

Yom Kippur Morning

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“Are We Ready?”

Besides referring to this season as the Ten Days of Repentance or the Days of Awe, the Comess-Daniels family recognizes this time of year as the anniversary of our dog's sobriety. Many of you know that six years ago, during the High Holy Days, we discovered Siggy's penitent for eating marijuana butts and cigarette butts he finds on the street. Since that time, Siggy wears a muzzle when we take him for a walk to prevent him from becoming desperately sick. In the past, when people saw him, the Hannibal Lector of Labradoodles, and they backed away, assuming he bites. These pandemic days, passersby who don't already know him think it's funny to see Siggy with his muzzle. "Look!" they say, "Your dog's wearing a mask, too."

For those who placed a bet that I would speak about my dog, let me be the first to offer you congratulations on your winnings. I hope you donate them to the Temple.

Betting is all about making predictions and guesses about future outcomes.

I'm as tempted as the next person to try to predict the results of the coming presidential election, but, in the end, I know all I can do is speculate. Speculation means nothing. VOTING means everything.

The more I think about the importance of November 3rd, and what it might mean about the struggle to maintain our democracy, the more my mind drifts to November 4th. I know full well that this year's election, in particular, might not be decided by November 4th or even the 14th for that matter. Still, whatever the outcome, I believe that November 4th, 2020, will be a day of reckoning. No matter who wins the Presidential election, we know what issues will be waiting on the President's desk, and they are unambiguous. They are every American's issues as well.

- The science of the COVID-19 pandemic is undeniable. No non-scientist has the right to say, "I don't think science knows," even if you are President of the United States. In the spirit of Yom Kippur, past mistakes need to be honestly acknowledged. New possibilities need to be vigorously funded, encouraged, and supported. Masking, distancing, and tracing need to be mandatory and backed up by appropriate fines.
- Racism is real. Black Lives have always mattered, but *our* systems have never acknowledged them in fullness and equality. Racism's toxicity and acidity already poisoned and burned the lives of millions. Recompense and reparations are necessary. The imprint of white privilege and its lingering stench of red-lining, segregation, inbred hate, profiling, voter suppression, police brutality, and profiling will take generations to diminish. They will never disappear. We need top-down leadership to keep us vigilant.
- We must lift up those who fell and will fall through the cracks in our economy that opened because of the virus. These are REAL people with regular, plastic

toilet seats, many of them working two and three jobs to scrape together enough to live, and they need help.

- California, Oregon, and Washington are burning. The Gulf and the East coasts are flooding. The air is thickening, and the soil's vitality is waning. Climate Change demands a federal response. Tomorrow is here, and the opportunity for some of the necessary healing has already passed.

Of course, there are many more issues we must address. Yet, whatever else we do, if we do not deal head-on with the divisiveness that is corroding American society, I fear for the longevity of whatever amount of democracy that remains. The Torah's mandate, from this afternoon's portion, "V'ahavta l'rei-echa ca-mocha," "Love your neighbor as yourself," could not be more critical as a standard for our society. The last two words of that verse that explain precisely *why* we MUST love one another. Those words are, "אני", "I am Adonai." In other words, our love for one another is essential to the functioning of the Universe.

No matter which candidate is victorious on or about November 3rd, we need to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the model of the South African entity of the same name. While it is true that the lines drawn by some over the past few years did not cause us to erupt – yet – in all-out oppression or violence, I fear what the slightest provocation might create. As Eric K. Ward of the Southern Poverty Law Center writes, "History is full of awful examples of what happens to humiliated losers. And a few good examples of winning the peace, of creating time and space to form a new center." And that, my friends, is why we must engage in truth and reconciliation now.

The work of reconciliation is for each of us to do, and it will be hard. Civil rights icon Congressman John Lewis taught us how far we must be willing to go to achieve truth and reconciliation. Of **his** time and **his** struggle, he wrote:

"We would settle for the proceeds of justice and equal rights, but the force guiding our involvement was the desire to redeem the souls of our brothers and sisters who were beguiled by the illusion of superiority, taken in, and so distorted by their false god that they were willing to destroy any contradiction of that faith.

"Being willing to withstand their rage, to serve as a reflection in which they could see themselves, was actually an act of compassion and love that helped release millions of white Southerners from the burdens inherent in the work of hate."

Are we ready to "withstand the rage," to be mirrors for irrational hate, and stand peacefully, non-violently, patiently, and resolutely until those who are about to boil over cool their temperatures and calm down? Abraham Joshua Heschel defined for us precisely what we will be facing. Racism. In our time, this also includes anti-Semitism, misogyny, xenophobia, White privilege, power-mongering, and loyalty to party over country. "Racism," Heschel said, "is man's greatest threat to man: the maximum of hatred for the minimum of reason."

In our time, Truth and Reconciliation will mean facing all these evils and more. Are we ready? As Jews and as Americans, we have no choice.