

Turning Toward Holiness and Strength

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The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur is the most sacred day of the Jewish year. This is the day that Jews around the world ask God and our fellow human beings for forgiveness. We atone for our sins, repent our errors and transgression and make what we call in Hebrew—*Teshuvah*.

Teshuvah is repentance but it is so much more. It comes from the word for turning. *Teshuvah* means that we have turned over a new leaf. Turned our life around from the direction it was headed. Turned toward a life of holiness and strength. On Yom Kippur our *teshuvah* helps us to turn toward God and our fellow human beings. Our repentance helps us to re-establish relationships that have been broken by our acts of unkindness and selfishness. Our repentance gets us back in balance with God and humanity. When we make *teshuvah* we ask to be forgiven both by God and by our fellow human beings. Our turning helps us transform our souls toward a New Year life.

Through repentance, prayer and charitable acts, we pray to be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of blessing, sweetness, prosperity and peace.

For the LGBT community the Day of Atonement is a time we too can look within. Each of us can use this season as an opportunity for self-improvement. How might we change the self-destructive behaviors that sometimes plague our community that is so often still marginalized by society? How might we rebuild relationships with our family and friends that have been damaged? How might we confront the demons of our own homophobia that still eat away at ourselves? How might we both ask for forgiveness and grant forgiveness to others for the hurts they have brought to our spirits, our souls?

Can we turn towards them?

For some of us however, when we hear the word sin—we can only imagine one thing and one thing only. Some of us have been taught incorrectly that to be gay or lesbian is a sin and that we are leading sinful lives. Nothing could be further from the truth!

I believe with all my heart, that I am just as God intended. Being gay or lesbian is a gift from God. In the book of Genesis it teaches, “All are created in God’s image.” That includes gay men and lesbians as well. So the sins we have to atone for our **not** that we are gay or lesbian. We are part of God’s world and rainbow.

But we do know that we haven’t always been the kindest person we could be. We do know that we haven’t always been fair or honest. We do know that we haven’t always reached out our hand to welcome the stranger in our midst. We do know that we haven’t always been as charitable as we might have been.

Yom Kippur is about turning the quality of our lives toward a life of blessing, promise and hope. Yom Kippur is about changing the way we do business in the world to improve our own life and the lives of others.

When the LGBT community comes together in strength and solidarity we do change the world. We enrich it with our vision of our world where men and women are truly equal. We enrich it with our commitment to equality and justice. We enrich our world with our commitment to honor all of our families! Indeed, we are choosing life.

It is my prayer that as the Jewish community celebrates its New Year, our whole community can turn toward each other and receive from one another the blessing of life and sweetness. Then indeed will be cleansed, purified and uplifted by one another towards a life of strength and holiness!

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