

Temple Aliyah
Shavuot 2016 Sermon Slam
Naomi Litrownik

Rob and I recently saw a play at the Huntington entitled “I Was Most Alive With You”; it is based on the book of Job, in fact, the father in the story, is scratching himself when the play opens, much as Job is beset with the plague of “itchiness”. Interestingly, the play opens on a Thanksgiving meal; the Christian mother is singing “Ode to Joy” while the Jewish father is singing Hallel. The play is interspersed with the actual reading of Job; as each character’s life falls apart, Job is read again and again. It is worth mentioning that sign language is used over and over as well, as the father’s and mother’s only child, a young adult son, is deaf, and many people are signing throughout the performance....not standing in front of or to the side of the audience signing as you may have seen at public performances, but rather, each actor has a “shadow” up on stage with him/her, signing. At times, there is only signing with subtitles written above for the audience to read. It is completely silent.

The anchor in the play is the one Jewish convert, the grandmother, who imbues strength to both her son, the father, and her grandson, the deaf young man. She speaks to them about “the still small voice” that each of them has inside, “the voice” that each of them can access to derive strength. The” Kol Dimmamah Daka” that Elijah, in Kings I, Chapter 19, verse 12, hears when he is expecting G-d’s presence to be in the Wind, the Fire, the Thunder, the Storm.

This “still small voice” is the one we all yearn to hear. It is a voice that imbues meaning, essence, dignity, sacredness. What gets in the way of us hearing this voice? We can get seduced by the clamor, the static, the chaos in our lives. It is so easy to get caught up in the busy-ness, the to-do list, the what ifs and if onlys. It is so easy to feel distracted by the sounds all around us.

What does it mean to listen to the silence? To immerse oneself in the Pause between the inbreath and the outbreath? That space between in and out has been named a “Sacred Pause” by author Tara Brach in her book “Radical Acceptance”. Think of “The silence” the Space, in between two musical notes.....What does that silence contain? To be present, to deeply listen to our own inner voice, in the moment of now, without changing anything, but rather to be aware of the breath of

life, the stillness within the chaos. Our central prayer in Judaism is the Shma, "Listen!" it says. And if we listen very very closely, only then will we hear. The Revelation, in fact, Most of the Journey of our People, from the Exodus from Egypt to the Receiving of the Torah, takes place in the Wilderness, the Midbar, which Rabbi Sheffa Gold names as "Mi- Dbar "without words". The place of silence where all speech is born. If we have a sense that we are all standing at Sinai, waiting for Revelation, how can we be truly present for this experience? How can we make meaning of our lives at any moment? Yes, there is often the thunder and the lightning; yes, there is often a great clamor.....a loud noise.....but there is much more.....there is a still small voice.....can you hear it?

I am inviting you to take the next few moments, with eyes closed if you'd like, to pay attention to what your "still small voice" may be saying to you.....does it connect you to the Awesome, the Mystery, the Divine? Can you hear it? Taking a few deep breaths, and listening..... Chag Sameach. Thank you to all of you who spoke, to all of you who listened....We are all at Sinai together tonight!!!