***Sleeping, awake? Vulnerable? And where is my Lover?***

*Ani yeshayna, v’libi er, v’libi er. Kol dodi dofek, pitkhi li. (2x)*

The Song of Songs reminds us: “I am asleep, but my heart is awake. The voice of my lover is knocking: open to me!”

Many of us are here now with our eyes open, awake, so why am I bringing this to you?

I wonder, how are we visibly awake, but in the powerful world of the invisible perhaps still asleep? Our heart knows that something isn’t “right,” and yet we cannot face it, name it, or do something about it because we are - in fact- actually asleep.

*Ani yeshayna, v’libi er, v’libi er, kol dodi dofek, ‘pitkhi li’!*

Why should we wake up? Isn’t it infinitely more comfortable to be numb?

Yes, it is comfortable, but when your lover knocks, calling to you “open to me!” … which would you prefer?

And so, this Yom Kippur we are given a choice… Yet not solely at Yom Kippur do we have this choice, for although today can be isolated out as a solitary day, in reality it fits into into a much greater arc.

But first, what do our days, weeks, and years often look and feel like?

For many of us, they are a bit messy.

We are constantly trying to make order out of the chaos of the piles of papers; bills to pay; dirty laundry and dishes; long days of work, or of feeling not as productive as we might like and wondering what we are doing with our lives; filling our cars with gas; attending to children, family, or friends in need of help or guidance, while simultaneously trying to squeeze in moments to connect to ourselves, our loved ones, and this wondrous planet we call Earth. Just as on Rosh haShannah and Simchat Torah we remember that before the world was created chaos filled everything, many of us struggle with our own movement from chaos to order. And did the Rabbi just say that “our lover was knocking- ‘open to me!’?” Who can hear this lover in the midst of our chaos?

How can we escape this sometimes futile-feeling-effort of running on the hamster wheel? And what do we do with the frightening fact that perhaps we are *not* invincible? We often try to sleep.

Alternatively, though, we could try tapping into the moment- both this very moment itself, and this greater arc of dramatic ritual in which we now find ourselves.

We call these days the High Holy Days, or *Yamim Nora’im/* the Days of Awe. But we could call this time the “High Drama days,” for the holy days of this season are full of intense drama.

Last week, together we heard the shofar blast 100 times in an attempt by our tradition to wake us up, to begin breaking open our hearts. Starting last night and continuing today we fast- refraining from food, drink, and the most intimate of acts. Many of us wear the simple color of white. Last week and today we ask, “Who will live and who will die this year!?”

And last night we wore *tallitot* as we opened this holy day of Yom Kippur with the powerful, ancient liturgy of Kol Nidrei. We beat - or rub - our chests, attempting to further open to our collective guilt, and our individual responsibility for these acts. Some of them we have ourselves actually committed. As for the others, our tradition tells us we are complicit simply because we are in fact all connected to one another, even as we try to differentiate and separate out who is “good” and who is “evil.”

Tonight, as we close this holy day, we open our hearts and sing out, *El nora alilah ham’tzeh lanu m’chilah bi’shaat ha’n’ilah / God- great of deed, the awesome one, grant pardon for the wrongs that we have done in the hour of closing the gates!*

The drama intensifies: *ptah lanu sha’ar,* “the gates are closing! Please- keep them open! I want to live!” And we end these great rituals with a single, extended, blast of the shofar.

But does this drama end then? And when does the arc of this season of high drama actually begin?

In his book, *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared,* Rabbi Alan Lew, may his memory be for a blessing, lays out a journey that we take from Tisha b’Av, in the summer, when we commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, through to the end of Sukkot, in autumn. For it’s not just the Temple that falls down on Tisha b’Av, but we are invited to ask ourselves, “perhaps my home, the solid four walls and roof that I thought provided order, structure and a foundation in my life, is collapsing around me…. Now…”

When our supposedly rock-solid systems collapse, where are we? Who are we? Do we have the courage to ask these questions?

Just a few weeks later the drama continues as we begin the ancient ritual of blowing the shofar… every day… trying to wake up.

For one month we engage in this work, until we finally come to the day of rebirth and new beginnings. Our autumn celebration of such hope… even as the world around us begins to move into the season of “letting go,” and falling. And so we enter the drama of Rosh HaShanah, and now Yom Kippur.

In just a couple of days, we - ourselves- will have the opportunity to return to home again. But this home that we will enter is not like the solid home that came tumbling down around us. This home is an “idea” of a home. In this home we face the truth that yes- we are vulnerable.

And this “idea of a home” reminds us that we are not separate from the rest of the world. We chant from Ecclesiastes- “To everything, turn, turn, turn. There is a season, turn, turn turn…” In owning and claiming our vulnerability, rather than fighting or hiding from it, we can find peace in our sukkah. *Ufros aleynu sukkat shlomekha….* until we dismantle this home and find ourselves journeying again.

We are in an arc of high drama, to remind us of our vulnerability. For from that place, even with the trauma it entails of experiencing our home falling around us and our search for a new home as we ask, “Who am I!?,” we can find deep healing.

In the fall issue of *Yes! Magazine,* Michaela Haas shares with us some of the research about how people get to “post-traumatic growth.” Although the disorder, PTSD, gets more attention, University of NC psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun describe the surprising benefits many survivors discover in the process of healing from a traumatic event. This is not to say that traumatic events are good things, or that everyone does heal.

According to Tedeschi, almost 90% of us will experience one or more traumatic events during our lifetime, through cancer diagnoses, traffic accidents, sexual assault, and other events. Nevertheless, Tedeschi and Calhoun tell us that “In the wake of trauma, people become more aware of the futility in life, and that unsettles some while it focuses others. This is the paradox of growth: People become more vulnerable yet stronger” (p. 44).

And **that** is the truth into which these dramatic rituals invite us to awaken. We end with **that** experiential and physical reminder as we sit in the sukkah. But the question remains, what about after Sukkot? What do we do until the next TIsha b’Av?

Ah… we get to practice, practice, practice… and fall asleep, and awaken again.

When I offer this arc of rituals, I want to be clear: coming to the synagogue for the various holy days and Shabbat is part of the practice. But I also recognize that that doesn’t work for everyone! That is okay! In addition, *just coming to the synagogue at these particular times* ***does not guarantee awakening!***

Rabbi Josh and I certainly strive to use the Jewish rituals and the structures we have as tools for awakening, yet while the structures and rituals can help us go deep, they can also get in the way at times.

In closing, though, I would like to offer you four different kinds of practices to experiment with in this new year. Perhaps they just might help *you* remember and awaken to your vulnerability, your potential for growth, and to more clearly hear *your* lover knocking on the door.

The first is physical, from a Hasidic Rebbe who died in the early 1800s in Poland. The second two are brought by Rabbinic Pastor and Spiritual Guide Estelle Frankel, a practicing psychotherapist and a seasoned teacher of Jewish mysticism and meditation. And the final one is really a heads up about an experiential class that Rabbi Josh will be offering starting in a couple of weeks:

1. So first, in a deceptively simple practice, Rabbi Simcha Bunem reminds us to live our lives awake to our power, while also walking in the world with great humility. We might- as he did- carry a note in each pocket. In one pocket are the words, “The world was created for me.” In the other, “I am nothing but dust and ashes.” Perhaps you would like to write those two phrases on paper and put them in a place where you can pull out the one you need at any particular moment.

Alternatively, through the Oseh gift shop you can also be the proud owner of a small wooden coin that has each of these phrases imprinted on it. Check the Oseh gift shop to get yours (after hag!).

However we do it, may we ultimately walk through this world, attentively balancing when we need to step into our power, and when humility will better serve us and others.

2) We often notice the negative: in others, in ourselves. While we must notice what needs to change if we want to have any hope of ever changing it, or us, we also need to set those critical eyes aside at times and “see ourselves through God’s eyes.” Perhaps we can incorporate into our busy lives some moments to stop, connect to the steady rhythm of our breath, and from that place see ourselves with **eyes filled with wisdom** and **loving-kindness**, eyes that **see with compassion and do not judge**.

May we see ourselves as the amazing mystery and pure being that

we each are.

3) In Estelle Frankel’s book, Sacred Therapy, she tells us, “Rabbi Simcha Bunam also remarked, “The mistakes [we make] are not [our] greatest crime. Rather, [our] greatest crime is that [we] have the power to do teshuvah- to turn [our] life around at any moment-- yet [we] do not do so!” (Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, p. 139). What might be an important starting point for this *t’shuvah*? Medieval scholar and doctor, Maimonides, reminds us of the importance of the vidui. “*Ashamnu…”* We are guilty…” we begin. And we continue, “*Al cheyt sh’khatanu l’fanecha…*” “For the sin we have committed before you…”. Yes. We are guilty of so much. And on Yom Kippur we get specific about our collective sins and the role of the individual.

Why such a large focus on this? To stir regret and remorse. For we need those emotions to be activated- in a healthy way that can lead to opening and action. We need to make space to feel the pain that we have brought upon ourselves and others in order to begin to change, in order to begin the *t’shuvah* process.

May our hearts break open.

4) Lastly, in just 3 weeks and 1 day Rabbi Josh will be leading an experiential class entitled “**The Life of All the Worlds: Aliveness, Being and Jewish Spirituality**.” Are you wondering how to hear the voice of your lover knocking? Sign up and find out for yourself.

This year, we will surely find ourselves sleeping again. But that is just the point- in noticing that we have fallen asleep we have the opportunity to begin to awaken. The rituals from the Tisha b’Av until the very end of Sukkot have a rhythm and power to them that can help us awaken. But in fact, every day we can make that choice as well. May we do so this year.

*Ani y’shena, v’libi er, v’libi er, kol dodi dofek- “Pitkhi li!”*

*Shana tova*, *v’gmar hatima tova*/ may we each be sealed in the book of wakefulness. Amen.