

The Weather Is Freaking Us Out

The weather is freaking me out. Noticing the weather, responding to the weather and watching its changes is one of my core spiritual challenges. It used to be that the seasons were somewhat predictable; storms were exciting and talking with strangers about the weather was an enjoyable way to connect and pass the time.

Not anymore. Now the changing patterns of weather are calling us all to awaken from our complacency. And my challenge is to maintain inner equanimity and steady calm in the midst of these stormy changes.

The science behind the dire consequences of the human causes of the climate crisis is indisputable. We are those humans.

The book of Deuteronomy COMMANDS each of us to “See!” — to open the eyes of our hearts and behold the world that has been set before us. This clear seeing is both our redemption and our blessing. Only when our vision is no longer obscured by false beliefs, fear, denial, or the illusion of powerlessness, can we experience the freedom to choose the Blessing of Life that is being offered to us. We are commanded first to SEE, because without that clear vision, it may not be possible to discern blessing from curse.

The vantage point of Deuteronomy and this moment of Yom Kippur, allows us to see where we have been — “the long strange trip it’s been,” — and the doors of possibility that open before us in response to our “seeing.” If we believe that we are powerless, if we believe that the Land of Milk and Honey is beyond our reach, then we will not see those doors of possibility. We will be stuck forever at the threshold, feeling powerless and freaked out about the weather.

The Torah tells us that at every moment, with eyes wide open, we can choose between Blessing and Curse. The blessing appears when we are attentive to the flow of God that pours through us. And the curse befalls us when we ignore that flow and instead “go after other gods that we did not know.” (Deuteronomy 13:3)

THE GODS THAT WE PURSUE, distract us constantly. (Gods like short-term profit, the comfortable status quo, unlimited economic growth...) This predicament of feeling compelled to “go after other gods that we did not know” describes the mind-state of disconnection from Source. That state which sometimes manifests as addiction, despair, or cynicism (or just a diminished vitality), obscures the choice that is set before us. Instead of making that choice for blessing in each moment, we fall into habit or succumb to our cravings, and then we make blind, flawed choices.

The freedom to choose between Blessing and Curse depends on our clear seeing, and our clear seeing depends on the mind-state that we’re in. Our mind-state is dependent upon how connected we are to Source in each moment.

THERE IS A GRAMMATICAL INCONSISTENCY in the first sentence of Parshat *Re’eh* of Deuteronomy that may hold the secret to our exploration of vision. The text says, “See, I have set before you this day...” (Deuteronomy 11:26) The imperative verb “see” is in the singular in the Hebrew phrasing, yet the “before you” is in the plural. In the traditions of Torah, a mistake like this becomes a doorway; a mistake like this calls us to face a spiritual challenge. To ask the question: What is the relationship between my personal awakening and our collective awakening?

We live at a time when our collective awakening, as communities, as nations, as a species has become crucial. As we confront the growing disruption of the global climate, the depletion of vital resources, the

growing disparity between rich and poor, the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, it is clear that the human family must wake up and make fundamental changes in the way we treat each other and our environment. God sets before us (as a collective consciousness) the choice for blessing or curse. Yet, in approaching that collective awakening we are each addressed personally, in the singular. You personally must open your eyes. You personally are challenged to see.

It may be that the climate crisis is the greatest challenge that humans have faced; it is a crisis addressed together and faced alone when we wake up each day to violent storms, raging fires or just unseasonably weird weather. On Yom Kippur we come face to face with our personal responsibilities and then each of us must respond by aligning ourselves with our highest ideals.

Part of that process of alignment is cultivating hopefulness, imagination, vision, compassion and connection with others in the same boat. Which means all of us.

I realize what a challenge this is when the leader of our country has, in fact, rolled back dozens of environmental regulations, most recently reversing rules on auto emissions, saying that they were an unnecessary burden on the American economy. The leader of Brazil wants to open the Amazon to new commercial activity, virtually shutting down the lungs of our planet. Russia has become a vast, powerful petro-state. China's state-owned companies are pushing for coal projects at home and abroad, and India is also dead set on the expansion of coal production regardless of the consequences. Short-term financial gain which looks like a blessing is in reality a monumental curse.

We have been conditioned to believe that the environmental crisis is caused by large outside forces and therefore can be solved only by large outside forces. But recognizing that we are also responsible for the problem is the beginning of taking responsibility for the solution. Isn't that what Yom Kippur is all about? *Al Chet shechatanu l'fanecha*. We have been on a path towards disaster. Together we can change course.

Rabbi Nahum Ward says that "God has infused (within Creation), a liberating energy, an energy that meets and overcomes obstacles to flourishing and animates a movement toward more consciousness and mutually beneficial relationship. That energy, ... animates all that is. This is the energy that bends the arc of history toward justice. We find vision, wisdom and hope—as well as courage and strength-- as we connect to that energy."

Realigning with our highest ideals on Yom Kippur gets very personal.

Here's something that you may not want to hear:

Our treatment of animals is unethical, inhumane and unsustainable. It is not aligned with our highest ideals of kindness and justice. The system that supports the raising of something like 10 billion land animals per year in the United States alone is also a main contributor to a public health emergency and the climate crisis. Almost 30 % of the world's ice-free land is used to raise livestock. We grow a lot of crops to feed animals, and we cut down a lot of forests to do that. --

WE have turned our planet into a factory farm, destroying the very forests that might save us.

For personal health, for lives to be less threatened by changing climate, people must eat differently. How to do this is not debatable — more plants, fewer animals, less junk — yet those who profit from the status

quo will fight those changes through clever marketing and the obfuscation of facts.

Although individual decisions do not have ultimate power, we are all connected. Each choice for blessing and life ripples out. Individual decisions have power, and despair is not an option.

16 year old Greta Thunberg graced us with her impassioned indictment of the status quo at the UN Climate Summit:

“People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!”

She went on to say, “The world is waking up, and change is coming whether you like it or not.”

The change that is coming begins inside each of us. We can step into this time of world-awakening, deliberately, together, inspired by our love for each other and our reverent connection with this place we call home. We can and must choose Life.