

Good Yuntiv.

I don't remember the first time that I heard about the idea of Tikkun Olam – repairing the world. I know that it was in my childhood and it's always stayed with me. The idea that our actions have cosmic significance; the idea that God needs our help; the idea that each mitzvah, each positive deed helps to draw us closer to a perfect world. If there was one guiding principle in my life, the idea of Tikkun Olam would probably be it.

It's hard to imagine what that ideal world will look like. The only time we envision a perfect world in Judaism, there weren't as many people around. Gan Eden - The Garden of Eden remains the ultimate Jewish paradise. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree and we've been locked out ever since. That doesn't mean the desire to get back to Gan Eden has diminished. In many ways the idea of Tikkun Olam reflects the longing that the Garden can be a reality for us once again.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi wanted to go. The Talmud (Ketubot 77b) shares a story about how at the end of his life, God orders the Angel of Death to grant Rabbi Joshua a wish and Rabbi Joshua asks to see the Garden of Eden. He's nervous that the Angel of Death is going to take his life before he gets there, so he asks to hold onto the Angel's soul-taking sword. In the end, Rabbi Joshua escapes into Gan Eden and after God's intervention, reluctantly returns the sword. That's really in the Talmud – you have to love the chutzpah of our rabbis!

It's all about getting back to Eden – to be a part of that perfect world. And it turns out that our Yom Kippur tradition may actually hold the key to the Garden of Eden.

On five different occasions the Torah tells us that we need to humble or oppress or afflict our soul on Yom Kippur. Twice in this morning's Torah reading, Leviticus 16, twice later on in Leviticus, and once in the book of Numbers.¹ We have to afflict our soul – it sounds serious, but what does it mean? The Torah doesn't tell us, so we turn to the Mishnah (Yoma 8) where our rabbis identify five ways that we disrupt our lives on Yom Kippur. These are the prohibitions that we're familiar with:

1. No eating or drinking; 2. No wearing leather; 3. No bathing; 4. No perfumes; and 5. No sexual activity.

Traditionally, we avoid one or more of these items each year on Yom Kippur and traditionally, each year, we wonder – how does this help? At this point in the day we might already be feeling a bit afflicted, but inevitably we raise the question: if I'm hungry and uncomfortable – how is this going to help me focus on my prayers and become a better person? And each year we get

¹ Leviticus 16:29, 16:31, 23:27, 23:32, and Numbers 29:7

an answer that might make sense for the moment, but the answer doesn't stick with us and we ask again the following year.

No more. No more will you have to wonder, because this teaching, which comes from Dr. Avi Rabinowitz² and that I learned from Rabbi Seth Limmer, this is the one that will stick with us. It's a great teaching that takes us back to the Garden of Eden. According to this tradition, after Adam and Eve ate the Fruit, God created Yom Kippur. This gave them an opportunity to atone before getting sent out into the world. Through this interpretation, each of the five prohibitions were meant to reconnect us with Eden.

Why no washing or perfumes? Because it says in Genesis 3:19 – “By the sweat of your brow...” This is interpreted to mean that we didn't sweat in Gan Eden. As we symbolically return to the Garden, there would be no need to wash, no need for deodorants or perfumes. Why no eating or drinking? Outside the Garden, we have to work for our food. In Eden, God provided for us. To connect to Eden, we refrain from that which we helped to create. We don't wear leather because leather shoes represent the protection we need for our feet and our lives. There is far too much that can bring us harm outside of the Garden. Gan Eden is a return to protection, so no need for leather, as we try to claim the sense of safety and security that we are constantly praying for. And of course, as we return to Eden, we recall the innocence of Adam and Eve before they ate of the Fruit – therefore no sexual activity.

This creative understanding of why we fast – how we disrupt our lives and afflict our souls – offers profound insight into the connection between Yom Kippur and Tikkun Olam. Our fast today is not without purpose. It serves as a model for transformation. In order for Yom Kippur to take us back to Gan Eden, that perfect world, we have to disrupt our lives. If we're going to repent and change, we have to disrupt our lives. If we have any hope of making our lives just a little bit better, we have to disrupt our lives. The late Shimon Peres, Zichrono Livracha, taught, "The Jews' greatest contribution to history is dissatisfaction! We're a nation born to be discontented. Whatever exists we believe can be changed for the better." I love that quote! And in order to bring about that change, we can't be satisfied with the status quo.

I'm aware that I'm asking a lot. Last night, I asked you to suffer and now I'm asking you to disrupt your lives... But this morning, I'm not going to ask you for a huge disruption. I'm not asking you to solve the problems of global warming or terrorism or peace for Israel or hunger. Tikkun Olam – repairing the whole world – it's a lot. We all have a part to play, but we are not

² Avi Rabinowitz. “The Inuyim of Yom Kippur & the Expulsion from Eden”. *Mail-Jewish*. Volume 37 Number 16. Ottmall.Com, 11 September 2002. Web. 17 September 2011. Found here: <http://pathoftorah.com/2015/09/20/yom-kippur/>

required to fix the whole thing. Our food drive is the perfect example. When everyone gives something, the impact is much greater.

With this in mind, think for a moment about your life. Spend some time this afternoon. What tikkun, what repair, what healing can you offer? A tikkun for family... A tikkun for an issue you care about... A tikkun to strengthen your CBI community or the Jewish people as a whole.... There are so many things that you can do – where can you help to bring wholeness into your life and the lives of others?

It will be disruptive to your usual schedule. Making minyan to help someone in the community mourn – it's disruptive – but that support and comfort make our world and our community a better place. Doing Judaism doesn't always fit into modern life - making it to Shabbat services or hosting a Shabbat dinner for friends or just being here on Yom Kippur – it's not so easy. Ask any one of our teenagers how stressful and disruptive missing one day of school can be.

That's why it's so important that we remember that such disruptions are not merely to add stress to our lives. Our prohibitions on Yom Kippur are sacred actions that remind us not to lose sight of Eden. The world is going to change – our lives will be disrupted by something. So take control and disrupt your own life and do so in a way that builds up community, that teaches others what kindness looks like, that connects us with our sacred tradition, or demonstrates to your family that they mean more to you than anything.

And God willing our disruptions will help to crack the apathy and indifference we see and experience, and lead us on the path back to Eden.

G'mar Chatima Tova – May we all be sealed for a good year!