

Erev Rosh ha-Shana I Drash

Eva Freund -- Delivered 4 September 2013

I am honored to be here at the beginning of the Days of Awe. At the same time I feel a bit overwhelmed with the task of being religious, astute, and intellectual, while not appearing strident. Tonight I am not telling you to join the fight for justice. Tonight I am bringing you a message – *im shemohah tismah* ‘if you listen you will hear.’

At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth

When the earth was wild and waste,

darkness over the face of Ocean,

Rushing spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters--

Although Torah begins with the creation of the earth and the separation of land and water – the process of creation is not complete until God creates a human being. Ever since -- humans have wanted to touch God...to become more God-like.

Humans are fascinated with the thought of creation. In our lifetime we witness the merging of human sperms and eggs in petri dishes and the cloning of animals. We witness the various uses of stem cells and note that stem cells, too, are now

being grown in the laboratory. Science and technology are bringing us ever closer to achieving that final step of creating a physical human being.

However we are more than physical beings. We are also emotional and spiritual beings. And... we desire to realize those attributes. We long to connect with God.

Humans have been undeterred in their determination to be more like God. They envisioned what the world would be like if humans could eliminate their imperfections. They envisioned what the world would be like if they were more like God.

Since the removal of all imperfections in one lifetime was unlikely, they had the idea that souls revolved through a succession of lives. Their belief in reincarnation is believed to have originated with the Pharisees who said that this can be compared to one candle lighting another – where the essence of the second is an independent entity. Yet it may be that the second flame contains imperfections from the first -- it is these that must be corrected. This ancient concept of reincarnation is continued through Kabbalistic Judaism.

Generations passed and some people thought they could improve on the concept of reincarnation. They decided that one could undergo a spiritual rebirth – a regeneration of the human soul directly from the Holy Spirit. This spiritual rebirth was in contrast to the physical birth experienced by everyone.

While speaking with Nicodemus, a Pharisee (John 3:7), Jesus, a member of the Essenes, said that “being born again” was necessary to begin the transformation of one way of living to another way of living. The transformation of which he spoke was that -- it was necessary to feel the spirit of God... in order to begin to

live one's life in a God-like manner. This meant doing the right thing in one's daily life, not only on certain days. It meant *walking the walk* and not just *talking the talk* -- *every day and every moment of every day*.

And even today, we continue seeking ways to connect with that which is more than we are. To some that presence is known as the Great Spirit. To others it is known as the Higher Power. To Star Trek fans it is known as The Force. It is not the name that matters - but rather the acknowledgement that there is "something" greater than ourselves. This "something" has given us life.

We continue our journey of seeking connection with this force that is greater than ourselves. We engage in meditation, prayer, drum circles, spiritual retreats and fasting. We enter into synagogues, mosques, healing centers, and ashrams. We sing hymns and we sing gospel music. We chant Torah and we invoke incantations. We do these things in our human attempt to feel—to actually feel the presence of that which is greater than we are.

For some time I have been pondering this duality – that of being 'born again' and that of 'reincarnation and wondering why I was so fixated by it. Then, one morning I awoke understanding that this duality is the essence of the process we begin at Rosh Hashannah and we complete at Yom Kippur. This process includes both the removing of our remaining defects and the regeneration of our souls. This process allows us to feel cleansed and rejuvenated. It allows us to be more connected to the Holy Spirit.

I often wonder how I can feel more spiritual and more contacted to my higher power. Although I have no immediate answer to this question ... I have come to

understand that finding my spiritual center will come from the effort that I undertake. Many years ago, as part of my own therapeutic process, I learned that I could change my actions long before I could change my feelings.

I learned that I could help others or be kind to them even if I did not like them. I learned to plant my own flowers rather than waiting for someone to bring me flowers. Just as my therapist helped me find the tools to gain my emotional center, the rabbi and the service leaders hope to help you find the tools to gain your spiritual center.

I do know that many of the tools I use for spiritual growth are those things we are doing here tonight and will continue to do in the next days. For example, we think about what we read and how we can use the information in our own lives. We learn to make our minds quiet. We look into ourselves. And, we open the door, just a crack, for positive feelings to replace our negative feelings.

While we are here together, recall that Me'or Einayim [May'or Anayim] says 'if you hear what is old you will hear what is new.'" The struggle for each of us is to make the old conversations new ... and to make old experiences new.

Let the prayers and the Torah readings you hear -- breath, live, and become new again. Tonight, on E'rev Rosh Hashona, it is our time to prepare for our spiritual re-birth.

Just as Bere'shit describes the birthing of the world with the words "At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth..." tonight we, together, begin the process of the birthing of our better selves. Tonight we begin our lives

anew. Tonight we leave our old lives behind and begin our lives anew. Tonight we are re-born.
