



new london
synagogue



Turning to the Left, Turning to the Right

Rabbi Sharon Brous' new book, *The Amen Effect*, opens with this account of Mishnah Middot 2:2.

'The text speaks of an ancient pilgrimage ritual, when hundreds of thousands of people would ascend to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The crowd would enter the Courtyard, turning to the right and circling—counterclockwise—around the enormous complex. But someone suffering, the text tells us, the grieving, the lonely, the sick would walk through the same entrance and circle in the opposite direction. Just as we do when we're hurting: every step, against the current. And every person who passed the broken-hearted would stop and ask, "*Mah Lach* - What is with you?" "I lost my mother," the bereaved would answer. "I miss her so much." Or perhaps, "My husband left." Or, "I found a lump." "Our son is sick." "I just feel so lost." And those who walked from right to left—each one of them—would look into the eyes of the ill, the bereft, and the bereaved. "May God comfort you," they would say, one by one. "May you be wrapped in the embrace of this community."

The Mishnah and the book inspired by it recognises what it means to carry pain or fear or loss, and what it means to seek and find comfort, "in the embrace of community;" the oxymoronic gathering of semi-strangers, semi-fellows the like of which will assemble tonight at New London. Perhaps, this year, we are all gathering in pain, perhaps, if it were us arriving at the Temple courtyard, we would all turn left and seek someone to look into our eyes and express their presence in ally-ship with our hurt. Or perhaps more precisely, there is a part of us that should "turn right," grateful for the blessings and gifts of the last year, strong enough offer comforting presence to others, and simultaneously there is part of us that needs to "turn left," as we limp along, in need of embrace.

Tonight, I'll lead a procession of Torah scrolls around the Synagogue before the Kol Nidrei (beginning by turning left). Every year I feel both buoyed by the embrace of our community and also, I hope, able to share just a little of compassion of the whole community as I meet the eyes of its members. May we all have the courage to draw from places of gratitude and strength and may we all find the honesty to be in our places of pain. May we all offer comfort and may we all receive comfort, *Kaparah* and atonement. In doing so, may we all be granted and sealed for a sweet and blessed year ahead.

(Two corrections from an email sent out by an over-tired Rabbi – me – earlier in the week. The ticket shared the correct timing for services over Yom Kippur, Kol Nidrei will begin 6:45pm today, Children's Services begin 11:30am tomorrow. In the spirit of the season, sorry.)

Chatimah Tovah, Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Jeremy