

The Gift of Accountability

The whole image and metaphor of being judged by God, just doesn't bring out the best in me. It is infantilizing. It provokes either fear or rebellion. Spiritual maturity requires that I accept the consequences of my mind-state, words and actions, but it is not Divine punishment. God is not angry or petty. God is holding me in love through it all, so I can use absolutely everything of life and death, to discern and fulfill my soul's purpose.

As we step into the High Holy Days, how can we inspire love? How do we empower each other? How can we open to the call of our potential?

An important, yet hidden part of the work that I do is that I am on the Ethics Committee of my Rabbinical Association. I do this work to face the shadow, to try to understand what can go wrong, how we might prevent it, and how to accompany my colleagues and friends on the path of Tshuvah, with humility, clarity and love. To be a member of a rabbinical Association is to give each other the gift of accountability.

And I have that same feeling coming here to celebrate the High Holy Days together. First, we make a decision to hold ourselves accountable, to do the work that is necessary in order to be clear channels for the Divine flow.

Bob Marley, in his song "Exodus," says, "Open your eyes and look within. Are you satisfied with the life you're living?"

Our liturgy is constantly sending us on an imaginary journey to re-live the Exodus — that mythic moment of possibility where we leave the constrictions, our small-mindedness, our narrow perspective, our passivity in the shadow of the powers-that-be, our addiction to the familiar and comfortable, our enslavement to the illusion of certainty.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reminded us of the persistence of the structures of power when he stated that "Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began but it is far from having been completed." This is true of the challenge of our outward political reality as we witness the stranger in our midst without healthcare or hope for justice. And it is true of our inner Pharaoh as well. Each of us is held back by the past, enslaved by our preconceptions.

We come together to hold ourselves accountable, and connect ourselves to *Oi Malchut Shamayim*, the Yoke of Heaven, which is another way of naming the infinite.

We come together to deepen our collective responsibility. Accountability presumes a certain potential, a certain inherent nobility. We are held accountable when we dare to own that latent yet secret potential.

The High Holy Days take us on an imaginary journey to our deathbed, where we can look back and have a soul perspective on the life we have lived. From that perspective we return to the bustle of our lives and can remember the essential values that might have been obscured; realign ourselves with that inner goodness, and reprioritize.

The Sages tell us, "A person will one day give reckoning for everything his eyes saw which, although permissible, he did not enjoy" (Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 12a)

On Yom Kippur, our tradition asks us to take an imaginary journey even beyond our death-bed.

In tractate Shabbat (31a) Rava said: "On the day you are entered into judgment you will be asked six questions

Asakta bifria ur'viah? — Did you engage in fruitfulness and reproduction?

Nasata v'natata be-emunah? — Did you deal with people faithfully? (literally did you give and take with faith?)

Kavata itim la-Torah? — Did you establish fixed time for spiritual study?

Pilpalta b'chochmah? — Did you explore wisdom?

Havanta davar mitoch davar? — Did you seek to understand the matter within the matter?

Tzipita lishuah? — Did you look forward to liberation?

You can imagine looking back at your life and asking, “Did I focus my attention on what was really important? How did I get distracted? Did I see the possibilities for love? Did I make the best of my situation? Did I remember my soul’s purpose?”

There’s a great comic character in the Talmud whose nickname was “*Ish Gamzu*”. No matter what happened to him, he responded to it with the words, “*Gam zeh l’tovah* — This is also for the good.” It didn’t matter if he won the lottery or his house burned down, if life was awful or wonderful... he had the same response. I will use this too for the good.

Ish Gamzu knew his soul’s purpose, and so everything that happened to him was dedicated in service to that purpose.

Let’s take one more imaginary journey— This time to the timeless moment before you, as a soul, entered this incarnation. You had a plan. You had a purpose. Let’s imagine that you chose the perfect family, the precise time and place, the ideal circumstance that could support the unfolding of your soul’s purpose. And you set an intention: I’m going to enter this life and use EVERYTHING to fulfil that purpose.

If on Yom Kippur I find the soul perspective and remember that my soul’s purpose is to learn how to love and be loved... then I will know that no matter what is happening I can look for the opportunity to learn these lessons and to grow in my capacity to love and to grow in my receptivity.

If on Yom Kippur I find the soul perspective and remember that my soul’s purpose is to awaken... then I will use EVERYTHING that happens as an opportunity for awakening.

(This was followed by *Ruach Nachon* chant to enter into an inquiry about our own soul’s purpose given to us through an imaginary journey to the timeless moment before birth. Then sharing with spirit buddies.)