

**No Hard Feelings
Yom Kippur Morning
2018**

Cindy and I recently embarked on a special trip abroad for a big upcoming anniversary. We wanted it to be something unique and memorable. We planned it carefully, of course consulting the wisdom of Rabbi Rick Steves, striving to strike a balance between novelty, comfort and just the chance to relax and simply be together—which for us is a true luxury.

In the days before we departed, a critical additional element came to mind—one that could offer a clear distinction between genuine down time and more of the same. In the spirit of our efforts this morning, we decided to embrace a *fast*—not from the culinary treasures we'd hope to

enjoy—but from the news, the media and most other, worldly connections.

It's not because we don't care about the issues and concerns of the day—particularly in these perilous, troubling times. Rather, if our time away was going to be true to its essence as recreation—or more pointedly—a *re-creation* of ourselves, our bond and our place in the world, we needed a break from the never-ending, omnipresent, outrage-fatiguing maelstrom that is our current culture.

We read books we'd been meaning to get to for decades. We drove through the countryside, sometimes with planned purpose, sometimes with aimless joy, discussing the important parts of our

lives that often get short shrift in our crazed, over-connected world.

***And you know what?* When we returned to Seattle both physically and to our cyber-smorgasbord—we really hadn't missed that much. Same ssstuff...different day.**

But as I reflect on the many gifts and gains of our time away, the chance to disconnect from the crises of the moment offered a profound renewal of perspective at this most critical of times—enabling me to act more thoughtfully and constructively to confront the considerable challenges we are facing. And this new take on the world helped me to redouble my efforts to move from my growing contempt for “the other side” to the genuine content of their views.

And perhaps most importantly, my fast helped me to better appreciate that, without greater empathy, compassion and patience to *really listen and to hear* the hopes and fears of others, nothing in our lives and in our world will be resolved for good and for right. And what can improve the wider world so significantly can also bind the personal bonds, closer to home, upon which larger gains depend.

But to get to that point of openness and understanding—to make the most of a re-created self—to garner the lessons of this holy day throughout the year and throughout our lives—we must get past resentments and recriminations—moving past regrets and ruminations—grasping

**for the higher ideal of harboring no ill will—
reaching a place of *no hard feelings*.**

**The texts of our tradition overflow with
wisdom and counsel in this regard—offering
insight toward a catharsis of self and clarity with
others. These words inspire us to express
ourselves honestly, to support change and growth
in others, and to strengthen our bonds with God
through others.**

**The powerful words we'll read in Torah this
afternoon from Leviticus 19, the Holiness Code,
provide some basic assumptions about what it is
to be a good person, and a good influence. Some
speak not only to our actions, but to the state of
mind and spirit from which those actions emerge.**

The passage concludes dramatically:

Do not hate your kinsmen in your heart. Admonish your neighbor but incur no guilt because of them. Do not take vengeance or bear a grudge against one of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself.

An amazing statement inspiring a tremendous task: To be aware of the toxicity of our roiling resentment; to fully share our bitterness towards others through sound criticism; to not allow rage to take seat in our hearts and to condemn our hands to irreparable harm; and to see all of these lessons as an expression of our ultimate need and gift: *To love others as we seek to be loved ourselves.*

A key Jewish virtue emerges from these commands: *Tochecha*—the command to constructively rebuke others. No, this is not a

Torah-based justification for stereotypical Jewish complaining and criticizing. It's our take on the old axiom that: *Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and expecting it to kill your adversary.* It is a profound realization amongst the ancients: A well-intended, substantive, issue-based critique is not only good for the soul in need of purging, but good for the object of the rebuke--offering guidance for growth, and balm for a bond that can ultimately draw closer through a resolution of disagreement and disconnect.

The rabbis took this even one step further, teaching that *tochecha* is more than a repair of what's broken. Sharing difficult feelings in a tough conversation can be the *only path* to genuine love and authentic peace. As the sages

advised: *Love without reproof is not true love.*

Peace without reproof is not true peace.

The courage to clearly and constructively share concerns and feelings, even and especially when painful to say and hear; to do so with the hope and goal of helping another change their ways, their words, and their lives; to see in such trying moments the key to the resolution of inevitable conflict, and to thus create and extend real *shalom*—real wholeness in a fractured world; *this* is how we can heal our times by healing our bonds; and it must begin with a conviction to live with *no hard feelings*.

I've counseled so many families in times of drama, duress and crisis—particularly in the waning moments of a loved one's life. These

moments tend to bring out the best and the worst in us, evoking long dormant memories and surfacing neglected conflicts. Sometimes the intensity of such times further embitters and alienates. But some times—*many times*—the magnitude of the moment inspires and compels a family to *finally* come together—to put aside petty grievances and generational feuds—to see through the prism of our brief and mortal sojourn what is truly important, what actually matters, and what can profoundly change our lives and those of others in a brilliant flash of holiness and revelation.

Perhaps it's human nature to only embrace this awareness when the final chips are down, the stakes are high, and the window for change is

narrowing. But if this sacred Day of Atonement means *anything*, through its call for our scrutiny and demands for our return, it offers a chance to change our lives, and to be change in another's life, while we still have time to live, while we still can forge a life that, looking back upon it on that inevitable and fateful day, we can honestly say we lived without regret, without remorse, with *no hard feelings*.

Song