

Rosh Hashanah 5771

Vanatnu

Rabbi Richard Litvak Senior Rabbi

Ten Pathways of Giving That Give Back to Us In Greater Health, Happiness and Longevity - Based on Why Good Things Happen to Good People-Stephen Post and Jill Niemark, (Broadway Books)

1 – 5 are: Celebration, Generativity (nurturing others and living up to our highest values), Forgiveness, Listening, and Humor - explained in Rabbi Rick's HH sermon

6-10 are: Courage, Respect, Compassion, Loyalty, and Creativity - described below

6. *Giving of One's Self Through Courage*

In 1996 Elissa Montani visited Bosnia. At the time she lived in Staten Island and suffered from a debilitating anxiety disorder. She was shown a letter from a boy who had lost two arms and a leg when a land mine blew up. The boy asked someone to help him. She found the courage to get doctors in the United States to help. The boy's courage gave her courage. Within a few years she had founded the Global Medical Relief Fund and was helping children from war torn places such as Bosnia, El Salvador, Liberia, Niger, Iraq and Somalia.

"Courage takes many forms. For some it means changing the world, even risking one's life to do so. For others, it requires standing up for oneself, speaking out in your own relationships about what you need, setting boundaries. For still others, it's the bravery to face each day in spite of difficulties, either psychological physical or economic. For all of

us it means developing the resilience and optimism to handle tough circumstances and emerge stronger and wiser. From the landscape of the world or our inner landscape, courage is a necessity—and can be a powerful way of giving...” “Courage comes from the Latin for ‘heart’ (cor). Courage is also contained in the word encouragement—literally, giving heart to another. And so we can look in the roots of language to show us the essence of courage.” Dr. Stephen Post notes the way in which the giving of whistle blowers gives back to them. He tells us that brave acts by whistle blowers--are self-rewarding. Research from the 1990’s has shown that of those who spoke up in the workplace against injustice, 90% said that they would do it again. They found it rewarding and uplifting. They had the courage to stand up for justice, but it came back to them in good feelings of self-worth and fulfilling an important purpose.

Some of the best research on justice and love has been done by Stanford University Professors Anne Colby and William Damon. They write, “Such courage begets great joy and connection to others. Over forty years of research have found that a commitment to justice is linked to sensitivity to fairness, the ability to imagine one’s self in another’s shoes, being moved by another’s suffering, and feeling morally and psychologically responsive. We can nurture these in ourselves. We can learn the three C’s of Courage: commitment, control and challenge. To increase commitment is to resolve to get and stay engaged even when a situation gets rough, rather than to turn away. Control means to see that we can have some control in the situation and not throw up our hands in powerlessness. Challenge means to see change and stress as an opportunity to learn, not a violation of our comfort or security. One can think of Elissa Montani whom I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion of the benefits of giving with and

receiving from acts of courage, in helping war wounded children and overcoming her anxiety disorder. Post speaks of effective courage as acting with “Carefrontation” of others. He points out the research on those with HIV showed decrease in symptoms when they reframed their lives as having a purpose in facing their illness with courage. He pointed out that a key element of acting in life with courage, in the face of illness or injustice is to have a clear purpose in life that one is dedicated to accomplishing.

For Jews, that comes easily. We find in the Aleynu prayer that we are to be partners with God in improving and fixing the world. This is called, Tikkun Olam. Smashing the glass at the end of every wedding ceremony and the prayer of the Aleynu at the end of each prayer service, reminds us that Tikkun Olam is a purpose that elevates our lives and helps us find courage in the face of illness and injustice, in strained relationships, and setbacks. What purpose in our lives leads us to act courageously in the face of illness of injustice? How will we act with carefrontation? How will that enhance the life of others? How will that enhance life for us? These are the questions we ask as we think about our behavior in the New Year.

7. Giving Respect - Look Deeper and Find Value

The Latin root for respect—respectare—means “to look again.” That’s a beautiful image that reveals the essence of respect. It requires us to look again, past first impressions and unconscious biases, to gaze deeply in order to understand another person’s history, struggles, life journey and perspectives. One of the most popular rock songs for decades has been R-E-S-P-E-C-T. The song conveys how important this aspect of life is to us in our health and feelings of happiness. Respect has four elements -- tolerance, civility, acceptance and reverence. In

Adam Seligman's 1998 Tolerance Project study, we find descriptions of the tolerance that developed between Rabbinical students and Islamic seminary students who met and studied together regularly both Judaism and Islam. As a result they were able to celebrate their commonality and differences, representing a tolerance that created bridges between those in societies at war.

Civility is a way of acting with respect. It is made up in part by acting with manners. Courteous people enrich their own spirits by making other people feel good. Civility also means kind and careful use of words. "Kind words smooth our way. Words are magic," writes Yale Law Professor Stephen Carter, author of the best-selling book Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy. "...Words at their best are the tools of morality, of progress, of hope. But words at their worst can wound... the way we use words matters." Civility is acting with respect in our words and deeds. It is a sacrifice we make for living with others, which comes back to us in stronger relationships that foster better health and happiness.

Acceptance is taking the time to really learn about another person, and then embracing and affirming them. It requires the time and attention of respectful dialogues, finding out what is important to another person and why that is important. Post suggests that the two most important questions we can ask ourselves each day are: what's truly going on inside me and can I meet that with kindness? When we learn to approach others with deep acceptance, we find the added benefit of approaching ourselves with this same caring and affirming acceptance.

Reverence is a sense of the sacredness of another and treating them with that sense of their infinite worth. We find reverence in the vastness and beauty of nature, but also in witnessing acts of goodness

by other. This was established in a study by Haidt in 2000. The model of reverence for the other is in Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship. It is at the core of the Jewish conception of marriage. The vow one utters is: "Behold, You are sacred/ consecrated/ Mekudeset Lee, to me as my husband/wife. Reverence, a spiritual sense of the sacredness of another, is perhaps the highest level of relating to another with the kind of respect that evokes deep love in return.

8. *Giving Through Compassion - Feel for Others*

Pati cum: these two Latin words make up the word Compassion, which means to suffer with. Compassion is to tenderly feel another's pain. Abraham Lincoln is a model of compassion. He once took home a drunk and cleaned him up. In his second inaugural address he wrote, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds." We are hard wired in our species for survival through compassion. New mothers brain images shows neuro-circuitry that are activated by the birth of a child. "Compassion calms and connects us. The well springs of compassion may be in the hormone oxytocin - a neuropeptide produced in a part of the brain called the hypothalamus, which penetrates the whole nervous system and has become famous for its link to pair-bonding, devotion and nurturing attachment. Some researchers now feel that oxytocin works through a unique axis of the nervous system that they call 'calm and connection' - the exact opposite of the well-known fight-or-flight hormones. Compassion allows us to mirror others' feelings. New research at Princeton is beginning to show that a brain area called the insula, located within the cerebral cortex is associated with empathy and compassion. It's a hot topic in neuroscience right now, because it is the place where mirror neurons - neurons that 'mirror' an experience

another person is having almost as if we're having it ourselves at the same time - seem to be located. Compassion is linked to having fuller positive emotions and spirituality. One researcher's new findings suggest that compassion and spirituality are hardwired and linked. He has measured the 'attachment' hormone, oxytocin, and the activity of the vagus nerve, a major nerve extending from our heart area to our brain, and found that both correlate with high compassion and intense spiritual experiences. Though these findings are preliminary, they hint that compassion is linked with other powerful feel good experiences like connectedness and spirituality. "

In 2005, psychologist Patrick Steffan found that compassion significantly reduced depression and stress among those who were religious. When he factored out compassion, he found that religion alone did not provide increased health benefit. Thus, the development and activation of compassion by religious worship and study, was what provided the better health and mental health benefit to those in his study. One exercise that Post reports as valuable in calming and connecting is to review one's day before going to bed. Visualize situations you didn't handle well as being handled with greater compassion. This not only makes one more compassionate but helps repair one's physical and mental stress and increases health. This spiritual exercise was taught by the famous Hasidic Rabbi, Nachman of Bratzlav, a hundred and fifty years ago as a preparation for the bedtime Shema. Compassion may be a key source of human morality. There is a special prayer during the High Holidays in which God is referred to as a God of compassion. The Hebrew word for compassion, Rachamim comes from the word for womb, Rechem. It recognized long ago, the link between mothers love and compassion for which we are hard wired. We are to emulate this Divine quality in our lives. "Scientists

Joshua Greene and Jonathan Cohen found that when people contemplated the harm done victims of violence, the same networks light up in their brains, as in mothers responding to suffering in their own children.” We can cultivate Compassion by meditation, by noticing pain and suffering around us, and by worship and study of the Torah. These help us to feel a wider range of positive emotions, to experience activism that results in a feeling of greater calm and wellbeing.

9. Giving Through Loyalty: Love Across Time

Dr. Post writes that, “Loyalty is love that lasts—and that’s what we all want. The commitment inherent in loyalty defuses our deepest existential anxiety. Broken covenants are hard to restore and never quite attain their state of original trust. It’s not easy to find loyalty in our society. Back in the 1960’s sociologists defined the typical American as ‘protean’ - after the Greek god who constantly changed his identity.” “As the Columbia law professor George Fletcher writes: ‘Shifting loyalties is an increasingly common way of coping with a weak friendship, a shaky marriage, a religious community that takes the wrong stand on an important issue, or a nation that has come into the hands of the wrong political party.’” In Judaism, Chesed is the Hebrew word for loyalty, for steadfast love. This type of loyalty is not blind to error or wrong doing. But in general, studies show that loyalty is good for us.

A study from the University of Chicago in 2005 found that those in healthy, happy, long-term marriages were highly giving and felt strong love toward others in general. Both married men and women are less likely to die than their single counterparts. When individual who were unhappy in their marriages but stayed in them were surveyed five years later, 80% were now happy indicating that working through hard times

in a marriage is often to our benefit, but not always, of course. Clearly 20% benefited from divorce from conflicted marriages.

Friendship can be beneficial to health protecting against depression and boosting self esteem. In a ten year study of people age seventy and older, a network of good friends was found to be more likely than close family relationships to increase longevity in older people -- by an impressive 22%. The famous psychiatrist George Valliant found in his long term study of life that subjects found the most important element in his men's good fortune was a loving marriage. Post adds that, "The science supporting the health benefits of long-term marriage is compelling. It seems that marriage is one of the most supremely balancing and healthful commitments we can make in life." In a study by Waite, "Almost nine out of ten married men alive at forty-eight would still be alive at age sixty five while only six out of ten never-married men alive at forty-eight would make it to retirement age." While those in marriage generally evidence greater health and report of happiness, Post adds the caveat that not all marriages lead to health benefits. He adds that "High conflict marriages in which couples openly fight in the presence of children, have been shown to lower immune function dramatically," according to a three decade study from Ohio State University study. One aspect of loyalty for Judaism is loyalty to the Jewish people. The Talmud says that the Jewish People are like a sheep. When it is pinched in one place, it is felt throughout the animal. The Hebrew Free Loan Society, The Jewish Burial Society, The Caring and Hospital Visitation Committees, The Jewish National Fund appeal, making a place in our synagogue for everyone regardless of financial situation, these are ways that we show our loyalty to the Jewish people and tradition. We feel good in giving of ourselves to our community, in doing a mitzvah. We feel good knowing we can call upon our

community when we need help or assistance. Being part of large extended family that will welcome you where ever you go, and helping to support and keep that community alive through our loyalty gives us a sense of belonging and connection that promotes good feelings in our lives.

Finally Post tells us how to maintain loyalty and love over time. Some things that help to create and maintain loyalty in relationships are to appreciate the differences that add to and enrich each partner's lives. Expect surprises and the unexpected. Give without expectation. Make the relationship a priority and spend time with one's partner. Admit mistakes, seek and grant forgiveness. These are always an important part of maintaining and repairing a relationship over time. Fix problems before they become calcified and overwhelming. Keep the vow of working through difficulties and sickness to gain the rewards of loyalty over time. As the decade long study on seniors quoted earlier established, not mates or parent child relationships, but friendships are often as important or more important in enhancing health and happiness. Many of the qualities mentioned above are also essential in maintaining and strengthening long term friendships which also have loyalty over time as a core component. Spend some time reviewing you relationships and these elements that are key to their maintenance over time. Determine which relationships need which of these types of attention. Set forth vows based on that awareness and start the enhancement of those relationships before Yom Kippur.

10. *Giving Through Creativity: Invent and Innovate*

Post reminds us that, "The diversity generated on our planet alone is a marvel. Somewhere between 10 million and 100 million species, flourish on earth. Life is so hardy and inventive that some organisms

can survive when frozen at temperatures of -70 degrees centigrade, while others thrive in deep-sea volcanic vents that gush black sulfurous water boiling at a hellish 700 degrees Fahrenheit. Regarding human beings he adds, "So here you are, today, alive in the midst of all this aliveness, your brain's 100 billion neurons firing away. What does all this creativity mean to you and how can you give creativity to yourself and others?" Professor Philip Clayton observes, "Once we recognize that we are microcosms of this macrocosmic process of unfolding novelty, that we are participants, we can look at our own lives with a sense of richness. I appropriate that sense of unfolding creativity, I joyfully participate." "Creativity allows humans to survive," says Harvard psychologist Shelley Carson. "We don't have the strength or speed to escape our predators, so we've survived by being creative and innovative.

Exposing ourselves to art, literature, astronomy, and any area that stimulates creative thinking can add joy and increase health. Those who participated in a drumming group were found to have increased positive immune systems. One study's author recalls, "Creativity can help heal us physically and emotionally. In my work with dementia patients, I've been amazed to see how quiet and stable these individuals become when they begin to paint. At the Fairhill Center on Aging, where I have held focus groups for the Alzheimer's Association, I have marveled that the work of these older adults is so free in color and form that it almost seems to benefit from the disinhibition of dementia. Today the Alzheimer's Association produces yearly calendars that feature art by those with dementia. Instead of abandoning them because of the painful erosion of their self and memory, this celebration of their art engages them through creativity with what still remains." A study in 2006 of cancer patients by psychologist and nurse

Judith Paice of Northwestern Memorial hospital found that, "... art therapy significantly reduced patients' symptoms after just an hour. Fifty patients were studied over a four month period; art therapy sessions reduced their pain, tiredness, depression, anxiety, drowsiness, lack of appetite and shortness of breath." Singing, writing, and other forms of creativity can provide a greater sense of well being.

Creativity as well in the moral realm has benefits for the giver as well as those helped. "Buckminster Fuller was awarded twenty five patents and many honorary doctorates. In the winter of 1927 at the age of thirty-two he was bankrupt and jobless. 'Bucky' had watched his daughter Alexandra die of pneumonia. He nearly committed suicide but instead at the last moment he embarked on an 'experiment' to find what a single individual can contribute to changing the world and benefiting all humanity." He lived a long and richly productive life, saved by his embrace of a creative moral path when in the depths of distress life nearly caused him to take his own. The High Holidays call on us to take time to think about the mitzvot, the ethical actions that call out for creative fulfillment and how we can feel the joy and happiness of life in doing them. Maybe it's volunteering around the Temple, or helping tutor a child, or coaching a kid's sports team, or helping with second harvest or the homeless shelter.

Here then are ten ways of giving of one's self, that Dr. Stephen Post has demonstrated contribute to a healthier, happier, and longer life: Celebration, Generativity (through nurturing others and living up to your highest values), Forgiveness, Deep Listening, Humor, Courage, Respect, Compassion, Loyalty and Creativity. Go through all ten. Rate them in order of which ones you do the most and best to which one's you do the least and are least good at. We often hear the saying, it's better to give than receive. It's good to receive. But it's clear that giving

of one's self in these ways provides tremendous return. Spend some time thinking about each of these ten avenues of giving. Jot down a few ways in which you can increase each in the coming year. Make a commitment to them. Remember the sacred wisdom of the Torah: Venatnu. You shall give. And 500 studies show, you shall receive.

All quotes are from: Why Good Things Happen to Good People: How To Live A Longer Healthier, Happier Life by the Simple Act of Giving, Stephen Post, Ph.D and Jill Neimark, Broadway Books, 2007