

Yom Kippur Day 5780
Paid In Full
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Last night, Cantor Bach, our *shlichah tzibur*, our liaison to God, chanted *Kol Nidre* beautifully on our behalf, praying God forgive us the vows we will make this year that will undoubtedly be broken in the year ahead. Pledges to be gentler, kinder, less materialistic, less addicted to technology, more supportive...each of can fill in the blank. Let's face it, many of those pledges didn't even accompany us out of this, Great Hall. Do any of those pledges warrant inscription in the Book of Life? What are our bargaining chips with God. What pledge can we give to God that will redound in God's ultimate blessing?

We see our short-comings vividly reflected in the holiness of this day. No one is perfect. Each of us has our frailties. Each of us has known defeat. On *Yom Kippur*, we not only recognize our own frailty, but we acknowledge it publically with each pound on the chest while echoing the words of *Ashamnu*--we indeed have missed the mark. We peer into our own brokenness--our personal suffering--and pray we emerge at sunset today, more whole, more sensitive, more human.

Bryan Stevenson in his book *Just Mercy* wrote, "We are all broken by something, We have all hurt someone and been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness is not equivalent. Sometimes we're fractured by the choices we make; sometimes we're shattered by things we would never have chosen. But our brokenness is the source of our common humanity, the basis for our shared search for comfort, meaning and healing. Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion. We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken nature and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion and as a result, deny our own humanity." And let me add, when we deny our own humanity, we deny God's existence in the world.

According to *Brachot* 9:5, "A person is duty-bound to utter a benediction for the bad even as they are duty-bound to utter one for the good." According to *Brachot* 60b, both blessings should be recited with equal joy. How can this be? How can we equally bless God for both life's goodness and the pain and suffering we endure? The pain and hurt remind us that we are human. Loss of loved ones is the price of our love, and even at our most vulnerable, loneliest moments, we offer gratitude for the gift of love that also brings pain. Sometimes our pain is the portal to deeper self-awareness and nurtures our humanity for others' suffering. Emotional pain can be transformed into love. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai stated that Israel received three precious gifts from God, and each was given through suffering: The Torah--out of our slavery from Egypt, the land of Israel through the wanderings of the desert, and the World to Come through our suffering."

Indeed this past year has been wrought with personal disappointments and challenges. AND it's been a tough year as Americans. Many of us, to quote Rosa Parks, are tired, tired tired. How do we stand before God this day? Knowing how far our country has moved away from civility--how deep political divisions are like an earthquake swallowing up our humanity--what merits do we bring before God?

The following story, *Paid in Full*, told by Rabbi Go'el Elkarif, who allegedly heard it from the person himself, gives us direction this day.

“There was a fellow who owned a jewelry store in Israel. One day a nine year old girl walked into the store and said, “I am here to buy a bracelet.” She looked through the glass cases and pointed to a bracelet that was more than 10,000 shekels--\$ 3,000 dollars. The man behind the counter asked her, “You want to buy that bracelet?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Wow, you have very good taste. Who do you want to buy it for?”

“For my older sister.”

“Oh that is so nice!” the storekeeper replied. “Why do you want to buy your older sister this bracelet?”

“Because I don’t have a mother or father,” the little girl said, “and my older sister takes care of us. So we want to buy her a present, and I’m willing to pay for it.” She pulled out of her pocket a whole bunch of coins that totaled just under eight shekels, a little less than two dollars.

The fellow says, “Wow! That’s exactly what the bracelet costs!” While wrapping up the bracelet he said to the girl, “You write a card to your sister while I wrap the bracelet.” He finished wrapping the bracelet, wiped away his tears, and handed the little girl the bracelet.

A few hours later the older sister entered the store. “I’m terribly embarrassed,” she said. “My sister should not have come here. She shouldn’t have taken it without paying.” “What are you talking about?” the storekeeper asked.

“What do you mean? This bracelet costs thousands of shekels. My little sister doesn’t have thousands of shekels – she doesn’t even have ten shekels! Obviously she didn’t pay for it.”

“You couldn’t be more wrong,” the storekeeper replied. “She paid me in full. She paid seven shekel, eighty agurot, and a broken heart. I want to tell you something. I am a widower. I lost my wife a number of years ago. People come into my store every single day. They come in and buy expensive pieces of jewelry, and all these people can afford it.

When your sister walked in, for the first time in so very long since my wife had died, I once again felt what love means.”

He gave her the bracelet and wished her well.

“During the High Holy Days, we come to the Almighty and we want to buy something very expensive. We want to buy life, but we cannot afford it. We don’t have enough money to pay for it. We don’t have the merits. *We are broken.*

So we come to the Almighty and we empty out our pockets, giving God whatever merits we have plus promises for the future.. I’ll pick up the phone and call someone who is lonely, I will learn an extra five minutes of Torah, I will be kind and I will be scrupulous about not speaking *lashon hara* (gossip) for one hour a day.

The Almighty says, “You don’t know how long it’s been since I’ve felt what love means.” God sees how much we love our Creator, and how much we yearn to improve, and God says, “You know what? You have touched my heart. Here it is, paid in full.”

The Jewish people's key affirmation of faith is the Shema--in which we acknowledge God's uniqueness--God's Oneness. On this Day of Atonement--we seek to be At One with ourselves and God. The second line of the Shema affirms God's eternity: Praised be God's glorious name and dominion forever and ever. And the very next phrase places us on the path to finding that Oneness... *V'ahavta et Adonai b'chol l'vavcha, u'v'chol nafsh'cha u've chol m'odecha*. "You shall love *Adonai* your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." So how, on this *Yom Kippur* Day do we show our love to God? What is our most precious bargaining chip? What can we collectively pledge this day, that demonstrates our love for God, that merits God's love for us? In the *V'ahavta*, we also read, the words inscribed on our Blessings Canopy--*V'shinantam L'vanecha*--you shall teach the *mitzvot* to your children. Even when we are tired and broken...when we don't have sufficient merit chips in our pockets...we must nurture our most precious gift to God--our children...the generation standing in our shadow while we are in flight. Not in the way, Abraham almost sacrificed his son, rather, in inspiring them to carry on when we stumble and fall. Children possessing idealism and tenacity, who pick up the mantle justice and love when we are tired and broken. In *Taanit 7a*, Rabbi Chanina taught, "I have learned much from my teachers. I have learned more from my colleagues than my teachers. But I have learned more from my students than from all of them." Indeed, youth are inspiring teachers and agents of good, emulating God's mercy and compassion in our world.

Last night I spoke about racism in our country--past and present. During the tumultuous years of the Civil Rights Movement, when fire bombings and lynchings were routine, it was youth who stepped forward and said--*Hineinu*--here we are, send us as non-violent protectors of liberty and justice. The Freedom Riders of the 1960s--those hundreds of mostly college students and young adults, black and white, put their lives at risk for social change. James Lawson, a member of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) wrote, "Through non violence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance disapiates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supercedes systems of gross social immorality." And Professor Raymond Arsenault, professor of Southern history reflected, "The Riders' dangerous passage through the bus terminals and jails of the Jim Crow South represented only one part of an extended journey for justice that stretched back to the dawn of American history and beyond. But once that passage was completed, there was renewed hope that the nation would eventually finds its way to a true and inclusive democracy." During the *Aleh Ezkara* -- *these we remember* section of our service this afternoon, we will recall the lives of the 3 freedom riders, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney, who were murdered on June 21, 1965 in Mississippi.

I'm certain, many in this sanctuary have participated in marches and protests. On April 30, 1970--decades before social media's impact--I was one of the 4 million students that shut down 450 universities and high schools, protesting President Nixon's sending troops to Cambodia. As a rabbi, I was arrested in Washington protesting for Soviet Jewry--a case that actually impacted an easing of emmigration from the FSU. And a part of me today is tired...jaded. That is why I went down to Foley Square on September 20 for the Global Climate Strike. The numbers of students of every ethnicity and social class--all shoulder to shoulder--voices screeching til hoarse with chants that inspired generations of protestors in decades past. Signs, mostly hand-made and recyclable--delivered a singular message: The current generation in power--My generation--OUR generation has messed up--youth today demand a voice and a role in preserving our planet. Why did I go the climate strike march? Initially not for me--but to

show that the old and the young, as the prophet Joel said, can dream dreams and see visions together. In the end, though, it was the students teaching me--that hope is passed *l'dor va'dor* – from the new generation to the old--indeed, they injected hope back into me. And Greta Thunberg--who had the *chutzpah* to stare down the president of our country and other world leaders at the U.N.--I truly hope she receives the Time's Person of the Year award--not for her *chutzpah*, but because the title is awarded "to the person who has done the most to influence the events of the year." May the nations of the world heed her plea and warning, and pass laws to change our planet's implosion. As Greta recently said, the fact that she and others are targets of political leaders' attacks, is the clearest indication youth are succeeding in rallying the world for climate justice. And the message for climate justice lives with Village Temple youth as well. Yes, middle school and high school students were part of the historic Battery Park gathering...but even those in elementary school know our planet is at risk. As many here know, this year, we held two children's services on *Rosh Hashanah*. The second was for children ages 8 to 11. We began the service talking about love. How do we show love for our parents? How do our parents show their love for us? How do we love each other...siblings friends? How, on the birthday of the world do we show our love for the earth? The response were beautiful...listening to and respecting parents, being nice to each, parents taking care of us, keeping us safe. One young boy, in response to showing love for our planet, cried out, "REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE." I pointed out that all their responses were the formula for how we show our love for God.

And what about the students of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School? Less than 6 weeks after the massacre, these, still traumatized students, organized the 'March for our Lives' in Washington. I and members of our congregation were there--and it was an emotional and powerful experience. But more than that--it was impactful.

According to a Pew report (August 2, 2018: After Parkland, States Pass 50 New Gun-Control Laws), in August 2018, "Something familiar happened in American in February: A gunman walked into a school, and shot and killed 17 students and staff in a horrific act of violence. But then something unfamiliar happened: State legislators--inspired by a movement led by the student survivors of that mass shooting...started passing legislation to restrict gun access...States across the country, including 14 with Republican governors, enacted 50 new laws restricting access to guns" in the wake of the Parkland massacre. "And in 2019, 47 more gun safety bills have been passed in 22 states and Washington D.C." (Giffords Courage to Fight Gun Violence) It was after Parkland, that Walmart stopped selling firearms and ammunition to people under the age of 21. And, the recent shootings last month at two Walmart stores, pushed Walmart to ban all sales of specific types of ammunition and banning 'open carry' of firearms even in states where it is legal. (CNBC, Sept. 3, 2019, Lauren Thomas, *Walmart plans to dramatically step Back from ammunition sales after horrific shootings*). The Parkland students' voices, now joined by adult victims at Walmart, like the *Shofar* blast, aroused Walmart CEO Doug McMillion out of his complacency.

And lastly, indeed, there is a cloud of racism hovering over our land and the attempts to rewrite America's history of welcome, is being challenged and rejected by many of today's youth. In August, Ken Cuccinelli, of Italian and Irish descent, when asked on NPR if Emma Lazarus's words memorialized on the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," are also a part of the American Ethos, he replied, "They certainly are: Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and

who will not become a public charge.” (BBC, Trump Official Revises Statue of Liberty poem to defend migrant rule change, Aug. 14, 2019). His words were in defense of the new ‘public charge’ requirement that ‘limit legal immigrants from seeking certain public benefits such as public housing or food aid.” Let us remember, Emma Lazarus was not an immigrant speaking for her relatives, she was a fifth generation Sephardic Jew. She was speaking for the then, current and future generations who truly make America great!

In a response to the cry for bringing immigration to a screeching halt in America, the American Jewish Historical Society, under the leadership of its executive director, Annie Polland, began an initiative called, The Emma Lazarus Project. The project includes an on-site student curriculum on Emma Lazarus. Students who attended reflected the economic, social and racial diversity of New York City. After learning about Emma Lazarus, students were then asked to imagine themselves as a 21st Century Emma. They were charged: “If you could write a poem for the Statue of Liberty today, what would it say? Think about an issue important to you and write about it--a message for newly arriving immigrants.” Let me share one inspiring poem written by Sophie Goldensohn:

*For all her storied strength, Lady Liberty weeps as she stands,
As what she symbolizes is crushed to dust in politicians hands,
She cries, for she can no longer shelter,
The exiles and immigrants as their truest protector,
The strength of the government is one stronger than she,
And she can't stop them, no matter how pressing the need be,
Behind her expressionless mask lies a face of frown lines and sorrow,
As she is forced to worry for the refugee's uncertain tomorrow,
She hopes for a brighter future, where America will, at last,
Have a chance to return to it's open-armed past,
But for now, she stands sobbing, one thing clear,
She is the shell of an era past, an outdated souvenir.*

We must not allow our children to be as tired, tired, tired... jaded, jaded, jaded as we have become. We have to inspire them, despite our weariness, to be brave, brave, brave. *L'shinantam L'vanech*--we need to teach and model for our children that love and not indifference, inclusion and not exclusion, must be their weapons for change. Like the girl in the jewelry store, who, reminded the storekeeper of the meaning of love, perhaps, our making that supportive pledge to the next generation will enable God to say, “You have touched my heart. Here it is, paid in full.” *Keyn Yehi Ratzon.*