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The Morning Takes Care of the Day

It's easy to get a little haphazard about our lives – a little haphazard, or a lot – and the days drift by in a haze of work or play, without being mined for the substance or meaning they so readily proffer us, if we would only receive their gifts. Every once in while, if we're lucky or unlucky, an alarm goes off and startles us awake from our dreamy or dreamless days: something unexpected or extraordinary, devastating or delightful. Last month, when I learned a close friend was suddenly very sick, I felt as if I'd been punched, or slapped – it was that violent. I reeled from the blow, and then opened my hands for the gift, immediately calling friends with whom I'd been out of touch and making plans to see them, and telling them I love them.

But I didn't like that it took my friend's illness to remind me to cherish my friends *every day*, and hold them close when I can. I want to be more deliberate in my friendships. It's not enough to say it's a priority; I know I need to create a new ritual of more regularly reaching out and connecting. Pastor and author John C. Maxwell writes, "You will never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine." Okay, then, a daily ritual. And, more specifically, a morning ritual. Again, Rev. Maxwell: "[How] we begin has its own huge impact on the success of any effort."

I say, *When we take care of the morning, the morning takes care of the day.*

One of the many things I love about Judaism is that it gives us a second new year each September, just where it belongs. That new year, Rosh Hashanah, begins tonight, and gives way to the ten Days of Awe: a time for self-examination, prayer, and repentance. At this new year, at this time of beginning again, I want to share some thoughts about the importance of our mornings. And I feel some sense of urgency about getting this right, given the state of the world. I do not want us to feel helpless or

hopeless in the face of – for example – the crisis of racism and poverty of all kinds in this country, or the largest humanitarian crisis in the world that is now exploding out of Syria. We need courage and strength to look with an unwavering gaze and see clearly into the suffering and the relief of suffering that is all ours. In these troubled times, as spiritual seekers in search of truth and meaning; as people who are called to the repair of that which is broken; we need to cultivate a high level of spiritual fitness.

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13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, Rumi, writes,
 Today, like every other day,
 we wake up empty and frightened.
 Don't open the door to the study and begin reading.
 Take down a musical instrument.
 Let the beauty we love be what we do.
 There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Perhaps you already have a morning routine. A morning routine will make us calmer – more serene and spacious; more creative and productive; and better able to negotiate the incoming hits of the day ahead. The closing words of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: “Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.” I'm going to invite you to join me in raising your routine to ritual, to fuel it with holy fire and bless it with intention raised to the level of devotion.

Here are a few suggestions. You don't have to do all of them – I certainly don't – but for your consideration:

You might want to include even one minute for reflection, meditation, or prayer. Inspired by our own Barb Seidl, I end each evening with gratitude, writing down three things from the day just past for which I am grateful. We can start the day with gratitude, as well: *Thank You* for the opportunity to wake up on this beautiful planet, and for another chance to get it right.

You might like to take a moment to read something to set the course of the day. There are several daybooks I love; some of you, I know, read from 12-step recovery literature, or the Bible. Poems are also a wonderful and sustaining choice. Sportscaster Charlie Jones says, “You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read.” In case it's true, we might want to get reading!

I don't journal in the morning, but some of you have found journaling absolutely essential to a day well-lived. Carl Mattiola is a software entrepreneur in San Francisco who's done some really good work on how to start the day, and he's a morning journal writer. He writes down three things for which he's grateful, and the one highest-leverage activity that he can do in the next 24 hours, making a commitment to it as he writes. He also writes down three things that would make the day awesome.

He starts his morning, actually, by reviewing what he calls his Direction Statement, which includes what you want from life, what you don't want in your life, the reasons for why you're doing what you're doing, the values that inform those reasons, and where you want to go with all that. The Direction Statement changes, starting with the morning review. In his commencement address at Stanford, Apple Computer founder Steve Jobs said, "For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself, 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?'" And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something."¹

Life is lived in a body, and a body needs water and food. Especially after the night's fast, our morning ritual should include watering and feeding our bodies! In addition, life is lived in a body that was designed not for sitting (sitting is the new smoking!), but for movement. I encourage us to wake up and *get moving*. Take a walk. Take it to the gym. Yoga has been adapted for every body, and it's a terrific reminder that we all feel so much better when we remember not to hold our breath! Let's breathe, and move as much as we can, and if at all possible, move outside.

I like to begin the day in silence (which is possible in a house of 28 teenage boys only very early in the morning!). For some of you, right from go, the sound track is everything. The fifth Buddhist precept reminds us, in essence, "garbage in, garbage out." The directive is to set ourselves up with some beautiful sound, or perhaps some less beautiful but highly motivating sound, and also to pay attention to the media with which we're going to begin our day. Is turning on the news the most uplifting and inspiring choice? John Lee Dumas, founder and host of "Entrepreneur on Fire,"

¹ Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer and of Pixar Animation Studios, Commencement address, Stanford University, 12 June, 2005

refers to his morning ritual as his First 80. His first 80 minutes do not include any media. Let's choose wisely!

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Many, many years ago, I heard the story of a woman living in England at the time of the Blitz in the second World War. Her husband was killed, and her minister went to her home to deliver the terrible news. She greeted him asking, "Are you bringing me bad news, that you come at this unusual time of day?"

The minister replied, "I'm afraid so."

"Is it about my husband? Is he dead?"

"Yes. I am sorry to bring you such sad tidings...."

"She interrupted him to say, 'Come in and let me make you a cup of tea.'

"At his astonished look, she explained, '[From the time I was a little girl, my] mother taught me ... that when anything very dreadful happens, I must think of what I would be doing if it had not happened, and then do that.'"²

This story remains a touchstone for me, and I invite you to join me in considering the possibility that, no matter what the day brings,

When we take care of the morning, the morning takes care of the day.

Beloved spiritual companions, as this new year dawns, even in the face of hopelessness and helplessness – especially now – may we seek spiritual fitness, raising routine to ritual. Let us fuel our days with holy fire, and bless them with intention uplifted to devotion.

Here, in closing, are passages from Maya Angelou's *Inaugural Poem*.³

Lift up your eyes upon
The day breaking for you.
Give birth again

² from *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, (the reading for) May 3

³ *Inaugural Poem*, 20 January, 1993

To the dream....

Take it into the palms of your hands
Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.
Lift up your hearts
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.
Do not be wedded forever
To fear....

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage....

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.