

**Kol Nidre 5779**  
Rabbi Mario Karpuj

Human Being, Rise up.  
Rise up, for you have the strength to do so.  
You have wings of the spirit,  
wings of powerful eagles.  
Do not deny them, or they will deny you.  
Seek them, and you will find them .

Rabbi Avraham Kook, Orot Hakodesh I, pp. 83-84

בן אדם, עלה למעלה עלה  
כי כוח עז לך  
יש לך כנפי רוח  
כנפי נשרים אבירים  
אל תכחש במ  
פן יכחשו לך  
דרוש אותם ויימצאו לך מיד

Since the first time I heard this song earlier this year, I've been wondering why it moves me so much.

Is it the melody, its simple but powerful lyrics?

I believe it is related to the fact that it accomplishes something we most of the time forget. It reminds us of the Divine spark we were charged with preserving inside our souls on the day we were born.

It succeeds to connect me, with my purest self.

Rav Avraham Kook wrote these words as part of a poem in which he urges us to contemplate the light of the שכינה, the Divine presence that permeates all existence, not as an abstract concept presented to us from the distance, but as the reality in which we live our lives.

He then invites us, in the words that became the song we were singing, to ascend, keep climbing, to rise up! For each one of us have the strength. We all have wings of spirit. Do not forsake them, he warns us, lest they forsake us. If we seek them with all our might, they, in return will find us immediately.

To ascend, to climb up, Rav Kook reminds us, we need to use our inner strength. Or, in his words, our spiritual wings.

We should feel at ease with this simple idea, with this awesome gift given to us when we were born.

But we don't. We actually feel it is really hard. Most of the time, we even forget that we even have that ability to reach new heights.

And then comes Yom Kippur. We open our Machzor and read about the gates of heaven opening in front of us, ready to welcoming us and our prayers. And we feel lost.

Are we supposed to imagine that we can indeed ascend to previously unknown heights?

We feel inadequate, overwhelm by the immensity of the task and by the small window of opportunity.

How in the world, we want to scream, am I supposed to do this in the next 25 hours?

How do I even begin to walk the path that will take me to the gate of heaven before it is too late?

And, by the way, what do we really mean by this deadline at the end of Nehila?

Don't get me wrong. My soul loves the imagery of those gates opening in front of us and the rush of reaching for them before they close as we blow the Shofar tomorrow evening.

But do we really believe in a God whose "office" has a limited time to deal with customer services?

My friends, let me share with you tonight, on the most sacred evening of the year, my complete and pure faith that the gates of heaven, do not exist.

This may be disappointing news to some of you, for sure they are to Bob Dylan who has been feeling like he's knocking on heaven's door for decades now.

But when you think about it, that image goes against everything we believe and do during the rest of the year.

Our tradition never says to us: Look, right now, God is busy with something else, but not to worry, in some days, or weeks or months, the Yamim Noraim are coming and for 10 days, you'll have God's undivided attention.

The only gates I believe in, my friends, are the gates of the cages we built around ourselves.

We hear Rav Kook's invitation to reclaim our spiritual wings and to fly high to make our dreams a reality and we feel uncomfortable. We feel trapped in the prison cells of our own creation.

And inside them, even if we found our wings, we wouldn't have enough space to really spread them out.

Those cages may feel very real, but there are only a creation of our imagination, of our insecurities, of our fears of losing those things we have while pursuing those things we really want.

We worry about what the future will hold for us if we venture through the wrong gate. We are paralyzed by the dread of choosing one gate only to find out we should have chosen a different one.

If you're a millennial, you know what I'm talking about. For the rest of you, welcome to the world of FOMO and FOBO (the fear of missing out and the fear of better options)

How are we supposed to deal with the anxiety they create in our souls.

One answer I'm sure many of you have heard about, its mindfulness, the Buddhist practice to develop self-knowledge and wisdom that gradually lead to what is described as the complete freedom from suffering.

But before any of us ever heard of mindfulness, our ancestors were writing for many centuries about these issues. They just didn't call it by that name.

One of these works, a book of Jewish ethical teachings composed in Middle-Age Germany by an anonymous author is called Orchot Tzadikim. The book advocates improving one's character and exercising balance in one's life.

What's the recipe for that? Well, the author chose to name each chapter of the book as one of the gates of those prisons we built around us. Learning about them, and having the courage to open the right ones, is what our lives is about.

An Israeli band called Alma transformed the table of contents of that book into a song. It really comes across like a prayer:

שער הגאווה, שער הענווה, שער הבושה, שער העזות

There is a gate of pride, a gate of shame, a gate of love, a gate of hate.

שער האהבה, שער השנאה, שער הרחמים, שער הקנאה

There is a gate of fear, a gate of remorse, a gate of anger, a gate of joy.

שיפתח בי שער...שער אהבה, שער השמחה, שער האמת

Let me open a gate...the gate of love, of joy, of truth.

Envisioning the opening of some of those gates we all have inside, the songs becomes a prayer hoping for the wisdom to open gates of Love, of Joy and Truth.

And this is my prayer for all of us in this awesome day that have just began. I pray for the courage to stop worrying about the pearly gates and start focusing on the gates we have created for ourselves.

May this be the year in which we remember our amazing potential to ascend to new heights.

The year in which we decide to venture outside of our comfort zone, into that scary and auspicious place in which we can spread our spiritual wings and climb up to achieve our dreams.