

## **Rosh Hashana I 5778- We are all out of place sometime**

Shana Tova. It's wonderful to have celebrated an entire year together. Can you believe it? A whole year passed already in our partnership together to be a place for the advancement of Judaism in Metropolitan Atlanta. You all have inspired me with your courage and your willingness to grow, to push the boundaries of what we can be. On Yom Kippur, I'm going to elaborate much more about how we're different. But today, I want to take a moment and recognize some of the similarities we have with every other congregation.

I'd like you to raise your hand if you are sitting in "your seat." By that I mean the seat you always sit in on High Holidays. We tend to sit in the same seats year after year because we feel a sense of comfort from the routine. In our seats, we feel home.

Ok, now, raise your hands if maybe you got here a little late, and someone else was sitting in "your seat." Don't be embarrassed; you're not in the wrong to feel maybe bit of annoyance, a bit of discomfort. Maybe you had that internal debate whether or not to confront the interloper who didn't realize they were sitting in *your seat*. Knowing that to do so feels a bit rude or a bit ridiculous, and on the other hand, not wanting to feel that sense of displacement for the rest of the service. You wanted to feel "home" but you weren't so sure you could in a different seat.

Finally, raise your hand if you don't have "your seats" in this place and you felt a bit of anxiety when you walked into the room, not knowing where to sit down.. Maybe you're new to town, or new to our congregation. Maybe you're not much of a shul-goer during the rest of the year. If that is the case, then maybe you were worried about sitting in somebody else's seat.

Whether you have been displaced by "others" sitting in "your seats" or whether you don't really feel like you have "your seats," I think every person desires that feeling of comfort. There's always a process of adjustment that takes place when you're in a place that is unfamiliar. If we break the word "unfamiliar" into its' root, it means "not like family." My hope is that by the end of these holidays, everyone in this room looks around and sees brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, grandparents. I want every single soul here to feel "home."

Earlier this year, I learned an interesting piece of Torah from the mathematics world called fractals. A fractal is a shape or pattern that is infinitely self similar. The closer one looks at a fractal, the more one sees the same pattern or shape, building upon itself to be a larger version of that same pattern or shape. One example of this is what's known as the Koch Snowflake

Start with an equilateral triangle, then add another equilateral triangle the opposite direction, a Jewish star. Then add equilateral triangles to every triangle that was created until the snowflake is seen. The more you zoom in, the more Stars of David you see, and as you zoom out, the same Star of David is seen.

These fractal patterns can be found throughout nature – small building blocks becoming larger forms of the same pattern. A snail shell is a fractal pattern. Romanesco Broccoli is a fractal pattern. River networks are fractal patterns. There is even a theory that the entire universe is a fractal pattern; planets swirling around stars, stars swirling around black holes in galaxies, galaxies swirling around - who knows?

Homelessness is a problem that resonates in a fractal pattern. In a very small way, feeling “out of place” is a small resonance from our own souls to the broader problems of homelessness in the world.

When one member of our congregation is missing, isn't home, we all feel that absence. We all feel out of place. I am beyond saddened that a daughter of our congregation, Jenna Van Gelderen is still missing after more than a month. Wherever she may be lost, we pray every day with RoseAnne, Leon and Will that she is found, and she comes home. Until that day, we all feel a little lost.

Below our feet is a home for the homeless. Every winter, Rebecca's Tent, the Shearith Israel shelter for women opens its doors and provides beds and meals for homeless women. We're proud of the work that Rebecca's Tent does in helping the homeless find a home. We at Shearith Israel are committed to help everyone find a home. Our shelter helps us fulfill that mission for some of the women in Atlanta. It's worth supporting. As uncomfortable and out of place as we may feel right now walking into Synagogue without your seat, imagine what it feels like for those who don't have a home?

This fractal pattern can be expanded--beyond our backyard, beyond Atlanta, beyond the homeless in America. Imagine being forced from your country because of violence or oppression. There is a growing crises of migration happening in the world as we speak. According to the UN Refugee Agency, there are 65.6 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. There are 22.5 million refugees, 10 million stateless people and only 189,300 of those people were resettled in 2016.

Of those lucky few who were able to resettle, their new locations are far from “settled” or home. They have to navigate a new bureaucracy, health care, jobs, language, all on their own. Less than 5% of refugee families have a sponsor to help them through these challenges.

Homelessness resonates through creation like a fractal pattern. When we feel out of place, we are resonating with those who have no home, no country. It's possible that in this grand creation of the Universe everything resonates with one another on levels we cannot understand. God resonates with us too. In the BT Megillah 29a we learn about how when we were exiled from Egypt, God went into exile as well.

**Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed be He. As every place they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Babylonia, and the Divine Presence went with them,**

**So too, when, in the future, they will be redeemed, the Divine Presence will be with them, as it is stated: “Then the Lord your God will return with your captivity” (Deuteronomy 30:3). It does not state: He will bring back, i.e., He will cause the Jewish people to return, but rather it says: “He will return,” which teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return together with them from among the various exiles.**

When we turn away from those who are in exile in the world, when we don't do the work of getting those who are out of place home, the cries of the displaced resonate all the way up to God, and God is pushed further into exile. In “The Hidden Face of God,” Bible Scholar Richard Elliot Friedman chronicles a trend in our Bible. When God creates the Universe, He is close. He walks in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, he walks with Noah, he walks with Abraham and his sons. He talks to Moses face to face, He produces miracles in the sight of the whole people of Israel. The newly birthed free nation enters the wilderness, homeless, but on the way home. When this homeless nation felt they had been abandoned by Moses and God on the mountain, they made a Golden Calf and substituted that Golden calf for resonating with the Holy Blessed One in the wilderness. God leaves the camp and retreats from the closeness of the people. He says, *Lo Ah'aleh B'keerbecha* - I will not go up within your midst. When we retreat from God, God retreats from us.

Today, when so much of the world is out of place, when we've retreated from the work of bringing people home, maybe God has retreated from us too. But the opposite is also true. If exile causes God's exile, then bringing people home brings God home too.

Dr. Danny Matt in his translation of the Zohar shared this text with me regarding the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah,

*“Blast the Shofar on the New moon, on the covering for our festival day (Psalms 81:4) - in order to break the covering, by which the moon is covered and cannot shine. When Israel below sounds the shofar, the sound issuing from it strikes the air, splitting firmaments until it rises to that might rock covering the moon. God perceives and Compassion is rising from below, awakening and confounding. The sound persists until it removes Judgment. Once compassion has be aroused below, so too above: another supernal shofar is sounded, emitting a sound that is Compassion; and sound meets sound. Compassion meets Compassion.*

The piercing sound of the Shofar cuts across the fractal levels of the universe to awaken compassion in us and our Creator. When we do the work of raising compassion within us for those who are out of place, God's compassion is awakened, and meets us in the middle.

We're going to organize a sponsorship of a refugee family through New American Pathways this year - we're going to help a family be home in their new country. To do this we're going to need a whole lot of us to step forward and volunteer their time and

resources to make this happen. It'll be a small contribution to a massive challenge in the world, but it'll be our contribution to bringing God home.

We're going to continue to support the work of Rebecca's Tent, and help the homeless in Atlanta find a home. The challenge of homelessness in this country is bigger than we realize. We've got to work how to systematically address this challenge. Rebecca's Tent is a small contribution to this problem, but it'll be our contribution to bring God home.

We're going to pray every single day that Jenna comes home. Wherever she is, however far away she might be. We're going to do everything we can to bring her home. We call upon every resource, every news agency, everything on Earth and upon God above to help the Van Gelderen family and all of us with the strength to see her home. Until the day that we know where she is, we're all out of place, and so is God.

Finally, we're going to work hard to make sure that every person who walks through our doors looking for their spiritual home finds it. We're going to be the home for the InTown Jewish community. We don't want anyone, especially those who are risk to be marginalized to be anything but home here. It's all of our job to make Shearith Israel the place where we do the work of bringing people home. We're going to be the home for InTown Judaism. Because every person we help bring home, we bring God home too.

For every person we help be home, we bring God a little closer to being at home too.

And Bayom Hahu - on the day we help bring God home

Nobody will feel out of place in their communities - because we will know that we are all children of the same God

Bayom Hahu, On that day - the systemic problem of homelessness will be solved and everyone will have a place to lay down safe at night

Bayom Hahu - On that day - everyone will feel safe in the world, without fear of oppression, persecution, or war because God values peace above all else, and when countries are at peace, everyone can be home

Bayom Hahu - on that day, we will rise above our discomfort in the world, and all of us will be home.

Until that day, we will do our part to move our brothers and sisters

Acheinu, the whole house of Israel, *Kol Beit Yisrael* -  
who are out of place, who are in trouble, *Ha'ntunim B'tzara U'v'shivya*.  
Who are standing between the sea and the dry land - *Ha-omdim bein bayam u'vein bayabasha*.

We call upon the one who brings people to their place *Hamakom* -  
to bring them home with merciful love - *Yirachem Aleichem* -

To bring them out of the narrow places to wide open home- *V'yotzi-em m'tzara lir'vacha.*

From darkness to light - *U'meafelah l'orah.*

From oppression to redemption - *U'mishibud lig'eulah.*

*Hashta* - Now

*B'agalah* - Quickly

*U'zman Kariv* - at a near time