

Yom Kippur 5767

Hope

Even before I saw Al Gore's film, *The Inconvenient Truth*, I realized that the world as we know it is changing at such a rapid pace that we barely have time to integrate the new reality and it has already shifted.

When I look around me, I see so much pain. I hear stories of teenage girls, cutting themselves in an effort to break through the numb emptiness inside. The rates of addiction to drugs, alcohol and other destructive substances seem to be climbing rapidly.

Violent crime in this county touched our community quite recently with the murder of Zalmo Bloombecker, may his memory be for a blessing. We were shocked by how close this brutal killing touched us or touched those we know. After all, the family had been members of Beth El in the past. And not long after this murder, Chancellor Denise Denton took her own life.

Every day we hear about the rising casualties in Iraq and the continued violence in Afghanistan, Shri Lanka -----and genocide in Darfur.

Hurricanes in the South, droughts in Africa and heat waves all over the planet. War in Israel, Lebanon, Gaza, involving the deaths of soldiers and civilians, young people close in age to my own son, and children many years younger.

Last but not least, the gap between those who have access to technology, healthcare and other basic needs widens and the world becomes increasingly fractured.

When I pause to reflect on this long and yet incomplete list, I have to admit, I am afraid. What is happening to our world? How is it that our situation has deteriorated so dramatically? Is there a way to change direction? Is there any hope?

After sitting with these questions I realize that this is the beginning of facing my fears and searching for hope. As difficult as it is, the process of change starts here. Before I can take action, I have to face my fears. Because the effort it takes to deny the fear, creates paralysis. I'm not saying that facing the fear is easy and that I live

with it at the surface on a day-to-day basis. I am saying that fighting the fear is exhausting and it drains the energy I have to work for changing maybe even a small item on the long list. Most importantly, fighting the fear shuts down our ability to feel the full range of our potential as human beings.

Yom Kippur is a day for facing our fears. Surrounded by community we are strengthened by the collective effort towards honesty, examination and hope.

As I search my soul for the remedy to this fear, I have realized that hope is the essential ingredient. My hope comes from my faith. And, from my passionate activism, my desire to nourish communities of conversation, my spiritual practice, and our people's history. The strength of this hope comes from my efforts to integrate these aspects of experience and draw upon Jewish tradition.

I am talking about finding hope for us as individuals, communities and the world.

I want to share a story of hope with you. It is one of transformation that I witnessed through my COPA work. Over the summer, the regional body of COPA launched a money campaign. We have been meeting with business leaders and asking them to invest in improving the lives of people in our communities. We work on issues such as affordable housing, immigration fraud, increasing the number of ESL classes and safety. I had the opportunity to witness a monolingual COPA leader face her fears and feelings of disempowerment find the strength in meeting with a local developer to ask for a large sum of money to sustain the work of COPA. Not only was she successful in raising the money, she took action through facing her fears openly, and finding the courage to spread a sense of hope in herself and build hope for the organization. This is a story of hope on a personal level.

Our search for hope needs to incorporate the old and the new. As Jews, hope is encoded in our DNA. Jewish tradition is filled with periods of great challenge, times when survival has been at stake. The Exodus story is a prime example. When we were first enslaved, we were given the building materials to make brick for the Pharaoh's projects. After the rebellion began the building materials were taken away, increasing the people's burdens. This could have lead to despair. The hope for freedom was born through the people crying out to each other and to God. Maybe it started with one person whose imagination was kindled through stories passed down through generations. Maybe

another person recognized the beauty of nature and understood that there was a source of goodness in the world. Maybe out of great love for his children, a father made a commitment to improving his situation, thus feeling the urgent need to end the cycle of slavery. We read in the text, that Moses who was an outsider, who was raised in the Pharaoh's palace, saw the burning bush and heard the divine voice. And with this act, faith in liberation was born.

As Jews, we have been given the gift of partnership through the covenant established at Sinai. We have inherited the opportunity to develop faith in the Divine and faith in ourselves. And, we must now see ourselves as active participants in developing strategies that repair the world.

The evening after Sept 11th, this year, I was honored to serve on an interfaith panel with the Reverend Jim Wallis. Reverend Wallis is the author of God's Politics, and founder of Sojourners. Sojourners is a national network of progressive Christians working for peace and justice. Most interestingly, he is an evangelical preacher. He travels around the country speaking about the connection between faith and politics.

In the final chapter of his books, he discussed the critical choice we must make between hope and cynicism. He writes, "Hope is not a feeling, it is a decision. And the decision for hope is based on what you believe at the deepest levels – what your most basic convictions are about the world and what the future holds – all based on your faith. You choose hope, not as a naïve wish, but as a choice, with your eyes wide open to the reality of the world..."

The writings of the Biblical prophets are another source for this hope. The prophets always began their messages with social criticism. The section we read on Yom Kippur is a perfect example. But the prophetic text always moves to a hopeful conclusion and a clear sense that we are able to change society and ourselves.

Isaiah says, "Do not remember the old things, or consider the things of old, I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (43:18-19).

We are entering the new year of 5767 and we can make a choice to believe that it is once again possible to transform this world and take seriously our part of the covenant. If we choose cynicism and fear, this is probably what the New Year will bring. But as Jim Wallis writes, "If we can be as open to the new opportunities as we are to the

potential dangers, who knows what could happen?"

Reverend Wallis shared stories with the over 300 people gathered in First Congregational Church and one of his strongest messages was about the changes he is seeing in his own evangelical religious community. When we think about evangelical Christians these days, we picture people who are strong conservatives concerned with personal moral issues like gay marriage and abortion. But as Wallis explained, there is a new large movement among evangelical Christians who are paying attention to some key social issues- poverty, race, the war, and the environment. These congregations, some of them referred to as "mega-churches", are calling upon their members to return to the religious teachings of the prophets and of Jesus and put these teachings into action. This is also a sign of hope.

Our own congregation is asserting the prophetic vision of hope by supporting affordable housing on Par 3. Through our COPA work, we will be gathering petitions to present to the County Board of Supervisors when they discuss a plan for affordable housing in our county on October 24th. If you are interested in building your sense of hope please attend the COPA study session this afternoon where we will be discussing the prophetic text Andrew G will be reading is a few minutes and the opportunities for acting upon our commitment to hope. You may download the petition from our website: www.tbeaptos.org Please return it to the temple by October 20th.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain. In his latest book, To Heal a Fractured World, Rabbi Sacks reminds us that the beginning of the Torah is filled with human failure. We need only look at the first few chapters of Genesis to find them- Cain & Abel, the story of the flood, the Tower of Babel.... Yet, after each of those failures, we find that God does not give up hope in us. And because God doesn't give up hope, neither do we.

We live in a world that cannot afford despair. Rabbi Sacks writes, "A morality of hope lives in the belief that we can change the world for the better..."

Two individuals who are acting with hope to change the world for the better are Sir Richard Branson and former President Jimmy Carter. Sir Richard Branson is part of the wave of philanthropists now stepping forward to contribute their resources to find cures to cancer, stop global warming and curb the AIDS epidemic. The latest example of

this came a few weeks ago when Sir Richard Branson, the British magnate and adventurer, said that all of his profits from his five airlines and train company, projected to be \$3 billion through the next 10 years, would be invested in developing energy sources that do not contribute to global warming. These wealthy people are making an effort to combat the hopelessness so many feel and through their actions, assert that there are ways to reclaim our future. Their large contributions encourage us to contribute to reclaiming our hope. Each of us is able to make the same statement they are making. Some of us are able to do this financially and all of us are able to find some way to contribute with our time and attention. When we act for the good, we affirm our hope and feel it grow.

I watched an interview with President Jimmy Carter a few weeks ago. Aside from my sadness about how much we need someone like him in government now, I was amazed at some of the things he shared. He spoke about his experience as a mediator in the 1994 crisis between the U.S. government and North Korea. At that time, we faced a situation similar to what we see now in Iran. The dictator of North Korea, Kim Il Song, had announced that he was going to move toward the development of atomic capabilities. With the support of the Clinton administration, Carter traveled to North Korea with the goal of reaching an agreement with Kim Il Song that prevented a war between North and South Korea. At the time, the US government and the government of North Korea were unable to have direct interactions. It took a non-governmental delegation, under the direction of former President Carter bring us back from the brink of war. Carter's motivation for this undertaking came from his deep commitment to hope.

When asked about the current world situation, he stressed the need to go back to the process of negotiation and dialog. He said "My own opinion is that the United States should have unequivocal commitment to discussing the controversial issues, not only with Iran, but with North Korea directly. And also between Israel and the Palestinians with the Palestinian government and also with Lebanon, and also with Syria. But if you refuse to negotiate or talk to somebody unless they agree with you completely, it means that there's no chance for accommodation." And, I would add, there is no hope.

Hope is at the core of our tradition. These holidays themselves are based upon hope in our ability to transform ourselves. To search our souls for the parts of our lives that we want to improve. I pray that as we continue this process, we realize our own potential and make a

choice to move from fear to hope. Hope in ourselves and our commitment to be partners in the work of healing our world.

I want to bless all of us that in this year we achieve major movement toward, environmental responsibility, peace, social justice, human rights and a flourishing of hope overcoming fear.

Rabbi Paula Marcus
Yom Kippur 5767

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