

Rosh Hashanah Day 2015/5776

A week and a half ago I saw the author of ***Daring Greatly***, Brene Brown, speak in Winnetka. In June of 2010 she gave a TED talk “The Power of Vulnerability” She thought it would only be seen by the people present and some of her family after it was put online. In over five years it has been viewed over 21 million times.

Last August she wrote an incredible piece on Fear:

In it she wrote:

“When confronted with news of a stranger’s unimaginable pain – a suicide, an overdose, a protest for justice and basic dignity – we have two choices: We can choose to respond from fear or we can choose courage.

We can choose to believe that we are somehow insulated from the realities of these traumas and that our willpower or our strength of character makes us *better than* these displays of desperation and woundedness. When we seek shelter in the *better than – safer than – different than* thinking, we are actually choosing fear and that requires

us to self-protect and arm ourselves with judgment and self-righteousness.

Our only other option is to choose courage. Rather than deny our vulnerability, we lean into both the beauty and agony of our shared humanity. Choosing courage does not mean that we're unafraid, it means that we are brave enough to love despite the fear and uncertainty.

The courageous choice also does not mean abandoning accountability – it simply means holding ourselves accountable first. If we are people of faith, we hold ourselves accountable for living that faith by practicing grace and bringing healing. If we consider ourselves to be smart and curious, it means seeking greater understanding. If we consider ourselves to be loving, it means acting with compassion.

It's difficult to respond to the tragedies of strangers – even those we think we know – because we will never have access to the whole truth. In the absence of information,

we make up stories, stories that often turn out to be our own biographies, not theirs.

Our choices have consequences: They make the world a more dangerous place or they cultivate peace. Fear and judgment deepen our collective wounds. That rare mix of courage and compassion is the balm that brings global healing.

We have two choices. Let's choose courage. Let's choose to love despite the fear.”

<http://brenebrown.com/2014/08/14/choose-courage/>

Choosing courage is challenging these days considering the global political atmosphere, the civil wars, Holy wars and economic wars raging throughout the world. Many of us here are all grateful for the blessings in our lives and yet every day we are faced with a war struggling against itself for things we thought we had overcome decades ago. When the cold war ended we thought the United States, Russia and China would all figure out how to co-exist and help usher in a period of peace and

prosperity for the world. When the Oslo Accords were signed and the Israel-Palestine peace process was moving forwards we thought we would see the beginning of an era of peace in the Middle East.

Just days after the fourteenth anniversary of September 11th, 2001 we find ourselves in a world trying to hold itself together and tear itself apart. And yet I would rather love courageously than live in fear. I would rather work for hope and walk toward those who consider themselves my enemies and do my best to make them friends until we feel like family. I'm tired of fearing Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and much of the Middle East population. Really I don't fear any of those names, because they only represent ancient land masses where old civilizations continue to live and millions of people simply try to raise their families and live in peace. These countries represent places where Jews lived safely for thousands of years before zealotry forced them to flee for their lives. When Queen Isabella of Spain exiled all of its Jews in 1492 the

luckiest of the expelled Jews successfully escaped to Turkey. The Turkish Sultan, Bajazet, welcomed them. He once said “How can you call Ferdinand of Aragon a wise king, the same Ferdinand who impoverished his own land and enriched ours?” The cradle of civilization as we know it gave birth to so much from the midst of these great lands.

I love the people of these countries who are just like me. I love them for getting up in the morning, having breakfast with their families and for going to work to try to make something for themselves in this lifetime.

It is the few, the fundamentalists, the theocrats, the ideologues of all religions and political beliefs who want to control the world by fear who wish to make the world over in the image of their religious and political zeal. While I will not sit idly by pretending they don't exist, I refuse to cower in fear of living simply because they hate all that our freedom represents.

None of us love living in fear of anything. We all have individual fears, and perhaps most of us have come to terms living with those fears, but no one wants to live in perpetual fear. I once learned that "al tirah" is the most repeated commandment in the Torah. "Do not fear." And yet fear permeates our lives almost on a daily basis. We fear we won't hear our alarm, we fear being late, we fear that doctor's appointment we've been putting off for weeks, we fear our presentation won't be received well, we fear we will never find true love or be able to keep it if we do find it. Each day is filled with tiny fears that either occur or don't occur. On a global level so many of us fear climate change. As Jews we fear for the safety of Israel. As Americans we fear for the safety of the United States. We fear for the safety of our families and friends during times of uncertainty. We fear nations will continue to lift up swords against nations in an age when we thought, we hoped, we dreamed that we would see war no more.

Many of you grew up in a time where you were taught that hiding under your desk would save you in the event of a nuclear attack. I was raised in the shadow of Vietnam and feared being drafted in a world where the draft hadn't existed since 1973. And in the end I volunteered and joined the United States Army for a short time when I considered being a military Chaplain. I grew up fearing the Cold War and mutually assured nuclear destruction. I feared another Holocaust, terrorist attacks and airplane hijackings in a world that made it clear that it wasn't safe to be a Jew. It wasn't that I hid myself away, or refused to live my life in the outside world, as much as I was very consciously aware of being Jewish and how the world treated Jews.

In a world where history has taught us to be wary of the world around us, as Jews our fears have taught us to always keep our eyes open and trust our fears and our instincts.

Today we find ourselves in a world where fear sells commodities, technologies, supplies, buys votes, opinions

and financial support. Even the forced obsolescence of our favorite gadgets, technologies and cars is just marketing induced fear that your favorite objects aren't good enough because the latest and greatest release has made them obsolete. How many of you are already planning to upgrade to the iPhone 6s? I'm waiting for the turbo charged one with satellite interface that can communicate with Mars, or maybe one that just doesn't crash or freeze ten times a day.

We are berated with the so many opposing facts and statements.

The world will end in our lifetime

The world is fine the way it is

A nuclear, biological, financial attack is imminent,

All is great, relax, invest, stop worrying, we are closer to world peace than ever,

Our government can't handle anything and is hiding the real truth.

Our government can handle everything and we are going to be fine.

We are bombarded with lies, truths and half truths and many of us aren't sure what to believe anymore.

Skepticism has become the new religion of the sane. We all know the truth is somewhere in the middle, but many of us aren't sure where the middle even is anymore.

Whatever comes of the Iran Agreement, I don't want to live the rest of my life fearing Iran. I believe in peace for them as much as I believe in peace for all of us. I have to, otherwise I would only have fear to fall back on leading to preemptive attacks on every ideology I don't believe in. And that would make me as bad as those who already wish to attack me and my freedoms.

I fear that the Iranian leaders have lost the ability to see the peaceful middle where we help each other steer clear of war and destruction. Rather than fight each other we need to figure out how best to feed our people, fight poverty and create mutually beneficial agreements where

all nations live safe existences supporting each other. Yes, I have idealistic views with a realistic pessimism for rulers who can't see that peace and security for all is the most cost effective answer that would allow us to live peacefully into the next century.

Within our fears we must find the willingness to love courageously. Only our love for life as we know it and peace for the whole world will help us maintain faith to see this world as we wish it would be. We have seen the glimmers of hope in our lifetime. And yet these last few weeks we've watched all the Syrian refugees leaving their homes and the lives they built to find safety and shelter from the two tyrannical forces trying to control how they live their lives.

Love is the only answer. It is the reason God brought this world into existence. It is the reason God created humans, Betzelem Elohim, in God's image. Love is the answer but it takes, hard work, determination, dedication, voices raised in unity, major world leaders working together to

pull us back from the forces who wish to destroy all we hold sacred. So while we must be prepared to defend our freedoms and protect our safety we must also pray for peace, love our enemies as we wish they would love us. We must find a different message to deliver to the world, because the last decade and a half hasn't delivered the message we want delivered.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat once said:

He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality.

http://www.azquotes.com/author/12873-Anwar_Sadat

If you don't have the capacity to change yourself and your own attitudes, then nothing around you can be changed. http://www.azquotes.com/author/12873-Anwar_Sadat

He also said "I believe that for peace a man may, even should, do everything in his power. Nothing in this world could rank higher than peace."

http://www.azquotes.com/author/12873-Anwar_Sadat

"There can be hope only for a society which acts as one big family, not as many separate ones." http://www.azquotes.com/author/12873-Anwar_Sadat

We as the children of Israel see ourselves as one people.
We need to teach the world that despite all our differences

we are one humanity. Love is the message we must teach the world. Love, courage, tolerance, cooperation. We have lived in fear too long while teaching a love of our Judaism, our values, our culture to our children for millennia despite the attempts of the world to persecute us time and time again. So many fear the Jews and Judaism because you can't wipe out a good idea. You can't wipe out love, devotion and beliefs. Throughout the world all Jews are praying as one people in celebration of Rosh Hashanah, the new year, the anniversary of the creation of the universe and of our world. We all recite the Shema together and pray God's oneness. May we see a day when the whole world sees humanity's oneness and may peace reign for all times from that day forward.

Love courageously as we all work for a sustainable peace.

Cain yehi Ratzon - may this be God's will