

Listening Before Yom Kippur - Rabbi David Ingber on Shabbat Shuva 5777 (10 7 16)

I don't have a lot to say tonight. So, so listen carefully. One of my favorite teachers and a dear inspiration for me throughout my spiritual life, my inner life, has been the poet Mark Nepo, whose book, *The One Life We're Given*, has been a guiding force for me.

It's been on my journey for the past during the month of Elul and now for the last few days of Tishrei and will be with me for a while, and so I want to read a piece from him and connect it a little bit to tomorrow morning's reading. He writes in a piece called *A Song for Pilgrims*. I wanted to journey with a group of inner pilgrims over time, so I convened a small class of willing souls who agreed to gather four times a year.

And we bonded quickly, he writes. And in each gathering, we picked up as if no time had passed. And over time, each of us shared how we'd been forced by life to shed some form of mask in order to live closer to what matters most.

We quoted the Greek poet George Seferis. I hope I got that right. George Seferis, who said, Like a bird with a broken wing that has traveled through wind for years, I sleep and my heart stays awake.

Like a bird with a broken wing that has traveled through wind for years, I sleep and my heart stays awake. Ani isheinad li b'ir. Says the author of *Song of Songs*, I am asleep but my heart is awake.

And Nepo writes, How the bird continues for years with a broken wing and how the heart continues for years despite its breaks becomes part of our inner vocabulary. Later on, he writes about how they would come together and instead of just quoting this beautiful poem, they would find a South American custom called *Aidaí*, which is Portuguese for and then. Regardless of the story that they told or the hardship that they conveyed, the custom in South American cultures, and he quotes, is for the listener to ask three times, *Aidaí, Aidaí, Aidaí*, with a tone that implies, and so, what does this mean? And so, what now? And so, what is your next step? And so, what does that mean? What now? What is your next step? I'm inspired by this because my dear friend, Dr. Aaron Lathes-Mokler sent out a beautiful teaching this morning, this afternoon, from Yeshiva Maharat, the seminary for ordaining women in the Orthodox tradition, started by Rabbi Avi Weiss.

And my dear friend, Erin, is the Director of Spiritual Development there. She sends out a weekly Parshat teaching, which is worthwhile to get on her email list. She quotes the Tolosachav Yosef, the great student, the most eminent student, the preeminent student of the Baal Shem Tov, of the founder of the Hasidic movement.

She quotes the Tolosachav, who quotes in the name of his teacher a verse from this, tomorrow morning's Parsha. Moshe is in the penultimate moment of his life. In fact, according to Midrash, it's the day of his death.

V'gidech Moshe, tomorrow morning we read about, Moshe is speaking to the people on his deathbed, almost. And he says to them, there will come a time that if you don't hear G-d's

word, if you don't listen to G-d, G-d will... G-d, He says, I will conceal My face from you at that day. And the Baal Shem Tov, quoted by his student, picks up on the doubling of the concealment.

Hasder astir, I will conceal, conceal My face. And the Baal Shem Tov says, it would be one thing for G-d to punish and say, I won't show you My face, but there will come a time when we will not only see, not see G-d's face, but we won't even know that G-d is here. And we'll give up even looking, says the Baal Shem Tov.

There could be hardships and difficulties, not G-d's punishment, G-d forbid, but a sense that we can't find G-d, no matter how hard we look. We use the language of G-d, we use the language of spirit, but we somehow feel that our wings have fallen and our eyes have been broken. Somehow we feel wounded that we're flying through wind.

And how are we making it through? We're searching in the dark, like the dark moon that we began Rosh Hashanah with, searching for a scintilla of light, she says. A scintilla of light, Aaron says. And sometimes we don't even know to look because we've given up so long ago that we could ever find.

And says the Baal Shem Tov, once you realize that G-d is hiding, then G-d is no longer hiding. At the moment that we realize, says the Baal Shem Tov, that within the dark place, it's possible to squeeze some light and stake a claim there for the Divine as you understand G-d, not the G-d whom you rejected, not the G-d whom you think is punishing you.

I sat with a young man this week and all he could say to me was, G-d hates me, I'm sure of it. What can you say when someone says that but cry, right? I say, let me speak for G-d, if I may. In this moment. And say, I love you. If we could hear that during these seven days before Yom Kippur. If we could hear that sometimes we feel double secret probation, double secret concealment. We feel like we're not even looking, we're so asleep, but the heart is awake.

If we could say, wake up, there's joy out there. There may have been an eclipse of the sun, but there's joy. There's joy.

So this Shabbat of Shuvah, Shuvah Yisrael Ad Hashem Elokecha Ki Chashada V'Avonecha This Shabbat of Shabbat Shuvah, this is named because of the verse from the Prophet who said, Return, O Israel, Ad Hashem Elokecha. And the great Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, Tevezetzler Rebbe said, really, only Ad Hashem Elokecha? Really, return only Ad, which means up to G-d? Shuvah Yisrael La Hashem Elokecha, it should say to G-d. What Ad means, up until, up to the precipice.

He says, come as far as you can and then the Rabbana Shalom, then the source of love and light and joy and possibility and potency and past. And we'll come to meet you there. On the darkness that's on the edge of town, you know.

May the G-d who hides in things that we've forgotten to look for, smile at us as we remember and as we rise.