

Gail Gurewitz, 2019

Prostrations on the High Holy Days

For the past few years a number of us at OS have been exploring Embodied Jewish Spiritual Practice; using the experiences of movement and growing awareness of the relationship between our bodies, minds and hearts to more deeply encounter ourselves and spiritual connection. Rabbi Diane Bloomfield, of Torah Yoga, says, “It is not the external form of the posture or movement that relates to a Torah concept. It is the consciousness and wisdom inside of you that does. The posture or movement is a vehicle that takes you to your inner wisdom.

For many of us, the grand, explicit gesture of prostration may be familiar from yoga or meditation practices. In yoga and other traditions, a full, Danda pranam, which in Sanskrit means "respectful salutation" or "reverential bowing" invites us to let go of ego and some element of control, as if we are even in control in the first place. It can help us to release intense emotions such as anger and frustration.

The front body is often associated with personality and individuality, while the back body is said to connect us with the Universal, with lineage, and that which is beyond or greater than our individual selves. We align with the moral universe that asks us to care about something beyond ourselves and our desires.

Lying fully prone on our bellies, arms overhead, is a gesture of humility and of letting go; letting go of trying to control, of releasing ego and our concretized personalities. In doing so, we may feel or at least imagine our connection to the Earth, the subtle pulsations of life from beneath us. This gesture also requires some degree of trust, since we cannot see what's around us. Here is the opportunity to surrender into our vulnerability; we can simply breath into the space surrounding us, with intention or prayer. Please listen to your body to see if it is appropriate today, and if not, you are welcome to prostrate by simply leaning

forward in your seat. Either way, we may even feel a sense of relief that comes when we recognize that we're not the center of the universe, and in that realization, we connect more deeply to one another and to that which is beyond ourselves.