

Dear Temple Sinai Family,

The prayer, *Elohai N'shama*, "My God, the soul that You have given me is pure," is an excerpt from the first tractate of the Talmud, Berachot. Traditionally, one recites *Elohai N'shama* at home, in preparation for morning worship, along with *Asher Yatzar*, which precedes it. While *Asher Yatzar* thanks God for the physical functions of our body, *Elohai N'shama* reminds us that we are so much more than our physical selves.

"My God, the soul that You have given me is pure."

Not all religions espouse this concept. Some faith traditions teach that every human being is born into this world in a state of sin because of Adam and Eve's fall from God's good graces in the Garden of Eden. In turn, we must spend our lives working to redeem ourselves from this inherited, Original Sin. Conversely, *Elohai N'shama* represents Judaism's rejection of this belief, stating that every human being is born pure, innocent, and completely free of sin. Our *n'shama*, our soul, is the Divine spark that the Holy One has placed within us for safe keeping. By imbuing us with this Light, God invites us to nurture, care for, and protect the pure soul within us.

Obviously, no one succeeds at this task entirely. Every one of us has, at times, fallen short, made a mistake, strayed from the path. Sinned. Each of us carries in our hearts and on our souls this emotional baggage. Our mistakes hang on our *n'shama*, weighing it down and blotting out its Light. Rabbi Jay has called this our emotional "schmutz." But he goes on to remind us that, if we wipe the schmutz away, if we set aside our emotional baggage, we'll find that pure soul is still within us. It's always there and it's always pure. We must simply return to it.

If we can ask for forgiveness and if we can forgive ourselves, our *n'shama* can shine again. If we can show compassion to others and have compassion on ourselves, we can redeem that purity of soul. If we can learn from our mistakes and rise above our shortcomings, then the weight of our misdeeds becomes lighter and we can live a richer, more fulfilling existence.

I know all of this is easier said than done, but *Elohai N'shama* reminds us that it is possible. It reminds us that, despite all of our flaws and imperfections, we are imbued with holiness. May we set this as an aspiration and an intention which can, in turn, give us hope and strength, even in the midst of our failures.

B'Shira, in song,

*Cantor Micah Morgovsky*