

*Ayeka, where are you?*  
*A Drash for Yom Kippur Morning 2021*  
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This morning, this Yom Kippur morning, is set aside for introspection and prayer. This past year of COVID has been one of lockdown, of quarantine, of seclusion. But has it been one of introspection?

I have been tempted to ask whether any of you, any of us, have used the time of seclusion to pray? In our lives that are typically overscheduled and frenetic, have any of us used this lockdown, this private time to become closer to G-d?

These High Holy Days ask us to do just this, to become closer to G-d, to become one with G-d. *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li, I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine.* From the most well-known of Jewish romantic poetry, the *Song of Songs*.

Many of us learned this as a song in religious school. Many of us learned this when our mothers took us with them to buy an engraved wedding present for some cousin. Some of us learned it here, at Bet Mishpachah, as an adult.

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. The bonds of a good marriage are unbreakable. The place where one starts and the other begins, unknowable to any and all. But in Numbers it is written as a poem describing our relationship with G-d. That, as it is with married folks, our relationship with G-d should be just as close.

As Rabbi Shefa Gold has written:

God, as this world holds me in Her loving embrace. I belong to The Whole.

I am an integral aspect to Everything-that-is.

I belong.

And that wondrous mystery I call God is central to all I see, all I do, all I know, all I am.

I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine. *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li.*

We pray and hope that our relationship with Adonai is so close that no one knows where one starts and the other begins.

On this day we are asked to repent and forgive. On this Yom Kippur, we ask God's forgiveness for our sins against Her; when we ask others to forgive us if we have behaved badly towards them.

When we make an accounting of our soul; a *Cheshbon ha-Nefesh*, reviewing the year past; as we consider changes to be made in our behavior during the year ahead.

On this Yom Kippur we concern ourselves with *teshuvah*, turning;

turning from ignorance to truth,

from darkness to light,

from evil to good.

From our intellect to our heart.

From the world of knowledge to the world of faith.

*Hashiveinu Adonai, eilècha, v'nashùva.*

Turn us to you God, and we shall return.

Ariel Neshama Lee has written that during these *Days of Awe*, we are called upon to bare our souls, to cleanse ourselves of **all that is negative**, of all that holds us back. We are called upon to begin anew as we start another year.

This morning's Torah portion, Nitzavim was read just two weeks ago, on a Shabbat during Elul, yet we read it again today.

Why? Why do we consider these words of Moses twice? What makes these words so important that we read them, consider them, reflect upon their meaning twice?

While most of us never know the exact day we will die, Moses does. And he takes the opportunity speak to his people one last time. He takes the opportunity to speak of many things, to model what we would call in today's time an *ethical will*. He takes his last opportunity to remind his community, to remind us, that a *Covenant was made* on their behalf, *on our behalf*, and on behalf of those members of the community of Israel yet to be born.

Of what does he remind us? What does he say to the assembled community?

That this commandment is not beyond your understanding, nor is it far away. It is not in heaven, nor in the seas beyond your reach. For the Word is very near to you. Carry it out *with your mouth* and *with your heart*.

I - *G-d* - have set before you today *life and good*, and *death and evil*, inasmuch as I command you today to love God, to walk in God's ways and to keep God's commandments, so that you may live. But if your heart shall turn in a manner that *forsakes God* and serves other gods, then I have announced to you this day that you will quickly perish.

Generation to generation, *l'dor va dor*, Yom Kippur has been and always will be a holy day, not only because of its pull to our hearts, not only because of its call to our souls, but because its core essence is considered by many to be difficult. But is it difficult? Moses says it is not.

This past year, the year of a pandemic *has been difficult* for many. A lockdown has kept us isolated in our homes.

How did you spend that time?

Did you work from home?

Did you home school your children?

Did you spend more time with those you live with?

Did you use your isolation to bring God into your daily life when that was not your normal?

Did you take the time to remember that you are now, and always will be, until the day of *your* death, a member of the community of Israel?

The idea of turning to God on Yom Kippur can be intimidating. Yet, consider this – consider God part of your family – behind the doors of the quarantine, this Yom Kippur, this turning to God, may be welcome; as welcome as a warm blanket of love surrounding you.

Have you spent this year remembering the covenant made on your behalf?  
To love God, to walk in God's ways and to keep God's commandments?

Did you remember that this commandment is not beyond your understanding, nor is it far away? It is very near to you. You carry it out *with your mouth* and *with your heart*.

So, on this Yom Kippur morning, we are trying to bring the words of the liturgy into our hearts. Trying to leave the outside world of illness and politics aside; trying to commit to walk in God's ways; so that the year ahead is a good year.

In Pirkei Avot, the rabbis teach: Repent *one day before your death* - obviously students of Nitzavim. Moses was unique in having this knowledge, and was able to use his final hours wisely, to make his dying declaration really count.

Without knowing the exact day of our death, perhaps the imperative is to feel the urgency of our words and actions every single day, to *live each day as if it were our last*. What if we spoke each sentence as if it were our dying declaration, as if we knew people would remember those words for a long time?

What if we pray today, knowing Adonai would hear us differently? And if we prayed as if our prayers were so compelling that Adonai heard the sincerity without doubt?

So, the question I ask you to consider this morning is *Ayeka*, where are you?

*Hashiveini Adonai, eilècha, v'ashùva.*

Turn me to you God, and I shall return

We *should be* forgiving others throughout the year. We should be behaving in ways that reduce the harm we cause through our behavior.

Yom Kippur is an annual reminder to do our best; an opportunity to be both retrospective and prospective. A look back; a look ahead.

To open ourselves to Adonai, our God. To realize that forgiveness is not something that happens without effort.

G-d does not expect *perfect* repentance. Adonai expects the *sincerity* of our heart, the valiant effort made. It may take years to forgive some. But if we do nothing more than think about forgiveness once a year, perhaps one year we will find that forgiveness has transpired, our hearts have been cleansed through years of effort, be it conscious or subconscious.

Pray this morning to bring yourself closer to G-d. To imbue each word of each prayer with sincerity.

*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li, I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine.* From one year to another, let each of us pray with sincerity and with love.

Wishing those of you that fast, an easy one. And those of you that do not fast, a meaningful and prayerful day.