

YOM KIPPUR, SEP 23, 2015, 5776, RABBI SHAWN ZEVIT

The Prophetic Reading for the Fast of Yom Kippur, Isaiah 57:14-58:14

<https://theshalomcenter.org/yom-kippur-meets-eid-al-idha-isaiah-ishmael>

Blessing before the Haftarah(Chanted)

*Blessed are You, **YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh,***

The Interwoven Breath of Life,

Who in every generation

Breathes prophetic truth

Through the throats of human beings --

As we blow outcry

Through the Great Ram's Horn. (Ameyn)

(Chanted): And God said: Open up, open up, Clear a path! Clear away all obstacles From the path of My People! For so says the One Who high aloft forever dwells, Whose Name is Holy:

I dwell on high, in holiness, And therefore with the lowly and humiliated, To breathe new breath into the humble, To give new heart to the broken-hearted.

When you wander off the path as your own heart, wayward, takes you. I see the path you need — and I will heal you.

I will guide and comfort you With words of courage and of consolation For those who mourn among you.

Peace, peace ... shalom, shalom!... to those who are far and near, Says the Breath-of-Life — And I will heal you.

They keep asking Me for the rules of justice As if they would take delight in being close to God.

They say: “Why is it that we have fasted, and You don’t see our suffering? We press down our egos — but You don’t pay attention!”

Look! On the very day you fast, you keep scrabbling for wealth; On the very day you fast, you keep oppressing all your workers.

Look! You fast in strife and contention. You strike with a wicked fist.

You are not fasting today in such a way As to make your voices heard on high. Is that the kind of fast that I desire? Is that really a day for people to “press down their egos”?

This is the fast that I desire:

Break off the handcuffs that oppressive power

Locks upon its prisoners!

Untie the ropes of the yoke!

Let the oppressed go free,

And break off every yoke!

Share your bread with the hungry.

Bring the poor, the outcasts, to your home.

When you see them naked, clothe them;

They are your flesh and blood;

Don’t hide yourself from them!

Then, when you cry out, YHWH/ the Breath of Life will answer;

Then, when you call, God will say: “Hineni- Here I am!”

What is it to invoke and evoke the Ultimate Hineni this holy day. Our sages of old resonated so deeply with Isaiah’s words that they placed them in the Haftarah of the holiest day of the Jewish year, even as they surrounded these words with ornate liturgy and ritual. They developed a treasure trove of piyyutim and additional blessings of yearning for teshuvah and healing, AND they brought in Isaiah to upend the tables around the Temple of our complacency on the very day we are seeking release and praying for life itself.

To say “hinei” to life- to truly be present and, as the Torah and prophets declare as our sacred life mission, “do justly, love with mercy and walk humbly”, requires more than a day’s efforts. It requires a lifetime of day by day choices.

Today, I want to continue exploring with you the themes Rabbis Yael, Margot and I began discussing on Rosh Hashannah. Our inspiration comes from the tradition of our Talmudic sages who teach: *Elu v’elu divrei Elohim Chayyim. These AND these are the ways of the Source of All life- of Life Itself. It is in accepting majority rule AND including minority views knowing the future may reveal different interpretations and perspectives on today’s*

viewpoints, that a greater vantage point is created that can hold change and challenge.

As I offered on Rosh Hashannah, I truly believe and have seen in my own life- that this “State of Being”- can be a framework for mindful and activist Jewish living, a foundational approach to how we can both do tikkun and rebalance within and in this precious fragile and powerful planet we swirl in. Rabbi Yael and I have termed this **The Power of "And:" Expanding Perspective and Action.**

Something was deeply stirred in our individual and collective conscience and consciousness this Rosh Hashannah. I have never had so many people, little and larger come up to me after a series of talks and ask how they can get copies (which we are working on), or wish to discuss which part of the “VAV/and” aspect deeply touched them and what they want to do or have already begun doing to truly change the narrative and the pathway their life has been headed on. One person stopped me in the parking lot and apologized that they could not remember a specific point I made, but they needed to go home and change two significant aspects of their relationships with their partner. I responded, “that’s what I said- you heard it!” I remember little Olivia- excited to spend her first adult Rosh Hashannah with us as part

of one of our dozen and growing new member households, declare how she wanted to be more loving with her family.

A Mishkan members' parent in attendance heard the words I relayed from Rabbi Hannan and Ali abu Awad's non-violent activist group in the West Bank about the mutual sharing and respect of a homeland and offered that maybe they needed to rethink their views on conflict in Israel and Palestine.

Members and guests shared an appreciation for getting a window in to discernment of difficult choices on balancing Jewish spiritual practice and acts of social justice in the world. Of how to be in the horror and complacency we have shown that has contributed to the death, destruction and un-rooting of so many fellow human beings in Syria, Eretria and elsewhere AND our need to act, to open doors now that the ice has broken and shiploads of humanity are seeking safe harbor.

A member who is a writer has confounded their editors by pointing out the number of yes/but turns of a phrase in a new book they are co-editing and is challenging them to replace this with yes/and where appropriate.

Last Shabbat, Shabbat Shuvah we heard from Sarah and Graie Hagans first-hand account of their work in Ferguson and for the #blacklivesmatter movement and were introduced to the need for **RACIAL HEALING AND RACIAL JUSTICE**- not only justice and an end to mass incarceration of people of color in our country. The ripples are simply too pronounced to simply nod at.

YK is the perfect opportunity to re-boot, explore our mortality and temporality on this planet and not only examine our missteps and affirm our actions for the good.

Given the number of losses so many of us have suffered with the loss of members of our community, the challenges to the well-being of our precious

world, loss of partners, parents and even children this last year, as Rabbi Margot spoke so movingly about second day Rosh Hashannah- the intertwining reality of death in our lives that Yom Kippur invites us to dwell in, is not such a remote idea. (no sustenance, no wearing what were other living animals, no washing, no creating other living beings) and living (seeking at-one-ment, forgiveness, reparation, renewal).

No real transformation, no true teshuvah for vows/commitments broken and those we need to make are possible until we can be authentic with our in-authenticity as well. Whatever we are unwilling or unable to communicate to bring into relationship keeps us stuck- no room to say what's there or what we're running from. Life is not about always being in balance, but about being in a dance with what is happening- this produces balance.

This is the balance or life stance of "elu v'Elu" that the sages held to incorporate majority and minority viewpoints, stating that even when we come to consensus about a particular approach in our own time we must include the "AND", the "VAV" of the other, for who knows if in the future the small voice of today may not be the voice of truth and the majority in another age. On this holiest of days- when we bring our own selves to bare before each other, our relationship to God or Not God as we experience and understand Divinity or Ultimate Truth in our lives is also called into account.

As Rabbi Arthur Green, writes from a neo-hasidic Reconstructionist perspective, in *Seek My Face, Speak my Name*, (p. 19). *God is both being and becoming, noun and verb, stasis and process. All of being is One in a single simultaneity in God and yet God is as the same time process without end."*

It may also be a day we can honor and grow beyond old ideas of ourselves, others, even God. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, whose philosophy of reconstructing Jewish life laid the foundation for our stream of Judaism to flow in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, said one of the main opportunities and challenges of Yom Kippur is to grow beyond a Pediatric relationship with our God-ideas and religious inheritances. Many of us are still living freeze-dried religious lives (sometimes opting for the word spiritual as a way around this locked place). Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, z”l, reminded us that the word religion comes from the Latin, to “re-lig”- reconnect the ligaments, the bonding and connecting points that enable us to move and live in this world.

The early sages knew this place well. They walked on the smoldering ashes of their universe as they knew it and chose to prepare a new way to find meaning and purpose and be of sacred service in a world that burned down around them.

In ***Baba Metzia 59a/b*** R. Eleazar said:¹¹ Since the destruction of the Temple, the gates of prayer are locked, for it is written, *Also when I cry out, he shuts out my prayer.*¹² Yet though the gates of prayer are locked, the gates of tears are not, for it is written, *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears.*¹³...

They go on to discuss whether a particular oven is pure or not: which, instead of being made in one piece, was made in a series of separate portions with a layer of sand between each. R. Eliezer maintains that since each portion in itself is not a utensil, the sand between prevents the whole structure from being regarded

as a single utensil, and therefore it is not liable to uncleanness. The Sages however hold that the outer coating of mortar or cement unifies the whole, and it is therefore liable to uncleanness.

R. Eliezer declared it clean, and the Sages declared it unclean; and this was the oven of 'Aknai.¹ ...It has been taught: On that day R. Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument,³ but they did not accept them. Said he to them: 'If the halachah agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!' Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place — others affirm, four hundred cubits. 'No proof can be brought from a carob-tree,' they retorted.

Again he said to them: 'If the halachah agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!' Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards — 'No proof can be brought from a stream of water,' they rejoined.

Again he urged: 'If the halachah agrees with me, let the walls of the schoolhouse prove it,' whereupon the walls inclined to fall. But R. Joshua rebuked them, saying: 'When scholars are engaged in a halachic dispute, why interfere?' They (the walls) did not fall, in honor of R. Joshua, nor did they resume the upright, in honor of R. Eliezer; and they are still standing thus inclined.

Again he said to them: 'If the halachah agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: 'Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halachah agrees with him!' But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven.'⁴ What did he mean by this? — Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no

*attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, after the majority must one incline.*⁵

R. Nathan met Elijah⁶ and asked him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour? — He laughed [with joy], he replied, saying, 'My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me.'

As of today Pope Francis is in the “house”- arriving just in time in Isaiah-like style to shake the complacent with his “Hineni” and challenging us to stand and say “here I am” in response. One of the places that he, like the ancient sages, is inviting us to transcend inherited mindset and even reinterpret God’s voice and the lineage of scripture is the earth we are of itself:

From Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light www.paipf.org:

Redefining Progress There is a tendency to believe that every increase in power means “an increase of ‘progress’ itself”, an advance in “security, usefulness, welfare and vigor” as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such. The fact is that our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. ...But human beings are not completely autonomous. Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence. In this sense, we stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. ... Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. Laudato Si, ¶105, ¶194

Climate Justice- The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest”. For example, the depletion of fishing reserves especially hurts small fishing communities without the means to replace those resources; water pollution particularly affects the poor who cannot buy bottled water; and rises in the sea level mainly affect impoverished coastal populations who have nowhere else to go. ¶48

-- From the “Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis,” 2015, co-authored by Rabi Arthur Waskow and others, that I enthusiastically signed, “The unity of justice and Earth-healing is also taught by our experience today: The worsening inequality of wealth, income, and political power has... direct impact on the climate crisis. ~~On the one hand, great Carbon Corporations not only make their enormous profits from wounding the Earth, but then use these profits to purchase elections and to fund fake science to prevent the public from acting to heal the wounds. On the other hand,~~ the poor in America and around the globe are the first and the worst to suffer from the typhoons, floods, droughts, and diseases brought on by climate chaos. So we call for a new sense of eco-social justice – a tikkun olam that includes tikkun tevel , the healing of our planet. We urge those who have been focusing on social justice to address the climate crisis, and those who have been focusing on the climate crisis to address social justice.

Without bringing insights into concrete action, they drift away (hence mitzvot, spiritual practice, etc). AND...we need to be willing to be with “I don’t know”. Confusion is often our way of managing “I don’t know” what to do, or “I have so many simultaneous feelings, thoughts, commitments, demands” and the challenges are so immense what could I possibly do?”

To deal with our fears of change we need to get in with them and explore, develop a non-anxious relationship with them, and with the places we have sinned intentionally and missed the mark. A great spiritual issue is not whether we are happy, sad, angry, but whether we can BE with these states.

Do we want control or freedom? We are not just our circumstances- yet we need to face them. We are not only our feelings, yet we experience them. No matter what we do or don’t do- there is a consequence- yet if we don’t try, nothing can change. Whatever we justify persists and can keep us from taking risks.

“Vav: or “AND” consciousness, our ability to hold multiple perspectives and realities as part of a sacred whole is a way of being in the world, we will need this not only for our own individual and communal sake, but to address the core challenges to our lives, to the racial, economic, environmental, class and social justice we proudly pursue.

And to this I add a great Sufi Poet's mevlana jelaluddin rumi - 13th century ancient

“Vav” consciousness prayer: *“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.”*

Let us go forward in this truth together.

(Chanting): Isaiah: If you refrain from trampling My Sabbatical time

And from being busy-busy

On My restful day and in the fuller rhythm --

Through My year of releasing Earth from overwork;

If you will not only call these times of Pause delightful

But also turn far from your usual way

And set aside your driven-work and chatter

To be yourselves the rays by which God's Holiness

Can turn this world into a radiant joy —

Then indeed you will find delight in YHWH.

Then — when you feed others — I will let you eat your fill.

For then — when you have joined the lowly —

I will set you all with Me, in the Majesty of Nurture

Astride the heights of Earth.

Now! For this word comes from the Mouth that Breathes all life.