

Erev Rosh Hashanah 2015/5776

L'shanah Tovah. A new and sweet year should bless us all.

In our lives many of us travel through our days feeling lost. There are all these phases in our lives where we hear friends or ourselves saying "I just need time to find myself," "I feel like I lost who I was," "I'm going to find out what I'm made of." It is this feeling of discomfort, of not feeling like we are where we are supposed to be that doesn't allow us to be comfortable in our own skin or where we are in our lives.

Sometimes it is good to be uncomfortable like when you feel you are in the wrong relationship, wrong job or wrong group of friends. Sometimes it inspires us to seek more for ourselves and push ourselves to achieve our goals and dreams. Other times it frustrates us or makes us feel locked into a relationship or situation we don't know how to get out of.

In our Jewish lives Rosh Hashana is an annual beacon meant to call us home. It is a moment in time set to remind us about the creation of time, the creation of all things we hold dear. It is a moment set in our Jewish lives where we are meant to feel at home, a place we return to in order to feel safe. It quickly approaches us when we don't feel prepared for it yet when it is finally here we breathe deeply and feel at peace once it arrives.

In the Torah God often calls out looking for us. God calls, searching for us, seeking us out wherever we may be. God is often described as a shepherd, collecting us, the flock, caring for us, tending over us, finding us when we've lost our way or gotten tangled in a thicket.

God calls to Abraham and Moses at different times and both answer "Hineini," "Here I Am." At Rosh Hashanah we will once again read about the Binding of Isaac. In the beginning of that story God calls to test Abraham and

Abraham answers "Hineini, here i am." At the key moment when Abraham is so focused on following God's request to sacrifice Isaac God's messenger must yell to Abraham twice "Abraham! Abraham!" Before Abraham answers "Hineini." Here I am.

It isn't that God doesn't know where Abraham is and it isn't as if Abraham doesn't know that God sees him and is with him, it is acknowledgement that Abraham had come back from wherever his full focus took him in that moment, lost in the prayer of his soul just before he thought he would have to truly sacrifice Isaac, that Abraham says "Hineini," here i am, I'm back, I'm listening, I heard you, I'm present." And perhaps in his heart of hearts he whispered, "thank you for being there, for calling me back, for stopping me."

In the book of Exodus, God sets a bush burning unconsumed to see who might take notice, a different test for a different age. When God sees that Moses has taken time to inspect the burning bush and turned his face aside out of respect of the miracle, God calls out to Moses from

the Burning Bush, “Moshe, Moshe!” and he answers “Hineini, Here I am.” I am present. I've seen something I've never seen before. Tell me why I am seeing this.” And God reveals his great plans for Moses.

In both instances God or God’s messenger must call out twice to Abraham and twice to Moses. Abraham becomes so caught up in the moment that his name must be called twice for Abraham to come out of his trance and become present.

I personally interpret the binding of Isaac differently and think that once Abraham hears the task at hand he AND Isaac are testing God as much as God is testing them. Can't you see Robert DeNero as Abraham “Really, you want me to sacrifice my most beloved son? You gonna test me? You gonna test me? We will do what you ask to test you! How bout that? We will see what kind of God you are to ask such a thing of us?”

The rabbis believe that Isaac was 37 when he is led up the mountain and prepared to be sacrificed by his father who would have been 137. Abraham and Isaac had to be of one mind for Abraham to have carried out God's test.

Isaac, as a grown man, must agree to be bound by Abraham, to go through with this test as father and son. It is the moment just before the Angel calls out to Abraham that Isaac, Abraham and God all test each other.

Abraham, Isaac, and God reach the moment of truth and it is God who blinks. Abraham is so committed that the Angel must call Abraham's name twice before he returns to himself, before he can call out "Hineini, Here I am."

How much does it take for God, family or friends to call out to us, for us to look up from our phones, our ipads, our computers, our work, our newspapers, our books to say "Hineini. Here i am?"

When Moses first notices the Burning Bush he must really take time to focus and acknowledge what he is seeing. He

is so in awe of what he beholds that he must turn away. He is stunned and it takes God calling his name twice for him to realize he is being summoned before he responds with “Hineini, Here I am.”

In our lives we get caught up in so much of the day to day that perhaps we don't see that text from our spouse, our boss, our family. We all know that sometimes we aren't here, we are checked out, dialing it in, on mental vacation, somewhere else. If we miss those moments when our people ask “Where are you?” how much harder is it for us to realize when we get so caught up in our lives that we don't hear when God calls out to gain our attention and pull our focus back to what is truly important. How often do we miss the moments when we should say “Hineini?”

In an article in The New Yorker a few years ago, Adam Gopnick writes about an imaginary friend that his three-year-old daughter Olivia developed. His name is Charlie Ravioli. Now, imaginary friends are not so

uncommon for three year olds to have. The odd thing about Mr. Ravioli is that he is always too busy to play with Olivia. Gopnick explains: “She holds her toy cell phone up to her ear, and we hear her talk into it: ‘Ravioli? It’s Olivia...It’s Olivia. Come and play? Ok. Call me. Bye.’ Then she snaps it shut, and shakes her head. ‘I always get his machine,’ she says.

“Or she will say, ‘I spoke to Ravioli today.’ ‘Did you have fun?’ I ask. ‘No. He was busy working.’ ...On a good day, she ‘bumps into’ her invisible friend and they go to a coffee shop. ‘I bumped into Charlie Ravioli,’ she announces at dinner.... ‘We had coffee, but then he had to run.’

She sighs, sometimes, at her inability to make their schedules mesh, but she accepts it as inevitable, just the way life is. ‘I bumped into Charlie Ravioli today,’ she says. ‘He was working.’ Then she adds brightly, ‘But we hopped into a taxi.’ ‘What happened then?’ we ask. ‘We grabbed lunch’ she says. [“Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli,” The New Yorker, September 30, 2002] It’s a cute piece, but a

poignant one, too: a three year old reflecting, as in a tiny mirror, the hectic lives of her parents, where lunches are grabbed and life is lived on the run from appointment to appointment, and human relationships are what we try to squeeze in between.

Hineini, Here I am. In these simple words we are taught that we are always Here, wherever that may be. But, it is our task to recognize where **Here is** and perhaps to recognize that God is always there waiting for us to say that we too are present.

In the year that was 5775 I watched my oldest son, David, become a bar mitzvah at home and in Israel and grow ever taller than his own father. My wife and I put things on the top shelves just so we can use him more to get things off the top shelves. I watched my daughter Yael learn to dive off the diving board and my youngest son Solomon learn to ride a bike without training wheels younger than any of his siblings and swim in the deep end so that he

could dive off the diving board too. I've watched my wife honored by the Weitzman Institute and complete her Masters Degree in Jewish Education. I've watched our congregation grow slowly, I've officiated weddings of some of your children, given names and witnessed brides welcoming some of our youngest members into our world, your newest children and grandchildren. I've been at bedsides to give comfort in the final moments of some of our congregants lives and spoke words about lives lived valiantly at funerals after some of Har Shalom's partners died. I witness so much of your lives. It is one of the greatest gifts you all give to me as we partner together, to be present and create the Har Shalom we wish to all be part of. While I strive to be present all of my experiences make me aware of how precious every moment should be to each of us.

As we enter this new Hebrew year of 5776 I ask you to take moments to be present and aware. Look around you and see the people you love the most and hold those

moments. Give yourself time away from the hustle, the technology, the demands that draw your attention away from all that is precious in your lives.

This Rosh Hashanah let us all breathe our gratitude in and out, let our prayers of love and thanks all join together and remind us how fortunate we are to live the lives we are living.

Be blessed with your blessings and let them reign in your life all your days.

Be Blessed with your blessings and may they inspire you to rain blessings upon everyone you see and all those held close in your heart.

Hineini is a message for all of us meant to bless our lives with a reminder to say “Here I am” and hear when our names are called.

Be blessed with a year of Hineini, and being present while you are written in the book of life.