

A Story Is Told...

While walking along a beach, an elderly gentleman saw someone in the distance who was leaning down, picking something up, and throwing it into the ocean. The person repeated the motion, over and over again. As he got closer, the gentleman noticed that this was a young man and he was picking starfish up off of the beach, one by one, and tossing each one gently back into the water. He came closer still and called out, "Good morning young man. May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young man paused, looked up, and replied, "Throwing starfish into the ocean."

The old man smiled and said, "I must ask, then, why you are throwing starfish into the ocean."

To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die."

Upon hearing this, the elderly observer commented, "But young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!"

The young man listened politely. Then, he bent down, picked up another starfish, threw it into the ocean past the breaking waves and said, "I made a difference for that one."

This story, each time I hear it, reminds me not to underestimate our potential for making a profound difference in someone's life. Sometimes, this difference is a result of a dramatic act; sometimes, it is from doing something small but unexpected. Sometimes, we are helping people far away, other times, we are helping our neighbors, Jews and those who are not Jewish.

As Jews, we feel the particular power of mutual responsibility and interconnectedness during this High Holiday season. Our tradition, in the Talmud, teaches, "Kol Yisrael Areivim zeh baZeh." Each and every Jew is responsible for one another. And, during our coming High Holidays, the message becomes even more relevant.

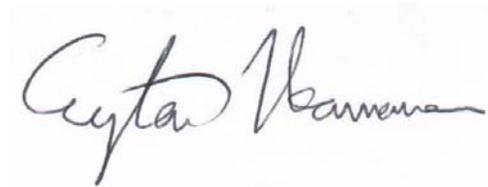
This season, we recite the Vidui, the Confessional Prayer, during our services on Yom Kippur. I remember – as a child - wondering why my parents were confessing to all of these sins. Had they actually murdered? What had they destroyed? They were not xenophobic... so I thought. Over the years, I have come to understand that the Vidui is just one additional way to look at what it means to be a member of the Jewish people. If we are truly God-loving people, truly **Good**-loving people, in our individual and communal lives, we rely on others to bring out the best in ourselves. "Being

responsible” for one another, quite literally, means making sure that we are doing our very best at representing Judaism – particularly here in Lower Westchester - in a way that not only makes us proud, but makes our wider community proud as well.

As a Jew, as your new rabbi, I feel a deep personal responsibility for your spiritual welfare and for the general welfare of Jewish people locally and worldwide.

Fortunately, as the “starfish story” reminds me, I know that I just need to pick up one starfish at a time. And, working together, I know what a difference we can begin to make.

On behalf of my family, please accept our blessings to you for a year of health, happiness, sustenance and peace. It is so exciting to be beginning this new year together. *Shana Tova U'metukah* – Happy 5775!!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eytan Hammerman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rabbi Eytan Hammerman