



The High Holy Days and Renewal
September 17, 2008

Shera Dubitsky: Good evening everyone. I am Shera Dubitsky, the clinical supervisor at Sharsheret. I am happy to welcome all participants from across the country. I anticipate that tonight's program will be meaningful and insightful. Thank you for joining us as part of the *Empower* Teleconference Series for single women touched by breast cancer.

Our feature speaker is aware that there are some participants who are joining us who are not single. We hope that those of you who are not in the *Empower* program will find this evening equally fulfilling.

We are fortunate to have Rachel Lerner join us in addressing this topic. Rachel presents weekly and monthly Tehillim/Psalms classes and records classes for the OU Radio Network (ouradio.org). Additionally, Rachel writes a Psalm Thought of the Day that reaches over 450 subscribers. She is a psychotherapist whose approach to Bible study integrates her passion for textual analysis with a psychological mindset. In addition to teaching, she maintains a private psychotherapy practice. Rachel has generously given of her time and insights to the women of Sharsheret on many occasions and I anticipate that her wisdom, humor, and honesty in addressing renewal on the High Holidays will serve as a meaningful springboard as we delve into the New Year.

I would like to briefly share with you an email that I received from a woman several months ago, and it reads:

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the two cups of coffee.

A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, he wordlessly picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous yes. The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed. Now, said the professor, as the laughter subsided, I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things - your family, your health, your friends and your favorite passions. And if everything else is lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter, like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first, he continued, there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls.

The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Spend time with your

family. Spend time with your friends. Watch a movie that will make you laugh. There will always be time to clean the house or take care of chores. Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.

One of the students raised their hands and inquired what the coffee represented. The professor smiled and said, "I'm glad you asked. The coffee just shows that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of cups of coffee with a friend."

With no further remarks from me, I now have the privilege of introducing my dear friend and colleague, Rachel Lerner. Rachel will speak for five to ten minutes and then we will open the floor for discussion.

Rachel Lerner: Hi everyone. I am really grateful to be here today to be able to speak to you about the topic of renewal and how to approach these High Holy Days. Wherever we are spiritually, whether we are deeply religious or we are just embarking, at this time of year we are really looking to understand how to kind of connect or reconnect, or to stay at least afloat during this period of intense self-reflection.

It is very challenging because soul searching and self-assessment leave us with one of two responses. The first of the two responses is that we can look at ourselves and say, "Oh my God. When I look at myself I see how much I am lacking. I see what's happened to my life. I see myself as not in the place I want to be." And that can lead to a demoralization that is the result of our soul-searching, which inhibits us from looking further and leaves us undone.

And at the same time, this search for the soul or soul searching, can also leave us feeling this inflated sense of self-worth where we see that we're doing

extraordinary well and we're practically perfect in every way. At this time of year, as we look at what's coming up in the forthcoming year, we really are struggling to come up with a clear-eyed appraisal of ourselves. We need to be able to find, especially those of us who are battling an illness, we need to be able to find some way of relating to the world and to God and to ourselves without losing sight of what's critical and what's important and what's valuable.

And how do we do that? How do we make that kind of clear-eyed appraisal? One of the things that strikes me as I go into this time of year, as I reflect on what's come before and what's going to come ahead of me, is to be in the moment, be fully present in the moment because we only know and experience in present time.

What do I mean by that? Very often what we do to ourselves is we do a job on ourselves and what we say to ourselves is, "Wow, I have to look at what's going to come next. I have to look at what's coming ahead in my future. I have to understand everything that's going to happen. I'm very outcome focused. And I am very outcome driven. And my life will be measured by the outcome of what happens to me."

But the problem with that thinking is that in truth we have almost no control, in fact very limited control over the outcome of what happens in our life. Those of us who are living with an illness, such as breast cancer, are really struggling to know what's going to happen, and if we make our entire journey outcome-focused then we run the risk of becoming utterly and completely victimized, powerless, and disengaged.

And that is too scary and too high a price to pay for self-reflection and renewal. In fact, the word renewal should not have a negative or pejorative

quality to it. It should have the quality of reengagement, reconnection and rebirth, and a sense of rejuvenation, whether it's spelled R-E-J-U or R-E-J-E-W. Depending on your perception, it can be both rejuvenation and rejuvvenation.

But in realty, how do you do that? How do you stop yourself from being that compulsive? Our entire culture, and our entire way of looking at the world is driven by what the results are going to be. We're very results oriented. And the trick, if you're going to navigate this time of year well, is to be entirely process-focused, to keep looking at process, to say: "You know what? It's not the destination that's important, but the journey." Now this sounds very sappy. It's a Hallmark card kind of thing.

But it is still true. It's all about the journey. The way I like to look at it is if you're going to go through this journey, it damned well better matter. It has to have meaning. And how do you invest something with meaning? You invest something with meaning by putting meaning into its process.

Victor Frankel was the father of Logotherapy. He wrote a book called, "*Man's Search for Meaning*," where he discusses his experience going through the Holocaust in the camps. He writes this absolutely beautiful poignant insight. He says, "He who has a *why* to live for, can endure almost any how." I think that statement is very relevant to all of us.

If we have a *why* to live for, whatever personal goal, whether it comes out of our faith, whether it comes out of our family, whether it comes out of our mantra, our determination to live and do this with grace, whatever it is that is the wellspring of meaning, if we invest our lives with meaning then we can deal with almost any how, we can deal with almost any circumstance because

everything in our life is pointed toward growth and development, and that to me is the key element at this time of year.

We are given a window of connection. The High Holy Days are our time to stop, look around us and look at ourselves and say, “What is it I want from life? What is it I want to be getting and giving? What is it I seek from God? What is it I seek from my fellow man? What is it that I want from me?” When we do that, when we search for meaning, we begin to attach meaning. The question itself begins the journey toward meaning because at that point you’re saying- how can I make all of this matter? It becomes opportunity for us to really dig deep into ourselves and say, “Who am I? What am I? And what do I want to be as I go through it?”

And the wonderful part about it is that we are not going through it in isolation. Whether or not we are or not in a relationship with a spouse or with siblings or parents, we are all alone with ourselves at the end of the journey. And we are really alone with our feelings and our thoughts. We have to be able at that time to reach deep into ourselves and reach out toward the people and to God if that’s where our belief system is at. We’ve got to say, “I need you to come to me and help me find you.” I always find it very ironic when people are in relationship with God; they always feel that have to do more than God does. My thought is that the One with the most power has to do the most work. God is there for us. He is invested in our finding him. And therefore, if we ask Him to join us and help us in our deliverance, we can go ahead and find him when we seek Him.

There’s a wonderful Hasidic story where the Kotzker Rebbe asks his Hasidim, “So where is God?” They answered, “Well of course, God is everywhere.” He said, “No, God is where He is permitted to enter.” It does not necessarily mean an intense intimate relationship with God. It means that in looking for

spiritual direction, we open the door that God will enter. In seeking Him, we give Him the means to find us.

We are not expected during this time of year to go through the renewal process without assistance. We are asked to dig deep, validate our experiences and be honest about our emotional state; if we are angry with God, to speak with God of our anger, to discuss it with him, have a conversation. Our task is not to be angry **against** God, but to direct our anger and communicate our anger **to** God. We must ask, “What of our humanity during this process. Our humanity is what this is all about. Our humanity is what is expected of us. Our humanity will permit us to both do the dance **to** and **away** from God. Our humanity is what permits us to find the resources to reconnect with God.

I encourage you, as we have this dialogue to please be as open and candid as possible. I really feel very strongly that this is a topic where there are no wrong questions. I hope I do not give you any wrong answers. I really encourage you to bring to me the things that you are grappling with, so that we together can find a way to help you experience a sense of renewal, revitalization and even perhaps to have a sense of hope and faith in the coming year ahead.

Shera Dubitsky: Thank you Rachel. That was so inspiring. I appreciate you sharing those words of spirituality and connectedness. We can go ahead and open all the lines.

Woman: I have a question. I don't go to temple, for various reasons. When I was younger, I used to go on the High Holy Days but now I don't go to any temple, I don't belong. And my reason is because I say, if there was a true God I wouldn't have gotten breast cancer, I wouldn't have lost my mother, I

wouldn't have lost my father, and several years ago I had this wonderful job, I wouldn't have lost that.

I've been struggling for the last several years and I turn to meditation. That's what I do now. And I get a lot of people saying, "Well, you don't believe in God?" I say, "Well, I have my own beliefs." When I tell them the reasons why they look at me crazy and they walk away.

Rachel Lerner: Okay, so let me ask you this - is it important for you that people validate your right to believe otherwise? Is that what this is about? Is it a feeling of not being validated?

Woman: I find the truth with meditation and that's what I believe in. And a lot of people say, "How can you believe in all that because that's not God?" I say, "Well, that's my version."

Rachel Lerner: See, I think you said it exactly right. I can only imagine that you are very angry with the god that you have experienced, which is the god that took away your mom, the god that gave you breast cancer, the god that took away your father - the god that used to be wonderful and is no longer. There are a lot of losses in your life. Yet you are not entirely willing, which I think is entirely to your credit, to shed your spiritual connections. You have chosen to channel this spirituality that has been given to you because there is a lot of spirituality in what you are saying; to put spirituality into your meditation. But what is meditation? Meditation is attending to your inner voice- it's listening to your inner voice.

I have been enough in a Hasidic circle to understand that the inner voice is the internalized form of God that's inside of all us of. The two parts- ourselves and the internalized God, affect one another, be it the Rabbi who works with

the elderly, the parent with children who are disabled, the survivors in the Holocaust. We can say that every experience we create has an element of the divine. It means literally that in each and every one of us is a small piece of God that's internalized. When we tune into ourselves through meditation or prayer, you are tuning into that inner spiritual voice which is the internalized voice of God.

Frankly, when someone says to you, "How do you not believe in God," I would say, "I believe in God, only my god is internalized and it's my inner voice that I'm attending to." I would feel no obligation to the one who said, "How do you not believe in God?"

I think, actually, you have a deeply spiritual side and that you need to honor it now. When you are tuning inward, you are really attuning into your inner voice, which is a deeply internalized spiritual center.

Woman: Well, it is nice to have someone tell me to listen to the gut feeling, that's a voice in my stomach, not the voice in my head.

Rachel Lerner: The voice in your stomach is the internalized voice of God, as well. I would not answer any more than I just answered them. And honor yourself.

Shera Dubitsky: Did somebody else want to jump in with another question?

Woman: Yes I have a question. It relates to the holidays that are coming up. I know during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur it is the time that you have certain things that are determined for you for the upcoming year. We are told to pray and to daven for certain things. I am finding this very stressful this time of year because obviously I have been diagnosed recently and I have had people trying to be positive saying, "Oh, you should really daven (pray) and you and

you should go to shul (synagogue) and make sure and let God know by praying, basically meaning by praying I am going to get myself a good prognosis.

I am feeling the stresses of the holidays this year, as we believe that our outcome for the year is really determined this month. And I'm having a hard time with that especially now dealing with this illness. I was wondering if you could just talk about that.

Rachel Lerner: First of all, it sounds like your diagnosis is very recent. Advice-giving is what I think people love to give. Men are generally accused of responding with problem-solving but in truth when in crisis, we all immediately rush to problem-solving. You don't need a problem solver. When you've just been hit with an aluminum bat across the top of your skull - which is what this diagnosis feels like, and someone says to you, "Okay, let's decide right now to spend a day and night in prayer and we will then guarantee your outcome."

You also have to honor where you are in the process. You need to honor where you are. You've just gotten a diagnosis. You really haven't processed it - maybe right now you've been tongue tied in your relationship with God. You don't even know what you want to say to Him, let alone how to say it. This is where you have to do for yourself your own self assessment, do your own self appraisal and try to understand what you can do and what you can't do, and honor that. When God asks of us to give of ourselves to Him - that is exactly what He is asking. God is not asking us to be superhuman. That is not a Jewish concept. That is an Aryan concept. It is not our concept. Our concept is to bring our entire humanity to the process of serving and communicating with God.

If right now you're raw and you're grappling with this, then your task right now is simple. It's to bring what you can to the table. If you're feeling up to going to shul (synagogue) and praying, then by all means go. If you need to stay home and it's overwhelming and you need to find your own center, then that's what you need to do. Praying is not just formal prayer, by the way. It's not just opening up the machzor (prayer book) and reading. If you need to be at home and you need to pray from your heart and just talk to God in English because you do know that He's multilingual. He speaks all languages. Then that's what you do. You don't have to follow the language of the prayer book or the liturgy. You can do whatever it is you need to do to connect.

Honor your process. This is a process and you've just been given a diagnosis-go to where you are comfortable. Talk to God. If you're still angry, if you're overwhelmed, if you're in shock, then express that to God. Talk about that with Him. And tell Him exactly what you told me. "I don't know what to say to you. I'm at a loss. This is where I am in my process right now. You gave me this illness. You know what I'm holding. I'm telling you honestly I don't know if I can talk to you right now. I don't know if I have it in me." Out of that dialogue you are talking. Even if you're talking to Him and saying, "I can't talk right now," that's a conversation. And that's all that's asked of you. Do not put on yourself the ownership and the responsibility. I must sit there and through the whole prayer service. I have to work extremely hard because everything depends on me right this moment. I think God recognizes where you are at and how overwhelmed you are. And if He doesn't know it enough, tell Him.

Woman: I have a problem when we say Unesanah Tokef (special High Holy Day prayer). You are standing there in front of God and you don't when whether you're going to live or who shall die and who shall live and who comes into the world. And I really get anxious and it's very hard on me. It is also

difficult to dress up for the holiday when my appearance has deteriorated as a result of my treatments.

The holiday shouldn't be like this. I feel very stressed out at that time.

Rachel Lerner: There are several layers to your question. I'm going to address it layer by layer. The first is about dressing up. I don't think that you should put yourself in a situation where you feel really stressed by attending synagogue. If you can go and be comfortable with how you look and sit in the back, wherever you see fit and not worry about anyone else's assessment, then I would say it's okay to do so. If you're going to go in there and you're going to be self-aware and self-conscious and feel miserable about how you look, then you will only have a totally negative experience. The Torah clearly tells you that a person cannot act against his own best interests. So that does not work. To do something that works to undo you or that works to diminish you is not in your best interest. That is not something I think you should be putting yourself through.

That being said, the second half of your question is very powerful in that it's how do you walk into a situation that creates anxiety in completely healthy people. And you have cancer and you know it's tough to take.

There are two ways to look at it. No matter where you are in the world and where you are in life, there will always be a turning point or a decision point where you are going to be evaluated and assessed. If you walk in there and you say to God, "Look, I know that when you check me out you're going to find things wrong with me, and I trust that you will give me an opportunity this year to make things better. And I will work on doing my part."

You just want to start to have a conversation by saying we have no control over outcome. If we obsess over the outcome whether we live or we die, we lose sight of the process. If you walk into the synagogue and say instead of reading this as whether you're going to live or die you say, "I understand all this - with that statement." You kind of hope that will do - pointing out to you what is at stake.

For those of us who are in this situation where life and death issues are at stake, we know that already. You can kind of tell this is redundant. But what we need to do is to clarify for us the process piece; we need to make our lives matter. If you come into that conversation with God and you say, "Look God, I don't know what the outcome will be. That's in your hands so I'll leave that up to you. You're capable. I'll do my part to sit there and try to make my life worthwhile. I will improve what I think of my shortcomings and I will work on using these experiences to grow from them and become a more spiritually connected person." Then the anxiety can diminish.

But if you take control and you decide that it's in your hands to control outcome, then of course you set yourself up to be totally stressed because the truth of the matter is, you don't have control of the outcome. I would say give it up. Let go. Another wonderful AA mantra is "Let go and let God". Let Him deal with that. Let him deal with the big stuff. You take control over you and that's a big enough task for all of us.

Instead of walking into it and getting anxious and undone, think to yourself- maybe I'm going to sit there and I'm going to take some time to be self aware and very mindful. And I'm going to say, "Hey God, this is your big moment. This is when you evaluate me. I'm already given you my report card. And you have to sit here. And this is me right now I've got to focus on me and how I'm

going to make this coming year meaningful- I'm going to make this my focus."

And as for looking great, we're always tougher on ourselves than anybody else is. Just look good enough.

Shera Dubitsky: I was curious when you were talking about asking yourself, "How do I make this matter or what do I want?" How do you do that and not be goal oriented?

Rachel Lerner: There are two things. Believe it or not, we are so goal oriented because we live in the American culture and the American culture has an interesting directive. It says that if you want it, it's yours. Anybody can be whatever they want, no matter what. We're so much believers in our self determination that if you're not, we believe that all things are possible and in our control. It becomes an issue of us not understanding how limited we are in our ability to control what happens to us. Our outcomes are not in our own hands to do. That simply is not the case.

How do you stop being goal directed? Everybody needs to have goals. But there's a difference between being goal directed and being outcome focused. Outcome focused is when you totally evaluate yourself based on how it turns out in the end. Goal directed simply gives you a star to reach toward. If your direction is to make your life as meaningful as possible, then you're already process focused. That's what gets you back to the process. You say, "My goal is that whatever God has given me, whatever life has in store for me, whatever He has dictated, I'm going to make every moment that I'm on the planet matter. That's my goal." That way whatever it is I choose to do, I'm working for the goal of having a truly meaningful significant and important life.

Woman: I do have a question. I'm young, I'm single, I had never gone to the Mikvah (ritual bath) and I wanted to go to the Mikvah. That seemed important to me at the time. The Mikvah attendant said to me, "We don't assume that people have done something wrong to deserve this, but if you have something bad happen to you, you're supposed to turn inward and say, "Okay, well what did I do to deserve this or what do I need to do to rectify this?" and take the opportunity to pray and all do all the mitzvot (rituals) you can because something is wrong. I've heard that from more than one person within the Jewish community and that's never settled with me.

Rachel Lerner: People don't always say things elegantly and embedded in that statement of when something terrible happens to you is that you must go and change your behavior or attitude. That's just another nice way of saying you must've done something wrong so go fix it, right?

I totally see it differently because that doesn't resonate with me. It feels like a blame game. Even if I did do something wrong, does it warrant the kind of response? Whether it's a cancer diagnosis you've received, or a quiet beating, does that provocation warrant the response? It doesn't seem to be a helpful way to proceed.

What I'm going to suggest is, instead of seeing it that way, view it as something like this, the cataclysmic event that happens to me. I am going to look at it as a learning opportunity, not as what did I do wrong, but this is my learning opportunity. This is my opportunity to go ahead and figure out what I want to become during this process. It's not about going inward and reflecting on mistakes. It does say, what can I do to make this experience meaningful? How do I interpret this stressful, suffering-centric experience? I make it worthwhile. I do it by investing it with meaning.

I am looking at it as a learning opportunity as opposed to a damning opportunity, an opportunity to look inside and grow, **not** to say I'm a terrible human being and that's why God did this to me.

Woman: I guess the issue that I had with it is that I'd heard it from rabbis. I heard it from so many other people.

Rachel Lerner: I'll tell you where it comes from. The Talmud says that if a person gets sick he should look inside and he check and see what sins he's committed. The reason for that is because in the Jewish faith there is a dynamic that's not only between mind and body, but between body and soul. The connection is that if there's something wrong with the soul it will be expressed in the body. What the Talmud says, what the Torah teaches, is that if a person is ill he should take a look at himself and see what he needs to do to correct that which is off kilter; he should identify those areas within himself that he need to work on.

If a person will look inward and realize that maybe he's done certain things that are less than ideal, he can use the illness as a springboard to resolve not to do it again. If a good person has done an honest self assessment and says, "Look, I'm an ordinary person. I'm not a terrible person and I'm not a phenomenal person. I'm just an ordinary human being and therefore this idea of me getting sick because of something I did wrong doesn't really work with me." Then you say to yourself, "Okay, it's not about right or wrong, it's about growth and learning. Everything that happens to us in some degree is a communication, is a teacher. And the teaching of illness is a teaching as well. And it teaches us where we want to go with our lives. What I think illness does is it forces people to use their time wisely.

I think that sometimes we are fortunate enough to recognize the kind of limited abilities we humans have. It's important to be able to stop and think

and identify where we want to put our limited resources and energy. And that's critical. If we can do that, if we can go ahead and say to ourselves that we recognize that this has happened to us and that perhaps we would like to do things differently. This illness has given us a chance to take a close look at ourselves; we can use the illness as a springboard for making our lives meaningful, deeper, for deepening our connections, for growing, for becoming more of what we were meant to be - **not** for this self deprecation.

You've obviously spent a lot of time thinking about your life and trying to develop and grow from it. And that's what's truly important.

Shera Dubitsky: I want to jump in here. I had read a book called, "*five things I didn't learn from breast cancer (and the One Big One I Did.)*" Shelley Lewis, who wrote the book, had said that there's an idea out there that you get a gift from this. When you get diagnosed with breast cancer there's the idea that you grow from this experience. What's the gift?

Shelley said, "I didn't even know there was a registry." Then she said, what ends up happening is everybody says, "So what did you get out of this?" She felt a lot of pressure to come up with that. It felt overwhelming to her. She was speaking to another survivor about that and she said, "Everybody says that I should have gotten a gift or I should have grown from this. I feel too much pressure." The other survivor said, "Well I guess maybe it's enough that you're still here." That really resonated with the woman and what she said at the end of the book, the one thing that she did learn, is not so much that she got something out of it but it validated who she was and who she had become in her life up to that point.

Rachel Lerner: What is clear is that you have done a lot of soul searching. You don't need to sit there with your cancer and view it as yet another life lesson. My

perspective is to view every journey that I've taken in my life as leading me to the place I need to be when I'm at the next junction or at the next crossroad.

A lot of growth took place before any of this happened to you in your life. And sometimes the fact that we can navigate cancer, perhaps with grace and elegance, is a function of the growth that preceded it and maybe that's what this is about. It is about walking into it and saying, "I learned a great deal and now the new challenge of cancer in my life can be better dealt with because of all the particular experiences that preceded it."

Woman: Thank you for saying it doesn't have to be the best thing that ever happened to you.

Rachel Lerner: Cancer teaches. It's been a whole process. I'm doomed. You know, it's all over for me, and yet I realize just because something is not the best time doesn't mean that it lacks all value either, you know. There are hard won lessons and there are easier won lessons in life. And I think that you are deeply graced in having had so much of life learning before this cancer came into it. It has given you so many more tools to deal with it.

The Torah never expects us to be anything other than fully human. If a person were to walk into it and say, "Well this is the best time I'm having," then it would utterly bizarre. I had a client once who walked in and was massively depressed and she'd say, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm so depressed." And she had just experienced a tremendous problem.

I said, "You know, if you walked in and said you were a happy camper I'd have to hospitalize you on the spot." Depression, when you're going through a trauma, when you're going through something that's debilitating and

terrifying, is a totally appropriate reaction. Feeling disheartened, feeling discouraged, feeling disconnected is all appropriate.

When we are in suffering, we need to go through a process and even dealing with it takes time. When you first are given a diagnosis, it takes time for you to come to a place of peace with it, if at all, you know.

And some people never arrive at that space where other people do. Does that mean there's something wrong with them? No. People process things at the rate that they can and they find their way of making sense of the universe. The only thing I'm suggesting is that part of the way to make it easy on yourself is to find a way to make it matter and make it meaningful so that it doesn't become simply an abhorrent miserable slap in the face, To imbue your experience with meaning- however you define that meaning.

I'm not trying to in anyway force people into any spaces where it has meaning. It's just a matter of where that person can identify it. But I thank you for highlighting the fact that the Torah never, ever expects anything more than what we are - then our humanness allows us to have.

Shera Dubitsky: And I also think that God helps that way. After all, He was the one who hard wired us. And so I think that He expects that from us as well, to be human.

Rachel Lerner: To be fully human, to be in this process and to be vulnerable and to cry and even when if it's painful, we don't hold it against him and we understand that he's coming from a place of suffering and pain.

There's a lot of law in the Talmud, a lot of law in the Torah that focuses on people's vulnerability because the Torah and Talmud acknowledged that

people are vulnerable and people are frightened and that's normal. Does anybody have any other thoughts?

Woman: Yes. I'm battling a different type of cancer. It's multiple myeloma and this is the first time I've listened to this and I am very appreciative for what you and everyone has said. It's been very helpful. I look forward to hearing more in the future. I just wanted to say thank you.

Rachel Lerner: Thank you very much for saying that. It was so sweet of you. I appreciate that.

Shera Dubitsky: Thank you for sharing that.

Woman: I want to get back to the issue about being noticed by others at a time I don't want to be noticed.

Rachel Lerner: I think that we put a lot of pressure at ourselves to look a certain way. I find it so interesting that I will feel sometimes when I walk into a place that I just look awful. And people say, "Oh, you look great." And then I feel like I look great and people will say, "Oh you look," you know...

Shera Dubitsky: Tired.

Rachel Lerner: You look tired. You look exhausted. I figure I have obviously no clue how I really actually look. I've decided that therefore I'm not a good judge. So I've given that up. That's my new philosophy. You know, I just make sure I don't have on anything horrific, that everything between my teeth is clean and I consider that a good day.

Shera Dubitsky: But I also want to go back to my opening introduction where I think if you're focusing on how you're dressing or you're feeling that you're going to be looked at, then I feel like you're filling the jar up with the sand.

If you're filling the jar up with the sand, you're not going to have room for the big stuff. I think as much as we can, try to empty out the jar a little bit to make some room for the things that bring real meaning to you. I think that goes back to something that Rachel was talking about, you are in control to do that.

Rachel Lerner: I think that's absolutely true.

Shera Dubitsky: I do want to ask a question about being process oriented. It seems to me that this is a time of reflection and to be process oriented. Do you have some strategies or suggestions when external forces intrude on that process?

Rachel Lerner: Give me an example of what you mean by that.

Shera Dubitsky: This is a time when we're together as a community. So on the one hand you want to be introspective and you want to be reflective and you want to be within yourself, but on the other hand, we're in a community when we go to (shul) or after synagogue, people gather together. Sometimes it may be hard to separate the two.

Rachel Lerner: You know, there are two things. Everybody wants a piece of you when you are in a sick situation and you can choose to get caught up in that and then feel less than because you can't give it, or you could set your boundaries. One of the things that I think that we have a tremendous amount of difficulty doing is setting boundaries for people.

When we are dealing with a lot on our plate and people start putting their own expectations and their own junk on us, I think it's important that we say, "Look, this is not something I should be dealing with right now," or, "I appreciate your interest. Thank you so much," and ignore whatever they're saying to me.

I find that what we need very much right now is honoring the self. So when people are going into this very emotionally charged time of year, this very difficult time of year, then it's important just to choose where our energy gets allocated- in dealing with cancer, we need to allocate our resources where they truly matter.

External pressures are very compelling but they do not dictate what happens to us. That is key because if we don't do that, then we wind up spending all of our energy trying to please everybody else and the one person who doesn't get pleased and doesn't get addressed is ourselves, and right now, we need to take care of ourselves. This is a good time, especially when it is so completely intense, to establish our boundaries and allow ourselves to move away from people.

If we can't do that and go to synagogue, if people do not respect the boundaries that we set up, then we have to limit our interaction to circumstances that support our feelings. But hearing and talking and self caring and self honoring has to take priority over everything else so that we can engage in the renewal process. Does that answer the question?

Shera Dubitsky: That absolutely does. Does anybody have any other questions?

Rachel Lerner: Or anybody disagree? By all means, feel comfortable to disagree with us or offer a different point of view.

Woman: With what's going on in the whole country now in this economic meltdown, I think we as cancer survivors maybe have to show the country again that we know how to stand up, we are the true survivors. We did this during 9-11 and I think that in this whole economic meltdown, all the cancer survivors of the world have to get together and say, "We will show you how to get through this whole process."

Rachel Lerner: Wow, that's quite a job.

Woman: We did it during 9-11. I remember going to many things afterwards and we all were saying, "We are the true survivors of the world. We will pull the country through and show them what it is to be survivors."

Rachel Lerner: Wonderful.

Woman: I think that's very good what she just said.

Shera Dubitsky: Whoever made the original comment about survivorship, I feel like I should make out a check to you because it actually gives me an opportunity to plug an upcoming teleconference that we're going to be doing in November on survivorship. So thank you very much for giving me the lead in on that. Rachel, do you have any final thoughts?

Rachel Lerner: I just want to say one final thought, that in this process, above all else, I want to encourage all of us and all of you to be self-honoring. What I mean by that is not to let this process be one of self deprecation and defeatism, but to go and honor your process, wherever you are in it, and recognize that you are a valued important person, that wherever you are in your journey, wherever you're going, whatever happens, your journey is meaningful because **you** matter.

That's what I want to wish you. I want to wish you the absolute certainty of how much you matter in this process. That should be a guiding light for you as you navigate this illness.

Woman: Thank you for saying that. Thank you.

I have a question. I have been fighting this for the last six months and I've been in the hospital for different sets of operations. I'm scheduled to have a stem cell transplant from my own stem cells in the next month or two. There are times that I just feel so tired that I turn on the TV and I watch something that is such nonsense, but sometimes I feel like I just need to do it.

Rachel Lerner: Are you feeling guilty for having gone to that escape? Is that what's bothering you?

Woman: Yes, yes.

Rachel Lerner: Well, let me ask you something, as a person who's on the verge of collapse and decides for a moment to take a deep breath, do you feel guilty?

Woman: No.

Rachel Lerner: That is what that it's for. A person cannot stay under the intensity of an emotional moment without taking that breath unless she wants to go straight into an institution. If your goal in dealing with this is to have a nice psychotic breakdown, this is the way to go.

But if you allow yourself the permission to have those moments of vulnerability and you say, "I'm doing this because I need a breather," then

that is fine and self-honoring. I think you have to accept that all you are is human. The point that I make here is that God does not ask of us anything more than our humanity will allow for.

So you need to do this. You need to be able to put your mind elsewhere, and that's what TV does. It gives you a chance to breathe so that you can take on the next hurdle and you can move forward. I don't see any reason for you to beat yourself up for that.

God made you who you are. You know what I mean? And He recognizes your humanness and expects nothing more than that from us. I think it is okay at this point to give yourself a little bit of a break and to just say this is what I need so that I can have the energy to continue to battle. Do you hear what I'm saying?

Woman: Yes, thank you. Thank you.

Rachel Lerner: You're welcome.

Shera Dubitsky: Rachel?

Rachel Lerner: Yes?

Shera Dubitsky: I'm thinking that this woman would be interested in getting onto your Tehillim Thought of the Day.

Rachel Lerner: I write a Psalm Thought of the Day, which is inspirational. It can be anywhere between a paragraph and two paragraphs long and it explains what the verse in Psalms is about. I try to make it deeply meaningful and deeply inspirational.

So I think you might benefit if you want to receive it. You can always unsubscribe if it's not your cup of tea, but it might give you a little bit of extra emotional strength or spiritual strength to battle this because it does sound like you're really facing a tough road, and you need whatever nurturing you can get.

So I offer it to you. There's no cost involved. It's just if you have email, I can put you on the mailing list and you can receive it.

Woman: I would appreciate that.

Shera Dubitsky: On that note, we've come to the end of this evening's meaningful event. I want to thank you all for participating.

Rachel Lerner: And I wish all of you a happy and healthy and blessed New Year.

Shera Dubitsky: I'd like to just say to you, Rachel, thank you as always for your insight. For those of you who haven't heard Rachel before, she presented in a similar teleconference last year around the high holidays, though, the focus was a little different. I encourage you to go to the Sharsheret website and you can look up the Empower High Holidays teleconference from last year. I think that you will find that equally motivating and equally insightful, and certainly as inspiring as this evening's event.

I want to wish all of you a meaningful, process oriented High Holiday season, and a New Year overflowing with sweetness and good health. Thank you all for joining us this evening. Shana Tova.

END

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