

Kol Nidrei 2020
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One of the main symbols of Yom Kippor is the Sefer Haim, the Book of Life. In Hebrew the word for life "*Hayim*" is plural. Our lives are touched by others. Each of us writes our own book of life with chapters of what we learn from others. Because I am new to this community. I would like to share with you from my Sefer Chayim, my Book of Life

I grew up in New Jersey in a family that was very active in our Temple. One of my earliest memories is from Yom Kippor, 1973. I was eight years old. I have two older brothers and

because we were under 13 and not fasting, our parents had brought a challah for us, which was in a bag, in our car, in the parking lot, of the Temple. At some point during the service we got hungry and went out to the car to eat Challah. My oldest brother, Ben, began to play with the car keys until he got the radio to go on – and then we heard the news – a war had broken out – in Israel on Yom Kippor. We went running back in to the temple to tell our parents, who told the others. Everybody came out and stood in the parking lot by their cars with the radios blaring the news of what was happening in Israel. That's the picture in my memory. All the adults standing there in the

parking lot on Yom Kippor. I suspect there were real prayers said that Yom Kippor in the Temple parking lot. Today, is the Yahrzeit of the Yom Kippor war that began 47 years ago at this time. More than 2,000 Israelis died in that war as Israel defended itself from a surprise attack. On that day in '73 I got the message. My family was part of something larger, the Jewish community. We were not Americans versus Israelis – we were one Jewish community with a common past and a shared destiny.

Both my parents deserve credit for shaping my Jewish identity but my Mom in particular had a

big impact. She was a Hebrew school teacher and later a principal, and I went to whichever Hebrew school she worked at.

This allowed me to experience diversity. I attended a Conservative Hebrew school, was the president of the NFTY Youth Group at our Reform Temple and went to Reform Jewish Summer Camp at Eisner.

When I was a teen my parents founded a Reconstructionist synagogue and hosted shabbat services in our home for years. Later during college, I studied at an orthodox yeshiva in Jerusalem. From these diverse

experiences, I learned that God is not Reform, Conservative, Orthodox or Reconstructionist.

These movements are all human creations and they all have their pluses and minuses. To the extent they bring people closer to Jewish life and ethics that is good and to the extent they alienate people – that needs to be fixed.

People ask when did you decide to be a Rabbi? I jokingly respond it was the third year of rabbinical school. Originally, I went to rabbinical school because I wanted to learn more about how our people had survived the Romans, the Crusades, the pogroms, the Holocaust. Our people is an inspiring story of

resilience and creativity, During the third year of Rabbinical school I was asked to serve as the student rabbi for congregation of 150 families in Bloomington, Indiana. The sincerity and enthusiasm for Jewish life I discovered there helped me to realize that becoming a rabbi was a path of meaning and blessing.

During the six years I studied to be a rabbi at Hebrew Union College one of my mentors was Rabbi Ben Hollander. He taught us Torah is called *Pardes*, the orchard. The mission of a rabbi is to guide people in the *Pardes*. Imagine you are waking among a row of trees in an orchard. The trees are full of fruit which you

desire to eat. When you pick an orange for the first time someone needs to teach you to peel off the skin, it's bitter not fit for food.

Someone needs to teach you to spit out the seeds, they are bitter not fit for food. In the orchard some fruits are good and some are bad. The poisonous fruits of hatred, sexism, homophobia, racism –these sadly do exist in the human imagination, just like you can find poisonous hemlock in nature. Jewish life is about critical thinking. How to distinguish (*lhavdil*) between the healthy and the unhealthy, between what promotes life or God-forbid endangers life, or limits the freedom of expression of one's soul. The role of the rabbi is

to help people journey in the world with Jewish wisdom and discerning eyes.

The Torah is a Sefer Hayim, a book of life. My hope as your new rabbi is to help you find meaning and inspiration for life. Together we are writing the next chapter in the book of life of our community. I shared some stories of those who have touched my life, my parents and teachers. I look forward to learning from you and with you. May our coming together today for Yom Kippor give us inspiration. May we strengthen each other as we journey forward. May we all be sealed in the Book of Life. *Gemar Hatima Tova.*

