



Spiritual Care Resources  
High Holidays

## **Rosh Hashanah Sermon**

by Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin

*Excerpts of this sermon are presented including the main message and additional references. This sermon can be easily adapted to weave in stories of someone in your community, a friend, or yourself.*

The Hasidic master the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, "Everyone has in him something precious that is in no one else." Those precious things can be our unique character traits that endear us to others and make us special human beings, or the delight we take in the accomplishments of our families. Sometimes, however that something precious is also quite painful. But because it is hidden, nobody knows that it is there.

A few moments ago we read the story of a woman named Hannah. She endured her own fertility woes. Like Hannah, there are people in this congregation who are unsuccessfully trying to bring a baby into this world. There may be people here who feel the pain of their adult children who are trying to conceive, or who are unable to bring a child into the world in other ways. It is difficult to adopt. IVF is not always successful and finances are frequently a barrier. That pain, which others cannot see, like Hannah's, is real for women and men who want to be parents.

Today on Yom Hazikaron, the Day of Memory, the biblical name for Rosh Hashanah, I want us all to pause and remember that the pain experienced by our ancestors living centuries ago, and the pain experienced by our neighbors living nearby, and the pain that we ourselves experience is sometimes not visible to those around us; that people experience hardships and sorrow and they are often standing or sitting right next to us.

Our ancestors Sarah and Hannah were women who cried out in their longing, women who desperately wanted children. They were women whose pain was hidden from everyone but God. Both of these women and millions who came after them watched as other women birthed and raised children. They watched, as people became parents and grandparents, excluded from birthday parties and the Bnai Mitzvah circuit and sales at Gymboree. Most women were silent and others reached out to close confidantes, but the pain is and was real for legions of women and their partners. The pain of childlessness is not the exclusive realm of women. Men who can't be fathers are in that same community.

I realize that that one of the reasons we read the stories of Sarah and Hannah each year on Rosh Hashanah is so that we can remember to encounter the other with compassion and empathy. I have no doubt there are people in this room suffering from pain similar to mine, and there are others who also suffer in silence but the source of that pain is different. The commonality to all of them is that it is an unseen pain that can strike the very depths of our souls.

*I always thought my business would take off. It has not. I imagined that my marriage would be perfect. It is anything but. I always imagined that I can do anything and I now I feel stuck in my*



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*current routine.* I suspect there is not a single one of us in this sanctuary this morning whose heart is not heavy for some reason.

There are those who have a family member desperately fighting illness. There are those who carry the emotional weight of constant care for an elderly parent. Others might have a child suffering from addiction. There is just a litany of things. Each of those situations is painful. And each of them is hidden away, unseen by others.

“Everyone has in him something precious that is in no one else.” Those precious things can build us up or break us down. The simple truth is that none of us really knows the details of each other’s lives. We all arrive at Rosh Hashanah standing at a crossroads of some kind. We are all in the middle of something complicated that challenges us.

To create an empathetic community capable of understanding and supporting each other in times of joy as well as distress, we need to take on the awesome challenge of fully acknowledging the other when we speak to them. If we respond and interact to people with compassion and empathy, then this will truly be a Beit Adonai, a House of God, and we will be able to dwell in it, all the days of our lives. That is God’s promise to us, and can be our commitment to one another for the coming year.