HOW ARE YOU DOING?
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Just before the start of the pandemic, Maghan Markle made headlines for her emotional, vulnerable and honest response to a simple question from British ITV reporter Tom Bradby. In a quiet moment during an on-camera interview Bradby ask her "How are you doing?" The world kinda stopped for a moment when she opened up to him with a sign and tears and said that she wasn't doing so well and how appreciative that he thought to ask the question.

I've been thinking a bit about that moment these last few weeks – in part because it was pre-pandemic and our worldly concerns, even those of an American, pregnant, BIPOC new member of the royal family seem relatively quaint compared to the burdens and worries we all have confronted these past 13 months.

But there is more to it than just reflecting on life pre and mid COVID – that question, "How are you doing?" it's come to mean something much deeper than the throw away greeting that it was before the world turned upside down.

I ask that question of people and I really want to know, how are they doing? And if they are doing better than me, which to be honest on many days is not a high bar to overcome, I want to know HOW they are doing better than me, what's their secret? – because this is hard, its wearing on me; and because I talk to dozens of you (who I can only imagine through the screen right now) I know it is wearing on you too.

Think about our emails for a moment, because for a while now we have not been bumping into people on the street and exchanging, "Hi how are ya's?" If we're bumping into people on the street we're doing the whole social distancing thing wrong.

"Hope you're well." "Hope this email finds you healthy." "Hope you and your family are healthy and safe during these uncertain and unprecedented times."

If you keep an active email account, you've likely received a note that includes a phrase like this in just the last few hours, let alone past year. And you've probably sent one. We have this ubiquitous experience that all of us are going through and getting through to varying degrees.

Clare Goggin Sivits, a digital marketing consultant based in Portland, Oregon wrote, "You kind of feel like you have to start every email with that, and if you don't you feel guilty.

Goggin Sivit, who sometimes writes freelance for online publications, described a recent exchange in which she emailed an editor and forgot to include well wishes. The editor replied that she hoped Goggin Sivits was doing well, staying healthy, and staying inside. "I thought, 'Oh

man, I totally left that out of the email that I sent her.'" Add feeling guilty for not having enough left in the tank to express empathy to the self-inflicted wounds we carry during COVID.

In this week's Torah Portion, Kedoshim, we read the powerful and imperative verse, "Vahavatah l'rayecha k'mocha" love your neighbor as yourself. For twenty years I have been giving sermons on this parasha, I almost used one of them again tonight – I'm not, but I do have a rule, that 'if I don't remember giving it you won't remember hearing it.' It's generally proven to be true.

But in twenty years of expounding on this verse I think in nearly all of them I have focused on the 'rayecha' part of the passage, "love your neighbor". In those sermons "love of self" was just a measure of how much we should care for others.

Not tonight, not during COVID – loving ourselves and BEFORE we care and worry about others that too is part of the commandment.

Self-care has maybe never been more important than in the midst of a pandemic when so much more than just our physical bodies are endangered; and now more than one year into the pandemic, when our natural and instinctive resources for guarding and protecting our mind, body and spirit may feel depleted. When as a third wave is cresting, the answer to the question, "How are you doing?" if we are honest with ourselves, let alone others, is "I'm not doing so good?", "I can't do this much longer?" "I am so done with COVID, but COVID apparently isn't done with us."

It's at this moment that "love and care for self is more important than ever."

The Babylonian Talmud (Yoma 75a) states "If there is anxiety in a person's heart, let that person quash it [yashḥena]" (Proverbs 12:25). Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi [dispute the verse's meaning]. One said: They should forcefully push it [yashḥena] out of their mind. And the other said: they should tell [yesiḥena] others. This ancient text recognized that an important form of self-care is to share our concerns, fears and anxieties with those around us. In fact, it prioritizes those healing actions over trying to cope with anxieties on our own, especially by quashing or repressing them.

The reporter asks the then Duchess of Sussex, "How are you doing?" and she answers him honestly, "Not many people have asked if I'm ok" she sights, the weight of it all, before Oprah helped her reveal it all is apparent in the sigh, tears well up and she continues ... "it's a very real thing to be going through behind the scenes."

That honest telling of our truth to others, that's what the Talmud is talking about, that's the first step in self-care.

Often we think of self-care as an action – going to the gym, a massage, coffee with a friend, I think self-care is deeper than that, but even still those are the very things we can't do right now.

We are so often taught that non-stop action and achievements are key to a successful life. Yet our tradition teaches us that in fact stopping, pausing, and recharging must be a priority. Take tonight, this moment for example. All week it has been glorious outside, we went on walks, we sat in our gardens watched the sunset. Tonight, its cold, as I write this rain is in the forecast. You're in, on your sofa, maybe with your iPad in bed watching services; listening to the beautiful and inspiring melodies of Cantor Korn; the inspired teaching of Rabbi Brown. I'm probably lulling you to sleep – something for everyone!

Shabbat is one of Judaism's most prolific, most universal, core and defining traditions. One that unites us across identity and observance. In the earliest words of the Torah, Genesis 2:2-3 reads, "On the seventh day God finished the work that God had been doing, and God ceased on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation God had done." God creates a protected space in time whose only purpose is to be a holy day of rest.

No matter one's interpretation of Shabbat observance or even of God and commandments, we can see lessons and messages in our core text. Shabbat amounts to taking a step back and desisting from interfering with our world's ever-moving cogs. Shabbat calls for a moratorium on our weekly pursuit to fill every moment with zooms, emails, and phone calls.

Productivity on Shabbat amounts to distancing ourselves from the mundane, disconnecting from the world, and focusing on those in closest proximity to ourselves. Focussing indeed on ourselves. Shabbat asks us to answer for ourselves, "How are you doing?"

This puts us on a path and a quest to achieve spirituality. Just as our tradition says "Dayenu/enough," so must we. In today's non-stop world, this idea is countercultural, almost impossible to comprehend and for many anxiety provoking. If we are not doing, who are we? This moment of crisis when so many of us are in a forced state of retreat, could also be an incredible opportunity to mull over and actualize some space and to shift focus into self-care; but only if we are honest with ourselves and vulnerable enough with others to be honest with them about how we are really doing. Not so that they can help us, but so that in telling them, we can hear ourselves.

Consider the vulnerability of stopping to honestly and thoughtfully answer that question, as the Duchess of Sussex did, as our Talmudic Rabbis did as an act of self-care, an actual response to the general insanity of this moment with specific actions you can take.

Another step, another prayer that should be in our prayerbook:

Dear God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

- Acceptance
- Courage
- Wisdom

And I would add the humble vulnerability to be honest when asked about all of the above.

If you this message touches on something that needs attention in your soul this Sunday at 1p the Vancouver Jewish Federation and JFS in partnership with all of the synagogues and agencies in our community is offering a seminar with clinical physiologist Dr. Betsy Stone, who teaches pastoral care at the Hebrew Union College – the seminar that Rabbi Brown, Cantor Korn and I each attended. The seminar is entitled: A Year of Upheaval: What Has Trauma Done to our Bodies and our Brains? The link is on our temple website to sign up.

This shabbat, ask yourself the question, “How am I doing?” then through the workshop, through our services, with the help of the people in your bubble or us your community; listen for the answer and the self-care each of us needs especially right now.