

Yom Kippur 5777

Dvar Torah offered by Shlomo Yoel (Stuart Joel) Goldman

It is with a deep sense of honor and gratitude that I share these words with you.

The parsha we read today is called Achrei Mot, — the section of Torah typically read on Yom Kippur,

Yom Kippur...the day of **Atonement**. Today I will be sharing that word, speaking it as...At-ONE-ment, as you will see why.

Yom Kippur, as described in this parasha, can be seen as a day of ultimate At-One-Ment, a kind of marriage day between us and the Holy One of Blessing. Far from being a dour day, the Talmud describes Yom Kippur as one of the two most joyous holidays in all of Yisrael, a day of love, kindness and forgiveness...

The parasha we will shortly read describes, in meticulous detail, the preparations of the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest, as he prepares to enter the innermost chamber and be in the fullness of the Divine Presence - to enter the Holy of Holies.

His washing to cleanse his body, his garments, meditations, incense as well as many other details are described... including a bull of the herd which is his sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. And of course the ritual of the two Azazel goats to cleanse the sins of the people.

We see that the Biblical observance of Yom Kippur was so very much centered upon the shamanic work of the High Priest. The *Kohen Gadol* had great power— the power to effect at-one-ment, and reconciliation with the Creator. He has access to Holy places that no one else may enter. He can perform rituals that no one else can perform. He is in charge of the cosmic apparatus that literally determines the survival of the world as well as the people's ability to feel connected to The Holy One and live into spiritual mindfulness.

This was the psycho-spiritual practice of our people at that time and it was effective. The only responsibility of the people was to abstain from work and to afflict their souls.

Well, lets not blithely dismiss that. Refraining from work and spending the day fasting and in deep mindful discernment over their actions and intentions is far from nothing... But still, it is the heroic and even life-threatening effort of the *Kohen Gadol* that holds open the gate between heaven and earth through which the Divine compassion and forgiveness flows.

The Torah passage concludes saying” For on this day at-ONE-ment shall be made for you, to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the ONE.” How is it though, that we fast and pray on Yom Kippur - and the very next day, somehow, the connectedness to the Holy One, felt so deeply on Yom Kippur, may be fading.

So what came up for me is this: Lets look at how this parsha can be understood as a deep metaphor -- providing a jumping off point into accepting responsibility, in each moment, for the internal work necessary to find Shalom and feel the connection and voice of the Holy One.

You with me?

If each one of us has an inner *Kohen Gadol*, how do we do the work of holding open the gates of love, compassion and forgiveness so that we don't just fast, pray and forget.

When we come together on Shabbos morning, one of our prayers says that in every nano-second Yah creates anew. MAASEH B'RESHIT: “in the beginning,” meaning creating the world anew again.. The Sufi poet Rumi said: “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

Lets put those two quotes together.

You can create and re-create, and re-create your world every moment, because every moment is brand new. So what kind of world, what kind of SELF do you want to be creating? Lets hope it is a world of love, forgiveness, compassion and Shalom, where we are each in touch with

our Highest Power, each able to walk into the Holy of Holies and open the gates.

Hebrew spiritual guidance describes mindfulness practices and actions each of us can choose, to come into resonance with our Highest Self and be fertile ground for the voice of the Holy One.

My sharing with you today will focus on some of this guidance --- how each and every one of us can engage in the Great Work of transformation of consciousness leading to an inner state of Shalom.

Every spiritual tradition knows that the work of spiritual growth and transformation is not easy. In fact it is most commonly referred to as THE GREAT WORK. There are obstacles, plenty of them.

Ancient Hebrew sources, and Hasidic ones too, call the chief obstacle “the Adversary.” This adversarial voice shows up in a lot of ways, You may be familiar with it. It can show up as the ego, or an inner voice of harsh destructive judgment, criticism, shame, discouragement, fatigue, or even self-hatred.

Some ancient sources give the “Adversary” a name and persona, because this powerhouse of obstacles starts to feel like an actor in our life story. This is actually where the Hebrew word Sah-tan” comes from, that then shows up in Christian theology as Satan or the Devil.

In Hebrew sources, this is the aspect of existence that gets us to forget we were born connected to the Holy One so we feel separated and isolated.

This feeling of isolation can lead to a feeling of despair, and this in turn leads us to being in the world with a mindfulness of ME: “I must provide, I must control and manipulate the world so I can feel secure, so I can feel fulfilled. Until a spiritual awakening occurs our typical motto is ‘**MY will be done**’”

Hasidic teaching reminds us that the soul is on a journey to achieve union with the God, a journey that elevates all of physical existence to a higher plane, so this union must take place with the soul living in a body. Each of us is an embodied soul. We’re not a body that has a soul, but a soul that is garbed in a body. The soul comes into the body to experience

what it needs to continue its journey to the light. And that journey begins with awakening.

Remember: every nano-second is brand new. Every moment creation is new again. We do not have to be stuck in old patterns!

So let me share some understandings that can assist us in transforming consciousness . We can renew our minds and be enrolled in the life school of self-transformation.

Ah... self-transformation. That is what we are here for. I mean all of us, sitting here when we could be out there doing more “ME” things like be shopping for more stuff...The reason to be here is that, here, together, we re-commit to self and world transformation. And that you can't buy anywhere.

So how do we start?

To begin transformation is dependent on a person leading a self - examined life. This means that we have to quiet down and pay attention to the voices and feelings of our interior world. One way to think about this is that we can each cultivate in our mind a consciousness known as the ‘Observer’ which is like an inner witness.

This awareness has only one function: to observe and be cognizant of what is going on in the mind. **This observation must be free of judgment. It just notices.** One precious gift granted us by the Holy One is the gift of mind. Mind THINKS!!

Every morning we can wake up and call out the morning blessing: “Thank you God for making me a conscious being!” OK,

it is great to have a mind and be conscious. But what do we typically use our precious mind for? You may be aware that most of our thinking, known in some circles as “monkey mind,” is focused on the future - whether bitter or sweet, or on the past - whether bitter or sweet. Very little consciousness is spent being here NOW.

That brings us back to AT – ONE – MENT

To be in a state of AT – ONE – MENT one must do the work necessary to be here now, in a state of Shalom, meaning whole, complete, perfect... right NOW.

Then we feel ourselves present to what I imagine we could call the Holy of Holies... we feel the presence of the Holy One without the obstacles and interference of the incessant mind chatter and disturbed emotions.

This requires transforming consciousness. And the entry point of that journey is the observer. As we become more and more aware of the interior voices we may notice that many of them are negatively self judging: not good enough, I can't do it, I am unworthy of, I do not deserve because..... and so on. **This is the Adversary in action, fulfilling its mission seeing to it that we do not turn toward God.** This can lead us to despair, depression and a constant hum of anxiety.

Ah.. but don't run away. There is information here. Continued observation may allow you to see the genesis of these harmful thoughts. In today's jargon these are often referred to as wounds.

I share a teaching from Ram Dass: Ram Dass, born Jewish and a PHD Psychologist, who upon his awakening, went to be a disciple of Neer Karoli Baba, a true saint in the Hindu tradition. He was taught that whenever you are triggered you are being shown where you have a wound. The wound is in a way like a magnet for circumstances that validate it. It feeds on the emotional reactivity that is generated by being triggered.

So now, the hurt feelings associated with the triggering can be seen as a gift to help us revisit the wound, feel the pain and then begin immediately to process it, to transform our consciousness by the renewing of our mind. Ram Dass said that a person living in this understanding will actually bless the person or circumstance that brought about the triggering, because it provides a means to shift the interior world into sacred space, even if only for a brief moment.

Thus, he asks us to consider that “ where I am triggered is where my inner work lies.” Rumi: shared it this way: “The wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

A Holy saint, in the Eastern tradition has said “Your own self realization is the greatest gift you can give the world.”

The Holy Baal Shem Tov, the greatest enlightened Hasidic master, spoke of interior transformation when he taught that when you’re praying and you’re distracted because you begin to focus on an external thought, or something attractive that pulls your eye... rather than reject this thought and attempt to push it away, and make yourself wrong or somehow inauthentic or undeserving to be connected to God, to use that thought or image with deep mindfulness to elevate your spiritual conscious to focus on the inner gift that it contains, given by the Holy One.

Another teaching, is the” law of reciprocity.”

Recently a book entitled, “The Law of Attraction” unpacked this ancient esoteric wisdom. This teaching refers to the awareness that every moment of your life, everything you think, feel, say or do is a vibration that goes out to the universe and is returned to you **in kind** (hence the reciprocity). Hazrat Inyat Khan, a Sufi mystic, spoke of this as the “Music of the Spheres.” It follows then that **what we are creating, by our life’s vibration, is the life we experience.** We are the author of the play we star in. And all of it, every single experience has the purpose of giving us the opportunity to understand and live into the “life school of personal transformation” to heal and shift that which is in our way so we can be present to The Holy One. As Rumi so eloquently said, ”Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” It also eliminates victimhood.

This is referred to in the Torah as R’TZOH v SHOV.. the angels go forward and back and forward again. Energy is always going out and returning.

I’ll come in for a landing with an observation about Teshuvah.... Returning, which is a big theme for the High Holidays.

Teshuvah in Hebrew means “return.” Accepting that it means to return implies that it is WE who have drifted away from the Holy One’s ever present-ness.

As I shared earlier, what we do internally and together on Yom Kippur is meaningful and can be transformative. And yet, living with the travails of the world, and the incessant ‘monkey mind’ we soon get disconnected from our sense of connection to the Holy One.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro has shared that the human condition is to forget this connection: (This is called Adversary in action). He goes on to share that any moment we can re-focus our consciousness on God, or prayer or mindful intentional transformation, **that is what spirituality is.**

So I will conclude by reciting a prayer intended to be a model for enlisting the aid of the Holy One in the Great Work of transformation of consciousness.

Holy One of Blessing

Let there be peace within me

Let my mind be clear and my heart pure.

Grant that I become more and more aware of Your ever- present-ness

Focus my attention in the observing consciousness

Allow me to be transformed by the renewing of my mind

Do not let me forget the endless possibilities that are born of faith and the grace from G-d that is bestowed upon us in every moment

Help me to remember that I am in exactly the place you intend for me to be

Remind me to give blessings and to feel grateful

Open my heart to forgiveness for myself and others

Grant me the awareness to be fully present, in every moment, so I can be here now

Embrace me as I surrender to your will

Help me to remember that I am Your child, and you are my Source created by You, Holy One, from light and love

Grant me the **lion hearted courage and eternal vigilance** that is required to do the Great Work of transformation of consciousness.

Let these prayers settle into my bones and set my soul free to sing and dance and praise and **LOVE**.--

♥•*~♥,•♥'*. *♥,*•♪♪♥♥,•*~*•♪♪*~*•♪♪♥*•♪♪♥♥,•*~*•♪♪*~*•♪♪♥

Aliyah #1

Here is the question again with which I began my Dvar: If each one of us has an inner *Kohen Gadol*, how do we do the work of holding open the gates of love, compassion and forgiveness so that we don't just fast, pray and forget?

This Aliyah is for you if you want to activate your inner *Kohen Gadol*: Come up to affirm a special way in which you want to hold open that channel in your life - maybe you have worked, or are now working, with any blocks or obstacles to holding open the gates of compassion and forgiveness for yourself or others, and you overcame that, or are wanting to overcome it.

Come up to honor the commitment you are making.

Aliyah #2

Ram Dass asks us to consider that "where I am triggered is where my inner work lies." Rumi: shared it this way: "The wound is the place where the Light enters you." The Holy Baal Shem Tov taught that rather than push away the distracting messages, find God in them.

This Aliyah is for our triggers.. and the wisdom that they offer us. To be an open channel for compassion and love, we have to be aware of when

we are triggered or hurt, and instead of reacting destructively, to BECOME PRESENT to the ouch, and USE it to show us where we have our work to do.

This Aliyah is for you if you want to affirm a commitment to mindful awareness instead of destructive reactivity in a situation that you are encountering, or if you want to honor the success you had in doing that in a life-situation that happened this year.

Come on up!

Aliyah #3

As Rumi said, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it." It also eliminates victimhood. That way love flows from you and returns to you.

This is referred to in the Torah as R'TZOH v SHOV.. the angels go forward and back and forward again. Energy is always going out and returning.

This Aliyah is for you if you want to open yourself to the reciprocity of LOVING and being LOVED in a more intentional way. If the Teshuvah that calls you this Yom Kippur is focused on removing inner obstacles to loving this Aliyah is for you

Come on up!