

Marc's Journal Entry #4 Koli Kulanu

Sh'ma

I have lots of areas that I need to improve upon for myself. I need to lose weight, and I need to be more "fit". So, I need to do better on my eating choices, and I need to carve out time for exercise. I read a lot and wish I could remember more. I find myself distracted by the weight of things on my mind at work or whatever, and so I find myself sometimes missing what someone is saying to me. As good as my relationships are with my family and friends, I would like them to be even better. I could go on and on.

For everything I want to improve upon, or for every goal I set for myself, there is in fact a way to achieve that improvement. The simple solution? Make it a habit. If it's that important, make it a habit. Do it daily, multiple times per day, weekly, monthly, whatever. Make it a recurring appointment on your calendar. Tell Siri to remind you. Get an app that can tell when you're not doing it right so your phone reminds you. Whatever.

I am a big fan of an influential book, Stephen Covey's [7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#). I read it not long after its publication in 1989. I was eight years into my career, I had been promoted in my job to more and more responsible positions, and I started realizing that my personal habits, words, actions and decisions had a big impact on my co-workers. Who I was and what I did actually mattered! Well, it mattered at least a bit. Maybe not a lot.

Covey stated (without much proof) that he studied accomplished people and arrived at seven habits that were responsible for their success. Of course, [the concept of "success"](#) has changed over time.

Covey wrote the book because so many people say "teach me how to be successful!" "Teach me your techniques so I can be successful!" People want a quick fix.

One of the things I love about Covey's book is that he clearly states: there is no quick fix. You must develop the right attitudes, and you must build upon a solid process. Using an agricultural example, everyone loves to eat bread, but there is no quick fix to make bread. A farmer clears a field, plows, weeds, plants seeds, waters, weeds some more. Then the farmer harvests, threshes, stores the grain, transports the grain. Then a miller grinds it, packages it, transports it to a point of sale. Then a grocer stocks it. Then a user buys it, combines it with yeast and water, lets it rise, and bakes it. And then "poof", it's bread.

You don't just have bread without all those other processes and work. There is no quick fix.

When I think about this, I'm reminded about things in our Jewish tradition that seem to be habits, or habit-forming. Things that we do multiple times per day, or daily, or monthly, or every year. We pause for a moment before we eat a meal to say *hamotzi*, acknowledging God for bringing bread from the earth. Upon awakening we pause to say *modeh ani*, acknowledging God for restoring our souls to us each morning. We have prayers for *Rosh Hodesh* each month, and we have our annual cycle of festivals and holidays. And we have our annual (or in Kol Shalom's case, triennial) cycle of Torah readings.

The Torah portion for Shabbat 7/28 is VaEthanán, in the book of Deuteronomy (starting with verse 3:23). This portion includes the *Sh'ma* prayer (verse 6:3), and its continuation *v'ahavta* (verses 6:5-9). I received via email a beautiful [d'var Torah](#) from the Ziegler School at American Jewish University in Los

Angeles (the west coast version of the Jewish Theological Seminary) written Rabbi Gail Labovitz about this Torah portion and the Sh'ma prayer.

Rabbi Labovitz brings a discussion from the Talmud, Tractate [Berakhot 15a](#), discussing whether one may say Sh'ma silently, or if out loud, how loud must it be said, and the order of reciting the prayers. The answer she gives is that, although Sh'ma should be said audibly, out loud, it is ok to say it silently or inaudibly.

The key learning point is that the Sh'ma is the most basic statement of our beliefs, the belief from which so many of our traditions derive. She writes: "The Shema is a crucial part of the morning and evening services with which we start and end our days. It is a statement of the most fundamental theological principle in a religion that otherwise typically de-emphasizes systematic theological statements. God is the sole and unified Divinity in the universe, and God is our God as the People of Israel."

Our tradition is to say Sh'ma twice daily, morning and evening ("when you rise up and when you lie down"). Many people say Sh'ma at night, at bedtime, as the evening recitation.

I am cultivating the habit of saying *modeh ani* when I awaken, and *Sh'ma* in bed when I go to sleep. This has been for the past few years, and still I can't quite count it as a habit; I need to remember each time. I'm trying to develop a habit that puts me in close touch with our tradition, and that helps me to fulfill a mitzvah daily. To me, doing this helps develop my relationship with God, and with the Jewish people. There is no quick fix for these relationships; they develop through habits. Pausing, being aware of these relationships, and marking these moments through prayer is one such set of habits.

I want Kol Shalom to be the kind of place in which congregants are aware that they do have a relationship with God and with the Jewish people. I think we are that kind of place, I want it to continue so, and I want us to grow in the number of congregants and the number of people growing their relationships. I want Kol Shalom to continue, expand, and thrive as a *kehilla k'dosha*, a sacred community. We are here, as a cohesive community, to do acts of loving kindness and merciful justice.

We are renewing our focus on this mission. There will be more on this in the coming weeks and months.

I want to be in dialogue with you. You can click [here](#) to send me a message, or you can email me at mplieber@ymail.com. I am thrilled to hear from you, to get to know you better, and to hear your suggestions on continuing Kol Shalom's growth and value to you.

Thank you for your help and for your part in our kehillah k'dosha, our sacred community!

Marc Lieber, President