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When I was growing up, summer Sunday afternoons were often spent around the television watching professional golf. In fact, as my father who is with us tonight can attest, my mother especially hated tournament playoffs, because that meant the golf would last into the dinner hour, and negotiations would need to begin about when we could eat, until my mother would finally scream, *"That's enough! Turn off the TV and get to the table, now!"* Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Lee Trevino were larger than life figures in my early years. And as a young duffer, I marveled at their seemingly super-human ability to hit the ball long and straight and to sink those long, winding putts---things I still haven't figured out how to do.

I thought about those heroes of my youth as I watched Tiger Woods fail to make the cut into the FEDEX golf playoffs this year. As I watched Tiger walk down the 18th fairway for the last time of the regular season, listening to all the commentary about his marriage, his ex-wife, his therapy, all the public scrutiny and armchair analysis made me a bit queasy. And it occurred to me that as a child I knew nothing about Jack Nicklaus's marriage. Nothing about Arnold Palmer's relationship with his kids, and certainly nothing about Lee Trevino's sex life. All we knew, blissfully, was what we saw when they made magic with their clubs.

It made me wonder if we are better off knowing all the personal struggles and failings of public figures. If we're better off knowing which athletes were in which strip clubs last Saturday night. Knowing which politicians stumbled in their marriages, and which children of movie stars can't stay away from cocaine. Or, rather, if we were better off before all the public revelations about personal embarrassments.

You could argue that it's healthier now, that enabling public figures to shield their darker, even disturbing behavior from us permitted them to create the impression that they are perfect; that they are more god-like than human. We're better off, you could argue, knocking them off their pedestals. And it is true, especially in our politics, that often, public revelations expose hypocrisy, and even criminality. But it's also true that the most common examples of public titillation reveal foibles that are more commonplace. Personally tragic, but you have to wonder if they are really any of our business. And our reactions to them most often are to make fun, to dig the knife deeper, to add to the humiliation, and to add to the reverberating pain the family must endure.

If our interest in the private lives of public people promoted more empathy and patience and humility; if it reminded us that we're all human,

that we all stumble, then, *dayenu*. Instead, though, it's turned us into a society of public humiliators. We hold up a magnifying glass to their private lives, so we can laugh at them. And it has fed the wildly destructive belief that only perfect people with perfect lives can lead us or walk out onto a field without us snickering at them. Any misstep and it's over. You make one mistake, and you're tainted for life.

Yom Kippur's premise is that no one is perfect, that we are all flawed. Not just them; but us, too; that we all need this day because every one of us has weaknesses. Every one of us is broken in some way. But we can't admit it, because we have created this unforgiving, impatient, and judgmental culture and community. And so, we hide, pretending that everything is fine, everything is perfect, lying awake at night, afraid of being "found out". When you have to face the truth about your marriage. When your child stays emotionally so far away from you. When you realize that you can't afford the life you want to live, that your career isn't where you'd hoped it would be, how do you react? Do you put on the mask of pretense, the smile that, you desperately hope, will hide what keeps you awake at night? Because what if they learn that behind closed doors, you are anxious, and afraid, and in pain? That you've suffered setbacks, that your life isn't what it seems on the surface. Do you keep pretending, because you believe that no one can really know you, and love you? Do you continue to live in fear that you won't be accepted for who you really are, in fact that you will be ridiculed and branded for who you are?

Yom Kippur comes each year to help us accept that our brokenness is our humanity. It is about accepting who we are. It's about what we do about who we are. And, it's also about accepting others, especially those we love, when their brokenness is revealed to us.

Rabbi Alexandri taught "If an ordinary person uses broken vessels, it is a disgrace for him, but the vessels crafted and cherished by the Holy One are all broken, as it is said... *the true sacrifices to God are a broken spirit; God is close to the broken and crushed heart.*" In other words, we human beings love what looks perfect, and we shun what looks blemished or cracked. But God created us, and we are all, somehow, broken. And God loves us.

Yom Kippur requires the healthiest kind of honesty, because, unlike the public purveyors of gossip and the neighborhood finger-pointers, Yom Kippur couples honesty with the call for embrace. It encourages us to embrace each other, even with all the messy, complicated, very human frailties and challenges that drive us all.

This year, Temple Sinai's community organizing campaign, in partnership with Long Island CAN and shepherded by our rabbinic intern Rachel Grant Meyer, will focus on bullying, trying to create a broad based community focus on its crippling effects on so many children. And I believe there is a connection between the rise in public ridicule, the instinct to pounce on any weakness, any imperfection, any

misstep, and the pervasive avalanche of bullying we see. It is the unrelenting drive to have to look perfect. To be the best students, the best athletes, have the best circle of friends, wear the best clothes, have the newest things, be invited to the best parties, get into the “right” college... that helps fuel this uncivil, obnoxious culture of competition, of divide and conquer, that promotes nastiness and bullying.

So many among us, and not just the kids, feel that they have to always look over their shoulders. Always comparing themselves to each other, always needing to know where they are on the pecking order, as if there is only one way to be successful and content and to make a difference in this world. As if the only way to enjoy a pursuit is to be better at it than anybody else, and as if stumbling and falling down is an unforgivable sin, from which you can never recover, that will leave you all alone, even though we all know that we gain the greatest strength, the greatest wisdom, and even the greatest self confidence, from learning to pick ourselves back up, after we have fallen down. That it is from rising from the ashes of our failures, that we truly grow.

I know so many kids, and adults, too, who are terrified that they will be friendless, alone, rejected and humiliated when others learn who they really are, because they see examples, or even suffer from such examples, all the time.

Yom Kippur, with its litany of *al chets*, with Kol Nidre’s preemptive forgiveness, is supposed to create the belief that you can be flawed, and good, that you can make mistakes and with hard work, with honesty and persistence, you can transcend them, and heal from them, and begin again. That each of us is a unique beautiful, sacred blend of intuitive gifts and uncomfortable weaknesses. Of magnetic talents, and darker demons.

When we realize that we are all struggling, all afraid that we will suffer from disapproval, or be the object of gossip, or glances that can make us feel naked, or loneliness and embarrassment, all of us, then, maybe we will thwart the instinct to so easily condemn others. Then, maybe, we can create a world where no one has to be afraid to leave the house, without a perfect looking mask on.

The Talmud teaches that God begins each day on the Throne of Judgment, but then moves to the Throne of Mercy. Yom Kippur affirms that God does not love us because we look perfect. God loves us, embraces us and forgives us, because we are human, and asks us to do the same. In this New Year, may we walk in God’s ways and embrace each other and accept each other, and love each other, and ourselves, for who we really are.