

## BARB'S YOM KIPPUR MORNING SERMON 9-19-18 Shaare Tikvah

This morning I am humbled and honored to come before you on this Holiest of days to perhaps offer some insight on this awe filled day and how the themes of Yom Kippur relate to our modern day world and to us in particular.

Ten days ago we began the services of the “Days of Awe” on Rosh Hashanah with the magnificent Hineni prayer – “Here I Am”, the confession of our prayer leader, but as we listened, we also reflected personally...here I am, warts and all, but I am one in this community and I come to add my voice in prayer, to reflect and take an honest internal look, so that we may add strength and better serve this holy congregation. With this prayer in our hearts and on our lips we approached the upcoming Days of Awe.

Yom Kippur, day of atonement is mandated for us in Lev.16:29 and Lev.23:26-32 where Moses (once again as G-d’s messenger) presented this law for all time to the entirety of Israel, those standing there currently and for all the generations that follow...it is a day of total rest and physical self sacrifice, a day without everyday distractions, a day to pray and repent...Without engaging in T’fillah (prayer), T’shuvah (turning and repenting) and Tzedakah (charity), we cannot expect to achieve God’s forgiveness. As we do these things, it is crucial to remember that G-d forgives us our sins against him, but he does not forgive our sins against others until we have repented and asked their forgiveness, until we have turned, squared away and made amends for the misdeeds, wrongs and hurts we have inflicted on others. This must be done with a full heart. We must take an inventory of and full responsibility for our wrongdoings and make them right with those we have harmed. We must do this based on what we have done, but we must also be willing to forgive those who have wronged us, sometimes

this being much harder to do. As flawed individuals, our species tends to find it hard to be sorry and very slow to forgive, including forgiving ourselves, but quick to judge others, the antithesis of what G-d expects from us. But, in order to be forgiven and cleansed by God, we must forgive, we must apologize and we must abstain from judgment of others.

I look at many of the requirements of this season for Jews and sometimes see Yom Kippur as the original and practical blueprint for the 12 step anonymous programs...ownership, responsibility, amends for our words and actions that impact others negatively and hurtfully and finally a turning away from the behavior that led us to a requirement to atone and returning (Shuvah) to making choices that bring us closer to G-d, rather than distancing us from him.

This morning our Torah portion was Lev.16:1-34 and Num..29:7-11. In my adult life, I have embraced Reform Judaism and in that tradition, Deut. 29:9-14 and 30:11-30 which is Moses' revealing of God's covenant with all of Israel on the Plains of Moab immediately before being allowed to enter the promised land was read. These two traditions represent very different themes and the Torah portions diverge dramatically. Why is this significant and worth mentioning and why did the early Reformers feel the need to make the change? These 2 Torah portions are very different in what is expected of us in order to show repentance and therefore have our sins forgiven. The Leviticus portion as we read here this morning is all about sacrifice in the Temple and what is required in preparation for the person entering The Holy of Holies to make the proscribed sacrifice on our behalf and so gain forgiveness, while the Deuteronomy portion as presented to all Israel and for all time stresses personal responsibility and commitment .I personally believe that both facets are required to achieve forgiveness. We are responsible for our choices good or bad, both individually and

collectively-think Al Chet prayers, but in order to be responsible, we must also be willing to sacrifice to protect and help those less fortunate and to stand up for the principles of love, acceptance and t'kun olam...making the world a better place for all. We have been given the unique power of free will and we can choose a path to good or evil. We can follow God's commandments and have life, prosperity and blessing, or we can choose to harden our hearts, ignore or circumvent the commandments and thereby suffer the severe consequence of death.

Often we have meant to choose good over evil, but much of the time we are not successful, and so we are doomed to death...but our G-d is also a compassionate G-d and he has provided a way for us to turn back, repent and thereby reduce this severe decree. This is what Yom Kippur is all about.

Personally, I don't believe that there is a gigantic ledger in the sky that lists debits and credits and ultimately says who will live or die in the coming year, but Yom Kippur gives me an opportunity for deep introspection and reflection...am I going to live fully by being kind, compassionate, empathetic and loving...choosing good, choosing to accept responsibility for my words and actions, trying to lead a more Godly life, or am I going to let cancer of the soul permeate and let me die internally by harboring resentment, being cruel and hurtful, being guilt ridden, failing to help others and failing to try and make my world a better place, in general choosing a less desirable, evil path, a path that leads to the death of my humanness. Everyday I am called upon to make this choice, some days good wins, and sadly some days evil does. These Days of awe have reminded me of my humanness, have reminded me of my faults and the sins I am guilty of, has made me mindful of those I hurt maliciously or unintentionally and what I have to do to make things right. I, as both an individual and part of society not only need to recognize that not all I or we have done is negative, but it

is also our obligation to acknowledge that we have also done good particularly in times of adversity. We are capable of great goodness, and on this day of Yom Kippur, I hope that I have done the work necessary to gain God's forgiveness. I am hopeful on this day that we have all searched our souls truthfully, forgiven those who have harmed or hurt us, asked forgiveness of those we have hurt and made a commitment that we will try and do better in the coming year than we did in the year that is about to close.

I apologize for rambling on, but Yom Kippur is so vital to us as Jews, that I am just trying to convey its importance to me personally and to us as a community. We are sitting and praying together in a beautiful and spiritual place...who would have thought that when we moved in here that we would still be here 10 years later. I remember helping Ed, my brother set up and move in here all those years ago...and the wonderful warm, fuzzy feeling that accompanied the hanging of our "stained glass" windows and I felt the sacredness of the worship place we had created. This feeling of sacredness exists to this very day, when I enter this sanctuary. This is a place that altho I am not often here has welcomed me with open arms, a place where I am comfortable and feel G-d's presence, a sacred place of worship and peace.

My family has been involved with Shaare Tikveh for over 30 years. My nephews all had their Bar Mitzvahs here and now I have also had the great joy of seeing my grand nephew Bar Mitzvahed here and G-d willing will see my grand niece have her Bat Mitzvah here during 5779. You have supported my family thru good times and sad, have named our babies and supported us at Shiva minyans when Ed, Carol and I lost our parents. This congregation has helped support and sustained us as we have helped support and sustain you...

and for this I am grateful.

As I sat here this morning and last night, I am reminded of my home place of worship, a church that is supportive of our journey and with generosity and kindness has opened their home to our very tiny Chaverah, so we have a place to hold our worship services, High Holiday services, Shabbat dinners and Pesach sedars . For this they want nothing in return...they just feel it is the right thing to do. How wonderful. When I look about my home sanctuary, a place of worship and peace, I see a place that chooses good, that chooses to be involved, that chooses to make the world a better place. I look at the signs of love, kindness and acceptance that are seen in abundance and I see how important equality and Tzun Olam is to that congregation. I read the words on the beautiful tapestries and I am inspired..."come to the party, you're invited, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here", "We stand with our Muslim neighbors", "People of faith stand with LGBTQ equality", "Pray for peace, Work for justice" and "peace on earth and let it begin with me". These signs, their work with the food pantry and the caring for foster kids show that that congregation believes in the principles put forth in our Torah, inclusion, Tzedakah and love, this despite the very significant theological differences. We share so much more than we differ.

As I reflected on my home congregation and place of worship, I couldn't help but reflect on my association with Shaare Tikveh and the parallels that exist between this community and mine...we are both extremely small, but continue to survive and bring and maintain Judaism to our communities, despite all odds being against it. In particular, I look at the significant accomplishments of Shaare Tikveh. Your amazing congregation is to be admired and applauded. You are totally lay led (as are we) but because of the commitment and dedication of your approximately 20 member units you have managed over the past decade to garner a minyan for about 90% of your

services, a feat that so many congregations much larger are not able to attain. Your membership supports food banks and other charities. Your Sisterhood and Men's clubs are active and provide social events, dinners, Temple cleaning initiatives before Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. A kosher kitchen is maintained as is an active and vibrant book club. The last dozen years has seen the Men's Club win the Quality Unit award every year and has also provided 11 Blue Yarmulke Men of the year winners. You have won a special award for innovating the electronic yahrzeit board, have participated in the yellow candle commemoration of the Holocaust and held training sessions in laying tefillin. 2 members have served on the Regional Men's Club board and you have donated Torahs to a Hillel and a fledgling congregation, when you no longer had room for them, so as to insure that they had our most sacred scroll and could insure continuity in their communities. In addition to this you are totally egalitarian and have been for years. Your services are complete and include all the proper elements...Torah is read, Dvars or sermons at all services as well.

The High Holidays, which provide full services are a wonderful testament to how important this congregation is to its members, both present and past. This is shown in no small measure by the dedicated return every year of Steve and Marty (The Hamburg brothers) to the shul of their youth as lay leaders to provide us all with the beauty of their service acting in the roles of Cantor and Rabbi, providing us with a truly inspirational experience for the high holidays.

In a world torn by strife and divisiveness, a world at war with itself, a world of hatred, contempt, xenophobia, civil unrest, threat of war, seeing these indicators of caring, of inclusion, of respect for the things we have in common, while celebrating that which makes us different and unique is an inspiration to me. These signs portray what we as Jews need to be. We need to be a light to try and show those who have

chosen hatred over love, war over peace, separation over inclusion, that there is a better way. We need to heed G-d's commandment to try and create a better world, a world of equality, a world of peace and acceptance and let it begin with me. This is the message of Yom Kippur. We are here to help repair a broken world, both personally and as a community.

As this day draws to a close, we hope we have done as required to be sealed in the Book of Life. If we haven't or if our prayers were rote and reached no further than our lips, not touching our heart or soul, there is still time...the gates of repentance are still open. We can still sincerely repent and ask forgiveness. We have time to confess our sins and make amends, but this awesome day is drawing to a close and there is urgency to act now. Search your inner soul, do the hard work and make sure that your slate has been wiped clean.

Choose life...Let our choices individually and collectively work for good and let's make a conscious decision to weigh how our words and deeds will impact others and try and make the kinder, gentler choice, rather than the harsh and hurtful one, and together let's, by becoming more active and involved help to make our world a better place for all.

Thank you, and G'mar Hatima Tova (may we all be sealed in the Book of Life for the year 5779)