



**Rabbi Kenneth Chasen**  
**Rosh Hashanah 5770 September 18, 2009**

**“Welcome Home”**

It is said that one should never ignore the elephant in the room. But what do we do when the *room* is the elephant in the room? *This* room?

On this night, we welcome the new year in a brand new temple home. We are home again, having rebuilt our entire temple – and having addressed the highest hopes and wishes that our congregation has held for this place we love.

The most important of those aspirations, as expressed by so many of you – better bathrooms. Nothing was requested more frequently. And if you haven’t yet visited them – they’re now to your right when you enter the building, not your left – they are bigger, better... and in an effort truly to break new ground, the hot water actually works.

The second most important aspiration our community had for its new home – the preservation of the 116 squares in the sanctuary. Statistically speaking, this was almost as important to you as the bathrooms. Whenever I explained that our acoustician ruled out the squares if we had any hope of improving the intelligibility of the spoken word in our sanctuary, I could see the looks of dismay on your faces. I could see that the survival of the squares was, to you, more important than the intelligibility of my spoken words. And so, with the help and creativity of our gifted architect, Fred Fisher and Partners, the squares were reborn, surrounding our ark. This, of course, brings me great joy, as now, when you check out of my sermon to start counting squares, your eyes will be doing *this*, instead of *this* – and there is, therefore, the off chance that I might just recapture your attention when you bump into me moving from one side of the ark to the other.

I don’t mean to make light of our community’s accomplishment in building this temple. One week ago, we celebrated that accomplishment with an unforgettable Sabbath of dedication, and we relived with pride so many of the magic moments that have happened over the years in this very space that we now occupy again – and have occupied since 1963. This sacred space, in which we now sit for the forty-seventh consecutive Rosh Hashanah, has been home to some superlative teaching from some of the greatest minds of our time. Here, we have experienced music that has reached deeply into our souls. We have gathered here by the hundreds to oppose the arms race, to break the boundaries separating races and religions, to decry genocide, to end homelessness in

our city. We have come here to rejoice at the greatest moments of our personal and family lives. And we have mourned so many of our most monumental losses right here.

Indeed, this place has housed true holiness for us – again and again... and now again. And this rebuilt home of ours equips us better than ever before to live as a holy community. We have a sanctuary in which we can experience each other's eyes and faces. We have so many more meeting and learning spaces than we did in our previous building, including dedicated spaces for social justice work, for meditation, for music, and just for being with one another. And we can be proud that our new temple is one of the most environmentally sustainable religious facilities in the world, and will be an example for countless other religious communities to follow.

Yes, there is much to celebrate about where we are gathering at the dawning of this new year. But when all is said and done, as remarkable as all of this is, our new temple building is ultimately just bathrooms and squares... pews and podiums... windows and walls. I hope and pray that we will use this new home of ours in good health and good spirit, but it will never come to define us. Never has. Never will. Leo Baeck Temple will always be who we are inside these walls.

So perhaps the real question we should be attempting to answer tonight, as we just begin to move into this new home of ours, is: What is it for? Why do we need it? Why do we need a temple at all?

One way to determine the purpose of a temple is to study the names that are most frequently used to describe it – names that tell us a lot about who we should be striving to become inside these freshly painted walls.

We should begin by noting that the word “temple” is itself an interesting moniker – one that actually makes an ideological statement more than a descriptive one. It has only been in the last 200 years that some modern communities have begun to call their houses of worship “temples.” Prior to that, the word was reserved only for the Temple in Jerusalem – the one that was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 of the Common Era, and the one whose resurrection someday, with its animal sacrifices and priestly rituals, is one focus of traditional Jewish worship. Congregations began using the word “temple” for their own buildings to announce that they no longer pined for a return to Jerusalem and the sacrificial cult – no longer prayed for its reinstatement, as Jews had prayed for centuries. So the word “temple” tells us less about what should happen here – and more about what shouldn't happen.

What are the names that actually describe what we should be doing in this new home of ours?

One name that has become familiar for a structure such as this one is “shul.” The word “shul” comes from Yiddish – actually, it's Yiddish, by way of German – and it

means “school.” But we’re not talking about the kind of school where grown-up teachers prepare children for their future. A shul is primarily a school for the grown-ups – a place where adults come to learn about who they are as Jews... and to equip themselves to prepare their own children and grandchildren to live Jewish lives.

Now, it may seem that we have invented schools within the shul to assign that function back to the community. But don’t be deceived – this shul cannot raise children to be Jews. Cannot. We can only give them tools here – knowledge about Jewish holidays and rituals and history. You are the ones who will model for them how... or whether... to open the toolbox and use what’s there.

So if you’re interested having kids and grandkids who care about being Jewish, *you* have to come into the shul – not just drop your little ones off here. Obvious, right? This is nothing new. Roll back the clock 500 years, and you’ll find one of our greatest sages, Moses Alshekh, teaching that we can only pass on to our children that which we ourselves love. Now, we know this, of course, about everything else that matters to us. When we care, for instance, that our children and grandchildren learn to love and value their siblings, since that’s all the family they’ll have left once we’re gone, we become a broken record, pounding the message home in every way we can through our words and actions. Or when we want our kids to see the political world as we do, we make sure they see what we’re reading and watching on television, what we’re saying to friends and family when we argue the issues – and even how we’re voting. But when it comes to being Jewish, many of us somehow choose to believe what we know isn’t true – that we can ship our children and grandchildren off to a place for which we show little or no interest, and have them conclude that the place and what happens there is important to us.

You would be disappointed in your children and grandchildren if they weren’t smarter than that. Not surprisingly, our happiest Religious School students – the ones who love being here – reliably come from families where Jewish living is happening both at home and at shul. And not surprisingly, the students who are taught about Shabbat on a Sunday – but never experience Shabbat – find our teaching to be boring and irrelevant. For them, it is, in fact, irrelevant, isn’t it?

Let me assure you – we are neither that good nor that bad at teaching your children and grandchildren. It’s just that you are the only teachers who really count in their Jewish lives. Or more precisely, we can’t succeed as their Jewish teachers if you are not also their Jewish teachers. Now, I know that is a daunting proposition for many of the parents and grandparents in this room. You fear that you don’t know enough to be the Jewish teacher or model for your young ones. You worry that they’ll resist your efforts, and you already deal with enough resistance in your crazy, overpacked family life. And most of all, you look into your heart of hearts, and you question whether your own Jewish beliefs and values are really all that solid, such that you could pass them along with as much passion and determination as you pass along your political beliefs and values.

These are all legitimate concerns. And fortunately, that's why we have a shul – a place to live and learn this tradition of ours. None of us can do it alone. A rich, diverse, compelling Jewish life of study, art, culture, and justice is the province of an entire community. It's all here, if we make it happen. This is the work of our REIMAGINE task force – the men and women who are now entering their third year of recreating the experience of lifelong Jewish learning and growth at Leo Baeck Temple. They're doing this for us, so we can do it for our children and grandchildren. And if, by chance, your grandchildren are being raised at a different shul, either locally or elsewhere, it is just as important for you to come into our shul. After all, don't you count upon the older congregants at the shul where your precious young ones are growing up to come in and create a community worthy enough to capture your grandchildren's souls?

The Chief Rabbi of England, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, wrote: “We cannot order our children to be Jews. We cannot deprive them of their choice, nor can we turn them into our clones. All we can do is show them what we believe, and let them see the beauty of how we live.” On the day that they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, they stand at the end of a line, and their parents and grandparents pass the Torah to them. A beautiful symbol – but trust me, our children know what's really being passed to them... or not being passed to them. They won't be fooled. If the gift we place in their uncertain grasp that day is more than just a charming relic from years gone by – if it represents a purposeful, joyful, thoughtful Judaism lived in home and community, you can be sure they'll want to stand one day as parents and grandparents and pass it along to the children they love.

Want it to happen? Come into our new shul – and we'll pass the Torah to you.

A second name we use for a building like this one – we call it a synagogue. The term comes from the Greek word, *synagoge*, which means “meeting” or “bringing together.” It suggests that a fundamental function of a place such as this is the bringing together of individual souls into genuine meeting, heartfelt encounter.

There could scarcely be a more important function for this place to fulfill. We live in what is arguably the loneliest time in all of human history. As the growing roar of our fast-paced lives has reached an all-time crescendo, we have countered the alienation by inventing an endless array of new ways to be human with one another. You can now, in a matter of minutes, email a group of family members from your computer, while text messaging a friend from your iPhone, post a message to the wall of one of your Facebook groups, send out a tweet to the hundreds of friends and loved ones who follow your life on Twitter, and post photographs for everyone you know to see on Shutterfly. It's all great. You've have connected with hundreds, possibly thousands of people, in less than an hour. And you've done it without ever speaking to another human being. Without ever looking in another person's eye, seeing the pain or the joy or the questioning that is there. Without ever hearing the knowing tone in another person's voice... or her cautiousness... or her regret.

The world became too busy for human encounter. Neighbors became strangers. Communities became consumers. And we used our technological acumen to replace quality with quantity. You can now communicate messages of little depth or importance to thousands of people.

The synagogue may be the one remaining institution devoted to communicating messages of ultimate importance on a human-to-human basis. When our jointly-created cult of the individual leaves you wanting – leaves you needing to give and needing to receive – you can trust that we'll still be devoted to helping you do both.

Did you know that the ancient rabbis actually taught us what to do if you want to pray, but there is no synagogue where you live? The answer: you find out what time the people in the nearest synagogue will be praying, and that's when you pray. You might not be able to stand with them, but neither will you be left to pray all alone.

In the Talmud, we read of Rabbi Eleazar, a poor man who was sick. The great Rabbi Yochanan went to visit him, and found him lying alone in the dark. And he saw that Rabbi Eleazar was weeping. “Why are you crying?” Yochanan asked. “Is it because you fear you haven't studied enough Torah? Do not worry, for we have learned, ‘it matters not whether you have done much or little, as long as your heart is directed towards heaven.’ Or are you crying because you're poor? Not everyone enjoys sustenance in both this world and the next. Perhaps you're crying because you have no children? As for me, I have buried ten sons.”

That's when Rabbi Eleazar interrupted him: “I am weeping because all this beauty will one day decay in the earth.” And that stopped Rabbi Yochanan in his tracks... no more asking his questions and offering his answers. He said simply, “Then you have good reason to weep,” and the two of them wept together. And then Yochanan said to Eleazar, “Give me your hand.” And he lifted him up.

Sometime later, Rabbi Yochanan fell ill, and Rabbi Hanina came to visit. They spoke, and then Hanina held out his hand and lifted Yochanan up. The Talmud asks, “But why, if Rabbi Yochanan was such a great healer, could he not lift himself up?” And the Talmud answers, “Because the prisoner cannot free himself from prison.”

Like the great rabbi, we are all called upon in this life to be both healer and sufferer. We move between the two roles over and over again. Sitting here with us today are those who arrive at this new year strong and well. And seated here are those whose spirits desperately need rebuilding – who are here counting upon someone to hold out a hand and lift them up.

Too many times to count, I have watched it happen in this sacred synagogue – this place of true meeting. I have watched as one congregant has lifted another up. In this sanctuary tonight are people who can say, “When I received that horrible diagnosis,

someone here lifted me up. When I lost my beloved spouse... when I lost my job... when I lost my savings... when I lost my marriage... when I lost our baby – someone here lifted me up. When I was new and feeling awkward and no one knew me, someone here lifted me up. When I was left disillusioned by a friend, or by my child, or by the world and its darkneses – someone here lifted me up.”

Trust me – that won’t happen on Twitter. It can only happen if you come in – to our synagogue – and be a part of something wonderfully real.

A third and final name for us to consider for this new building of ours – its name in Hebrew... Beit Kneset. The words literally mean “House of Gathering.” This is a place where our community comes together in force – not only as individuals caring for one another, but as a strong group capable of leaving its imprint on the world.

Nearly the entire final third of the Book of Exodus is devoted not to our experiences in Egypt or at Sinai or in the wilderness – it is, instead, a painstaking account of every last design feature in our people’s first-ever sanctuary... the kind of blueprint that would have left even our temple’s architects dizzy with details. Our ancient sages noticed that the language in these chapters of Exodus contains some intriguing echoes of the creation narrative from the book of Genesis, and they saw in this a metaphor. With the erection of the sanctuary, creation was happening all over again – only now, human beings would do the work, not God. The wonders of the natural world were God’s contribution to creation. Our contribution would be the wonders of human community. We would be the creators of the Beit Kneset, our House of Gathering, and it would be our template for the world as we would wish for it to be.

We need to make this place a template worthy of our moral pride, for the world outside these doors desperately needs the help of our example. It permits a grotesque disparity between haves and have-nots. It allows the starvation of more than a billion human beings to continue unabated, even though there is enough to feed everyone twice over. It sanctions genocide, still continuing in Darfur for a seventh year. And in our own country, 46 million people living without health care can be turned into a political football – a partisan power game whose sole object is winning. And then there is the homelessness, and the warring, and the poverty, and so many other social realities that reveal the ugliest truths about what humanity is ready to conscience.

It’s enough to overwhelm the soul. And for many, it’s enough to trigger a sense of futility. But that’s why we have a Beit Kneset – a place where we envision what’s possible if, strengthened by each other, we set out to build the world of our ideals... and then we actually start building it.

The modern Jewish thinker most frequently invoked from our temple’s bima, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, wrote that a Jew is “a person whose integrity decays when unmoved by the knowledge of wrong done to other people.” That is to say, our

spiritual pursuits in this sanctuary are not an end in themselves. They exist only to intensify our resolve to build the world as we would wish it to be – never to retreat, never to surrender, no matter how corrupted the world before our eyes might become. The fact that we know we cannot fix it all does not exempt us from attempting to do precisely that.

And this is why our Beit Knesset – our House of Gathering – mobilizes our forces through our Homelessness Task Force, and through Peacebuilders, and through our Green Team, and our Sudan Focus Group and our AIDS Lunch Group... and every other world-altering project we make our own. All of it is our response to being religious people, obligated by virtue of being Jews.

The great Talmudic master, Rav Huna, once asked his son why he didn't attend the lectures of Rav Hisda, another of the rabbinic giants of his day. "Rav Hisda talks about hygiene and worldly things," said the young man. "He talks about health – and I don't want to listen. I want to listen to someone who teaches me about Shabbat." Rav Huna replied, "You call that secular? You call that worldly? That's all the more reason for going. You cannot separate the street from the sanctuary."

In this Beit Knesset, this House of Gathering, we carry the weight of our prayers, our study and our heartfelt relationship with one another back into a world in need, for we cannot – and we will not – separate the street from the sanctuary.

So why do we need this beautiful new place of ours? Because we need a shul in which the Torah comes alive in us and stays alive through and beyond us. Because we need a synagogue where we can lift each other up from despair – and know that we will never be left alone in the dark. And because we need a Beit Knesset to convene us for the purpose of repairing a broken world worth redeeming.

Some years ago, our congregation founded a new men's group, Achim. The name means "brothers." Its purpose would be a bit grander than your garden-variety temple Brotherhood, whose mission usually peaks with putting out the bagels on Scholar-in-Residence weekend. Achim would exist to learn together and from one another, and to share in heartfelt and honest relationship. Not the sort of thing men often invite in their lives. But our Achim welcomed the chance to care and be cared about, and just a few short months into their existence as a group, their openness to that mission was put to the test.

A group member sent an email message out to this new band of brothers. It was entitled, "A Different Kind of Letter." And it reads as follows:

"Dear friends,

"I enjoyed very much being part of this group, and I missed participating in it the last two months. The reason for my absence – and there is no easy way to say this, so I

will say it as it is – is that I’ve been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and I have less than a year to live. It is very sad, but it is also a time that will come to all of us.

“I have led a full and wonderful life. I have an amazing wife and a terrific family – children, their spouses and kids, and I am very grateful for that.

“This is one of those situations where there aren’t too many words one can say – so I will say it again: I have lived a fantastic life, I have loved my life and all the wonderful people in it. I will be sad leaving you, but I am very happy with what I have accomplished in my 73 years and the legacy that I leave behind.

“We know you want to help us, and we will let you know how. This letter is just to give thanks to you all for the wonderful life you gave me.

Love to you all.”

I remember the flurry of email activity that followed the distribution of this message. Very suddenly, our group was in the deep water together. How would we respond?

The next eight months would reveal the answer. There would be phone messages and visits. Offers to provide help at home. And on one Shabbat morning, we formed a circle in the living room of our stricken brother’s home – and together with him, we prayed the Shabbat service, and we studied together, and we guided each other through our growing sense of loss. And at the end of eight months, we would grieve together. As the news of funeral plans circulated, the Achim shared words of tribute – what they had learned about living from the dying of their fallen brother. And they announced their intentions to be at the memorial service for one another... except for the one brother who wrote that he could not attend, for he would need to be at his wife’s bedside as she received chemotherapy treatment. And then he became the recipient of the group’s love and concern. It was time to take him by the hand and lift him up.

A place where we choose to learn together... and to live together... and where we choose to die together is the only kind of place where we will actually choose to change the world together. It can happen in this shul, this synagogue, this Beit Knesset.

The great medieval Jewish scholar, Abarbanel, taught that the synagogue is needed to combat the idea that God is in the heavens. This building – it’s just bathrooms and squares... pews and podiums... windows and walls. It is nothing until we move God in.

We’ve built a glorious new house. It’s time to make it our home. Welcome home.



**Rabbi Rachel Timoner**

**Rosh Hashanah 5770    September 19, 2009**

**“Enough is Enough”**

What a year. Collapsed markets, failed industries, widespread layoffs, foreclosed homes. One year ago this week, Lehman Brothers folded, beginning the largest intervention in the American financial system since the Great Depression. Though there is disagreement about exactly who is to blame for the crisis, and what should have been done in response to it, we have general consensus on one point: as President Obama said this week, from homeowners to derivatives traders, we were irresponsible in pursuit of excess.

In this sanctuary, there are people who lost life savings, who lost a job, who faced the fear of not making the mortgage or the rent. As pensions shrank, as retirement funds contracted, many in this country, and in this room, are confronting an old age very different than anticipated. Some are asking “Will I have enough to live comfortably until the end of my life?” Will there be enough for my family, for my children?

Some of us remain relatively unscathed. It was simply a year of seeing if we could get by – if we could be happy – with a little bit less. A smaller vacation. A smaller home. A smaller shopping list.

Almost everyone in this country faced some kind of loss this year. In the midst of the pain and the fear and the loss, is there anything positive we can find in this? Many might say no, but perhaps, just perhaps there is a gift here, an opportunity to ask ourselves, individually and collectively, what is enough?

In 1996, I visited a village of returned refugees in Guatemala. These Mayan people had fled the army and the guerillas during Guatemala’s long and bloody civil war, and now had returned to a small plot of land in the

midst of dense jungle. The war was just ending and the refugees were still in danger of massacre. Felicia and I had a friend who was living in this village, trying to help.

In order to get there, we had to take a tiny airplane that, let's just say, would not meet FAA regulations. This plane had duct tape on the landing gear. It had no seats. But the pilot had placed two plastic stools in the back for us to perch on, and gratefully the siding was coming off of the airplane so we could wedge our hands inside the wall to hold on. We prayed as we skimmed the top of the jungle's foliage. As we prepared to land at a clearing in the trees, the pilot informed us that he did not have fuel enough to stop, so we had to jump out as he taxied along the grass.

When we arrived at the village, we were surrounded by generous smiles and kind eyes, women shyly watching with babies wrapped snugly on their backs, men with American t-shirts putting out their hands to welcome us. The proud elders gave us a tour of the school room and the houses that made up the village – each a single room of plank walls, mud floors, and thatched roofs. Outside town were row after row of corn that the villagers made into many varieties of food for every meal – tortillas, tamales, masa, soup, and a special corn drink – meals occasionally accompanied by beans, chicken, or eggs.

We stayed in the village for four nights, and everywhere we went, people offered us food, always saying, “Please take it, please, we have enough.” We have enough. This was not a kind exaggeration in the name of hospitality. This was a genuine expression of plenty. The people in this village believed themselves to be rich. Everyone had a roof. Everyone had three meals a day. The children could go to school. They had each other, and for now, they were safe. They had enough.

It is experiences like these – I know many of us have had them – that give us a brief flash of perspective, perspective on the extraordinary wealth that we take for granted. We ask ourselves, how much happier are we for what we have? How much of what we have do we need?

We Americans live with such excess, we've become inured, numbed. There may be some in this room who've experienced such loss this year that they are no longer numb – they've had to assess exactly what they need. But most of us can't even *see* what enough looks like. We can't recognize what

it feels like to be sated. How many of us find it difficult to identify that simple moment when our stomachs are full? How many of us have felt overrun with belongings – as we struggle to weed out the clothing, the gadgets, the supplies that fill our closets, our garages, our lives? How many feel that our children probably have too many toys, too many things –too much to be good for them? And yet we continue to buy, to acquire. How many of us, though we’re making salaries that my Mayan hosts would gasp at in disbelief, find that our monthly budgets are actually tight, particularly after the events of this year. Sometimes we even worry that there won’t be enough.

The fear of scarcity is not unwarranted. In some part of our biology, in our primeval brain, we know that our existence is precarious. In the vast emptiness of the cosmos from which we emerged, through which we hurtle, there really IS not enough for us. Not enough warmth, not enough to breathe, to drink, to eat. We are born onto a spinning rock amidst a gaping dark space, and the fact that we could exist nowhere else in the solar system makes the vibrant riches of life on this planet stand out in sharp relief. How difficult it is to trust this miracle that we have all we need.

For tens of thousands of years our species lived from day to day not knowing that we would have enough, not knowing when the next successful hunt would bring us food. Some part of us is still hunkering down, hiding away from lions and tigers, lining our caves with food enough for the next drought, for the next siege, buffering ourselves with things to protect us from all of the threats that loom outside.

In just a few generations we have gone from persistent lack to extraordinary abundance. We’re new at this. We don’t know what to do with our wealth. Though we have the technology and capacity right now to provide food, clothing, and shelter for all who live on earth without denying ourselves anything we need, that’s not the choice we make.

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled, *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Is Not Enough*. He begins with this observation: “Ask the average person which is more important to him (or her), making money or being devoted to his family, and virtually everyone will answer family without hesitation. But watch how the average person actually lives out his life. See where he really invests his time and energy, and he will give away the fact that he does not really live by what he says he believes. He has let himself

be persuaded that if he leaves for work earlier in the morning and comes home more tired at night, he is proving how devoted he is to his family by expending himself to provide them with all of the things that they have seen advertised.”

Three thousand marketing messages flow into the average North American brain each day. Three thousand messages a day shout out that there is something that you should want, something you need. The feeling, the drumbeat is that you can never have enough. No matter how much you buy, it will never, ever be enough. Even those who truly eschew the rampant materialism of our society are besieged by these messages, and are affected by them.

To make matters worse, our economic model is structurally dependent on growth. We are told that the engine of progress is consumer spending. That in order for our economy to recover and stabilize we must continually spend more. In other words, we must continually experience ourselves as *lacking* – a book, a work of art, a toy, a telephone, a car, the perfect beer, wristwatch, shoes – something out there must always be our missing piece. Of course our children want everything – every new shiny plastic item on display. How do we teach our children lovingly, without shame, that they have enough?

Judaism is not an ascetic tradition. In Ecclesiastes we read, “There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.”<sup>1</sup> We Jews love to eat, and we love to celebrate the fullness of life. In fact, we are commanded to consume and be satisfied.<sup>2</sup> The primary blessing we say for our food, *birkat hamazon*, is said after we eat, in that moment of fullness, of utter satisfaction in completion of a meal. This practice derives from the Book of Deuteronomy, in which we read *v’achalta v’savata u’verachta*.<sup>3</sup> God commands: You will consume, you will be satisfied, and you will bless. It turns out it wasn’t only our mothers who told us to eat up and to like it. We are commanded in Torah to eat and to feel satisfied, and then out of that satisfaction, to give blessing.

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<sup>1</sup> Kohelet 2:24

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Richard Levy’s observation

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 8:10

It is out of this awareness of satisfaction and blessing that we are able to be generous, to share what we have, and to make wise choices with our money. Deep down, we know the difference between enjoying abundance and wallowing in excess, the difference between saving and hoarding.

For the last five decades the pursuit of growth has been the single most important policy goal across the world. But as this year's collapse showed, unfettered economic growth does not guarantee stability. Leading economists, including a number of Nobel laureates, have argued in the last decades that it is time for a more holistic and realistic economic model.

In the meantime, the assumption is that the global economy will continue to grow indefinitely. But here's the problem: the earth is finite. It is not growing alongside the economy; it is being ravaged along the way. The forests, the animal habitats, the rivers, the soil, the oceans, the air, the atmosphere – clear cut, poisoned, washed away, overfished, toxic, overheated. As Bill Collins says in Thomas Friedman's book *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, "We're running an uncontrolled experiment on the only home we have."

Americans spent \$100 billion on bottled water last year alone, \$100 billion in one year! Never mind that there are no regulations on bottled water, and that tap water may actually be better for us. Never mind that the plastic bottles leach into the water. Never mind that the bottles are choking our waterways and landfills and being found in the stomachs of dead albatross thousands of miles away in the center of the Pacific Ocean. We spend \$100 billion on bottled water when most of us already have clean water running out of our taps, whereas it would cost only \$30 billion to provide clean water to all human beings on earth, to those dying of entirely preventable water-borne diseases around the world. What an odd misappropriation of funds.

In the Talmud, we read the following: Why are people like weasels? A weasel spends life darting about, gathering things, and knows not for what purpose. So it is with people.<sup>4</sup>

We shop for fun, or because we're bored, or because it feels good to acquire things, to own beautiful things. The shelves and shelves of products on display in the store and online are visible, tangible evidence of our

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<sup>4</sup> Talmud Shabbat 13:1

security, that everything we need is right at our fingertips, that we are safe from that howling emptiness out there – and in here.

We are masters of our world, able to choose between seven kinds of mustard, ten kinds of toilet paper, and ninety kinds of hats. What an exercise in power, and freedom, to have that huge range of choice, to have the resources of the earth processed and packaged and stacked in neat rows before us, arranged twenty deep on hangers for our browsing pleasure. All accompanied, of course, with a free plastic bag (one trillion of them each year), to carry our new belongings home.

We not only buy what we can afford, we buy what we can't afford. Credit card debt, at more than \$1 trillion, is now triple what it was in 1990, after adjusting for inflation, and personal bankruptcies are at record heights.

My teacher, and one of my predecessors as Assistant Rabbi here at Leo Baeck Temple, Rabbi Richard Levy, told me that because he doesn't spend money on Shabbat, sometimes he walks into stores as if they are museums. In museums we have no expectation that we will buy what is on the walls, we are simply there to appreciate. Stores are full of beautiful things, interesting things that we don't need. What would it be like to treat a shopping mall, or a Target store, or Rodeo Drive, like a museum?

The colorful landscape of products available for our consumption may give us a sense of safety, comfort and freedom; however, buying things is not making us happy. As Oscar Wilde wrote: "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it." Despite a quadrupling of GDP and an even greater increase in consumption since World War II, surveys say Americans are less happy today than we were then. As Bobby Kennedy said "[The gdp] measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

In the Talmud, we read of a principle called *Dai Machsoro*: enough for one's needs. When a person falls on hard times, the Rabbis say that the community is obligated to provide that person enough for his or her needs. How much is enough? they ask. There is no single standard. Two people may have very different experiences of need and no one can judge another's needs. I cannot judge what enough looks like for you, and you cannot judge what enough looks like for me. And that is why it is so important that each of us know for ourselves precisely what it is that we need.

Too often we fill our lack with something different from what we really need – when we're anxious we eat; when we are exhausted we watch TV; when we are depressed or lonely, we go shopping. In order to know what we need, we must know ourselves. We must find our way past the clamor of immediate gratification to the quiet calling of our bodies and souls, the wisdom within us.

When we consume more than we need there's another problem. All of those goods flooding our markets, advertised on our television screens, and filling our closets have prices that do not reflect the fair value of what it costs to make them. The bargain basement prices that we are accustomed to are subsidized by poisoned farm workers, abused sweatshop workers, and child labor. The gleaming new items we behold in the store or on the web, the beautiful blouses, the brightly painted Hot Wheels with the cool flames on the side, these were sewed, ironed, molded, painted by the hands of the world's poor working 16 and 18 hours a day – for pennies.

We like to believe that even sweatshops are a valuable investment in the Third World, providing a step out of poverty for workers and stimulation for the economy. But sweatshop workers are often paid so far below a living wage that they become forever trapped in poverty. For example, Honduran workers sewing clothing for Wal-Mart in 2003 earned 43 cents an hour. After buying meals and transportation, they were left on average with 80 cents a day for rent, clothing, child care, medicine, and emergencies. 80 cents a day was neither a step out of poverty nor the means to stimulate the economy.

The cost of environmental devastation appears nowhere on our price tags either – the rivers, the oceans, the mountains, the forests are being laid waste with no evidence in the prices we pay.

Our over-consumption not only leaves us in a gnawing state of dissatisfaction, not only traps the world's poor in poverty, not only devastates our fragile blue planet, but it ultimately threatens civil society. The more things we bring into the private sphere, behind our walls and fences, the more we have to take care of those things. The bigger our homes, the larger our land, the greater our possessions, the more we are forced to attend to our property. And that means less time, attention, and resources are left for the public sector – for public spaces, public institutions, public life. The bigger our home libraries, the less we need a public library.

The bigger our back yards, the less we need public parks. The more bottled water we buy, the less invested we are in the safety and quality of the municipal water system.

And our self-reliance is illusory. When we allow our property tax rates to be capped, our income tax rates to be cut, public systems to be eroded, and the safety net to be eviscerated, we are all ultimately at risk. Our fences cannot protect us from toxic air and the consequences of a devastated earth, our belongings cannot shield us from the consequences of hopelessness and shameful inequality. And, as we sit behind our castle walls with the drawbridge up, who have we become?

On this Rosh Hashanah, in a year of economic reckoning, in a season dedicated to fundamental reprioritization, it is essential that we, in the words of Marge Piercy, “burn the debris of habit and greed and fear.”<sup>5</sup> It is necessary that we ask ourselves: what is enough?

A Jew wakes in the morning, and in our very first moment of consciousness, before we open our eyes, before we stretch or sit up, *even* before we think of a complaint, Judaism teaches us to know what we have. Jews all over the world do this every morning. We say Modah ani, Modeh ani I am grateful. Modeh, l’hodot, means to acknowledge. The first step of every morning is to acknowledge the gift of life.

Do we know what we have? Look around you. Here we sit safe, in our community. Our simple breath – in and out – a miracle! The wiggling of toes, the swing of an arm, majestic! The light coming in through the windows. The curious faces of the people around us; their gleaming eyes, the smiles, human warmth, a heart that aches and beats and yearns. Friendship and love. Do we know what we have?

Modah ani. I acknowledge. I am grateful.

Say one hundred blessings a day, our tradition teaches. One hundred moments each day to stop and know what we have. The Miracles of Every Day Life. A blessing for waking, a blessing for standing up, a blessing for wearing clothing, a blessing for firm ground to stand on. There is a blessing for walking, for eating fruit of the earth and the fruit of a tree. A blessing for seeing new blossoms, for the smells of spring, for seeing the ocean, for

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<sup>5</sup> Nishmat Kol Chai

hearing thunder, for seeing an old friend, for being free, for being a Jew. One hundred blessings each day. Judaism teaches us what enough looks like, what enough feels like. Dayeinu. We have more than enough.

The Kabbalists describe life and the earth as saturated with God's blessing, flowing through us like a river, abundant and never ending. We pray in Psukei d'Zimra, our Songs of Praise, *Ilu finu male shira ka yam....* If our mouths could be as full of song as the sea, our tongues like the waves .... we would still not have the words to thank You.

We have More than Enough.

For two thousand years our people have been thanking God for giving us blessings. Imagine this: in the ghettos, in the times of the blood libel and pogroms, in the villages of the Levant, in shtetl life when there was not food for every meal, when we had meager belongings, still, every morning we would wake up and say thank you God for giving me blessings.

And here we are – most of us with a dozen pairs of shoes, several televisions, and a refrigerator that's so full you have to dig to find what you're looking for. And we're not sure if we have enough?

Our tradition provides a powerful antidote to the grasping dissatisfaction of our times. Dayeinu! We Have More than Enough.

For those of us whose cupboards are full, whose houses keep us warm and safe, who have clothing to wear, whose children have an education: what else do we need? What are we doing with all of this stuff? To be human is to be vulnerable, but our things will not protect us.

We have More than enough.

It is sometimes difficult to believe, as one of almost seven billion people on the earth, that what we do matters. But everything we buy is a vote. A vote for or against pesticides on our food, a vote for or against the dignity of the world's poor. Americans consume thirty percent of the world's resources. We are positioned to have tremendous collective influence with how we spend. Even if only the people in this room today consistently exercise restraint and wisdom in buying, we will have an impact.

I challenge all of us this Rosh Hashanah to begin with three specific actions. 1) Let's make next Shabbat "Buy Nothing Day." On this coming Shabbat before Yom Kippur, let's experiment with buying nothing for one day. Maybe you'll find it's something you want to do every Shabbat, or one Shabbat a month. 2) Let's take stock of what we have. What would it be like to pretend that our houses were museums? One time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur let's walk through our homes admiring the works of art, the handsome furniture, the architecture. How many treasures will we find – beautiful bowls or vases, jewelry, fine garments, children's toys – exquisite and delightful things. Let's take stock of what we already have. 3) This week, let's each pick one thing that we will change in our buying habits. Maybe it's time to begin buying organic fruit and vegetables, or fair trade coffee. Maybe it's time to stop buying bottled water. Let's change just one simple habit.

These three actions –next Shabbat as buy nothing day, our houses as museums, and one change in our buying habits – will get us started. But fundamental change takes more than a week. What is needed from us is as difficult as it is urgent – it requires patience, determination, and long-term commitment. I'm teaching a class this year called Tzedek v' Ruach, Justice and Spirit, that's designed to enable precisely these kinds of changes – through study, reflection and the creation of a community, we will create the forum to set goals, and the support to live by them. Information about Tzedek v' Ruach is in the Lifelong Learning Booklet, which will be arriving in your mailbox any day now. I hope you'll join me.

As Harold Kushner writes: "Money and power do not satisfy that unnamable hunger in the soul. Even the rich and powerful find themselves yearning for something more." Let us enjoy our fine and beautiful things, but know – each of us – when enough is enough. Let us slow down and make fewer transactions, and pay attention to what we buy – with what materials, made by whom, and under what conditions. With our shopping cart full, let us pause and consider: do I need this? What is lost if I do not buy it? What is gained if I do not buy it?

Let's clear our clutter, and give our excess to people in need. And let us attend to our true wealth – the quality of our relationships; the kindness we show to those whom we love and to the stranger; acts of courage in the face of hardship or suffering; acts of generosity and justice for the well-being of others.

Let's build the kind of community, the kind of society, that each of us could turn to if we find that we really do not have what we need. But may it be in this New Year and for many years to come, that each of us will have enough, and know we have enough.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, she asah li Kol Tzorki.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of all the world, who has given me everything I need.



**Rabbi Kenneth Chasen**  
**Yom Kippur 5770      September 27, 2009**

**“Back to the Ocean”**

It's a script that's become familiar. Powerful leader campaigns on platform of personal integrity and honor. Gives moving speeches about how we need to address our moral failings. Maybe he advocates for the rights of the most vulnerable. Maybe he talks about the scourge of human trafficking. Maybe he talks about how more must be done to ensure that young women aren't bought and sold like just another everyday commodity.

Or maybe he talks about family values. The sanctity of marriage.

And then, well, you know what always seems to happen next.

You pick up the morning paper, and by now you're actually not even surprised to read what decades ago might have caused you to fall out of your chair. The family-values governor of South Carolina has gone missing for several days, and it's just come to light that he was not in fact hiking the Appalachian Trail, but was instead cheating on his wife with his mistress – his soul-mate – in Argentina.

Or you turn on Jon Stewart to hear how the law-and-order Governor of New York, famous for his strict ethical and moral standards, the sheriff of Wall Street... father of three teenage daughters... has spent tens of thousands of dollars crossing state lines to engage the services of a high-priced, twenty-two-year-old prostitute.

Lately, it seems like practically every family-values politician in America is getting caught literally with his pants down. Senator John Ensign of Nevada. Governor Mark Sanford. Tennessee State Senator Paul Stanley, and the list, sickeningly, goes on and on.

Fortunately, we as Jews can take some pride in the fact that in our Jewish state of Israel, the situation is, of course, much better. Politicians in Israel know how to model appropriate behavior.

Except, of course, for the previous Prime Minister of Israel, who was just indicted in a corruption scandal. And then there is the previous President of Israel, whose trial in Tel Aviv for his alleged sexual crimes – including rape – began just this month. And we

really don't want to get started talking about the dozens of corruption charges brought against Israeli politicians and officials over the years.

Most of us would characterize the experience of reading about the foibles of the rich, powerful, and famous as depressing and sad. We think about the lives that have been damaged or destroyed. Their victims. The survivors of their acts of force or deception. Those who were hurt by the corruption and lies. The cynicism bred in our children about public service, about leadership, about power.

So yes – these incidents are depressing and sad to us. But today is a day for complete honesty. And so, if we were able to be brutally honest with ourselves, we'd admit that there are other feelings that these incidents inspire in us. Delight, perhaps. Sometimes, reading about all of this despicable behavior actually makes us feel better about ourselves. In fact, we probably wouldn't even choose to read about this stuff if it didn't make us feel better about ourselves.

I mean, look – I may not be the best husband in the world. Sometimes, I'm impatient and inattentive. I don't bring flowers as often as I should. I don't recognize Valentine's Day as a legal holiday. There are times I leave my socks on the floor, my shoes in the living room, and my hair in the sink. I know – pathetic. But, hey, at least I have never skipped work, pretending to go on a hiking trip, so I could fly to Argentina to cheat on my wife. Not such a lousy husband after all!

All these scandals; all this bad behavior. It's easy to lampoon it. It's easy to criticize and condemn these folks for being such unforgivable hypocrites. It's easy, convenient, and – let's admit it – sometimes kind of fun to engage in *heshbon nafsho* – an accounting of the other guy's moral failings. What's harder is truly to engage in what this season calls us toward: true *heshbon nafsheinu*, a real, deep, thorough, painful accounting of our own souls.

A day for complete honesty. If we were courageous enough to be truly honest about it, we'd acknowledge that this High Holy Day exercise is really not at all what we like to claim it to be. We sit here all day – on two days out of a whole year – and we stare painfully into the mirror. We examine what most needs fixing in ourselves. And we resolve to change ourselves. We say things like “*Ut'shuvah, ut'filah utz'dakah ma'avirin et roa hag'zerah*” – that our sincere repentance will temper the consequence of our actions. And then we leave. And the ugly truth is that with rare exception, the things that are truly worst about us remain worst about us when we come back next year. We may alter a few behaviors for the better, or perhaps see ourselves with renewed perspective. But more often than not, we remain shamed annually by the very same items on those sin lists in our prayer books. And the silences – those inescapable silences during our Yom Kippur worship – they are filled with a palpable queasiness that we are once again staring last year's same sins in the eye. The sins – and the pattern of returning

to them – they sadden us, maybe even sicken us. We can truly feel ill over them sometimes. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century giant, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, once wrote: “The pangs of sin lie in the nausea caused by its obnoxious taint.” We know from that nausea, don’t we? It’s not the fasting that causes it. It’s us.

We get pretty deep inside our demons on this day. But then something remarkable happens. The day ends, we break the fast, and we go back to tolerating those demons. Until next year. But imagine... just imagine our lives – our consciences, our relationships, our impact upon our community and our world – if we actually decided this time to take those demons on all year long.

What stands in the way of that happening? What leads us, instead of confronting our own shortcomings to wallow in a bit of what the Germans call *schadenfreude* – an unsavory joy in the shortcomings of others? It’s a dark thought to ponder, but could it be that we actually relish the opportunity, either consciously or subconsciously, to magnifying our own sense of self-worth by condemning in others the very same weaknesses we tolerate in ourselves? To relieve the nausea, to escape the obnoxious taint, through the gift of comparison to those who make us feel like moral exemplars?

It was in the 1950’s that Stanford psychologist Leon Festinger famously coined the term “cognitive dissonance” to describe the discomfort we feel when our most disappointing behaviors fail to match up with our noble beliefs. Festinger found that we humans will go to extraordinary lengths in our mind’s eye to reduce that dissonance – and that we’ll usually attempt to reduce it by reshaping our noble beliefs to accommodate our disappointing behaviors, as opposed to choosing the much harder solution, reshaping our behaviors to accommodate our beliefs.

Take, for instance, the dissonance between knowing that smoking cigarettes is stupid because it will kill you and choosing to smoke a pack a day anyway. We’re not built to tolerate a dissonance like that. We have to reduce it. The logical way to do it is, of course, to quit smoking. But what happens if I can’t quit – if I find that it’s just too hard? Then I’ll have to reduce the dissonance in some other way: Smoking is not really all that bad, I’ll tell myself. My smoking is a risk I have to take – after all, it’s the only thing that keeps me calm... or it keeps me from overeating, and obesity is itself a horrible health risk, you know?

We will engage in wanton self-deception when cognitive dissonance hits. We will say or do whatever most speedily gets us out of that jam. And that includes telling ourselves that we are something we are not... seeing ourselves as better, more forgivable, than we actually are. Social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, in their book, *Mistakes Were Made... But Not By Me*, tell a fascinating story of their visit to our local Museum of Tolerance right here in Los Angeles. When you enter the museum, they recall, “you find yourself in a room of interactive exhibits designed to identify the people

you can't tolerate. The familiar targets are there (blacks, women, Jews, gays), but also short people, fat people, blond-female people, disabled people... You watch a video on the vast variety of prejudices, designed to convince you that everyone has at least a few, and then you are invited to enter the museum proper through one of two doors: one marked PREJUDICED, the other marked UNPREJUDICED." And as you may recall from your own visits to the museum, "the latter door is locked, in case anyone misses the point, but," say Tavis and Aronson, "occasionally some people do. When we were visiting the museum one afternoon," they write, "we were treated to the sight of four Hasidic Jews pounding angrily on the UNPREJUDICED door, demanding to be let in." How nice to be completely free of prejudice... except, perhaps, against all those awful moral louts filing through the PREJUDICED door.

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that there is always a different door of self-judgment through which we walk, while happily – even gratefully – sending everyone else through the main door of moral failure. And this is why we can get so worked up reviling in our parents, our siblings, our children, our friends, and our politicians and celebrities the same unsavory traits that keep accompanying us back to these services year after year. Assailing those failings in them, say the psychologists, is a purposeful, if often subconscious, mechanism for escaping the dissonance, for granting ourselves moral cover: "If I passionately decry this ethical breach, I will demonstrate my own moral rectitude. I will show myself to be above such a sin."

"Well, at least, I will appear to be above such a sin."

"Well, perhaps, at the very least, I will display that I haven't lost sight of the sinfulness of my own actions. I'll have done some penance by pointing out that I still see right from wrong – and that should make my failures somewhat more excusable... right?"

Not much different than Rep. Mark Foley crusading against child exploitation while sending sexually explicit messages to congressional pages. Not much different from Sen. John Ensign summoning the political guillotine for President Clinton for his infidelities while engaging in a few infidelities of his own. Not much different than castigating your father for his stubbornness while ignoring your spouse's pleas for you to be less stubborn.

Think I'm being unfair? Well, how did you react when you heard disgraced Governor Mark Sanford during a damage-control press conference talk about "C Street" – the house on Capitol Hill where powerful adulterers like Sanford and Ensign and Rep. Chip Pickering have sought Christian spirituality and Bible studies. In case you forgot, we all thought: "What moralizing, hypocritical pigs! Can you imagine these guys, pursuing their spiritual and religious fulfillment while clearly tolerating their own persistent violations of the very morals they were studying and praying about?"

I mean, really. It would be like coming to synagogue and confessing to God a whole long list of sins and then going back to doing whatever we were doing before we sat down to purge our souls.

You might not know this, but there is actually an academic discipline known as “hypocrisy studies.” There are experts on why we are the way we are. And apparently, convincing ourselves that our own failings are not really all that bad is a critical part of relieving cognitive dissonance in our lives. Psychologist David DeSteno of Northeastern University teaches that when we judge our own transgressions less harshly than we judge the same transgressions in others, it is likely because “we have this automatic, gut-level instinct to preserve our self-image. In our heart, maybe we're just not as sensitive to our own transgressions.” Dan Batson of the University of Kansas, a pioneer in hypocrisy studies, says it even more starkly: “...people have learned that it pays to seem moral, since it lets you avoid censure and guilt. But even better is appearing moral without having to pay the cost of actually being moral.”

Like coming to synagogue, being seen by everyone as we repent for our sins, as we beat our chests, and then going back essentially to our old and hardened ways. It is disturbing – really disturbing – to consider, but the scholars of “hypocrisy studies” would characterize these proceedings tonight and tomorrow as a permission slip to keep sinning. It is better to appear moral without having to pay the cost of actually being moral.

Well, this is a day for complete honesty. And relieving our cognitive dissonance by adjusting our honorable beliefs downward to make room for our less-than-honorable behavior is, shall we say, less than honest. So tonight, I want to suggest three texts to strengthen our efforts this year to choose the more honest path – to inspire us, even prod us, to adjust our behaviors to match up with our worthiest ideals.

Text #1 – Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, the great Kotzker Rebbe of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, taught that most people do their mitzvahs in public and their sinning in private. That is, they make sure that their name appears on the list of donors to the synagogue building project. They want everyone to know they gave. When others are watching, they are careful to be on their best behavior. But when no one's watching, when the lights are out, in the privacy of their own homes, that's where they sin.

The rebbe taught that we should behave in exactly the opposite manner. Sin in public, and do your mitzvahs in private. Place your flaws on display for all to see. Your impatience. Your anger. Your pettiness. Don't hide them. Let everyone see them for what they are. But out of humility, keep all your righteous acts private.

Our response to the Kotzker Rebbe? You're out of your mind. But here is the wisdom of his teaching: Imagine how differently we would behave – how much self-restraint we would exercise in transcending our worst vices – if we assumed that the ugliest parts of ourselves would be on display for all to see.

Remember a couple years back when an audio recording of actor Alec Baldwin screaming in anger at his 11-year-old daughter on a phone message was released to the media? It was a circus. The talking heads had a field day. We all excoriated him.

Now, the way he spoke to his daughter was pretty shameful. I hope I never say words like that to someone I love – even if they have behaved in a way that would warrant harsh words.

But parents – can we be at least a little honest? On our worst days as dads and moms, haven't we all behaved in ways that if the media were to acquire a transcript or recording of our admonishment to our child, of our words spoken in anger, we would be positively mortified?

What if when we found ourselves in that place of wanting to yell at our children, what if at that moment we took our child to a public place instead of a private place to have the chat? What if at that moment we turned on the webcam for all to see? How differently might we parent our child if we knew the world was watching? Or how about an argument with our spouse or parent or friend? How differently might we talk if we knew others were witnessing our behavior at that moment? Or what about our business decisions? Or our financial decisions? Or our judgments of other people? How might they change if others could look right in and see what we were up to?

The wisdom of the Kotzker can help us. Might we try this year to behave always under the assumption that our sins will be revealed for all to see – and then watch as our behavior falls much more closely into line with our highest ideals and values?

Text #2 – another jewel of Chasidic wisdom, this one from the legendary Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. He points out that on Rosh Hashanah at Tashlich, we cast our sins into the waters, but on Sukkot, just two weeks later, we are to sing these words of the prophet Isaiah: “With joy, shall you draw waters from the wells of salvation.” (Isaiah 17:3) For the Rebbe, this carried a clear message – those sins... drifting around in the waters after we tossed them there... they're still waiting for us a couple weeks later. They don't vanish in the water. They can't be made simply to disappear. So when we draw waters with joy, as Isaiah teaches, on the festival of Sukkot, it's not just some pure H2O we're gathering. The sins are floating around in there... and gathering them is supposed to bring us joy.

Now, that turns the whole custom of Tashlich on its head. Many of you were there with us on Rosh Hashanah afternoon, Lifeguard Tower #7 at Will Rogers State Beach, where now hundreds of our congregants gather each year to participate in the ancient ritual of Tashlich – of metaphorically casting our sins into the Pacific Ocean. We have a brief ritual. We sing a song or two about repentance. We offer a few prayers. And then, as penitent individuals, surrounded by many others on the same journey of self-exploration, each of us privately considers the parts of ourselves which we most wish to transcend, and then we toss bread crumbs – symbolic manifestations of those weaknesses – into the sea. And we stare into that vast expanse, witnessing its massive power, envisioning its capacity to engulf those tiny crumbs of sin and make them disappear.

The Rebbe of Berdichev says, “Not so fast.” Sure, it would be great if we could just throw our worst tendencies away – and make them stay away. What a wonderful solution to the cognitive dissonance plaguing us about ourselves. But any good environmentalist will tell you that whatever we put into the water, we’ll end up taking out of the water. So why not embrace the teaching of the Rebbe? Why not go back a couple of weeks from now and gather up all the ugliness we’re attempting to toss away in this sanctuary on this Yom Kippur... and do so with joy?

Now, we might buy everything about that teaching... except for the joy part. What on earth would be joyful about going back to the ocean, or to this sanctuary, or just into the deepest recesses of our souls and collecting all the sins we are trying to rid ourselves of on this Day of Atonement? Where’s the joy in that? Well, that’s where text #3 comes in. It’s the story of the great Talmudic sage, Resh Lakish, who was celebrated as a man who sinned grievously and repented. According to Rabbenu Tam, one of the great medieval rabbinic masters, Resh Lakish was already a renowned scholar before he became a contemptible thief. And there he was, wallowing as a criminal, when Rabbi Yochanan, about whom I spoke on Rosh Hashanah, came to see him. And he convinced him to repent – not just to admit his descent into thievery, not just to wish it away, but to stand down that demon and change his life. And he did it. And thereafter, Resh Lakish became an even greater sage than he had been before becoming a criminal. He was now a better scholar than ever. Now, how did that happen? He certainly wasn’t deepening his knowledge of Torah while he was out stealing from people. What made him greater after sinning than he had been before sinning?

It was sin itself. And therein lies the joy of gathering up all the misdeeds and misbehaviors we’d rather just trash on this Yom Kippur. You see, pretending we can trash them is not only a disservice to those we hurt through our weakness... it’s a disservice to us. We remain less than we are destined to be. We rob ourselves of the joy of self-transcendence – of seeing ourselves rise to the glory of which we are capable. When we tolerate our basest inclinations and habits... when we sadly accept them as a part of who we are... when we explain them away, or defend them as less shameful than the inadequacies we observe in others, or deny their collision with the noble self-portrait

we have painted in our heart of hearts, we deny ourselves the very awakening that we humans like to call wisdom.

A man travels many miles to consult the wisest guru in the land. When he arrives, he asks the wise man, “Oh, wise guru, what is the secret of a happy life?”

“Good judgment,” says the guru.

“But, oh, wise guru,” says the man, “how do I achieve good judgment?”

“Bad judgment,” says the guru.

There is no shortcut to greatness. And no amount of chest-beating here will get the job done. If we come back next year and sit in this same space, and we wither before the very same items on those sin lists in the prayer books, this exercise of Yom Kippur will have become nothing more than a permission slip to sin – a warm blanket of two measly days worth of guilt with which to comfort ourselves as we remain locked in the habits of yesterday. But if instead, we gather up all of this torment, all of this shame, and with joy, stand down those demons and change our lives, our sins can produce greatness in us. They can make us better than ever before.

I don’t know which sin or sins on the list really hit you right between the eyes. But I know the ones that do it for me – the ones that tell the truth about me. And you know exactly which ones tell the real truth about you. They’re the ones you spent last Yom Kippur agonizing over... and the one before that... and now this one. But it doesn’t have to be next one.

This year – all year – let us go back to the ocean, and draw in the truth, and taste the joy of becoming greater than ever before.

*Written collaboratively with my study partner, Rabbi Josh Zweiback, Director of the Year-in-Israel Program of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.*



## A Sermon for Yom Kippur Morning, 5770, September 28, 2009

Rabbi Leonard I. Beerman

Imagining this day, imagining that we would return to this space which has been our home since April of 1963, imagining that it would not be the same home we left just a year ago, imagining that here again we would be ushering in a new year, a new beginning, and that I would be standing here to speak, the first thought that entered my cluttered mind was of the very first beginning, the beginning as recounted by the writers of the book of Genesis, and about a single word in a tiny book I have cherished over the years, called *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, written by Mark Twain more than a hundred years ago as a love offering to his wife, Olivia, Livvy, who was dying.

“This new creature with the long hair is a good deal in the way,” Adam says on the first day of his diary. “I wish it would stay with the other animals”... Cloudy today,.. think we shall have rain.... WE? Where did I get that word? I remember now—the new creature uses it.”

Later, Eve writes in her diary: “I followed the other Experiment around, at a distance, to see what it might be for, if I could. I think it is a man. I had never seen a man, but it looked like one. .. It has frowzy hair and blue eyes, and looks like a reptile. It has no hips, it tapers like a carrot; when it stands, it spreads itself apart like a derrick; so I think it is a reptile, though it may be architecture.”

Architecture. Yes, that’s what did it, that word, architecture. I suppose it is inevitable that this particular holy day season will have to do with architecture, and also inevitable that the opinions we have about our newly revised sanctuary will be as varied as our members in their habits and in their tastes. This is the way it was when we moved here in April of 1963. And this is as it should be now. We all have a stake in this place. We have waited for it. We have worked for it. We have contributed to it, or will, I trust, soon contribute to it, and generously, I hope. We should care about it, every corner of it. And obviously, we do.

It will not happen for some time, but eventually we shall come to understand that although a hole is to dig, a synagogue is not just to look at. Looking, a very important faculty, to be sure, is, after all, an exercise of the visual sense. There were some early Christian theologians who believed that Christians could more effectively be shaped by architecture than by Holy Scripture. That one could learn more about humility by looking at something beautiful in the church than by studying the Gospels. We Jews have never indulged in these ideas. For us, a synagogue can be quite inspiring in its beauty, and yet it is not primarily for looking. It is for praying, for learning, for feeling, for thinking, for doing, for being challenged to do, to act, to act in behalf of the values which a synagogue is meant to embody, to assert, and to inspire. For we surely realize, as Alain de Button once wrote, that architecture, even the finest architecture, “may indeed contain moral messages, but we know that it has no power to enforce them.”

Well, as you can see, no more blue and purple, or magenta to agitate us here, as they did to so many of our members when they first entered the sanctuary forty-six years ago. These new colors are gentler to the eye; I hope not to the mind. The doors of the ark, the eternal light, still here; for the distracted and the bored, our architect, Fred Fischer, preserving and yet elaborating on a Leo Baeck Temple tradition, has provided you with the comfort of the 116 squares, and even made them easier to count. My hands on this lectern, can still feel the hands of the celebrated woodmaker who carved the wood and made it, and the pews he designed for you, my friend, Sam Maloof, who died at 93 just a few months ago.

“Renovation,” they call it. According to the O.E.D., “to renew materially, to repair; to restore lost in damaged parts; to create anew.” And it gives as an example Shelley’s words – “surviving still the imperishable change that renovates the world.” That’s our temple. That us as Jews, is it not? Surviving still the imperishable change that renovates the world.

Once more we have been drawn here by the extraordinary power of this holy day. It is so good to be here with you, so good to hear the walls of this place reverberate with your voices at prayer. This day speaks to us – always has and will – it speaks to our very human condition in a stunning and profound way. This day affirms one of the great insights of the Jewish heritage, so simple, that it is almost embarrassing to repeat. And that is, that we are so constructed as human beings that we lack moral consistency. The resolutions we make are not always resolutions. The promises often promises unkept. That we are good, but not always as good as we think; we all need a little mending. And something more: that evil, one uncomfortable to acknowledge reality, evil, is a constant in our lives. And evil it is not only to be found in the brutes, and butchers, and monsters of

history, of whom our people has known too much; and in the *ganovim*, the ruthless thieves of whom our people may have produced too many; it can also be found in the blameless men and women who are not capable of great evil.

That is to say, evil is not only in the extravagant sins, but also in the sins of decent human beings like you and me, the sins of Jews and Christians and Muslims, people of other faiths, and people of no faith – the sins of inertia, the sins of those who feel no pressing urge to change their minds or their hearts or their habits, the sins of those morally blameless people, the innocent ones, caught up in the impersonal forces that direct our destinies; people like us, who often feel that we are not the makers of history but its victims. And yet somehow, and enigmatically, the struggle with the evil instinct, said the Besht, Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic movement, more than 300 years ago, the struggle with the *yetzer harah*, the evil instinct, can beautify the soul.

So, if we can come to this day with the seriousness of purpose it wants to evoke in us, it can be a profound experience. If we are not literal but free with its liturgy and its pageantry, responding to the prayer and music, open to their suggestions and the many moods they provoke, then we may encounter some of the awe, and some of the joy of these Yomim Noraim, days of fear or awe, as they are called. Here there is a place, an honorable place, for a mighty landscape of feelings – guilt, love and grief, pride and humility, and gratitude. But do remember: this is a day designed to prick the numb or slumbering conscience, to make it hurt at least a little bit, on the assumption that an awakened conscience is what makes a human being, what makes a woman or a man more nearly a companion of God.

Where are the places in my life, in your life, where we need to arouse a numb or slumbering conscience?

Well now, I reached this point in the preparation of this sermon, and paused to ask myself: So, where do you want to go with this sermon, Leonard? Why not surprise those in the congregation who still remember who you are, and talk about something spiritual, or something very personal ; celebrate sensation, or celebrate the congregation for its truly marvelous energy and dynamism – and the Jewish people, and Israel? Or, have you thought about baseball – you and Joan are such baseball fanatics. And especially with the Dodgers about to win the Western Division. Baseball is a great metaphor for Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is all about failure, and baseball is a game of failure; the very best batters fail two out of three times. And yet, at the same time, “baseball is the perfect metaphor for hope in a Democratic society.” And remember what Richard Greenberg wrote in his play,

*Take Me Out:* “baseball is better than Democracy or at least Democracy the way it’s practiced in this country – for unlike Democracy, baseball acknowledges loss. And while conservatives will tell you, leave things alone and no one will lose, and liberals will tell you that intervene a lot, and no one will lose, baseball says, someone will lose. And not only *says* it, insists upon it. So that baseball achieves the tragic vision that Democracy evades, evades and embodies. Democracy is lovely, but baseball is more mature.”

Or you might even take this opportunity denounce that secret anti-Semite – as someone has called him – Judge Richard Goldstone- who behind the façade of courage he once displayed as an opponent of apartheid in South Africa, and having served as chief prosecutor of the international courts in the trials of Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and behind the pretense of being a Zionist, has now revealed his true bias, for in 574 pages of examination, reaffirming the revelations of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and Israeli human rights organizations, he has condemned Israel and Hamas for war crimes committed in Gaza, and he has had the unmitigated hutzpah to call upon them both to conduct independent investigations of their behavior, or face the possibility a trial before the International Court.

Or why not get away from that raucous stuff, and just read that poem by Richard Wilbur, perfect for Yom Kippur, the one with rhyming couplets, with the word in it you had to look up—*fatuities*—utterly stubborn smug foolishness?

*At my age, one begins/ To chalk up all his sins,/ Hoping to wipe the slate/ Before it is too late.// Therefore I call to mind/ All memories of the kind/ that make me wince and sweat/ And tremble with regret.// What do these prove to be?/ In every one I see/ Shocked faces that alas/ Now know me for an ass.// Fatuities that I/ Have uttered, drunk or dry,/ Return now in a rush/ And make my old cheek blush.// But how do I repent/ From mere embarrassment?/ Damn-foolishness can't well/ Entitle me to Hell.// Well, I shall put the blame/ On the pride that's in my shame./ Of that I must be shriven/ If I'm to be forgiven*

Is that it? Is that all you have to say about that conscience Yom Kippur is supposed to awaken? What about the moral disaster of the wars in which we are so stubbornly engaged, and from which, I hope, our president will have the courage, not to expand the war, but to extricate us? And what of the economic crisis which has permitted the vaunted free-market economy—the dominant religion of America-- to crush the lives of millions of our people, consigning them into the humiliation of unemployment, and sending so many others howling with fear and confusion and anger, vile anger.

And what of Israel and its recent cruel and unsuccessful wars? 1387  
Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the three weeks of Operation Cast  
Led. Of these 773 did not take part in the hostilities, including 320 under the age  
of 18, and 109 women over the age of 18. Of those killed, 330 took part in the  
hostilities, and 248 were Palestinian police officers, most of whom were killed in  
aerial bombings of police stations on the first day of the operation.

As for the Palestinians, they killed 9 Israelis during the operation: 3 civilians  
and one member of the Israel Defense Force by rockets fired into southern Israel,  
and 5 soldiers in the Gaza Strip. And in addition to the nine, another 4 soldiers  
were killed by friendly fire

320 under the age of 18. I must not forget. I must tell you this: I returned  
home last week after the Rosh Hashanah morning service, to find an email from  
Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish. Izzeldin Abuelaish, some of you may remember, is the  
Palestinian gynecologist, who travelled weekly from his home in Gaza to a Tel  
Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv, where he had a part time position. Passing through  
the Erez crossing in Gaza, making his way through the check points, where he had  
become well-known, he delivered Israeli and Palestinian babies, and then returned  
home every weekend to care for patients in the Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza. His  
wife had died of cancer just a year ago in September, leaving him with their eight  
children. Four months after her death, the Israeli army, responding to years of  
rocket attacks by Hamas, which were traumatizing so many in southern Israel,  
began a massive bombing of Gaza. Abuelaish didn't dare to risk the life of his  
children by leaving his home. So it was that on January 16 of this year, an Israeli  
tank fired shells into the home of Dr. Abuelaish. Two of his children were  
wounded; three of his daughters were killed, and a niece with them.

Abuelaish, screaming in agony at the horror, made more horrible by what  
the shells had done to the bodies his children, called his Israeli friend, a television  
journalist, Shlomi Eldar, who took his call in the midst of a broadcast on live  
television; the screaming voice of the doctor, crying out to Allah, begging for help,  
could be heard all over Israel, and soon through YouTube, all over the world. This  
was the only direct experience of the impact of the war on the people of Gaza that  
Israelis were able to see, unless they were watching Al Jazeera, since Israel had  
barred all news coverage from Gaza. A day later, a cease fire was declared.

In April, Abuelaish came to Los Angeles, and I was invited to have lunch  
with him and three others, at the home of my friend Stanley Sheinbaum, my friend  
Rabbi Steven Jacobs was among them. I came to our meeting with the greatest  
hesitation, uneasy, anxious, about how you approach a man who had just suffered

such an excruciating loss. But to our amazement, far from being overcome with grief, we found him consumed with a passion for peace and love, and our common humanity. Now, ten days ago, came this email from him:

*Dear Leonard*

*From all of my heart I wish you and your family a bright and happy new year. A year of happiness,.. and peaceful moments; May this year open up many more opportunities for us to think wisely and collaborate and live in partnership and peace. Be sure that our people both Palestinians and Israelis are in my heart and prayers. Wishing all of you ... a blessed and joyous year filled with peace and prosperity. We have so much in common in humanity... I pray to celebrate our success of achieving a real peace among all of us soon and open our eyes, hearts and minds with love to each other.*

The message came not from Gaza, but from Toronto. Dr. Abuelaish had accepted a position on the faculty of the School of Public Health at the University of Toronto, just days before the bombing occurred. The Toronto Globe and Mail reported, last week, that his five children, two boys and three girls, ages 7 to 19 – have been adjusting remarkably well. They're making friends, and getting invited to birthday parties with the neighborhood children. In fact, the first thing his new neighbors did, when it became evident their children were becoming fast friends, was to pry off several boards of the wooden fence dividing their properties, to make it easier to cross from one to the other.

For a man who had to pass through Israeli checkpoints to get to work, the imagery isn't lost. "This is what neighbors do in Canada," he said.

No such thing occurs for the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza who continue to live in a veritable cage. Since the Hamas victory in the election three and a half years ago, Israel has subjected the people of Gaza to an increasingly intolerable blockade that restricts their ability to import food and fuel, building materials, corrupting the water system and sanitation facilities on frequent occasions. As a result there has been almost a total collapse of the economy, contributing to already high levels of unemployment and poverty and rising levels of malnutrition among children. In response to these dire conditions, I joined a minyan of rabbis (including Rabbi Jacobs and Rabbi Haim Beliak) who felt that we must break the silence in the Jewish community, that we would engage in a monthly fast to express our conviction that we could no longer stand idly by Israel's heartless collective punishment. More than 70 rabbis and 800 others, non-Jews among them, have now joined in this fast for Gaza in which we call for a lifting of the blockade, for providing a free flow humanitarian and developmental aid. And we call upon Israel, the U.S, and the international community to engage in

negotiations without pre-conditions with all relevant Palestinian parties - including Hamas. And we encourage our own government to engage vigorously both Israelis and Palestinians toward a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

At this stage of preparation, prowling around my disorganized files a few weeks ago, I came upon a pamphlet containing a series of lectures given in 1950 by Dr. Leo Baeck, (the great and brilliant German rabbi after whom our congregation has been named) at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. His subject, "Judaism, the Jew and the State of Israel." It also included the questions asked of him and his answers. "What can we in America do in order to keep Israel from becoming a mere state?" was one of the questions. And, "What do you think will be the nature of the Judaism emanating from America?"

Baeck's answer was astounding to me, in that he, a relative newcomer to American discourse, displayed a remarkable understanding of American history and of the place of religion in the development of American character. "All religious confessions in America," he said, "are somehow and somewhat like denominations of a fundamental faith that is called America. This American character has proved to be one of the most penetrating agents in human history. And this character has been formed by concurrent forces, by the colonial adventure and experiment, which very often at the same time were spiritual adventures and experiments. ...And it has produced an American Jewishness, Jews, really Jews having the American features: combining the sense of independence and the sense of union; agreeing to differ and to be different, in order to agree; judiciously, generously faithfully, safeguarding the old, and greeting the new; stating the particular and receiving and embracing any universality; true to the peculiar, and wide open to humanity. "This," Baeck said, is the character of American Judaism, this is the nature of the Judaism emanating from America; and this is 'what American Jews can do in order to keep Israel from becoming a mere State.'"

"Our people in Israel," Baeck continued, "have had to fight for their existence, their freedom...They are forced to turn inward and be self-centered and thereby concentrate on the State in the narrow sense of the word. And that is the danger that is always in man's way, that the obsession of today may become the habit of tomorrow. In this the American Jew can do very much by remaining true to himself, and by helping to keep open in Israel both the way and the mind, that Israel may not merely be a State, and that we may always be conscious that it is impossible to think of Judaism without thinking of mankind, just as we cannot think of mankind without thinking about Judaism."

Leo Baeck's message to us; mine to you. Surviving still the imperishable change that renovates the world

N.B. A final footnote: Specifically excluding the circumstance of leaving the Temple parking lot to enter Sepulveda Boulevard, about which our Temple President has repeatedly cautioned us, it is my wish that when given the opportunity to choose, you will turn left, for as our late and greatly lamented friend William Sloane Coffin reminded us with the title of his final book *The Heart is a Little to the Left*, near the heart, that is the most congenial place for us to be. Even the Torah told us this morning: "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, nor too remote. It is not in heaven...Nor is it beyond the sea...No, it is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, and you can do it."

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**Rabbi Kenneth Chasen**

**“When Does It End?”**

**Yizkor Yom Kippur 5770      September 28, 2009**

“When does it end?” she asked.

It was *Oneg Shabbat*. Standing in the middle of the Social Hall, the room pulsing with spirited conversation, Deena stood alone, a barely sipped coffee cup in her hand. Minutes earlier, we had recited *Kaddish*, and her beloved Arthur’s name was on the list. It was the second anniversary of his death. *Yahrzeit*. An indicator of the passage of time. One full year beyond the unveiling service, which signified the end of formal mourning. Two years beyond that awful afternoon of farewell. She stood alone in a crowded room, teeming with life.

“When does it end?” she asked – knowing, of course, that no satisfying answer would be forthcoming.

I was only two years into my rabbinate at the time. Deena’s husband was among the first congregants whose funerals I would officiate. So her journey of living with loss became, in many ways, the looking glass through which I would learn how to perform the mitzvah of *nichum avelim*, of comforting the mourner. With Deena, I watched it all – the final weeks of clinging to hope, and then tearfully abandoning it... the wistful final days in which every breath, every movement, every touch was bursting with forever significance... the stunning moment of parting, for which there is no preparation, no matter how inevitable its arrival may be... the surreal first weeks of aloneness, when it seemed like he would surely walk back through that door sooner or later... the long march of the months, awakening to absence... and the slow learning to live without. And then, at last, with the passing of years, a longing for the end – of the pain which had become an unrelenting ache... of the emotional torment, refueled by every *simcha* missed, every story unshared, every embrace craved but undelivered.

“When does it end?” she asked.

Our vain pursuit of a finish line to our marathon of mourning is well described by the poet, Edward Hirsch, who wrote:

Give me back my father walking the halls  
of Wertheimer Box and Paper Company  
with sawdust clinging to his shoes.

Give me back his tape measure and his keys  
his drafting pencil and his order forms;  
give me his daydreams on lined paper.

I don't understand this uncontainable grief.  
whatever you had that never fit,  
whatever else you needed, believe me,

my father, who wanted your business,  
would squat down at your side  
and sketch you a container for it.

The poet's father – the container-maker – taught his son that everything can be held in something. But with Dad gone, he discovers that grieving is the exception to that rule. No container can be invented for it. There is no specified time frame that can hold it, no place in the heart, no chamber in the bank of memory. No matter what you try to fit it into, the grief comes spilling out, often when you least expect it, and sometimes when you are ill equipped to cope with the mess.

Sure, we would be relieved if we could set boundaries around our bereavements – allow them, after a certain time, only to hurt when we permit it, such as at services like this one, which arrive at their appointed times on the Jewish calendar. We could prepare for that. It would be a relief... but in truth, we should ask ourselves: Would we actually choose such a thing, even if we could?

The messiness of our grief – its resistance to easy containment – is what invites our departed loved ones to show up in every corner of our lives. We can hear, sometimes through the din of our weeping, the counsel they offer as we face new and difficult choices – we know what they're telling us. We can still smell her favorite perfume as we get dressed to go out without her. We can feel upon our fingertips the whiskers on his cheek as we miss embracing him in the morning. The sound of her laughter eclipses our own when we know that she'd find the joke even funnier than we do. We see the blueness of his eyes in our own child's eyes – and the quirky mannerisms that were clearly bequeathed two generations on... how his granddaughter nervously drums her fingers on the table, just like Grandpa did. And when we need someone to temper our sharp edges that need rounding off, or to rebuke us in our moments of weakness, we can count on them still to deliver the needed message, for we can hear them despite the stillness of their lips. We couldn't escape their message even if we tried. And even those

traits with which we struggled mightily – their anger, their cynicism, their stubbornness or neglect – something is now sacred about that, too, as we battle daily to hold fast to it all... the last vestiges of a life too precious ever to surrender.

And so, they visit us at will, often catching us unprepared. And we welcome their arrival, even when it hurts. That is the odd paradox of mourning. Our potent, frequent memories of our departed ones make them feel both closer and further away. And that is the reason we actually cleave to the pain – for there is no more encountering them without missing them. The pain is married to the memory, whether we like it or not. The loved ones we grieve are now both light and darkness in our lives, and we don't get to enjoy the one without enduring the other. But isn't it worth it – to shed a few more bitter tears, to let in the primal pain of separation, in order to unleash in our lives the wondrous, persisting influence of those who so changed us... and still can?

Leon Wieseltier, who wrote about his first year of mourning his father in his book, *Kaddish*, tells the following story: “When I left the shul this evening, I walked over to the park. The heavy summer air was filled with fireflies, hundreds of them, burning and vanishing, burning and vanishing. The park was a field of floating, passing intensities. I sat for a while and watched the little eruptions of brilliance. Wherever I looked, it was the beginning and the ending of light. No light lasted long, but there was not a moment of total darkness. This, I thought, is another ideal of illumination.”

This hour of *Yizkor* is for embracing that alternate ideal of illumination – for seeing in our grief not just the ending of light, but also an endless array of new beginnings... for recognizing that we will never be surrounded by total darkness, not so long as the sparks of memory can dance upon the surface of our senses, making our departed ones real to us once again, and enabling us to make them real to our children and grandchildren.

“When does it end?” Deena asked.

And the answer, we know: Sadly and joyfully, it does not. There will be darkness in their absence. This, we already know. The holes in our hearts will remain. But with loyalty and with love, we will not be scared away by the dark. At this hour of memorial, we will renew our commitment to push back the darkness with those little eruptions of brilliance that bring our departed loved ones close enough once again almost to touch. That is the promise we make to them when we speak the *Kaddish* in their names.

Their legacies are ours to sustain. They enter tomorrow through us. Let us give them to tomorrow.