The first time I visited a detainee at the Suffolk County House of Correction, nine months ago, I was very nervous. I wasn’t sure how my visit could be helpful for the young man from Guatemala, detained by ICE at the border. I knew that he didn’t know any English and being a Spanish speaking clergy would be helpful, but beside being able to hear him out, I couldn’t really help with much. I was also very nervous, because it was my first time inside of a jail. After 30 minutes speaking with this man and hearing his story, I asked him if he wanted to go back or stay a bit more, we still had time in the interview room. He looked at me and asked: “Is it ok if we stay here, even quietly, for a little bit more?” And we did.

A couple of weeks ago, I visited another young man there. He fled from Nicaragua after being shot, leaving behind his parents, his wife and a two year old child. He had already passed his credible fear interview at the ICE office in Burlington. Credible fear is when a person demonstrates that he or she has a credible fear of returning to his or her home country and therefore cannot be subject to deportation from the United States. Yet, unbelievable as this may sound, after passing the interview this young man was somehow “lost” in the bureaucratic and chaotic system of ICE and was not able to get a court date to continue the process of receiving asylum (by now, we have been able to find an attorney, he has a court day and we hope things will take a positive turn for him shortly). Try to imagine how it feels to be lost in a bureaucracy, to realize that because of misplaced paperwork you no longer truly exist for those who hold your fate in their hands… How profoundly painful that must be. When I left and we said goodbye he thanked me for visiting him, he said to me with tears in his eyes, that he felt almost as if his mother had visited him, that he felt cared for and loved. We spoke for a long time about his fears and about his loneliness and I realized that just by being there with him I was conveying something very powerful, I was saying to him HINENI, I am here for you, WE are here with you. YOU Truly exist and you are NOT ALONE.

That same day, I returned to my regular life and after picking up my daughters from camp and daycare, my little one fell and asked me to kiss the “bubu” on her knee. I kissed it and after a moment, she returned to her joyful and energetic playing. As she went back running, I laughed at this well known ritual we all do of pretending that the kiss can magically make the pain disappear. But then I remembered the interaction I had that morning with the young man in detention, and understood the power and the magic of stopping for a moment to kiss what hurts, the communication and healing that is embodied in that act.
In that moment, I thought to myself, perhaps this funny childish ritual conveys important lesson which we need to learn and practice much more in our lives. When I kiss her bubu, I am saying HINENI, I am here for you, and you are not alone.

We learn in the Talmud:

"אמר רב שמעון בנו שמעון שמעון רפאות השמנה היא רפאות לعالم"

Rabbi Ḥama bar Hanina said: Great is repentance, as it brings healing to the world.

These are difficult times. Daily we witness the impact of inhumane immigration policies, of gun violence, of voter supression, of objection to LGBTQ rights and of so much more that is impossible to list. It is easy to experience a loss of hope, a lack of clarity on how it is at all possible to move forward and bring some healing to this world. This talmudic teaching may offer some guidance as to the nature of the personal and societal teshuva we need to do. In order to bring some relief, some healing to ourselves, to our loved ones, to our communities, to our country we must be able to say HINENI.

My friend and colleague, Rabbi David Jaffe, teaches in his book “Changing the World, from the Inside Out” that bringing positive social change to any system requires deep self-awareness, caring, determination, and long-term commitment. To bring about change, we must cultivate the inner resources we already have. In the words of Rabbi Jaffe “the repair on the outside could not be divorced from repair on the inside”2. Or as Ebn challenged us at the beginning of the selichot service, we ought to work on how WE, each of us, need to change and grow, so we can change the world around us.

We read today the known story of Akedat Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac. In this story, God, calls Abraham and Abraham answers HINENI, Here I am.

The word Hineni appears 178 times in the Tanach. It is spoken by people most often in response to God but it is also spoken in response to another person. In the Torah itself, the word Hineni occurs eight times – three of them occur in the second-day reading for Rosh HaShanah.3

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1 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate of Yoma 86b
3 Rabbi Amy Wallk Katz  http://www.heneshrbar.org/hineni
Dr. Erica Brown writes: “Hineni connotes a readiness and acceptance of a mission or task that often portends danger.”

Rabbi Amy Wallk Katz writes: “In the Torah, each time the word Hineni is used, it signifies a turning point, a potentially life-changing moment requiring decision, action and resolution. When the Torah uses the word Hineni, the person speaking is saying: “I hear your call. I understand what you are asking of me. And I am prepared and ready to do it, because I recognize, although it is hard, it is also important that I act.”

Hineni is also the opening word of a prayer of humble preparation for prayer addressed to God, sung by the the shaliach tzibur on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (and which Reb Moshe will recite shortly).

In one of his last songs “You Want It Darker”, the late Leonard Cohen sings “Hineni, hineni; I'm ready, my lord”. In an interview in October 2016 he said: “That declaration of readiness, no matter what the outcome, that’s a part of everyone’s soul. We all are motivated by deep impulses and deep appetites to serve, even though we may not be able to locate that which we are hoping to serve. So this is just a part of my nature and I think everybody else’s nature to offer oneself at the critical moment when the emergency becomes articulate. It’s only when the emergency becomes articulate that we can locate that willingness to serve.”

Many of us in the community have been reading the book “Just Mercy, a story of Justice and Redemption” by Bryan Stevenson throughout the month of Elul. Bryan Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending the poor, the wrongly condemned, and those trapped in the furthest reaches of our criminal justice system. In the book he writes about his work and especially about one of his first cases, the case of Walter McMillian, a young man sentenced to die for a murder he didn't commit.

There is a chapter in the book called “I am here”. In that chapter Stevenson tells about Mrs. Williams, an older black woman who showed up at the courtroom for McMillian dressed elegantly as if she was going to church. Stevensons tells us about her elegant presence and her strong desire to be there to confront the injustice. When walking into the court and after going through the metal

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5 Rabbi Amy Wallk Katz [http://www.tbespringfield.org/here-i-am-hineni](http://www.tbespringfield.org/here-i-am-hineni)

**HINENI, Here I Am:**
Healing this wounded world
Second Day Rosh Hashanah
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman
detector, she saw a dog that was guarding the entrance. At that moment she lost her composure and was overtaken by a look of absolute fear. She stood frozen and eventually walked away from the courtroom.

Later, when Stevenson tried to calm her down and asked her not to worry about missing the session, she responded: “No sir, I was supposed to be there and I wanted to be there. I tried, I tried. Lord knows I tried. Mr Stevenson, but when I saw that dog, I thought about 1965, when we gathered at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma and tried to march for our voting rights, They beat us and put those dogs on us”.

The next day, Mrs Williams appeared again the courtroom and as she walked in she said loudly: “I ain't scared of no dog”. She moved past the dog, and walked into the courtroom, she sat down near the front of the courtroom and turned to Stevenson with a broad smile and announced. “Attorney Stevenson, I’m HERE”. Stevenson writes that what he understood her to be saying at that moment was - I am here because I’ve got this vision of justice that compels me to be a witness, I am here because I am supposed to be here. I am here because you can't keep me away.

HINENI.

This year I am challenging myself and inviting you to join me in thinking what being present could mean in our lives. From the simplest act of listening to our children and spouses (maybe not so simple) and to our own personal needs, to the large questions of what my community and country ask of me.

We have become a perpetually multitasking culture, using our phones and computers to be in so many different places at once that it is easy to forget to be fully present for ourselves, for our loved ones and for those around us. We forget to say HINENI when called upon.

I experienced the joy of being fully present for my children when we were on sabbatical, away from all my various obligations, and I have experienced the ease with which the full presence can be lost in all the competing calls for attention.

I have experienced the meaning in visiting congregation members in the hospital, even if the visit was short. I have seen how much that kind of visit can mean to a person and I could fully relate to that feeling of happiness for being seen, cared and loved.

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7 Bryan Stevenson. “Just Mercy, a story of Justice and Redemption”, pages 180-182

HINENI, Here I Am: Healing this wounded world
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In the book of Isaiah we read:

Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me.”

Isaiah’s courageous words not only say, Here am I, but also, send me. Send me to do your work God, send me to your people. I would add - send me to remind people that we should live in the image of the Divine. Send me to bring your presence to this world, send me to kiss the pain and send me to help bring some healing.

I want to invite us all to think about how we can each bring in the new year with a stronger awareness of the significance of being fully present in this world. And I am going to invite you to join me by saying, HINENI, HERE I AM together at the end of each sentence:

Hineni - means to be present for ourselves, caring and loving ourselves, which could mean finding time to pray, meditate, workout and eat healthy - HINENI.

Hineni - means to be present for our loved ones, our children, spouses, parents, siblings, friends, which could mean spending time with them, turning off our phones during dinner and making a priority to be with our loved ones-- HINENI.

Hineni - means to be present for our communities, for this community and for all the communities to which we belong, for the elderly, for people who need a visit, it means making a phone call and showing up in moments of sadness and in moments of simcha-- HINENI.

Hineni - means to be present and take responsibility for our communities, for TBZ, by showing up, by volunteering because the work is important and has to be done even when it is not easy - HINENI.

Hineni - means to show up at rallies and demonstration, because it matters. Hineni means to stand for what is right and raise our voices. Hineni means to be an UPstander -- HINENI.

Hineni - means to go and vote on November 6 because our civil right is an obligation and is part of our responsibility -- HINENI.

8 Isaiah 6:8

HINENI, Here I Am:
Healing this wounded world
Second Day Rosh Hashanah
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman
**Hineni** - means to name the injustice we see around us and see how we must change so we can help change happen -- **HINENI**.

**Hineni** - means to kiss the bumps and wounds of our children and believe that the love we put in the pain can heal-- **HINENI**.

**Hineni** - means to truly believe that every one of us can help heal the world. That if we bring love to the pain we encounter by being truly present, we might perhaps be doing the great act of *tshuva* that brings healing to the world- **HINENI**.

*Shana Tovah,*

Rav Claudia