

Tshuva is Now

Sadhguru chants Nithyananda Yoga Yoga Nithyananda Yoga Yoga Nithyananda Yoga Yoga Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda Nithyananda You can feel it in the air, you know. Both literally and figuratively, we're already there. Kimat, almost.

And every year on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah, on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, the Torah addresses us in a very personal way. Atem nitzavim hayom kolchem. You're all here today. You made it, almost. Atem nitzavim hayom kolchem. That we are blessed to be able to arrive at the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. And in the indeterminacy that is what life is. The suspicion, the intuition that each of us has that is noble and dead on. We recognize the palpable sense of uncertainty that is what it is to be human. The radical vulnerability that is to have made it in this lifetime, into this body, into this place and time to be incarnate is to live a life that is both joyous and celebratory and radically hanging by a thread. Atem nitzavim hayom kolchem. All of you here.

The Torah begins by saying you are standing. You are firm. Nitzavim. Yitzivut. Stability. And the questions that the commentators ask around some of these verses are interesting but they're not for now. Maybe one. The Torah goes on to say after it addresses us in the plural kolchem, all of you, kolchem, all of you in the plural. It then switches language mid-speech. Moses begins to speak in the first person. Le'ovrecha be'brit uve'alato. And of course the commentators, all of them, are confused. You began speaking in the we and now you're speaking in the you single. But the question isn't that strong a question really. Because as much as all of us have made it here together, each and every one of us had a unique path that brought us here. As much as collectively we might have spent last Rosh Hashanah together, many of us, the unique maslul, the unique path that we took to arrive here this Shabbat and this Rosh Hashanah and this Yom Kippur is uniquely our own. It belongs to each and every one of us. Only we know individually what it took to arrive. And how many moments in our life we weren't sure if we'd make it. And whatever that means. The Torah says all of you together are here and lucky, but each of you individually has a story to tell.

Each of you individually will be praying for something unique on Rosh Hashanah. I love to tell the story that my Hebrusa came back from Israel one year and he said that he had experienced the most powerful preparation for the high holidays in Israel. He'd been at a learning institute and they had done an exercise where they invited the community to come together. And when the community came together, they divided into small groups and in those groups they shared with one another what it was that they would be praying for on Rosh Hashanah. And my friend Joe said to me, you know, I've never had that experience before in my life. I always go to shul, I know I'm sitting next to the same guy for the last 20 years and I have no idea what he's praying for. And he said to me, and he said something very beautiful, he said, and there are moments in my davening and my prayers on Rosh Hashanah where I can't pray. And if I knew what the person next to me was praying for, I could pray for them. Isn't that beautiful? If I knew what they were praying for and I couldn't pray, I couldn't open, I couldn't find a way into my heart, I could then open my heart to this person.

We are all together and unique. The path towards tshuva that Nitzavim, this week's Torah portion, lays before us, teaches us a number of lessons about what it is to return at this time of the year. Rabbi Alan Lew points out that the word return appears seven times in this week's parasha. As if to say to us this parasha is all about returning. And a number of lessons about returning he offers. One is that tshuva never ends. The process, the dialectic, the dance of tshuva is a process of returning and running, running and returning, leaving and arriving. It never ends. He says a step away is a step home. That the very things that we thought were the points of leaving are in a different perspective and a different mabat are actually bringing us closer. So tshuva is always circular and it always moves us in a certain direction.

And the last thing he says about tshuva which he takes from this week's Torah portion is maybe the most beautiful line in Torah and I say that, I know, every week. The Torah says this week that even if tshuva is circular or maybe a spiral of growth, it's never ending. Maybe tshuva also requires us hitting rock bottom in certain circumstances, whatever tshuva is. We might imagine the Torah is kind of thinking in our minds. You might imagine that you don't really know how to do it. You might come to shul and think okay rabbi teach me how to do tshuva. Maybe I should go to a class on how to do tshuva. Maybe I should take a workshop on tshuva. Maybe I should go to Esalen and do a tshuva at Esalen, which is not so bad I'm sure. Ki karov eylecha ha-davar me'od. B'ficha u bil'avcha al'asot'o. Re'ei natati d'fnechem ha-yom et ha-bracha ve'et ha-klala. The Torah says ki karov eylecha ha-davar.

You don't have to go far away to know what tshuva is. You don't need to go to some expert. You don't have to do something special. Tshuva is the process of knowing already what you know but turning towards it. Tshuva is found in the moment to moment that our mind is creating. Tshuva is found in the issues that arise over and over again in our lives that we can't seem to get out of. That's where tshuva is happening. That's where tshuva is inviting us. Ki karov eylecha ha-davar, the matter is close to you. It's right now.

I always love the quote of Rav Kook who said once, he didn't say it once, he said it, it was in his book, Orot Ha-Tshuva. He said that tshuva, returning, aligning ourselves, connecting, opening, all of those happen in an instant. He brings a proof from the oddest of places. He brings a proof from the Talmud where the Talmud says that if I offer you a ring, I say I would love, let's have a condition, I'd like to get married. And I'm a rasha, I'm an evil person. And I make a condition, we'll be married if I'm a righteous man. Knowing full well, right, that I'm not going to fulfill that condition, I'm not exactly righteous. The Talmud says, Misafik, on a doubt, we're married. Why? Shema hir ha-tshuva. Perhaps in the moment when I conditioned, I had a thought of returning. And I fulfilled my condition, now I'm a righteous person. A moment's thought in the middle of a process. You never know, you never know. Hatem nitzavim ha-yom kolchem.

Each and every one of you is lucky to be arriving again at Rosh Hashanah and you have a choice. It couldn't be clearer. Life is this choice. The choice to turn. To turn towards our vulnerable soft hearts. To turn towards our messy places. To turn towards our breath. As we navigate fear and anxiety about the future. To make that turn is tshuva. And for that reason, we are here again. Standing firm. Being clearly called. I know all of you who are here

tonight, you know a thing or two about tshuva. I know all of you that are here tonight, know a thing or two about what it is to hear that voice.

So may God bless each and every one of us. As we make that final turn towards Rosh Hashanah. That we have the courage to be quiet. To stop all of our busyness. To not wait for next year. To allow ourselves to be close to that which is already close to us. Ki karov eylechem ha-davar naod.