



Rosh Hashanah 5785 Dvar Torah day two – Oct. 4, 2024

By Anya Manning

My husband Elie and I first started dating in college. Around finals time that first semester we were together I was very stressed. So many tests and papers all due at the same time. On top of that, extra curricular activities including 10pm-3am shifts at Nightline; the support and suicide prevention phone line.

I told Elie “There’s so much going on. I just need space. We can’t hang out. I need to focus.” He looked a bit dejected and disappointed but nodded. The next day he called me while I was studying for my chemistry exam. He said “I think I get you now. When you say “go away” you actually mean “come close.” “Right?” He ended, hopeful for a validation of his assessment. I closed my book and my eyes. “Yes” I replied calmly. “Want to go for ice cream?”

There’s a lot to unpack in this short story, but three messages stand out to me as I reflect on the experience.

1. It’s hard to be with others when we don’t feel our best.
2. Even when we think we know what people want or need, it’s often helpful to check to make sure.
3. Showing up matters.

Sharon Brous’ new book [*The Amen Effect: Ancient Wisdom to Mend Our Broken Hearts and World*](#) is centered around Mishnah Middot 2:2, which describes a time when hundreds of thousands of people would ascend to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

כָּל הַנִּכְנָסִין לְהַר הַבַּיִת נִכְנָסִין דָּרָךְ יְמִין וּמִקִּיפִין וְיוֹצְאִין דָּרָךְ שְׂמָאל

All who entered the Temple Mount entered by the right and circled to the right and exited by the left

But not actually “everyone”...

, חוץ ממי שֶׁאַרְעוּ דָּבָר, שֶׁהוּא מְקִיף לְשְׂמָאל.

Except for someone to whom something had happened, who entered and circled to the left

מֵה לֶךְ מְקִיף לְשְׂמָאל

That person was asked “Why do you go round to the left?”

, שֶׁאֲנִי אָבֵל

“Because I am a mourner,” he answered

, הַשּׁוֹכֵן בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה יִנְחַמְךָ.

(And they were blessed) “May the One who dwells in this house comfort you.”

, שֶׁאֲנִי מְנַדָּה,

If they replied “Because I am excommunicated”

הַשּׁוֹכֵן בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה יִתֵּן בְּלָבָם וּקְרֹבוֹ, דְּבַרֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר.

“May the One who dwells in this house inspire the community to draw you near again,” according to Rabbi Meir.

What's striking to me about this Mishnah are the physical actions. The whole community must show-up and physically orchestrate itself in a dance of sorts. Those for whom nothing notable has happened must walk to the right creating a space for those שָׂאֲרֵנוּ דָּבָר for whom something has happened to walk left. We must walk right so we can encounter and greet those walking and treading against the current. We walk to the right so we can ask "Mah Lecha?", "Mah Lach?" "What troubles you?" "What's bringing you to walk through the world in this way?"

And inevitably we, too, will find ourselves at one point or another walking to the left, giving us the opportunity to hear the question "Mah lecha?", internalizing the curious, caring encounter and outstretched hand.

Even when we're in deep pain - physical or emotional, physical AND emotional (because physical and emotional pain often come together), when we are suffering, we are encouraged to show-up. It doesn't say "stay home until you're feeling better." or "Sit in the back so when you want to cry you can exit fast." As Rabbi Sharon Brous writes "when all you want is to self-isolate - because who would understand anyway. You root your suffering in a context of care." We come together as a community regardless of which way we need to walk that morning.

And then there is the supportive and reliable communal response in the Temple. They will say הַשׁוֹכֵן בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה יִנְחַמְךָ (And they were blessed) "May the One who dwells in this house comfort you." They will reach out to connect.

Similarly, as we muster the courage and strength to show up to synagogue after a loved one has died, after a cancer diagnosis, or perhaps deep sadness that we don't understand ourselves, we trust that the community will say what we need to hear. They won't try to fix our problems in the moment. "Have you seen Dr. X? Have you tried changing your diet" They won't share their story in an attempt to connect or perhaps "misery loves company." They will simply see us and say "May you find comfort." I am sorry for your pain. I am sorry for your loss. I wish you comfort - through G-d or through community, through G-d and the community.

It's hard to be together when we don't feel our best. AND the mishnah gives us the ritual and language to do so.

But what about when we are not in such a highly curated place such as the Temple? How might we show up in other spaces?

In the Talmud, masekhet Berakhot 5b, we learn about the story of R. Chiya b. Abba, R. Johanan, and Rabbi Eleazar.

"Rabbi Yoḥanan's student, Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba, fell ill. Rabbi Yoḥanan entered to visit him, and said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? Do you desire to be ill and afflicted?"

In the Talmud there is some discussion on whether suffering can lead to reward so he is essentially asking "is this suffering worth the potential reward, or do you wish it would go away?"

"Rabbi Ḥiyya said to him: I welcome neither this suffering nor its reward,. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: Give me your hand. Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba gave him his hand, and Rabbi Yoḥanan stood him up and restored him to health."

How beautiful it is to see a teacher visiting a sick student. Presumably, Rabbi Yohanan noticed that his student was not in his shiur or class or perhaps someone alerted him knowing that it mattered to this teacher.

Similarly, in the Minyan Maor community we strive to notice each other - both in and out of shul - physically and emotionally. Who hasn't been at shul for awhile? Who has missed a couple book club gatherings? Who has been absent

from the schnapps table at kiddush club? Who hasn't been as talkative at kiddush? Who seems more overwhelmed than usual?

And then there is the ASK from Rabbi Yohanan - How do you feel about what you're going through?

How often are we crying or yelling and told to "wipe our tears and think of all that is good in our lives." To "turn that frown upside down" While these comments are meant to help, sometimes we are just sad. Sometimes we need to just be sad. And that's OK. What we need is someone to sit with us.

This reminded me of a beautiful dialogue between Winnie the Pooh and Piglet.

"Today was a Difficult Day," said Pooh.

There was a pause.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Piglet.

"No," said Pooh after a bit. "No, I don't think I do."

"That's okay," said Piglet, and he came and sat beside his friend.

"What are you doing?" asked Pooh.

"Nothing, really," said Piglet. I quite often don't feel like talking about it on my Difficult Days either. "But goodness," continued Piglet, "Difficult Days are so much easier when you know you've got someone there for you

-A.A. Milne

Sometimes, what it means to show up isn't to DO anything It is simply to be with someone else. After all, we are human BEings.

After Rabbi Yohanan heals his student, Rabbi Hiyya Bar Abba, the gemara continues.

"Similarly, Rabbi Yoḥanan fell ill. Rabbi Ḥanina entered to visit him, and said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: I welcome neither this suffering nor its reward. Rabbi Ḥanina said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand, and Rabbi Ḥanina stood him up and restored him to health.

אָמַאי, לוקים רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן לְנַפְשִׁיהָ?

The Gemara then asks an interesting question: Why did Rabbi Yoḥanan wait for Rabbi Ḥanina to restore him to health? If he was able to heal his student, let Rabbi Yoḥanan stand himself up.

אָמַרְי: אֵין חֲבוּשׁ מִתִּיר עֲצָמוּ מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים.

The Gemara astutely answers, they say: A prisoner cannot generally free himself from prison, but depends on others to release him from his shackles.

And once again, the gemara reminds us how important it is to be in community with others regardless of how capable or experienced we think we are. A surgeon cannot excise his own appendix. The best therapist cannot mediate their own marriage.

Our Minyan Maor community strives - and often succeeds - to show up for each other in these ways.

Lori Kahn wrote us all on the listserve after her mother, Muriel, passed away “you showed up for me and my family during the immediate time of mourning. You sat with me, listened to me and prayed with me. You helped me move forward and for this I am very grateful.” She goes on to offer a helping hand to others who are or will be going through this intense period of caring for an elderly parent.

This is what community looks like. It’s the call after the loss. The vulnerability to ask (and offer) for help, and then the minyan showing up for us.

Entering into the aseret yimei teshuvah we dedicate time to thinking about teshuva; asking ourselves, and perhaps our community; How do I want to show up in the world this year? For whom do I want to show up? How do I create a community where people can show up with their whole selves? How can I lean in to this community for support? How might we elevate the community to the next level? Throughout this period of teshuva - even starting back at rosh chodesh Elul - we say Psalm 27.

In verse 4 we chant *achat sha'alti m'et hashem ota avakesh. Shivto b'veit adonai kol yimay chayai*. One thing I ask of God, That I might dwell in Your house all the days of my life.

What does it mean to wish to sit in God's house all the days of my life? For some this may be a desire to rebuild and dwell in the 3rd Temple. For me, however, this is about integrating certain aspects of the Temple into our world today.

From the literary parallels in the Torah between the construction of the Mishkan and the creation of the world, we are encouraged to look at God's house as a microcosm of the world we wish to build. . The psalm is saying we wish there is a world (or even community) in which the caring and compassionate ritual of the Mishnah and Gemara we read above become a reality.

A place where we show up. Even when we don’t feel our best and it’s hard to be together. Whether we walk right and ask “mah lecha?” inviting others to share and opening our hearts to their words, OR we walk left acknowledging our loss, our pain.

We show up to notice and to reach out. To ask. We show up to be noticed and to answer. That is a world (or community) in which I would pray to spend all my days.

For years this community has been cultivating a culture of care. How might we continue to grow this commitment in the year to come? I look forward to being part of this project.

Shanah tova