

That cuts to the heart of it just now, doesn't it? Because some of you are thinking, wait a second. It's Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana is a day of deep ambivalence.

It's a day that is called Yom Hedin. Day of Judgement.

That doesn't sound good, does it?

Day of judgment. Scary a little bit.

But it's also a day of coronation.

[HaYom horat elam] It's the celebration of the birth of the world. That's a celebration of birth itself. The Torah reading tomorrow morning will be heralding a birth.

It will be themes of birth in the have to the prophetic readings which will have Hannah praying for a yearning, praying, pleading for a son which will be fulfilled in Shmuel and Samuel. It's a day of [?]

We're praying for the visitation of the kingdom of God on earth. I always wanted to say that and we're in a church, so I wanted to say that.

Amen. Amen.

And what that means. What does it mean?

I know I'm not asking you to check in your theological preferences at the door. We didn't check off a box. I believe in God. I don't believe in God. I think the siddur is literal. I don't think it's literal none of that was asked. But some of you might be wondering, what does that mean? And I'm sure there are as many understandings of that as there are people here tonight, and that'll be here over the coming few weeks.

But on a simple level, it means the realization of a vision that would be worthy of saying, this is God's kingdom. Yeah, that we would be living in a world where we would see manifest in the real, not the ideal in the real, something that we would say are. That's a God I believe in. That's a world that is in the vision of the God that I believe in.

[???] To be the sovereign over the world in your glory, doesn't mean I hope that everybody believes in my holy book.

But that everybody sees with the eyes of God.

And you don't need me to stand here and tell you that we lived through another year.
Where? Where that vision.

Was sadly not fulfilled.

So we come together to keep praying, to kindle that that hope.

To dust off the dust of cynicism and despair. We come this hagim.

To become like that shofar again. Hollow. Not in the Hollow Men sense, but in the sense of being a conduit for hope, for being a vessel for that vision that within my own body, heart, mind and soul, there aren't blockages where hope gets stuck.

Yeah. Where I need a quadruple bypass. Hope surgery, you know.

And the year does that to us.

So we arrive at this season, which when I was growing up, of course meant the High Holidays. But those of you who live here in New York know that this time of the year is not only the time of the year for the High Holidays, but it is also the time of the year for... You got it? The US open, right?

I thought I heard you US open.

How many of you been? How many people have you been to the US open? A couple of people. Those who don't know what it is. Raise your hands. Okay. Wow US open. It's a tennis tournament. It's a good tennis tournament. And if you don't know what tennis is, that's afterwards. We'll talk about that after.

So here's the phenomenon. You can. It could be here. It could be the US open. Doesn't matter where you get there. You scope it out. You get your cheap tickets online or at the scalpers. Nobody ever admits to doing that. You get your tickets, you come in, you find your seats all the way up, the nosebleeds right up right there.

You see what's going on, and you scope out where you're not sitting.

Which is right there.

And then you wait. You wait, you wait. And at the right moment, right, right down, looking around, seeing. So finally, you're right there in the best seats in the house. It's all about the seats, right? Right. All of you were here early to preheat this not so hot sanctuary.

So where you sit on Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur is very important.

Where you sit is a vital question that I want you to hold for the next ten days. Where am I sitting?

What angle, what perspective? Am I looking at? Things from my center stage left stage right. I don't even know if that's right. Is that stage left? Stage right.

I spoke earlier about Shuvah.

The word Shuvah means literally in answer. Unfortunately, in the sense of ba'al Shuvah, which is often the term used for someone who's returned to religion. They say you are a ba'al, you're a master of answers. Which is quite sad, isn't it? Because I would hope that someone who returns to religion has questions, not answers.

But Shuvah means an answer.

It also means to return something like a returned object. So if I lose something, [...] is when I bring it back to you. [???

I'm going to bring it back to you. And this is the deeper meaning of Shuvah when it's understood by the mystics to be a returning of that which you really are.

Which you've lost, which somebody else might have been given. That's what Shuvah is, is returning to you what was lost. For the mystics Shuvah is the movement of the divided self towards wholeness, a wholeness that includes divisions and ruptures, successes and failures.

Homeless and whole heartedness are those states of being that form the underpinnings of courage. And courage is what it takes, my friends, to be compassionate. Compassion takes strength. Compassion, say our sages, is what this entire period is all about. There is a wonderful Talmudic teaching that says that on Rosh Hoshana we blow the shofar, and we do all of these things in order to do one thing and one thing only.

To change God's seat, to change God's seat. The Gemorrah, the Talmud says that on Rosh Hoshana God sits in Kisei HaDin, the seat of Din, the seat of judgment, the seat of karma, the seat of law, of law and cause and effect, what's called strict justice. Justice. You did X. This is what your life is like. And the whole movement, say the rabbis, is to move from Kisei HaDin, the judgment seat, to Kisei HaRamin, the compassion seat.

We are trying to awaken in God. And by that I'll just make a subtle move here, because everything in our tradition we say about God, we also say about ourselves to some degree, not everything, but many things. One of the highest forms of ethical living is to be like God. To act like God would act. Imitatio Dei, [???], God clothes the naked, we clothe the naked, God heals the sick.

We are enjoined to heal the sick.

The word Shuvah, I think, is connected to the word Lashevet.

Where you sit. Do you sit on judgment's seat? Is that the section that you have been given this high holidays? Judging the services. Judging yourself for judging the services.

Judging the whole every little piece. Where do we sit?

What do you sit in? Compassion seat. You sit in the place of of what compassion really is.

I don't know exactly what it is, but I'm going to get there in a minute. But my question is, how do we move from one seat to the next? Right. It's not as simple as just getting up and going down here or going to be courtside. And I have to be honest, I don't know. [???], I don't know.

I have no idea. I love the quote that some of you might know from Anne Lamott great author. She she writes, "how come you can hear a chord and another and then your heart breaks open? How come you can hear a chord and let another? And then your heart breaks open?" Mysterious are the ways that we move from judgment seat to compassion seat.

I have no idea what it will take. We're going to be doing a lot of sitting and standing. Sitting and standing and singing in chords will be everywhere, and who knows, it could be a glance. It could be a memory that floats up. It could be a word. It could be the light somewhere.

On Rosh Hashana we are attentive to the mysterious ways that we move from judgment to compassion, it could be.

It could be that we're hardwired to do this kind of returning. That could be the truth, could be that we just do Shuvah. That's the way it goes. Maybe, like homing pigeons, we have an innate yearning to reground and to come back, to reconnect our core. Maybe or maybe looking back over time, we've seen what centuries of retribution in the name of justice have done.

We have only doubled and tripled the number of dead.

So let's put down the myth tonight that the Angel of justice needs to be blind and cold in order to do her work. The reverse is actually much truer to our experience, isn't it?

Justice that is lasting is only possible through a clear I, and an open heart is secret of Din of justice is in Rahamin, compassion. So compassion. Compassion literally means to feel with. And when the sages claim that we're trying to move God from justice to compassion, they aren't just making an important theological statement. They're making an important humanistic assertion.

We, like God, are invited during this period to move our judgments to compassion.

As we care for the one soul we are given and the one world that we have been given. Is it justice or healing that we need? That's our question. Is it justice or is it healing? And compassion, by the way, doesn't mean pity. Pity is a stepchild of compassion. Pity is an oversympathizing with one side of a situation.

Compassion as a deep core practice is the practice of holding as many sides of truth as we can possibly hold, while feeling all the lives that are involved. A justice that is informed by compassion reflects a maturity of the heart that allows victims and perpetrators to face each other authentically. Deeper Forms of justice has the thief working to give things away, and the violent ones dressing the wounds in emergency rooms.

Mark Nepo writes compassion as feeling with someone, as with feeling with myself, would have justice remove her blindfold and put her scales down. Instead, she might stand between the violated and the violator with a hand on each of their hearts, deeply listening. Get that? That compassion would have me standing between with a hand on the heart, listening deeply.

I was so moved when I read that maybe that's not what you were expecting. This high holiday period. What I know for myself is that changing my seat from judgment to compassion is the holiest form of imitating God that I know. If compassion is the largest perspective we can comfortably hold, if compassion is the part seen against the backdrop of the whole, if compassion means healing and not retribution, touching hearts, not beating them down, then I'm ready.

Then I'm excited about tonight. I'm excited about tomorrow morning and Friday morning. I'm excited about even Yom Kippur because it gives me a chance to flex my compassion muscles.

It gives me a chance to see how much judgment is really necessary to commit to change.

When we become aware of that voice that is constantly judging, we want to scream out to the fire, come on, help me move from one seat to another. Help me move from the voice of criticism to the voice of listening, of inquiry.

That's what we're doing.

So, compassion. Maybe some of you are thinking, well, that's a pretty typical Romemu sermon.

My experience, friends, week in and week out and in the prayers that I placed into this ark that were written by our own community for two hours, I took handwritten notes that were written on Saturday evening, prayers that I asked the community to give over as a way for me to know what people were praying for. They were written anonymously, almost all of them.

I wanted to get a sense of what is going on, what's percolating, where are people, where are people's hearts? And you can't imagine how much self-hatred there is. You can't imagine. You ask someone to tell you what you're praying for. And three out of the four notes were, "I have to stop beating myself up." Three out of the four notes were, "help me."

Help me find a place where I can be as nice to myself as I am to my friends.

So what kind of God are you tonight? God? What kind of God are you going to be? When we come here to remember? I hope that you will be a God who holds up a compassionate mirror, a God who gives directions on how to move from the seat of judgment to the seat of compassion.

So I invite you tonight and throughout the holiday to ask yourself where does compassion live in me.

And I also want to invite you, if at any moment over the next ten days or three that will be together, you feel like moving your seat.

Be my guest.