

Yom Kippur Chavurah Service  
Sanctuary - Youth Reflection  
9/30/17

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JORDAN: During this high holiday season, we practice *teshuva*, the process of intense self-reflection and improvement. While often translated as repentance, *teshuva* is most accurately understood as turn or return - we turn to who we believe we should be.

IZZY: We return to see the humanity in every human being. We return to our Jewish tradition, to our way of life and the lessons of Torah.

CLAUDIA: The high holiday liturgy is designed to help us with *teshuva*, to help us turn and return to the Jewish teachings and traditions that have grounded us for thousands of years. We can read prayers with an intention that help us to reconnect to the basic, fundamental values of who we are as Jews.

RUTHIE: There are few Jewish values more fundamental than welcoming the stranger. The most commonly repeated commandment in the Torah is to welcome the stranger among us, to treat them as the native and to love the stranger, for we were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

STEPHEN: We can read the Un'taneh Tokef prayer, exploring the value of hospitality and the importance of welcoming the stranger. Through this lens, the prayer can be read not only as a personal accounting of sins, but as a collective accounting, recognizing the shared fate of humanity and that the calamities that often seem so far away, could happen to any one of us.

ALL: On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. Who shall live and who shall die?

ALL: Who by water?

RUTHIE: Another boat ferrying refugees to Europe has capsized between Turkey and Greece. Rescuers arrived too late to save them all.

ALL: Who by thirst?

STEPHEN: At least 44 migrants died of thirst in the Sahara Desert after their vehicle broke down, making their way from Niger to Libya

ALL: Who by hunger and who by plague?

JORDAN: More than 1,200 die of starvation and illness at Nigeria Refugee Camp – catastrophic humanitarian emergency at Bama camp for people fleeing Boko Haram.

ALL: Who by stoning?

ILAN: 13-year-old Asho Duhulow was keen to escape from a dismal Kenyan refugee camp for displaced Somalis. So the 13-year-old returned to her parents' homeland, Somalia. When she arrived, she was raped and then stoned to death

CLAUDIA: By reading the Un'taneh tokef prayer through this lens, we gain a new perspective into the harsh, catastrophic realities that refugees and migrants can face. The words of this prayer resonate in our collective Jewish memories as we recognize our Jewish history as one of migration, movement, fleeing persecution, and assimilation.

JORDAN: Last year at Beth Emet, we studied the Jewish history of migration and diaspora and connected it to current immigration issues around the world.

IZZY: In March, we participated in a border immersion experience with Cristo Rey Lutheran Church in El Paso. We heard migrant testimonies, met with border patrol officers, immigration advocates, and witnessed deportation sentencing proceedings.

*[Blog post excerpts – All step one step down]*

RUTHIE: At the U.S. District Court in Las Cruces, New Mexico, we saw both arraignment and sentencing hearings, and what we saw was surreal - people one at a time, standing in chains, very seldom able to answer questions as their attorneys spoke for them....someone's life was flashing before their eyes, finding out the consequences of what they were charged for and trying as hard as possible to change the outcome, in a five or ten minute slot.

CLAUDIA: We visited a woman in Aguadulce who shared her story about being undocumented, and how her husband was deported. She is so afraid of immigration officials that she has not left her home in two months - but she has not lost her faith. Afterwards we went to meet another woman in Hueco Tanks, who made us delicious tamales, and also shared her story with us.

IZZY: Her husband had been deported multiple times and they went years without seeing each other, yet they never gave up hope. Eventually her husband made it back to this country and surprised her. It struck us how his story shared many aspects with

stories from those who managed to hide throughout the Holocaust and avoid concentration camps.

JORDAN: "We try to do our job with compassion, we're not robots," the Border Patrol office said. I was struck by the sheer hypocrisy of the whole system; how it was somehow expected that people just come here legally, yet it is so difficult to do so. How it will take over a century for a person filing for residency to be granted it: far longer than their lifetime. But of course, the Border Patrol's job is to "lock up bad guys," as the officers had said when asked how they explain their job to their children.

ILAN: I found the wall particularly powerful. It is one thing to hear our politicians talk about a wall, and a whole other to see that we already have one...we already have one and it already creates a sense of separation, of "us" and "them." It was very intense to see the difference between the two sides, Mexico and the U.S. and to see the impact that a physical symbol of oppression and separation has on two communities.

STEPHEN: Over the week we had the opportunity to hear so many stories and perspectives about immigration. Almost every single person we met, from a pastor to a healthcare worker to an immigration lawyer, told us that the most important thing for us to do was to take what we learned back to Evanston and let people in our communities know about what's going on.

[Blog excerpts conclude – all take one step back ]

RUTHIE: Our trip to the border was six months ago, sandwiched half way between last Yom Kippur and this Yom Kippur. As we reflect on the year that has passed, we think about who we were before the trip, and who we are now. We returned with so much knowledge, and passion to take action. We held rallies, and wrote resolutions. We called legislators and organized our community. And we cannot stop here.

IZZY: On Yom Kippur we read the words of the prophet Isaiah, who challenges us not simply to fast and return to a life of complacency and apathy, but to root our ritual fast in justice and action. “

STEPHEN: This is the fast I desire: To unlock the chains of wickedness let the oppressed go free. To share your bread with the hungry, and to welcome the poor and the stranger into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to ignore your own kin."

CLAUDIA: We must heed Isaiah's call to action, sharing the lessons we learned at the border and mobilizing our community. As we read in the Un'taneh Tokef prayer, we are reminded not only of the possibilities of danger and tragedy, but of hope and the opportunity to change.

ALL: Who shall be at peace?

RUTHIE: We will be at peace when our country upholds its promise of freedom and justice for all

ALL: Who shall be content?

ILAN: We will be content when the voices of the vulnerable and oppressed are heard

ALL: Who shall be exalted?

JORDAN: Those who not only speak of kindness and welcome, but match their words with action.

STEPHEN: On Rosh Hashan it is written, on Yom Kippur, the book is sealed, and through teshuva, tzedakah, and tefilah – return, righteousness and prayer - we have the opportunity to change the outcome of this year. May this Yom Kippur lead us into further learning, action, building bridges, and greater care for the stranger among us.