

Between the Suns
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Thanks to Ellen Prell for sending me the following story. While being driven by his chauffeur outside the confines of the Vatican, on an obscure small country road, with no one about, the Pope instructs the chauffeur to pull over. When they have come to a full stop, the Pope instructs the driver to change places with him so that he can drive. Fearful of contradicting the Pope, the chauffeur tries to explain. "I'm sorry, Your Holiness, but I can't let you do that. I'd lose my job! What if something happens?" "Who's going to tell?" asks the Pope with a smile? The driver reluctantly gives in and no sooner does the Pope sit in the driver's seat than he puts the pedal to the metal, speeding through the countryside. Eventually they hear the siren and see the flashing lights of a police officer's motorcycle behind them. The Pope slows down and guides the limousine to the side of the road. The officer approaches the limo. The Pope rolls down the window and the officer steps back in surprise when he sees the Pope. He approaches the car once more and this time looks beyond and behind the Pope and sees the driver sitting in the passenger's compartment. The officer steps quickly back to his motorcycle and radios his chief. He says, "I've pulled over a limousine and I think there's someone REALLY important in there." "Doesn't matter how important he is" the chief replies, "If he violated traffic laws, give him a ticket!" "Well," the officer says, "I'm not sure I can do that. Like I said, I think this one's REALLY important." "Well, just how important do you think this someone IS? Who do you think you have there, the mayor?" "More important than that," says the officer. "Is it a Senator, then?" asks the chief. "No, more important," says the officer. "A head of state?" "Well, sort of," the officer says. "OK," the chief says, "is it the Pope?" "No," the officer says, "The Pope's just the chauffeur. I think I pulled over God!"

From a Jewish perspective, the person in the passenger compartment of the limousine is important not because he might be God, but rather because he IS a human being. In fact, on this day of Yom Kippur, it is MORE important that the other person is a human being than God. The rabbinic understanding of this day of Yom Kippur firmly

admonishes us that Yom Kippur takes care of transgression between God and us but not those between us and other human beings, be that a traffic violation or something else. We are further cautioned, that we cannot address wrongs between God and us UNTIL we have addressed wrongs between ourselves and others. We are also told that since the image of God rests within every other human being, we harm God every time we harm someone else! Our tradition provides a spiritual radio frequency for God to not only hear but also hopefully trust and accept our remorse, our regret and our apologies. The path to God IS THROUGH our fellow-human beings and ONLY through our fellow-human beings.

As you might be aware, the Hebrew word for this process of repentance, apology, the expression of remorse and regret is *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is built upon the Hebrew root “Shin-Vav-Vet” meaning to turn or return. It contains within it three kinds of turning and returning. The first is returning to our past wrongdoings so that we truly confront our wrongdoings and truly strive to make amends with those impacted by those who were wounded by us. This leads to a commitment to turn away from similar negative interactions in the future. Finally, there is a turning toward better and more constructive ways of being.

The rabbis consider *Teshuvah* quintessential to the world. Like artists use clay, paint or any other material the rabbis mold their notions of *Teshuvah* into beautiful, breathtaking perspectives on the meaning and the value of our lives and the lives of those around us.

According to the rabbinic understanding of the structure of creation, the possibility for apology is carved into the potentialities of the Universe. However, there seems to be some difference of opinion about precisely **when** that occurred. To understand the tradition’s approach, we need to free ourselves from scientific knowledge and theories about the creation of our planet and solar system. We must even disconnect from the way the Torah describes creation. I invite you to join me as we ask questions like my ancient colleagues did. The questions and the answers they may create will be the colors we brush onto a canvas, the sculpture that lies hidden in a piece of wood or stone, the tapestry that individual strands of yarn will weave. For those of us with high cynicism quotients, keep inserting the words “as if” in front of everything I say. It’s all a beautiful metaphor!

A wonderful commentary tells us that BEFORE creation, some of the elements of the world and its history came into being so that they would be ready at the time that they would be needed or because the rabbis could not imagine the world being able to sustain itself without them. Among

these were the Torah written with black fire on white fire and lying on the lap of God (Cynics, breath!). Once the Torah was in existence, **she** spoke to God (Cynics: “As if” is your mantra!). The Torah expressed doubts about whether creating an earthly world with human beings who would ignore her precepts and act in destructive ways was worthwhile. God replied that the Torah need not worry because, *Teshuvah*, the possibility for turning, remorse, understanding and apology, was already part of the fabric of the Universe. The rabbis considered this reality to be confirmed in the book of Psalms (90:2-3). From the words of this poem, the rabbis envision a specific Voice, brought into existence as a foundation stone of the Creation, constantly calling to humanity and reminding us that we are relatively short-lived and it won't belong before our bodies are reduced to the earthly elements whence we came. In the meantime, the Voice urges us to turn, to return, to apologize – to engage in *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* not only enables humans to apologize for their individual misdeeds and seek reconciliation, it also is the platform upon which the ultimate healing of the world will be built. How so? Just as the Creation of the Universe began, a wind hovered over the water. For the rabbis, the wind IS the ultimate healing of the world – there in all it's potentiality right at the beginning of the world! The water beneath it IS *Teshuvah*. In other words, the human capacity for apology is an energy, a force within us, making our healing with one another always imminent, always attainable.

One of the epithets for Yom Kippur is “Shabbat Shabbtonim”, the Sabbath of Sabbaths. It was noticed by the rabbis, as I'm sure by many here, that Shabbat and Teshuvah have sounds, that is Hebrew letters in common. That makes it easy for the rabbis to equate Shabbat and Teshuvah. What do they have in common? Some commentaries about Teshuvah see it as something achieved in layers. When a person is first confronted with doing something wrong or hurtful, we are often defensive, either because the offense was committed unwittingly or because we knew what we were doing feel guilty and embarrassed. Later, as turn to confront to truly confront our misdeeds, we understand more, eventually moving toward remorse, regret and apology. Shabbat, too, is something experienced in layers and it, too, brings a gradual increase in understanding. All of this is possible for Shabbat and Teshuvah because both of them depend upon a rest, a pause. In order to do Shabbat, we must disengage from our weekday activities and concerns. In order to do Teshuvah, we must disengage ourselves from actions that bring harm to others. Before we can turn, we must stop.

One of the most lyrical and expressive rabbinic notions is that a powerful and healing pause like this comes from the very first pause, a pause they say occurred at the very end of the last day, the sixth day, of the creation of the world. Since Jewish days begin at sundown, this moment came just as the sun was setting and the seventh day, the first Shabbat, was about to begin. The rabbis deemed this moment “Bein haSh’mashot”, between suns. In that moment, all the elements of the world that were brought into being before the Creation, now became actualized so the world could exist. Among these were the Torah, the rainbow that Noah saw after the flood, the ram that Abraham sacrificed instead of his son, Isaac, the manna that would sustain the Jewish people in the Sinai wilderness and even the first pair of tongs (which solves that riddle for those of us who always wondered how they were made). At this moment intangibles were brought forward as well: wisdom, understanding, reason, strength, social concern, moral might, righteousness, self-judgment, loving-kindness, and compassion. Most significant of all, taken out of its dormancy in between the suns of the sixth and seventh days was Teshuvah, intertwined as it is with Shabbat, a moment of pause. The ability to stop our wrongful actions, to recognize and apologize for a mistake, a hurtful word or action is what enabled Adam and Eve to step forward out of the garden as the fully responsible humans they were to become. For us, their descendents, Teshuvah is still the foundation of our living.

This has been, in many ways, a tumultuous year for us all. There are many blessings in being a community like ours at Beth Shir Sholom, but there are some downsides as well. Ironically, like any close relationship, the same openness that enables us to be communally supportive and caring with one another can also leave us exposed and vulnerable to hurt from each other. For us, as Beth Shir Sholom, we need this Yom Kippur. In the past 12 months, or 12 days or even the past 12 hours all have hurt others in our community purposefully, or through neglect, or through a naiveté, or through a mistake, or through revenge or through a brainless moment. Every one of those hurts needs an apology. We know that Yom Kippur, at its core, only facilitates our ability to apologize to God, the Oneness of all Being, the Infinite All, but is not designed to create bridges of understanding between us and our fellow human beings. Yet, if we hurt the Oneness of All when we hurt each other, then Yom Kippur, should be and can be, for our Beth Shir Sholom community, about the apologies that need to be expressed between us and how we use those apologies as examples for we must do in all our relationships. As we do with our music,

our prayerbook and our celebrations, we re-invent and invigorate our Yom Kippur so that we dedicate it FIRST to apology to each other and through each other to the Oneness in which we live.

May this day be filled the same potential that was there as the Sun set on the sixth day. May this day be buoyed by wisdom, understanding, reason, strength, social concern, moral might, righteousness, self-judgment, loving-kindness, and compassion. Like the wind over the primordial water, may we know the possibility for healing we can achieve with one another because we can apologize to one another. On this day of Yom Kippur, the day with the greatest Shabbat and Teshuvah possibilities of all days, in this moment between the suns, let us pause and turn.

Bein Hashmashot – Between the Suns

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(Dedicated to Eden Comess-Daniels on the day of her becoming Bat Mitzvah)

On the far side of forever
When the world was being born
At the end of a creation
There came a setting of the sun
And then the sun touched the horizon
And in the colors of the dusk
From the mystery and uncertainty
Rose a turning tower of dust

“This turning is a gift for you,”
Said a Voice without a name,
“So you can always find this Eden
Though it may seem far away
It is here and it is waiting
When you see that you can change
In the turning that is evening
In the pause between the days

“When you can breathe a rainbow
And you can taste the wind
And you can hear the stars glow
And you can make a friend
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“For this life is like a pathway
A road to all your days
And when you start to wander
And when you lose your way
Know that you’ve come to that place
Because you’ve brought some pain
To yourself or to another
But you can begin again

“For the turning is a dance of truth
A way that you can choose
To come to see yourself
Not just through others, but for you
The turning is a dance in time
And also, it’s a place

A garden in the sunset
When the moon is on the way

“Where you can breathe a rainbow
And you can taste the wind
And you can hear the stars glow
And you can make a friend
Bein hashmashot – Between the suns

“For without the turning
There would be no love
No justice and no kindness
No below and no above
No peace between the peoples
No darkness and no light
No remorse and no forgiveness
No sense of wrong or what is right

“So here you stand before tomorrow
Between forever and today
In the turning of your evening
In the pause between your days
And when you know not where you’re
going
When you cannot find your way
Just look so far within you
Turn around and you will say

“I can breathe a rainbow
I can taste the wind
I can hear the stars glow
I can make a friend
Yes, you can breathe a rainbow
You can taste the wind
You can hear the stars glow
You can make a friend
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