

The Sermon I Shouldn't Give but Will

Rabbi Michele B. Medwin, D.Min.

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A couple of months ago one of the rabbis posted on the CCAR Facebook page, “**What is the sermon you want to give, but can't?**” That sermon immediately came to mind. But I can't give it because... it might upset some people, it's not warm and fuzzy, it might be considered inappropriate for a rabbi to talk about, is that the message I really want my congregation to hear? Yet the more I thought about it, the more I realized that this is the sermon **I need** to give, for myself, and hopefully for all of you. Here is the sermon I should be giving: Let's find a way to get along. Let's find a way to talk even if we disagree. Let's find a way to understand each other. Yes. I am a rabbi. I usually preach on ideas like this.

But this year is different! So I AM going to give the sermon I shouldn't give. Please bear with me. Be patient with me. I need to do this. It has been pent up inside me for so long since, as a rabbi, I am not supposed to express such thoughts out loud. We are supposed to keep such thoughts to ourselves.

I purposely decided to give this sermon on Erev Yom Kippur, right before we do the Vidui – the confessionals, the *Ashamnu* and *Al Chet*. So I am asking forgiveness ahead of time if you feel offended. This is a global message and NOT directed at anyone here in particular. And as soon as I am done I will ask you and God to forgive me for my sermon transgressions.

So here goes.

There are **two** pervasive emotions I have been feeling ever since we had to cancel our in-person services and move back to Zoom only. The first emotion is a **deep, deep, sadness**. I guess you sensed that when I stood before the open ark on Rosh Hashanah, with an empty sanctuary behind me. I wanted you there with me in person as I praised God before the Torahs. My emotions came through as I tried to continue with the next readings. It was so painful to be there without you.

Yes. Zoom works. Yes, we have even gotten closer on Zoom. But Jews are supposed to be praying in a synagogue, with an ark, with a minyan, with each other. We are supposed to hug, and shake hands, and sing together out loud, and be quiet next to each other during silent

But we are commanded to save lives. This very contagious and more potent Delta variant put an end to us being together in person, once again. We had no choice.

After a year of coping, and making things work, and weeks of meetings of how to return safely, once again, in person worship was swiftly taken away from us. It needed to happen to ensure the safety of our temple community, because we are in a very high risk group, but it was heart-breaking to do so. It felt like a rug was just pulled out from under our feet leaving us to find a way to remain standing, without wobbling or falling over.

So that is what is behind my sadness.

The second pervasive emotion I have been experiencing lately is **anger - real, raw, and burning.**

The second temple shut down did **NOT** need to happen if things were different. You all follow the rules but so many others in the country do not. They don't isolate or socially distance. They refuse to wear masks which would not only protect others but protect themselves, they scream against vaccinations and tell lies to scare others away from getting vaccinated.

This variant would have not gotten so strong and so prevalent, if people only followed the scientific guidelines. And we would be together in person in the sanctuary instead of behind our screens. I know, I should be setting an example as your rabbi. I should show you how to remain calm and positive and be reassuring through all of this. And I work hard to do that most of the time. But tonight, I want you to hear how I am feeling because I believe that many of you are feeling the same way inside, even if it does not show on the outside. So I am going to talk about my anger. Please forgive me if I have misjudged your emotions and you are not feeling any of the anger that I am.

There are two different types of anger.

Anger can manifest itself by adults who experienced trauma growing up, either a significant trauma or a series of chronic small traumas. They felt helpless as a child, had to suppress that fear which eventually turned to anger, and as an adult are taking that anger out on everyone else. Healing that wounded child can help the adult not feel the need to be so angry anymore.

So here is what I am angry at:

- I am angry that I am here in my home office, behind a computer, on Yom Kippur, having to look at your marvelous faces on a screen rather than in the sanctuary.
- I am angry that I am not supposed to talk about this topic because some consider it “politics” and people get upset when it is brought up. I do try to honor that, but this is the elephant in the room that has gotten so large there is no room left for us. NO this is not politics. This is about **Judaism** and the ethics and values I cherish so dearly.
- I am angry that leaders, elected by the people, are so selfish, so hungry for power, that they put their own best interests above everyone else.
- I am angry at politicians who pretended the virus wasn't real. “It's a hoax” they say, delaying actions that could have save so many thousands of lives, talking against vaccines out loud, while secretly getting vaccinated.
- I am angry at politicians who prevent others from wearing masks, or asking for proof of vaccination, when people are just trying to keep safe.
- I am angry at a government who so mistreated the black community in the past and continues to do so, that it is hard for them to trust the government now when they say the vaccine is safe.
- I am angry at politicians and religious leaders who prey on vulnerable people, spewing lies that have sucked them into believing those lies, even though it puts their own lives at risk.
- I am angry that people who have severe illness are being turned away from hospitals because the beds are filled with people who have COVID who had refused to wear masks and get vaccinated.
- I am angry at finding out that a friend I assumed was vaccinated, was not, and had been in our apartment with us unmasked.
- I am really angry at myself, that there is a small part of me that feels some type of justice is being served when I hear about a prominent vocal anti-vaxxer, who led so many others too their deaths, who got COVID and succumbed to the disease.
- I am angry that politicians put their own need for power above the safety of our children returning to school.
- I am angry that school shooting, after school shooting - nothing is being done to protect our children other than teaching them how to duck under a table.
- I am angry at the gun owners who won't do anything after our children are repeatedly gunned down in schools.
- I am angry at elected officials, who supposedly believe in Democracy, ignoring it at best, or are involved in taking it down at worst - Inciting insurrectionists, determined to throw democracy

- I am angry that a state could pass a law making it illegal to give someone a **bottle of water** who is in line waiting to vote.
- I am angry at law makers that passed a law, reminiscent of Nazi Germany, encouraging and rewarding people to turn other people in for doing something very personal, that has been legal for fifty years.
- I am angry at a governor I believed in, who helped me get through the worst of the pandemic, but at the same time, created such a toxic work environment, especially for women, that he was forced out of office, denying responsibility as he slammed the door on his way out.
- I am angry when people with white privilege or police, take pleasure in humiliating people of color.
- I am angry that many in communities of color don't have access to the same medical care that I have.
- I am angry at climate change deniers as we see over and over again - extensive heat waves, powerful destructive hurricanes, devastating floods, wild fires run amok that destroy homes and families.
- I am angry at seeing beautiful, breathtaking glaciers in Alaska, knowing that they are all shrinking that may eventually disappear.

I could go on but.....

I am tired of making up excuses for the action of others. I am tired of trying to see their side. There is no validity in an argument based on lies, deceit, misinformation, and lust for power.

So now you know that rabbis are human too, and have all the emotions you do. We just don't always share them.

I purposely saved this sermon for Erev YK. Therefore I still have 24 hours to repent for giving this very negative sermon. Again, I do apologize if I offended you. That was not my intent. This was a global message and not pointed at anyone specific.

So why did I decide to give the sermon, at the risk of getting people angry at me. Because I do believe I am speaking for many of you. I sense a great deal of simmering anger among you, that in some, has turned into depression, at what we have had to live through, once again.

As a therapist, the only way to heal is to have a safe place to talk about your angry.

As a rabbi, I work hard to instill hope, think positive, and optimistic, but everyone once in a while the therapist in me wants to tell you, take a day to be angry - scream, punch a pillow, get it all out, Even better write it down - make a list of all the things you are angry at.

I originally wanted to suggest we have an anger list burning ritual at the Sukkah party, but I couldn't think of a way to do it safely. But you can do it on your own. Find a way to safely burn your list. Then we can go into the new year without anger, and more easily return to focusing on hope.

I thank you for giving me this angry moment, for being MY therapist, and giving me a place to vent. I promise you tomorrow's sermon will be positive and hopeful.

Righteous anger is holy when it leads to making a change in the world. But here is my problem. I am so emotionally drained. It is hard to take this anger and turn it into something productive. And that makes me angry at myself. I find myself turning off the news when it gets too hard to bear. How long can we continue to shut out the world? Judaism demands we do something.

The Talmud teaches, "You are not expected to complete the task, but you are required to start." Yet, I don't even know where to start anymore, or where I left off. It is so hard to move forward when we keep getting pushed back after making progress. I am working on it.

So, here is one last thing I am angry about. We are about to recite the Yom Kippur Confessionals of all the things we have done wrong in the past year. I need to recite it for giving this sinful sermon. But each of you do so much good. You are kind, and caring, and responsible, while others out there are so evil. You shouldn't have to be confessing to these sins that are mentioned in our Mahzor this year. You didn't do them.

So tonight, I am giving you a free pass. As we continue with the Ashamnu reciting all the sins we have committed, instead of saying it for yourselves, say it for all the others in our country who HAVE grievously sinned against themselves, against us, and against God.

We continue with the *Ashamnu Vidui*.