

Discerning the Path

Preparation for the Days of Awe - Elul 5779

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1.

HaShiveynu - Return Us

~ Avakesh ~ Eicha Lamentations 5:21; weekday Amidah; Psalm 90:12 ~

HaShiveynu, Adonai, Eleycha, ve'naShuva (x4)

HaShiveynu le'Toratecha
ve'Korveynu la'Avodatecha

va'ha'Ch'zireynu bi'Tshuva Shleyma
leFanecha HaVaYaH

HalleluYah

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ ה' | אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָ [וְנָשׁוּבָה]
הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ לְתוֹרָתְךָ, וְקִרְבָנוּ לְעִבּוֹדְתְךָ,
וְהִחְזִירֵנוּ בְּתִשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה - לְפָנֶיךָ הוֹי"ה

לְמִנּוֹת יָמֵינוּ כִּן הוֹדַע וְנָבֵא לְבַב חֲכָמָה:
הַלְלוּיָהּ:

Limnot Yameynu ken Hoda (x3)
v'naVi Levav Chochmah

HalleluYah

Return us to You, HaVaYaH [Adonai, Shechina, etc]
And to You, to You we shall turn (2nd time: we return)

HalleluYah

ותשובה, ותפלה, וצדקה - Teshuva, Tefila, Tzedaka

Returning to Wholeness -- Prayer and Supplication -- Generous Giving
These Have the Power to Change Our Fate

2. Lach Amar Libi: My Heart Spoke to You

~ Nava Tehila - Yoel Sykes; Psalm 27 ~

Lach Amar Libi: Bakshu Phanai, Bakshu Phanai לך אמר לבי בקשו פני
Et Panecha, Havaya, Avakesh, Avakesh את־פניך יהוה אבקש

*My heart said to You: Seek my face, seek my face
Your face, Eternal One, I seek, I seek...*

3. Pure Heart ~ Psalm 51:12; Nava Tehila ~

**Create a Pure Heart in Me, Great Spirit - Create a Pure Heart in Me
And Renew a True Soul Within Me - Renew a True Soul Within**

אלול Elul: some word play

אל - God, power אליל - false god, idol; useless thing

לולא - If only

as in: לולא האמנתי לראות בטוב־י בארץ חיים:

“If only I could believe in the goodness of God in the land of the living”

- Psalm 27 (psalm for Elul and Tishrei).

אלו ואלו - these and these

as in: אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים

“These and these are [both] the words of the ever-living God” - Talmud (eg Eruvin 13b)

אני לזודי וזודי לי - I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me

- Song of Songs 6:3

4. Blessing after Food

בְּרִיד רַחֲמָנָא מַלְכָּא דְעֵלְמָא מְרִיָּה דְהַאי פִּיטָא
Brich Rachmana, Malka d'Alma Marey d'Hai Pita

**You Are The Source Of Life For All That Is
And Your Blessing Flows Through Me**

**O Lord Prepare Me / To Be A Sanctuary,
Pure and Holy, Tried and True
And In Thanksgiving, I'll be a Living / Sanctuary / For You**

וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם, וְאַנְחֵנוּ נְבָרְךָ יְיָ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם:

**V'asu li miKdash v'Shachanti b'Tocham,
V'Anachnu neVarech Yah me-atah ve-ad Olam**

5. Netivot Shalom on Teshuva (Month of Elul Aleph:5; in vol.Devarim)

These 40 days of teshuva from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are days of personal renewal for every Jew; for just as a renewal is taking place in the physical world, renewal is also indicated at a soul level.

Thus this season is particularly appropriate and appointed for becoming like a new person, with a new nefesh [life-force soul], a new ruach [spirit] and a new neshama [consciousness], and being able to rise above our embedded nature and the unhelpful habituated patterns we have previously incorporated.

This renewal is the essential point of these days of teshuva... The purpose of this time is to be renewed in our spiritual lives - for over time even our spirituality can get bogged down under dense material influences.

This is why we say in the psalms: "Create a pure heart in me, Great Spirit - and *renew* a true soul within" (Ps 51) - the point is the newness. We are not seeking to mend or patch up the old; rather we are asking for a complete renewal, may God renew us for the good!

Actually we have moments for teshuva every day in the evening, and every erev Shabbat, and every erev Rosh Chodesh, which is known as a Yom Kippur Katan [a miniature Yom Kippur].

Similarly these are times of renewal, as we say in the liturgy “who in His goodness renews creation each day,” Shabbat of course being a reconnection with original creation, and rosh chodesh being the rebirth of the moon...

When we say, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains: from where will my help come?” (Ps 121:1) our sages teach that this can mean seeing all our flaws standing between us and God, as big as mountains, leaving us all stirred up as to how we can overcome them.

The answer is to remember that “My help is from the One, maker of heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2). Which is to say, *God is re-making creation every day.*

So even if you don't have the power within yourself to rectify your shortcomings, which are as big as mountains, it is in your capacity to be completely remade, along with everything else which is being constantly remade, the new heavens and the new earth.

When a person says:

“I lift up my eyes and see all my shortcomings, and I don't see the way to be able to surmount them and ascend to the Holy One of Blessing and attach myself to God's nature while I still have such terrible character traits / habits / proclivities [midot], and I am confused and in chaos as to where my help will come from!”

The inner response should thus be:

“My help is from the One, maker of heaven and earth - for just as there is a constant renewal of the heavens and of the earth, so too we can tap into that renewing, and renew our midot and the patterning of our life-force.”

And since each year has its own unique purpose and character distinct within creation, being like a world unto itself, during the High Holy Days of RH and YK the new character of this new year begins to develop. So at this season we are in this early-creation state, as it is written: “And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.” (Genesis 1:2)

6. Vidui: Creating a Spiritual Action Plan - Rabbi David Jaffe

The word vidui comes from the Hebrew word for “acknowledge.” To make a personal vidui is to acknowledge clearly the reality of your life.

The first step is to take a good look at your life in the past year, and acknowledge one or two things that went very well, and one or two things you need to change.

Then create a concrete, visual image in your mind of a goal for how things would look in each case if you could, indeed, change what needed to change.

For something that went well, imagine what your life would look like if you could employ that strength on a more regular basis; for something that needs to change, imagine what it would look like if you made that change.

1. Do this visualization for each item.
2. Write a few words that capture the changed, new reality.
3. Then identify one or two soul traits that go along with each item.

For example, if you acknowledge that you speak disrespectfully to your adolescent children and your goal is to speak with them like you would speak with an adult, the soul trait might be patience (savlanut) or respect (kavod).

4. Then think of one concrete action you could take on a regular basis to strengthen your patience or respect.

Continue this with all the items you acknowledged.

You now have a personal vidui and a spiritual action plan for the year!

I write all this down on an index card and bring it with me to Yom Kippur prayers. After reciting the set vidui in the prayer book, I take out my index card and say my own, personal vidui. I pray to God for forgiveness where I missed the mark, and for help in growing the middot, soul qualities, I need in order to make my vision a reality in the next year.

After saying this vidui five times on Yom Kippur, I revisit it every Rosh Chodesh (new moon), noticing progress and renewing my commitment to keep growing.

This passage comes from the companion to the High Holidays recently published by Hebrew College.

If you are interested to learn more from Rabbi Jaffe, you could look at “Changing the World from the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change” (2016), which won the National Jewish Book Award for Contemporary Jewish Life.

7. Reviewing the Year

Forgiveness

1. What does forgiveness feel like?
2. What is your relationship with forgiveness? Do you forgive easily?
3. Who or what do you want to forgive? Is there anything you really **don't** want to forgive?
4. Whose forgiveness must you seek?
5. Between now and Yom Kippur is the time for mending relationships with people you know. Whom must you forgive? From whom must you ask forgiveness? Start two lists.

Practices suggested by Melinda Ribner, Kabbalah Month by Month

1. Divide the past year into fall, winter, spring, summer. What were the highlights, achievements and themes of each quarter?
What unfinished business remains from this past year?
2. Having done this review, do you have anything to add to your forgiveness lists?
3. Four Worlds check-in: what is going well, and where is there room for improvement in each of the following realms?
 - physical health, fitness and wellbeing
 - emotional wellbeing, intimacy, connection with others

- intellectual stimulation and growth
- spiritual connection and spiritual practice

For what must you forgive yourself? Start a list.

8. Hitbodedut - Speaking to God

"When a person meditates in the fields, all the grasses join in with their prayer and increase its effectiveness and power" - Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: *Likutey Moharan* II, 11.

During a session of *hitbodedut*, the practitioner pours out her heart to God in her own language, describing all her thoughts, feelings, problems and frustrations. Nothing was viewed by Rebbe Nachman as being too mundane for discussion, including business dealings, conflicting desires and everyday interactions. Even the inability to properly articulate what one wishes to say is viewed as a legitimate subject to discuss with God. - Wikipedia, "Hitbodedut"

Rebbe Nachman told his leading disciple, Reb Noson, that *hitbodedut* should be practiced in a simple, straightforward manner, as if conversing with a close friend. *Tzaddik* #439

He also advised: "It is very good to pour out your thoughts before God like a child pleading before her parent. God calls us God's children, as it is written (Deuteronomy 14:1), "You are children to God." Therefore, it is good to express your thoughts and troubles to God like a child complaining and pestering her parent."^[6] - Aryeh Kaplan: Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #7.

One can approach *Hitbodedut* at an even more basic level, simply making inchoate, primal sounds to the Holy Blessed One, aloud or silently:

You can shout loudly in a "small still voice"... Anyone can do this. Just imagine the sound of such a scream in your mind. Depict the shout in your imagination exactly as it would sound. Keep this up until you are literally screaming with this soundless "small still voice."

9. The King is in the Field

The Baal Shem Tov called the days of *Elul* the days when the King is in the field. He explained with a parable:

Normally, in order to gain an audience with the King, one must go through a lengthy procedure. One must travel to the capital city, arrange an appointment, and then get permission to enter the palace. Even when permission is granted it may be days or weeks before one is finally allowed to enter. When one does finally get to see the King, the audience is likely to be short and very formal. The citizen, not used to the royal surroundings, doubtless feels out of place, and maybe even regrets her or his decision to see the King. From this great fear and uneasiness, one may even forget to put one's request before the King.

But once a year, the King leaves his capital to visit the various regions of his Kingdom. Now a King can't just enter a city unannounced. When he reaches the outskirts of the city he is to visit, his entourage sets up a camp while a special delegation goes ahead to the city to make preparations for the King's visit.

In the meantime, the King is in the field; relaxed and enjoying the early fall weather. He doesn't stand on the same formality that he does when in the palace. The common folk are allowed to come out to greet the King and receive his blessing.

Baal Shem Tov - Likutei Torah, Devarim 32b

10. Psalm 27: A Psalm for Elul

You are my light and my help / Whom should I fear?
You are the fortress of my life / Whom should I dread?

When the narrow ones gather their strength to devour me
It is they who stumble and fall
Even if a royal army were camped outside my gate / my heart would not fear.
And when they struck out with terrible weapons against me / Even then I'd trust

One thing I ask for, one thing I hope - To live in your house / All the days of my life
To behold your loveliness / Every morning in the light of your temple dawn

Till on a doomful day
You secure me in your precincts
Conceal me within the folds of your covering tent
Place me high and safe upon a rock
My head lifted above the engulfing waves

With the joy of my heart / I will sacrifice
Within that billowing shelter / Singing and playing my abandonment to you.

Hear my voice when I raise it up / Be gracious - answer me -
Speaking with your voice my heart sang, *Seek my presence*

I will.

Do not hide your glowing face from me / do not reject me in anger because of my shortcomings
You have always been for me / Don't cast me off now, don't walk away / My helper, my friend

My mother and father forsake me / But you take me up
Show me the way! Guide my steps on the clear path
Against the ever-present cliffs and thickets / Protect me from the noise of desire and hatefulness
From false words and shouted accusations

If I did not have faith in your rightness / That is would bloom in this living land -
It is unthinkable

I wait only for you / With strength and good courage -

I wait only for you (Translation by Norman Fischer)

לְדָוִד | יי | אֹרְזֵי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵינְרָא יי מְעוֹז חַיִּי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד: בְּקֶרֶב עָלִי | מְרַעִים לְאֶכֶל
 אֶת־בְּשָׂרֵי צָרִי וְאֵיבֵי לִי הִמָּה כְּשִׁלּוֹ וְנִפְלוֹ: אִם־תִּתְחַנֶּה עָלִי | מִחֲנֵה לֹא־יִירָא לְבִי אִם־תִּתְקוּם
 עָלַי מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בּוֹטָח: אַחַת | שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְי אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־יְי כָּל־יְמֵי
 חַיִּי לַחַזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־יְי וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכְלוֹ: כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי | בְּסִפְּהָ בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסִתְרֵךָ אֶהְלוֹ בְּצוּר
 יְרוּמָמַי: וְעַתָּה יְרוּם רֹאשִׁי עַל־אֵיבֵי סְבִיבוֹתַי וְאֶזְבְּחָהּ בְּאֶהְלוֹ זִבְחֵי תְרוּעָה אֲשִׁירָה וְאֶזְמַרְהָ
 לִי: שְׁמַע־יְי קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי: לָדָּ | אֲמַר לְבִי בְּקִשׁוֹ פָּנֶי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יי אֲבַקֵּשׁ: אֶל־תִּסְתַּר
 פָּנֶיךָ | מִפְּנֵי אֶל־תִּטַּ בְּאֶף עֲבָדְךָ עֲזַרְתִּי הֵייתָ אֶל־תִּטְשֵׁנִי וְאֶל־תִּעְזֹבֵנִי אֲ"לֵהִי יִשְׁעֵי: כִּי־אֲבִי
 וְאֲמִי עֲזָבוּנִי וְיִי יֶאֱסֹפְנִי: יֵא הוֹרֵנִי יי דָּרְכֶךָ וְנַחֲנִי בְּאַרְח מִיִּשׁוּר לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרִי: אֶל־תִּתְנֵנִי בְּנַפְשׁ
 צָרִי כִּי קָמוּ־בִי עֲדֵי־שֹׁקֵר וַיִּפַּח חֲמָס: לוֹלֵא הָאֲמַנְתִּי לְרֵאוֹת בְּטוֹב־יְי בְּאַרְצְ חַיִּים: קוּה אֶל־יְי
 חֲזֵק וַיֶּאֱמַץ לְבָבְךָ וְקוּה אֶל־יְי:

11. My Personal Resolutions

Teshuva (being whole): _____

Tefila (speaking directly): _____

Tzedaka (generosity): _____

12. A kavana for Shofar (from the Netivot Shalom)

שָׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים | רָאשֵׁיכֶם וְהַנְּשָׂאוּ פִתְחֵי עוֹלָם וַיִּבֹּא מִלְכָּךְ הַכְּבוֹד:

"Lift up your heads, o gates; and be lifted up, eternal portals; so that the Sovereign Power of Presence may enter." - Psalm 24:7

See how this verse contains an acrostic of the letters of shofar!

By means of the shofar on Rosh haShana, the faculties of the mind are elevated, as are the portals to eternity - which are the openings of the heart, the emotions and longings. When your awareness and

your feelings are purified [by the experience of the sound of the shofar], you can merit the experience of “the Sovereign Power of Presence entering” into your limbs, like the psalmist alludes to when s/he writes: “All my bones are saying, “God! Who is like You?!””

This is the ultimate receiving of the sovereignty of the divine, when the Holy One of Blessing rules over you, mind and heart and body.

Chai Ani (I'm Alive) ~ R' David Zeller ~

Yai dai dai dai dai dai dai ... I'm alive (x3)

**And who is this aliveness that I am? (x2)
And what is this aliveness that I am?**

Is it not the Holy Blessed One?

הֲלֹא חַי אֲנִי
וּמִי הוּא הַחַיּוּת שְׁלִי?
הֲלֹא הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרַךְ?

**Yai dai dai dai dai dai dai ... Chai Ani (x3)
U mi hu ha'Chaiyut sheli? (x2)
Ha'lo ha'Boreh yitBarach? Return Again**

Mah Nora HaMakom HaZeh: Being Here Now is Enough

~ R' Shefa Gold; Genesis 28:17 ~

Mah Norah HaMakom HaZeh! מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

How awe-some is this place!

(The Ineffable presence was here all along... and I didn't even know it)

There Is Nothing But You - Ein Od MiL'vado

אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבַדּוֹ ה' הוּא הָאֵלִים

Ein Od MiL'vado, Ein Od MiL'vado, HaShem hu haElohim

There is Nothing Besides It

The Name, the True Power

No god but G!d