

A Message from the Rabbi

Rabbi Mark Fasman

I recently finished reading a remarkable book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, by Naomi Remen. In it, she shares stories about her patients and reflects on illness and healing, brokenness and wholeness. At one point she explores the traps that we all fall into; we can become entrapped by our own attitudes. She writes:

What we believe about ourselves can hold us hostage.... a belief is more than just an idea—it seems to shift the way in which we actually experience ourselves and our lives. According to Talmudic teaching, “We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.”

We find ourselves in the High Holy Day season, being urged to examine our lives. We are supposed to reflect on our specific actions, particularly our failures during the past year. Our task is to recognize the gap between what we did and what we should have done. And once we recognize these ways in which we have fallen short, it becomes our obligation to make peace with those we have hurt, either intentionally or unintentionally—this is mechila, asking forgiveness from those we have hurt. Only then can we ask God to forgive us for those behaviors.

But the far more difficult task is to examine who we are and who we could be. We are challenged to make teshuvah, to transform our lives from what we are to what we could and should be. We begin by confronting our patterns of unhealthy behavior and then resolve to change those behaviors.

Dr. Remen’s insight got me thinking. Before we repair our past failures and before we consider a change of course in our lives, perhaps we need to examine the way in which we examine the world. Before we ask others to forgive us, we need to acknowledge that we remember the event through our own filter. I know what I intended. I interpret the interchange favorably or unfavorably based on my own biases. But the Talmud reminds me that I remember the event not as it was, but as I was.

We also have to consider the way in which we see ourselves. Do I like myself or do I dislike myself? Who do I see when I look in the mirror? Am I a perfectionist? Am I a narcissist? Am I filled with fear or anxiety or anger? Do I assume the worst about others? Am I too forgiving? Am I bitter? Is the glass half-empty or half-full? Am I depressed? Am I incompetent? Am I a tzaddik?

These self-conceptions make all the difference when it comes to teshuvah. There are things we ought to change, but we don’t recognize them. There are other things that are just fine, but we feel somehow inadequate and in need of a make-over.

The High Holy Days are the right time to consider course corrections in life. But maybe this year it is more important to examine the way in which we see the world and ourselves. God has given us another year of life. There can be

no greater blessing. Perhaps it is time to let go of our anger, to neutralize our bitterness, to discard our demons. Maybe we don’t have to be perfect, maybe we aren’t inadequate, maybe we are worthy of being loved and deserving of respect.

We can all improve. And we all should improve. We are not perfect, but each of us is created in God’s image. We cannot know why God created us, why we live in a world filled with imperfection and pain and loss and anger and fear and evil. We can only know that when Torah says that we should choose life and blessing, it means just that. We cannot choose what will happen to us, only how we will respond. If what we believe about ourselves

determines the way in which we experience ourselves and our lives, then let’s enter this season of teshuvah by first fixing what we believe about ourselves. It is beautiful to wish others a year of life and blessing. But we first need to choose them for ourselves.

L’shanah tovah u’metukah – May you have a good and sweet year. G’mar chatima tovah – May you be sealed for all good things.



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SAVE THE DATE:

November 9, 6:30-8:30pm

**2009 B’nei Mitzvah
Family Dinner and Program**

Join us for a night of food and “bonding” as a B’nei Mitzvah class. Do not miss this, as you will receive important information and get the chance to do a special project together.