

Ani yisheinah v'libi er. Shir HaShirim (The Song of Songs) teaches these words- I am asleep but my heart is awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: "Open to me- pitchi li-achoti, rayati, yonati, tamati- my sister, my love, my dove, my pure one. The text goes on ---the one who is asleep says- but I have taken off my coat, and washed my feet...I can't get up...not now.

The midrash, Shir HaShirim rabbah teaches that when the verse says I am asleep but my heart is awake- "my heart" refers to HaKadosh Baruch Hu...God. Though the Jew sleeps and loses contact with the One, God still resides in the Jew's heart. Always there waiting, knocking, gently calling for us to return.

So let's unpack this, what does it mean that God is knocking, from within us! And we are sleeping...or running, or avoiding...or fearful...

Let's take a look at the character of Jonah, the book which we read this afternoon. What a brilliant story to bring in the midst of this very wonderful and difficult day of standing in the presence of our flaws, of our fears, our anxiety...Did you ever make a mistake...maybe say the wrong thing to someone, tell a little lie, not stand up for what is right and then upon mulling it over—realizing you have done something wrong—desire deep down to run, and to run fast? Away from yourself, away from your "sin". In the fear, you do not own up to what you have done...you try to cover it up. Well, it was unintentional. "I was not aware of the larger situation here" or lie, "I didn't do that" "It wasn't me!". These are all ways

we run and hide instead of standing before the holy act of teshuva and owning our wrongs our fears, our humanity.

Jonah does just this! God asks Jonah to go to Nineveh, to warn the people that if they do not repent, God will destroy them. Instead of taking the command and acting...Jonah runs...trying to get away. Yet everywhere Jonah goes, God is there. In the belly of the ship, in the ocean, in the Big Fish...Jonah finally gives up when he realizes he cannot outrun God. Aviva Zornberg teaches in her book

“The energy of his desire to escape is palpable, even as it is thwarted at every turn. He tries every direction of evasion, heaven and hell, sea and land. Mythic opposites draw him, in experience or imagination, to elude the God who mysteriously, turns out to be holding his hand...Darkness fails to hide him from God’s eyes; God knew him before he knew himself; God’s consciousness filled his mother’s womb, shaping his protoplasm into himself. Such a God is inescapable.”

We run from lots of things in our lives. From the depths of sadness because the pain of losing someone we love is just unbearable. We run from love sometimes because it makes us feel vulnerable and scared. We run from failure- fearing that if something didn’t work in our careers, in our daily work that somehow this will define our full selves. We will never recover. And we run from fear itself. Too great is the unknown, the abyss out there, the not knowing of how this whole picture of life will work out is well, too hard to hold.

But here is the thing about running...When we run, we miss the chance for connection. Human to Human, Human to self, and Human to God. A wrong done, a fear, a loss is a crack---and a crack is always potential to let the light in and to be transformed by the holy power of human connection and Divine energy.

And when teshuva- returning, fixing, seeing, stopping, happens from a place of love...the Rambam teaches that sins are not only erased from one's "record" but transformed into merits.

Here's what that looks like in real life...

Ferguson, Missouri Saturday August 9th:

11:51 a.m. – A call comes in about a robbery at a convenience store. The dispatcher gives a description of the robber and says the suspect is walking toward the Quick Trip convenience store.

12:01 p.m. – The officer encounters Michael Brown and a friend as they walk down a street. Brown is shot to death as a result of the encounter.

Sunday Aug. 10

10 a.m. – Michael Brown, 18, was unarmed, St. Louis County Police Chief Joe Belmar [says in a news conference](#). Belmar says Brown physically assaulted the officer, and during a struggle between the two, Brown reached for the officer's gun. One shot was fired in the car followed by other gunshots outside of the car.

Brown's parents retain attorney Benjamin Crump, who represented the family of Trayvon Martin, as their counsel.

A candlelight vigil to honor Brown later turns violent. More than a dozen businesses are vandalized and looted. More than 30 people are arrested and two police officers suffered injuries, police said.

10 a.m. – Hundreds gather outside the Ferguson Police Department to demand justice for Brown's death. Police arrest at least seven people.

6 p.m. – Community members and leaders meet and pray at a meeting hosted by the NAACP.

8 p.m. – Several gather again on West Florissant Avenue in Ferguson, and police use tear gas to disperse crowds that did not protest peacefully.

Wednesday Aug. 13

Tensions rising

Police begin to throw tear gas at protestors in Ferguson.

Tensions continue to rise for the next several days.

This is a situation filled with fear, with running, with hiding. Who killed this unarmed boy? Fear from the black community about their safety amidst a national police force that has killed many unarmed black men and boys around the country. Remember Trayvon?

On August 17th- something incredible happens. It will not solve the pain, but it is the first time real teshuva begins. Captain Ron

Johnson, one of the police leading the effort in Ferguson comes to a unity rally in Greater Grace Church to speak. Capt. Johnson is an African American man in a blue uniform. He gets up in front of the crowd of thousands, in front of the family of Michael Brown and says this:

“I want to start out by talking to Mike Brown’s family. I want you to know that my heart goes out to you and I say that I am sorry. I wear this uniform and I should stand up here and say that I am sorry. (The crowd roars with applause)

“This is my neighborhood. You are my family, friends. **And I am you.** I will stand to protect you. To protect your right to protest.

Last night I met some members of Michael Brown’s family. And they brought tears to my eyes and shame to my heart.

When this is over I’m going to go into my son’s room. My black son. Who wears his pants saggy, his hat cocked to the side, got tattoos on his arms. But, that is my baby. ”

“And we all ought to be thanking the Brown’s for Michael. Because Michael is going to make it better for our sons to be better black men. Better for our daughters to be better black women. Better for me so I can be a better black father. And, our mothers, so they can be even better than they are today. Lets continue to show the nation who we are. But, when these days are over and Michael’s family is still weeping, still on their knees praying. No matter what positive comes out, we still need to get on our knees and pray. We need to thank Mike for his life. We need to thank him for the change that he is going to make in America. I love you, I stand tall with you and I’ll see you out there.”

That's teshuva. That's not running. That's standing, standing in front of the fear, the pain, the hurt. Owning it and I will tell you Captain Johnson's words did not take away the pain of the black community or the pain of Michael Brown's family, but in that moment, when he stood in front of that community, in his uniform and he said I'm sorry, I'm ashamed. A tikkun went up from this earth. Something was fixed. The world felt a little lighter, a little less broken. A little more holy.

Captain Johnson didn't speak from fear, or hate, or shame. He spoke from love. He did teshuvah from love. And that day something was restored.

In Shir Hashirim Rabbah- that same text that talks about God knocking and us sleeping, God says, "my children, create for me a small opening of Teshuvah, as tiny as the head of a pin, and I will open for you openings that even wagons and chariots can pass through." Just stop running, stop avoiding. Just stand and make a little opening and I will come to you and help you to be transformed.

Today as we sing our hearts out Al het shehatanu lifanecha, for the sin we have committed against you, Ashamnu, we have sinned- as we contemplate who we are--- let's stop running and let's start standing. Let's own our sins, let's own when we are wrong. Let's show up and listen to that holy knocking- let's listen to that call that is deep in our hearts. Because it's not

just for us and our relationships...it's how the world is changed. Arik
Einstein wrote a beautiful song about just this:

You and I will change the world and then all will follow. You and I will try.
You and I will start at the beginning. It will be difficult. But You and I will
change the world.