

## Kol Nidre Address - Kol Rina - October 11, 2024

Marianne Sender

Dayanu!

Have I gotten your attention? No, I didn't mix up holidays. I know that Dayanu is a song sung at the Passover seder. That the word means, roughly, "it would have been enough for us" and is sometimes used in general conversation as a signifier of communal and individual satisfaction with what one has. And I'm well aware that tonight we've come together for the Kol Nidre service of Yom Kippur - no seder meal awaits tonight! But I've been thinking a lot about the concept of "dayanu" lately - the concept of being fully satisfied with just enough. But more on that soon.

For the next 26 hours or so, we won't be thinking about what will be enough. We won't be thinking about possibilities along a continuum. Yom Kippur frames the world in binary terms. Good vs. evil; safety vs. destruction; health vs. sickness; life vs. death. We are led to look long and hard at the worst that could happen over the next year and to confront without filters an obvious fact we usually try hard to avoid - the worst could actually happen at any time. We pray it doesn't. We ask G-d for forgiveness for our many faults, our many missteps, the many things we've done wrong, both intentionally and unintentionally, as individuals and in community, and we ask that we be spared the worst. Perhaps it can be said that we are asking G-d to say "dayanu" - that our repentance, prayer, and charity have been enough for us to merit inscription and sealing in the Book of Life for another year,

How do the rituals and liturgy and practices of Yom Kippur highlight potential calamity - the terrible things we hope to avoid through our repentance, prayer, and charity and through G-d's mercy? The powerful imagery of the Book of Life being written and then sealed before the gates are closed. Wearing white to simulate a shroud. Refraining from eating or drinking since the dead do not eat or drink. Refraining from work since the dead have no agency - their ability to create and to effect change has ended. The martyrology which details Jewish suffering and death through the millenia. And of course the list of Terrible Things that Could Happen in the Unetaneh Tokef - the various ways in which we could die and suffer.

As if we need such reminders this year. As we recited the martyrology last year, we had no idea that on Simchat Torah, a new calamity would be added to that wretched list - October 7. Here in the US, enemy missiles are not raining down and US soldiers are not deployed in a shooting war. But our hearts are constantly with those in Israel who face such dangers. Our hearts are constantly with the hostages. And the earth does seem to be shifting under the feet of American Jews: the normalization of antisemitic ideas and speech, the increase in antisemitic acts, the ever increasing need for security at Jewish venues - I could go on. Reflecting as an example on the Metrowest commemoration of October 7 at B'nai Jeshurun, with its massive security presence, we are grateful that our local governments support their Jewish citizens - obviously, that has not often been the case in diaspora communities over the millenia. But we can't help but also wonder what's going with such a display of force - the intense screening of attendees, the many armed security personnel and police officers, the

police cars apparently forming a perimeter around the whole neighborhood. It's not comforting that this is needed. When I used the restroom at Jeshurun, I noted the signs informing us that the room was a safe room. I doubt that any churches have bathrooms that are safe rooms, unless perhaps in Tornado Alley.

There's a short meditation on the Unetaneh Tokef in the book that Reb Lenny provided that powerfully expresses the mindset of Yom Kippur. It doesn't actually mention October 7 or anything that happened on that day. We could have read this reflection last year. But reading it last year would not have triggered the same thoughts, the same fears, the same prayers because October 7 hadn't happened. And now it has.

READ REFLECTION ON PAGE 64 - Unetaneh Tokef by Julie Brandon

*Will it be me  
Will it be you  
As we listen for the still, soft voice  
One that utters dire pronouncements than may come true  
Or possibly not  
Trembling in fear wondering, waiting  
Has the time come  
will the gates close, leaving us outside  
shut out  
the final separation from the Divine  
or perhaps we'll squeeze through  
safe for another year  
the sound of the shofar echoing in our hearts  
reminds us of the impermanence of life  
and the importance of living our lives as though  
the gates remain open*

Of course tomorrow, when there are three stars visible (or, theoretically visible, since the light pollution in South Orange makes it hard to see stars no matter the time), we will return to our everyday lives. We will still dwell on how October 7 has shattered the world. But we won't go about our days thinking about metaphorical gates closing at sunset. We will make judgments and choices along a continuum. We'll be back in a world where the saying "the perfect is the enemy of the good" makes sense. Where we often say - dayanu.

OK, let's lighten this up a bit... Over the past two weeks, the Senders have had a household challenge. A small challenge - by no means a big deal in cosmic or any other terms. Indeed, small enough that it's easy to take it as a blessing - a lesson in dayanu. When Stuart and I arrived home recently after a long road trip, we noticed a few moths flying around. Odd, we thought. We had no idea where they were coming from. A day or so later, I had to get something from our daughter's room. Of course, she now lives far away and the room is not often entered and the door is usually

closed. Well, I quickly discovered where these insect explorers had come from - some dog food that Rachel had left, with our permission, in her old room for the next time she visited with her dogs was spewing out pantry moths. Which were flying all over the place. Now, we had had a dog - Shadow, of blessed memory - and we knew enough to put her food in sealed containers but she's been gone awhile. So now we had a room filled with moths and cocoons. After a few days of thinking that all we needed to do was remove the food and put up some traps and vacuum the rug, we went through items stored in the room near where the dog food was and realized the moths had been on a colonization spree. While they don't eat clothing or canvas bags or stored childhood toys, they sure do like to put their cocoons all over them. Suffice to say that Rachel's Barbies are unlikely to be written in the Book of Life - she will not be able to hand them down to the next generation as I did mine. But I also store a lot of my stuff in her room now. Stuff I like but don't use very much. Much of which I should donate, but it's easy to keep that task on the back burner. At least until contemplating the moth colonization spree. My stuff didn't yet appear to have been part of the conquest. Just in case the moths were still on the march - on the fly?? - I grabbed the things I cared about and took them to safety. Much of the rest, assuming it remains free of moths, will be donated. The stuff I took to safety from the moths is enough - way more than enough. Indeed, it's too much - but it's a start. Some may say that G-d sent us messengers - horrible little flying messengers - that compelled me to get on with some serious downsizing.

OK - Here's the pivot to the President's Address....

As we all know, Kol Rina has to downsize.

This is obviously not the time for a budget discussion, but it's clear to all that the rent for this entire floor is too high for the minyan. The board and the Options Committee have weighed and discussed multiple alternatives for the minyan when the current lease expires this coming June. There's a broad consensus that one option we should explore is whether we can find a smaller, cheaper space, including the possibility - which may or may not exist - of renting part of this space at 60 Valley. We have no idea today whether such a smaller, cheaper space might be available here or anywhere else. And, of course, even if it is available, we will need to be clear on the ramifications before any commitments are made. We will need to be clear on what is needed for Kol Rina to continue to pursue its mission to be a welcoming community that provides a place for traditional, egalitarian Jewish prayer, learning, and communal experiences from simchas to shivas. We need to ask some very hard questions about our future viability if we don't have the resources to sustain this mission. We will need to be clear on whether people are willing to make the commitment to finance another lease should one be available given we have a budget with little to no reserves. In summary, we will need to be clear before any possible commitments are made for space in the future that Kol Rina will still have enough to continue as the minyan we have strived to be and that we will have the requisite commitment to continue with broad membership support. Looking out at you all today, I believe this little minyan - the little minyan that could - may still be able to climb a few more hills.

One way to show your commitment, your faith in the possibilities of the future, is to contribute to the Kol Rina Kol Nidre Appeal. It's easy to put this task on the back burner and then forget to do it, but I

can't begin to express what it would mean if everyone sent in a check of any amount with the label "Kol Nidre Appeal." It would be a vote of confidence in Kol Rina's ability to continue and in your commitment to our community. And while you are writing out that check, don't forget your contribution to the Yizkor Book.

You also show your commitment by your presence. Your presence here tonight. Your presence on Shabbat mornings, at board meetings, at committee meetings, at the Monday Zoom minyan, at Susan Marx Fund events, at simchas, at shivas, at social events, etc. etc. As a volunteer organization, there are endless roles to fill and endless ways to contribute time and talent, including simply coming and being part of the community. If I may be so bold, I'd like to use myself as an example. I have grown and gotten enormous satisfaction not only by participating but by stepping out of my comfort zone in recent years. When I started my Jewish journey in earnest in my late 20s, I acknowledged and embraced the fact that there would be some steep learning curves, including learning another language, but also learning the rituals and prayers of traditional Judaism. Based on my interests, my career paths, my talents such as they are, my comfort zones are in history, philosophy - in the English language. My comfort zone in communal activities is not with ritual but rather the administrative stuff: setting agendas, attending and running meetings, writing emails and memos. But I recently read from the Torah again many years after Cantor Fine's classes for beginner readers, I led musaf (very imperfectly - I still struggle with Hebrew), and I've become very comfortable as English gabbai. I've also been doing service organizing - contrary to my assumption, it's quite easy most weeks to use the tools available - Hebcad, the luach - to put together a list of readings. Kol Rina offers opportunities for growth because we rely almost exclusively on volunteers and there is so much to do. Indeed, if anyone is not comfortable with administrative tasks and wants to stretch a bit, contact me - I can easily help you out with that.

This year has been difficult to say the least. We look forward to this new year - a year, we hope, of peace. Indeed, I can't think of any better way to close this year except with the prayer we say so often: Oseh Shalom....

Gmar hatimah tovah and Shabbat Shalom! May you have an easy fast and a year filled with joy and security, love and good deeds! And if I have offended any of you this past year, with the deepest sincerity, I ask for your forgiveness.

Marianne Sender