

**“Connecting”**  
**Rosh Hashanah 5772/September 29, 2011**  
**Rabbi Jay M. Stein**

The idea of standing before this holy congregation at this time of year is one that is on my mind all year round. No matter how many years they have been on the pulpit, when you ask any rabbi why they still feel anguish at this time of year, most rabbis will say that they will have to stand before their people, and based upon their words, people will either decide to come back to synagogue or wait another year until their return. Most every rabbi feels this even if they never say it.

We feel attendance is a mandate of our performance. We feel many congregants will choose to come back or not because of what we say. We are afraid that people may not hear our message and that our brand of Torah will not inspire. This is my one chance to turn you on. If I find the right word or turn the right phrase maybe I will make a difference in your life and you will come back. In a particularly self-defeating moment, we remember the numbers of people who returned for Sukkot and then this theory is confirmed.

The task before each rabbi is not like a Broadway production. We are not here to entertain, though sometimes we are very interesting. We are here to connect. We all want, and I want, to solidify a bond – to touch a heart, to move a soul. These moments together can right the system, and they can be the necessary impetus for alteration, for a correction, a *tikkun*, a repair.

Today the moment a plane touches down, people rush for their smart phones. They check their emails or texts. I even saw one person take his phone in flight and make his way to the bathroom to check his email or make a call. We lost what we all need and we have replaced it with a diversion. I have 742 friends on Facebook but I don't feel connected to almost any of them. In fact, those faces are a constant reminder to me of the work I really need to do to connect. So today, at least for this time together, I ask you to think about drawing closer to each other and put aside that which is a diversion, a leisure activity or a hobby.

I have a Facebook page and I have a website. I upload my classes and, with the help of Rabbi Knopf this year, we put out a *Youtube* message – but I don't feel any closer and my guess is neither do you. You may be more entertained but I don't feel you are more connected.

That is the essence of the fear every rabbi has at this time of year, while standing in this place in front of crowds of people. We are afraid of not connecting. Some of us do it brilliantly in this venue, in this situation, as did Rabbi Wolpe (z"l) and my father. But some prefer the hospital room, the classroom or even the quiet of our offices. No matter. What every rabbi wants is to connect. We want to connect with our people and we want to connect our people to God. It is what we all want. I am never happier than when after a sermon someone may come to me and say, “I felt like you were talking to me.” I made a connection. My heart saw your heart. I shared my secret and it made an impact because the bond of being human is the quintessence of living. We make the journey here, no matter how uncomfortable we may feel, no matter how out of place we may feel, because we want to connect and we need to connect.

Everything we are and everything we do is a result of our interconnectedness. We have to stop fighting it. We have to realize that what happens on the other side of the world affects us. A tsunami

devastates a continent and eight months later an earthquake hits there and is followed by a hurricane. It is at these times we recognize, “There by for the grace of God go I.” We are connected.

Can we try an exercise for a moment? Turn to a friend, a neighbor or a family member. Give them a hug, and hold on for six seconds. I will time you.

Oxytocin is a hormone released when humans connect. It is also released when they hug for more than six seconds. This hormone decreases fear and anxiety while simultaneously increasing empathy, trust and cooperation.

On the other hand, Dopamine is released in the system when the brain receives new information such as a text, tweet, or email. This release trains human to do things that make them feel good over and over again, but we never feel satiated. That is the infinite Dopamine loop. We have confused one for the other. We think we have connected and all we have done is acquired new information. We have mistaken the feeling.

James Lovelock made popular the *Gaia Hypothesis*, which postulates that the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment. We are all part of one big entity. What we do here effects what happens over there. A kindness in the supermarket is felt in the supermarket, and then the playground, and then on the train, and so on.

But that is nothing new. A butterfly flaps its wing and a title wave is felt around the world. But we have stopped short of understanding how that effects our relationship with God. The *Gaia Hypothesis* must be expanded to include God – a Theogaia hypothesis if you will. God is part of the system, not beyond it, not outside of it.

We have all been taught the compartmentalization of our tradition. There are laws between man and God and laws that are between man and man, “*Bein Adam L’Chavero and Bein Adam L’Makom*”... and today we are here to discuss the problems that have arisen between man and God. We reference the sins we have committed between each other as we engage in the conversation with God, but we hold tight to the categories *Bein Adam L’Chavero and Bein Adam L’Makom*. The groupings help us define the problem and offer a return path. You may think that that was a sin against a person so you can fix it through a conversation. You can pay that person back. That was a sin against God so you can come to shul, pray fervently, sincerely and fix that. However, it is not that simple. The relationships are connected and one impacts the other. They learn from each other and they inform each other, just as a father learns the depth of the task from his father. As we learn to be loved by God, we learn to love. The system informs itself.

We learn in the Mishna, “***for transgressions as between man and the Omnipresent, the Day of Atonement procures atonement, but for transgressions as between man and his fellow, the day of atonement does not procure any atonement, until he has pacified his fellow.***”  
(Talmud Yoma 85b-86a)

We come today to ask for forgiveness from God but have we done this with each other? They are interconnected. You must start in one place or the other, but don’t stop there. If you have an ability to seek forgiveness from God, apply that same honesty to your friends, to your family and to your

co-workers. If you can do it with the people in your lives now, then bring that same sincerity to your conversation with God.

This Mishna gets codified into law in the Shulchan Aruch, (O□, 606:1) and in a brilliant comment by the Machatzit HaShekel (Rav Shmuel ben Natan Neta HaLevi 1738-1827) ***Hachet b'viduyav lifnei HaMakom Hu B'viduyav lifnei Chaveiro***. Just as we ask for forgiveness from God, so too we must confess before our fellow person. We learn from each activity and we learn from each experience. We learn from one relationship and apply it to the other.

We learn covenant, commitment, loyalty and love from each relationship. Our sages require us to apply these lessons to other relationships, then the connections are deeper and more significant.

As Rabbi Brad Artson points out, “Our sense of Judaism as a living organism celebrates its component parts connecting in dynamic intergration; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” (Kolot, Fall 2011 page 51)

Mao thought he must destroy the sparrow to preserve the crops as they were eating the seeds. Then came the locust leading to mass starvation and in five years, 36 million people died of starvation. The results of losing sight of the interwoven nature of this universe can be devastating.

Albert Einstein once said, “If honey bees become extinct, human society will follow in four years.” He was speaking with regard to the symbiotic relationship of all life on the planet. We are all part of a huge interconnected ecosystem, each element playing a role dependant on many other elements, all working in concert creating the symphony of life. Should any part of the global body suffer, so does the whole body.

President Barrack Obama while addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations last week rightfully claimed, “Emerging economies from Asia to the Americas have lifted hundreds of millions from poverty. Yet three years ago, we confronted the worst financial crisis in eight decades. That crisis proved a fact that has become clearer with each passing year – our fate is interconnected. In a global economy, nations will rise or fall, together.”

Essentially, he was saying what Wayne Dyer brilliantly encapsulated, "When you live on a round planet there is no choosing sides." To which I add the trope, “You can't leave God out either.” We must not forget God created this world, on this day, *Hayom Harat Olam*. Some have chosen a relationship with God to the exclusion of civilization, while some have chosen a relationship with their neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family to an exclusion of a relationship with God. And the cycle spirals downward.

Dr. Lena Allen Shore, a member of our own congregation, wrote so beautifully this season:

***“IF YOU KNOW HOW TO LOVE GOD...”***

*If you know how to love God  
You know how to love your family*

*If you know how to love your family  
You know how to love people*

*If you know how to love people  
You know how to love the trees, the mountains,  
the rivers and oceans*

*If you know how to love the oceans  
You love the Galaxy where you live*

*If you love your Galaxy  
You love all the Galaxies in the Universe*

*If you love the Universe  
You love the Creation of God*

*If you love the Creation of God  
You are never alone...*

John Muir said, "When you tug at a single thing in the world, you find that it is attached to everything else." Some came today to see God and some have come today to see each other. If we do see what we came looking for, we will see the other as well. Just expand your view.