

TOOLS FOR ELUL: PREPARING FOR THE DAYS OF AWE

Dear Gan HaLev-ers-

I am looking forward to spending the Days of Awe 5772 with you. Of course, I am busy preparing for our time together, but I wanted to invite you to prepare as well.

The Jewish calendar schools us in emotional literacy. Its days of celebration and commemoration actually provide us experiences that hit all the poles of emotional life. If we allow the calendar to be our teacher, we are less likely to be blindsided by these profound experiences when they touch our personal lives, for we will have cultivated the necessary emotional muscles, in the company of community, that can sustain us when we encounter these experiences as individuals.

The month of Elul, which begins with the new moon of August 30th and ends with Rosh Hashanah, on the new moon of Tishre, is a month of preparation for the New Year. It is set aside for self-reflection. Traditionally, we are to hear the sound of the Shofar each morning, bidding us to “arise from our slumbers” and become more present and self-aware. We are to examine our lives and begin the work of directing our lives to more authenticity. What that authenticity might look like is suggested in the following psalm, which is repeated each day.

Achat Sha’alti

*Achat sha'alti me'eit Adonai, otah avakesh
Shivti b'veit Adonai, kol y'mei chayay
Lachazot b'noam, b'noam Yah, u'l'vaker b'heikhalo*

*One thing I ask, I ask of You, for which I earnestly pray:
That I might dwell in Your house all the days of my life,
Knowing the beauty, the beauty of You, and to dwell in Your holy place!*

What does it mean to “dwell in [God’s] house?”

That’s a good question for you to bring to your Elul preparations for the High Holidays. For me, it means to examine my life and the extent to which I am living a life in alignment (dwelling in God’s house) with my authentic values. How does my life reflect the things that I consider “Holy?”

The work of Elul is to answer that question. The work of the High Holidays is to come to terms with that answer and , through Teshuva

(turning, returning to our authentic, holy path) do the necessary realignment in order to pursue our soul's call.

I encourage you to spend the next month asking yourself that question and listening (in reality or imagination) to the call of the shofar. I would be delighted to meet with you individually to help with your preparation, if any of you would like that. I will be arriving in Marin on the 21st and will be available throughout the week before Rosh Hashanna and during the ten days between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur.

Here is a Jewish spiritual practice to help you discover the call of your soul. It is to be recited upon going to sleep each night and followed up upon, the first thing when arising, the next morning.

DREAM INDUCTION FOR THE MONTH OF ELUL

Before going to sleep each night, ask the following question.

What turn must I make to return to my authentic soul & contribute to healing the world?

Then recite the following dream incantation, written by the 16th century legalist and mystic, Rabbi Joseph Karo.

I adjure you with the great, mighty and awesome Name of God, that you visit me this night and answer my question and request, whether by dream, by vision, by indicating a verse from Scripture, by automatic speech or writing.

Say the Shema and then go to sleep.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad.

Hear, O Israel: YHVH is our G-d,

YHVH is One.

When you wake up, the next morning, write down your dream,, first thing! If you don't remember your dream, just start writing whatever comes into your head or open the Torah to a random page and write down the first line that you see. When we come together on Rosh Hashana evening, bring an index card or small piece of paper with a distillation of what you have learned and place it (anonymously) in a dream basket that we will have for you.

Together we will discover our collective call for the sacred Hebrew New Year: 5772. I look forward to being together!