

September 2018 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

Some of you may know that before making the decision in 2008 to become a rabbi, I had been a teacher and school administrator for a full two decades. For some of those years at the end of my prerabbinic career, I served as Dean of Students, which meant that, among other things, it fell upon me to oversee the disciplinary process when students failed to uphold the behavioral standards expected of them. While it would be reasonable to assume (as people often do) that this would have been particularly unpleasant work, the truth is that as I look back on it, some of my most rewarding teaching experiences came when working with these students in trouble.

One of my standard practices when working with these youngsters was first to speak with them about the incident, and then to have them call their guardian(s) to explain what had happened. I always thought it better for the student, rather than me, to take ownership over this part of the process.

The next step, assuming the infraction was serious enough to call home but not serious enough for me to convene the student-faculty disciplinary committee, would be to ask the student what s/he thought the appropriate consequence should be. Again, the best way that I could see for me to help the student understand the impact of his/her behavior was usually to have him/her trace through all the ways in which the behavior in question had impacted others, and then to ponder the best ways to repair the situation.

Next, I would ask him/her to spend the next day considering what had happened and then return to me the following day with a written recommendation for what the disciplinary consequences should be, assuring him/her that whatever s/he suggested, that would indeed be my final decision. This may sound risky, and I suppose it was, but in all the years of my following this practice, I could probably count on one hand the number of times a student actually proposed consequences that were **less** significant than I would have recommended had I done so without deferring to his/her own wisdom.

What do we learn from this? Especially as we stand poised to cross into the most focused ten days of personal repentance of the entire year? Many things, I'm sure. But to me, the most important is that when left to our devices, so long as we are pushed to ponder our actions in the most impactful ways, each one of us will find our inner compass pointing towards moral excellence. Of course, we will miss the mark from time to time. Of course, we will do things we wish we hadn't. And of course, we don't always do things we wish we had. That is part of what it means to be human. But when push comes to shove, I believe the process of *Teshuva* (turning towards God in the spirit of atonement) continues to serve the Jewish People so effectively and fully year after year after year not only because our blessed Tradition has given us the gift of sacred process, but because God Godself created humanity with the facility to

discern right from wrong, and with the keen desire to do Good in this world. As tempting as it may be to run from our mistakes, when held accountable for missing the mark, we tend overwhelmingly to demand the best from ourselves.

The opportunities I had over the course of my teaching career to walk this particular path with scores of students will forever enrich me. I am grateful for the lessons they taught me year in and year out about the value of moral excellence and, when all is said and done, the ability and the drive that each and every one of us has towards achieving it.

As we stand ready to enter the Ten Days of Awe and introspection, I pray for us all that we too will find the courage and wisdom to confront our own mistakes and find ways to repair the damage we have caused. In doing so, I pray for each and every one of us that we will find the joy and happiness that comes with the renewed relationships we re-establish and strengthen.

L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year,
Rabbi Dubin

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