

Kol Nidre Night 5774
September 13, 2013

I want to share with you a comment from the website of
moviephone.com:

They've tried everything. One host. Two hosts. Four
hosts. 32 hosts. Comic hosts. Serious-theatrical hosts.
Hollywood-legend hosts. Young hosts. Old hosts. Hip hosts.
Square hosts. Singing-and-dancing hosts. Every year, it
seems, the [Academy Awards](#) goes back to the drawing
board to figure out what sort of emcee will keep the show
lively, attract viewers (especially younger viewers) and keep
them from flipping channels during the slow parts.

This fickleness is not new to the Academy Awards. If you look
through the list of Oscar ceremony hosts since 1929, the only
people to host multiple times consecutively are Bob Hope, Johnny
Carson, and Billy Crystal. But the situation has only gotten worse.
Over the last 11 years, only 3 people have been asked back as solo

hosts, and then no one more than once. It smacks of desperation for ratings and buzz. Because it has struck me that the Academy at the moment doesn't seem willing to give someone a chance to grow into the role. As soon as someone is bad, or too edgy, or not funny enough, they get shunted aside and replaced with someone else. I believe this tendency is reflective not only of the Academy, but of our society: We want it now. Indeed, today we are trained to look at the camera and see our shot the moment we take it, instead of waiting weeks to get photos developed. We can see any movie or TV show we want, when we want it, instead of waiting for the theatre to show it or the station to run the rerun. If we want information about almost anything, we take our phone out of our pocket and check the internet. And there is now Google Glass, eyeglasses that can give you all sorts of information while barely moving a muscle.

But the message of Yom Kippur is something different. Today we repeat over and over the 13 attributes of mercy God presented to Moses: Adonai Adonai el rachum v'hanun. One of

the most significant of these is *erekh appayim*: God is patient (lit. “slow to anger.”) The Midrash describes how Moses goes to heaven to get the Torah, and he sees God writing the words *erekh appayim* in the Torah. Moses says, “Oh, you mean you are patient with righteous people.” God says: “No, even with sinners.” At this, Moshe Rabbenu is shocked. “What? Who cares about the sinners? Let them die!” Then comes the Golden Calf, Moses begs God to forgive the people. God reminds him of his previous statement: “But Moses, you urged me to have no patience with sinners.” I believe your exact words were, “Let them die!” Moses says, “God, you were right. Please be patient and forgive them as You have spoken.” Thus is born the idea of *teshuvah*, the idea that God does not destroy us when we stray, but gives us multiple opportunities to change our ways. Thus, the Mahzor declares: *Ad yom moto t’chakeh lo lit’shuvah, l’hantoto lit’chayah*, “Until the day of death You await our repentance, to turn us toward true life.” God is patient. He will wait our whole lives to see if we can get on a decent path and learn to live meaningfully. In a world that wants

it “yesterday,” we must follow God’s example and cultivate patience with ourselves and others.

If we go back to the story of the Academy Awards I started with, the attitude that says, “The ratings need to be great now! The show needs to be perfect now!” is a short-sighted one. If the Oscar producers took someone of talent and said they would host it for 3 years in a row, that person would likely get better with each performance. That is true in many more prosaic cases as well.

The ink is barely dry on new standardized tests, and some teachers are suffering consequences because their students didn’t do well.

These kinds of evaluations need to take place over an extended period. How often are we impatient? If the car in front of us

stops suddenly, do we honk the horn in annoyance before realizing there is a stop sign we didn’t see? Do we allow our favorite team to have a couple rebuilding years, or do we want that

championship “now!” Do we make sure our employees have the tools and the time to really learn the ropes, or are we quick to yell at them for screwing up, convincing ourselves that is how you

create accountability? When [Tom Watson Jr.](#) was the CEO of IBM, a senior executive made a mistake which cost the company a large sum of money. When Watson called him into his office, the executive said, "I suppose you're going to fire me." Watson replied, "Not at all, young man, we have just spent a fortune educating you." That is a smart CEO.

When we are impatient, we are convinced that faster is better. But, of course, that is often not true. If you do not take the time to assess a situation, you will likely not handle it appropriately. If you dismiss an idea or an individual too quickly, you will lose their talents without recognizing them. If you are too quick to judge your fellow, you cannot blame others if they unfairly judge you. And it is important here to mention another category: having patience with ourselves. Often it is ourselves we are most impatient with. Heshbon ha-nefesh cannot really happen without giving ourselves space and time. Impatience makes us unable to acquire knowledge, judgment, and skill.

And what is it that causes impatience? Dr. Alan Morinis writes the following:

The real root of impatience is the erroneous belief that we are the masters of our fates. The truth is otherwise. We are actually wired into all kinds of larger circuits and systems, from the molecular to the social to the spiritual, and it's an illusion to think that we control very many of the factors that shape our lives. Least of all can we expect to rule the timetable according to which life takes place, which is usually the focus for our impatience.

In fact, the piyyut which tells us *ad yom moto t'chakeh lo lit'shuvah*, "Until the day of death you await our repentance," helps us reflect on our mortality and lack of control: "Our origin is the womb; our destiny is the grave; our fate is to give a reckoning to our maker.... Our days are chaotic, our nights are void, our pursuits are fleeting...." But then it continues: "But why complain? To be living at all is gift enough." It is when we realize how short and insignificant our lives are that we can begin to be

grateful for what really matters in our lives, and on the gift of life itself. When we reflect on this, we can truly combat the pull of “I want it now!”

Most of us are familiar with the story of Hillel, and how he was asked to summarize the Torah while standing on one foot, but few of us realize that the point of that story is the importance of patience. The Rabbis compare Hillel to his rabbinic rival. They say, “A person should always be gentle like Hillel, and not impatient like Shammai....” The prospective convert who asks Hillel the famous question first asks it of Shammai, who promptly shoos him away with a stick, for he correctly perceives the man is trying to make fun of him. The point of the story is that Hillel, when he has more than enough right to be angry, always finds a way to give a gentle answer to even the most ridiculous questions. His actions take this troublemaker and bring him into the Jewish people. Hillel rejects responding to “now” and instead responds to what he thinks could be, with a little love. Let us devote this year to cultivating the attribute of patience. May we honk the horn less

quickly in traffic, do less frustrated yelling, and – most important – give ourselves and those around us the time and love we need to become everything that we can be. I look forward to Ellen DeGeneres hosting the Oscars in 2014, and hope that, no matter what the pundits say, she is asked again.

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