

Shanah Tovah. The Tosefta, a compilation of Jewish law of the second century teaches:

“A person might think, Since the House of Shammai declare unclean and the House of Hillel clean, this one prohibits and that one permits, how, then, can I learn Torah?

Scripture says, “Words...the words...These are the words..’ All the words have been given by a single Shepherd, one God created them, one Provider gave them, the Lord of all deeds, blessed be God, has spoken them. So make yourself a heart of many rooms and bring into it the words of the House of Shammai and the words of the House of Hillel, the words of those who declare unclean and the words of those who declare clean.” (Tosefta, Sotah 7:12)

Our tradition has a beautiful way of continually surprising me with the wisdom I need to hear and learn- at the moment I need to learn it. “Make yourself a heart of many rooms” where you and the world you encounter can hold opposing truths and they can both be right. I believe this to be the single hardest thing to do as a human being and that is our work. Today in this season of reflection and everyday as we approach the world. It is the work of the Jew.

It is to see the world with complexity. To hold a multiplicity of truths and to understand that we exist in a world with multiple truths. It is to carry our past, our history, our narrative, our Torah, our joy, our persecution AND to live in the present with our achievements as a people and a vision for where we want to go.

In the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf liturgy, we encounter 3 major themes: Malchuyot (God rules), Zichronot (God Remembers) and Shofarot (God Redeems).

In Malchuyot we affirm the sovereignty of God. We say that God rules now and forever...What God are we talking about? I want to suggest some ways of relating to the ONE, Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu, the Ribono shel Olam...

We build our lives in binaries...with boundaries. I live in my house and my neighbor lives in her house. I like kale salad, I don't like fried foods. I want more time in quiet, I need less demands. I have internal instincts of what I feel is right and wrong and how one ought to behave in the world. My socks go in the top drawer and my tshirts go in the bottom drawer. Organized just so.

But there are moments in our lives when we feel stretched beyond the boundaries of binaries and ushered gently into unitive experiences. Experiences when the very boundaries, contours of our everyday lives seem to lift and disappear. Experiences such as falling in love, encountering the beauty of and vastness of the natural world, floating in the ocean.

These moments, I would like to suggest are a window into the energy of the Ein Sof- the never-ending—a mystical Jewish understanding of God. Rabbi David Cooper writes:

As nothing can be separated from it [Ein Sof], everything is interconnected in a Oneness, a unity, that cannot be divided. Things that in relative reality appear to be polar opposites—light and dark, hot and cold, male and female, determinism and free will, heaven and earth, good and evil, and so forth—are in absolute terms inevitably contained in the Oneness of

Boundlessness.

For those of us who have experienced this boundlessness, even a glimpse, it is a place that we wish to encounter continually. But also must hold in ourselves that according to the mystics, we, humanity, lives in the world of yesh—of object separateness...I am me and you are you. There are lines and contours and different organs, but within that world of Yesh the energy of God- the boundless connection is possible to tap into if we spend the time to develop the practice of connection.

It is the practice of living in a heart with many rooms.

The next theme---Zichronot- is the concept of memory- in the liturgy we ask God to remember us, to remember the days of old and our covenant. It is as if we are walking God through a storybook of the past- of our connection, of our promises, of our greatest family memories. But it is not just nostalgia, it is remembering so we can be redeemed, we can be healed, we can be written in the book of life and live life with the greatest dimensions of love and openness.

This summer as we were all thrust into the terror of the situation in Israel- the murder of Eyal, Naftali, and Yifrach zichronam livracha- the thousands of rockets that terrorized Israelis from the north to the south.. another war, another failed ceasefire. It felt and it feels like it will never stop. In moments of crisis or liminal space it is helpful to remind ourselves of who we are. What is Israel to us?

It is the place that our people have longed to return for thousands of years. It is the actualization of a dream held for centuries that our people would return to the land of the avot and the imahot,

our founding mothers and fathers and to control our own destiny instead of living under the uncertainty, scrutiny and persecution of other nations. In his book *Under this Blazing Light* Amos Oz writes:

Here we have set our sights on standards which have no parallel in any other nation. Many of our agonies spring from the fact that the Zionist enterprise was born out of monumental visions and not from some piecemeal attempt at minor reforms. Here, in the land our fathers loved, we used to sing. "All our hopes will be fulfilled." Notice "all our hopes." Not just a single hope or two. You can still sense, beneath the surface, this demand: to be the most or else to be damned. The most moral, or socialist, or religious, or sophisticated, or strong or clever or creative- each strand make its own uncompromising demand. All these demands yearn for the ultimate, and are not prepared to settle for anything less. There is admittedly an element of collective hysteria in this fervor, and even a measure of secret national lunacy. But I prefer this lunacy to the state of mind of docile, conformist nations...

Any of us who have spent time in the land know this to be true. Life is more intense, you cannot escape the political realities, the constant question of vision, of unrest and of the complexity of voices knowing the way forward. The quality of life there takes on a very different character. Each day full of the ultimate- engaging in this thousand year old dream- to create our own destiny and it is so intense that sometimes it is hard to live there.

David Hartman, *alav hashalom* writes, "To see the living reality of the State of Israel in its cities, its agriculture, its hospitals, and its social welfare and immigrant absorption programs is to witness the translation of the belief in a creator God into the living history

of a people. The strength of the Zionist revolution emerged from its capacity to restructure reality on the basis of Jewish hopes and aspirations.”

And also, with all of the demand for the “ultimate” he writes “living in Israel demands a “Talmudic” concern with details. If you ignore or are sloppy with particulars, you ultimately destroy the spirituality of this country. And this country has two constitutencies- one that lives there and another (all of us Jews who do not) but relate to Israel out of spiritual need and concern.

It is the place where the ultimate is tried and where it also can fail and when it does, it becomes an international story and a reflection of who we are as a people. This summer saw such a reality with the nightmare of the killing of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, alav hashalom. He is a part of our story now too.

And the tradition continues to whisper: “Make for yourself a heart of many rooms...”

And then there is shofarot...the call for Redemption. It is that moment of the splitting of the sea.. when the Israelites are being chased by the Egyptians and God splits the sea so that they can leave oppression and walk towards freedom through the sea on dry ground with the sea walls on their right and their left---and yet, for us readers of the Bible we know that the splitting of the sea, the moment of redemption was also followed with hard work. The work of wandering in the wildnerness for 40 years, of building trust within community and building trust in God, the work of learning how to live as free people and not as slaves. It did not come without work and it did not come as we might have envisioned redemption.

What we know of redemption from our tradition is that it is the discipline and practice of living with opposites. Of opening our hearts to the existence of binaries living side by side. It is a people who just witnessed miraculous redemption- plagues, the splitting of the sea AND at the next moment murmur of returning because the unknown is scary. Redemption is not easy.

I am not a politician, I am not an expert on the Middle East and certainly don't have access to the kind of intelligence that these professionals do. But I know for certain that without clear vision of where we want to go and a reminder of who we are, we cannot realize redemption. Not in ourselves, not in our people and not on our precious land.

In Hartman's words "Zionism gives expression to a people's refusal to define what is possible solely on the basis of what is given; it reflects the concept of "will" implicit in the doctrine of creation. "Let there be" expresses the rejection of the eternity of the universe because it captures the essential principle of a worldview predicated on belief in the possibility of change and novelty."

It is the very place where we say to establish a State amongst our neighbors who hate us is impossible, but we will. And we did. To become a strong people again from a position of weakness and near annihilation- is impossible, but we did.

We must remind ourselves that we are dreamers and we are not just dreamers but we are a people that know how to turn dreams into reality. But what we have to remember is the ancient saying "make yourself a heart of many rooms."

Amos Oz says beautifully: " I believe in a Zionism that faces facts,

that exercises power with restraint, that sees the Jewish past as a lesson, but neither as a mystical imperative nor as an insidious nightmare; that sees the Palestinian Arabs as Palestinian Arabs, and neither as camouflaged reincarnation of the ancient tribes of Canaan nor as a shapeless mass of humanity waiting for us to form it as we see fit: a Zionism also capable of seeing itself as others may see it; and finally, a Zionism that recognizes both the spiritual implications and the political consequences of the fact that this small tract of land is the homeland of two peoples fated to live facing each other, willy-nilly, because no God and no angel will come to judge between right and right. The lives of both, the lives of all of us, depend on the hard, tortuous and essential process of learning to know each other in the curious landscape of the beloved country.

May our hearts build many rooms and may we live to see peace.
Amen.