

## Healing from the Trauma of the Pandemic

It's nice to hear a live, non-virtual response!

For 15 months, there has been a lot of silence and “you’re muted!”

Most of our experiences were in two-dimensional squares; and while we connected, shared, and supported each other, it is not like being in a real three-dimensional community with more than just a few people.

There is no substitute for schmoozing in the hallways, before and after (and, I dare say, during!) services. We build relationships and find new ones in the parking lot, during *Kiddush*, and in the sacred “in-between” time that is not even planned.

And we *are* coming back together.

As we gather this Shabbat morning, let's appreciate this first Shabbat morning service back with our community. As you have seen, we are still transitioning. It is not as easy as just flipping the switch.

We are still requiring all adults to be vaccinated (which makes sense and I am so pleased that all those 12 years and above in our community that I have spoken with are already vaccinated!) As an added measure of precaution, we are requiring everyone to be masked inside the building, except when leading, as we take incremental steps to open more and more.

But we ask you to come back!

Come back to *minyan* which will be in-person beginning this Wednesday, June 23, morning and evening – just like in the “olden days!”

We will still have a Zoom option, but what a blessing it is to be back.



I love the blessing for moments of goodness: “*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh HaOlam Hatov V’HaMeiteev* – Blessed are You, Eternal One of the Universe who is filled with goodness and helps us experience even more goodness.”

This is such a moment.

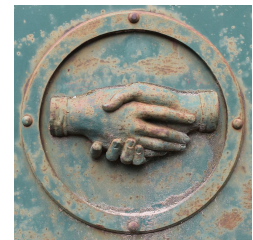
Let’s simply acknowledge that and pause for a moment.

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But I also want to be honest.

It is *weird*. Simple rituals are no longer simple.

It’s a bit strange to need to relearn handshakes and hugs.



But we have all endured some measure of trauma – a worldwide trauma; one that is not fully over. It was frightening and remains so. Many of us lost loved ones and many of us could not be with family or friends in critical moments...

When one experiences a traumatic event, there is a need to recover, to heal from that experience. And so, I invite us to consider how we will heal from this trauma? What are some of the ways we will both recover and reflect on what happened to us?

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Our Torah reading opens with a most unusual ritual. The ceremony of purifying one’s self with the ashes of the red heifer, a unique cow that almost never comes into existence.

The traditional understanding of this *mitzvah*, of this commandment, that most commentators teach, is that there is no logical explanation for this ritual. We simply perform it.

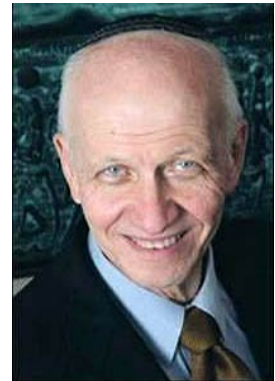
Why?

“Tradition, Tradition!”

OK, while I do love Tevya, I am not a fan of his answer. If we cannot find some meaning in a ritual, then we are missing something and we need to examine it more closely. In my understanding, these traditions evolved over time and they evolved because people were involved in their creation, finding them compelling, serving a need.



As Rabbi Yitz Greenberg writes: “This ritual was, in fact, fully understood in biblical times. Furthermore, it is a fundamental principle of the covenant that the commandments are given, not to train us to robotic conforming obedience in the service of God, but rather to improve people and their character traits.”



So, let us look more closely at this commandment. This bizarre ritual was for someone who was impure because they came into contact with a dead body. Imagine if that happened to us: it would be challenging, if not downright scary.

It was traumatic.

One needed to heal from this.

It is no different today. When we experience trauma, we work with a therapist; we engage in rituals – be they prayer, meditation, reflection, exercise, art, yoga, etc., or immersing in a *mikveh*, a body of water to experience the healing and the recovery from that traumatic event.

Jacob Milgrom, a biblical scholar, points to the fact that the ritual contained blood which is a symbol of both life and death. Just as the person experienced trauma around



death, so too, their healing necessitates an element of the trauma itself.

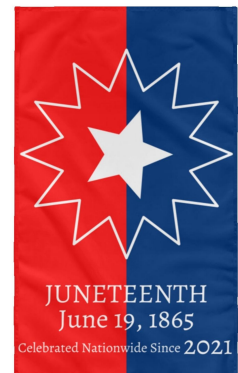
Many therapists utilize a variation of the same practice today. It is by re-examining the past trauma – remembering it and then softening its intensity that we can begin to lessen its devastating impact on us.

And there is another strange aspect of the ritual, the one who performs the healing, the handler or healer becomes impure. It is as if the intensity of the trauma has passed to the person charged with helping the other recover. Like a therapist or a rabbi or a doctor who sits with people, during and after these times of intense difficulty, they also take a measure of that pain. While many have claimed that this is another conundrum, to me it makes logical sense.

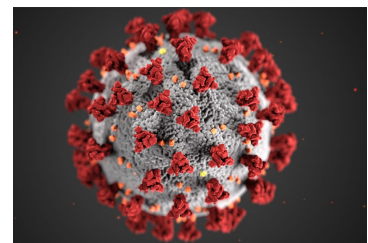
It is a reminder that we all bear each other's burdens.

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Speaking of trauma, as we mark Juneteenth today, we are aware of all the racial trauma that has been inflicted upon the Black community in America for four hundred years. We are taking one small step toward recognizing it, although we have clearly not solved it.



Covid-19 has been a different kind of trauma, one that we have ALL experienced. While surely there have been varying levels of intensity for each of us, it has impacted all humanity and for an extended period of time. Even as elements of it continue, we must find ways to heal from it.



How?

It is not so easy. But, I believe that it begins right here, right now. By coming back together as a community. By listening to each other, by

sharing with and supporting one another. By returning to some degree of normal.

We are all playing both roles: healers and those in need of healing and it will take time. This was not a limited event, it endured and, therefore, it will require more reflection and our own modern rituals.

While I do not foresee any red heifers involved, it will require all of us to be filled with compassion towards each other, realizing that we all had unique experiences – some harder and some easier.

But they were *all* unlike anything we have lived through before.

May this summer be a time of healing and coming together so that by *Rosh Hashanah* we will be able to celebrate the rededication of this physical space and our physical community.

