

Yom Kippur 5782

לֵאמֹר מֹשֶׁה-אֵל, יְהוָה וַיְדַבֵּר

אֱלֹהֵיכֶם יְהוָה אֲנִי, קְדוֹשׁ כִּי: תְהִי־קִדְשֵׁימ--אֱלֹהִים וְאִמְרַתְּ, יִשְׂרָאֵל-בְּנֵי עֵדֶת-כָּל-אֵל דַּבֵּר
יְהוָה, אֲנִי: רַעַף דָּם-עַל תַּעֲמֹד לֹא, בְּעַמִּיךָ רֹכִיל תִּלְךָ-לֹא
חָטָא עָלָיו תִּשָּׂא-וְלֹא, עֲמִיתְךָ-אֶת תּוֹכִיחַ הוֹכֵחַ; בְּלִבְבְּךָ, אַחִיךָ-אֶת תִּשְׁנֹא-לֹא
יְהוָה, אֲנִי: כְּמוֹךָ לְרַעַף וְאַהֲבַתְּ, עִמָּךְ בְּנֵי-אֶת תִּטֵּר-וְלֹא תִקֵּם-לֹא.

God spoke to Moses and said: Speak to the entirety of the Israelite congregation and tell them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord you God, am holy. Don't be running around as a talebearer among the congregation; neither shall you stand idly by silent when your neighbor's blood is shed. Don't hate your brother in your heart; you should confront him about his sinful behavior so that you do not bear the consequences of his sin. Do not take revenge, nor carry any grudge against your fellow, so that you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I Adonai (have spoken).

Today's Haftarah is from the Book of the prophet Jonah: The Lord spoke his word to Jonah, son of Amittai. He said, Leave at once for the great city, Nineveh. Announce to the people that I can no longer overlook the wicked things they have done." And, after an encounter with a storm and a great fish, prophet Jonah did just that; he announced the imminent judgment of that city and watched and waited for its destruction.

I must say that I sometimes feel that I am living in the Nation of Nineveh. I see myself as a resident of a country many of whose citizens seem to take a perverse pleasure in violating the commandments found in the Torah teaching that I just read. Some compare the divisive situation we

find ourselves in today to be very similar to the one our nation found itself in just before the start of our Civil War. I would not argue against this comparison, but as a Jew, my mind and heart reflect on the destruction of the Second Temple, the sack of Jerusalem, the death of one million Judeans, and the exile of Jewish people from their homes and their homeland in 70 CE. Living just after this catastrophe, our Sages asked, “Why did these events occur? What were the sins of our people to merit such a fate?” In Talmud tractate Yoma, which describes the laws and rituals of Yom Kippur during the era when the Temple still stood, they came to this conclusion: though many persons that lived during the time of the Second Temple engaged in Torah study, observed the mitzvot, and practiced acts of lovingkindness, there was wanton gratuitous hatred during this period, a hatred that divided the people so destructively that even as the Romans besieged Jerusalem, Jew fought and killed Jew rather than attend to the defense of the city. Unfortunately, it sometimes seems to me to be a condition we are experiencing here in the USA.

So, what are we supposed to do to remedy this catastrophic condition? I ask this question because “we” are Congregation Tikkun Olam. We have committed ourselves to help repair the broken parts of creation and heal those who inhabit this fractured world—people, animals, the environment, all of nature. In today’s liturgy, we read a declaration by our Rabbis found in Tractate Yoma: “For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones; but for transgressions of one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until they have made peace with one another.” Unfortunately, our ancestors could not avoid giving in to the hate they felt in their hearts towards their neighbors. They could not

make peace with one another even in the face of a national disaster. They seem to have hated both their neighbors and themselves.

Rabbi Israel, the Ba'al Shem Tov, related the commandment to love the neighbor as the self with the commandment "Don't hate your brother in your heart." He taught: "Your fellow is your mirror. If your own face is clean, so will the image you perceive. But should you look upon your fellow and see a blemish, it is your own imperfection that you are encountering—you are being shown what it is that you must correct within yourself." My teacher John Makransky expressed the situation this way: "One reason that we have difficulty finding enduring love that we need to help others is that others often bother us. So many others just don't seem so good to us. What bothers us about others are aspects of ourselves that they mirror back to us, aspects we dislike seeing. Until we make deep peace with aspects of ourselves, unwanted aspects we don't want to see, we cannot open to the intrinsic goodness of others that lies hidden from our view." Therefore, we must act to make peace with ourselves and, in doing so, reduce the level of discord that affects our relationships with others.

As we know, not everyone may be open to such an exchange. But often, herein lies the problem with our relationships with others. The negativity we express towards others may reflect the negativity we feel towards ourselves. So, how do we address this situation? How do we begin to make peace with aspects of ourselves that we don't want to see? This morning's Torah portion has some good advice for achieving this goal. First, we do not stand idly by while our neighbor's blood is shed. Instead, we take whatever actions we can to ensure that such events do not occur in the future. Second, even as we act, we do not hold on to any vengeful

thoughts that arise inside our minds and hearts. It is not that we are likely actually to seek to take vengeance. But holding some grievance is hurtful to ourselves and our ability to love ourselves and others. Holding onto a grudge has been compared to drinking poison and then hoping that the other person dies; it is destructive of self and our ability to relate to others. It reinforces our own deepest fear that we may be just like the other against whom we hold the grudge. It is only when we let go of our grudges that we can love our neighbor as ourselves. Since we all want others to treat us in such a fashion, we must learn to treat all others in this way.

To accomplish this, we must recognize that the faults we see in others are often reflections of shortcomings that we see in ourselves. Then, we must begin the process of genuinely forgiving both the other and the self. It is not easy to do this. Our scripture gives us a choice: We can be like prophet Jonah, who could not give up his grudge against Nineveh and hold fast to our call for the destruction of the wicked. Or we can work to be like the prophet Micah, who urges us to act with mercy towards ourselves and all people. The message of the Book of Jonah is that we need to act like God and repent and abandon any plans for retribution. As we apply *tikkun olam* to ourselves, let us create a regular practice of cultivating caring for ourselves and showing ourselves lovingkindness to better share it with those around us.