



Yom Kippur morning d'var – Sept. 25, 2023

By Irle Goldman

My name is Irle Goldman

Oot'shuvah, OO'Tfilah, Oo'Tzadakah...Ma'avirim et ro'ah Ha'gezarah

These words are traditionally translated as:

And Repentance, and Prayer and Charity
Transform the Evil Decree

But let me explore with you how else we may look at this line... based on I have to share with you from where I am at this point in my life.

This past July I turned 78...I feel like this is In the shadow of 80...what Pirkey Avot calls Gevurah which is traditionally translated as Courage

So what does this shadow of Gevurah what I am learning from being at this stage of life have to offer you about this day.

(But maybe there is a better translation for me (and us?))

1) Let me start with two introductory remarks .

First, A DISCLAIMER

This is One person's story and may be different for each of us.

(Take from it what might serve you and let go of the rest).

2) One experience that I have been pondering and even struggling with since Israel 1964 Yom Kippur...is how different Yom Kippur feels here vs Israel....

Here it feels more only/just like An Awesome and Somber Day of Judgement...

Some of that is true also in Israel but it also feels like much more of a Chag...A Celebration of Forgiveness...with singing and dancing in musaf (Morry and Michael) and almost a carnival-like atmosphere in the street devoid of cars

So how would I describe to you how I am feeling at this stage of my life that affects how I am experiencing Yom Kippur this year.?

Here is a story that epitomizes it.

MY STORY

3) I am the oldest of 5 kids (over a span of 12 years). This past February, I got a call from my sister telling me that my brother Barry (15 months younger than me) had suddenly just entered the hospital in LA with stomach and heart issues and (according to many of the doctors,) was not expected to live.

Although several months before, I had gotten an MRI which indicated that my back was so bad that I should probably be in a wheelchair and my PCP sent me to a neurosurgeon to get a consult about surgery., It turns out that, out of the five of us, I was the only one who could go there to visit him. The other one of my brothers was bound to bed with a chronic illness (for the past 16 years) and one of my sisters had woken up not being able to see and needed two eye operations, while the youngest sibling was being treated for Bladder cancer...not to mention that her husband had just been suddenly diagnosed with bladder

cancer...and several other people close to me were having their own health challenges

In that state of things, I flew out a couple of times to see Barry. The doctors at first were not hopeful. He had both a bleeding stomach and a very weak heart which needed stents...one required blood thinners to heal it and the other would be harmed by those same blood thinners....between a rock and a hard place.

When Barry was awake he was often on the phone with his lawyer and business associates, putting his affairs in order (in case he died).

In my mind I was rehearsing where we would be sitting shiva and realizing the impact of getting older... when my siblings, my peers (and not just my parents) are at an older age too and our mortality is much closer...(Bodies are temporary) And that somehow I would have to come to terms with that

I realized that this was not just bad luck
But rather the stage of life that I have entered.

I remember thinking this about my mother as her peers were dying (my father had died suddenly at 53 years old and I was 28)
But my mother's way of dealing with this was to not go to any funerals after she hit the age of 60...She said it made her too sad.

But that's not my way

Rather, I try to figure out what this means and how I could possibly cope with it and even learn from it...when Steve Brown contacted me asking me to give this drash...

It was during those times that what I want to say to you today started to become clear to me...what my reflection upon and message about the importance Yom Kippur ...what Yom Kippur was made for!

How can we accept our mortality while at the same time embracing our life force.

TODAY

As of today, Barry has (what feels like miraculously) and after not being able to eat or drink for 5 weeks, and having a feeding tube for 7 weeks, and getting 4 stents to repair his heart...has come back to Life..

My sister's two eye operations have restored her sight
My other brother has started Dialysis again
And my other sister continues with her monthly infusions
And her husband has begun a clinical trial for advanced prostate cancer.

I, myself, have been told by my surgeon that I am much to functional (with my walking and jogging a swimming continuing) to get any surgery at this time.

Others close to me are having their own health challenges and treatments.

So how am I to make sense of and make meaning from this?

Tshuvah, Tfilah Oo'Tzedakah, Ma'avirim et roah Ha'Gezayrah.
That's what our liturgy tells us.

Let us start with the last words of this sentence...Ma'avirin et Roah Ha'Gezayrah

On the surface it seems to be saying that these elements may prevent us from dying...but of course that can't be true.

Death will come to all of us eventually, no matter what we do. Rather, let me suggest to you that what these prevent is worse than dying is never having the ability to live fully.,,when we are alive.... To let our fears and our guilt and our mortality temper the fulness of our lives and prevent us from becoming our BEST SELVES.

OUR LITURGY SAYS THIS DAY IS DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF LIFE (The Life Force)...

Zacharanu L'chaim Melech Chafetz B'Chaim...L'maanchah Elohim Chaim

So what has this stage of life taught me about Tshvah, Tfiah and Tzedakahand how it plays a role in

1) LET ME SUGGEST TO YOU...

TSHUVAH can be seen as Physical as well as Emotional and Spiritual Resilience.

Too often we " Know" that things are bad can get no better and yet they may.

Barry was making plans for his ending and now he is back.

When I was in a skiing accident 8 years ago and broke my femur in 7 places, I knew for sure that I would never walk again...It turns out that after surgery and PT I was jogging again 9 months later.

When I did the Arava Institute Israel Ride 4 years ago with my son Zagy...over and over I knew that I could never make it up many hills, and yet I was able to do 90% of them.

T'shuvah is the antidote to this kind of what's called negativity bias...the human tendency to expect the worst.

T'shuah

,as Ira Corinow said on Rosh Hashanah, teaches us that it's always possible to do a U-turn..to change your expectations.

In fact, I would suggest that even more than a U-turn, it more as a spiral where you return to where you started yet see it for the first time.

You may have more perspective and wisdom than before. (Barry returning with more perspective and compassion)

JUST AS THIS CAN HAPPEN PHYSICALLY, IT CAN HAPPEN EMOTIONALLY, BEHAVIORALLY AND SPIRITUALLY...THAT IS WHAT T'SHUVAH seems to be about...resilience!

(Barry returning with more perspective and compassion) my valuing my limited time with him even more and when I return to "Knowing" that this is catastrophic (whatever it is) I can at least say to myself...You know Irle, this may be your neurosis rather than reality.

2) TFILAH-

Imagining and giving words to what may be possible (even when or maybe especially when you really don't believe that it can be). Thanks and Requests (Possibilities).Making the impossible Possible

When returning to Nantasket beach this summer, Barry told me that during the time in the ICU he was negotiating with God and asking for more time at Nantasket Beach and Dairy Queen... if he survived Also, The very notion of Prayer itself as a way to open our hearts and minds... is the process as well as the content. It is the opening up of possibilities ...to growth...to life

3) TZEDAKAH- SERVICE

- CARING and Interconnectedness.

At this stage of life I am surrounded by friends and relatives who need help and I myself sometimes needing help.

Tzedakah is ultimately about how we can create a world of giving and receiving...both to ourselves and to others.

Letting people open the door for me when I was on crutches after my ski accident..

Asking for help when I had COVID last month.

Inviting neighbors to bring me things.

4) Bringing together American and Israeli Yom Kippur. Yes, it is a time of intense self-accountability but it is also a time when we should celebrate the possibilities of a God and a world that offers us unexpected opportunities..It is a time of awe and yet the Talmud describes it as one of the happiest days of the year.

5) Gevurah as Endurance...and what can I say about what Gvurah means to me?

I see it as Endurance

Those millions of sometimes meaningless moments when we decide, over and over o chose Tshuvah and Tfilah and Tzedakah in out lives and in our world...that brings us to a celebrations of all that is possible and an acceptance of what is not.

Both an awesome accounting of our limitations

And a celebration of our Lifeforce

Let me end with blessing for today

May we each

Combine the richness
Of T'shuvah, T'filah and Tzedakah

Resilience, Possibility and Appreciation, Creating and Contributing A
world of Caring and Inter-dependence

To lead us to the have the Endurance to experience the
deep awesomeness and celebration of our lifeforce on this day of Yom
Kippur.

G'mar Chatimah Tovah