

Aharei Mot/Kedoshim 5777

Every Day is Yom Kippur

This year, as often the two Torah portions of Aharei Mot and Kedoshim coincide. And they are very different from each other. Aharei Mot is mostly comprised of a detailed treatment of the sacred rite of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, on Yom Kippur. Kedoshim, by contrast, is a list of personal, ethical and social obligations that are to be practiced in the everyday.

We always read these parshiyot at the point of the Jewish year that is the furthest from Yom Kippur. That coincidence seems to invite a sort of check-in.

Think back to Yom Kippur...Can we remember the way we felt that day, and at the end of it? Can we remember if we made promises to ourselves to be better? Did we commit to try to change?

I'm ready to bet that either we only have a fuzzy recollection.

Because the truth is that we can't become holy by coming to shul and having a breakthrough just on a single day of the year. For a long time I have thought that one of the things our contemporary Judaism has not done well is that the role of the shul has been over-emphasized. Shuls have become spiritual supermarkets, where folk turn up periodically with their carts to fill up their spiritual closets, with greater or lesser degrees of success. But no institution can bear the weight of that expectation.

The truth is that the quest for holiness is an individual quest. If we want to live meaningful, spiritual, holy lives, then we should not expect any institution to provide that for us on its own. We have to bring kedushah down to a level of daily practice...which implies that every day needs somehow to be Yom Kippur.

In fact, the authors of the Siddur saw this, and go some way towards providing that experience for us – or at least giving us liturgical reminders.

Take Rosh Hodesh, for example. Every month we announce from the Bimah when the next month will begin. The *nusah* for this – the complex tune that Elliot sings – is actually High Holyday nusah – that's why it's so twiddly and serious.

And the Musaf Amidah for RH also explicitly seems to reference Yom Kippur. Rosh Hodesh – known as *yom kippur katan* – is *zman kaparah lk'hol toldotam* – a time of *kapparah*, atonement, in every generation. We pray for our lives to be renewed not only with goodness and blessing and joy but also with pardoning of sin, forgiveness of transgressions and (in leap years only) atonement for wrongdoing.

But it's not just every month that we are reminded of Yom Kippur. For the greater part of the year at Shaharit and Minhah we have the section called *tahanun* – that actually means, personal petition, and it is recited in what is symbolically a prone position, recalling the prostrations of Yom Kippur.

The *tahanun* liturgy was standardized in 14th century, and there are still some variations. But *tahanun* always contains Psalm 6 – ascribed to King David when he was in deep distress. If we look at that psalm (p.134) - *Chastise me not in Your anger, God, chasten me not in Your wrath, be merciful to me for I am weak* – this is language that clearly evokes the pleadings of Yom Kippur, isn't it? Somewhere in the back of our minds we can perhaps hear echoes of the *Avinu Malkeinu* – and indeed, the familiar phrase that we sing to the tune it feels like we have always known forms part of the Tahanun liturgy as well – *avinu malkeinu, honeinu v'aneinu...*

But there are numerous days in the Jewish year on which Tahanun is not recited – what should our spiritual practice be then?

I suggest that it turns up in a formula that's so familiar we miss it. In the daily Amidah we find the formula *s'lah lanu, m'hal lanu*, and we even 'klop' – we beat our breasts in a recollection of the many, many times we did so on Yom Kippur itself. Do we hear *kaper lanu* in our minds even though it isn't there?

Yet even so that doesn't give us a daily dose of Yom Kippur, because we don't say that formula on festivals.

For a true daily dose of this form of *kedushah*, we have to take on a personal practice – very powerful one. Unfortunately it is not found in every Siddur (the red Sim Shalom doesn't have it). It is a prayer by Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz,

who lived in Prague, Frankfurt and later Jerusalem, known in the Rabbinical world as the *Sheloh* after the initial letters of his great work, *Shnei Luhot HaBrit*. The prayer forms part of the liturgy before going to sleep at night, designed to be recited as we climb into bed. This is how it goes:

Master of the Universe, I forgive anyone who angered or troubled me or wronged me, whether to my person, my finances, my dignity or any other offence – whether it was done under coercion or done as an act of will, accidentally or intentionally, with words or with actions, in this life or another. I extend this forgiveness to every individual and ask that no one be punished on my account.

May it be Your will, Lord my God and the God of my ancestors, that I will sin no more nor return to those ways, neither will I anger you nor do anything bad in Your eyes.

May the wrongs I have committed be erased by Your infinite compassion but not through suffering or sickness.

May the words of my heart find favor before you, God, my Rock and my Redeemer.

How is this the same as the other ‘yom kippur’ material and how is it different?

It is the same by both theme and content. The line *May the wrongs...* shows up at the end of every Amidah we say on Yom Kippur – it’s taken from the Talmud. And our wish to be better, to find favor – that’s familiar Yom Kippur territory.

But there is also a key difference. In this prayer, we not only request forgiveness but we get to grant it. We get a 360-degree experience of the process of forgiving.

Because human beings are not very good at learning. If we just wait to be forgiven, even if we pray tremendously hard for forgiveness, we are still, in the end, being passive. We can only really learn by being active. And so, in the daily practice that embodies Yom Kippur, we get a 360-degree experience. We get to be both the forgiven and the forgiver. It is challenging to forgive! – but by

requiring ourselves to do so, day after day, we give ourselves the opportunity to grow.

If we are to truly claim a robust spirituality, we have to do it by being involved. Change can't happen when we are being passive; it has to come about incrementally, a tiny step at a time. And this simple but committed daily practice of re-experiencing Yom Kippur every day is a way to begin.

I have copies of the prayer for you...if you would like, please take one. Give it a try. And see if the Yom Kippur of Aharei Mot, that we think of as being only once a year, can also be the kedushah of every day.

Shabbat shalom.