

Anne Frank and the Small Sacrifice  
 A Sermon for Yom Kippur Eve 2015/5776  
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Shanah Tovah

This summer my family and I visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. If you have ever visited it or read Anne's Diary, you know her story: how she, her family, and four others hid in the secret annex, never knowing if they would be discovered and arrested by the Nazis.

Walking through the very rooms Anne lived in, looking at her bedroom wall covered with pictures of Hollywood stars, looking up at the attic window Anne found such comfort and strength looking through, gave me an even deeper appreciation for this incredible young woman.

Several excerpts from Anne's diary are highlighted throughout the Annex. I was particularly moved by this one: "...you have to make sacrifices for a good cause, and I'm glad I can make this small one." <sup>i</sup>

She writes this early in her stay, referring to her willingness to share her room and her things with a new resident, Fritz Pfeiffer, known in her diary as Mr. Dussel, another Jew who needs a place to hide. She sees her small sacrifice as part of a greater purpose, a good cause, saving a life. Anne, who witnessed first-hand the depths of human cruelty, was not ready to accept that the world had to remain as it was. She holds true to her ideals, even after two years in the annex, writing, "*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.*"<sup>ii</sup>

It's true. Nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world...You have to make sacrifices for a good cause, and I'm glad I can make this small one.

Her words make us wonder what *we* are waiting for, what small sacrifices *we* are willing to make for a good cause?

Tonight is Yom Kippur, the holiest night of the year. Tonight we are called upon to account for our actions, and inaction, and consider how we want to change. Perhaps Anne's words can help us do that.

Tonight on this holy night I want to share with you three good causes we often overlook. Each requires only a small sacrifice on our part to help improve the world here in our local community and within our congregation.

The first good cause is the one we will read about tomorrow in our Haftorah from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah reminds us that our fast is meaningless if we do not also feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless.

Did you know that 15% of Howard County children are food insecure?

For most of us, it is a small sacrifice to bring a can of food for the Food Pantry every time we come to Beth Shalom on a Sunday or weekday, ideally something high in protein like tuna or peanut butter. It is a small sacrifice to volunteer an hour or two, maybe with a friend, to pack up the donations and bring them to the Maryland Food

Pantry once every month or two. Maybe we can do more, like serve meals at Elizabeth House's soup kitchen or donate supplies and pack lunches this winter for the homeless in Grassroots' cold weather shelter.

"How *wonderful* it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world..." These are some easy ways to start.

The second good cause also comes from Holy Scripture. In Genesis, Father Abraham invites three strangers into his tent. Do you know one of the first things Abraham and Sarah do when the guests enter? They offer them something to eat. It is one of our oldest traditions of Hakhnasat Orchim, welcoming guests with food.

For many of us, it is a small sacrifice to spend a few hours once every few months as a kitchen volunteer for the good cause of sustaining our welcoming community. And you'll make good friends too. If a Friday or Saturday doesn't work, making or picking up a dinner for someone who is ill, homebound or grieving are relatively easy ways to make a small sacrifice to help improve the world by spreading kindness and compassion through food.

The third good cause also makes the world a better place by spreading kindness and compassion. Our Sages, in their wisdom, ruled a mourner needs at least 9 others to recite Mourners' Kaddish. They knew that the journey through the shadow of death is eased when surrounded by others, by a minyan.

Did you know we provide the only egalitarian minyan in our community? Beth Shalom members and other Howard County Jews who have lost a parent, a spouse, a sibling, or God forbid a child, rely on us every evening. Let's not let them down. Every congregant receives an assigned day of the week every few months, but you can pick different days by signing up on line or just coming whenever possible. For most of us, it is a small sacrifice to spend 15 minutes, half an hour with travel, to attend a Sunday or weekday evening service a few evening a year for the good cause of easing the pain of loss for someone. Bring the kinds and they will learn an important lesson about how to be there for others.

These three suggestions are just some of the many ways we can help improve our little part of the world.

I am not saying it is necessarily easy to find a few more minutes in our otherwise busy week. And sometimes we get so caught up in our own *tsuris*, our own troubles, it is hard to see anyone else's. But maybe that is when making a small sacrifice for a good cause is most important. For we may just make a big difference for ourselves as well as those we seek to help.

Chayke Lobl tells this story about her grandfather, Aaron Lazer after World War I.<sup>iii</sup> Many things were in short supply, including shoes. So Aaron, a struggling scholar with a wife and new baby, had an idea. He borrowed 5,000 kroner, a princely sum then, and traveled to a large city to purchase shoes.

He returned a few days later with a wagon load of cartons. He had spent all the money to purchase 500 pairs of military shoes. Imagine his despair when he opened the cartons only to discover they contained 1,000 right foot shoes! There was not a single

left foot shoe among them in the cartons. How was he every going to repay the family and friends who had lent him money at great personal sacrifice?

Everyone urged him to return the shoes and demand a refund. Aaron returned to the market where he met the man who had sold him the shoes, but the man was no where to be found.

Aaron returned home inconsolable. His family advised him to go see a Rabbi they knew, a holy man who had helped many others. Aaron pulled himself together and went. After listening to Aaron, the Rabbi advised: "Go and pray and God will help. Have faith. All will be well."

Dutifully Aaron followed the Rebbe's advice. He sequestered himself in the synagogue and wept and prayed. He was so obsessed with his ruin that he failed to notice a stranger enter the synagogue until the other man's loud sobs woke Aaron from his stupor. Aaron didn't know the man but he recognized his pain. Aaron didn't know whether he had any emotional resources left with which to help, but he forced himself to approach the man. "Welcome," Aaron said. "I heard your cries and my heart goes out to you in your pain. How can I help?"

"No one can help," the man sobbed. "I borrowed a lot of money to buy shoes to start a business. I thought I was buying 500 pairs of military shoes and instead I received 1000 shoes for the left foot!"

Stunned, Aaron placed his arm around the man's shoulders and said, "My friend, I have very good news for you. I have 1000 right foot shoes!" The two men teamed up, sold their shoes, and ultimately became very rich. The story has a happy ending, a miraculous ending, but only because Aaron did not wait a moment, but made a small sacrifice for a good cause, to help someone in pain.

We too can gain more than we give when we make a small sacrifice for a good cause.

My friends, Yom Kippur is not about resolutions. It is about evolution: our ability to grow, change and make choices to improve ourselves and the world, or at least our little part of it. We need not wait a moment more to start doing so.

As you came in this evening, you were handed a small card with your name on it. There are flaps for each opportunity I mentioned tonight and one for other ways to help. Please take your card, fold down at least one flap and pass your cards to the aisle so the ushers can collect them. After the holidays, someone will contact you to work out the details that work for *you* of how you can help start improving the world.

*Use these links to sign up online:*

[Signup to help with Friday night Onegs](#)

[Signup to help with Saturday morning Kiddushes](#)

[Signup for Minyan](#)

[Signup for other volunteer opportunities in and around Beth Shalom](#)

Anne Frank was arrested with her family after more than two years in hiding. She died in Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp. Just a few months before her arrest, she wrote, "*In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.*" Anne's creativity, generosity of spirit, and hope in people's goodness have inspired millions around the world. Who knows what Anne could have achieved had she lived.

As we exited Anne Frank's secret annex, we came upon a short film in which writers, actors and visitors talk about what Anne's story means to them. I was most struck by Emma Thompson's words, that all of Anne's "would haves are *our* opportunities."

We have many opportunities to help improve the world. I mentioned only a few this evening. There are many more. Sometimes it is only in making a small sacrifice for a good cause, like Anne did and like the shoe salesman Aaron did, that we discover the very thing we, ourselves need most.

We need not wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. May each of us find our own small way to do so as part of our Jewish community in the coming year. And let us say, Amen

Shanah Tovah.

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<sup>i</sup> Diary of Anne Frank, Nov. 19, 1942.

<sup>ii</sup> Diary of Anne Frank, March 26th 1944.

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal, *Small Miracles II*, pp. 17-21.