

Erev Rosh Hashanah 5772

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Rosh Hashanah, often translated as the Head of the Year or the New Year, can also be translated as the Beginning of Change. This Rosh Hashanah change is dramatically occurring in our world with the incredible upheavals and transformation convulsing through the Middle East. Many nations are at a crossroads; Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and most immediately in Israel's constellation, Palestine. We as Jews are puzzled by the meaning of much of this change and seek to find our footing within these dramatically shifting realities.

The wisdom of Judaism is centered on the idea that the Divine Mystery of Life wants freedom for humanity, and yet, we are more than a little concerned about the outcome of all of these shifts. Will they be good for the Jews?

With so much in flux and so much attention, it seems sure to be a time of powerful challenge within the internal dynamics of the Household of Israel.

In this season of introspection rather than attempting to analyze the shifting identities of other nations, we would be wise to look inward and consider how we experience our Jewish identity and how we manifest our identity in the world. What change might we consider?

I would like to share with you some thoughts about powerful internal forces within the Jewish people, acquired through our historical traumas, and requiring our attention for healing. How might we work toward shifting our painful narrative of trauma and victimization to one of aspiration? Additionally, I'd like to share some thoughts about the relationship of American Jews with Israel.

Each of our lives is a story. The inner story we tell ourselves about our lives can either limit or expand our life's possibilities.

If we've experienced in our childhood traumas, rejection and abandonment we carry that forward and live with it every day. We create the structures of our lives to be protective of those early wounds. On the other hand, if we've been praised and nurtured, we have a fundamental quality of trust and security that grants us the possibility of living fully to our greatest potentials.

So many of us over the years have benefited from personal growth processes that have allowed us, within a healing modality of counseling or therapy, to address wounds and difficulties we've experienced during our life journey. We have found the capacity to recreate our personal narrative as a step in our healing.

Examining and gaining insight into limitations resulting from earlier life experiences, we can accomplish some degree of healing and growth. We can mature and take responsibility for managing our lives in light of the pain experienced in our earlier years.

For some, simply perceiving changes in their life situation allows a revised and more positive narrative to replace a prior more limiting narrative. Through engaging our own pain, and updating our inner narrative, pathways of growth and healing can be discovered.

There is a meta-dimension to this dynamic as well, lived out on a collective level. We can view contemporary Jewish life and consider the impact of our shared narrative of trauma, acquired through historical experiences, and consider the impact of that narrative as it pertains to Israel.

The former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg wrote a controversial book a few years ago entitled, "The Holocaust is Over We Must Rise from Its Ashes." In this book he describes the Jewish people as traumatized so badly that we are unable to even trust ourselves let alone the world around us. The dwelling on victimhood saps Israeli society from the ability to define itself by positive attributes.

He writes, "...the Jewish people remain fully connected to the sick, malignant parts of the European experience...we sanctify our security doctrine, often expressed vengefully and belligerently." Burg is the son of two holocaust survivors and has been among the most influential political figures in Israel for decades. He has had a front row seat on this unfortunate and persistent reality.

The impact of this Crisis Narrative is enormous. As a result of this post traumatic inner narrative, we Jews continue to live with profound anxiety often anticipating disaster and lacking an ability to be trusting. This Crisis Narrative limits the creativity of our thinking and our capacity for healthy risk taking. It results in Israel, the expression of Jewish sovereignty, presenting a harshly militaristic face to the world, a face of *Din* and *Gevurah*, strict judgment and might.

It results in limiting the health of the discourse among American Jews and creates an environment of hostility and near hysteria between Jews who hold varying views about how to best love and support Israel. Slanderous statements are hurled with abandon. The disdain and self-righteousness which can characterize exchanges between otherwise dignified and reasonable individuals, is an embarrassment to a people noted for its love of discourse in search of truth, of healthy debate, of assuming multiple opinions about just about everything.

We are operating with what might be called Terror Control. This is not about controlling terrorists. It is about controlling the terror that remains in the hearts and souls of our people who have been traumatized. We must heal from this.

The Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem has brought together a team of outstanding scholars to study the Jewish narrative of Crisis and its need of transformation to a Narrative of Aspiration.

The internal narrative of trauma and crisis, so many of us carry as adult Jews living so close to the time of the Shoah, reverberates deep within our soul. How could it be otherwise? Anxiety, fears, a deep sense of vulnerability and insecurity all live close to the core of so many Jewish people today. In the Crisis Narrative, naturally the drive simply to survive is the shaping force of our thinking and behaviors. Other values necessarily diminish relative to the intensity of the sense of crisis at any given time.

This narrative has driven the formation and development of Israel and the Jewish community in North America. The scholars at Hartman Institute are asking whether this Crisis Narrative continues to be useful, productive and sustainable into the future. They propose and are developing materials through which we can assess the viability and wisdom of perpetuating that narrative.

Later this year I will be facilitating a series of study sessions at TBI utilizing the resources developed at Hartman Institute.

In reality, Israel stands today as a vital and strong nation that militarily dominates the Middle East. The country is economically thriving, and has acquired the nickname of “start-up nation” due to the creativity of entrepreneurs in Israel. The contributions that Israel is making to the fields of technology, medicine, communications and the arts are tremendous. And, Israel enjoys enormous political and financial support from the United States.

The Crisis Narrative that migrated to Israel with the survivors of the Shoah has been constantly re-stimulated, reinforced over these decades of war and terrorism. As Israel has grown in its power over the course of these decades, the underlying narrative of Israeli society has not adjusted along with the new reality that has emerged.

The constant wars and acts of terror directed against Israel, along with the chorus of non-acceptance by neighboring countries, have served as powerful prods to keep Israel focused on developing as a significant military power well beyond the strength of the neighboring countries. The security apparatus in Israel, including the separation barrier, have been effective in providing Israeli citizens with an increased sense of protection.

The constant harassment by Hamas, firing rockets at civilian populations, has kept the Crisis Narrative alive. The provocations by Iran elevate the Crisis Narrative to a fever pitch and it becomes difficult to discern the appropriate level of concern and response to these security challenges.

Hartman Institute is proposing that we consider working toward a transformation from our Crisis Narrative, which we each carry some share of, and allow ourselves to replace that

narrative with an Aspiration Narrative, a narrative that envisions the possibilities of who we want to be as a people, from a place of calm and a feeling of success.

This shifting of self-perception allows a reordering of Jewish values helping us to shape ourselves and our communities with our higher Jewish values rather than those diminished due to our constant urgency for survival.

These are values of democracy, of justice, of freedom, of peace- which are all foundational Jewish values.

Creating an Aspiration Narrative is in many ways reclamation of our founding narrative. Abraham is told that his seed will be a Blessing to the nations of the world. Is that not the nature of what we would love to see Israel be as an expression of Jewish national sovereignty?

We were strangers in a strange land, and we know the heart of the stranger, the vulnerable one in the world. We are to love the stranger, and be a fountain of care and compassion in this world. Our messianic vision holds the hope that all people will recognize the bond of Life's Unity. Declaring, "My House will be a House of Prayer for all peoples."

Our ancient Aspiration Narrative calls us to become a *Mamlechet Kohanim V'Goy Kadosh*, a ministering nation and a holy people, a people of blessing, not a hurt, angry and fearful people.

We only have to look to our ancient sources, in order to feel our initial sense of calling to rewrite our modern narrative as a hope-filled, world-healing narrative, at peace in this world. This may involve us being willing to be leaders in this world. Leaders chosen by our history, and chosen by the lessons and values we have learned that can benefit our lives and the lives of others.

This current period of dramatic transformation in the Middle East provides an important opportunity for narrative re-evaluation in Israel and among American Jews as the changing narratives of the Arab nations are in dramatic flux moving, G-d willing, in the direction of democracy and increased freedom for the millions upon millions of citizens of these nations. Sadly, thus far Israel has seen the deterioration of its relationships with Egypt and Turkey and the spotlight of the world is shining on Israel and Palestine as Palestinians unilaterally seek recognition of statehood at the U.N. Which way this plays out may well be determined by the fear or confidence of Israel.

While unquestionably, Israel must have firm assurances that a Palestinian state will live in peace alongside Israel, operating from a narrative of Aspiration, Israel would do everything in its power to wholeheartedly support the development of the nation of Palestine. This would be a loud and clear message to neighboring countries that Israel is a confident and strong nation with good will toward neighboring peoples. Israel would affirm its aspirations of living in peace with neighbors who also seek the blessings of freedom and peace. This would go far toward affirming our capacity to move beyond the Crisis narrative into a new stage of self-understanding and well-being. I must repeat that this process should not involve the

diminishment of Israel's security. That must remain firm. It is the increase in expressing other values that this shift calls for. While security certainly must remain a high priority, it mustn't and it need not suffocate the expression of our aspirations beyond survival.

I was once standing with my teacher, Reb Shlomo Carlebach, z'l, watching him davven *mincha*, the afternoon prayer. I noticed that he had his hands over his heart, the left hand in a fist and the right hand covering the left. When he was finished with his prayers, I asked, "Reb Shlomo, is there some teaching about the posture that you're choosing in your prayer?" And he said, "Yes. The left hand is *gevurah*, its strength and might, and the right hand is *chesed*, compassion and loving kindness, and the *chesed* always has to cover the *gevurah*."

That's what I thought about when I was in Israel at the checkpoint. Be *gevurah*, we need *gevurah*, we need strength, but that's not all we are. That's not what we're here surviving for as a Jewish people, just to be *gevurah*. The message from Avraham is *chesed*, it's to go into the world with love. And to be as strong as we need to be as a people. Thank G-d we're in a time when we're truly strong as a people. Our lives are most likely better than the lives of Jewish people have ever been. I can't think of a time when there were two centers of Jewish life, almost of equal size, one expressed in sovereignty, and one such as we have here, living in freedom and calm. An environment in which we can enjoy the blessing of calm, and heal from our own trauma. I know I carry it, I know right where it is, the ache, the deep ache of anxiety that's right under the surface waiting for stimulation if the wrong message comes into the world. I think we all have that. Thank G-d the younger people have a little bit less, and that shows the goodness of the passage of time as a healing force.

This is a time to muster our creativity, and our *chesed*, to have it cover the *gevurah*. That's the face that we need to show as Jewish people into the world. That's the reason we have survived.

The eyes of the world are focused on Israel and we should invite that attention as an opportunity to demonstrate our deeply held Jewish values.

The Jewish people, in our expression of power and sovereignty, must reflect the full range of Jewish values. Justice, freedom, peace, blessing, these are the ethical values which are in the depth of the hearts of the Jewish people. We must free ourselves from the fear and anxiety that blocks the expression of these values.

It is time for Jews to trust in the gifts that G-d has given us. Gifts of success and well being beyond any we have experienced in our long history.

There is a very beautiful and wonderful Israel emerging slowly as it heals from the traumas of the past. There are many, many Israelis involved in great works of justice, are true pursuers of peace, who are doing acts of *chesed*, of compassion every day.

On our recent TBI tour of Israel we visited several of the places and people who are energetically building a pluralistic, just and compassionate nation. The Hand in Hand School,

Yad b'Yad, in Jerusalem, with its Jewish and Arab faculty and student body; the Neve Michael children's village for kids who are in need of shelter from damaging family situations; our meeting with Rabbis for Human Rights; our experience of Druze citizens of Israel and our visits to several Progressive congregations in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv. All these and more gave us hope for an emerging Israel, whose values we recognize in the values we have always cherished as Jews.

These are examples of the invisible day-to-day reality of so many Israelis who are working to create an Israeli society at peace and radiant with justice. If we are wise as American Jews, we will do all we can to support that emerging Israeli society. This is the face of Judaism's *chesed*, loving-kindness, and it must shine into the world. This emerging Israel deserves and needs the support of American Jews.

During this season of particular focus on the spiritual work of *teshuvah*, individual and collective self-evaluation, we in the American Jewish community must ask ourselves if we are doing all we can to support changing our personal and collective narratives. What burdens of the Crisis Narrative restrict our ability to envision a hopeful future? How can we move to a place of an Aspirational Narrative?

Israel and Palestinians have a long list of responsibilities to meet before there will be mutual trust. We must actively engage in every possible way with those Palestinians who have declared their desire and demonstrate their readiness to live in peace alongside Israel in their own free and independent nation.

While Israel lives under great pressure and stress with a highly activated Crisis narrative, American Jews have a different experience. We flourish in a safe and secure environment which allows other Jewish values to characterize our communal expressions. It is important for us to be connected, compassionate, and understanding of the depth of the re-stimulated post traumatic narrative that has such a profoundly powerful capacity to limit the expression of Jewish values beyond the goal of survival in Israel.

American Jews are living in the best conditions and enjoying the greatest success that Jews have perhaps ever experienced. If we look objectively at the condition of the Jewish people today, we see an abundance of blessings, success, achievement and prosperity.

These blessings and the passing of time are loosening the grip of our crisis narrative and allowing us to access the possibilities of who we want to be, as individuals, and as a people, moving beyond fear to faith.

As we shape ourselves and our communities on the basis of positive values, we can inspire each other to give expression to the values of love, compassion, justice and democracy.

These works we do are meaningful expressions of Aspirational Judaism. We can share with Israel the beauty and meaning we find as we create a Judaism that is not stifled by our activated anxieties and fears for safety.

Within the past two weeks, we have hosted events here at TBI that we can take great pride in. Our Center for Jewish Life has become a resource for our city, not only for our Jewish community.

Two weeks ago, our sanctuary was filled with fellow Eugeneans who came to a benefit concert for the Egan Warming Center. Our musical group Chiribim provided the music, and funds were raised toward preparing adequate shelter for homeless individuals on bitterly cold nights this coming winter.

Last week, our facility was used for a gathering of people concerned about the tragic crisis in Sudan, where a genocide continues to unfold. Then, the following evening, TBI was honored to host the 30th anniversary celebration of Mobility International USA. Again, a full house of our fellow Eugeneans came to celebrate the ongoing global struggle for the advancement of full human rights for people with disabilities.

This place has become, in our short three years here, a Center for Jewish Life that is a valuable resource for our larger community. When these events are held here, we fulfill the very essence of the longed for vision of Jewish life as a blessing to those around us. This is the aspiration that is rooted in the very deepest depths of our peoplehood, and the fundamental purpose of our mission as a *Mamlechet Kohanim V'Goy Kadosh*, a ministering people, a nation that is elevated through G-dly values.

We are building an institution here that reflects profound and deeply rooted values. The Jewish people in America seek to be fully integrated into the broader society while firmly remaining rooted in our Jewish traditions and values. This is a tremendous moment for us as Jews to be able to create our Jewish life unencumbered by the sense of vulnerability and outsider status that has been a constant for us for hundreds and hundreds of years.

How blessed we are to live in such a time! And how inspiring it is to consider the opportunities we have to continue to be a blessing to our community and to ourselves. Let us celebrate the desire for freedom, dignity and rights for all peoples, to live in peace and fulfillment, the ultimate expression of Shalom.

On this Rosh Hashanah, as we stand before the Eternal Mystery of Life, and look towards our individual and collective improvement, I pray that we each consider how we can continue to heal ourselves and the Household of Israel. May we continue to discover the beauty and goodness of a Judaism that is driven by our highest aspirations as a people. May our love for Israel guide us to find ways of supporting the struggle they face in navigating the complexities of healing from past traumas and finding a way forward in healing and peace.

As we listen to the call of the Shofar this Rosh Hashanah, we invoke the flow of compassion, *rachamim* toward our lives rather than *din*, strict Judgment. May we also merit to allow Compassion to flow from our lives into this aching and wondrous, and ever-changing world.

Shana Tova Metuka. A Sweet New Year to each and everyone.
Good Yontiff.