

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter,  
the Chassidic master also known as the Sefat Emet,  
Teaches that every human being has what is called a נקודה פנימית, an inner point.  
This point is the presence of God within us,  
the spiritual location within ourselves  
in which we can access our deepest depths  
and our most sacred selves.  
Some people know this inner point as their emotions.  
Some people know it as their soul.  
Others know it as the part of themselves that feels amazed  
when they visit the grand canyon,  
Or the part of themselves that feels joy when they meet their first grandchild.  
It is our inner access road to feeling the fullness of life.  
Our spiritual work in the world, according to the Sefat Emet,  
Is thus twofold.  
One, to uncover and connect to our inner point  
So that we deepen our connection to our souls.  
And two, to expand this inner point within ourselves,  
So that we grow in our capacity  
to experience the divine presence pulsating within us  
and throughout our sacred reality.

Uncovering and expanding our נקודה פנימית, our inner point  
Is at the center of what we do here at Temple Beth Torah.  
Everything we do-  
Prayer, celebrating the holidays, celebrating baby namings and bnai mitzvahs,  
mourning, learning about Judaism, building relationships with each other-  
All of this is ultimately about accessing a depth of life that we might otherwise not access.  
In other words,  
everything we do at Temple Beth Torah is about living spiritual lives together.  
We are here together  
to build deeper relationships with our souls and ourselves,  
To build deeper relationships with each other,  
And to build deeper relationships with Jewish living and community.

Now as a community of unique individuals,  
we each have our own approach to Jewish living.  
For some of us, Jewish living is about participating in traditional rituals and practices,  
things like lighting Chanukah candles and hosting Passover seders.  
We do this because the tradition of it is meaningful and grounding.  
For others of us, Jewish living is about passing down knowledge and traditions  
to the next generation.  
It is about giving our children and grandchildren a Jewish identity,  
a sense of who they are and where they come from.

And for yet others of us, Jewish living is about connecting to Jewish people.  
It is about being part of a community with shared history, culture, and practices.

All of these approaches to Jewish living are important.  
They can be deeply meaningful, substantive, and authentic.  
And significantly, they are all trailheads for the path of spirituality.  
All of our approaches to Jewish living are gateways  
to build lives of meaning, purpose, belonging, and blessing.

As your Rabbi, I have had the honor this year  
Of seeing you uncover and expand your inner point,  
and of walking with you along the paths of meaning, purpose, belonging and blessing.  
These paths have included the bnai mitzvahs we have celebrated together.  
For me, one of the great joys of the bnai mitzvah process  
has been meeting individually with all of our bnai mitzvah families before the service.  
These conversations have been incredible experiences  
of connecting to what is meaningful about having a bnai mitzvah.  
Our conversations have gone into profound depths  
About what we find meaningful about being Jewish,  
About what of Judaism we want to pass down to our children,  
And about what it means for the bnai mitzvah student to begin forging their own Jewish identity.  
I have seen how meaningful these conversations have been for each member of the family.  
I have seen families connect to each other in deep ways,  
even discovering each other's spiritual sides which they had never seen before.  
In these moments, I have witnessed every family member discover their נקודה פנימית, their inner  
point, in a new way.  
It has been a profoundly meaningful experience for me to help all of this unfold.

I have also seen you uncover and expand your inner point in moments of grief.  
I have sat with some of you in my office or on the phone  
as you have told me about the beloved parent or sibling or relative you lost.  
Your grief revealed a deep well of love  
And an uncertainty about what the future would look like without them present in your life.  
I have stood with you as you have delivered eulogies,  
As you have honored your loved one's unique soul  
and the influence they had on your life.  
And I have seen you connect to the one you lost through memories,  
Which brought you to laughter and to tears,  
Both the beginning of the path of healing.  
I have seen you connect to your deepest selves, to your inner point,  
as you have walked your paths of grief.

I have also seen you uncover and expand your inner point  
during our regular life together as a community.

I have seen this happen during Shabbat services,  
When we have taken the time to slow down and to connect to one another,  
When we have taken the time to sing and to pray,  
And to have real conversations and connections with God and ourselves.  
I remember seeing this especially during our first Shabbat service in person together.  
I remember vividly that moment  
when we all got to sing together for the first time since the pandemic started.  
I heard so much life in every voice, so much joy.  
I felt everyone's spirits being lifted up by each other's song.  
It was a very powerful moment.  
I have also seen us connect to our inner depths when we have shared poetry during Shabbat.  
I have seen in your faces what it looks like  
when something in a poem feels profoundly true to you,  
Or when something in a poem moves you.  
And I have seen this during our Shabbat morning Torah studies.  
I have seen us light up at the parts of the Torah that offer us just the guidance we need,  
And I have seen us struggle emotionally and ethically  
with the parts of the Torah that trouble us.  
We have asked profound questions of the Torah  
and of ourselves in the process.  
This was yet another experience of being with you  
as you connected to and expanded your פנימית נקודה, your inner point.

All of these moments that I have just described-  
the highs, the lows, the more regular aspects of Jewish living-  
Have been incredible experiences of witnessing what happens  
When we reach for greater depths than the world tends to offer us,  
Of witnessing what happens within each of you, within myself,  
And among one another when we reach moments in our lives  
That allow us to feel how vast our souls really are.  
These moments can bring us into a depth of life, a depth of inner connection,  
That can help us experience the fullness of what it means to be alive-  
in all its joys and its challenges.  
Living fully into all of these profound moments  
Is precisely what I mean  
When I talk about pursuing meaning, purpose, belonging, and blessing.  
Living a life fully felt  
Is precisely what I mean  
When I talk about what it means to live a spiritual Jewish life.

These spiritual paths that we began walking together just over a year ago  
have now brought us to Rosh Hashanah,  
the beginning of our season of renewal and reflection.

It is precisely at this point on our path, on Rosh Hashanah,  
that the Sefat Emet urges us to reconnect to and renew our inner point.  
Even though we have moments throughout the year  
that we feel deeply connected to our inner point,  
Our inner connection tends to ebb and flow.  
This happens, according to the Sefat Emet,  
because of ways we miss the mark during the year.  
Our transgressions disconnect us from our inner selves,  
And they cast a shadow over our holy inner point, which conceals it from us.  
In other words, when we turn away from our inner selves  
In thought or in action,  
We become disconnected from our spiritual depths  
And become distant from our capacity to be fully alive in our lives.  
According to the Sefat Emet,  
This is why we pray each Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to be inscribed in the Book of Life:  
We pray to be reconnected with our inner source of life  
Whose roots are in God and the ultimate sacredness of our world (Drash #1 on RH in the  
Language of Truth).  
We pray to renew our capacity to live our lives fully.

As we dive into our process of reconnecting to and renewing our inner point of life,  
We also look towards the future, and begin to look towards the other piece of inner work  
that the Sefat Emet invites us to consider.  
This is the work of expanding our inner point,  
of going beyond inner connection and renewal  
To a place of spiritual growth.  
Now, as I mentioned earlier,  
many of us have already been engaging in this inner work  
through participating in Jewish living here at TBT.  
The spiritual work that I want to invite all of us into this year  
is to continue this work of inner expansion.  
I want to invite all of us to reach for the next rung of spiritual growth.  
This means continuing to deepen our relationships with ourselves, God, and each other.  
This means continuing to deepen our relationships with Jewish living and community.  
This also means reaching for new depths  
of meaning, purpose, belonging, and blessing  
in our lives together.

Now according to the Sefat Emet,  
the way we expand our inner point is through our Jewish actions.  
Using the language of the Zohar, one of the most central texts of Jewish mysticism,  
The Sefat Emet likens this process to digging wells within the earth.  
We use the commandments to find the living waters below the surface.

Put otherwise,  
our Jewish actions help us expand our access to the living waters within ourselves.  
And the more effort we put in, he teaches, the greater depths we will achieve.  
In his words: “according to one’s efforts...the inner vitality from the Life of all life  
can be found in every place” (Sefat Emet, Parashat Toledot, 5650)

We will pursue many paths, and dig many wells,  
to help us expand our inner points here at TBT.  
One will be the path of prayer.  
At our Shabbat and holiday services,  
We will spend more time building relationships with the words on the page,  
Allowing the ancient words of our ancestors  
To be in deeper conversation with the words on our own hearts.  
We will let the music of our voices and our instruments  
bring us to even deeper places of joy and hope.  
We will continue to uncover the ideas and aspirations  
embedded within our traditional prayers  
through reading poetry.  
Our prayer practice will be one of our central paths.

As will our celebrations of the Jewish holidays together.  
Each Jewish holiday has its own unique spiritual offering.  
Some holidays are about joy, others are about grief.  
Others are about the miraculous, or the absurd.  
These spiritual offerings are all unique trailheads for the path of spirituality.  
We will take each holiday as an opportunity  
to reconnect to and expand our inner point.

Another path will be the path of Torah study.  
Our Torah study together will not only expand our knowledge of Judaism,  
But it will invite us to ask even deeper questions and make even deeper discoveries  
about ourselves, one another, and our world.

Another path will be the path of building relationships with one another.  
This year as a community we will begin pursuing the path of what is called Relational Judaism.  
This path is guided by the understanding  
That a community thrives not only when we have high quality programming  
But especially when we have deep relationships with one another.  
This is because our relationships with one another  
can bring us an incredible sense of meaning, purpose, belonging, and blessing.  
To this end we will create many opportunities to get to know one another at a deeper level,  
And to invite each other to live our lives together.

Yet another path will be the path of Tikkun Olam, of repairing the world.

We will walk this path with a spirit of kindness, generosity, and hope.  
As I will talk about during my Yom Kippur morning sermon,  
this work of Tikkun Olam will include the work of chesed, of acts of loving kindness;  
of tzedakah, of charitable giving;  
And it will include a newer addition to our Tikkun Olam work,  
The work of Tzedek, of pursuing justice.  
With all three approaches to Tikkun Olam,  
our personal experiences and our most deeply held values will guide the work that we do.

Whether it is these paths or others at TBT,  
I hope you will join us in connecting to and expanding your inner point.  
I hope you will join us as we pursue a Jewish spiritual life together  
Of meaning, purpose, belonging, and blessing.  
I hope you will join us in this process of inner transformation.