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Kol Rinah
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When was the last time you were lost--when you really didn't know where you were? Before I go any further, let me give you a roadmap for what I'm going to talk about--so you don't get lost!

I'm going to speak about the feeling of being lost, and how we get lost. Then I'll tell you a story about being lost, and found, and then, I'll say something about how to get unlost, how to find and be found.

Being lost isn't really a thing anymore. Not with GPS, Google Maps, and smartphones. But there's lost, and then there's lost.

Even with all this technology, I still sometimes feel lost. Not geographically, but emotionally, and spiritually. Sometimes when I feel lost, I don't know how to do what I need to do. I can't see my way through. I have no real-life version of Google Maps to tell me to make a u-turn, or to take a detour because there's traffic ahead. Sometimes, when I feel lost, I lose sight of my destination--what I'm trying to accomplish, and why it's important.

I don't think I'm the only one who still sometimes feels lost, even directionless, emotionally and spiritually. When do you feel lost? In what ways have you felt lost this past year? In what ways do you feel lost right now?

Our modern life doesn't really recognize being lost. There's always a new route to take to avoid traffic. There's always an impulse to ask our devices for answers. Our modern life doesn't give us as much still space to feel lost. But even though the feeling of being lost is increasingly unfamiliar, it may well be more common, just unrecognized. We may misunderstand it as boredom, or apathy, or aimlessness. But when we are lost, we certainly don't know how to get where we're going, and we may even have lost sight of our destination.

We feel lost when we encounter terrain, or a world, or a system that's new to us. We may feel lost when we're trying to navigate the healthcare system, even if we're doctors, or the healthcare insurance system, or the legal system, even if we're attorneys. We may feel lost when we are caring for an aging parent, or parenting a child for the first time. We feel lost when we first start a new job, or a new school, or move to a new place.

We feel lost when everything around us seems like it has changed, and we not only haven't been given a map to navigate this new reality--we can't even imagine what it would say. When a loved one gets sick, or dies, or leaves. When our own body becomes a stranger to us. When our children move away, and we are lost, even as they are off finding their own paths.

We feel lost simply when we don't know where we are in the machzor, or when we walk into an unfamiliar prayer space, and don't know where or with whom to sit, because the room is unfamiliar and the people we used to sit with are no longer there.

We feel lost when we feel we are the only ones who feel lost.

Yom Kippur is a day to acknowledge those feelings of being lost

Chet, sin, is sometimes translated as missing the mark. But when it's not an arrow we're shooting that misses, but rather, my own self that has missed, I wind up lost. So much of the liturgy of Yom Kippur is about how we lose our way, how we sin.

Teshuvah, repentance, is about noticing that we are lost, and trying to correct our course, to aim ourselves back in the right direction. It's as if God knows we're going to get lost periodically, and gave us this day, these hours, to start to get unlost, to find ourselves, and our way. Halakha, Jewish law, literally means, "the walk," or "the way."

Earlier today, I quoted to you the first line of the Haftarah for this morning, from Isaiah. Let me read it again. "God says, 'Build up, build up a highway, clear a road! Remove all obstacles from the road of My people!' (Isaiah 57:14)

Yom Kippur is a day to try find a highway, a road, a goat path, back, to ourselves, to God, however we conceive of God.

It's not only God to whom we're trying to return. We're also looking for our way back to those people we care about, and to what matters most to us in the world, to a way of making sense of our lives, with the challenges and losses and baffling contradictions we all experience. On Yom Kippur, we try to find our way, or at least find a way to find our way, and to be found. And we do it not in comfort, but in affliction, hungry, thirsty, tired, acting out the part of angels, somewhere between living and dying. We try to find our way back, at the end of twenty-five hours, to the lives we are proud to live, to lives we have the courage and stamina to live. And on this same day of Yom Kippur, as we seek to find, or maybe find again, the coordinates of our lives, we also say Yizkor, the memorial prayers, for those who no longer travel life's journeys with us. And it may be exactly those people who we remember who can help us to find our own way today, this Yom Kippur.

First, settle in for a few minutes, I want to tell you a story about being lost, and finding, or being found.

There once was a king who had a daughter. When she was young, they were close, but as she grew up, they spent less and less time together. The king was busy governing, and would check in on the daughter every so often, often without her even noticing, but the daughter was busy with her own life and interests, and was not all that interested in being a princess.

She traveled, farther and farther from the palace, and the capital, until she was in a place where she knew no one and no one knew her. She decided to stay. Needing food, and lodging, and not wanting to fall back on her princesshood, she apprenticed herself to an elderly shoemaker. After all, she had always loved shoes! She learned the art of making shoes, and found it satisfying. She loved making beautiful shoes for those who wanted them, and comfortable shoes for those who wanted them, and more and more people wanted shoes both beautiful and comfortable.

After a time, the master shoemaker was unable to work anymore, and gave the business to the woman. With dreams of riches and fame and fortune, she knew she could do more and better than the master shoemaker, so she took out some loans, bought more supplies, expanded the store, and made more and more beautiful, and comfortable, shoes. And on the first day of the expanded store, all was well. But the second day, business slowed, and the rest of the week, it slowed some more until it was a trickle. Everyone in the town had all the shoes they could use, or afford.

And she owed money, which she had no way of paying back. To her creditors. To the master shoemaker. One day, the master shoemaker noticed her crying, when she thought no one was watching her. He asked her what was wrong, and she said nothing. Everything is fine! He sat, quietly with her for a few minutes. And then she told him everything.

He thought for a moment, and then said, "I bet they'd love your shoes in the town in the next valley too." So she began to travel, selling her shoes, while the old shoemaker minded the shop, which at this point he only needed to open for a few hours each day.

One day, back in the capital, the king saw someone wearing a pair of beautiful shoes, yet they were able to walk so comfortably. He thought, for the first time in months and months, of his daughter, and thought, I bet she'd like those shoes.

So he sent one of his trusted aides to find the shoemaker, and have him make a pair of shoes for his daughter, who he also asked the aide to find.

The trusted aide searched far and wide for the princess, but of her, there was no sign. But he learned quickly of where the famous shoemaker lived. He appeared at the store when the master shoemaker happened to be there, and tried to bring him back to the palace, but he stopped him, and said no, he didn't make these beautiful, comfortable shoes—it was his apprentice. She came out, and the aide was shocked—a woman made these shoes! And then he realized, it was the princess! The princess, however, did not want to blow her cover. She denied and denied, but consented to return to the palace, at least to show some shoes.

When she arrived at the palace, and saw the king, he looked at her, and she at him, and they ran to each other and embraced.

She never became the queen of the kingdom, but slowly, under her influence, throughout the kingdom, people had many fewer foot problems, thanks to her beautiful, comfortable shoes.

As I told the story, did find yourself identify with anyone? Did you identify with the daughter when she needed to travel far from her home and all she knew of her life? Or did you identify with her when she had a vision of building something? Or when it didn't work as expected? Did you identify with the master shoemaker, who has wisdom to offer someone who is lost? Did you identify with the father who grew apart, in slow almost imperceptible steps, from his daughter, but somehow recognized something made by his daughter? Are you someone who needs is lost and needs to be found? Are you someone who can guide someone else on their way? Most of us? We're both.

Who is calling you home? Who is calling you back to your path? Maybe it's a spouse or partner, from whom you have grown distanced. Ask yourself, "what are the ways the one I love is looking for me, yet I am lost to them? What are the ways my children are looking for me, yet I am lost to them, not there, not available? What are the ways my parents are looking for me, yet I am lost to them, in a different city, or with different priorities, living a different life than they expected? What are the ways my friends are looking for me, yet I am lost to them, too busy, too self-absorbed?"

How do we realize we're lost, which isn't easy to admit in the first place, then begin to find our way, begin to find, and to be found? Each of us has different answers. Maybe this year you will find new ways to find your way back. For me, it comes back to people. When I think about you, not the collective you, but each of you, I feel immense privilege and humility that you allow me to walk alongside you as you take some of your most challenging, and joyous, steps on your paths. And it helps me find my way back to being the rabbi I want to be. When I think about Tammy, and my kids, I remember what matters the most to me and who I want to be to them and in the world. When I think about my parents, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents, I remember what I'm a part of, and I think of those who laid the stones for the paths that I would one day walk on.

Often, the people who know us best can help us find ourselves and can remind us who we are. Some of them are sitting next to us right now. Some of them we can call up on the phone, or text, or see in real life. And some of them are not in this world anymore, but live instead in the world of our memories. Some of them have been gone for so long. Some of them we still can't believe are gone. Think of someone you are missing, whether someone in your family or not, even if you are not staying in the room to say yizkor for them. If you imagine asking them a question, can you imagine how they would answer? If you asked, "I feel lost sometimes. I feel lost right now. How will I find my way?" what would they say? Not all our relationships would point us in the right direction. Even if not, how would it feel just to ask?

In a few moments, we'll begin Yizkor. Yizkor is a designated time to have a chat with those who aren't here with us anymore, to open ourselves up to the possibility that those we are remembering might help us remember who we are, where we're going, and why.

Avinu malkenu, zachreinu l'chayim tovim, may we be found to be inscribed for good lives, of fruitful searching, of finding and being found, and of shining our own divine light to illuminate the paths of those around us.