

November 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

Over the course of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, I spoke with you about some of the mental health challenges that we all share, whether it is we ourselves or someone we love who is living with the diagnosis.

I began on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* by sharing my discomfort with the notion that God should demand that we pray and live with a joyful heart, because if that truly were the case, then how could anyone affected by depression or anxiety possibly satisfy God? In the end, I concluded that since it can be nearly impossible for those with severe mental illness to do this, it is for them especially, for those whose self-reflections are so distorted they have been rendered incapable of seeing their own true selves, that we say, you are not alone. We are here. No, I said, you do not have to smile if you don't have it in you, because we're here to smile for you until one day, hopefully, you will have it in you to do it for yourself. However long it may take, we'll be patient, I said, because you matter.

On the morning of *Rosh Hashanah*, I shifted the conversation away from mental health challenges that are chemical or biological in nature, inherited and completely natural, to those with mental health challenges that are completely unnatural, in no way part of our DNA, the ones forced on us by emotional or physical trauma. To these people, I said that while forgiveness and reconciliation are indeed core to the meaning of these days, this does not mean that victims of abuse – physical, sexual, mental, or any other kind – should ever be forced to forgive their tormenters until and unless they choose to do so.

During *Kol Nidrei* I shifted focus once again and addressed my remarks not to those of us who suffer from mental illness of one kind or another, but instead to those of us who love and seek to support others who do. In other words, my remarks were directed to every single person in the room. In a nutshell, I suggested that the very best, most loving thing we can possibly do is trust the reality of their pain, offer our presence, and respect the timing of their own processes of healing.

And then on the morning of *Yom Kippur* I narrowed in to speak directly to those of us who actually know from the inside what it's like to live with mental illness. Recognizing how difficult it must be, I nonetheless suggested that it is incumbent upon us to choose life, which sometimes requires that we lower our defenses and allow others to help us when we need it. Choosing life, I suggested, means accepting that some of us will gladly hold the bag for others until they're able to hold it again for themselves. It means having the courage to say we need each other. It means being able to let go of our un-earned shame, but it also means having the right to let go of it slowly if we don't have it within us to go any more quickly. It means having the right to put our own needs first without guilt. It means accepting and appreciating the

blessings of life. It means being able to bask in the light of the divine spark that dwells within.

And now, having shared my thoughts on Mental Health during *Yamim Noraim*, the days of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, I am excited to announce our very special follow-up program, which will take place on Sunday, December 8.

It is my privilege to live next door to a woman named Sandra Luckow who, in addition to being a professor of film at Yale, Columbia, and Barnard, is also an award winning documentarian herself. Sandra's most recent completed work, [That Way Madness Lies](#), not only tells the heart-wrenching story of her brother's fall into adult onset schizophrenia, which is challenging enough, but it also paints a stark picture of the challenges that families face when trying to navigate the mental healthcare system in search of help for those whom they love so much.

I am grateful for the opportunity to screen this film at JCNWJ because from the moment I saw it for the first time I have been struck by the masterful and unexpected way it has revealed to me new angles from which to see what the spark of God might look like in different people. This is why we will have clergy as well as a mental health expert and filmmaker sitting on the discussion panel that I will be moderating (see below for the names of our panelists).

[Our Sunday program](#) will begin at 4:00 and be followed by a ½ hour intermission (with food available in the Elaine Hirsch Simcha Room) at 5:45. At 6:15 we will regather in the sanctuary for a final 60-minute panel discussion, during which there will be ample time for members of the audience to ask questions and offer comments.

We look forward to seeing you on Dec 8, and **PLEASE BRING FRIENDS!** This is a program you won't want to miss!!!

L'Shalom

Rabbi Dubin

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