Yom Kippur 5775

On the first day of RH we spoke of the 6 questions that you will asked be on the day of Judgment (Yom HaDin). Today is Yom HaDin and I hope that you have given some thought to them over the seven days.

As for many questions in life there are no generic answers and each of us will choose how to respond to them in our own way.

The essence of this YK day –etzem hayom hazeh– as it is referred to – is that we are offered this day to be freed of the pat answers and the rationalizations that stand in our way as we confront ourselves –those hidden parts of ourselves. As our liturgy reminds us God is examines and searches our innards and our hearts so no place is absent of this inquiry. There is no way to cover up our deepest thoughts –they are always, in some form or another, displayed in the world -in our relationships and in our aspirations.

The Shalosh esreh middot– Adonai, Adonai, el rakhum vekhanun, etc with which we begin our selikhot during the five of Yom Kippur modulates the pace of the day- it is the key- the secret password that allows us to enter a safe space for us to voice our faults –together in unison – to become aware that our transgressions against each other are also Divine offenses. Our behaviors to each other that we have worked hard on repairing until we reached this very day –etzem hayom hazeh- can now paraded for all to see and hear- As we return to our Divine source climbing the ladder of our al-khets –back to life --yes I have missed the mark and I’m coming on back to you.

The impressive communal ritual of Yom Kippur, especially at the final service of the day, Ne’ila, which many of you can attest, is remarkably celebrated here at TBZ. If you haven’t experienced it- you should. It’s worth delaying your break-fast to after Yom Kippur ends in order to be with us this early evening at 5:45.

It is at Ne’ila that you see the power of etzem hayom hazeh–the power of this very day to transform us. At Ne’ila we are transformed from beseechers for forgiveness into protesters storming the gates of Heaven before they close. Our powerful voices–reinvigorated despite a day of abstinence –are raised into a
declaration of One-ness and unity—it is perhaps why the Day of Atonement might be read more accurately if it was called the Day of At-One-Ment.

The voices of Ne’ila, the time of the closing of the gate, are both soulful and joyous—both forlorn and hopeful—both sober and intoxicated. and we succeed every year in putting our foot into the gate—keeping it partially open all year long. This is our protest - don’t close the gate.

We end with shouts – with declarations:

We declare Sh’ma yisrael hashem elohenu adonai ekhad once.

Try this translation of the Sh’ma out for size:

Sh’ma Yisrael: Listen and Hear O Israel—God-wrestlers-those who struggle for attachment to the Divine and to the Other- those who enter into covenants with the Divine and each other

YHVH: the four lettered depiction of the dynamic mystery— that which can never be quantified that which cannot be pronounced— that which had no name— that can only be expressed by Breath— by being alive— that Gods us— that provides the reality upon which I can gaze— that Essence of Essences— that force which underlies all existence— that is One— Unique, Unified, Singular— that which permeates the weave of all existence into an inter-dependent tapestry

Baruch shem kevod malkhuto leolam va-‘ed- is shouted three times.

Praise the name of God’s glorious sovereignty for all time

This phrase which is read in an undertone through the year is a whispery response to the grand demand of the Sh’ma. On Yom Kippur we let is loose and articulate it loudly.

Our reality is to be praised— it is the stuff of life— what we make of this reality is in our doing— Melekh can be thought of as the organizing principle of reality— as one of our readings in the musaf service offers us. This timeless principle is articulated in the world governed by physics. It is also within us as we strive to singularity, the One-ness that is demanded of us at the end of the Sh’ma.
What is my own organizing principle? What governs my life? How do I integrate the different parts of myself? This integration in people is often called integrity.

Praised be that I am ruled by integrity as the organizing principle of my life.

God-wrestlers, children of god-wrestlers these are our struggles.

Finally we shout out responsively:

_YHVH YAH_ – the four letter name of mercy we found in _Sh’ma_

_Hu ha-Elohim_ : is shouted 7 times – plaintive cries from deep in the belly and deep in the soul – yes we are now fully aware of the balance of mercy and justice on which to build our lives.

Yah, my breath, my life force, is what rules me. My breath is the Elohim – that God-name of Judgment, of boundary and strength the force that balances mercy Elohim is often understood to be nature – _haTeva_ – it shares the same numerical letter value in _gematria_, Jewish numerology.

_HaTeva_ – the natural – _haElohim_ brings us back to Eden – to the edenic harmony That, of course, was ended by judgment for our desire for flux and change for knowing the two sides of life – good and evil – by making our life path a trail to balance the two.

_Yah Hu haElohim_: the balance of mercy and justice.

These phrases are not sung with sweet melodies – they are shouts – as in the sounds of demonstrations, of protesters – reminding ourselves and the world- that beneath the conflict, hatred and pain we see around us there is one-ness, interdependence- both in time and space, and finally that Yah – the breath of life- what can never be captured, the forever undefinable grand entity that sustains our universe is our _Elohim_. We experience our own rebirth to ourselves with new hopes and aspirations. Perhaps, these shouts are the screams of childbirth as we rebirth ourselves.
So we end Ne’ila on the note of *gevurah* – strength and boundary.

We derive comfort from the steadfast nature of the universe and its natural order. It reminds us that we are mere creatures sharing a planet; a planet we must vow to protect; a planet that should unite us and not divide us. We put our foot in the door at Ne’ila-the gates are never truly locked.

This gevurah also helps us withstand the fragility of leaving our homes to the fragile harvest booth.

The Sukkot harvest that follows immediately after Yom Kippur is really the final step in the story of rebirth- even though nature seems to be dying to us –we bring in the fruits of our labors and efforts and we invites guests to share in this bounty as we sit in harvest booths- we invite guests of the spirit – the patriarchs and matriarchs, etc. and our friends and neighbors to

We all sit together and sing joyously, imbibing as much as needed for the merriment to mount, to warm our hearts in the these October evenings in the sukkah and as we are about to fall into dormancy –laying low –hidden- we end with celebration of our connection to the Tree of Life –the Torah forever flourishing –our bridge back to the Garden of Eden. This when we bring back mercy to balance our lives.