

I begin by giving great thanks for the opportunity to gather here together in the light of this moment.

As I prepared to stand here tonight and bring forth a teaching that I hoped will be helpful- I sat and felt coming through the waves of Rosh Hashanah and our welcoming of the New Year, in the midst of all that is going on in our country and the world—the question-
- How Do We Keep On Rising?

How do we keep on rising and acting for goodness with strength and love in the onslaught of these times?

It is so difficult and so deeply painful to witness what is going on in our country. It is infuriating—maddening-----devastating.

And, as we know and experience, it can be so easy to get knocked down by all that is going on every day.

So we ask, in this moment of *kol nidre*, when the light comes from the *olam*, from the hidden mystery, and shines with so much power and intensity--

How do we keep on rising?

And how do we keep rising and acting for goodness with strength and love?

As I sat with this question I thought about a teaching by spiritual activist Joanna Macy that I actually brought here to *kol nidre* services exactly 10 years ago in 2008, right before we elected Barack Obama President of the United States.

I reread what I had written and I remember those days when we had so much hope. We were rising and turning toward such promise, such expanse of possibilities.

It hurts to remember—and these teachings from Joanna Macy felt important then and they feel even more important now.

So I am going to offer Joanna's teachings as a framework, woven with guidance from another writer and activist who is a very important teacher for me, Terry Tempest Williams, and of course as seen through my own lens of this moment.

In the face of the onslaught—in the face of defeat—in the face of seeing so much of what we love and value desecrated---

How do we keep on rising and acting for goodness with strength and love?

Joanna—gives a framework for 5 practices that call forth conscious awareness and action--- and paves the way for us to keep rising.

First practice is the practice of Gratitude

Cultivating and activating gratitude every day.

Neuro-science supports this.

Every faith tradition teaches this and when we pay attention in our own bodies we can feel it.

Gratitude changes us.

It softens our hearts.

It expands our perspective.

It brings us into relationship and connection.

Through eyes of gratitude the world looks different.

And gratitude opens us to joy—

And moments of joy are fuel for the heart and soul.

Joy nourishes us and gives us reasons and encouragement to keep on rising.

It is important not to be timid or shy about allowing joy. Moments of joy are the treasures of life—and fuel for the soul. Joy makes everything worthwhile.

So the first practice is gratitude—simple and absolutely essential.

Make a commitment to say thank you twice a day—once when you get up in the morning and before going to sleep at night.

This practice of gratitude will change us and it will give us strength to keep rising.

2nd practice---In Joanna Macy's words: Don't be afraid of the dark

Joanna teaches, we should not be afraid of the pain we feel when we pay attention to what is going on in our country and the world

It is imperative not to duck from the pain—not to duck from the sadness –
To meet it face to face.

I know for myself when I even begin to touch into the sadness that I feel about what is happening in our country—what is happening to the earth—

I feel that I could drown in an ocean of sadness—that I will never come back from the devastation and despair.

But the teaching is --and I have had this experience....

That as I stay with the sadness—and don't let it spiral off into anger or hatred—but stay with the pain of the sadness, the sadness gives way—and softens my heart. I am weeping. But I am weeping for what I love.

Sitting with the sadness –is painful—and it connects me to what I most value— because the sadness grows from what I most love.

And as we allow the sadness it encourages compassion and care and it calls us to act in the world not from fear or hatred—but to act in the world standing on and rising from what we most love.

2 Don't be afraid of the dark. Allow the sadness so we can rise from what we love.

And this is difficult and we can't do this alone—and that is why the 3rd practice calls for us to create and sustain communities.

#3 calls us to:

Reach out to each other. Make connections.

Honor our relationships. Find common ground.

There is no way we can rise alone. It will never happen. We need each other.

How do we do this?

We begin simply. We show up.

We show up for each other in times of difficulty and joy.

We show up when someone is ill or passing and we make it our business to show up for *simchas*, for celebrations.

We make sure we ourselves are someone who can be counted on—someone who is steadfast and true to their word.

We reach out and ask for help. Doing this creates connection. Giving someone the opportunity to help us is a way to strengthen and affirm relationship.

And we gather. We gather in times of joy and sadness. We gather for meals, for rituals, to make music. We gather to dream, to build, to act.

We make commitments to each other—and we make commitments to our communities.

And we fashion our relationships and communities based on what we love—based on our values, our principle and our visions.

And as we reach out, as we connect-- our collective strength and courage expands and we all rise.

The 4th practice (This could be one of the more challenging ones.)

Honor your own gifts and your offerings

Many of us have the tendency to belittle what we have to offer, what we have to give.

We all have our own *mishegas* and when we ask ourselves, “What is mine to give?”, the mind has a field day as it goes off rambling:

“Look what this other person is doing—I am not doing anything in comparison to them.”

“I really don’t have anything of value to give.”

“I am not doing enough—ever.”

Or “I a just feel so overwhelmed by the magnitude of it all—there is just nothing I can do.”

None of these thoughts are helpful or encouraging.

Berating ourselves does not lead to action.

What does lead to action is practicing valuing our offerings.

And remembering that everything is interconnected—this life—this world is a completely interdependent system.

I don't need to do what that person is doing—they are already doing it.

I need to discern and bring forth what is true for me and what is mine to do.

And as each of us does what is ours to do— it benefits the whole.

Valuing our gifts, our abilities, our offerings—encourages us to step forward and offer them.

And when we value what we have to offer it encourages us to keep on reaching and discovering how we can be of service.

As we honor our own offerings –we are also more apt to value each other's offerings more freely.

And in doing so—we cheer each other on-- and we all rise.

Practices 1-4

Gratitude

Allowing sadness

Creating connections and community

Honoring our offerings

Now for #5... Act you age.

“Act your age”, Joanna Macy says, as she reminds us “that every atom, every cell in our body reaches back to the very first bursting forth of light and space. We are all as old as the universe and with the universe we are continuing to evolve at every moment.”

So, she says, “When ever we are acting for the benefit and well being of each other and the earth, we should know we are doing this with the full authority and strength of our 13.8 billion years. We are 13.8 billion years old, and the life of this planet has desired us

into being, and it is through us—through our love and care--that the life of this planet will continue.”

#5 teaches that we need to cultivate the longest and most expansive perspective—our lives carry the force of the *olam*, this mysterious expanding universe.

Our actions stand on the strength of the ancestors.

Our actions are being called forth by the prayers of the generations to come.

And our actions carry the power and possibility of every creature, every tree, rock, mountain, canyon and river that ever was or will be.

We need to feel their strength, to feel their love, to feel their prayers and let this call us to rise again and again into goodness. This is number five.

One more thing—an essential aspect of this teaching, especially in this moment:

We need to do all of this with eyes wide open, knowing that there are no guarantees, knowing that no matter what we do we might not see the results we are working for in our lifetime.

This is hard—and essential. And it means we must act for good for the sake of goodness itself unattached to the results we witness.

“Live with the radical uncertainty of not knowing what your actions will bring,” Joanna Macy urges, “let it fuel your courage and creativity. Let the radical uncertainty inspire radical solidarity -- radical compassion and radical love.”

Even as we do not see the results we long for Macy teaches —

We must keep on rising and acting for good and “know that whatever happens---every action --every risk we take for the benefit of this planet and all life will bring forth dimensions of transformation and healing beyond anything that that we have yet to see.”

Here in the light of *kol nidre*, 5 practices of conscious awareness and action to help us keep rising into goodness:

- Every day give thanks and encourage joy
- Allow the sadness
- Support community and nourish relationships
- Honor our own offerings
- And act with the dignity and strength of our 13.8 billion years

May we, in solidarity with so many others through out this country and the world, make a commitment to keep rising and acting for goodness again and again and again.

So that in days to come,
Our children's, children's, children, children,
Who may not even know our names,
Will be able to say about us---
Let us give thanks for our ancestors
And for the love, healing and goodness they left in their wake.

Ken yihi ratzon May it be so.

Rabbi Yael Levy
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A Way In Jewish Mindfulness
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