

Kol Nidre Sermon 5786
October 1, 2025
Rabbi Laura Rumpf

We have arrived at Kol Nidre, 5786.
What a tender night this is.
What a vast array of longings we bring with us.

There's a prayer — a verse of poetry — that has been nestling in my heart as I prepared for tonight. It orients us toward what we are doing here, gathered for Yom Kippur.

It is the opening line of *Anim Zemirot*, a 12th century prayer often read during these Days of Awe:

אָנעם זמירות וְשִׁירִים אֶעֱרֹג כִּי אֶלֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי תַעֲרֹג

Anim zemirot v'shirim e'erog, ki eilecha nafshi ta'arog.

“I will sweeten melodies, and weave them into song, for to You my soul longs.”

While we pray, many of us wrapped in our woven tallitot, we are weaving the songs of our souls' longings.

And I love that in Hebrew, weaving and yearning rhyme: *e'erog, ta'arog*.

So often, especially in these times, my restless mind spins and spins, wondering what I can **do** when it feels like the world is unraveling.

But perhaps the first threads of repair begin not with action, but with a pause, touching the deep yearning that brought us here tonight.

Our Jewish tradition is not alone in revering weaving as sacred.

There's an indigenous story told by elders around sacred fires that speaks powerfully to this moment:

Inside a cave, an old woman is weaving the most beautiful garment ever imagined. From time to time, she must pause to stir a pot at the back of the cave. In that pot are all the seeds of the earth. If she doesn't stir it, the seeds will burn — and life itself will vanish.

But while she stirs, an inky black dog slips in and unravels her weaving. Thread by thread, until only chaos remains.

When she returns, She does not rage. She pauses. She breathes.

Then she picks up the thread. And she imagines an even more beautiful garment — one that could not have existed without the unraveling.¹

The elders say: *Do not curse the dog. We cannot always stop the unraveling.*

We cannot always stop the unraveling.

But we can join with that woman.

For she represents the world's creative force for good — that Spirit in us which dreams new possibilities into being.

We can pick up a single thread, and from what has come undone, together weave a reality more beautiful, more just, than what came before.

And so, on this Kol Nidre, this tender night, we pause to ask:

What thread is mine to lift up? What thread is ours — together — to reweave the world more beautifully, more justly, than before?

We do not need an ancient tale to remind us that we are living in a time of great unraveling.

The phrase “*the future hangs by a thread*” feels achingly real.

We see it in the unraveling of our democracy and our justice system. We feel it in the fraying of the fabric that once bound us together as a society.

We grieve the unraveling of America's promise — the ideals the Jewish poet Emma Lazarus etched in verse on the Statue of Liberty:

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...She proclaims- Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”²

But today, too many remain tempest-tossed. Too many lives are laid threadbare. And the golden door of welcome feels closed.

A friend and fellow Jewish activist steeped in immigrant accompaniment, testified at a recent vigil about having to sit with a young mother in a cell, separated from her family, her belongings confiscated. She handed the woman a sharpie- -to write the phone numbers of her

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<https://www.wisdom2be.com/essays-insights-wisdomwritings-spirituality/qs7bs52yrp1hqu94aa5w52dkh6hdz>

² <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus>

local relatives on her arm. “In case she was deported” As the numbers inked the woman’s forearm, my friend’s eyes filled with tears, recalling her own grandmother in Poland, forced to bear numbers on her arms, in another *very* dark unraveled chapter of our people’s history. As she spoke at the vigil, every one of us with Jewish ancestry felt our own tears rise, our hearts tug in grief-and in connection to this young mother in detention.

The unraveling is not only collective.
It is also deeply personal.

Some of us feel the unraveling because significant roles have irreversibly changed — in parenthood, partnership, work, identity. Some of us have not only unraveled, but ripped garments with specific grief.

Kriyah, the tradition of tearing of the fabric of a cloth at a funeral is the ancient Jewish way of saying: *My heart is torn open. My world has unraveled because you are no longer in it.*

On Kol Nidre, we do not deny the unraveling.

We name it.

And we ask not: “How do I stop it?”

But rather: “What thread can I take up? What thread is mine to weave the world anew?”

Now, here’s a confession. I am not a weaver or a seamstress. In fact, my only semester at Roosevelt high school that threatened a C on my report card was Sewing. Fortunately it's ancient history at this point but we’re being honest about our flaws and failures tonight...

But I do know something about these fringes. (The Tallit) This tapestry.

Jews have been weavers and garment makers for centuries. From Bezalel, the artisan and weaver whom Torah describes as connecting the Jewish people around the crafting of a shared sanctuary, to the Jewish women who demanded justice in the wake of the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911: Weaving has always been one of our forms of resilience and repair.

And the tallit itself tells this story. In the book of Numbers, God commanded Moses to instruct our people: *Make fringes on the corners of your garments, throughout the ages... so that when you see them, you will remember my mitzvot and live by them.* (Numbers 15:38)

See what you stand for, God says. Wear your values.

On this holy night, Kol Nidre, many of you are joining those of us on the bima in wearing your tallit because this is the night, our tradition teaches, that we emulate the way God first wrapped Godself in a woven garment to show Moses the potency of prayer and repair. The

Talmud recounts how God came to Moses saying : “Let the one wrapped in a prayer shawl reciteL “(*Adonai Adonai, El Rachum V’Chanun, Erech Apayim U’gdol Chesed V’Emet*)³ Words that remind us of the qualities that are the true ingredients of transformation and justice: Compassion (*Rachum*), Mercy (*Chanun*), Patience (*Erech Apayim*) and, demonstrated kindness (*Chesed*). We chant those verses tonight-to weave a thread of connection to God, to a source beyond us who is our partner in healing, and in co-creating the future. ⁴ That source gives us courage, when we do in fact, move from the solace of this evening, into the active, connected lives we are called to in this year.

If the world is unraveling, and if all of us are needed to reweave the future we yearn for, then we — Temple Beth Am — have a specific sacred calling as we cross the threshold into 5786. As Rabbi Ruth so aptly quoted from Dr. Martin Luther King on Rosh Hashanah, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” We are a people who *embrace* that our futures are bound together, and we will not witness this moment of great collective unraveling without a wise, and active response.

We cannot reweave the entire broken world. Not yet. But we can claim the thread that is ours.

What threads can we take up together, right now, as we turn toward our 70th year as Temple Beth Am? How can we collectively weave a holy garment—a tallit, dare I say—that is sacred, purposeful, and rooted in our Jewish values? A tallit that holds the essence of all of us working together, to meet this moment?

When I look out tonight—at a sea of white and soft color, at the simple garments and tallitot so many of us wear—I do not see a powerless people.

I see a connected, intergenerational multitude.

A rare and beloved gathering of diverse, talented, heartfelt people.

A people made up of the raw material of what we most hold dear.

I see a people who take up the thread that is ours.

A people who can reweave a tapestry, built of our yearnings for justice peace, and love to empower us, in the year ahead.

And as we mark 70 years of Temple Beth Am, there is a particular connection to the tallit I want us to grasp tonight.

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-13-attributes-of-mercy/>

⁴ Rosh Hashanah 17b:5-7z.

Our sages taught: every 70 years—not a moment sooner—a *Hilazon* emerges. A mysterious source of sky-blue dye. The most precious thread in a tallit.

It is rare. It is timely. And if you don't seize it when it comes—it is lost.⁵

Every 70 years. Imagine that.

And so at this precious moment—marking 70 years as a community—can we seize the unique thread that is ours, that is now?

Can we fashion a new tapestry incorporating that precious Hilazon, one that ushers in the future we yearn for now, in this room?

As we turn 70, we inherit seven decades of values, boldly expressed in action. I know, for example, that this congregation has organized, has joined, has marched, has housed, has advocated, has fed many hungry people. And this is just a glimmer of the foundation we stand on.

In *this* historic time of unraveling, we can draw on that wisdom—on the labor and passion of those who shaped our congregation, including many of you in this room—and weave it together with the Hilazon of now.

The thread of all of us saying: Yes. To our collective yearnings translated into action that meets this moment.

Can we take what has unraveled, take up the Hilazon, and weave a bolder, brighter tapestry—a *Sukkat Shalom*—to wrap ourselves in proudly, wherever we are called to stand for our values, In 5786, and for 70 years to come?

This is Kol Nidre.

Our collective—and deeply personal—sacred night of the soul.

The melodies, the prayers, the white fast—stir something unique in each of us. Each of us has yearnings we weave into songs we sing together.

So I ask, with curiosity: What is stirring in you?

What thread is yours—and only yours—to take up in 5786?

The tallit I wear contains threads and knots

And as I look across this room, I see a stunning diversity of tallitot, each with its own story.

What they share are threads and knots.

And each knot orients us to mitzvot.

⁵ Menachot 44a:2

Mitzvah means “commandment”

But in Aramaic, it is also related to the word *tzavta*—to join, to connect.

A mitzvah is not only a commandment—it is a connection.

Each knot, each thread, signals a point of connection. And those connections that move us most are the raw materials we need to weave together with intention this year

For me, a connection point that moved me from yearning into action came at the vigil I mentioned earlier.

I stood shoulder to shoulder with other Beth Am members.

Wearing the tallit gifted to me by my mother—who was also present.

When our eyes met as we heard the story of numbers inked on a young woman’s arm, I felt moved—I felt linked.

Linked not only with her, but with my grandparents and great-grandparents—Jewish activists, and survivors.

And with my children, who will inherit a broken world, but who will also inherit a tallit. When they become Bar and Bat Mitzvah, I will place this garment on their shoulders and say: *Take up the thread that is yours to weave. I believe in you.*

You do not need to be a lifelong “social justice warrior.”

You do not need a title or a position.

What you do need is a heart that quickens.

A willingness to connect.

A desire to contribute to something beyond yourself, beyond your lifetime. And a willingness to do so here.

Imagine if, during this year, each of us tied a single knot in a thread. A knot representing one commitment to sacred action in this community. Imagine if we shared those commitments—letting it be known that when we act for justice and love, we act as Beth Am. That we are a true House of the People.

That we will take a stand for the marginalized. That we will shelter families, enliven Torah for these times, and respond to the crises of this moment as an intentional community, connected in courage.

If you are so moved—you will have a chance to take up a literal thread and tie a knot of connection this sacred season—a knot linked to your specific yearnings for action to contribute to our collective, revitalized *tzedek* (social action) efforts as Temple Beth Am turns 70. Over the year, our threads will join together, and together, we will weave a tapestry of mitzvot. Of sacred, inspired action.

Maimonides taught: the world is evenly balanced between merit and injustice.
And with one mitzvah—one act of connection—a person can tip the balance. All the more so
when multiplied hundreds of times over.⁶

So I ask again: What is stirring for you?
What is the thread that only you can take up in 5786?

A thread of education? Of advocacy?
A thread of scientific rigor? Of grief transformed into a calling?

And if you are someone who can literally weave, who knows the craft of fabric, I invite
you—help us weave tallitot for our 70th year. Tallitot to wear when we march, when we pray,
when we serve, when we demand change.

My prayer is this: that when we gather next year, each of us will have tied a knot.
Each of us will have made a connection to the shared vision of Tempe Beth Am at 70. Because
though we cannot always stop the unraveling—we can meet it.
We can pause.
And we can co-create a Sacred Tallit that reflects all of our yearnings expressed through action.
A tapestry of justice, of love, of resilient response.

Ken Yehi Ratzon.
May it be so.

⁶ Hilchot Teshuvah 3:1-3