

YOM KIPPUR SERMON

Forty six years ago Rabbi Edward Tenenbaum came to Temple Beth Zion as a guest Rabbi, he never left.

Twenty six years ago, on Passover, I stopped at Joe and Esther Sturt's home to visit Judy. I was going to change my clothes and go to my aunt and uncles house for Passover. I wasn't feeling well. It turned out I had Chicken Pox and I never left. In forty six years the Rabbi almost never missed a Yom Kippur Sermon. This is my first Yom Kippur Sermon. I hope this sermon will do the Rabbi Justice. Rabbi Tenenbaum, you will be missed. May we have a moment of silence in his memory.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is traditionally a day, in which we seek forgiveness of our sins from God. Yom Kippur is traditionally a twenty five hour fast day, and is considered a full Sabbath day in which we do not work, drive, bath, wear leather, or have sexual relations. Many people dress in white and wear athletic shoes made of cloth or other non-leather materials. It is a time to divorce one's self from our everyday luxuries. It is the most important holiday in the Jewish Religion.

I have always observed Yom Kippur even while I was away at college. I kept the tradition which I was raised with, but for many years there was really no meaning to it. I was raised in the Jewish faith but, I celebrated the holidays only out of tradition and respect. Many years ago I remember my father told me it was Sukkot, and I said "OK", and went on with my business. Things in my life have changed over the years and I now find myself studying Torah, and I am actually involved in a Para-Rabbi program. This program is teaching me about Judaism, conducting services, and many other aspects of Jewish tradition.

I was so excited about my Bar-Mitzvah, It was the day that I became a man, I was getting gifts, and I had a big party, but Judaism did not really play an important part in my life. I did not realize the meaning or the importance of this event. Surprisingly I was the Hillel Director at Whittier College, probably because there were not many Jewish students to choose from, and it was a way to earn some extra money. We were the first Jewish organization ever at Whittier College.

There have been many instances in my life that have drawn me away from Judaism. Interestingly enough the instances that drew me away, eventually became what brought me back to Judaism.

Let me explain. I was raised as an only child, which can be both a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing is you can usually get what you want, the bad is, there is no one to share things with, and as a child you do not always want to share everything with your parents.

My parents were raised in Poland, they were both Holocaust Survivors, and suffered many atrocities at the hands of the Nazi's. My mother was in Auschwitz and was a young child when she went to the concentration camps. She never talked about the camps, and I am not sure what kind of hardships she suffered. I remember a television miniseries, "Holocaust", and this was the first time my father ever talked about his experiences in the concentration camps. As a child there was always a certain distance between me and my parents, because of the torment they endured, especially by my mother, but there was no way that I could have known what they went through. It is interesting that many of my

friends are the children of Holocaust survivors. Many of us have lost touch over the years, but when we do see each other there is a bond, which can only be explained by the fact that deep down inside we know what our parents experienced. Somehow their torture has been passed on through the generations.

My father passed away in 1982, and my mother died by suicide in 1983. She never recovered from the torment she endured during the Holocaust.

I am not here to bore you with my family history, but it is the foundation for my experiences and growth as a Jew.

As I stated, I was not very religious for most of my life. After my mother's death I did not believe there was really a God. In fact, since the time she passed away I do not read the Amidah during Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Shabbat, or any other holidays. The Amidah is a silent devotion to God. I felt that with everything my family went through that there is no God. If there was a God, why would he let them suffer the way they did. Certain things that happened in my life actually strengthened the feeling that God did not exist. I still

do not read the entire Amidah to this day. I pray silently for friends and family that I have lost and for friends and loved ones currently in my life, but I am still unable to read the prayer that is a silent devotion to God. I am sure you are asking, why? My answer is. Why would God, let my mother suffer as much as she did. I attended services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but I could never accept the existence of God. A few years ago Judy and I were visiting Aunt Fanny along with her grandson Garth and his Son Max. Garth mentioned that Max did not believe in God. We were all shocked, but Aunt Fanny responded to Max with a simple answer. She told Max that God is in your heart. For me, that was an acceptable resolution, if God exists, he exists in your heart.

Yom Kippur is a time for forgiveness, reconciliation and Teshuvah (resolution and transformation); simply, it is a time to Un-Stick yourself or let it go. What does this mean? We all carry around baggage. A famous author says “Bad Things Happen to Good People”. Let me discuss this from a personal view. As a child of Holocaust Survivors, I wish I understood what they

went through earlier in my life. I can never forgive what happened to them, but I loved them and they helped me become the man I am today. The Teshuvah (resolution) is that I had them as long as I did, and they were always there for me. They were an important part of my life. I remember, just before my father died, I told him I loved him. This was probably one of the few times I said that to him. My father responded you don't have to say it, I know it.

As most of you know I had a failed surgery on my foot. I am not able to work and I have difficulty standing or sitting for any length of time, because the surgery was performed incorrectly. Unfortunately, we lost the malpractice suit against the surgeon. Honestly, I will never be able to forgive the surgeon for the damage he caused but it is time to let it go.

I will never be able to forgive the Nazi's for the atrocities that many of our families lived through. We will never forgive, we will never forget and we will never let it go. In this case, not letting go is the resolution. There are some things that can never be forgotten.

It is important to realize that forgiveness and resolution are independent of each other. You can forgive without resolution, and you can resolve without forgiveness. When my mother died a close family member told me, “If, I were taking care of her this would never have happened”. A week before she died, he told me “thank god she is your problem”. He is the last surviving member of my mother’s family, and the person I am the closest to in the family. Unfortunately, there has been a lot of turmoil between us over the years. I have been able to forgive him for many of the things he has said and done, especially those that he expressed because of his own emotional pain. Part of the problem is he cannot let anything go. He is a holocaust survivor, went through a bad divorce, and he has a strained relationship with his children. In my case, he remembers every argument or misunderstanding we ever had. He is in his 80’s and I hope that someday soon he can let go and we can move on with our relationship.

You can hold a grudge, but where does it get you. I urge everyone during this Yom Kippur to forgive, resolve or reconcile. It will only make your life better.

Most of you know that I have been trying to do away with the appeal at Temple Beth Zion during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I believe we should be able to remember our loved ones without placing a monetary value to it. We also need to remember those lost during 9/11, The Holocaust, Pogroms, and wars throughout the years.

The reason I am doing the appeal this year is that Temple Beth Zion needs your help. Temple Beth Zion has been in existence since the early nineteen-forties. It started off as a pillar in the community, and now we need your help to bring Temple Beth Zion back to the status it once held. Temple Beth Zion is like “Cheers”, everyone knows your name. You can attend services anywhere, but it really means something when someone comes up to you, and asks you by name how you are doing, have a sweet new year or an easy fast.

I was the main caretaker for both my parents, which was a very difficult task. You cannot do it alone.

Temple Beth Zion is like an aging parent. It cannot be saved by one person. We can save Temple Beth Zion by working together as a family. We must all work together.

Our Rabbi, Edward Tenenbaum, worked until his dying day, to help Temple Beth Zion survive. I urge everyone to give what they can. I would also urge everyone to make a monthly donation. As I stated in a letter to the congregation earlier this year, please make a monthly donation of eighteen dollars or more, or whatever you can afford. As you all know eighteen is chai, chai is life, and we need to infuse life back into Temple Beth Zion. Only you can keep Temple Beth Zion alive. The late president John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country". I say "Ask not what Temple Beth Zion can do for you, but what you can do for Temple Beth Zion and Then see what you and Temple Beth Zion can do together as a community.

Thank You.