Personal Prayer, Yom Kippur, late service

_Y’hi ratzon milfanekhah_… May it be your will… that this Day of Atonement transform fear into compassion, paralysis into courage, distance from you into a fountain of your loving-kindness.

For me, and perhaps for some of you here today, Rebbe Nachman’s song: _Kol ha’olam kulo, gesher tzar me’od_. The whole world is a very narrow bridge—rings painfully true. _Ribono shel ‘olam_, you know that I have long been afraid. Whether it was the Defense Department manual on building a nuclear bomb shelter (in Miami Beach, no less!) that I ordered in 1963, or the life choices I made believing these were the way it had to be—rolling like a tumbleweed through my own life—you know that I have long been afraid.

A book I know calls fear “an evil and corroding thread.” It adds, “the fabric of our existence was shot through with it.” For me, this, too, rings true.

King David, who seems to have anticipated my situation precisely, poignantly asked in Psalm 27: _Adonai ori v’yishi mimi ira Adonai ma’oz hayyai mimi efhad?:_ The Lord is my light and my salvation, from whom shall I fear; The Lord is the stronghold of my life, from whom shall I be afraid? How, _Ribono shel ‘olam_, do I get to such a feeling of certainty? When I have no clear notion of who you are and how you are to be found, how do I sing, with David, a song of praise that acknowledges the dangers inherent in living while standing strong and unshaken on that _gesher tzar me’od_, that very narrow bridge?

If, as Rebbe Nachman concludes, the essential thing is to be not afraid—_v’ha’ikar lo l’faheid klal_—how do I do that? Not only on _Yom Kippur_ or during the _Yamim Nora’im_, not only on _Shabbat_ morning, surrounded by a singing, _ruah_-filled community, but in each moment that remains to me.

Psalm 27, verse 9, “_al tasteir panekha mimeni_”—hide not your face from me—is my predicament… I have often lived either in ignorance of or with my back turned to your Countenance. And so today, my prayer _Ein Sof_, the Without End, is: tuck me under your wing… grant that I may feel the slight breeze of _kanfei haShekhinah_, the wings of your spiritual presence. For I am afraid… and I cannot become unafraid by myself.