

Kol Nidre 5777  
Bagels, Breaches, & Isaiah Jews  
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It is a pre-Shabbat tradition in the Simon-Latz family to go to breakfast at Brueggers Bagels Friday morning before school. We arrive by 6:45am and because we're regulars, the staff knows our orders. Sorta like Cheers—you wanna go where everyone knows your name. The girls also get their teachers a bagel.

As you also may know, I have a fairly good time poking fun on social media at the commercialization of the staple Jewish food—the bagel—that has made its way into the American palate in a ubiquitous—if slightly culinarily suspect—manner.

Instead of the “traditional” sesame, plain, salt, and pumpernickel bagel, Brueggers gives you options: Asiago cheese, everything, blueberry, or, *chas v'shalom*, pumpkin. And on them, you can place a myriad flavor of cream cheese: salmon, veggie, olive, or strawberry. And of course, you can order them with eggs, cheese, sausage, ham, and bacon. On a bagel.

All this, against the backdrop of the Lower East Side's Carnegie Deli announcing their closing this coming December after nearly a century serving Jewish cuisine.

Now, while I post with good humor on my Facebook page to the amusement of many, I see this great bagel debate is about more than what simply provides pleasure to one's tongue.

In a powerful way, the once maligned doughy bread of impoverished Jews on the Lower East Side has made its way—one might say it was “culturally appropriated”—into the mainstream consciousness of America and has become such a multibillion dollar industry, its is forcing traditional local bagel shops out of business.

The symbolism is potent: Jews—our humor, our food, our culture—are now part of the American story. I turn 46 next month; my parents were born in the days following the Shoah and World War II, where there were still quotas on how many Jews could get into certain colleges, “covenants” in Edina that prohibited Jews from buying homes in the neighborhood, and rampant McCarthyism that held Jews as suspected “other” — incapable of being “loyal” Americans by definition. Intermarriage was less than 5% and the Baby Boomers here can share with you painful memories of being called a kike, a dirty and/or cheap Jew, or other their vile personal experiences of anti-Semitism.

My in-laws, Michael's parents, were born at the dawn of the Shoah, their parents fleeing Nazi Germany with them as refugees. When their boat docked in Capetown, South Africa, they were greeted with a sign that read: No dogs or Jews allowed.

Contrast that image with my children—my parent’s granddaughters—who are coming of age when the next president of the United States will have a son-in-law who is Jewish.

While anti-Semitism still exists today, there are no longer structural anti-Semitic barriers to our full participation in American civic life.

Which begs the question about the bagels: If our cuisine and our culture, our humor and our commitment to learning and justice have made it into the mainstream; if it is now commercially acceptable to put bacon on a bagel and the Star-Tribune headline from last Tuesday reads “House Republicans love Chick-Fil-A; Democrats really into bagels”; if now, given that the intermarriage rate is north of 50% and Jews are sought after by non-Jews as life partners; if, after a few generations, we have made it in America, who are we? If we’re no longer in exile, if we aren’t engaged in a daily fight against anti-Semitism and assimilation; if we have access to power, education, employment, politics, and civic life—if there are no barriers to us as Jews—who are we?

At the funeral of Shimon Peres (z”l) 10 days ago, Israeli writer Amos Oz asked Israel and the world, “Where are the brave leaders?” <http://www.timesofisrael.com/amos-oz-where-are-the-brave-leaders-shimon-peress-successors/>

This question sits on my heart: Why are we here as Jews? What is our sacred purpose?

Self-perpetuation for the sake of itself seems vacuous. If we aren’t here for a holy purpose, why bother?

Our Yom Kippur Haftarah—a timeless shout from the prophet Isaiah—offers as compelling an answer as I’ve ever seen. It’s our call to be brave moral leaders in the world.

<sup>5</sup> “Is such the fast I desire,  
A day for people to starve their bodies?” Isaiah asks.  
Is it bowing the head like a bulrush  
And lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Do you call that a fast?

<sup>6</sup> No, this is the fast I desire:  
To unlock the fetters of wickedness,  
And untie the cords of the yoke  
To let the oppressed go free;  
To break off every yoke.

<sup>7</sup> [This fast] is to share your bread with the hungry,

And to take the wretched poor into your home;  
When you see the naked, to clothe them...

<sup>12</sup> You shall rebuild ancient ruins,  
you shall restore foundations laid long ago.  
And you shall be called  
"Repairers of the breach,  
Restorers of cities for habitation."

Now, there are a lot of passages in the TaNakh about fasting, but the rabbis chose this one to read on Yom Kippur. Why? Because they wanted to make certain we felt discomfort in our fast and that our discomfort would center us as Jews in our sacred purpose: to live with compassion and ameliorate suffering whenever and wherever possible; to be brave.

It's what Elie Wiesel, *alav hashalom*, taught when he said, "We must take sides ... When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy.... Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment – become the center of the universe."

The Isaiah text teaches we must do this—go to every place on the planet where people suffer—to be repairers of the breach.

What exactly is this breach? What's broken?

This summer while I was studying at the Hartman institute in Jerusalem, Noa, our daughter, broke her foot. [She had a fabulous attitude and within 48 hours, she was back at camp]. What fascinated me was how the medical team examined and treated the break. The doctor looked at and felt her foot and applied pressure with his thumbs to locate the break. She was x-rayed and given a c-t scan before they put her in a cast—and afterwards. Now, not being a medical professional, at first I was irritated. We had been at the hospital for several hours, it was nearing midnight, and we were all exhausted. Why do you need to take another x-ray after you've put a cast on? I asked. The doctor, Omri, patiently explained that he needed to check to make sure they set the cast—and the bone—correctly so it could heal properly.

A broken foot is not the same as a broken society. But there are lessons to be learned—especially in the care given to understanding what was broken and how best to treat the break so it could ultimately heal and grow stronger.

Isaiah's call reverberates.

As a synagogue, as a Jewish people, we've got a spiritual agenda rooted in Isaiah's call for justice: to feed the hungry and address the systems that permit hunger; to restore

our cities so that Black and Brown people are not seen as monsters to be feared and shot by the police but as beautiful children of God; to unyoke us from our immoral priorities that make it easier to get a gun than to vote; to ensure that the people of Flint can drink clean, lead-free water; to embrace Syrian refugees; to restore our collective priorities so that no person is impoverished, no sick person goes without care, no human is abandoned or suffers alone.

We've got this. We know how to set these breaks; we need the political will to help them heal.

But Isaiah calls us to stretch and expand the boundaries of our hearts and consider *all* people who are in bondage and suffering—not just the ones we agree with politically or have affinity for.

As we sit together in the discomfort of Isaiah's fast, as we look to untie the chords of the yoke, to unlock the fetters of wickedness, to free the oppressed from bondage, I wonder and I ask with a great deal of trepidation four weeks before our nation votes:

What would it mean for us to reach out to people who support Donald Trump for President?

Now, what Donald stands for is appalling!

The way he speaks about women, people of color, Muslims, immigrants, and people with disabilities is appalling!

The grotesque racist and sexist fury he's unleashed is appalling!

His coarseness, temperament, and brutishness are deeply morally offensive. He's uniquely outside the bounds of a normal candidate.

And—I have to swallow hard and breathe deeply as I say this—And, we aren't going to restore the painful breach in our community unless and until we're willing to engage with at least some of the people who disagree with us—and agree with him.

Perhaps like the doctor with Noa's foot, we need to take time to examine what is broken in order to repair it.

Part of what's broken, part of the breach, is a sense of people feeling invisible, that they don't matter, that they've been forgotten. Not true for all of them; some are just boorish racist, sexist, anti-Semites.

And some really do feel abandoned by our country. We know this experience, you and I; so many of our families came here on boats—some as slaves, some as refugees—many

impoverished, many working as peddlers, in factories and mines; many under the yoke of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia... We did the jobs no one else wanted because we needed to feed, house, and clothe our families.

Today, some—not all, certainly—some of the very folks who support Trump, themselves feel invisible, forgotten, and disrespected. And they feel that he’s listening to them and taking their concerns seriously.

In his book, “Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis,” J.D. Vance, a Yale law school graduate who grew up in poverty in Appalachia writes, “What many don’t understand is how truly desperate these places are, and we’re not talking about small enclaves or a few towns—we’re talking about multiple states where a significant chunk of the white working class struggles to get by. Heroin addiction is rampant. In my medium-sized Ohio county last year, deaths from drug addiction outnumbered deaths from natural causes... And on top of that is the economic struggle, from the factories shuttering their doors to the Main Streets with nothing but cash-for-gold stores and pawn shops.”

“My grandma (Mamaw),” Vance continues, “... said that most people were probably prejudiced, but they had to be secretive about it. “We”—meaning hillbillies—“are the only group of people you don’t have to be ashamed to look down upon.”  
<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/trump-us-politics-poor-whites/>

Sounds familiar: the pain of feeling invisible, forgotten, devalued. We know that experience even if our individual or collective particulars are different.

Let me state unequivocally: I am not making a moral equivalency between unarmed Black people who are shot by police and white people who show up at Trump rallies shouting at Muslims to leave America, hold signs that call Hillary Clinton “Hitlery,” and threaten physical violence to those they disagree with.

I am advocating that if we are to take the spiritual mandate of this fast seriously—to break the chains of bondage, to let the oppressed go free, to repair the breach, to restore our cities—if we are to bring our Judaism into the public conversation, then we need to collectively acknowledge and show compassion to those who are afraid, suffering, and feel marginalized even when we fundamentally disagree with how they express their anger and their anguish—even when their politics offend our dignity. Compassion does not mean agreement, acquiescence, or abandoning our values. Compassion demands we hold the humanity of all people even in the face of the absurd.

Because we know, we know, this breach of communal trust didn’t happen with this election; its been dripping resentment and dislocation for generations. Mistrust of government and institutions, economic dislocation, worry over the growing disparities of wealth are all shared by people across the political spectrum. Today, the United

States Congress has a lower approval rating than colonoscopies and cockroaches. (<http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2013/01/congress-somewhere-below-cockroaches-traffic-jams-and-nickleback-in-americans-esteem.html>)

People are fed up and they're afraid. As my friend Rabbi Sharon Brous explains, "two core, driving fears in our country today are the fear that I can't provide for my loved ones and the fear that I can't protect my loved ones. Both are real and serious, and both must be addressed with urgency, resources and great sensitivity." <http://www.ikarla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RH1-america-needs-to-find-its-way.pdf>

Fear does not excuse the vile behavior we've witnessed on the campaign trail this past year.

We can simultaneously call out people for their vicious attacks on others, hold them publicly accountable, express compassion for even the most egregious amongst them, and pursue our prophetic agenda of human dignity and justice. We are capable of embracing moral complexity.

We know how to do this.

We learned something in the marriage campaign four years ago; we talked to people, all across the state, about what mattered most to them; to us. And we listened.

We've got to be careful not to romanticize the past because we won. Some of those conversations were brutal; we had doors slammed in our faces; people called us awful names on the phones; some hung up abruptly; while marching in Edina's July 4<sup>th</sup> parade, opponents of marriage equality screamed violent epithets at us; the rage in their eyes haunts me still.

We persisted. We kept going.

We didn't get everyone to agree with us. Some still don't. But we acted with integrity, faith, and humble resolve every step of the way. In the process, we did more than win the vote: we transformed our community for the better. We never let go of our core belief in the fundamental equality of marriage even as we reached out to people and listened to them when we knew they might never agree with us.

That's the purpose of this fast: to break the chains of all who are in bondage, to repair the breach of trust in society, to live expansively with justice and compassion at the center of our moral urgency.

Yes, people who use racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, misogynist vile speech, people who commit hate crimes, those who harm others must be held accountable. Those in our community who have been targeted by such vitriol—especially our sisters and

brothers of color—need not put themselves in situations to be re-traumatized. Holding compassion for self while giving space to others to pursue this work might be best.

There are people who act with such callous disregard of others, who act so inhumanely, that they make it difficult for us to see their humanity. In Judaism, compassion and justice are held together—we can have compassion for others even as we seek justice for the harm they have caused. As Bryan Stevenson teaches in his powerful book, **Just Mercy**, “we are all more than the worst thing we have ever done (pg 18).” Holding compassion for those who do ugly is ultimately *for us*—so we don’t lose our humanity.

It is time for us to answer Amos Oz; it is time for us to be brave: to live with fierce and fearless compassion for those we disagree with; to see their humanity as we pursue different goals, vote differently, work for justice in ways they may find appalling, and even if they don’t reciprocate our decency. We need to stretch the boundaries of our compassion even when it is hard—especially when it is hard.

To live freely as Jews in America is a blessing. With this blessing comes the responsibility to join with other communities—those who share our values AND those who challenge our deepest beliefs—to repair the breach and restore our cities; to recognize our common humanity with our neighbors who belong to the Mosque and our neighbors who belong to the NRA.

To be a Jew in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to live bravely, to remember where we’ve been: the desperate conditions we survived, the Pharaohs we confronted, the torture our loved ones endured to get us here.

Our relentless commitment to human dignity extends to **all** humans: those who share our values and those who seemingly despise them. We Jews must face the breach with such an abundance of radical compassion that we will overwhelm every rupture in our society with love as we do the hard, holy work to repair our broken hearts and rebuild our broken cities.

They say that rabbis give the sermon we most need to hear ourselves.

I am striving to be an Isaiah Jew and I invite you to be Isaiah Jews with me.

G’mar Chatimah Tovah.