

With Hope in Our Hearts

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After Noah built the ark, the animals started to board the ship two by two. Pair after pair of animals passed by Noah, heading up the ramp into the ship. First came the elephants, side by side, male and female, and they nodded to Noah as they boarded. Then, came the tigers, the beautiful male and female couple striding along the ramp to the boat. You can imagine Noah's confusion as he looked quizzically at the Hippo walking towards the ark alone. Noah asked him where his mate was, and the hippo looked up at the boat with bright eyes and an enthusiastic smile. "I am hoping to meet her on the cruise!"¹ Hope springs eternal!

Hope is a concept that was talked about a lot this year, but seemed to be in short supply at times. The question I want to pose to you today is how do we, in our modern world, find hope in the midst of crisis?

It says a lot about the Jewish people that the national anthem of our homeland is called, "Hatikvah," the Hope. I learned about hope in modern day Jerusalem. I learned about hope from Israelis, Israelis who live in the face of crisis, tragedy and threats of terror constantly and personally. And they live with an ability to move forward. They send their children off into the army, and they live without giving up on a future where we will sit under our vine and fig trees and none shall be afraid. This summer, I was reminded of the amazing ability our Israeli brothers and sisters have to move forward with hope no matter what, and I was inspired. Israelis seem to find hope in the face of crisis. Perhaps, we can learn from our brothers and sisters in Israel.

The terrorist attack in March of 2002 at Jerusalem's Moment cafe, where 11 people were killed and over 60 people were injured was a turning point in my life, because I was right there. I heard it, I saw it, I felt the ground shake, and I was too near to it. It was a place Brian and I along with our friends frequently ate and drank with lots of other Israeli and American young people, and it was across the street from the prime minister's residence, so we felt fairly safe there. The attack shook my world. Afterwards, I did lose hope and any sense of security I had. But, this summer, as I spent time in Jerusalem, I went back to Moment Cafe. It had been rebuilt immediately after the attack, despite criticism and protests that the owner had not done enough to prevent the attack in the first place...and eventually, the ownership changed. But still, the day I visited this summer, there they were - young Israelis hanging out, drinking coffee, eating at the inside bar and the outside tables, with more security, to be sure, and seemingly without fear. How do they do it?

Maybe, it is because of the reason that Paul Liptz gives, a renowned Israeli speaker as well as educator and social historian who has spoken to us and taught us at Temple Judea annually, as he will this year in January: When asked how he could be so joyous and hopeful after talking about all the threats Israel is facing in a lecture, he said, "I have no other choice. Hope is the only option."

¹ With thanks to Kirk A. Erwin Lyons, Neb.

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As Americans, many of us have faced crises of both a personal nature and a national one in the form of an economic crisis in our country. The impact of this crisis is real on the families of this congregation, as it is for families across the country. 55% of the people interviewed for a recent New York Times article are jobless for the first time in the last five years.

54% of the people interviewed said they feel HOPELESS, and 82% don't think they will have a new job in the next couple of months. Some of you, maybe more than you can imagine, have recently felt the sting of an unplanned end of employment, the fear of losing a large chunk of your life savings, the disbelief as a home slipped through your fingers, the tragedy of a family torn apart by divorce, death, physical or mental illness. Our community, like many others has seen its share of crisis this year. Some of you are breathing heavy at how close you may have come to the edge, or wondering at your good fortune that you have actually benefited from the downturn and how long will that last? **What can we find in our tradition that gives us the hope to move forward despite the crises in our lives?**

Certainly, hope is a big part of our Jewish tradition.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, who was born in 1772 in the Ukrainian village of Medzobez, and who we will be studying and learning about throughout this year was no stranger to difficulty and sadness. His two young sons passed away within a year of one another. His wife died of tuberculosis soon after. Rebbe Nachman suffered from the same pain-wracking disease for several years, before succumbing to it at the age of 38. Yet it is Rebbe Nachman who gave the Jews of Europe their "battle cry" during the years of the Holocaust: **Never despair! It is forbidden to give up hope!**

In our own personal lives, when we encounter crisis, pain, and loss, how do we hold onto our hope that life can get better?

I would like to offer three answers, from our tradition:

First, sometimes, it requires a bit of separation from the craziness of our day to day lives to find the hope we need.

On Yom Kippur, we separate from our normal life and self: We refrain on this day from eating, drinking, wearing leather shoes, anointing with oil, and having sexual intercourse, according to Jewish law, in order to help us to separate from the earthly. No cell phones, pdas and blackberry for a few hours....if you can. Stop. Just stop. Try to separate and think about your life from an outsiders perspective.

"In her new book entitled A Paradise Built in Hell, Rebecca Solnit describes five disasters that occurred in the last one hundred years in North America.² Through her research and interviews of survivors from these five stirring stories she "discovers that disasters give rise to small, temporary utopias in which the best of human nature emerges and a remarkable spirit of generosity and cooperation takes over." "People," she says, "suffering unimaginable misfortune often revert not to savagery as governments predict and media has a predisposition to report, but to selflessness, comforting themselves by aiding others. Solnit cites many examples of those who remember a disaster as paradoxically one of the (amazingly) great moments of their lives."³ They don't want to say it was wonderful, but they have no

² The SF earthquake of 1906, the Halifax, Nova Scotia explosion of a munitions ship in 1917, the Mexico City earthquake in 1985, the 9-11 in 2001, and Hurricane Katrina, 2003.

³ A Paradise Built in Hell, by Rebecca Solnit, Dan Baum, Book Review, Washington Post

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language to describe the feelings. Altruism just doesn't do it. And unlike the adrenaline rush of a short lived superhuman rescue, paradise that is created in community lasts for months and years. She theorizes that this phenomenon happens because normal everyday life is **already** a disaster.

Our lives start daily, eventfully enough, waking to a broken air conditioner, getting peanut butter on your suit, the carpool is late and you have an early meeting, a kid has a sore throat, the boss dumps on a new deadline, dinner burns, and a there's a drip in the sink as you try to get some sleep. We live our normal everyday lives in a constant state of low to medium level crisis, catastrophizing what might happen knowing full well that generally, we make it through the day.⁴ The everyday "crises" are real. We sometimes need the separation from the day to day grind of our life to awaken to the hope we have in our hearts for the future.

One way that Temple Judea is responding is by setting up various support groups for a variety of crises that people in our community are experiencing, from bereavement to divorce to addictions and joblessness, which you will be hearing and reading about in the coming months, thanks to the great work of Vicki Hamersmith, and a generous grant from the Reckson Foundation.

Usually, it is a crisis that causes a paradigm shift. But, we don't have to wait for a crisis! Shabbat every week is practice for us, an opportunity for separation from the every day - and today is the Shabbat of Shabbats. **Sometimes, we must separate to shift our view of the world and find hope in an otherwise dreary situation.**

2. We can use this time away from our regular life to make a decision to change and find hope

Think about your own story, your own life, what is it that you need to make a decision to improve?

What is one specific thing you want to refine in yourself? Where is the area that you need hope? Is it a broken or estranged relationship that you may have given up on, because it seemed hopeless that it would get better? Was it a difficult situation that you have become numb to, because it seemed hopeless that it would improve? If you leave YK without thinking about how to refine yourself and improve your life, you have wasted this day. Yom Kippur is a day for atonement, change and HOPE. We read over and over that we confess and God forgives. Our liturgy reminds us again and again, there is hope for each one of us. When we say the words "Adonai, Adonai, gracious and kind, forgiving the iniquity and transgression and sin..." that is hope. It runs through all our prayers today.

In a small book by Jim Hartness and Neil Eskelin called "The 24 hour Turn Around," which uses 24 one hour time periods to change your life, the first step is making a decision. Transformation begins the moment you decide to change. "Nothing happens without the decision to change." Once that decision is made, the actions follow much easier. We must decide to be more hopeful.

We separate, we decide, and then:

3. We also have to move forward with hope - by taking action. During my year in Israel, I used to take an aerobic/cardio class at the YMCA gym in

⁴ Rabbi Devora Lynn of Fredericksburg, VA in her Rosh Hashanah sermon 5770.

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Jerusalem, and the instructor, who was a tiny woman with an astoundingly loud voice, who had served in the army and had boundless energy would yell "kadima!" meaning to go forward. It is also, of course, the name of the political party in Israel. It is a great symbol as well, of the Israeli attitude that I think we can adopt - GO Forward! This may be a tough time for you. But go forward! This may be a scary time, But go forward! What other choice is there? We must live with hope, yet hope is not enough, either. We have to work and take action, with hope in our hearts to bring about results. Hope only works as long as its accompanied by action.⁵

The Shalom Achshav Movement is a great example of Israelis, not only hoping, but moving forward with hope in their hearts to bring peace. Shalom Achshav, or "Peace Now," is the largest extra-parliamentary movement in Israel, the country's oldest peace movement and the only peace group to have a broad public base.

Our Torah portion this morning, Nitzavim, reminds us: "we all stand here today," in a crisis of our community and facing personal crises, and our stories are intermingled. We stand together today as we did at Sinai. Hearing the voice not coming from heaven but from the quiet place within us. The holiness is of our own stories (p. 262 Beginning Anew) "It is not hidden from you, nor is it far off, the word is very near to you, in your moth, and in your heart, that you may do it." The Torah says, "Choose life!" Choose hope, and move forward just as we continue to learn from our Israeli brothers and sisters.

With hope in our hearts, we must separate from our lives, make a decision today and move forward.

Lyricist Yonatan Gefen writes in the song *Yihye Tov, (It Will Be Good)*, made famous by David Broza, and was written after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, "*mey'a shanim shel cherev v'od lo av'da hatikva*," "a hundred years of war, but hope has not been lost."

In the songs and actions of our people, we affirm that regardless of the setbacks we have witnessed in Eretz Yisrael, we will survive and grow as a nation. The songs of Israel have given us courage for a hundred years, and they will be remembered and sung in generations to come: "yihyeh tov" despite all of the hardship, we believe in our hearts that there is hope for a better tomorrow for Israel and for each one of us.

Living with hope requires a separation from the mundane. This day is a gift because you are separate from everything else in your life. A decision must be made, and then we must act to move forward to live with hope. Yihyeh Tov. It will be good!

⁵ Ralph Marston, The Daily Motivator, January 4, 1997.