



HIGH HOLY DAY SERMONS

Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.,
Senior Rabbi

2018 - 5779

8339 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027

Table of Contents

<i>"The Voices of Tradition",</i>	Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.	pg. 3-9
<i>"Israel's Many Voices",</i>	Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.	pg. 10-19
<i>"The Quiet Voice Within: I Cannot Forgive You",</i>	Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.	pg. 20-28
<i>"The Prophetic Voice of Justice",</i>	Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.	pg. 29-38
<i>"Undiminished Voices: Listening To The Unheard Voice",</i>	Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.	pg. 39-41

High Holy Day Services are streamed online and can be found at
<https://kenesethisrael.org/stream-services-online>

"The Voices of Tradition"

Erev Rosh HaShanah ~ 2018/5779
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

About twenty-five years ago, I was invited to do a wedding in Richmond, Virginia. At the reception after the ceremony, a young man approached me. He was about 6'6", broad shouldered and had flaming red hair. In a deep Southern accent, he asked to speak with me. "Rabbi," he said drawing out both syllables, "that sure was a fine ceremony." "Thank you," I replied and added, "Have you ever been to a Jewish wedding?" I presumed the answer was "no." But then, my new giant friend replied, "Rabbi, I am Jewish. My name is Weinstein," in his southern most voice.

This year for the High Holy Days, I want to address the theme of "Finding Your Jewish Voice." We know there are all types of Jewish voices. Some of them are the voices of yesterday, some current and, although still in tiny whispers, Jewish voices of the future.

For an ever-decreasing number of us, the authentic Jewish voice is a mix of English and Yiddish or Yinglish: "Mine people!" "OY Gut!" "Vey iz mir" and more. For younger American Jews, this voice is largely unknown, although a number of Yiddish terms survive but remain unmentionable from the pulpit.

For another group of American Jews, the old voice of Judaism was a clearly American voice but a voice which included the vocabulary of synagogue life. Temple. Friday night. It was the voice of my Reform ancestors including my Sunday school teachers. "Please rise for the Shema! "May the time not be distant," etc.

In my family, the authentic Jewish voice of my childhood was more of whispered German English. It was the quiet voice of family elders who had fled from Nazi Germany. Quiet, devout, unassuming. Often spoken behind closed doors. This voice of Judaism was literally a hidden voice.

My childhood rabbi's voice was deep and devotional. His words were elegant. He could have been an FM radio announcer. It was an inspirational voice anticipated by the community, particularly on the High Holidays and much beloved.

During my teen years, Israelis provided another Jewish voice. For most of us, our first contact with spoken Hebrew came in the form of tour guides. They were Jewish cowboys. They were confident, muscular and they smoked. They had no parallel in America or in the synagogue. It was hard to believe these men were actually Jewish. They were tan in December, wore men's jewelry and their shirts wide open!

I also remember going to hear Rabbi Meir Kahane of the Jewish Defense League at the Baltimore JCC around 1970. Angry. He was a spitting and hateful man. His beard was scraggly. His open collar shirt and suit were stained. I never heard a Jewish voice like his nor like the voice of the crowd that cheered him on. It felt like a Jewish lynch mob. I was shocked, disgusted and a little bit afraid. They were the worst Jewish voices I ever heard and hope to never hear again.

There were also funny Jewish voices too – like Alan Sherman, His borsht belt humor was a big hit in my childhood home. Every new album was eagerly awaited. “Hello Mudda,” the “Drapes of Roth,” and “Harvey and Sheila” were legendary tunes. I have to admit; I still listen to them and am amazed at the complexity of their weave of Jewishness and 1960s culture. It is a Jewish voice I still really like.

At camp as a kid, I encountered a new emerging class of Jewish song leaders: an unprecedented mix of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Israeli entertainers and Hasidic Jews combining English, Hebrew and guitars in unprecedented ways. I was on staff with a whiny 16 year old Debbie Friedman who made our song sessions rock but then kvetched day and night about conditions at camp.

In Moscow and Leningrad, I met Refuseniks. Tired, scared, oppressed, they looked and spoke more like Russians than Jews to me. Their English was limited. But they greeted me like a brother. They told me their stories. They were suffering. Their hope was in immigration and in us. Sometimes, I learned, the most powerful voice is spoken in quiet, nervous phrases.

In Cuba, I met Jews descended from Turkish immigrants called *Pollokos* who enunciated their Hebrew prayers with Spanish accents. “The revolution wanted to make us all equal,” they said to me, “so they made everybody poor.” They insisted they did not suffer from anti-Semitism but had no rabbi and relied on American Jewish help to keep their synagogues open.

In College, I met Jewish Professors who spoke of Judaism in a profoundly intellectual fashion. – My philosophy professor was an atheist and told us that the Greeks were culturally superior to the Hebrews. My poetry professor loved James Joyce and proudly published an intellectualized Yiddish study called, *Schlemiel as Metaphor*. I was so confused. I thought a schlemiel was a sad sack of a person, not a metaphor.

In rabbinic school, my professors talked about Judaism like it was nuclear physics. We had to learn to read Babylonian Aramaic which sounded like Hebrew with food in your mouth. The voice of Judaism was found in classical texts, so difficult for us as students to read and understand.

After rabbinic school, I heard the voice of Jewish communal professionals – who talked with extreme confidence about their programs and the monetization of the mitzvot. However, it wasn’t clear to me who was listening or what they were actually saying.

In recent years, I have begun to hear a new class of Jewish voices - the voices of my grandchildren and little kids our preschool. Something about 3 years olds saying “Shabbat Shalom,” seem so good and so right.

For sure, congregational life during the last 30 some years has presented a whole new spectrum of Jewish voices. My first pulpit was in Harlingen, TX. Their community featured Jewish hunters who flew 2 seat planes to their ranches. I listened to Jewish Hoosiers in Richmond, Indiana, holding on to their Judaism with surprising confidence and tenacity. I still hear from them all these years later. There were also Jewish prisoners in a medium security prison in Lebanon, Oh looking to be excused from making license plates on Rosh Hashanah.

When we moved East, I met storekeepers in Endicott, NY who had to work on Shabbat but insisted on a Conservative liturgy while in shul. In Binghamton, New York, college students from downstate New York valiantly tried to adjust to an upstate community without a single deli.

In Philly, for the first time, I met Jewish families with colonial Jewish roots, quietly proud of their heritage and generally unassuming as people. I have worked with dozens of mixed heritage families trying to weave a Jewish threads into their existence and several dozen converts of all stripes. I have listened to military Jewish voices and anti-military Jewish voices and Buddhist Jewish voices and atheist Jewish voices. I have listened to Jewish voices primarily anchored in philanthropy and Jewish voices anchored in anti-institutional anger and suspicion.

Most Jews today say they are “just Jewish” but compared to coal miners in West Virginia, they are seem very Jewish to me. We even have Black Hat Orthodox Jews today who are 18 years old, essentially live in the 17th century but carry cell phones with them except on Shabbat.

In sum, Jewish life today is like a large symphony orchestra warming up. Lots of different sounds, not really together, sometimes loud, sometimes, quiet, perhaps waiting for the moment when they can play something together.

The fact of the matter is that Judaism began with a single voice, the voice of:

Let there be light

Let my people go

The Ten Commandments

Justice, justice, you shall pursue

Love your neighbor as yourself

Hear o Israel

Then, after Moses, there were the prophets who proclaimed:

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly

Holy, holy, holy

Be a light to the nations

Before we were the people of the Book, we were the narrators of the Book.

Judaism began, developed and grew as an auditory tradition.

Where is that authentic voice today? The voice of tradition? The voice of ethical urgency? The voice of passionate purpose? The voice of holiness? The voice of compassion? The voice of justice? The voice of faith? The voice of love? Can we still hear it? Can we still speak with that authenticity?

And so I ask: How can we reshape, improve, refine our Jewish voices today? How can we give our voice texture, depth and resonant beauty?

First, know who you are! Know what part of the Jewish experience comes most naturally to you! Then, pick your main theme or themes: prayer, Israel, social justice, study,

culture or philanthropy. Deepen your identity through reading, meetings, film and programs. Pick a second theme and explore it, too!

Come here - KI has everything Jewish for all ages, for all interests and encourage others to do the same.

Here's a dose of reality. For more than half of the people in the American Jewish community, the sound of the Jewish voice is fading. 60% are unaffiliated. The fastest growing group of Jews in this country are the "nones," Jews who claim they have no religion at all. The only group of Americans who attend services less than Jews are atheists.

It is increasingly important for those with a Jewish voice to use it and raise it in an effective way – to invite, encourage, reinforce, and accompany the lost sheep back to the fold.

On the Jewish New Year, we always begin with the voice of the shofar. Perhaps the oldest and most compelling of Jewish sounds. It is a call to arms, a wake up, a celebration, a reminder, an echo, and a bugle blasting "forward."

We begin and end the New Year to the sound of *Tekiah*.

Lift up your voices.

Speak from hearts.

Be heard in your family and friendship circles

Listen with your heart

Listen with your soul

And speak with all your might

The sound of the shofar can still be heard across the land
or it can fade into the memories of a muted people.

The choice is ours as a congregation.

The choice is ours as individuals

It is time to find our Jewish voice!

Tekiah and a happy, healthy new year to all!

Shana Tova.

Amen

"Israel's Many Voices"
Rosh HaShanah Morning - 2018/5779
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Our theme for the holidays this year is finding your Jewish voice. Last night, I talked about finding our own authentic voice and amplifying it in the year to come. On Yom Kippur evening I will speak about our inner Jewish voice and on the morning of Yom Kippur, I will talk about the voice of Jewish social justice. Finally, at Yizkor, I will talk about the voice of memory. But today, I want to share a different message with you and give voice, at this moment, to my concerns about Israel as an American Reform Jew.

Every year on Rosh HaShanah morning, I speak about Israel. The textual basis for my decision is rooted in this morning's Torah portion: the binding of Isaac. Israel, in my mind, has historically been Isaac, bound, endangered and stoic. Because of the regional and global situation in which Israel exists, I have generally refrained from criticizing Israel from this pulpit. Moreover, because of the history of our synagogue and its previous association with the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism [seventy years ago], I again thought it best to be protective of Israel from the pulpit. For nearly twenty years, I feel I have been generally well received but not without some criticism from those among us who are less than happy with the Israeli government under Prime Netanyahu and their American supporters on the center-left and the right of the Zionist spectrum.

Today, I speak to you as an American Reform Jew and from the perspective of my personal Zionist commitments. **I am not neutral when it comes to Israel. I am deeply pro-Israel.** It started as a feeling in my childhood and grew with successive visits as a teenager and 20 something. Except for my father's objections, he was a combat veteran of WWII, I probably would have volunteered to serve in the Israeli Army. But I didn't and instead intensely studied the history of Zionism and the Jewish State, learned more than a little Hebrew and made a commitment to visit Israel

regularly. This Fall, I will be taking nearly 40 of you with me. I think it will be my 30th trip or so.

But this year, for better or worse, in addition to urging continued support of Israel, I also feel I have to voice my concerns about a number of Israeli policies and practices. **Just about everyone agrees that it has been a bad year in Israel-Diaspora relations.** These concerns come at a critical time in Israel's relationship with the United States and the capacity of its army to wage successful, asymmetrical warfare against Hamas, Hezbollah and terrorist cells in the west bank. I raise my voice with full knowledge of the dangers of Hezbollah and the Russian-Iranian presence in Syria and the threat of Iranian provocation and missile attack. **However, as the prophets taught thousands of years ago - challenges to Israel's moral core are also threats to its security.**

However, there are problems today between Israel and the majority of American Jews which must be addressed and cannot be deferred on the grounds of Israel's national security. **Israel is not Netanyahu.** Israel is not the settlers nor is it the ultra religious. Netanyahu governs with the thinnest of majorities and properly speaking, no one represents all of American Jewry. None of the Jewish organizations we have in this country are expressions of an official Jewish polity. Jewishness and Judaism in America are voluntary. My choice is to speak for myself, not for the Reform movement, not even for this synagogue, not for you, but for me alone. Like a son in a troubled family, I need to say my peace today because without honesty there can be no "*shalom bayit*," no peace in the family.

A number of issues now exist between Israeli and American Jews. Unfortunately, it is a sizable and serious list. It includes the religious rights of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel, the Jewish identity of non-Orthodox converts, the religious status of the children of the mixed married, the use of the Western Wall, the recently adopted Nation-State Bill, the future of the two-state peace plan, the blockade of Gaza, the human rights of

Palestinians in the territories and the plight of African immigrants in Israel to mention most of the leading challenges.

In my opinion, the most salient issue between American Jews and Israel is ideological. Israel was founded and developed by the Labor Party and its coalition of different left of center constituencies During the same period of early Israeli state building, American Jews were overwhelmingly Democratic. Israel's pioneer spirit and left leaning social policies matched well with the political culture of American Jews. These ties became increasingly strong from 1948 to 1977.

Then in 1977, Menachem Begin became Prime Minister of Israel. Begin was an unrepentant nationalist and a disciple of the revisionist Zionist Hawk, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who, before 1933, was supportive of Mussolini and Italian Fascism but then distanced himself from them. He and his followers later opposed the 1947 UN partition of Palestine and had longed dreamed of a Greater Israel, at one point, on both sides of the Jordan or as the Bible put it, "from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River."

During the struggle for Israeli Independence, Begin and his followers actively fought with the British and only reluctantly fell in line with the Haganah, in fact, in June of 1948, armed conflict broke out between the followers of Ben Gurion and Begin over the disposition of the boat Altalena, its 900 crew members and cargo of weapons and ammunition intended for the Irgun. Although Civil War was averted, there were casualties and intense controversy on both sides about the real possibility of a larger Jewish internecine conflict and a right wing coup in the fledgling Jewish state.

In short, there was no love lost between left and right in early and pre-state Israeli politics and to make matters worse, both sides had factions and extremists. On the right, one of the political crack lines was between the Begin faction and the Netanyahu faction, led by Ben Zion Netanyahu, the self-exiled father of Bibi Netanyahu. Thus, when Netanyahu became Prime Minister for the first time in 1996, it was a double

victory. First, it meant the old Jabotinsky block was back in power and second, it was a victory for the Netanyahu family and the anti-Begin side of the Herut-Likkud bloc.

As many of you know, I spent the first half of this last summer researching the life of Bibi Netanyahu. I did so for several reasons.

First, he lived in this area (about a mile down Township Line) and graduated from Cheltenham High School in 1967.

Second, he is Israel's second longest serving Prime Minister and its been on his watch that most of the fissures between American Jews and Israel have opened up.

Third, it is my contention that the current widening gap between American Jews and Israel is both ideological and generational.

In my opinion, the majority of American Jews never really adjusted to the loss of power by the Labor Party and its democratic, socially liberal and globalist orientations. By contrast, the Likkud party is nationalist and irredentist. When people say that Israel today is not the Israel of our parents and grandparents, what they mean is that Israel is no longer the Israel of Ben Gurion, Golda Meir and Yitzchak Rabin.

Israel today is increasingly Sephardi, Orthodox and expansionist. It is more "at home" with the status quo with all of its problems than with the idea of a two state solution and it often seems more materialistic than idealistic. Its not even clear how much most Israelis actually like Netanyahu, but they put up with him because he is tough, practical and ideologically in line with his grandfather, father and the old guard of the Revisionist movement in Zionism.

What I learned about Netanyahu this summer is that he already had a solidified worldview and a political philosophy as a young man. His time in Cheltenham did not fundamentally alter his views although I am not quite sure he did not develop some enduring ties with American Jews, perhaps for their political support, perhaps because they are potential Israelis. For the present, however, American Jews are probably politically less important to Netanyahu than Christian Evangelicals, and hence the friction. The best I can say is that Netanyahu is not willing to cut us off entirely but the ties that bind are fraying one strand at a time. For sure, he did not like the teenage culture he experienced in Cheltenham and found it to be frivolous.

In my opinion, the passage of Israel's Nation-State bill which passed on July 19th this summer by a vote of 62 to 55 was perceived by most American Jews as an ideological marker that Israel and American Jews were now on profoundly different pages. In essence, the bill made the Jewishness of Israel superior to its democratic nature, a profound shift away from the language of Israel's declaration of independence.

In terms of detail, it also downgraded the official place of the Arabic language in Israel which previously accepted Arabic and English, alongside of Hebrew as its official languages. Lastly, the possible consequences for Israel's Arab population of nearly 1.7 million are profound and even more startling was the impact it had on Israel's 130,000 strong Druze community which heretofore enthusiastically supported the State. Now, the Druze are openly rethinking who they are in the state of Israel and why they are defending it, often at a very high price.

At the end of the day is question about the nature of Israeli society: is it a democratic state with a Jewish majority or is it a Jewish state with second class minorities. For most American Jews, Israel's Jewishness and its democratic values should be inseparable. In my view, most American Jews approve of the enfranchisement of Israeli Arabs and viewed that enfranchisement as a good faith promise about the final status of

Arabs in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The nation-state bill has undermined that assumption for many American Jews.

The nation-state bill has also crystallized a previously unasked question for American Jews. Long committed to state building for Israel, American Jews are increasingly uneasy about their role, direct or indirect, in Palestinian state building and the protection of Palestinian civil rights. Few American Jews, myself included, want to be involved in Palestinian state building. It is their problem and they are doing a particularly bad job of it. On the other hand, are all Palestinian rights to be restricted because of Israeli security? Are there any Palestinians legitimate partners for peace or is it better to just view military administration as the de facto and long term reality for the territories?

The problem with all these questions is that there is not endless time left to answer them. Although there are legitimate questions about the actual Arab birthrate, non-Jews now make up 49% of the people west of the Jordan River. The population of Israel proper is 9 million including 6.7 million Jews. However, the one state solution would result in a demographic tie. It is hard to imagine Jews and Arabs sharing the land in a democratic way and, of course, neither party wants to be politically subservient to the other. To some extent, the Nation-State Bill was passed this summer to guarantee that Israel would remain Jewish, but not necessarily democratic, if a one-state, Zionist solution is adopted by Israel. For Netanyahu, the answer is the status quo combined an unrestricted commitment to Israeli military superiority.

Included in the status quo is the blockade of Gaza by land, sea and air by Israel and Egypt. No airport, no sea port and controlled access on land, Gaza is small, crowded and poor. It is almost identical in physical size and population to Philadelphia but the average household monthly income is only \$200 a month, compared to \$4000 a month in Israel. Of course, **Gaza is illegally controlled by Hamas** which continues to launch terrorist attacks against Israel and uses its own people as shields. Could more

relief be brought in by land through Israel? Should the US have suspended all humanitarian aid to Gaza? Do we continue to say that they have brought their problems on themselves or is there a way out of this humanitarian disaster?

The unilateral decision to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem revealed still other cracks in the American Jewish-Israeli connection. In Israel, the move was widely hailed as a moment of national vindication. The right, middle and most of the left cheered the move and in many places, parks and plazas were named after President Trump. The initial American Jewish reaction was more divided and less effusive. The question wasn't the Jewishness of Jerusalem. Rather, people and organizations worried that the failure to throw a bone to the Palestinians would be costly in the long range and undermined any chance of peace based on political as well as security considerations. The reaction of our own Reform movement was initially very uncertain until Rabbi Jacobs was "Bibi-splained" into a less ambivalent expression of what the symbolism of the move meant to Israel and the Jewish people. Clearly, we were not in the same place and that's not good.

Among those questions is the blockade of Gaza by land, sea and air. No airport, no port and controlled access on land, Gaza is small, crowded and poor. It is almost identical in physical size and population to Philadelphia but the average household monthly income is only \$200 a month, compared to \$4000 a month in Israel. Of course, Gaza is illegally controlled by Hamas which continues to launch terrorist attacks against Israel and uses its own people as shields. Could more relief be brought in by land through Israel? Should the US have suspended all humanitarian aid to Gaza? Do we continue to say that "they" have brought their problems on themselves or is there a way out of this humanitarian disaster?

A second set of flashpoints between Israel and American Jews involves the legal status of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel. In addition to the constant backtracking on an egalitarian prayer area at the Western Wall, an incident took place

this summer on July 19 when a Conservative rabbi was arrested at his home in a pre-dawn raid? Rabbi Dov Haiyan was released by the police after 10 hours but the damage was done and protests were voiced around the world.

This summer American Jews also debated the political culture of Birthright Israel and Hillel concerning Israel. I personally participated twice in Birthright when it first started in 1999. To date, 600,000 young people have travelled to Israel with Birthright. The age of participation has increased to 32. About 40,000 people a year travel to Israel with Birthright or as it was called, Taglit. Should the participants be given an ideologically defined tour? How and who should represent the Arab side of the experience or even the Israeli center? Unless college students are only in it for a free trip and a chance to party, its hard to imagine they don't have some genuine questions that come from a solidly pro-Israel place?

This summer, the nature of freedom of speech popped up in Israel as well.

Should peace activists be denied entry into the country? Should well known Israel intellectuals, like Benny Morris, critical of the government be detained at the airport and interrogated? Will rabbis who challenge government policy be blocked from leading tours in Israel? Where will it stop? What is legitimate and what is out of bounds?

Israel even has its own border fence in the south whose purpose is not only to keep out terrorists but to block the path of African migrants who walk thousands of miles to find itinerant work in Israel. Can they apply for asylum? Should they be allowed to work? What happens to them when they are out of work? Are they responsible for an unusual amount of street crime in Tel Aviv? Should Israel pay their countries of origin a few thousand dollars to take them back?

Well, what can we do? We don't live or work in Israel, serve in the Army or vote there? Should we desist? Not go there? Stop our financial or political support? No, not at all.

If anything, **it is more important than ever to remain in touch and to travel there when possible.** Issues are complex. The world looks different from Jerusalem. The average Israeli family is generally a lot better than average. It is the homeland of the Jewish people. So, I am going with about 40 of you this Fall. We are going to many of the major archeological sites but also to Reform communities. We will meet with military leaders, diplomatic leaders and journalists. We will even have a presentation by a moderate Arab Israeli. My hope is not to change opinions but rather to deepen understanding.

Second, I believe we need to be more supportive of Reform Judaism in Israel. It is a small but growing part of Israeli society, a cohort particularly close to our own with respect to Judaism and democratic values. They also need our support and encouragement. I particularly look forward to this part of our trip.

Finally, we need good information about Israel. It is easy to go online today and read the Israeli press. “*Times of Israel*” is a free newspaper. *Haaretz* is like Israel’s NYT but charges. You can also watch Israeli TV news online daily for free. As always, I will be teaching about the Arab-Israeli conflict in our confirmation academy and working with our college students many of whom are encountering significant anti-Zionism for the first time in their lives.

In 180, reacting to the dismantlement of Yamit, an Israeli settlement in the Sinai, the songwriter, Naomi Shemer, composed a beautiful ballad, “*Al Kol Eleh*,” It is a powerful song about the paradoxes and contradictions of life in Israel. Its core message can be found in the words of its chorus:

*“For the sake of all these things, Lord,
Let Your mercy be complete
Bless the sting and bless the honey
Bless the bitter and the sweet.*

Israel is a complicated topic. Being Jewish is complicated. It takes information. It takes thinking. It takes understanding who you are and what your highest values and primal loyalties are. This year when we talk about Israel, let us do so from a position of strength, good information, moral clarity and fortitude. Let us echo the prophets of ancient Israel who called on our ancestors to love their tradition and to demand justice in the gate. But most of all, let us affirm *Ahavat Yisrael*, the love of Israel, in all of its complexities, problems and aspirations.

Shana Tova.

"I Cannot Forgive You"
Erev Yom Kippur - 2018/5779
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

You are in your family room. The TV show your kids have been watching is over and the credits start running. The quicker of the two kids grabs the remote purposefully, instantly changes the channel to the show of his choice and cradles the remote controller like a fullback clutching a football on a short yardage play up the middle. The other child is physically unable to dislodge the remote but, in fact, had been promised the remote and loudly begins to protest. Number one won't budge. Number two escalates his ever-louder protests and the quiet of your home descends into the Battle of the Alamo.

Now its time for parental intervention. A parent secures the remote from child one and hands it to child two and then orders the aggressor to apologize to the victim. The command is followed by a half hearted but rather snotty "sorry" which draws a bitter grunt of disgust from the new owner of the remote. Battle over. Parent wins. Both kids are sore and its back to television for a maximum of 30 minutes of *Shalom Bayit*, family peace, before the warriors of discontent shift their positions on the remote control TV battlefield.

Sound familiar? Of course it does! We all have these moments of ephemeral crises or something like them. All of us have been compelled to make insincere apologies to our siblings and say "I am sorry" just to maintain the appearance of civility, only to be met with the snide rejection of the winner of the battle, knowing full well, that round 2 or 22, is only a half an hour away.

We learn to say "I am sorry" and even "I forgive you" early in life, just like we are taught to say "thank you for the candy," when all we really want to do is rip the wrapper

off and sink our teeth into a welcome piece of chocolate. Saying “I’m sorry” is the price of civilization and eventually, most of us learn how to play the game.

There are many famous quotes about forgiveness. Alexander Pope taught “to err is human, to forgive is divine.” Gandhi said that “forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.” Norman Cousins said, “life is an adventure in forgiveness.” Hannah Arendt observed that “forgiveness is the key to action and freedom.” As a young person, I was deeply impressed by a quote attributed to Golda Meir that “we can forgive you for killing our sons, we cannot forgive you for forcing our sons to kill yours.”

Judaism, like all the great religions, recognized a long time ago, that without some kind of “forgiveness,” the world would be a lot tougher place than it already is. Thus, “Forgiveness” is at the very heart of Yom Kippur, our most sacred of days. It is our divinely sanctioned amnesty day. We offer God our deepest prayers of supplication and remorse for our offences and then we are clean, table rasa, until we ourselves begin to sin again the next day or even that night. We don’t need an interlocutor, an agent, a priest, a sacrifice, or anything other than sincerity. In Judaism, we are forgiven by God and enter the New Year in a blameless state.

Sounds great, even easy, whether you believe in God or not. Who wouldn’t take this kind of deal? But there is a catch. In the Talmudic discussion of Yom Kippur, it is stated in Yoma 8.9 that for sins between God and people, Yom Kippur atones. But for sins between people, Yom Kippur does not atone until the perpetrator seeks forgiveness from the victim and the victim forgives him or her.

In light of this teaching, a tradition developed in Judaism that at this time of year we approach people we have hurt, in anyway, during the course of the last 12 months and sincerely ask them to forgive us. In more serious cases, asking for forgiveness may require payment for actual losses and then punitive damages. In still more serious cases, punishment, even jail, may be required before all accounts are squared. But what

happens, when the victim simply cannot forgive the perpetrator. What if we can't just turn the other cheek? What if a person hurt us or hurt a loved one so grievously that we have no forgiveness in our heart? What if you were betrayed in a way that there is no end to your suffering? What if what they did to you was so bad, you could never forgive them?

What do you then? Do you take your anger to the grave with you and hope your enemy takes it to the grave, too, but before you? Do you refuse to talk about it, negotiate or coexist in anyway? How will the grudge ever end? How can there ever be peace again in our heart or in the social dimension of your life?

In the news last week, it was announced that the woman, Wanda Barzee, involved in the kidnapping and torturing of Elizabeth Smart from her childhood home in June, 2002, was getting an early parole for good behavior! Elizabeth Smart, from a passionately Mormon religious home, went on the air and stated that this is wrong and her tormentor should not be release at this early point in her sentence! Can you really blame Elizabeth?

On the other hand, what are we to make of the surviving members of the 2015 Charleston Church shooting in which a young white supremacist murdered 9 people at a Bible study at a black church in the South Carolina port city, standing up at a bond hearing and forgiving him. Some qualified their comments by adding "may God forgive you." Others said they forgave him but still sought justice. Is it possible to automatically forgive even the most heinous crime without preconditions?

The most poignant treatment I know of the question of forgiving the unforgivable, was raised Simon Wiesenthal exactly 50 years ago in his book, *The Sunflower*, in 1969. Wiesenthal was born in Austria and survived the Holocaust. He became a renowned Nazi Hunter and was involved in the capture of both Adolf Eichmann and Joseph Mengele. He was prolific, wrote 9 books and many articles.

In *The Sunflower*, Wiesenthal recounts how he met and was asked by a 22-year-old SS soldier who was dying of his wounds to be forgiven for his personal role in massacring a large number of Jews in a hideous manner. The dying German explained that he had been raised as a practicing Catholic although his father was secular and an anti-Nazi. The dying soldier also asked Wiesenthal to deliver a letter to his mother.

In addition to telling his story, Wiesenthal also asked 32 distinguished individuals to reflect on the question of forgiving the unforgivable. Among the respondents were Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Primo Levi, philosopher Herbert Marcuse, and novelist Cynthia Ozick. Each provided a serious, thoughtful answer. Some urged forgiveness to break the cycle of hate. Some said the dying soldier was wrong to be asked to be forgiven. Some said they could not forgive. Others said they could forgive but could not forget.

I remember back in the mid-1990s, 50 years after the end of World War II, I read that some of the German army divisions my own father had fought against in the Battle of the Bulge were having reunions at the same time as some of the American military units. Both were scheduled to go to Metz, in France, for the event. "If you went," I asked my father naively, "would you greet former German soldiers if you bumped into them?" "I would acknowledge them," he answered, "maybe a nod of the head." Then, unexpectedly, he added to his answer. "But if they were SS," he said with a much darker voice, "I would not acknowledge them in any way." "Why," I asked, "what's the difference?"

"Snipers," he said tersely, "snipers."

"I don't understand," I replied. "Well," he continued, "many times after we attacked a village and took it, the Germany Army would pull out and retreat but the SS left suicidal snipers behind and they killed more Americans than we would lose during

the battle.” “They can never be forgiven,” he ended the discussion conclusively. His words stuck. “They can never be forgiven,” I thought to myself, “I guess they can’t.”

On the other hand, with the passage of enough time, forgiveness can be achieved between groups of people and between nations. Even though the British burned down the White House, America and the UK reconciled a long time ago. And how many wars took place between the English and the French? 73 years ago the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan to hasten the end of World War II, for the most part American-Japanese relations are fine today. I don’t know of too many American Jews who will not go to Spain because of the Spanish Inquisition although feelings about places like Germany and Poland are mixed and often ambivalent. Given enough time and the right circumstances, it seems even the bitterest of enemies at the national level can find common ground, if not true forgiveness.

However, the collective and the interpersonal clearly do not work the same way with respect to forgiveness. In his answer to Wiesenthal, Rabbi Heschel told a story about the Rabbi of Brisk. The Brisker Rav was riding in a train on the way home from a business trip. In the train, he was mocked by a group of businessmen. Days later in synagogue, one of the travelling salesman saw the Rabbi in shul, was mortified and went up to the rabbi to ask for forgiveness. The Rabbi said, “no, I can’t forgive you. You are asking forgiveness from the Brisker Rabbi but the man you mocked in the train was, in your view, a *nebesh*, a nobody, an unimportant man. You must find him and ask him for forgiveness.” In other words, no apology was possible the same way the Sunflowers that Wiesenthal saw on the graves of Holocaust victims could offer forgiveness. They can only remind us, the author is teaching us, not excuse the inexcusable. In Judaism, personal offenses between people can only be forgiven personally.

Remember the 1969 movie *The War of the Roses*, with Michael Douglas, Kathleen Turner and Danny DeVito? The two main characters Oliver and Barbara Rose are locked in a grueling divorce battle. It was the ultimate case of irreconcilable

differences and it ended tragically with couple lying dead in the entry hall to their elegant home under a collapsed crystal chandelier. But many broken relationships, marriage or friendship, can be fixed and usually forgiveness is a big part of the healing. Surprisingly, the concept of forgiveness is only marginally used in modern psychology. Other terms like reconciliation might be used but in general, with the exception of a branch of psychology called Positive Psychology, forgiveness has not attracted much empirical research.

There are also alternatives to total forgiveness which involve an active suspension of guilt. One alternative to forgiveness is just letting something go. No one says “I am sorry.” No one has to say “I forgive you.” You just let it go and let the cauldron of anger simmer down. Sometime this strategy works; sometimes it is the only thing that works. Sometimes an emotional “time out” is the best we can hope for.

On the other hand, the opposite of non-forgiveness is revenge. What if you not only cannot forgive, but need to take revenge. Revenge means punishing the one who has offended you. Revenge is a ubiquitous theme in human culture. We see it in the Bible. We see it in the Arts. Hamlet, one of the great works of world literature is a dark story about revenge in which revenge is given a supernatural mandate by the ghost of Hamlet’s murdered father. In the end, Hamlet himself dies, slashed by a poisoned sword. “The rest is silence,” the bard concludes the tragedy.

We use revenge at every level of life. Your team loses a game to a historical” rival. “Next year,” we proclaim, “we will get our revenge and win!” “An eye for an eye,” the 18th century BCE Babylonia emperor Hammurabi proclaimed. Blood feuds, vendettas, honor killings and cycles of violence are all part of human culture and maybe even part of our animal nature. Even some animals like elephants, camels and chimps are known to take revenge on those who hurt them or their families.

However, normative morality warns against revenge as a mode of justice. The world class philosopher Frank Sinatra and several others taught that “the best revenge is massive success.” Douglas Horton warned, “while seeking revenge, dig two graves, one for yourself.” “In taking revenge,” Milton wrote, “one keeps his own wounds green, which would otherwise heal and do well.” And an unknown sage wrote, “an eye for an eye, and soon the whole world will be blind.”

Finally, it is important to also consider the challenge of forgiving oneself. The need to forgive oneself is based both on the possibility of having actually having done something wrong and for feeling guilty for it. Feeling guilty is a complicated subject. Guilt can also be based more on perception than fact, but nevertheless we punish ourselves and cannot forgive ourselves. If we are overwhelmed by guilt, we cannot function. Conversely, if we have no sense of shame, we can become a danger to ourselves and others. What happens if we cannot forgive ourselves?

Probably the most famous story there is about guilt is Macbeth. In this dark tragedy, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are destroyed by guilt. Guilty of an actual murder, they descend into madness and perish. A similar plot is provided by Edgar Allan Poe in his *Tell Tale Heart* in which the narrator-murderer too descends into madness and his crime is revealed. Emotional guilt, however, is not always tied to a crime or even wrong doing but it can tremendously destructive.

Jewish culture is often tied to the idea of guilt. The paradoxical myth of Jewish Momism includes mothers who are endlessly narcissistic about their children’s achievements and at the same time seek to control their children through strong doses of guilt. I am sure you know the one about the man who calls his Jewish mother and asks how she is doing. “OK,” she sighs. “Mom,” the man replies, “that doesn’t sound right, what is wrong?” “Well, son, honestly,” she says in a weakened voice, “I lost ten pounds.” “You lost ten pounds,” the son exclaims, “Why? What’s wrong?” “Well, son, Honestly,” she replies, “I didn’t want to have food in my mouth when you called.”

Guilt is serious business, especially when you are your own accuser and you cannot forgive yourself for some offence, real or imagined. It can lead to depression, social isolation, loss of self-esteem, even suicide. I have not heard of an anti-guilt medication. Maybe a big Pharma company could invite “Forgiv-a-nex.” It would be a best seller. Sometimes, it seems, we need to “let it go,” forgive ourselves and move on.

Forgiveness, in all its dimensions, is a central part of most of the world’s great faiths. In Judaism, it is so important that our most sacred day of the year, Yom Kippur, is basically about forgiveness. We begin our high holy days with prayers of *selichot*, prayers asking to be forgiven. We come to synagogue on the evening of Yom Kippur to hear the chanting of *Kol Nidrei*, in which we ask God to forgive us for all the false promises we may have made to ourselves during the last 12 months and we end with *Neilah* and its message of confidence that, indeed, we are forgiven for all the forgivable trespasses we may have committed. It is a cleansing, uplifting and restorative process.

But there can also be a class of offences beyond forgiveness, things done by others against us and things we have done to others. For these offenses, Yom Kippur does not atone for but the day of atonement does chasten, refine and define. It helps us see what is possible in the realm of forgiveness and what is not. It helps us to be better people. It cannot t make us perfect because moral, emotional perfection is beyond our human capacity. Sadly, in that regard, we cannot forgive everything.

Yom Kippur teaches us that God is eager to forgive and that we should be likewise be prepared to forgive and move on, whenever and wherever that is possible. We are told that sometimes we need to work harder on ourselves going forward. We are told that God does not want the death of the sinner but that we should atone and live. We are also told that sometimes forgiveness is not possible even as it remains desirable in other parts of life. Sometimes justice weighs heavier in the scale of life than forgiveness, but justice must also be proportional.

May the power of this sacred night help us to forgive others and forgive ourselves and whenever we cannot forgive, let us strive for self respect, fairness and proportionality.

Gmar Tov. May you be inscribed for a good year.

Amen.

"The Prophetic Voice of Justice"

Yom Kippur Morning ~ 2018/5779

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Of all the different types of natural disasters, the one that holds the most weight for people in our region of the country is the hurricane. The word Hurricane is actually derived from the name of a god of the indigenous people of Puerto Rico and entered the English language through Spanish. Hurikan was the god of weather and storms among the Taino. Tragically, the people of Puerto Rico still know of the relentless power of Hurikan in the most tragic of ways.

While living in Ohio, Liz and I experienced, separately, both an earthquake and a tornado. The earthquake literally caused the hills to roll and the tornado was preceded by the most threatening sky I have ever seen and was followed by incredible, localized destruction. In northern Israel, I once found myself driving through a wild fire. Flames of 20 feet leapt up in front of our vehicle and then to the side and then back in front of us like a multi-headed dragon. The heat was tremendous. For a few minutes, I feared for my survival.

But it is the reality and effects of the hurricane which speaks to most of us. Hurricanes are immense, powerful, relentlessly and unforgiving. The wind can roar day and night breaking and cracking things everywhere. Unprecedented rain, like a horizontal waterfall, furiously drenches everything and flood waters rise quickly and then recede slowly like the Noah epic in the Torah. Will we have electric power? Will we be trapped? Will our property be destroyed? The howling and the beating of the storm doesn't seem to stop if you try to ride out a storm. And, then, your family needs to wait to hear if you have survived the storm as communication is restored block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood. Rebuilding seems overwhelming, if not

impossible. In some places rebuilding takes somewhere between forever and never. Hurricanes are powerful, terrible experiences.

For many of us, the news cycle during the course of the last year has been like living in a hurricane that landed on shore and then just didn't move. The rains and winds of controversy and injustice constantly rattle the protective shutters of our lives. The flood of concerns about reproductive rights keeps rising. The damage to human life because uncontrolled gun violence gets bloodier and bloodier. The storm surges of new policy sweep away immigrant families and leave children cutoff from their parents and trapped in government housing with no hope of re-unification. Who would ever have imagined that we would actually be discussing white nationalism again in this country as a current reality in 2018?

For many of us, it feels we are trapped in a howling storm and we are forced to scurry about stuffing the sandbags of political resistance to save what little seems to be left of human decency in this country. Not since the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war has American society been as stirred up as it is now. We have seen activism on the left and the right at various moments. For sure, there was a rising tide of discontent from the right during the Obama years and now, the reaction from the left is activated and a huge political clash, an uncivil war of sorts, has erupted across the land. The political center has all but disappeared, contracted from the constant demonization and name-calling that has replaced most rational discourse. Time honored legislative procedure has been replaced with brutal, power politics. Labels have replaced discussion of policies. Basic morality is drowning in a sea of pornographic excuses which literally make one's head spin. International relations are being disrupted. Enemies are treated as friends and friends are viewed as enemies. In short, we are living in a political hurricane which has come ashore, is tearing us apart, drowning us in anger and not moving on.

How far have we come? Two years ago when the Colin Kaepernick story broke, I was at my gym dressing after a very modest workout. Several older gentlemen were having a discussion about “the knee.” They all agreed, if Kaepernick didn’t want to respect the flag, he should move to Russia. Everyone who had been talking nodded in agreement and the locker room went silent.

Equally perplexing is the latitude extended to the White House by Protestant, evangelical churches in this country which, simultaneously, taken on harshly xenophobic attitudes and are endlessly forgiving of any sin, no matter how salacious, by the President. It is almost impossible to understand the moral and theological calculus used to reach these conclusions other than raw Machiavellian politics.

There is a Chinese curse, “may you live in interesting times.” We, apparently are cursed. We live in a stalled hurricane and are being pounded by the constant swirl of the storm.

How do we ground ourselves in such a storm? To what can we tether our ship of life? How do we navigate and keep our bearings in these trouble times?

My answer will not surprise you. Judaism is a prophetic faith. Its goal is peace and justice and rejects retreat from the world, the search for private cocoons of harmony. Judaism is all about keeping the moral high ground and fighting for human dignity.

Judaism began with a protest against injustice, a protest against God sweeping away the good people of Sodom and Gomorrah along with the bad because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even God is called to moral account in Judaism.

Moses stood up in front of the people and told them in no uncertain terms – “justice, justice you shall pursue” and “added do not favor the rich or the poor in

justice,” “use honest weights in all your business dealings” and “love your neighbor as yourself.”

The 8th c BCE prophet, Amos, who we honor with a full window in this sanctuary (middle window, my right, your left), prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel in a time of general prosperity and reprimanded the wealthy of the realm “not to sell the needy for a pair of shoes,” lest their success be derived from exaggerated economic inequality.

The prophet Isaiah in this morning’s powerful Haftarah rejected religious hypocrisy as unacceptable in God’s eyes: do not come to the Temple and offer your prayers and songs and then cheat and defraud people in other parts of your life. What is it that God wants? The fast from injustice!

In Isaiah 58, we read:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;

When you see the naked, that you cover him,

And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then your light shall break forth like the morning,

Your healing shall spring forth speedily

In his Second Inaugural in the waning days of the American Civil War, President Lincoln also quoted Isaiah and told the people that healing the nation and caring for the widow, the orphan and the wounded veteran were our highest national responsibilities. Helping our neighbors, not endlessly punishing our domestic rivals was his creed.

Reform Judaism, especially Reform Judaism in America, is distinguished by its concern for Social Justice and KI has always been at the center of this effort.

The first American Reform rabbi to make Social Justice the center piece of his theology was David Einhorn who served KI during the Civil War. Courageously, Einhorn condemned slavery as immune and a function of greed above justice. Einhorn's son-in-law, Rabbi Emil Hirsch, who served in Chicago, was responsible for adding the social justice plank to the Pittsburgh platform of 1885. It read: "In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." Rabbi Krauskopf heard that call when he established his farm school in Doylestown in the 1890s.

After Lincoln, the President who probably had the greatest impact on Reform Judaism's view of social justice was Teddy Roosevelt, first a Republican and then an independent Progressive. So powerful were TR's views, that when he died in 1919, KI commissioned a memorial window in his honor. It still stands in our lobby, next to the entrance to the chapel. Take a look, it is beautiful!

TR's 1912 Bull Moose platform which he called "A Contract with the American People," called for, among other things:

1. the dissolving of the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics
2. Strict limits and disclosure requirements on political [campaign contributions](#)
3. Registration of lobbyists
4. A national health service to include all existing government medical agencies.
5. [Social insurance](#), to provide for the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled
6. Limited the ability of judges to order [injunctions](#) to limit labor strikes
7. A [minimum wage law](#) for women
8. An [eight-hour workday](#)
9. A federal [securities commission](#)
10. Farm relief

11. [Workers' compensation](#) for [work-related injuries](#)
12. An [inheritance tax](#)
13. [Women's suffrage](#)
14. [Direct election](#) of [Senators](#)

As the Bible says, there is nothing new under the sun@

Exactly one hundred years ago in 1918, combining Biblical teaching with American Progressivism, the Reform movement through the Central Conference of American Rabbis, issued its first Social Justice Platform. Although incomplete by today's standards, it still stands as the foundation of Social Justice activism in the Reform movement, in many ways the defining characteristic of our brand of Judaism.

Social Justice was subsequently taken up by Reform Rabbi Stephen Wise who helped found the NAACP, the movement's Social Justice Commission which was created in 1948 and most importantly, the creation of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, DC. founded in 1961. To the eternal credit of the RAC, it hosted the group which drafted the Civil Rights Act of 1964, originally envisioned by President Kennedy before his assassination and then championed by LBJ and others.

Today, the RAC is widely known as a vanguard for social justice in Washington. Our own synagogue has deep ties with the RAC. Lay leaders from KI attend its Consultations on Conscience and annually, our Confirmation Class visits there to learn how to directly lobby Congress in Washington, DC.

So what are the social justice issues Reform Judaism is championing today? The list is long and the list is urgent. From affordable health care to "me too," Reform Judaism is providing important leadership in America today. The two national issues which I found to be the most impactful this last year were immigration and gun control.

The storm over immigration policy in the United States was whipped up with the revelation of a policy of family separation on our southern border. The decision to blur the criteria for asylum seeking turned the flight to freedom into a national nightmare for this country. Responding to feelings expressed in this congregation, I wrote a poem last Spring called “My Mommy is Here” and had it posted on Facebook. More than a 100,000 people read it and many used it at services and programs, Jewish, Christian and secular, all across the country. Although the furor over this policy has simmered down, there are still 12,800 minors in custody and federal facilities designed to hold children are 90% full on our southern border.

No question immigration is a hot button issue. It involves race, economics and security concerns. It has been used as a rallying call for the politics of xenophobia. It flies in the face of Judaism’s understanding of the golden rule, to love your neighbor as yourself, in which the word neighbor is understood to mean all of humanity.

A second national issue for the year 5778, was gun control. Mass shootings have become a way of life in this country from Columbine to Sandy Hook and now to Parkland, Fl. On February 14, 2018, the deadliest secondary school shooting in American history took place at Stoneman Douglas High School. 17 were killed, including several Jewish kids. A nearby Reform synagogue turned into a hiding place. I know the rabbi there. Brad Boxman is a native Philadelphian. Previously, he was the rabbi of my brother-in-law’s synagogue in CT. He lost confirmands in that mass shooting. Our confirmands elected to sing the Parkland song “Shine” at their service this year. We will hear it again in just a few moments. Gun violence is not an abstract problem; it is real and it is personal.

There are 393 million guns in the United States, 120 guns for every 100 people. About 100,000 people a year are shot in the United States; of them, approximately 30,000 die. Since 1982, there have been 99 mass shootings with assault rifles in this country. 96 people are killed by a gun in the US everyday. 2/3 are suicides and 75% of

suicides are white males. Approximately 3 million children a year witness gun violence. 44% of Americans know someone who has been shot. Statistical information is endless and sickening. No other advanced country behaves the we do with our guns.

What do we need: gun registration, removing assault rifles from the market, limits on magazine capacity and tracking of all gun sales! Even if you sell a car to a friend, you have a title and taxes to attend to. In my opinion, the 2nd amendment calls for a well regulated militia, not radically laissez faire gun ownership. Gun ownership is a right but it is also a responsibility. Gun violence in America is yet another perpetual storm we seem to live in without hope of resolution.

In addition to immigration and gun violence at the national level, there is another storm I believe we are weathering. It is so close and so much a part of our lives, it is hard for us to even see. Instead, we just put on the raincoats of denial and go about our daily lives. It is called Hurricane Philadelphia. Philadelphia is the sixth largest city in the United States and is located 2.5 miles from where we are now sitting. Officially, it is also the poorest city in this country. 25.7% of Philadelphia's 1.5 million residents live in poverty, double the national poverty rate of 13.4%

Our poverty is deep and it is old. It is multigenerational. It is multi-racial. It is 50% black (double the national rate), 20% white and 20% Hispanic. It is overwhelmingly young and in single parent homes headed by single mothers. We are at the lower end of high school graduation rates in the country. While much of the rest of the country is growing and in recovery, we are sinking ever deeper into the quicksand of urban poverty.

It is easy to wear blinders and not see this cancer. You can drive up and down N. Broad Street, stay in the left lane and never stop. You can glory in the revival of Center City and the gentrification of adjacent neighborhoods. You can marvel at the growth of the Univ. of Penn, Drexel and Temple and not be concerned at the displacement of the

impoverished neighborhoods crumbling on their edges. You can drive by the massive central offices of the Philadelphia School District and not stop to think that 70% of students it serves live in poverty and the per student budget in the city is half of less than that of the suburbs. You can be content to live in your own pocket, pull down the blinders and blame the poor for their plight.

Permit a local analogy. Next to Abington Friends School, there are no storm drains. When it rains, a lake appears in the street and then drains down to Elkins Park. So too Philadelphia. Urban poverty and its consequences will not be contained, they spill over and cause problems in surrounding areas.

We have two model City-Suburb partnership programs here at KI. We send 2 dozen tutors to help at Lowell Elem School in Olney and we have a monthly community dinner, HaMotzi, here at the synagogue. If 500 or a 1000 synagogues and churches did the same, it probably would not move the needle, so to speak, on local poverty. But it would create a different environment, a different ethos and hope!

Big, shiny buildings in city center are great. Gentrified neighborhoods are great. But the worst urban poverty rate in this country is horrible and it is growing, like a hurricane stalled over land dumping misery on the population.

Partnership between the suburbs and the city will help. But we need creative national policies, we need regional planning, we need business strategies that help improve the general quality of life and we need city-suburban partnership. We need to vote with the common good in mind and we need to work for that good as individuals and as a congregation.

This afternoon, we read about the prophet Jonah. He was sent to save the Mesopotamian city of Nineveh. Can we do less in our own time and place?

Things are not all bad in this country or this region at this moment. Far from it. There is so much that is good, strong and growing. The problem is that too few of us share in the blessings of our area and our country. Working to share the blessings, helping to provide responsible, self-sustaining opportunities, erasing structural racism and just being a loving neighbor will go along way.

Abraham, Moses, Amos and Isaiah knew that.

Rabbis Einhorn, Krauskopf and Wise believed that.

Now it is our turn, not only to weather the storm but to man the life boats and to work for the day when our light, too, shall shine forth like the morning.

Amen.

Shana Tova

"Undiminished Voices: Listening To The Unheard Voice"

Yom Kippur Yizkor ~ 2018/5779

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

Throughout the High Holy Days, we have been exploring the theme of *Shema Kolenu, Hear our Voice*. It is also the name of a prayer probably written in Lithuania at the end of the Middle Ages. To amplify its meaning, we use the musical setting written by the great American Cantor-Composer, Max Helfman, with its powerful voices and majestic melodies. We ask to be heard and to be forgiven.

Each of us has many voices. We have the voice of our childhood and the voice of adolescence. We have our adult voices and we have our inner voices that only we can hear. The inner reading voice, the voice of private analysis, the self-critical voice and the voice of wishes and aspirations.

We also have a whole other set of voices, voices that are not ours, the voices of others – our spouses, children and family, the voices of colleagues, friends and neighbors. We know all of them well. But then there are the voices which we still hear and listen to but can no longer be heard. These are the special voices of Yizkor, the voices we long to hear with our ears but can only find in our minds and our hearts. These are the voices of our loved ones who have died during the past year and years past. These are the once familiar voices we heard for a life time, the voices of love and comfort, the voices of instruction and concern, the voices once filled with laughter, the voices which delivered the wisdom we needed and still need to stay on the tracks of life and not make wrong turns or become lost.

We each have a special voice or, perhaps, voices of memory. For me personally, it is my father's voice. He died in 2010 but I can still hear him and, more importantly, still listen to him. He is gone but his memory is alive, his values are alive, his beliefs are still

alive in me and I still hear them. During his last few years of life, I used to talk to my father, almost every day. A strange routine developed. If I had a funeral at a far away cemetery, I would call him on the way back to my office. Most conversations were about regular things, just catching up. At other times, we talked politics and world events. Luckily, we agreed on just about everything. Toward the end, we talked about his finances and his philosophy of daily life and what he wanted me to do for my mother. I still hear his voice instructing me.

After he died, I did not erase his message on his voicemail. It stayed there for along time. Then, one day, I needed a new phone and when they transferred my data his voice was lost. Privately, I was upset. His voice was gone and I was sad, not that I would listen to it. But then I realized, that voice is not gone. I just can't hear it on the outside. On the inside, it is still there and I can hear the voice that can't be heard and more importantly, I can listen to it and gain from it and be assured by it.

All of us have these cherished memories. On Yom Kippur, perhaps more than any other day, we strain to hear those voices – one more time, one more word, one more distinguishing syllable or sound. Like bundled collections of old pictures in the attic, they are there, preserved, locked in time, accessible when sought and surprisingly alive. We can still hear them from now.

The voices of love we can only hear in our hearts are important parts of who we are and what we have become. We are not just our current biochemistry. We are many things, among them our most sacred memories. It is not surprising that in the Jewish tradition, we ask God to remember our ancestors even before we ask God to listen to us. Remember Abraham we say, remember Sarah we pray; answer us for their sake and just for ourselves.

We are no different. Something of our worth as human being, our true value is anchored in our past, in the people who helped make us who we are today. They are still

with us in so many ways, including their voices. *Shema Kolenu, Hear Our Voices*, they call out and we listen to them and feel their presence again.

In an introduction to Kaddish, we are reassured that “so long as we live, our dead shall live too.” And it is true, they live in our memories. But there is more to us than active memory. We have souls. Souls are like spiritual energy and, by analogy, we know that energy cannot be destroyed or lost, rather it changes form but it is still there. The soul endures. The soul, like love, doesn’t die.

On this Day of Atonement, we turn inward, mostly to review our actions during the last year, to atone and to make the determination to do better in the days ahead. But as we make that inner journey, we can again hear the living voices of those who came before us and are still teaching us, still encouraging us and still helping us in our own journey.

At this Yizkor, may your memories enrich you, inspire you and help you move forward as renewed people in the year to come.
Amen.