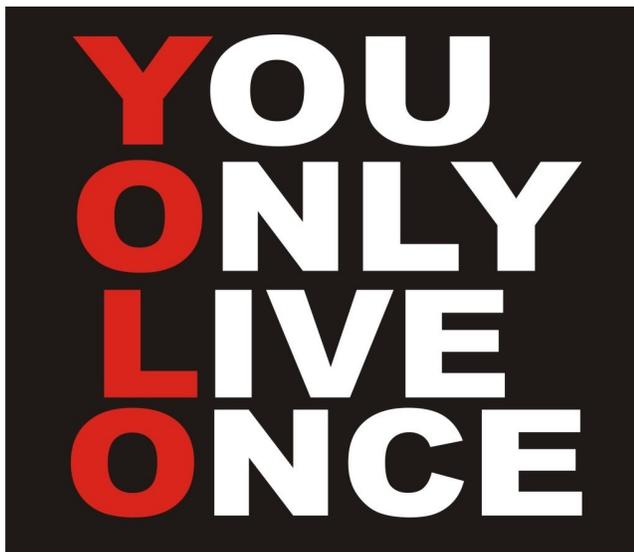


I love new words. They enable us to formulate and express what we are thinking and feeling in new ways.

Four times a year, the Oxford English Dictionary publishes a list of new words that have only recently been invented. A couple of recent additions include



“YOLO,” “gender-fluidity” and “clicktivism.” I’ll tell you what “clicktivism” means since most of us have seen much of it lately, and even engaged in it. Similar to the word “activism,” it means support for a political or social cause—specifically through social media, like sharing posts on Facebook or signing and circulating online petitions. I suppose I could be called an occasional “clicktivist.”

And then there are words that have been around awhile but there might come a time when we discover them to be useful, like the word “fuhgeddaboutit.”

Over the past few months, you have probably heard me talk about the interdependent relationship between *Tikkun HaOlam* (Repairing the World) and *Tikkun HaNefesh* (Repairing the Soul). The events on our 2016-2017 programmatic calendar were chosen with these two values in mind. Our recent Scholar-in-Residence, Danny Siegel (who was with us Nov. 18-20), was chosen because of his skill in the work of Repairing the World. Our next Scholar-in-Residence, Rabbi Andrew Hahn (a.k.a. the “Kirtan Rabbi,” who was with us Feb 3-5) was chosen because of his skill in the work of Repairing the Soul. Although all of our programs and services emphasize one or the other of these two Jewish values, they are both, in fact, interdependent.

In the course of our ongoing exploration of the relationship between the world and the soul, I have come across a word—actually two words—that describe the embodiment of their interdependence. While these two words have been around a long time and have even been frequently used together over the past decade, it only dawned on me recently that they could help us think about what we do in a new way. These two words are “spiritual activism.” I suppose that some of us here at Temple Israel could be called “spiritual activists.”

The term “spiritual activism” has been used often in

popular and professional literature over the past decade. A quick Google search for this term (in quotes) produces close to 90,000 results. A friend and former pastor at the Coral Gables Congregational Church, Guillermo Marquez-Sterling (who has since moved to St. Petersburg) published a book on the Rise of the Spiritual Activist four years ago, which I just pulled off my bookshelf. So I've seen the term but hadn't thought about it in a Jewish context until now.

Spiritual activism is a way of thinking and acting that is both compassionate and pragmatic. It is a holistic approach to "doing" social justice that facilitates transformation on both a personal and social level. It involves a "doing" that flows deliberately out of "being." It recognizes that external systems of corruption and oppression are directly related to the internal psycho-social dynamics that perpetuate suffering. Spiritual activism calls into question the construct of "us vs. them," urging us toward a broader and more inclusive understanding of the word "we."

For example, when we observe MLK, Jr. Day weekend (Jan. 14-16) we will once again sing the hymn, "We Shall Overcome." Thinking about it from the vantage point of a spiritual activist like Dr. King, the song doesn't imply that one day the tables will be turned and "we" will overcome "them." Such thinking only perpetuates conflict and suffering. Instead, "we shall overcome" implies that a broader and more inclusive understanding of "we" shall prevail. All of us together shall overcome the inherently oppositional nature of

an "us vs. them" mentality.

Martin Luther King's example of spirituality fused with activism demonstrates how it's possible to one day transcend the tribalism of fundamentalist religions and the narcissism that characterizes much of today's New Age spirituality. But if you think about it, Dr. King was only following in the footsteps of the prophets and sages before him who envisioned a "beloved community" of like-minded people whose actions would bring blessings to the entire world. His vision echoes that of the prophet Isaiah, who called us to serve as "a light unto the nations." We are here to follow in their footsteps.

In the coming weeks, we will continue our exploration and practice of spiritual activism, from our observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day (Jan 26-27) and its message of "Never Again" in relation to genocide, to our joyful celebrations with Dr. Alan Mason at *Shabbat Shirah* (Feb 10) and Tu B'Shevat (Feb 11). I can guarantee that you will be both challenged and energized at any of our upcoming programs and services because the fusion of spirituality and activism combines two very powerful currents as well as two very powerful words.

A new expression like "spiritual activism" has caused me to think about what we're doing here in a new way. At the start of a new secular year, the timing is perfect. As Hillel said, "If not now, when?" Or as one of my students said, "YOLO!"