

Greg Rosh Hashona Sermon • September 12, 2026

Hi everyone. Shana Tovah.

Thank you to Cantor Wunch for the invitation to speak here today, on the topic of sacred interconnectedness.

The question I want to explore is:

How might we live differently if we remembered that we belong to one another, and to our living world?

I will start with a story about my father.

Both of my parents passed away in 2023, a few months apart. My father was in palliative care at Sunnybrook in October. The trees were in beautiful fall colours, and I had taken some time off work, so I was fortunate to spend many mornings and afternoons with him.

Some days we would just sit quietly in his room. Other days we were both up for an adventure, so I would wheel him through the courtyard to the chapel area on the other side of the hospital.

There's a Christian chapel, a Muslim prayer room, and a beautiful tiny synagogue with stained glass windows where we would go.

My dad and I had sat beside each other in shul for so many years, especially on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So it was really special to be there together those last few times.

We would sit quietly, open our prayer books, and sing or pray. One of the prayers we said together was the Shema.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.

This is a powerful memory for me. And I keep coming back to the feeling of this word. *Echad*. One.

What does that mean? Why do we say God is one? God is one with what? With who?

And what might this mean for me, for us, for how we see our world, for how we live our lives?

Part of my exploration of this question has been through my meditation practice, which began 25 years ago, when I was a master's student in Germany and a professor there became a spiritual mentor to me.

As I explored different teachers and books for inspiration, I came across Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk. He used the word *interbeing*, to describe the idea that no one and nothing exists in isolation.

All of us are shaped by the unseen forces and influences of our parents, and their parents, and all of the generations before them. By our teachers, our experiences, our families. By the air we breathe, and the food we eat.

He talks about a piece of bread on our plate. Where does this bread come from?

It comes from the clouds, which make the rain that waters the soil. The earthworms aerate it. The sun gives warmth and light to the seeds of wheat, so they can grow. The farmer drives the tractor, the miller mills the grain, the baker bakes the bread, and the delivery driver brings it to the store.

So this piece of bread is in *interbeing* with all of these people and things.

We acknowledge this same interconnectedness every Friday night at our Shabbat dinner tables when we say *hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*, expressing gratitude for the bread that comes from the earth.

But what about us, as humans, as individuals? We live our lives so often from a perspective of separation. There's me, and the things I need to do for myself. I need to be clean, dressed, fed, and healthy. I need to take care of my family, my community. And then there's everyone else, out there, with their own lives. This is all true, of course.

But underneath that, rather than integrating this concept of interbeing, we tend to live in an illusion that we are separate from one another and separate from the world around us. So many of our problems are rooted in this sense of separation. Our anxieties, our fears, our conflicts and our wars.

While our bodies are our own, are we not a weave of interconnected relationships? Don't we rely completely on each other?

Where would we be without our families, our neighbours, our communities? Where would we be without air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat? We are one with each other, and we are one with the natural world.

If we can live more fully from this awareness of interconnectedness, how might our life change, how might our world change?

Here's a small example.

Last week I was biking with my son Noah, and we rode past an older man sitting on Bloor Street with a Tim Hortons cup, asking for change.

We stopped our bikes and pulled over. I put some money in his cup, and looked into his eyes, and said, "*May you be well.*" His eyes, while they had a certain sadness in them, sparkled with life and gratitude.

It felt like a real moment of connection with this human I had never met. It would have been easy to ride past. I've done that many times. His life over there, mine over here.

But something made me stop, a sense that this could be me, or someone I love. That in some way he was actually a part of me.

We face that same choice, of whether to see separation or connection, in all kinds of ways. With other people, other communities, other cultures or countries, and even with birds, insects, trees and rivers.

But what if they are part of us?

What if this entire world that we live in and everything in it is an extension of our own selves? What if we are all interconnected organs of our living planet?

Of course, seeing this interconnection more clearly won't make our differences disappear. We will still disagree. But it might change how we see the problem, and the people we are in conflict with.

This perspective feels particularly meaningful to me on Rosh Hashanah.

This is a time of reflection. A time of transition, of endings and new beginnings. A time of taking in what we've learned, and setting intentions for the new year.

As the summer sun turns into fresh autumn air and the colours of fall, we have this moment to pause, remember and reconnect to what is most important in our lives.

In everything I'm interconnected with - my partner, my children, my family, my work, my neighbours, my planet - how can I show up with more love, with more empathy, with more presence?

My wish, for myself and all of us, is that we are able to let go of the worries, the fears, the anxieties, and the pains that we hold too tightly. May we grow our capacity to be in gratitude, and in presence, and in love, for all that we are interconnected with.

An ending is also an opportunity for a new beginning. So I come back to that moment in the synagogue at Sunnybrook, with my father, saying the Shema together. We remain connected, as one.

Adonai Echad.

Shana Tovah.