

Good morning. Most of you know that I've been having cancer treatment this year, and so far it's working pretty well. It made me lose all my hair, even my eyelashes, and I never had any idea how practical eyelashes are. You need them for showers, for wind and nature – stuff...

Between hiding from covid and having cancer, I haven't really gone anywhere or done anything in ages, so I have nothing to talk to you about today.

So I hit the books and just started reading so at least I could pretend to have something to talk about. Did you know that when our ancestor Leah found out she was supposed to marry Esau instead of Jacob, she asked what kind of man he was and when they told her, she cried so hard HER EYELASHES FELL OUT! Don't tell me the Torah isn't relevant to real life...!

I keep reading. Two things keep coming back to me from the times I studied Talmud as post-divorce therapy. 1) The Hebrew word shofar is derived from the word for "broken heart." 2) The word shalom is used for hello/goodbye/peace but really it means "completeness."

The more you read about our heroes in the Torah, you see they are not whole. They are not unbroken, nor are we. And yet – that incompleteness or brokenness, and the yearning that comes from it are what binds us to other humans, and to Gd, and what keeps us learning and evolving.

Truth be told, I haven't been a total hermit. I have been talking to people now and then. Including, I periodically call up my son – and sometimes I apologize to him for the broken, damaged world we have all left him. He always reassures me that that's okay – he doesn't seem to hold a grudge.

And lately I've heard a *lot* of otherwise optimistic people saying that climate change, especially paired with political polarization is making it impossible to ever repair the world – that we're too far gone. But tikkun olam is one inarguable reason that we are here.

Political polarization - that gloomy topic suddenly reminded me of the wit & wisdom of our own Phil Weiser. Not the gloomy part, mind you... I used to go to some of his Silicon Flatirons panels in Boulder, and one day Phil and his colleagues convened an evening about the history of communication starting with the transcontinental telegraph in 1861. We heard history unfold through the advent of the Associated Press, broadcast news, cable news, the internet & social media.

Phil pointed out that all of this shows the evolution of WHO WE AS A SOCIETY HAVE ALLOWED TO CURATE our news for us. But there was an expert from Boston who mentioned that even back in the early telegraph days, local newspapers were dependent on the telegraph operators to communicate national and international news for them to print. And sometimes the telegraph operators would alter those messages. Frequently, in fact.

Technology evolved to offer such widespread communication that for a while it was difficult to get away with made-up or altered stories. But now technology has evolved so that no one really curates our news at all – we do that ourselves from a million different sources. The panel wondered how do you create laws and advocate for justice in a free society where facts are no longer distinguishable from opinions...?

Because everyone has different facts that inform their lives and actions, people are less likely to listen to each other because we have this feedback loop always reinforcing our own worldview. That's an intractable problem that leaves us all feeling helpless. (*Fun speech so far, isn't it?*)

And about that climate change... I'm a pretty sciencey person but even I was slow to accept the notion that climate change might have some impact in my lifetime.

I get it now.

If we are destroying the earth, where can we find guidance to fix what Gd himself warned us against back in Adam's time?

I don't know.                      So let's talk about me some more.

I had a blood test 3 weeks ago that indicated the chemotherapy didn't work and my cancer had roared back full force. I took a day and cried (mostly to Lisa and Ed, thank you thank you thank you). And then - I went outside to have fun and not think about dying, at least until things were confirmed. It was a good strategy! Two weeks ago, I had a petscan that showed that the blood test was completely wrong and I am in fact cancer free. The doctor said that particular blood test can do that sometimes. That might have made me cry if I hadn't been so busy shouting hooray.

I have done some crying this year. And some thinking about what purpose crying serves.

Crying is something that shows up over and over in stories associated with Yom Kippur and the rigorous transformative work that we are doing today. They say Moses wrote the Torah while dipping his quill in the sacred tears of Gd. The Esh Kodesh says that Gd has a crying room called the Mistarim. Gd can cry with us in spirit whenever we need help, but on Yom Kippur we are allowed to join Gd in the outer chambers of the Mistarim and cry together. The idea is that crying alone has the effect of breaking you. But the crying that you do together with Gd – that strengthens you. When the gates are closing tonight, some say it's the gates of the Mistarim that are closing. *(We are one mystical people, I'm telling you. Mystical.)*

But you know Jews... we don't talk about anything without an opposing opinion. For a stance opposed to crying, I went to Mel Brooks. "Look, I don't want to wax philosophic, but I will say that if you're alive you've got to flap your arms and legs, you've got to jump around a lot, for life is the very opposite of death."

We can do this. We can cry with Gd *and* we can flap our arms and legs and jump around. But how does that serve to repair the world?

Those intractable problems from the beginning... At the end of that Silicon Flatirons panel, in that room full of people smarter than me, a woman named Patty Limerick said that it all seems impossible and everyone agreed. But she hinted - at least in my mind she hinted - that this lack of solutions might mean that we just haven't found the right questions yet.

That works! That's Jewish. Pirke Avot tells us to "Turn it, and turn it again, for everything is in it." *Turn It Again is also the title of a Red Hot Chili Peppers song, so it's profound on a lot of levels.*

"Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it. Don't turn from it, for nothing is better than it."

I do have full faith that we and our children and grandchildren will keep turning and turning, finding different questions to ask, and once we've stumbled on the right ones, we will in fact see how to repair the world. Our broken world that we love, even with all its chaos.

As they say in Game of Thrones, "Chaos is a ladder."

My wish – I have cancer so you have to listen to my wish, which I stole from a poet named Suzi Q. Smith: May we care for ourselves, each other, and the planet we share. May we exist in harmony, joy, peace, and kindness. May we be brave enough to be tender. May we be tender enough to heal.

May we be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year.

*Source: See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are? And all that I have created, I made for you. But be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world- for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it. Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13*