

Yom Kippur : The Day of Attunement

By Rabbi Shefa Gold

A Bat Mitzvah student wrote to me with the following question:

I hope that you will be willing to take the time to write and share with me what faith in God means to you as a Renewal / Reconstructionist Jew and how faith plays out in your daily life or in the life of your community?

Here was my answer:

“I call God “the Great Mystery.” To have faith in a mystery means that in each moment I am challenged to surrender to “what is,” and to look for the hidden blessing. Each day I am challenged to remember that I am ultimately safe. Even Death is safe... because when I identify with the reality of my infinite soul... there can be no tragedy. That feeling of ultimate safety is very freeing. It allows me to take risks, make mistakes and learn from them... and open my heart moment to moment to the mystery before me, no matter how terrible or beautiful. My faith urges me to look for beauty and blessing everywhere and in everyone. I am not disappointed.

God is the Glue that holds everything together, so when my faith speaks it says, “look for the connection between all things; look for the holy relationship between all beings.”

Whenever I feel disconnected or lonely or separate, my faith reminds me to search out the connection and to find the whole world inside me.

From Ecclesiastes Chapter 3:

אֶת-הַכֹּל עֹשֶׂה יָפֵה בְּעֵתוֹ גַּם אֶת-הָעוֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם

Et-Kol asa yafeh v'ito, gam et ha-olam natan b'libam

(God) makes everything beautiful in its time,
and also hides the universe in their hearts.

The job I am given is to uncover that beauty and to search for the intimation

of the whole universe in each of its parts. When I am working to heal my own heart, I do that work by remembering that whatever I am experiencing is part of the curriculum of being human.

When I am working to create community, I do that work from the faith that we are all part of one delicious organism, that we are already connected. And now we get to learn how that connection manifests. I receive every message of separation as a clue to what needs healing or clearing so that I can receive the truth and grace of wholeness.

The way I grow my faith is by sensing that God has faith in me... who I am and who I'm becoming. Each day we sing to God in our liturgy and say, "Raba Emunatecha! How Great is Your Faith, God!" And then I feel myself being seen and known and loved completely, exactly as I am. In that moment of feeling accepted, forgiven, encouraged and seen in my beauty, I am empowered to live another day with a full heart. My faith in the essential goodness of life grows because God has placed Her faith in me by giving me an opportunity to stand face to face with the Great Mystery without flinching. God's faith allows me to stand up as a Divine Partner, despite all of my flaws."

As we sit together on Yom Kippur, moving through this voluminous liturgy, my intention is to receive from the experience something that can grow our faith, so that this faith can sustain us through every difficulty we encounter. It can become the foundation for our experience and can give meaning to both victory and defeat, both pleasure and suffering. Faith can anchor in us a remembrance of the bigger picture, so that as the details and complications of our lives pour into our awareness, they fall into a container that is so large... we won't be overwhelmed. Every prayer that we say here today can be dedicated to expanding this container.

If God is a mystery that is fluid, alive, dynamic, ever-changing, and ever-eluding our grasp... then being in relationship with God every day means continually expanding to meet that Mystery. It means staying alert and curious, watching for signs and wonders. It means staying receptive and open. It means I get an opportunity to search for the best in myself as I respond to

each and every challenge.

Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism says that "...the failure to live up to the best that is in us means that our souls are not attuned to the divine, that we have betrayed God."

We have a chance today to attune our souls.

We might even call it the Day of Attunement.

So how do we accomplish this attunement to the divine, to the best in us?

The Unetane tokef prayer says, "The Great Shofar is sounded and a still small voice is heard." That still small voice is the key to our attunement. (This phrase kol dama daka is from 1st Kings chapter 19) This is the story where Elijah the prophet learns that... if we have enough patience and commitment... then, after the wind, the earthquake and the fire, after all the tumult...comes the still small voice. When we return our attention to the essential -- a centered awareness of our most generous compassion, our reverent appreciation for the preciousness of Life, then the still small voice can reverberate and be obeyed. And if we learn to listen well to that inner knowing, we can each become wise and calm in the face of even the most difficult challenges. We betray God when we ignore that voice or when we drown it out with the noise of our lives.

As a musician I know that the key to making beautiful music with others is to listen well. Our core prayer, the Sh'ma, teaches us that listening is the key to Echad, Oneness. And you can't learn to listen well, unless you stop at regular intervals to let the dust settle, to let the wind and fire and earthquake in our brains settle and slow and come to stillness. That is why the practice of Shabbat, of stopping our busy-ness, is our most precious gift. And Yom Kippur, this Day of Attunement is called the Shabbat of Shabbats.

We sit here all day away from the distractions of food and commerce, and we let the words of our ancestors wash over us. We leave the wind and the fire and the earthquake of our world outside, and we listen together for the still small voice. All these prayers that we chant, all the Torah that we learn, all the words that we've inherited are meant to send us to our own innate wisdom, to

the natural rhythm of love that beats in our hearts, to the simple joy of just being alive... to the best in us.

At the end of Yom Kippur, this Day of Attunement, the Great Shofar will be sounded and God-willing, the still small voice will be heard – inspiring us to take time each and every day to listen to its quiet wisdom and to receive its poignant beauty.