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Elul Drash

In just a few weeks, we're going to be in the thick of the High Holy Days. It might not be a time of celebration like Simchat Torah or Purim, but unlike those festivals, the High Holy Days -- and especially the days leading up to them -- force us to think deeply about how we interact with the world around us, our loved ones and ourselves. This is what the month of Elul, the month we're in right now, is all about.

So in case some of us haven't begun the process of preparing for the High Holy Days, I have come up with a list of questions for all of us to think about tonight and in the coming weeks. It's an exercise for all of us, regardless of age.

The World:

Am I walking as lightly as possible upon the earth? Do I pay attention to my consumption of resources and how I dispose of waste?

Do I make myself aware of other cultures and peoples? Do I learn about other ways of living and seeing the world?

Am I informed about pockets of intense suffering in the world and have I done what I can to contribute to easing that suffering?

Our Community:

Do I participate in the life of my city? Do I know who the local political leaders are and what they stand for?

Am I registered to vote and have I studied the issues that may affect **my** daily life?

Do I support, in one way or another, the individuals and groups who are creating Jewish life in this city? Does my Jewish life extend beyond the walls of Beth Israel?

Do I encourage and support those who have taken on the responsibility of Jewish leadership?

Have I thought about taking on more leadership within my Jewish community?

Our Family, friends and work:

How are my closest relationships? If any of them are strained, is there anything I could be doing differently to help improve them? Do I make time for the most important relationships in my life? Do I treat my siblings, children and parents with respect?

Do I have close friends in whom I am able to confide? Do I accept people as they are or do I try to change them? Have I made any new friends this past year?

Our Selves:

Am I taking care of my body? Do I exercise enough? Do I eat properly? Do I get enough rest?

Do I keep my mind active? Do I read good books? Do I talk about ideas and important matters with friends and family?

Do I pray? Is music part of my life? What about meditation? Do I allow myself to deeply experience beauty in nature?

This was not a test? Just our annual check-up. Luckily for us, we don't have to actually get on that scale or take our clothes off or get our teeth scraped. But usually after our annual doctor and dentist visits we're told what we need to do in the coming year. Floss more—that's what I'm always told. Well, no one is going to tell you what you need to do for this spiritual check-up. You are the doctor and the patient. You know what you ought to do. I hope it's painless. And I hope you pay attention to yourselves.

I hope you have a meaningful ELUL.