

## KOL NIDRAY 5776

Back in the 1930's, the Labor party in Palestine was struggling over the question of whether or not to support partition in the Land of Israel.

Splitting Palestine into a Jewish nation and an Arab nation would create the first independent Jewish state in almost nineteen hundred years. It would come, however, at the cost of giving up some of the holiest and most historic sites in the Land of Israel.

Partition had the potential for leading to peace, to offering a home to many of Europe's persecuted Jews. On the other hand, partition meant that part of the Zionist dream would die, as parts of the Land of Israel were traded for peace.

David ben Gurion, who would become Israel's first Prime Minister in 1948, could not decide what to do, so he asked a long-time, political mentor, Yosef Tabenkin for advice. Tabenkin said: "Give me twenty four hours, and I will tell you what I think you should do, because I need to consult with two people." Tabenkin came back the next day, and said: "I think you should vote for partition."

Ben Gurion thanked him for his advice, and then asked: "would you mind telling me who were the two people you consulted with before making your decision?"

Tabenkin said: “I asked my grandfather, who is no longer alive, and I asked my grandchild who is not yet born. Only after I thought about what they would say and what would be best in their eyes, could I make my decision.”

Each and every day, we all make decisions based upon the information we possess. Whether at work, at school or at home, our decisions have consequences which usually will not affect the world, but certainly have the potential to impact our lives.

Many years ago, my parents were annual subscribers to the theatre series at downtown Detroit’s beautiful Fisher Theatre. Over the course of many years, my parents were able to move up to third row center seats. I saw a few plays from those quite-amazing seats.

However, as Detroit’s fortunes began to decline, the quality of the plays did as well. What used to be pre or post Broadway productions became second-rate shows. Though they did not attend many of the shows, my parents faced the same question every year: do we subscribe again or lose the great seats it took so long to get? They stuck it out for many years, until they just couldn’t justify it any longer.

I know some of our congregants here tonight faced a similar dilemma with their Mets season tickets. As fate would have it, this year, after they finally gave up their seats, the Mets turned their fortunes around.

We cannot know what the future will bring. We make our best decision concerning major issues like Iran, refugees, the economy, the Middle East, the stock market, the race for President and criminal cases we see presented on TV.

None of us can know the truth with absolute certainty. We see people exonerated who were sentenced to death by the courts. We hear respected leaders in society confess to lapses in judgment. We are constantly surprised when what we know to be true turns out to be false. We do the best we can, but Yom Kippur reminds us of our imperfection.

Back in rabbinical school, I was friendly with a very bright grad student who was living in the dorms, while working on her degree. Anita was someone whom I aspired to emulate and whom I feared to emulate. She was a perfectionist, which is a problem because, of course, none of us is perfect. I literally had to console her once when she got a 99 on one of her papers.

While many of us strive for excellence, we are realistic enough to understand that we are not perfect. Several years ago, the father of a Bar Mitzvah boy came into my office right before the service and admonished his son “you’d better not make any mistakes!” As soon as the father left, I told the boy not to worry because I knew that he would make some mistakes because everyone does, even the Cantor and me.

Of course, that’s what I told the Bar Mitzvah boy. It’s what I tell almost every Bar and Bat Mitzvah. However, the truth is that my own imperfection is very frustrating to me. Whether it is sermons, bulletin articles, classroom notes or more, I always find plenty to correct in my work, especially my written work, no matter how many times I go over it. At a certain point, however, the amount of possible improvement no longer justifies the time and effort required to bring it about.

Still, a different perspective can be helpful in finding our faults. Other people are usually more adept in finding our errors than we would be. As a result, the Temple established a two-person proofreading team to go over most of what is sent out to our Temple membership. From bulletins to calendars to flyers and more, we have made huge strides in eliminating errors, but we’re still not perfect and we never will be. Ultimately, we have to accept that no matter how well we have done, no matter how hard we have tried, there is always room for improvement.

One of the reasons that I love sports is the possibility of the unexpected. Back in 2002, when the Mets traded for superstar and future Hall of Famer Robbie Alomar, everyone agreed that it was a great move. The problem was that Alomar played terribly. Management did everything right, but it just didn't work out as expected.

Sometimes, we just can't do anything about bad decisions, but sometimes we can. Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of "When Bad Things Happen To Good People" told the story of the Yom Kippur sermon he delivered one year on the theme of forgiveness. The next day, a very upset woman came to see him. She told the rabbi that ten years earlier, her husband had left her for a younger woman, leaving her to raise her kids by herself. She asked "And you want me to forgive him for what he did to me, to us?"

Rabbi Kushner said "yes, I want you to forgive him. Not to excuse him, not to say that what he did was acceptable. No, you should forgive him because someone who has no right to live inside your house should not continue to live inside your head. Why are you giving a man like that the power to hurt you?"

Forgiveness may be a favor we do for the one who offended us, but it can also be a favor we do for ourselves, cleansing our souls of thoughts and

memories that diminish our lives. We often have little choice regarding the actions of others. However, since we hold the power to choose how we will respond to hurtful words and actions, we can actually let go of those hurtful memories and deprive the person of the power to hurt us any longer.

There are plenty of bad people in our world. However, there are also plenty of good people. Sometimes, good people make bad mistakes. Police officers make mistakes. Black people make mistakes. Muslims make mistakes. White people make mistakes. Political candidates make lots of mistakes. Jews, Christians, left-handed atheists who are allergic to mushrooms and hate classical music make mistakes. We should not fear those who make mistakes as much as those who believe that they never make them.

Last Shabbat, Drew Botwinick stood on this bimah as a Bar Mitzvah. Like hundreds of others who stood here before him and like all those who will stand here after him, Drew's decisions take on more importance now that he is a Jewish adult.

Of course, there is still a lot for him and all of our b'nai mitzvah to learn about life. We can do our best to consult with the future and with the past,

but one of the few things we can be certain about is that there is very little about which we can be certain.

Events which are filmed remain disputed; brilliant minds in virtually every field of knowledge remain divided on fundamental issues. We all have our opinions; we all have our perspectives. As long as we understand that others feel about their truth the way that we feel about our truth, we have a chance to bring healing and understanding to our world. Our world becomes a far more dangerous place when people believe that there is only one truth and that they, alone, possess it.

The greatest danger our world faces is the threat of fundamentalism. Those who see only one way, their way, have brought tremendous devastation to our people and to our world throughout history.

On this Kol Nidray, we remember the suffering of our ancestors during The Spanish Inquisition. They were tortured, expelled and killed by those who confused insecurity with certainty.

On this Kol Nidray, we remember the suffering of our friends, families and neighbors, nearly three thousand strong, who were killed on September 11, 2001 by those who confused insecurity with certainty.

On this Kol Nidray, we look forward to our descendants yet to be born and pledge to build a better world for them. On this Kol Nidray, we look back to our ancestors and vow to learn from history, so that we do not have to relive the tragedies of the past.

Though we know what we like, though we know what we believe, we serve God and humanity best by working to create a world which is committed to the concept of pluralism, to recognizing that there is more than one way to view the world and what happens within it.

As we seek forgiveness for our past misdeeds and decide upon how we will live our lives in the year ahead, may we first consult with our ancestors and with our descendants. May our actions not only make us feel good; may they bring honor and blessing to those who dreamed of us and to those about whom we dream. AMEN