Jew with his people, and specifically with the congregation, which, outside of Israel, is the framework of our corporate existence as a people. Judaism's ethical and spiritual values have a much better chance of infiltrating the conscience and character of the individual Jew as long as he belongs actively to the congregation.

As long as the branch is attached to the tree, the vital sap of the tree will reach it.

May this coming Yom Kippur join us together and re-attach us firmly to that great tradition of which we say:

הן הן נחמיהם ויהי חיינו

IT IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THEM THAT HOLD FAST TO IT.

Amen

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In 48 hours from now, the mood of Yom Kippur will be epitomized by the Kol Nidre chant.

Personal relations? Making friends? Winning the respect of people? Being loved and having someone to love?

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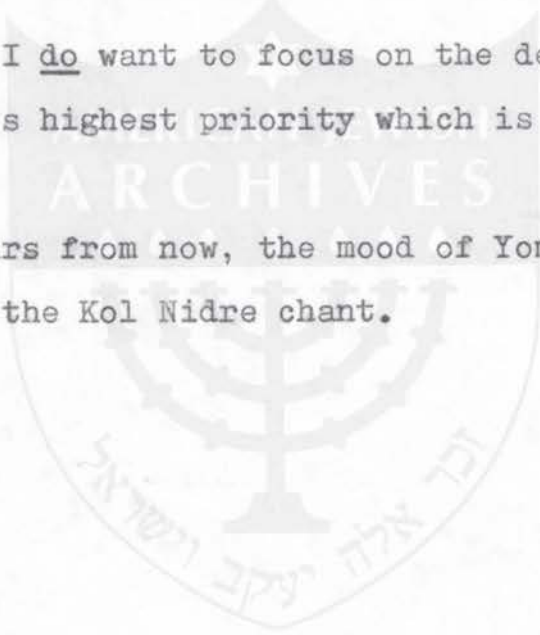
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(X) pp 2-5 were part of a sermon preached at WNC - My "opening" sermon, Sept 5, 1969

Remorse or Repentance?

Musical tastes differ very much, but there are exceptional compositions with a universal appeal. One of those is the Kol Nidre. It touches the Jewish heart as no other melody does, and not only the heart of the Jew. Many Christians have been deeply moved by it.

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is merely uncomfortable"

Even sharper than the sharp-tongued Irish genius was a Chassidic master's comment on regret:

"Dwelling on feelings of regret is like sweeping dirt this way and that ---the broom does not become any cleaner thereby. The important thing is not to wallow in dirt but to get clean."

Repentance, my friends, is the cleansing process.

It begins where regret ends, and aims at the ethical transformation of the man. It is among the great life-time achievements, certainly much more than a state of feeling.

The Hebrew term for repentance TESHUVAH brings out much better than the English how much more it is than regret. Teshuvah means literally "coming back," "returning." It means a break with your ownself, a drastic change of character.

I wouldn't be surprised if, at this point, many of you raised an objection: Can one really change the basic pattern of one's character overnight? Can an hour such as this, or a day such as Yom Kippur, un-do what a life-time has done in shaping one's personality?

Believe it or not, this is the claim, the urgent contention, the promise of our religion. Yom Kippur's Torah portion includes the challenge:

SEE, I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY, LIFE AND GOOD, AND DEATH & EVIL
This very day, you should decide between two ways of living....

The Talmud confirms this point with the rabbinic statement that a person can acquire eternal life in a single hour, meaning that the course of one's whole life may be changed through an hour of Teshuvah. BUT THERE IS A BIG IF. Teshuvah is not as simple as regret. Only if you can do 2 things, will you experience genuine Teshuvah:

First, the disintegration of the old self.

It begins with an intensification of remorse to the point when one appears disgusting in one's own eyes and one rejects a part of oneself.

This mood is called CONTRITION; it means being crushed and shattered inside and the classic Biblical example is the 51st psalm in which a guilt-stricken David throws himself at the mercy of God:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit
A broken and a contrite heart O God
Thou wilt not despise."

What is a broken spirit? It is a fracture, a split within. The rabbis describe this split or inner conflict through the image of the Yetzer Ha-tov --the good urge wrestling with the Yetzer ha-ra, the evil urge. And the first sign of victory of the Yetzer Ha-tov, the good urge, is the verbal confession.

The moment we drag our corruption out into the open and, in so many words, Confess the evils we want to get rid of, at that moment we begin to purge ourselves. When I confess my wrongs, I reject them and expell them from my system, so to speak. It marks the disintegration of the old self.

But, this is only the first step. Words are cheap. The second step is paying the price; I mean an act of undoing the wrong we have done, including restitution and compensation for the harm we have inflicted.

If you have hurt someone with malicious words, with words of abuse or insult; if your words have damaged another person's dignity or reputation; or worse, if any act of yours has caused social, professional or monetary injury to anyone, you owe that person restitution. A verbal apology or expression of regret is like pulling nails out of a wall which you had no right to deface. Withdrawing the injury is not enough. It must be followed by repair work. Undoing the injury proves that your repentance is genuine.

There is a third step in the Jewish ethics of repentance and that is the culminating point in that great penitential Psalm 51 to which I referred earlier:

"Create me a clean heart, O God

and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

*THE GIFT OF
A NEW SPIRIT!*

"Now, wait a minute," --- you might object --- "Is God the one to produce a moral turn-around, a new attitude, a new spirit, or, is it the culprit's ^{own} responsibility to achieve a drastic change of mind?" The answer is that both God and the sinner cooperate in one's moral rehabilitation. When we truly want a change within, we are not alone. God helps us. That is the point of all our prayers, to connect with the divine spirit to *lift* us up to a higher *Self*.

The ultimate hypocrisy is a Yom Kippur observance of superficialities, of trivial pursuits, turning the day into a mainly social experience, people watching, looking around who's there, or an endurance contest in fasting. As Isaiah in the Yom Kippur Haftara castigated a Yom Kippur crowd for making a show of their external ritual observance without the slightest moral or spiritual change within, so we, today, must tackle the really hard job of cleansing the corrupt self within on this holiest day of Yom Kippur.

The story is told about the Besht, founder of Hasidism, that one day, close to Yom Kippur, leaders of his village urged him to keep a certain villain out of the synagogue on Yom Kippur: "That man is a scoundrel, a traitor, and a sinner, a danger to the whole community" "No, no," said the Besht; "Impossible, every person has some spark of goodness." "But rabbi, even your great heart must recognize that a rotten branch must be cut off" "On the contrary," replied the Besht, "as long as that branch remains attached to the tree, there is yet hope for it to be cured."

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Theoretically, every person is improvable, but the reality is that the individual rarely undergoes a significant character change in isolation. We need the example, the pull and push and contagion of the group. Every parent knows that moral persuasion on a person-to-person basis cannot measure up to the impact of a peer-group upon the child. Our standards need to be upheld by a reinforcing environment.

This highlights the importance of bonding every Jew with his people, and specifically with the congregation which, outside of Israel, is the framework of our corporate existence as a people. Judaism's ethical and spiritual values have a much better chance of infiltrating the conscience and character of the individual Jew as long as he belongs actively to the congregation.

As long as the branch is attached to the tree, the vital sap of the tree will reach it.

May this coming Yom Kippur join us together and re-attach us firmly to that great tradition of which we say:

הן הן איל חיים ואלהם תחזיקם

IT IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THEM THAT HOLD FAST TO IT.

Amen

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SPIRITUALITY by Joshua O. Haberman

Yom Kippur Morn.
Sept. 23, '96

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The human condition is precarious. From birth on, life is a struggle for survival. There are no gains without pains; no achievements without frustrations and no escape from the decline of age, its feebleness and dependence and death.

The Talmud tells of a $2\frac{1}{2}$ years' debate between the 2 antagonistic schools of Hillel and Shammai, on whether man ~~was~~^{would have been} better off ~~to~~^{not have} been born into this world ~~or not to be born~~. The conclusion, which constitutes the only agreement ever recorded between these 2 schools, was: Man would ~~have been~~^{have been} better off not to have been ~~born~~^{created} but having been put into this life, let him learn from the experience and ~~wisdom~~^{apply} ~~of his ancestors for the guidance of his life.~~ ^{it to his future doings} (Eruv. 13b)

There is a yiddish story about 2 fellows discussing the judgement of Hillel and Shammai. They thought about it and then one said with a sigh: "So, it would be better not to have been born ---- but who has such mazal? -- May be one in a million!

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One of his last and best books was written only 8 years before his death. It was a time of mounting political tension in my native city of Vienna. Fascism was on the rise; Adolf Hitler was about to seize power in Germany and Austria was in the depth of depression. His book, published in 1931 was entitled Civilization and Its Discontent. It sparkles with keen observations about life.

He develops chiefly 2 themes: The first is the high price we must pay for the benefits of civilization. Life in an organized society requires the suppression of our instincts. Civilization is synonymous with restriction of the individual's urges and desires for the sake of his more or less secure co-existence with others. Civilization means living under the control of higher social authority, whatever form of government. (p.42,44)

Fantasies about the life of the free and noble savage are rubbish because savage man was neither free nor noble but was forever fighting for his life against everyone else. So, civilization merely replaced one set of dissatisfactions by another.

Freud's second theme is a paradox: The quest for pleasure and happiness is our foremost aim, yet we are doomed to suffer, --- and largely for 3 reasons:

1. Nature with its laws which sustains us, also threatens our existence. (p 23/4)

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Freud then considers the various paths which lead to pleasure and happiness: work, the arts and above all, love. But each of these is also a source of pain and frustration. As for love, ^{which in his words, is} "our most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure" --- he adds: "We are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love." (p.29)

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The problem with the human being, as portrayed by Freud, is man's colossal self-centeredness, something the philosopher David Hume confirmed by his remark that the ordinary person is more concerned about the pain in his little finger than about the welfare of humanity.

Man is entrapped by his humanity. We cater to our ego and then must suffer for its chronic dissatisfaction.

There is a way of escaping our entrapment in our ego needs, --- and that way is personified by one of the most remarkable individuals in our history.

If ever there was a man entitled to despondency it was Ezekiel, a priest in Jerusalem who in his youth saw his city ravaged by war and together with thousands of its leading citizens, was deported hundreds of miles away to Babylonia, the nation that had destroyed his people. There he was, reduced to the status of a nobody. According to all the evidence, the people of Israel was dead and so was its religion. Yet, something happened that turned Ezekiel around and made him our foremost prophet of hope, the father of a new

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“The spirit entered into me,” he said, “and set me upon my feet.” (Ez. 2.2)

It was a profoundly personal, inner experience. He no longer felt abandoned. He felt connected and empowered by a spirit that issued forth from the omnipotent God.

He had escaped the tiny prison of his ego and saw himself as part of the cosmos, connected to the creator of all. Maimonides teaches us that nothing really matters except God and whatever meaning or significance there is to our life, which is but a momentary flicker in the night, is our connection with God. *In transcending ourselves, in reaching out to God we regain a sense of significance.* Ezekiel saw that power beyond himself and was transformed: "The spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet."

In chapter 37, he describes a vision, a valley filled with dead bones,

There, he feels the spirit of God descending and then he sees those bones suddenly covered with sinews, flesh and skin and rise to new life. Ezekiel's point is not the idea of resurrection from the grave and the promise of immortality. That is a misunderstanding of his vision. What he was talking about is the revival of his people by the power of the spirit, symbolically expressed in the image of bones rising to new life: *לֵב שׁוֹמֵר*

לֵב שׁוֹמֵר "Our hope is not yet lost" he shouts in a burst of new confidence, and these very words became the inspiration, 2,500 years later, for the composition of the Jewish national anthem, the Hatikva.

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To the exiles in Babylonia, it meant that their life-line with God was not broken, despite the destruction of the Temple. It meant that every person has direct access to God's spirit even without priests or mediating rituals. There is no wall, there is no distance between God and man. This truth may lift a person out of despair and out of that terrible sense of abandonment which one experiences in illness, in bereavement, in the reversal of fortune or in the painful breakdown of a relationship. We can overcome it all if only we open ourselves to the infusion of a new spirit.

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Hasselbach's infatuation with the Nazi ideology happened in the course of a prison sentence during which he fell under the influence of older Nazi jail mates. After several years of organizing skinhead groups all over Germany and training them for violence against foreigners and Jews, one night he saw a television report about the firebombing of a tenement house by some of those Nazi skinheads, in which a number of Turkish immigrants were killed. The sight of the charred bodies of children shook him up. Hasselbach felt a revulsion and change of heart. A new spirit entered into him and turned him *around.*

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WHY FORGIVE? ^{Yom Kippur Seminar 1997} WHC A

Promise-keepers — We Promise Breakers

We're all on a "guilt trip"

Conscious of wrong-doing, of others

~~and our own~~
~~YET WE COUNT ON FORGIVENESS~~

~~on divine amnesty, on God's pardon~~

~~3 ways to react to evil in others in ourselves:~~

~~① Indifference~~

~~② Striking back in revenge, retaliation~~

~~③ Forgiveness:~~



WHY FORGIVE?

Last night we read

לְעֵת לַיְלָה נִשְׁמָע בְּכֹחַ הַיְיָ
כִּי יִשְׁמָע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְיִשְׁמָע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Our father, our king, inscribe us in the book of forgiveness —

We ask God to forgive — but why should He? If one really believes that there is a God who judges us and deals with us accord to merit or demerit, — why should He spare us the punishment we deserve?

2 answers: ① God's love for His creatures overrules His justice
[See Ex. 34. 6-7]

② Heinrich Heine who had piled up an impressive record of transgressions & sins, as an epistle and notorious womanizer, said, God will forgive because that's His business!

~~D~~
Why God may have an obligation to forgive
may be suggested in the first crime story
of humanity, Cain's slaying of his brother, Abel

Gen 4. 3-15

God gives Cain amnesty & protects him against
any further persecution. Why?

Midrash: Cain complained: Why are you
punishing me? After all, you made me
the way I am; you gave me the evil
urge. If I was a killer, it's because you
created me as such.

[Cain exhibited to client of a Jewish defense lawyer
— and the defence moved God to grant
forgiveness — acknowledged their ^{propensity to violence &} some
responsibility for Cain's ^{action} resulting
in murder.

So, maybe H. Heine had a point It's God
business — a duty to forgive — but

~~Q22~~ -

Why should we human beings practice forgiveness?

As a matter of fact - striking back, hurting those who hurt us, punishing an offender, is the most natural thing to do.

If we are urged to forgive, are we not asked to act against our normal, natural instinct?

My remarks fall into 2 parts: Why forgive and How to forgive.

I. Why forgive?

4 Reasons

① People change

G. B. Shaw "The only man who behaves sensibly is my tailor. He takes my measure anew every time he sees me whilst all the rest go on with their old measurements, and expect them to fit me."

The Case of the French Foreign Legionnaire Ernst Tessier

It happened in North Africa in 1942. The press reported the heroism of a certain adjutant Ernst Tessier of the French Foreign Legion and reporters went there to investigate. They found Ernest Tessier to be a tight-lipped man of about 39 who didn't mix with his fellow Legionnaires and their type of recreation. One day, he ordered 4 newly enrolled Jews to report to his quarters. They were first

terrified, but when face to face with him, they were charmed by his warm friendliness. He said to them; softly: "I love all Jews, I think they are the most civilized people I have met."

As friendship grew between them so did their curiosity about the background of Tessier. One night, again at his tent, they were interrupted by a new recruit:

Legionnaire Rathenau saluted the stranger.

At this Tessier leaped from his chair. Rathenau did you say? Are you related to the late German minister by that name?

"His nephew, sir!" replied the new-comer.

(Let me interrupt by recalling with you that Walter Rathenau was one of the most brilliant Jewish statesmen of Europe. He was

the first of his people to be murdered by the Nazis in 1921. Over a million Germans lined the streets of Berlin at his funeral. The police only caught one of the 3 assassins -- 2 committed suicide. The one they caught got 15 years in prison.)

- 5 -

Now, when the new-comer in Ernst Tessier's tent said:

"His nephew sir," ---Tessier grew pale and then said:

"Rathenau, I am the man who murdered your uncle. My real name is Ernst Werner Teshow"

With these words he drew from his pocket a faded scrap of paper, carefully unfolded it --- a letter in German written to Teshow's mother by the mother of the murdered Rathenau:

In grief unspeakable, I give you my hand, you of all women, the most to be pitied. Say to your son that in the name and spirit of him he has murdered, I forgive, even as God may forgive, if before an earthly judge he make a full confession of his guilt and before a heavenly one repent. Had he known my son, one of the noblest men earth bore, he had rather have turned the weapon on himself. May these words give peace to your soul.

Signed : Mathilda Rathenau.

Tessier weeping like a child now revealed the rest of his story.

How he was released after only 5 years in prison, enlisted in the French Foreign Legion

In prison ^{how} he read the writings of Walter Rathenau... studied Jewish history & learned Hebrew in order to read our holy books... ^{Said Tessier} I discovered what barbarians the Nazis really were and so I have devoted all my energies in the last 15 years to suppress the evil in my soul, just as Mother Rathenau conquered herself when she wrote this letter to my mother. In all these years I have done all I could to help the Jewish people ^{the correspondents} and verified that in 1941, disguised as a dock-worker in Marseille, Ernest Tessier had smuggled 700 Jews out of occupied France into freedom.

A PERSON WHO HAS CHANGED IS ENTITLED TO A NEW JUDGEMENT

② LOVE CONQUERS ALL

Lev. 19.18 Do not hate, nor bear a grudge
but love

HOSEA ch 1, 2-9
(p 784)

Ch. 3. Hosea's continuing love for Gomer, taking her back despite her adulterous past — So God will take back his people

His marriage to a harlot, a parable of God's Covenant with an unfaithful people Israel. The names of 3 children: son Jezreel, Daughter Lo Rukamah, son Lo Ammi. *suggest rejection of God's spouse*
~~draw~~ out Gomer
even as Hosea presumably

Ch. 2. Application of Hosea's experience to Israel's restoration as God's people.
L2 Rochefoucauld: "One pardons in the degree that one loves"

But, what if you cannot possibly find love in your heart for your offender?

③ George Herbert: "He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass"

A candid inventory of our own life would show that nearly all the wrong-doings for which we fault others have been committed by us too, one time or the other

④ Non-forgiveness is self-destructive: The bearing of a grudge, Resentment is an acid that dissolves the powers of the soul

Leonard Barmant on Nixon:

His greatest strength? Intelligence

His greatest weakness? An uncontrollable anger
an all consuming resentment of reality perceived, actualities which unbalanced his judgement

Friedrich Nietzsche ^{mocked} severely attacked X^{ian} morality. He ^{mocked} its virtues, such as humility, non-resistance, compassion & the glorification of suffering as the characteristics of a slave-morality designed to suppress the natural instincts of the strong.

Only one ^{Judeo} X^{ian} virtue he would not repudiate, i.e. the curbing of one's grudge or resentment. Resentment makes you sick - and so he'd combat it not on

Morale

9

grounds but for hygienic reasons!

II How To Forgive - 3 suggestions

① Find some of the good there is in the other

H. Buber: "One can only hate part of a being" (1a Th p. 68)

If you look hard enough you will discover even in the one you resent most deeply, qualities that are not bad — ^{perhaps} even good.

Attitudinal sage: God gave us 2 eyes, with one to see our own faults and with the other to see our neighbor's virtues

②

Cool it!

You may have been given the advice not to mail an angry letter immediately.

One of our rabbis made it a rule never to express his anger the same day he was offended. It's amazing what a difference 2 days will make!

Another rabbi whose fierce temperament could not be silenced a whole day would, when enraged & ready to burst out in anger, run upstairs and change his clothes, in hopes of coming back as a changed person.

The gate of forgiveness & reconciliation opens up
& cracks if you can refrain from giving

Tit for Tat. Prov. 15.1 is such a library
of human relations wisdom

"A soft answer turns away wrath"

The kind of self control needed to give the soft answer
moved a Talmudic sage to exclaim in admiration:

Who is a hero? He who can ^{control himself} ~~hold his tongue~~
And who is the hero of heroes? He who can turn an
enemy into a friend.

③ Benj. Franklin offered another reason for forgiveness.

Be grateful to your enemy because he
lets you know your faults —

and knowing your own flaws will make you more tolerant of
the defects of others.

your faults you should correct
— and for that be grateful
to him and forgive the offense.



Add

Elie Wiesel's

Op ed piece in N.Y Times

It's time for reconciliation
with God

Why God forgives?

① Because He loves us

② Because as our Maker
God bears some responsibility
if we turn out evil — and
forgives us when we act as we were
made to act

If it is true, as we learned in Hosea's case that love begets forgiveness it is also forgiveness that begets love

Many a couple, suffering the rupture of their relationship found healing & the renewal of love ~~in~~ in mutual forgiveness. The Best's "Love him more"
The answer to a troubled relat. may be more Love

To Sum up in conclusion:

WAY FORGIVE ?

- ① Because people change
- ② ^{Because} Love enables us to forgive
- ③ Because we ourselves may need to be forgiven for our wrong doings
- ④ Because an unforgiving pride is

We offered 3 suggestions ^{Self-destructive}

HOW TO FORGIVE

- ① Find some good in the other
- ② Cool it - don't respond in the heat of anger
- ③ If the offender has attacked, blamed or criticized you - he might be calling attention to some of

From dust... To p 4

A poor Jew was helping
his wife clean the house
before the holiday -
"Be sure to dust under the
beds" - she said.

He did as told and swept
out a pile of dust and
smiled.

"What are you so happy about?"
asked the wife.

As I was dusting,
I remembered the verse:

"From dust you come, to dust
you shall return" - and

forget if in between you can
enjoy ^{from time to time} 1-2 glasses of Schnapps -
you've got a good deal!

Distap between a lifetime purpose
& the purpose of your life now

Distinguish betw objective meaning
& meaning of the personally
something I deeply want & seek

HILTON

GUEST
STATIONERY

After R.H. Services, someone told me how nice it is to see old friends again but also a bit of a shock to see his friends get old

Reminded me of the fellow who went to the 25th reunion of his grad. class.

"New was it," asked his wife.

"The amusing thing about a reunion like that is that your classmates have gotten so stout and bald they hardly recognize you."

To spare yourself this shock, come regularly and watch your friends age gradually.

TRYING TO MAKE SEAS OUT OF LIFE

Woolf: Life is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound
& fury / Signifying nothing.
Refer to "Invictus" by Henley

Alfred Lord Tennyson: But what am I?

from In Memoriam

part LIV, stanza 5
An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language but a cry!

From Meaning a Value of Life in Encyclo of Phil. part 4

pp. 467ff.

p. 467 § 4 Schopenhauer - "Everyone would have declined
gift of life if he could have foreseen its course"

p. 468 § 2 The few cases of happiness are like decoy birds
which lure us into a sense of false security

p. 468 § 5 ^{Clare} Darrow - "Life" an awful joke

TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF LIFE:
The Meaning of Human Existence --
A Jewish Perspective

By Joshua O. Haberman for the Yom Kippur Morning Seminar at WHC
Monday, October 20, 1999

The historian Arthur Schlesinger called America “a nation of joiners.”

We have a passion for association, for organization, for community action --- a national characteristic already noted 1 and ½ centuries earlier by Alexis de Tocqueville. Moreover, we can't sit still. We must keep busy. We are constantly in motion. You might call us a nation of “activists”. We abhor being alone. The notion of **time out** for reflection is unappealing to most of us, except for strict Sunday observing Christians and Shabbat observing Jews. Among us Jews, the one great exception to the rule is Yom Kippur, when, all of us, even secularized Jews, take an unusually large amount of time out for our annual spiritual check-up, the *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, or self-assessment in which we review our way of life and take a deep look inside. You are in a crowd but there is time to think and you are alone with your thoughts

The focus of Yom Kippur is entirely on what you are doing with your life, how you are measuring up to what is expected of you as a Jew in relationship to God and your fellow man. But our self-assessment goes further. Many of our prayers strip us of all our status symbols, achievements and accumulations, down to our naked creatureliness – our human frailty and mortality.

Franz Werfel in one of his essays describes the funeral of the Austrian Emperor

Franz Joseph. The solemn procession halted before the monastery of the Capucian monks, where traditionally members of the Hapsburg dynasty have been buried. The royal master of ceremonies stepped forward and loudly pounded on the gate with his ornate staff. From within a monk called out: "Who is it that wants to be admitted?" The master of ceremonies answered: "This is His Royal, Imperial and Apostolic Majesty, Franz Joseph the First, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, King of the Lombards and Venetians, King of Bohemia, King of Galicia, King of Croatia and Slovenia and he listed the many more imperial territories. The voice of the unseen monk answered briefly: "I know him not." Again the master of ceremonies announced a more condensed and modest version of the Emperor's title, but again came the curt answer from within: "I know him not." Finally, the master of ceremonies said: "A poor, sinful man seeks admittance." Now the monk replied: "I know him," --- and the gate was flung open. (Hayim Greenberg, The Inner Eye, vol.2, p.143-4)

This comes close to the spirit in which Jews face themselves and their Maker on Yom Kippur. The old custom, still practiced in some traditional synagogues, is for the worshipper to be garbed in the *kittel*, the white burial shroud, stripped of pride and possession, while the prayerbook speaks of the miserable human condition in graphic terms: "Man's origin is dust, and dust is his end. Each of us is a shattered urn, grass that must wither, a flower that will fade, a shadow moving on, a cloud passing by, a particle of dust floating in the wind, a dream soon forgotten."

(*Gates of Repentance*, p.109-110)

The most solemn High Holy Day prayer, next to the *Kol Nidre*, is the Unetane tokef, "Let us mightily proclaim" the majesty of God and the frailty of man.

Every moment we stand at the brink of death. While the Book of Life is opened up before God, we do not know if we shall be around next year, “who shall live and who shall die, who shall perish by fire and who by water; who by earthquake and who by plague; who shall be poor and who shall be rich; who shall be humbled and who exalted.” (by Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, GOR, p.107-9)

Such a somber summation of the human condition prompts the question raised in our prayerbook (p. 181) “What am I here for? What is the meaning of my being?”

Or, **Is life worth living ?**

Yom Kippur is not the only time this question occurs to us. Whether human life means anything at all is a question that pops into our mind quite often as a passing thought, but on Yom Kippur it clings to us as a challenge that cannot be ignored.

Why go through an existence which is bound to end with cruel decline, enfeeblement, a humiliating loss of power and control of self? **Does our life have some higher meaning for whose sake we should endure it all ?**

In Judaism the jury is still out on whether or not life is worth living.

We find side by side an optimistic and a pessimistic position.

The optimistic view proceeds from man’s high station among the creatures of this earth:

“And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it.” (Gen. 1. 27-28)

The meaning of life, then, according to the creation story in the Bible, is for man to act as custodian of the earth and all its creatures.

The 8th Psalm is amazed but also jubilant that this tiny creature “man” should have such a big role:

“When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars that You set in place,
what is man that You have been mindful of him,
mortal man that You have taken note of him,
that You have made him little less than divine
and adorned him with glory and majesty,

You have made him master over Your handiwork,
laying the world at his feet....”

But elsewhere the Bible demolishes the idea of man’s superiority.

Only a couple of pages after calling man made “in the image of God”, the Bible shatters our illusions of grandeur with the blunt Words, “dust you are and to dust you shall return.” (Gen.3.19)

The Biblical book of Kohelet is more explicit in downgrading man very much like Thomas Hobbes’ assessment of human life as “**solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.**”

Kohelet.3.18-20: “I decided as regards men....that they are beasts....they have one and the same fate: as the one dies, so dies the other, and both have the same

lifebreath; **man has no superiority over beast**, since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both come from dust and both return to dust.”

He would agree with Macbeth’s definition of life as “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying **nothing**” (V,v.17) – only Kohelet put it more briefly:

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (1.2)

KOHELET 7.15: The reality of life as he experienced it did not square with the expectation of goodness rewarded and evil punished:

“In my own brief span of life , I have seen....sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness and sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of his wickedness....”

KOHELET 12 : Most devastating is his description of man’s deterioration in old age, when limb after limb and organ after organ ceases to function “ and the dust returns to the ground as it was and the lifebreath returns to God Who bestowed it.” It makes one think of Woody Allen’s grim judgement of life as “a sexually transmitted disease.”

KOHELET. 4.2-3 : As for meaning in life, Kohelet, cannot see it. Consequently he judges those who died “more fortunate than those who are still living; and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun.”

So what are we to do while alive? Don’t brood over man’s fate. It is what it is. Instead, make the most of the joys you can reap in life: “eat ,drink and enjoy” (5.17 and 8.15) Try to look your best in your apparel and appearance and “enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life....for that alone is what you

can get out of life.” (9.8-9) . He adds an appeal for making the most of life, ---one of my favorite Bible sentences: “Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. For there is no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in *Sheol* (that is the hereafter) where you are going.” (9.10)

But isn't Kohelet in contradiction with himself? On the one hand, he despises life as an absurdity and futility without meaning; on the other hand, he is telling us to enjoy life as much as possible. The answer seems to be: There is nothing you can do to change the terms of life, so take whatever pleasure you can get out of it before the bitter end.

About 500 years after Kohelet , Hillel and Shammai, the two foremost sages of that generation and their disciples debated the question whether it would have been better if man had or had not been created. After 2 and ½ years of debate, they finally agreed that it would have been better had he not been created, but since he has been created, let him investigate his past doings, and let him examine what he is supposed to do.

So, you might think that the pessimists have won the upper hand. Not quite. There is a third position with reference to the meaning of life.

I once officiated at a wedding at which Tommy Corcoran, President Roosevelt's one-time advisor, offered this toast: “To the bride: try to understand your husband and love him.---- and to the groom, always love your wife but don't try to understand her.” Maybe that's the way to view life, live it, make the most of it, take it the way it is, but don't try to understand its meaning.

Some things are unexplainable. When Beethoven had played a new sonata for a friend, the friend asked him: "What does it mean?" Beethoven returned to the piano, played the whole sonata again and said, "That is what it means."

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS. We are not mentally equipped to look to a point beyond life from which to assess its meaning. We must recognize the limits of human knowledge as Santayana humbly confessed:

Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
 That lights the pathway but one step ahead
 Across a void of mystery and dread {from The Light of Faith}

However the fact that we cannot see something, does not mean it isn't there. There may be meaning to human life as part of a larger context which is beyond our comprehension. A single painted tile by itself is virtually meaningless, but if seen as part of a mosaic, it has meaning. We human beings are denied the vision of the larger mosaic of life which may extend to cosmic dimensions beyond our comprehension.

In that moving but also comforting book, Tuesdays with Morrie, by Mitch Albom, Morrie tells us what enables him to face his approaching death without fearing total annihilation: It's the analogy of the ocean wave. 2 waves were riding out a storm and as they came rolling toward the shore at which all waves came crashing in, one wave said to the other, "this will be the end of us." "Not at all, replied the other wave, "even if we crash, we still remain part of the ocean." Death is not the end. In some mysterious way, we remain part of the totality of life.

One thing is clear: None of us came into this world by his own choice.

Life did not create itself. Its origin points to a higher will beyond life. A classic statement in the *Sayings of the Fathers* has us face the reality of the human condition:

R. Eliezer ha-Kappar said:

“Without your consent were you created, and born into the world without your choice, you are now living without your volition, and will have to die without your approval; so likewise without your consent will you have to render account before the supreme King, the holy One, blessed be He.” (*Pirke Avot*, chapter 4.29)

During the Crimean War a British Cavalry commander ordered his brigade of some 600 men into a frontal attack against powerful Russian artillery which completely destroyed the brigade. Tennyson immortalized the tragedy in his poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which includes the lines, relevant to the human condition at all times:

Forward, the Light Brigade.....

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

Theirs but to do and die. (*The Charge of the Light Brigade*, 1854)

Human existence is existence under higher orders. Why and what for, we do not know.

We have no choice but rely on faith that our life is not pointless, not without meaning and purpose.

The prophet Isaiah could not specify the purpose of creation but was certain that it was not a waste: “The Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it, **He did not create it a waste**” (Isaiah 45.18)

Perhaps the last word should be spoken by a poet. Alfred Tennyson, inspired by feeling rather than the flickering candle of philosophic reasoning, rose above his doubts, - --and they were many --to affirm his faith:

Behold, we know not anything:
 I can but trust that good shall fall
 At last – far off – at last, to all,
 And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream, but what am I ?
 An infant crying in the night;
 An infant crying for the light
 And with no language but a cry.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
 And gather dust and chaff, and call
 To what I feel is Lord of all,

And faintly trust the larger hope. (from *In Memoriam*, liv. lv.)

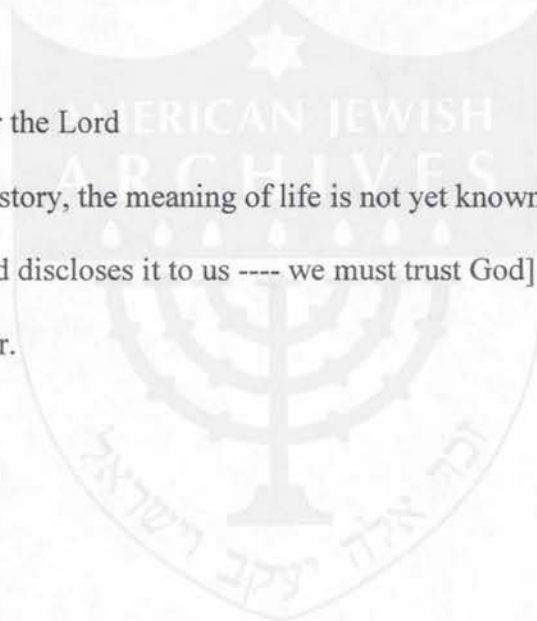
I suspect that Tennyson was inspired by that magnificent Psalm 131 , the shortest in the book, which sums up the posture most representative of the Jewish spirit – humble recognition of the mysteries beyond our understanding, submission and trust in God:

O Lord, my heart is not proud
Nor my look haughty;
I do not aspire to great things
Or to what is beyond me,
But I have taught myself to be contented
Like a weaned child with its mother;
Like a weaned child am I in my mind,

O Israel, wait for the Lord

[the full story, the meaning of life is not yet known to us, we must wait
until God discloses it to us ---- we must trust God]

Now and forever.



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“who shall live and who shall die,
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 who by earthquake and who by plague;
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 who shall be humbled and who exalted.” (by Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, GOR, p.107-9)

וְיִחְיֶה וְיָמוּת
 וְיִשָּׂרֵף וְיִשָּׂחַף
 וְיִשָּׁדַד וְיִשָּׁחַד
 וְיִשָּׁפַח וְיִשָּׁחַף

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וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֱדָמָה בְּצַלְמֵהוּ יִבְרָא אֹתָם זָכָר וּמְרִיאָה יִבְרָא אֹתָם וְבֵרַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֹתָם וַאֲמַר אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם הִנְנִי שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹכְךָ וְאֵת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶתְּנֶה לְךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶתְּנֵה אֱלֹהִים לְעַבְדֵי אֱדָמָה

“And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them,

“be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it.” (Gen. 1. 27-28)

The meaning of life, then, according to the creation story in the Bible, is for man to act as custodian of the earth and all its creatures.

The 8th Psalm is amazed but also jubilant that this tiny creature “man” should have such a big role:

“When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that You set in place,
 what is man that You have been mindful of him,
 mortal man that You have taken note of him,
 that You have made him little less than divine
 and adorned him with glory and majesty,
 You have made him master over Your handiwork,
 laying the world at his feet....”

But elsewhere the Bible demolishes the idea of man’s superiority.

Only a couple of pages after calling man made “in the image of God”, the Bible shatters our illusions of grandeur with the blunt Words, “dust you are and to dust you shall return.” (Gen.3.19)

אדם עפר ואפר ישוב
 וְעָפָר יִשָּׁבֵר וְעָפָר יִשָּׁבֵר

The Biblical book of Kohelet is more explicit in downgrading man very much like Thomas Hobbes’ assessment of human life as “**solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.**”

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So, you might think that the pessimists have won the upper hand. Not quite. There is a third position with reference to the meaning of life.

I once officiated at a wedding at which Tommy Corcoran, President Roosevelt's one-time advisor, offered this toast: “To the bride: try to understand your husband and love him.---- and to the groom, always love your wife but don't try to understand her.” Maybe that's the way to view life, live it, make the most of it, take it the way it is, but don't try to understand its meaning.

Some things are unexplainable. When Beethoven had played a new sonata for a friend, the friend asked him: “What does it mean?” Beethoven returned to the piano, played the whole sonata again and said, “That is what it means.”

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS. We are not mentally equipped to look to a point beyond life from which to assess its meaning. We must recognize the limits of human knowledge as Santayana humbly confessed:

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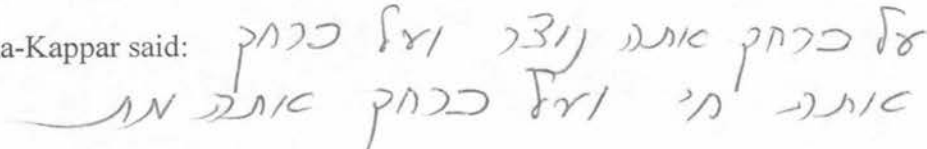
That lights the pathway but one step ahead

Across a void of mystery and dread {from The Light of Faith}

However the fact that we cannot see something, does not mean it isn't there. There may be meaning to human life as part of a larger context which is beyond our comprehension. A single painted tile by itself is virtually meaningless, but if seen as part of a mosaic, it has meaning. We human beings are denied the vision of the larger mosaic of life which may extend to cosmic dimensions beyond our comprehension.

In that moving but also comforting book, Tuesdays with Morrie, by Mitch Albom, Morrie tells us what enables him to face his approaching death without fearing total annihilation: It's the analogy of the ocean wave. 2 waves were riding out a storm and as they came rolling toward the shore at which all waves came crashing in, one wave said to the other, "this will be the end of us." "Not at all, replied the other wave, "even if we crash, we still remain part of the ocean." Death is not the end. In some mysterious way, we remain part of the totality of life.

One thing is clear: None of us came into this world by his own choice. Life did not create itself. Its origin points to a higher will beyond life. A classic statement in the *Sayings of the Fathers* has us face the reality of the human condition:

R. Eliezer ha-Kappar said: 

“Without your consent were you created, and born into the world without your choice, you are now living without your volition, and will have to die without your approval; so likewise without your consent will you have to render account before the supreme King , the holy One, blessed be He.” (*Pirke Avot*, chapter 4.29)

During the Crimean War a British Cavalry commander ordered his brigade of some 600 men into a frontal attack against powerful Russian artillery which completely destroyed the brigade. Tennyson immortalized the tragedy in his poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which includes the lines, relevant to the human condition at all times:

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Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

Theirs but to do and die. (*The Charge of the Light Brigade*, 1854)

Human existence is existence under higher orders. Why and what for, we do not know.

We have no choice but rely on faith that our life is not pointless, not without meaning and purpose.

The prophet Isaiah could not specify the purpose of creation but was certain that it was not a waste: “The Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it, **He did not create it a waste**” (Isaiah 45.18)

וְיִצְחָק יֵאָמֵר לַיהוָה אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא לַאֲדָמָה

Perhaps the last word should be spoken by a poet. Alfred Tennyson, inspired by feeling rather than the flickering candle of philosophic reasoning, rose above his doubts, -
--and they were many --to affirm his faith:

Behold, we know not anything:
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last – far off – at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream, but what am I?
An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,

And faintly trust the larger hope. (from *In Memoriam*, liv. lv.)

I suspect that Tennyson was inspired by that magnificent Psalm 131, the shortest in the book, which sums up the posture most representative of the Jewish spirit – humble recognition of the mysteries beyond our understanding, submission and trust in God:

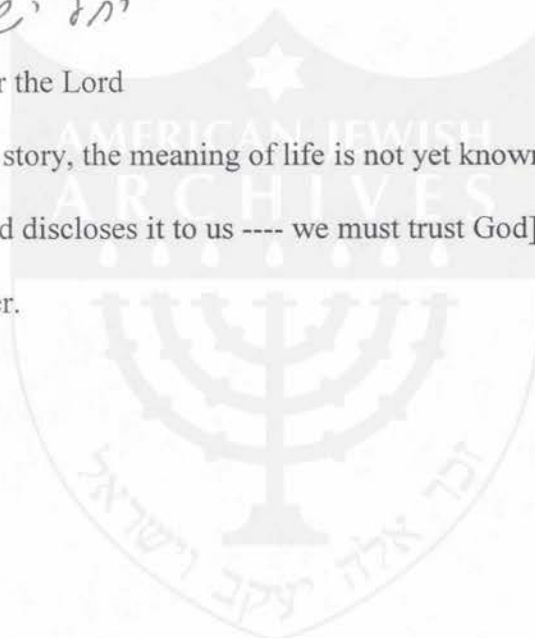
O Lord, my heart is not proud
 Nor my look haughty;
 I do not aspire to great things
 Or to what is beyond me,
 But I have taught myself to be contented
 Like a weaned child with its mother;
 Like a weaned child am I in my mind,

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכַּח לַיהוָה

O Israel, wait for the Lord

[the full story, the meaning of life is not yet known to us, we must wait
 until God discloses it to us ---- we must trust God]

Now and forever.



TRYING TO MAKE SENSE ~~OUT~~ OF LIFE:

The Meaning of Human Existence --

A Jewish Perspective

By ~~Joshua O. Haberman for the Yom Kippur Morning Seminar at WHC~~

~~Monday, October 20, 1999~~

Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman

The historian Arthur Schlesinger called America "a nation of joiners."

We have a passion for association, for organization, for community action --- a national characteristic already noted 1 and ½ centuries earlier by Alexis de Tocqueville. Moreover, we can't sit still. We must keep busy. We are constantly in motion. You might call us a nation of "activists". We abhor being alone. The notion of **time out** for reflection is unappealing to most of us, except for strict Sunday observing Christians and Shabbat observing Jews. Among us Jews, the one great exception to the rule is Yom Kippur, when, all of us, even secularized Jews, take an unusually large amount of time out for our annual spiritual check-up, the *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, or self-assessment in which we review our way of life and take a deep look inside. You are in a crowd but there is time to think and you are alone with your thoughts.

The focus of Yom Kippur is entirely on what you are doing with your life, how you are measuring up to what is expected of you as a Jew in relationship to God and your fellow man. But our self-assessment goes further. Many of our prayers strip us of all our status symbols, achievements and accumulations, down to our naked creatureliness -- our human frailty and mortality.

Franz Werfel in one of his essays describes the funeral of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph. The solemn procession halted before the monastery of the Capucian monks, where traditionally members of the Hapsburg dynasty have been buried. The

royal master of ceremonies stepped forward and loudly pounded on the gate with his ornate staff. From within a monk called out: "Who is it that wants to be admitted?" The master of ceremonies answered: "This is His Royal, Imperial and Apostolic Majesty, Franz Joseph the First, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, King of the Lombards and Venetians, King of Bohemia, King of Galicia, King of Croatia and Slovenia and he listed the many more imperial territories. The voice of the unseen monk answered briefly: "I know him not." Again the master of ceremonies announced a more condensed and modest version of the Emperor's title, but again came the curt answer from within: "I know him not." Finally, the master of ceremonies said: "A poor, sinful man seeks admittance." Now the monk replied: "I know him," --- and the gate was flung open. (Hayim Greenberg, The Inner Eye, vol.2, p.143-4)

This comes close to the spirit in which Jews face themselves and their Maker on Yom Kippur. The old custom, still practiced in some traditional synagogues, is for the worshipper to be garbed in the *kittel*, the white burial shroud, stripped of pride and possession, while the prayerbook speaks of the miserable human condition in graphic terms: "Man's origin is dust, and dust is his end. Each of us is a shattered urn, grass that must wither, a flower that will fade, a shadow moving on, a cloud passing by, a particle of dust floating in the wind, a dream soon forgotten."

(*Gates of Repentance*, p.109-110)

The most solemn High Holy Day prayer, next to the *Kol Nidre*, is the Unetane tokef, "Let us mightily proclaim" the majesty of God and the frailty of man. Every moment we stand at the brink of death. While the Book of Life is opened up before God, we do not know if we shall be around next year,

who shall live and who shall die,
who shall perish by fire and who by water;
who by earthquake and who by plague;
who shall be poor and who shall be rich;
who shall be humbled and who exalted.” (by Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, GOR, p.107-9)

נְשִׂי יְהוָה וְנָחַת אֲנִי
נְשִׂי גְּאֻלָּה וְנָחַת בְּנֵי אֱמִים

Such a somber summation of the human condition prompts the question raised in our prayerbook (p. 181) “What am I here for? What is the meaning of my being ?”

Or, **Is life worth living ?**

Yom Kippur is not the only time this question occurs to us. Whether human life means anything at all is a question that pops into our mind quite often as a passing thought, but on Yom Kippur it clings to us as a challenge that cannot be ignored.

Why go through an existence which is bound to end with cruel decline, enfeeblement, a humiliating loss of power and control of self? **Does our life have some higher meaning for whose sake we should endure it all ?**

In Judaism the jury is still out on whether or not life is worth living. We find side by side an optimistic and a pessimistic position. The optimistic view proceeds from man’s high station among the creatures of this earth:

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JPS p. 869

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JPS p. 6

אדם עפרו ואותו ישוב עפר

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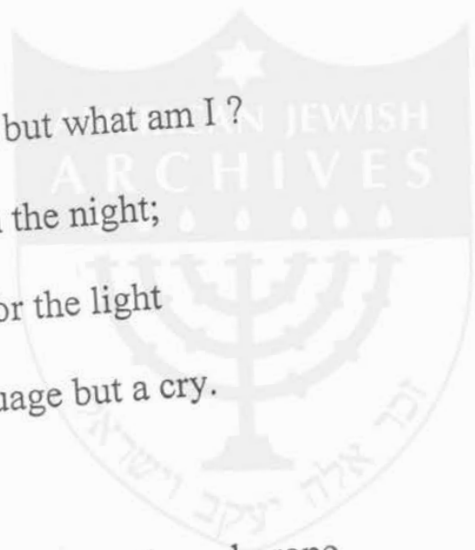
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Psalm 131, the shortest in ^{the} *(JPs p 973)*

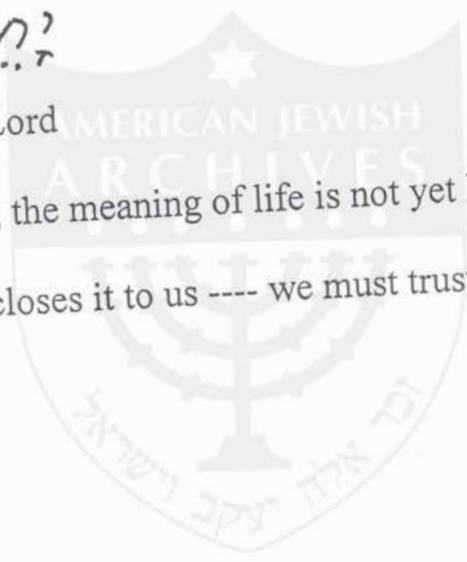
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 Like a weaned child with its mother;
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יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

O Israel, wait for the Lord

the full story, the meaning of life is not yet known to us, we must wait
 until God discloses it to us ---- we must trust God

Now and forever.



THE HURT AND HEALING OF REMEMBRANCE

By Joshua O. Haberman

At Yom Kippur Yizkor, September 20, 1999

Washington Hebrew Congregation

The lights are dimmed.....soft music....tender words...We indulge in the nostalgia of remembrance. We want our feelings soothed. We want to be comforted by gentle words. We close our eyes as memory evokes the silent parade of our departed and we remember not only names and faces but ~~our~~ love ~~and~~ relationships, how they treated us and how we treated them. We remember their favorite sayings and how their faces lit up and how we hugged and kissed one another at reunions, --- and shed tears at goodbyes --

How we miss them

and we relish the feeling or illusion of their presence within us.

how *momentary*

If this is part of the so-called "feel good" religion, --- so be it!

There is no wrong in our religion's gentle voice of comfort and consolation. But this is not the only voice we hear on this day of confession when we must face the truth, the whole truth, ~~and nothing but the truth~~ about our lives in order to be cleansed in repentance. We ... also hear the voice of the "feel right" religion. Our memories are not all sweetness and love. As the poet Richard Savage (1697 - 1743) suggested in his line,

"O memory, thou soul of joy and pain," some of our memories hurt.

We must deal with these painful memories even when they are not all loving. We must look into the darker recesses of our ~~memory~~ *minds* and deal with

those lingering feelings of rancor and resentment, of grudges and anger at those who in their lifetime would not accept and appreciate us, ^{who} unfairly ^{or neglected us or rejected us} disparaged us and denied to us, -- or so we thought -- a full measure of love.

And what about the pain we gave them? What about the ways in which we deceived, betrayed or exploited them? If some of our departed sinned against us --- so did we sin against some of those we now remember.

Why is this Yizkor service not part of Rosh ha-Shanah? Why is it included in our Yom Kippur observance? The answer is obvious: There is a link between remembrance and repentance. We need to reconcile not only the living but also the spirits of the dead, to forgive and ask for forgiveness. As long as you are alive, you can change all your relationships, even with the dead, by changing your attitude toward them. You can forgive and make peace with them.

Our saintly teacher, Eleazar ben ^{Ye} Judah of the 13th cent., said:

“The most beautiful thing a person can do is to forgive.”

If this seems too difficult, remember George Herbert’s (1593 – 1633) words:

“He who cannot forgive, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.” None of us is perfect. Nearly everyone can match the faults he sees in others. Each stands in need of forgiveness.

Finally, each needs to forgive himself for whatever blame may fall upon him for wrongdoings perpetrated on others, alive or dead. Contrary to the abusive stereotype of the Jewish mother giving guilt-trips to her children, Judaism, more than any other religion, aims at the eradication of guilt through repentance. But penitence must not be overdone. Said one of our Hasidic teachers: "Don't wallow in your guilt and penitence too long. The broom which sweeps the dirt back and forth does not get any cleaner in the process. Confess and repent and go on with your life." What matters is that we clean the slate for a fresh start in the new year.

So let this hour be an hour of forgiveness and healing. Let us remember with love those who loved us, and with forgiveness those who offended against us, and let us repent the wrongs we have committed against all, the living and the dead. *This is the day to purge our hearts of all bitterness and anger at others and at ourselves.*

Let remembrance become reconciliation and redemption and turn our hurt into healing even as we turn to God with the words of

David: Have mercy upon me, O God,....

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity

And cleanse me from my sin

For I know my transgression

And my sin is ever before me.

Create me a clean heart , O God,

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Oseh shalom bimeromav, hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu ve-al kol Yisrael

May the heavenly Maker of peace, make peace among us and

grant us peace in our hearts. Amen



THE HURT AND HEALING OF REMEMBRANCE

By Joshua O. Haberman

At Yom Kippur Yizkor, September 20, 1999

Washington Hebrew Congregation

The lights are dimmed.....soft music....tender words...We indulge in the nostalgia of remembrance. We want our feelings soothed. We want to be comforted by gentle words. We close our eyes as memory evokes the silent parade of our departed and we remember not only names and faces but ~~our~~ love ~~our~~ relationships, how they treated us and how we treated them. We remember their favorite sayings and how their faces lit up and how we hugged and kissed one another at reunions, --- and we relish the feeling or illusion of their presence within us.

If this is part of the so-called “feel good” religion, --- so be it! There is no wrong in our religion’s gentle voice of comfort and consolation. But this is not the only voice we hear on this day of confession when we must face the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about our lives in order to be cleansed in repentance. We ~~also~~ also hear the voice of the “feel right” religion. Our memories are not all sweetness and love. As the poet Richard Savage (1697 – 1743) suggested in his line, “O memory, thou soul of joy and pain,” some of our memories hurt. We must deal with these painful memories even when they are not all loving. We must look into the darker recesses of our memory and deal with

those lingering feelings of rancor and resentment, of grudges and anger at those who in their lifetime would not accept and appreciate us, unfairly disparaged us and denied to us, -- or so we thought -- a full measure of love.

And what about the pain we gave them? What about the ways in which we deceived, betrayed or exploited them? If some of our departed sinned against us --- so did we sin against some of those we now remember.

Why is this Yizkor service not part of Rosh ha-Shanah? Why is it included in our Yom Kippur observance? The answer is obvious: There is a link between remembrance and repentance. We need to reconcile not only the living but also the spirits of the dead, to forgive and ask for forgiveness. As long as you are alive, you can change all your relationships, even with the dead, by changing your attitude toward them. You can forgive and make peace with them.

Our saintly teacher, Eleazar ben Judah of the 13th cent., said:

“The most beautiful thing a person can do is to forgive.”

If this seems too difficult, remember George Herbert’s (1593 – 1633) words:

“He who cannot forgive, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.” None of us is perfect. Nearly everyone can match the faults he sees

in others. Each stands in need of forgiveness. The philosopher Hermann Cohen deepened our understanding of the Bible’s golden rule, *Love your neighbor as yourself* (*Leviticus 19.18*) by reading the Hebrew *Ve-ahavta l’re-acha* (love your neighbor) *cha-mocha* (he is like yourself) suggesting that all of us share the same human nature with comparable potentials for good but also for evil. Most of the faults of others are matched by our own faults. WE NEED TO FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN.

Finally, each needs to forgive himself for whatever blame may fall upon him for wrongdoings perpetrated on others, alive or dead. Contrary to the abusive stereotype of the Jewish mother giving guilt-trips to her children, Judaism, more than any other religion, aims at the eradication of guilt through repentance. But penitence must not be overdone. Said one of our Hasidic teachers: "Don't wallow in your guilt and penitence too long. The broom which sweeps the dirt back and forth does not get any cleaner in the process. Confess and repent and go on with your life." What matters is that we clean the slate for a fresh start in the new year.

So let this hour be an hour of forgiveness and healing. Let us remember with love those who loved us, and with forgiveness those who offended against us, and let us repent the wrongs we have committed against all, the living and the dead.

Let remembrance become reconciliation and redemption and turn our hurt into healing even as we turn to God with the words of

David: Have mercy upon me, O God,....

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity

And cleanse me from my sin

For I know my transgression

And my sin is ever before me.

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