Here we are!

This day is the culmination of a process of *teshuvah* begun on Rosh Chodesh Elul, 40 days ago. Ideally, we have been taking stock and getting right with each other, and getting right with ourselves. Ideally, by the time the gates close tomorrow evening, no matter what failures and hurts we have repented, we will be ready to step clean into the new year.

There has been a concern through our textual tradition that people might just do the symbolic gesture of the day, rather than actually change their ways. Even the biblical prophet Isaiah, whose haftarah we'll read tomorrow, scolds the people for engaging in a meaningless fast without fundamentally transforming their lives or society.

And our sages teach explicitly in the mishnah about Yom Kippur, Chapter 8, section 9: One who says: I shall sin and repent, does not get to repent. [If one says]: I shall sin and Yom Kippur will atone for me, Yom Kippur does not affect atonement. . . for transgressions between a person and their fellow, Yom Kippur does not affect atonement, until one has undone the damage they cause and pacified the other.

What do we do about the damage that can't be fixed? What about the hurts that can never be undone? There are so many ways we could take this: to a national reckoning around racism, to how US foreign policy has led to the migration crisis, or to the #MeToo movement and generations of sexual violence. Tonight, however, I am particularly thinking of the destruction we have collectively wrought to life on earth, I along with everyone else in this room; in this society.

No 40-day *teshuvah* process will undo the effects of climate change and environmental degradation that are starting to snowball. No atonement will reverse the speed of the melting ice, stop sea levels from rising, prevent summer wildfires and yearly superstorms. It is too late to reverse the disappearance of coral reefs, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people as climate refugees. If the premise of this holiday is that past mistakes won't come back to bite us in the *tuchus* then we are out of luck, because many of our collective mistakes will linger for hundreds of generations.

What do we do with this on Yom Kippur?

We wipe the slate clean.

That is to say, I can get so hung up by the failures already weighing on me that I despair of making anything better. Yom Kippur demands that I relinquish that despair. It absolves us of fixing the past, not to make us feel good, or to make our lives easier - but precisely in order to hold us accountable to what we might yet accomplish in the future.

The last textual message we will receive tomorrow is almost a farce: for our mincha, afternoon service tomorrow, the haftarah is the book of Jonah, in which a reluctant prophet prophesies destruction to an Assyrian city, Nineveh; whose inhabitants from king to cattle all repent. Destruction is averted as Jonah sulks over the apparent inconsistency of God's wrath and mercy.

We hear Jonah right before Neilah, and I want to suggest that we learn from the people of Nineveh. Hearing a prophecy of destruction, they resist the two far most likely impulses: to ignore it, or to despair, and instead they coordinate a highly organized community *teshuvah* process.

This is extraordinary. The subtext here, I suspect, has been trying to nudge its Jewish listeners for centuries: if these pagan sinners could get their act together, what is stopping us? Further, as Nigel Savage, the founder of Jewish environmental organization *Hazon* wrote recently: "Prophets prophesy to avert a potential future, not to predict it. The Biblical Jonah foresaw the destruction of Ninevah – but the people repented and changed their ways, and Ninevah was not destroyed."

Even today, there are prophets among us trying to avert the worst versions of our future. A few weeks ago, I read a prophecy, in the form of a book, just published, by Jonathan Safran Foer, called *We are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast.* It will be my next "Read with the Rabbi" book this winter.

We are the Weather is an extended meditation on the realities of climate change, and on the human psychology that makes it so difficult for us to take the necessary action to save what might yet be saved of our children's future.

The first hurdle is that even those of us who know that climate change is real – and climate deniers make up only 14% of the US public - literally cannot believe that it is real.

For example, I am intellectually sure that climate change will make my children's adult lives radically different from my own.

Even if we hold to the maximum warming goal of 2 degrees Celsius – which is both insufficient and nearly impossible at this point – my daughters will know a world of more volatile weather, filled with more desperate refugees, more extinction, more famine and a more uncertain economy. That is the *best-case scenario*. And yet, I consistently plan for a future that looks like my present, from the trees I plant in my yard to the way I invest in college savings plans, to the idle speculation I share with Jacob about the travel I'd like us to do as a family when our children are teenagers.

I don't know how to prepare for the society, the economy, the ecosystem that I know intellectually they will inhabit, because I don't believe in it, in my gut. I am not like my great-Grandma Eda, who sensed that she needed to do something - and did it. I am like the Jews who stayed behind in Grojec, and knew, hypothetically, that things were getting worse, but couldn't conceive of the magnitude of what was coming - or what they might do about it.

Safran Foer asks, from the point of view of history, who looks worse: the denier who didn't believe, didn't care, and didn't do anything, or the person who claimed to believe, and felt outrage, and felt despair - and still didn't do anything?

Safran Foer points out that if we really believed in climate change, we would behave differently. We would radically change our lives to address it, just as Americans on the home front radically changed their behaviors and their consumption patterns, during World War II, because they believed both that it was necessary and that it was worth it.

Particularly, there are 4 trends that we could all be part of if we accepted the reality of climate change. Safran Foer cites the climate science and identifies the 4 most significant actions any of us can do, starkly, they are: stop having children, stop driving, stop flying, and stop eating industrial animal products.

Again: stop having children, stop driving, stop flying, and stop eating industrial animal products.

I don't know about you, but when I hear that list, I get defensive and want to check out. First, not having children is a demand that is too loaded for me, as a descendant of Shoah survivors. I have children, and I hope to have more someday.

Driving is often necessary to the structure of our lives, and it connects us to community; consider our parking lot this evening! And I confess as someone from the East Coast who still has much of my family there, if there weren't air travel, I would never have moved to Eugene. And so much of who we are and our history, identity, family and community, is wrapped up in the food we eat.

And yet, the near impossibility of excising any of these behaviors does not absolve us from working to minimize them: to fly less than we did last year. To commit to alternatives to driving, or to carpool. To eat less meat, or dairy or eggs. This is something we humans know how to do – when we know that we *have* to. Our whole country underwent strict food and fuel rationing during World War II, and most people felt virtuous and proud to be part of a collective effort. Today, these are the equivalent "home front" actions that would be the most significant for reducing global warming and saving as much as can still be saved.

Depending on what factors you consider, industrialized animal agriculture accounts for 14% or up to 51% of all carbon emissions. Even at the low estimate; it's a significant percentage.

Since we read the book, my household has decided that we will only eat one meat or dairy meal per day, and we will try to keep those meals light on the animal products. Though we do not identify as vegan - my husband is in fact a trained kosher butcher - we have decided to relate to meat and dairy as the decadence that they truly are in planetary terms and save them for rare, special occasions.

On the one hand, this is a significant and inconvenient shift for us. With two small children, cheese especially has been a daily staple of our diet, and it is hard to give it up as a staple.

On the other hand, to be honest, I feel a little embarrassed talking to you all about it, because I don't want to pretend some great virtue for making a lifestyle shift that is such a drop in the ocean. It doesn't take the place of other necessary advocacy work, protesting, or tzedakah. *But I want to stop using the fact that it's a drop in the ocean to let myself off the hook from just doing it.* Because our consumption patterns will *have* to shift, either within a few decades as famine forces us to shift them, or because we thoughtfully and proactively shift them ourselves. And because if all of us here make such a commitment, then it becomes more than a drop.

We have just begun a fast (and if you're not fasting, it's a long service!) so there is ample time to make a choice about what we will next feed ourselves. And even if you need to eat meat for your own nutrition - or for that matter, even if you're

already vegan - I am confident that each of us could be doing more to take "home-front" actions and scale back our personal and household destructive impact. They won't be easy or convenient changes, but they will move us towards consumption patterns that won't destroy the world.

Of course, during World War II, there was a government and ample social structures existing to encourage people to fight on the "home front". Today our government and social structures expressly and implicitly discourage us from doing anything about climate change. Not only do they not support those efforts, but our government, goaded by industry forces, is in the midst of rolling back the regulations that would mitigate the problem.

There is a temptation – which I have indulged – to say that individual actions don't matter, unless the government and corporations clean up their act. This is the mirror image of the claims of energy company executives and more cynical government officials who say that since individuals are not cutting our carbon emissions, why should we expect the corporations or government to do it for us?

There are rhetorical points to be scored in such an argument, but if we keep playing this game of chicken, we'll all crash. It's not either/or! The fact that we don't individually live carbon free lives does not absolve corporations and government from accountability for this crisis. That is why the *Juliana* case being litigated by Our Children's Trust from this very city is so important. Part of our responsibility is to keep pushing for environmental regulation, demanding compliance with existing regulations from the local to federal level, and to keep demanding that polluters pay.

But the converse is also true: the accountability of major corporations and government doesn't absolve us from making the day-to-day changes in our lives that will ultimately be required from everyone in order to save as much as can still be saved. World War II wasn't won *only* by homefront actions, but homefront sacrifices were still necessary for the winning of World War II.

And with the government failing to inspire us to make these changes, we must motivate each other.

We *do* have support from a local community initiative that recently began, and which we at TBI are invited to join.

It is called "Eugene Carbon Free Challenge" or ECFC. The project calls for community groups, such as our congregation, to see if we can reduce our ecological footprint collectively. We will be forming supportive small groups to learn to use the website, to meet once a month to discuss our challenges and our successes, and to find support and community in our collective efforts to redress the most pressing problem of our time. The first presentation of how to get involved is scheduled for Weds, Oct. 23, 7:30pm, here at TBI. I hope to see you there.

I spoke on Rosh Hashanah about the importance of *teshuvah* coming not just from fear, but also from love. Our fears about climate change are already being realized. We will not change because we fear that species are going extinct, or because we fear the desertification that is causing millions to go on the move and become refugees. If we are only motivated by fear, we will too easily slip into despair as those situations accelerate.

The task is to love what there still is to save in this imperfect world, and to do our best to save it: the species that can survive two degrees of warming but not three; the land that can remain wild for generations in the future, the human communities that can withstand some sea-level rise but not more; our own children. . .

Our own children. . .

I have in the past indulged in the cold comfort, which may be familiar to some of you, that even if we humans go extinct, even if we take down more than half of the current biodiversity with us, the world will eventually recover from us and bring forth new life, as it has done after all of the major extinctions preceding us.

But few years ago, I participated in a training with Joanna Macy, a contemporary philosopher of deep ecology. At one point, she had us meditate on the wonder that is the human hand. I invite you to look at your own hand as I share her words: "[this] *is an object unique in our cosmos: a human hand of planet Earth. In the primordial seas where once we swam, that hand was a fin – as it was again in its mother's womb. Feel the energy and intelligence in that hand – that fruit of a long evolutionary journey, of efforts to swim, to push, to climb, to grasp.. . That hand learned to hold a spoon… to throw a ball… to write its name… to wipe tears… to give pleasure. There is nothing like it in all the universe."*

I burst into tears during that exercise. Hearing Joanna Macy's words, I had to acknowledge that my cold comfort about the world surviving us was predicated on an assumption that humanity is nothing better than a scourge. Joanna's words reminded me that humanity is also wondrous; that the fact of our existence is

miraculous. Our extinction would not be a happy ending, any more than the extinction of any other species. We are worth preserving, and we are worth working to improve.

Jewish tradition suggests the same: Judaism is *not* premised on the idea that humans are inherently sinful. These holidays especially remind us that we are full of moral possibility: we have both the *yetzer hatov*, the good inclination and the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination.

We can always strive to have the good we do outweigh the harm. Even if we assume that the ways we have related to the earth are utterly evil, Ezekiel 33:11, quoted throughout our High Holiday liturgy, puts it best: "As I live—declares Hashem GOD—it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from their [evil] ways and live."

Ultimately, it is not our feelings or motivations that determine whether we will be righteous or wicked, to use the liturgical terms. It is our action!

Whether we are motivated by fear, love or just peer pressure will matter less than what we *do* with our motivation. In the story of Jonah, surely some of the people of Ninevah didn't understand why everyone was taking this mad prophet so seriously. And yet, they too dressed in sackcloth and fasted, and had a role in averting disaster. Some of you surely don't believe all the words we will say tonight as we knock on our chests, yet still you say them, because that is what we are doing here together. So as we proceed with the rituals to absolve ourselves of fixing the past, let us hold ourselves and each other accountable for the future. The story of Jonah, the whole project of Yom Kippur, reminds us that individual

actions and collective actions both *do* matter, and that no matter how late we repent, it will never be too late to save *something* of value.