

Part 1

The signature prayer of Kol Nidre was beautifully sung in such a powerful and moving way by Karina Cowan. This haunting composition draws us out of our individual concerns and problems and places us within the Jewish community on erev Yom Kippur, the eve of Yom Kippur. It is like a shofar blast reminding us that tonight is different than all other Shabbats-after all it is called the Shabbat of all Shabbats. It challenges us to listen to ourselves-our questions-our fears-our anger-our pain-our sadness-our failures-our successes, all the things we spend the year running away from. Kol Nidre says, "Remember me-comfort me-understand me." For if we do not take the time to listen to ourselves, how can we possibly listen to anyone else? For some of us, we are so good at listening to others, we use them as noise to crowd out our own voice. For others, our own voice rings so loud we forget others were also created in Gd's image. What is it that I need to hear today? What is it that I need to roll up my sleeves and take seriously in the coming year so that next year I will hear Kol Nidre differently, even though the words and notes will be the same?

Kol Nidre draws our attention to all the promises we made individually and communally in the last year. Did I fulfill them? What still needs to be done? What is stopping me from changing? What is the purpose of my life? What gives it meaning?

The Barachu which we are about to do on pp. 708 reminds us that each of us is necessary to create the whole for it is the first prayer tonight that requires a minyan. Without all of our individual paths, our whole is incomplete and fragmented. So take a moment to think not only about your journey to our minyan, but also your part in enhancing our minyan tonight and every night in the coming year.

Please rise

Part two

Two years ago I introduced the concept of reading 1/3 of the Torah portion and, therefore, taking three years to finish reading the whole Torah. I challenged you to think of what rituals you might take on during this Torah cycle which will be completed on Simchat Torah 2015.

Last year I asked you to write down your new mitzvot so I could start collecting them. Wouldn't it be neat next year if we could dance around the torot surrounded by mitzvot that have shaped our community?

Tonight I would like to share a few of those mitzvot submitted by congregants in the last year just to give you an idea of what transformations are possible right here at CJC. What is actually done is limited only by you.

One congregant wrote about the disjunction between our preconceived notions and what actually exists: "I never imagined I would ever engage in Talmud Torah. That's something real Jews do, in a Yeshiva, like in the movie, "The Chosen." I had heard good things about the class, Jewish and Alive in America, so I figured I would attend, primarily to satisfy the increasingly urgent necessity to model the behavior I wanted to see from my kids on Sunday morning. I was surprised by what I actually learned: I really saw a diversity of ways that people pursue their spiritual paths."

Another congregant wrote about the connection between adult education and ritual practice: "More than ten years ago, my Jewish life began to change. My Jewish education had stopped at Sunday school. I began attending Adult Education classes because I wanted to know what I was doing in shul and why I was doing it. I was drawn from increasing my knowledge into practicing my Judaism more actively without the intention to do so. And the more I attended services, the more I wanted to attend services....and my life feels much richer from both the knowledge and the practice."

Another congregant wrote about two different mitzvot that she had taken on; the common denominator was how Judaism was practiced on a daily basis: "Although I have already been involved in

mini-Tikkun olam (working to fix the world) projects in my own sphere, such as helping my elderly neighbor, I will try this year to do something for someone else at least twice every day....This year I have been and will continue to say a blessing over everything that I eat.”

Another congregant wrote about the many opportunities CJC affords us: “The adult education classes at CJC have broadened my knowledge of the Jewish faith, challenged the way I observe myself and others and created deep relationships with those I’m studying with. Rabbi Starr and Cantor Morrison always make me feel comfortable in asking any question and are always encouraging and supportive. ...As I’m engaged in this wonderful study I remind myself that this is all offered as part of my membership in CJC.”

Another congregant described the intellectual satisfaction that comes from both learning and teaching: “Becoming a bat mitzvah was a wonderful experience for me...My favorite part was writing the drosh. It was so interesting to think about how something written so long ago could have relevance to our lives today. I was given the freedom and the opportunity to consider the Torah’s teachings in a contemporary context and it gave me a much deeper appreciation of the role of religious study in today’s world. My enjoyment of the weekly services continues to grow and deepen as I learn more. I continue to enjoy the ways CJC offers to come to know and appreciate my heritage.”

Another congregant described how a requirement was enjoyable as he wrote: “My new ritual was attending more Friday and Saturday services with my children as part of their b’nai mitzvah preparation. It turned out that I really enjoyed the services, and somewhat surprisingly to me, so did my children.”

Another congregant wrote about the gradual power of practicing Shabbat: “It was hard to tell my husband that I wasn’t going to spend Friday night or Saturday morning with him because I was leaving to pray, with strangers. I didn’t know what his reaction would be because the person he married didn’t do that. The first few times going to services were awkward. I hated leaving my husband at

home, didn't know the congregational customs and tunes, and I was embarrassed in front of everyone. I felt like a phony. However, the more I participated, the more I wanted to internalize Shabbat and make it part of my usually frantic life. I slowly learned the tunes and found myself humming them at work. I found I enjoyed sharing the intimacy of prayer with a group of people that also wanted the peace of Shabbat. I started remembering particular bits of Shabbat learning during the week that made me thoughtful. I don't know that I actively decided to observe Shabbat, but the more observant I become, the more perspective I gain in my life. I think this makes me a better wife, mother, co-worker, and person. Nowadays, my husband lays out our now worn Shabbat tablecloth, sets up the candles and the Kiddush, and puts out kippas for himself and our boys before we light candles as a family."

What ritual did you take on last year? What new ritual do you hope to do in the coming one? Please contact Cantor Morrison or me if we can help you on your spiritual journey. Email the successes and challenges as you take on new rituals. Let me know how your Jewish life has changed in the coming year. And always keep in mind a picture of a community based on interconnecting Jewish tradition with contemporary knowledge allowing us to engage joyously in Jewish mitzvot.

Part 3

In a moment we are about to begin the section of the service called the confessionals. It is the time when we recite the many different sins we have committed. Many rabbis have written about why am I admitting to sins I did not do? And why are all the sins in the plural? First, the rabbis never meant this to be an exhaustive list but rather ideas to spur more thought and probing. Only I know my sins and only I can confess them. But more important, only I can correct them.

Having said that, the rabbis also understood the individual's responsibility to and for the community. I may not be a teacher, but I am responsible for voting for politicians who force our educators to teach for the tests instead of for life. I may not be an abuser, but I am responsible for not holding my role models up to a standard of decency and respect. I may not be mentally ill, but I am responsible for allowing our society to turn its back on those who are too sick to advocate for themselves. I may not be a logger, but I am responsible for forgetting to recycle paper so that more of our trees can live. I may not be a migrant worker, but I am responsible for eating food picked in subhuman conditions. The confessionals are both about my individual sins and our community's collective sins. It reminds us that we all are necessary parts of the whole. Ashamnu, we have sinned. We have failed ourselves, our loved ones, our community, our country, our world. We have missed the mark. Ashamnu-I have sinned because human beings were created with free will. And sometimes I am too tired, too hurt, too angry, too sad, too sick, to get it right. Sometimes I am just wrong.

But truly the greatest gift human beings have is the ability to do teshuvah, to recognize our mistakes, to learn from them, to forgive ourselves and others, to work to be better than I was. Ashamnu, we have sinned, and we are sorry. Please rise.