

Kol Nidrei 2015/5776

Mi Ani? Who am i?

Mi Atah? Who are you?

Mi Anachnu? Who are we?

Kol Nidre, a soft, clear voice that hums gently in our ear then rises in timber louder and louder until it is a roar in our minds reminding us that Yom kippur is upon us. Kol Nidre acknowledges our humanity, as we ask for forgiveness not for the year that was, but for the year that will be. It acknowledges our future inability to follow through on all of our future promises and pledges, all the ones we don't even know we intend to make. It leaves us with more questions than answers.

Who am i?

Who are you?

Who are we?

*Rabbi Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" Pirke Avot - Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14*

Rabbi Hillel is considered to be one of the wisest people who ever lived. This saying from the Talmud is one of his most famous sayings. The first phrase, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

differentiates between two selves - "I" (*ani* in Hebrew) and "for me" (*li*). It implies that each of us has differing facets between our self we recognize as "I" and our self called "me."

The "I" represents our inner self, the depths of our soul, the essence of the spark of life radiating from within us. It is the reflection of the Divine, the peace of us that make us Betzelem Elohim, made in God's image.

Our "me" is our worldly personality, our ego, the identity we show to the world in our words, our deeds and the face we show publicly. Pieces of the "me" originate from outside us, from others, from society - from that which is outside "I."

Who am I?

We spend a lifetime trying to understand the divine spark deep within us. We spend a lifetime trying to remember that and recognize God in our life and that special piece of us that differentiates from all other people. So many people come to me from the very young to the very old which such doubts of the Divine presence in the universe and in our lives mostly because we have such a different relationship than say Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jonah all the Biblical characters we try to relate to and understand while we live our lives lacking so much understanding about ourselves. Because we can't always hear or see how God communicates with us we grow doubtful and feel as if we are truly alone.

I want to tell you my secret. I see all your Divine Sparks within you. I see the beautiful way you look at your kids, how you treat each other and treat your wives, husbands, parents and siblings. I see so much in you. I see your pain, your happiness, your triumphs, your despair, your abilities, and all you are capable of accomplishing in this life. Sure you aren't perfect all the time, who is? We are all human. I know that you may not know this, believe this, see it within yourself or know how much you all shine, but as a whole we are an incredible community of individuals who have changed the world, who continue to work to change the world, who change every life you connect with including mine. I see each of you and see your inner spark always. Here's the problem. You can't always see your inner spark, your ME is busy telling you it doesn't really exist, or it isn't so bright, or it isn't capable of making any change you can imagine. Our MEs have a voice that often convinces us that we don't shine or don't know how to shine. Our ME, our inner voice is often a liar because we've been taught not to trust our instincts, our true abilities, our true Divine nature.

When Sam got sick and then went into remission the first time someone asked what we wanted to do, my first thought out of my mouth was I wanted to raise a million dollars for pediatric cancer research. I was immediately told "That isn't enough." There wasn't even a pause or a thought to let me enjoy this singular vision in the beginning of the brief happiness that didn't last. Of course I knew it

wouldn't be enough, but when in this world is a million dollars not a great start to changing the world in hopes of making it a better place for someone. If I couldn't save my son, how do I not work towards saving someone else's daughter, son, grandchild, cousin, niece, nephew?

It is our Divine Nature to dream big and then figure out how to make our dreams real. It is within us to create our worlds, our universe, BECAUSE we are created B'tzelem Elohim, in God's image.

Ask yourself Who am I? Look inward, but first take your lens and clean it, clean how you see yourself, see yourself in the light of God. See yourself in all the love that God and your parents, your friends, your family poured into you throughout your life. See your beauty inside and out. See yourself as good and worthy, loved and lovable. See your strengths, accept your areas where you are still growing. Those are not weaknesses as much as they are opportunities to remind you that you can't do everything yourself. What we consider weaknesses are what remind us that we need help and the courage to ask others for that help. Let love be the white light that shines upon you and reminds you that you are one of the greatest creations ever brought into this world in hopes that you would birth more peace and beauty in the world in all you do.

Who are you among the people who make up your world? Who are you at work, at home, in your family system? Who are you in this city,

this state, this country, this world? You are all here for a reason. You are all created in God's image. But you have to know how to ask not only who am I , but also Who are you?

At the point when you have burned away all your questions about yourself you will no longer ever ask that question because you will have a clear image of Who am I and know confidently the answer to Who are you? I am I, and I am me. I am perfect as I am, imperfections and all. When we accept ourselves for who we are, we no longer have doubts or our inner voice nagging us. We have silence, love and direction because all of a sudden our path seems clear. The answer to who am I seems clearer than it has ever seemed before. You are the Divine Spark that illuminates everything about you.

We will read Jonah tomorrow afternoon. We will read about a Prophet who was so concerned about his win loss record that he refused to do God's bidding because he knew Nineveh would repent. He knew the city would be saved and it would look like he was an ineffectual Prophet. He knew that the city would believe him and in it's atonement it would look as if nothing would have happened anyway. Jonah, a prophet, a man who actually had God speaking to him in a direct line of communication, was more concerned with how people saw him than with successfully carrying out God's task despite having been picked as the best person for the job.

Who am I? Who are You? Who are we? *"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"*

When? Now. Now is the moment we have to be for ourselves and believe in ourselves. Now is the moment when we must surround ourselves with people who help us continue to become our best selves. Now we need to join our minds to figure out how we can all best change the world for good. "If not now when?"

Kol Nidrei is that moment when we all stand on the precipice of change. Who are we? We are those who stand in this moment as one, praying to be forgiven for our promises and vows we can't keep tomorrow. Who are we? We are partners, friends, spouses, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, children who together can create great change. Who are we? We are Har Shalom, the children of Israel, those chosen to bring a great light among the nations so that they may see and understand that light. We are all one.

Kol Nidrei we stand looking backwards where really we see nothing. There is nothing behind us. The past is dust. How often do we spend precious moments of now looking back at days that will never be again?

Kol Nidrei is now. Kol Nidrei prepares us for the moments ahead, helps us prepare to clean our minds and spirits of the grit and silt of another year where we know we can do better. Tonight it has arrived just like we knew it would a year ago. The question is what do we wish to do with this Kol Nidrei? What change do you feel possible within you that will make this year different from all other years?

All your inner lights shine as bright as the sun, hidden deep within your bodies.

May this be the year we see with our minds, our hearts and our souls as much as we see with our eyes.

May your light shine brightly within your mind and shine outward into the world.

May you see and feel not only your own light shine forth, but begin to see and feel all the lights of those you love surrounding you in great light. May this be the year we shine together for the whole world to see.

May you all have a lite fast

Cayn yehi ratzon - may this be God's will