

Yom Kippur: Celebrating What Is

Dear Friends,

Yom Kippur is a joyous holiday!

It begins with a festive meal - the kind Jews love having - which would normally take place after evening services but because of the fast, is brought forward to the afternoon.

This meal is not meant to fill our bellies in order to make the fast easier. Rather, it is a royal feast of celebration. We celebrate the abundance. We celebrate what is. We celebrate life.

On Shabbat and holidays it is forbidden to fast. Yom Kippur is the big exception to this rule. It is a very important holiday which earned the title Shabbat-Shabbaton, i.e. both Shabbat-like and a holiday, and only on this holiday are we allowed to fast, because it is a significant part of the celebration itself!

Shabbat is considered a “taste of the world to come”; a small, imaginary glimpse of a world without worry and deprivation. Yom Kippur, then, is an even higher plain than Shabbat. On Yom Kippur we are so (theoretically) in touch with the fullness our Being, that we don't even require sustenance!

We are all familiar with the experience of continually walking over and opening the refrigerator, even when we aren't hungry. This action is an expression of a perpetual and deep sense of deprivation and of disquiet.

It is entirely a psychological hunger, but we experience it as physical.

Yom Kippur is an opportunity and an invitation to practice the sense of inner satiety, of being whole.

The sense of deprivation - hunger, thirst, etc - comes from our consciousness, from our thinking. In reality, there is nothing lacking. There is only the **sense** of lack and deprivation, which are the result of **thought**.

The word “isn't” is fictitious; there **is** no such thing as isn't... There **is**, indeed, a sensation of hunger; there **is** a sensation of thirst; there **is** a sensation of being cold or hot. There **is** a sensation of pain. But in fact, these are all feelings of what **is**, and it is only our thinking that translates them into what isn't:

there-is-a-feeling-of-hunger becomes the thought “I do **not** have food.”

We are in the midst of a severe drought. Everyone is talking about the **lack** of rain. There **isn't** enough water. This is a sensation which concerns us greatly, and for good reason! But it is nevertheless "only" a sensation. The truth is that **there is what there is**. There **is** rain and there **is** water. True, the map of precipitation has changed; there **is** flooding in the coastal plain, and in the north there **is** a drought.

Notice the difference between discussing what there **is** and what there **isn't**.

One of the words that appear repeatedly in the Yom Kippur prayers is the word "chet", sin. I do not normally talk about sins in my drashot. Not because there aren't any, but because it is a difficult word to understand and it connotes judgment and guilt. Great care is needed when judging ourselves and others, and so I prefer to leave it to the Divine realm. We, humans, can never understand Divine judgment and morality, so better leave it up to Him...

Having said this, and in light of the topic of this drasha, I would like to suggest that Yom Kippur deals with a very unique kind of sin: the sin of feeling deprived.

If deprivation is one of consciousness and thought, while in reality there is only what is, then the sense of deprivation is a sin of sorts - a misguided judgment of the Creator. The sense of lack may even be the ultimate sin (although, as I said, I leave this decision up the Divine Judge).

In the Torah, Yom Kippur was THE day of great blessing. At its climax, the High Priest, having rid himself of all of the baggage and sins of Bnei Yisrael, would conduct a magical ceremony which we will read about in great detail in our prayer books tomorrow. Although it is difficult for us to understand or identify with, what is described is how the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies and revitalize the life-giving connection between the people and the Creator - He who creates all that is. The priests' entrance was made possible by very careful preparation which involved cleansing himself mentally of all sense of deprivation and the sense of victimization that goes along with it.

When the Cohen Gadol came out of the Holy of Holies, the people would all greet him with great excitement and burst into a spontaneous celebration, recognizing the abundance, the blessing, and the bounty all around. The hymns describe the Priest's face as glowing, and everyone around him radiating with the unique light which he brought from the Holy of Holies, and from his connection to the vitality of life.

On a regular Shabbat we create a 25-hour interval of abundance for ourselves - food, drink, good company - in order to experience a taste of “the world to come” - a world of unlimited abundance, a world in which we lack nothing. On Yom Kippur we are invited to connect to the world in which nothing is lacking because there is no *isn't*. Everything just *is*.

Whether or not you are fasting, this is an invitation to take the time on Yom Kippur to investigate the elasticity of human consciousness; to notice how much “isn't” we carry, how strong our sense of deprivation, and to see whether we can connect with a different awareness; to see if we can enter the Holy of Holies and emerge from it with a new sense of abundance, of presence, of the vitality which exists in everything.

Chag Sameach, G'mar Chatima Tova, and a blessed fast to those who are fasting.

Elisha