

Our Haftarah, remembering the words of Solomon's prayer, begins (I Kings 8:54-58):

וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹת שְׁלֹמֹה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה אֵת כָּל־הַתְּפִלָּה וְהַתְחִנָּה הַזֹּאת קִם מִלִּפְנֵי
מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה מִכַּנֶּרַע עַל־בִּרְכֵּיו וּכְפִיו פָּרְשׁוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

When Solomon finished offering to GOD all this prayer and supplication, he rose from where he had been kneeling, in front of the altar of GOD, his hands spread out toward heaven.

וַיַּעֲמֵד וַיְבָרֶךְ אֵת כָּל־קְהֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹל גָּדוֹל לֵאמֹר:

He stood, and in a loud voice blessed the whole congregation of Israel:

בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן מְנוּחָה לַעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לֹא־נָפַל דְּבַר אֶחָד מִכָּל
דְּבָריו הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ:

"Praised be GOD who has granted a haven to Israel—God's people—just as promised; not a single word has failed of all the gracious promises that were made through God's servant Moses.

יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמָּנוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶל־יַעֲזֹבֵנוּ וְאֶל־יִטְשָׁנוּ:

*May the ETERNAL our God be with us, as was the case with our ancestors.
May we never be abandoned or forsaken.*

לְהִטּוֹת לִבִּבְנוּ אֵלָיו לָלֶכֶת בְּכָל־דִּרְכָּיו וּלְשַׁמֵּר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקָּיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶת־
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ:

May our hearts be inclined to [God], that we may walk in all God's ways and keep the commandments, the laws, and the rules that were enjoined upon our ancestors.

What does it mean to “incline your heart?” It sounds so simple and self-evident, and it is so pervasive in the language and theology of our prayers that it is frighteningly easy to miss. Or maybe it sounds simple when in reality it seems to be the whole entire spiritual puzzle in which we are engaged.

There are rules, and there are realities. Well, I say rules, these are your, yes *your*, *Yerushah*, your inheritance from the ancestors. The inheritance is yours to analyze, study, and make choices, as well as your responsibility to teach to the generations to come, whether they bear meaning and sufficient spiritual challenges for you or not.

So, as to those “rules:” When we say the *tefilah*, the main prayer, we have a lot taken from us, it feels like: we are asked to stand regardless of how our body feels or what it can do easily, we are asked to feel a sense of gravity whether we are in a silly or sad mood, we are asked to put sounds of ancient Hebrew on our lips and say words we did not choose. All of this is designed to free the heart to speak in silence to Gd—in honesty, in fear of that honesty, in fraught and fragile danger. Faith is trust that what we call “Gd” will not judge or mock our truest selves, that the “seal of Gd is truth itself” (b. Shabbat 55a).

But the heart is not totally free from this rule; the heart is subject to rules as well (m. Berakhot 4:5) “וְאִם אֵינוּ יָכוֹל לִירֹד, יִחַזֵּיר אֶת פָּנָיו, וְאִם אֵינוּ יָכוֹל”
 הָיָה רוֹכֵב עַל הַחֲמֹר, יֵרֵד. וְאִם אֵינוּ יָכוֹל לִירֹד, יִחַזֵּיר אֶת פָּנָיו, יָכוֹן אֶת לְבֹו כְּנֶגֶד בֵּית קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים
 לְהַחֲזִיר אֶת פָּנָיו, וְיָכוֹן אֶת לְבֹו כְּנֶגֶד בֵּית קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים: *While praying, one must face toward the direction of the Holy Temple. One who was riding on a donkey should dismount and pray calmly. If he is unable to dismount, he should turn his face toward the direction of the Temple. If he is unable to turn his face, it is sufficient that he focus his heart opposite the Holy of Holies.*” Solomon’s prayer invited in ancient days the *Shekhinah*, the earthly and feminine aspect of the Divine Presence, into the Holy of Holies (corresponding to and completing the masculine aspect of *Qudsha Briku*, the Holy One Blessed Be He which is inaccessible in the Heavenly *Bet Midrash*). The place called the Holy of Holies was the dark and inaccessible heart of the Temple that stood twice in Jerusalem and stands no longer in the world.

First the Babylonians and then the Romans destroyed this secret, dark dwelling place for Gd’s Presence among us, so that in today’s world, one place has become many—*your hearts*. Nevertheless, that rule still applies. So, this is the simply stated and maddeningly complex spiritual challenge that you must take upon yourself this year: ***Where does Gd—whatever that term reflects, contains, and instructs for you as a creature—where does the Eternal and Infinite One settle its tangible presence in your own life and world? Where do you incline your heart in this new year, in the season of rains of blessing in their proper time, in this new chance for growth and change, in this sprouting of precious hope that this year we will come together and get it right, where is the Holiest place where the name of Gd can live?***

Set, therefore, your spiritual and ethical center in this new year as inclined toward new hope—your heart, the best you can do when you are truly honest, between yourself and Gd. Offer us, your community who is your family and who loves and accepts you for the good and best of you and what you bring to the world, offer us your Holy of Holies and let us offer you ours. This is terrifying and vulnerable; earn the right to other’s faith in you. We can do better than the worst impulses of our base and genetically remembered aspect of human nature, *יצר הרע*, *yetzer ha-ra’*, the wicked impulse.

When the Holy One of Blessing wanted to create the first human, made both male and female as a single being undivided and alone with a singular heart, the angels in Heaven were divided—some like the Angel Peace said that this creature is all war, others like the Angel Truth said that this creature is all lies (after Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1, 3-5). The Angel Peace was ejected from heaven, thrown to earth for its comment. The Angel Truth suffered the same fate. Gd knew better of us, that we could overcome the worst of our complicated nature and base impulses; Gd’s faith is firmly entrusted in us, in humanity, as the Psalms remind us: “לְהַגִּיד בְּבֹקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאַמּוֹנָתְךָ בְּלֵילוֹת:” [Gd,] proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak, Your faithfulness each night” (Psalm 92:3).

We are of the nature of our primate evolutionary clade, the only creatures on earth inclined to intentional war and murder; we have at the same time a mind and a heart to

overcome the wicked impulse coded in our genes that lead us to this season. Therefore, one version of the ancient midrash concludes that it is humanity's job to "cause Peace to spring up [to Heaven]" from down here on Earth (after Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1, 3-5).

We are of the nature of self-protection, mistrust, doubt, and lies because too often our secular world amplifies the worst of our wicked impulse and does not demand *hakarat ha-tov*, the seeking of the good in us. Our Jewish tradition, *your own* inheritance, teaches you to seek the good, and amplify it in yourself and this world by your actions—*tikkun olam be-malkhut Shaddai*. Therefore, a second and equally authoritative version of the ancient midrash concludes that it is humanity's job to "cause Truth to spring up [to Heaven]" from down here on Earth (after Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1, 3-5).

Make peace; make truth. Let peace be the foundation of our efforts towards each other in this new year. Let truth be the courage we learn to make into a solid base of our action, intentions, and efforts alike in all we do, because it is Gd's seal and because it is scary; let us be kind, and let us be brave. Let us resolve as *precious individuals constituting our fragile community* to do as we pray for and expect from our Gd. And as King Solomon, the new king who had new intentions, better and unwarlike intentions as compared to his father David, prayed millennia ago (I Kings 8:57-58):

יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמָּנוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶל־יַעֲזֹבֵנוּ וְאֶל־יִטְשֵׁנוּ:

May the ETERNAL our God be with us, as was the case with our ancestors.

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אֲבוֹתֵינוּ:

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