

Rosh Hashanah Day 2, 5781

Shana tova!

I want you to think back to 2019 with me for a moment.

And I know, it's hard to remember a time before March of 2020.

But I want to think back to the end of December, 2019.

One of the things that I mentioned last year during the High Holy Days is that all year, I save articles, quotations from books, TV shows, anything that reminds me of the High Holy Days.

And if I think it may be something I want to speak about, I put it in a file.

So, if you have something for me, any time, just send me an email.

I remember watching Hasan Minhaj's show, The Patriot Act.

And in his final episode of the year, as he reflects back and looks forward, he talks about how he is going to approach 2020.

Little did he know what 2020 would bring.

But I find it incredibly helpful.

Here is what he suggests:

The biggest problem of 2019, is that "we're exposed to all the news, all the time, which makes us feel like we have to care about everything all the time."

It's called "compassion fatigue."

Minhaj compared it to feeling like we have "50 tabs open in our mental browsers.

And we're about to crash."

So this is what he suggests:

"For 2020, give yourself a break.

Just pick a couple things to not care about, for your sanity.

I'm not saying shut down your browser.

Just close a couple tabs.

Now I know it's weird, hearing this from the show that tells you to care about something new every week.

And we're not going to stop doing that.
But I also understand, if you've gotta take a breather.
That's why, after you're done with this episode, you have every right
to close a tab in your brain.
Especially if it helps you double down on the issues that really matter
to you.
So over the holidays, sleep well.
But not that well.
I'll see you guys in 2020.
We've got a few more tabs to open."

I find this mental image so powerful.
I'm one of those people who always has a few Internet browser
windows open.
And each window has at least a few tabs.
As you can probably imagine, there are times when I have too many
windows, and too many tabs, open.
So my computer, inevitably and unceremoniously, crashes.
Now don't judge me!
I know I'm not alone.
I know some of you out there keep 5, or 10, or 50 tabs open at a time.
And I can imagine that for some of you, just thinking of having more
than 5 tabs open at a time instantly gives you a headache.
If this digital metaphor means nothing to you - just imagine complete
information overload.
I love this metaphor that Minhaj introduces.
If we have too many tabs, our computers crash.
It's the same for people.
Sometimes, we have too many windows and tabs that are open.
And when that happens, we can either wait for the moment when we
crash.
When we are so overwhelmed that we can't process new information.
Or, we can proactively close a few tabs in our brains.

Allowing us to focus our energy on the issues that are most important to us.

Giving ourselves permission to not do *everything*.

So that we can make a real impact on *something*.

This is especially important this year, when it feels like the world itself is falling apart around us.

What do we do, how do we respond, when we feel overwhelmed and helpless?

When we are lost in the crumbled remnants of what we used to take for granted, lost without a sense of what to do?

One of the machzor's most famous, terrifying, and poignant poems, the Unetaneh Tokef prayer, describes what the world looks like when it is falling apart.

The prayer is scarily evocative of this past year:

Mi yichyeh umi yamut - who will live, and who will die.

Mi vekitzo, umi lo vekitzo - who will live a long life, and who will come to an untimely end.

Mi vaesh umi vamayaim - who by fire, and who by water.

Mi vamagefah - who by plague.

Mi bachanikah - who will be strangled.

Mi yaani umi yaashir - who will be impoverished, and who will become wealthy.

The Unetaneh Tokef feels so real.

But the prayer doesn't end there.

Long before Hasan Minhaj, the machzor suggests as a response: close down some tabs and windows.

Don't crash.

When you are overwhelmed by all of the problems in the world, all of the grief, you can't try to solve it all.

You will get swallowed up in it.

The Mahzor prayer seems to acknowledge that we may become disheartened and discouraged.

Our usual ways of coping may feel especially battered.
The Unetaneh Tokef prayer is reaching out to us in this year which is so far from ordinary.

Speaking to us when we are at a loss.

What are we to do, where are we to begin?

The Mahzor prayer refines Hasan Minhaj's advice.

Close all the tabs but three, the prayer suggests.

Just keep open three tabs.

Three tabs that can focus your energy in productive ways.

Tab #1: teshuva - repentance;

Tab #2: tefillah - prayer;

And Tab #3: tzedaka - charity.

The machzor is blunt - you and I can't change the entire world.

It's not possible.

If we try to change the fate and destiny of the universe, we'll be swallowed up, not able to change a thing.

But we can make things slightly better.

If we focus on a small portion.

If we close most of the tabs.

But keep a few open.

So often in life, but especially this year, it can feel impossible to know what to do next.

And yet, we move forward.

Maybe feeling like we're stumbling in the dark.

But still, we forge our path, little by little.

We can't always know how our decisions will affect our future, or when our righteous actions will pay off.

What we can do is think, what can I do, today?

What problem, or piece of a problem, can I take on in this moment?

What do I need to do for myself, for my family, at this point in time, to help realize my goals?

What steps can I take toward happiness and healing?

The Unetaneh Tokef offers three tabs.

So I'll share with you three tabs that I'm opening, and invite you to think about what yours are.

Tab #1: Teshuvah: Teshuvah is about acknowledging our failures, and working hard to do better.

There are days when I put so much of myself into my work, that when I am with my kids, I don't give them all of the energy and love that I wish I could.

That's a tab that I'm keeping open.

Tab 2: Tefillah: prayer in Judaism is most poignantly about bringing the community together.

For when we are together, according to our tradition, your prayer and your prayer and my prayer lift each other's up.

Anshe Emet does prayer so beautifully.

And yet it is so different than it was 7 months ago.

I am committed to ensuring that everyone in our community finds a meaningful way to *daven*, to pray.

That we all find a way to continue lifting each other's prayers to soaring heights.

That's a tab that I'm keeping open.

Tab #3: Tzedakah: this word comes from the word *tzedek*, meaning justice.

I'll speak more in depth about this on Yom Kippur.

But in brief: I am incredibly proud of the work by Koleinu, Anshe Emet's racial justice team.

We are seeking to lift up the voices of Jews of color in our community, and to highlight our synagogue's conversations about race and racial justice.

We know that Anshe Emet is not going to solve all of our city, our country, and our world's issues regarding racial justice.

But we have identified a few ways in which we want to make a difference.

That's a tab that I'm going to open.

This Rosh Hashanah, with so much unrest in the world around us, may you discover what matters most to you, and act accordingly.

We all will choose different tabs to close and to open.

May you find the strength to face the challenges of this new year.

May you give yourself permission to close a few tabs.

And may the tabs that you open create more goodness, more hope, more light, in our world that desperately needs it.

Shanah tovah.