

**Yom Kippur 5772 – October 8, 2011
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On a cold, drizzly Sunday morning I turn onto Harvard Boulevard and see the line of people, huddled against the building, seeking shelter from the rain. Inside, dedicated volunteers are packing bags and getting ready. One by one, our clients step forward and are handed a bag—something to satisfy the gnawing hunger in their stomachs. I notice the smiles on our volunteers' faces as they hand a bag to someone in need. It's the kind of smile that comes from knowing you've fed a hungry person.

The rain stops as I make my way across town to our Westside Food Pantry on a nearly deserted 10 freeway. The scene is the same. A seemingly endless line of hungry clients waiting outside, while inside I'm greeted by many of you, making sandwiches, brewing coffee, and packing bags. Again, I see the smiles on volunteers' faces as they make a momentary connection with a client, handing them a meal—the first in nearly a week for some.

Ask any one of the volunteers why they're there, and each will say it's because it feels good. After all, most of us are kind, caring, and compassionate human beings who, when confronted with a hungry person, want to feed him. It makes perfect sense. What makes no sense is why we sometimes ignore a different, but painful hunger in the people we love most.

The High Holy Days require reflection and introspection, but if we only look within ourselves, we've only done half the work. The High Holy Days demand that we not only look deeply into ourselves, but that we also look deeply into the hearts and souls of the people we love. And when we do look, really look into the hearts and souls of others, we sometimes find that they are starving and not because they are fasting on Yom Kippur.

Our children are sometimes starving for love and attention—starving to know that they matter to us.

Our teenagers are starving for acceptance in a world that tells them they're not good enough.

Young adults, fresh out of college are starving for someone to take a chance on them, for the opportunity to make it on their own.

Wives sometimes starving for a sign from their husband that his love won't fade.

Our aging parents starving for us to call or email, to reach out and let them know we're ok, that we haven't forgotten them.

Many of us, starving for quiet moments with the ones we love that remind us how much they matter and how much we really do care.

So many starving for true friendship, a human connection, a touch, a call, an embrace that nurtures our souls.

There's a famous story about a rabbi who asked God the difference between heaven and hell. "See for yourself," replied God, escorting the rabbi down to visit hell. Hell was horrifying. It was row after row of tables laden with heaping platters of delicious food. In front of each platter sat people who were pale, emaciated, and moaning with hunger. As the rabbi got closer, he understood why people were starving with delicious food right in front of them. Each person's elbows were locked so that their arms could not bend in order to bring the food to their mouths.

Next, God escorted the rabbi to heaven, and to his surprise, the scene was almost identical to hell. Row after row of long tables, laden with food, but the people sitting at the tables, whose elbows were also locked so that they could not bend their arms, were well fed and happy. As he got closer, the rabbi realized the difference between heaven and hell was that in hell, each person sat alone, starving, unable to feed himself. But in heaven, each person filled a spoon with food and offered it to the person sitting across the table. Each one fed the other in friendship and love.

Of course, the story isn't about heaven and hell; in fact it's not about food at all. It's about reaching out to another in friendship and love—that's what makes the difference. The people in hell weren't starving for food; there was plenty of it. They were starving for someone else to care about them, to feed them, to love them.

It's obvious when someone is starving for food, but it's not always easy to know when someone is starving for something that is intangible but no less real.

David's Blackberry vibrated in his pocket. The call was from his mother, the third this week—he let it go to voicemail. He and his sister moved their mother into assisted living after their father died last fall. At first it was an occasional mid-afternoon call “just to say hello,” or because “she was thinking of him.” Then, the calls started to come every day so David stopped answering most of them.

“It feels like an intrusion into my life,” he complained. “It's burdensome because we don't really have anything to talk about. It's really frustrating.

I've always had a good relationship with my mother,” he went on, “We grew apart a bit when I moved to California but we fell into a very comfortable routine of monthly phone calls to catch up. I don't understand what changed?”

David didn't spend too much time thinking about it though, he has his own family to worry about, a son who just started college, two daughters in high school, and a wife who has recently gone back to work full time.

It was nearly 4 a.m. when the phone rang again. David and his wife were fast asleep. He looked at the phone—it was his mother—the third time today. “Why is she doing this to me?!” he shouted as he threw his Blackberry at the nightstand. “She just keeps calling and calling, it's getting worse and worse. Doesn't she realize I've got a life and a family of my own?”

“How many times has she called today?” his wife calmly asked.

“Three,” he replied.

“And how many times did you pick up?”

“None.”

“Hmm—and how many times have you or your sister been back to visit her since she moved into Cedar Springs?”

“None,” answered David.

That’s when it hit me,” he reflects. “My mother was alone, starving for my attention—starving to know that she wasn’t forgotten. My father gone; her out of the house they shared for fifty years, left, surrounded now by strangers in a strange place while I went back to my familiar, busy life. The less I reached out to her, the more she starved and the more she tried to be nourished by inserting herself into my life. She was starving for communication, starving for any connection with me. It took a long time for me to realize this, but when I did and began reaching out to her, I discovered that it nourished me as well. Our relationship isn’t starving anymore.”

Will we nourish our relationships with those we love in the year to come? Will we answer the call? Will we make the call? Will we ask ourselves what the people we claim to love the most are hungering for from us? And then, will we feed them?

Tomorrow, like every Sunday morning, hundreds of hungry people will line up at our food pantries, and we will feed them. But there’s no food pantry for the other kind of hunger in our lives; no line to stand in.

Tonight as we end our physical hunger at Break Fast, let us reach out to those we love to end their emotional hunger; their hunger for care, nurture, attention and love, so that this will be a Shanah Tova, a good, sweet and loving New year.