

Rosh Hashanah in the Round 5780

Rabbi Sarah Graff and Rabbi Amy Eilberg

Practicing Curiosity

מָה רַבּוֹ מְעַשֵּׂיךָ יי! - How great are Your works, Adonai!

From the morning service, Psalm 104

מָה רַבּוֹ? –What is great (right in front of me)?

מָה זֶה? - What is this?

Beginner's Mind

We can reclaim our capacity for encountering wonder and radical amazement and re-engage with the freshness, spaciousness, and interconnection of our lives. One way to do this is **to cultivate beginner's mind, to train ourselves to meet every moment of experience without superimposing on it preconceptions about how it should be.** ... While our society puts a premium on expertise and intellectual acumen, training in cultivating beginner's mind encourages us to adopt a mental stance of not knowing, of remaining open to the freshness of this moment without trying to define or control it, and of exploring all facets of present-moment experience with inquisitive, nonjudgmental curiosity. ... This is why our sages emphasized that "a person must teach their tongue to say 'I don't know.'" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 4a) ...

Here is an exercise to try: Imagine what it might be like to encounter someone or something you are very familiar with as if it were the first time. Maybe you've been married for 30 years. What would it be like to wake up and relate to your spouse without the build-up of preconceived notions? Though it may be scary and unsettling, encountering the ordinary and routine may suddenly feel extraordinary, making your heart swell in appreciation, awe, humility, and loving-kindness for what's right in front of you. ...

I cannot assume that I know what anything is today just because I encountered it yesterday and the day before. All I can do is encounter it as it is now, in the ever-unfolding present — fresh, radiant, and alive— with curiosity and wonder. What would happen to our prayer lives if we approached ourselves and the words of the siddur with the same orientation? To taste what this might be like, I offer the following concrete practice: Before you begin to pray, ask yourself, "What is this?" And simply respond, "I don't know!"

From "The Blessing of Curiosity," by Rabbi Sam Feinsmith

We are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have the answers.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Questions

1. What do you find amazing? When have you felt wonder?
 2. What stops you from being curious?
 3. What are the questions you want to ask yourself this Rosh Hashanah?
 4. Think of someone who is very different from you (maybe someone you know, maybe someone on the other side of the world). What might it be like to be them?
 5. Toward whom do you want to be more curious in the new year?
(spouse, child, parent, friend, coworker, strangers, those of a different race, religion, nationality, political leaning...)
- What do you want to ask them, from your most open-minded, curious place?

Hayom Harat Olam - Today is the birth of a world

הַיּוֹם הַרְת עוֹלָם, הַיּוֹם יַעֲמִיד בְּמִשְׁפָּט כָּל יְצוּרֵי עוֹלָמִים, אִם כְּבָנִים אִם פְּעֻבָּדִים.
אִם כְּבָנִים, רַחֲמֵנוּ כְּרַחֵם אָב עַל בְּנָיִם. וְאִם פְּעֻבָּדִים עֵינֵינוּ לָךְ תְּלוּיּוֹת,
עַד שֶׁתִּחַנְּנוּ וְתוֹצִיא כְּאוֹר מִשְׁפָּטֵנוּ, אִיוֹם קְדוֹשׁ.

Today is the birth of a world. Today all creation is called to judgment, whether as Your children or as Your servants. If as Your children, be compassionate with us as a parent is compassionate with children. If as Your servants, we look to You expectantly, waiting for You to be gracious to us and, as day emerges from night, to bring forth a favorable judgement on our behalf, awe-inspiring and Holy one.

Recited 3 times in Rosh Hashanah Musaf

What does curiosity have to do with judgment?

Malchuyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot - Verses for Contemplation

Malchuyot - Sovereignty

שִׁמְעֵ יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.

Listen Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One. (Deut. 6:4)

Zichronot - Remembrances

זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלַתֶּיךָ, לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר, בְּאַרְץ לֹא זְרוּעָה
Zacharti lach chesed ne'urayich,

ahavat kelulotayich, lechtech acharai bamidbar, b'erezt lo z'ruah.

I remember the affection of your youth, your love when we were betrothed
when you followed Me in the wilderness, a barren land. (Jeremiah 2:2)

Shofarot

כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּיָהּ

Kol haneshamah tehallel Yah, Halleluyah.

Let every breath of life praise Adonai, Halleluyah. (Psalm 150)