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Erev Rosh Hashanah 5776/2015

Nothing More

Last summer I went on a three week meditation retreat to Costa Rica. We were in a quiet part of the country off of the southeast coast in the rainforest. It was fun waking up in the morning to the sound of howler monkeys and exotic birds, and saying, "It's a jungle out there!" After morning meditation and qigong stretching on the beach, we'd engage in sessions of learning and meditation. The confluence of nature's beauty, the abundance of animal life, the power of being in a small group, and the opportunity to focus inward all came together to provide an unforgettable experience. I'd like to share with you two of the lessons I learned.

First lesson, we are love. Not, we have the capacity to love, but we ARE love. Love is not only some vague sentimental feeling or hormone induced brain chemistry – that's something different. Our natural state is love. We are love, even when we choose not to live it.

The hard part for many of us is to fully love ourselves. Funny how that level of self-compassion, acceptance and forgiveness can be so difficult. Can you look in a mirror, say "I love you" and mean it? It's a worthwhile exercise and it gets easier, less silly, and more meaningful with practice. We can only love others to the extent that we love ourselves. Conversely, we don't let others love us in those places where we don't love ourselves. There's a reason they say on the airlines to put your oxygen mask on first before you help others with theirs...

In many ways, fear is the opposite of love. Fear is a love blocker. Fear of sharing our feelings, fear of saying our truth, fear of failure, fear of embarrassment – these all hold us back from loving ourselves and loving others. Start with small things. Push yourself past that fear. From personal experience, I can tell you that it gets easier as you practice.

Judaism has much to say about love! At the top of the list are the words from Leviticus 19, a section filled with laws about how we are to treat each other fairly and compassionately: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In Deuteronomy we read, “Love Adonai Your God with all your heart, soul and might.” We chanted these words earlier in our service. The Talmud teaches [*Yoma 26a*] that to love God means that we should behave divinely towards others. In our prayers and in rabbinic writings, the Torah is considered God’s gift of love to our people. And *g’milut chassadim* – acts of loving-kindness are considered among the most important of all the commandments.

My retreat take away lesson regarding love is to put love in where love is missing. Putting love in can diffuse situations or conversations where there is negative emotional energy. Putting love in deepens relationships. Living from the heart and putting love in, changes us and the world. Take a moment now and think of a place in your life, a person or situation where you can make a difference by putting love in...

A second lesson I learned from my retreat was that all things are connected. We are One. I think we know this intuitively. Separateness and aloneness are an illusion. There isn’t anything else out there. Prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices can help us feel that connectedness. We are part of the expanse of all Creation in the universe. We are part of God. We are “*b’tzelem Elohim*”, not only created in the image of God, but connected to God. How much better would this world be if, as you go through your day, you see the face of God in each person you come into contact? Would your words or actions change, if you acknowledged the holy spark within each person? Even Jean Valjean sings in *Les Miserables*, “To love another person is to see the face of God.”

The Shema is our ultimate statement of One-ness. It begins “Shema” – listen up, pay attention, be present to this moment. “Yisrael” – immediately we acknowledge our connection to community. “Yisrael” – those of you who wrestle with God. “Adonai Eloheinu” – again, a

statement of connection – God is OUR God, all humanity, all things. “Adonai echad” – (as I translate it), God is Oneness.

We stop feeling connected, feeling that one-ness when we isolate ourselves or when we play the part of the victim. Get past it! It’s a New Year, and more importantly, a new moment in our lives. We have the incredible gift of free will, the opportunity to choose. Choose life! Choose to connect - to yourself, to others, to nature, to God, to the wholeness of life. We are born in relationship. We exist in connected relationship. On Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement, we seek to be “at one” with ourselves, with others and with God.

Gratitude and prayer create easy gateways to feeling deeper connection. Take a moment now, and think of those things in your life that you are grateful for – include family and friends, but try to dig deeper to go beyond them. And, notice how this brings a sense of connection and personal meaning...

We are love. We are One. Important lessons, but this knowledge is not enough. This is where I leave my Costa Rican retreat lessons and turn to Judaism which compels me to action. We may be the “People of the Book” and deeply value learning, but Judaism is a religion and culture of doing. When we, all of us, were standing together at Mount Sinai and God was offering us the Torah – a guidebook for living – we said in one voice, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*”, we will do and we will listen. The doing takes priority over the learning. Leviticus implores us, “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” Deuteronomy compels us, “Justice, justice shall you pursue.” In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of our Fathers, written 2000 ago, Rabbi Chanina teaches, “For one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures.” We are love, we are one, and we are how we treat each other. Let’s be doers.

On this Rosh Hashanah eve, let me remind you that (whether you are members or not) we are Rodef Shalom – pursuers of “shalom”, at its deepest meaning, “wholeness”. Let us pursue

wholeness, love, and connection - for ourselves, in our relationships, and in the world. *Kein y'hi ratzon* – may this be God's will.

I've never had a song write a sermon before, but this one was a perfect fit. I'd like to teach you the chorus, which you've pretty much heard already. Repeat after me...

### **Nothing More by Alternate Routes**

To be humble, to be kind.

It is the giving of the peace in your mind.

To a stranger, to a friend

To give in such a way that has no end.

We are Love

We are One

We are how we treat each other when the day is done.

We are Peace

We are War

We are how we treat each other and Nothing More

To be bold, to be brave.

It is the thinking that the heart can still be saved

And the darkness can come quick

The Dangers in the Anger and the hanging on to it.

We are Love

We are One

We are how we treat each other when the day is done.

We are Peace

We are War

We are how we treat each other and Nothing More

Tell me what it is that you see

A world that's filled with endless possibilities?

Heroes don't look like they used to, they look like you do.

We are Love

We are One

We are how we treat each other when the day is done.

We are Peace

We are War

We are how we treat each other and Nothing More

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tXzIVjU1xs>