

## **Finding Stillness- Yom Kippur 2018**

### **By Lara Lubitz**

Iyaz was the treasurer and trusted friend of the great king Solomon. He was the first among all the courtiers and always stood at the king's right hand, clothed in a costly robe of honour. You would never have thought to look at him, that Iyaz had once been a shepherd boy, clad only in a sheepskin jacket and simple sandals. But such was his good sense, his wisdom and his honesty, that the king made him a member of his court and put him in charge of his most precious possessions. From time to time in the course of his duties, Iyaz would bring his master a tally of all the gold and precious jewels that were stored in the palace cellars, and also the fine materials and rugs that furnished the state's apartments. But strangely enough, the contents of a small chamber in the topmost tower, he brought no tally at all. Yet every day he climbed up to this little room, and remained there for an hour. And every day as he came out, he locked the iron door securely and put the key into his pocket. What lay behind that locked door, was known to Iyaz alone.

The privilege of his role as treasurer and the love bestowed upon him by the king made the other courtiers jealous. Day after day as they watched him climbing to his secret turret, they plotted against him. "What," They asked amongst themselves "has he hidden there? He alone keeps the key and brings the king no tally. He is the treasurer to the palace. Without doubt he is hoarding gold and keeping a precious store for himself, we should tell the king about this." So they did, rejoicing in their hearts that now they would bring down Iyaz. And the King wondered, "What has my servant concealed from me?" And so he gave orders to them, Saying, "Go at midnight, when Iyaz is asleep, force the door to the uppermost chamber open, and whatever you find is yours."

Now the king had no evil thoughts of Iyaz. He was putting the courtiers on trial. "Whatever Iyaz has done," he mused to himself, "there is a reason in it. Let him do whatever he will, for he is my trusted servant."

In the meantime the courtiers went to work. They struck at the door of the uppermost chamber and broke the iron lock. They swarmed in, jostling each other, greedily seeking treasures to keep. They looked to the right, they looked to the left, up and down. But the little, uppermost chamber was empty, except for a dusty sheepskin jacket and a pair of tattered sandals. No treasure lay in the uppermost chamber, and the courtiers went to the king the next day, pale faced and ashamed.

"What? Empty handed?" Said the king. "Surely you should be heavy laden. Show me the hoard of precious jewels that my faithful friend has stolen."

"Oh King, forgive us, we have nothing to show you but a sheepskin jacket and a pair of tattered sandals."

"No," said the king. "In this case it is not I who will deal with your punishment or forgiveness, that right belongs to my faithful servant. What do you say, Iyaz?"

Iyaz stepped forward, "Oh king," he said, "the command is yours."

"Then Iyaz, tell me this. Why these marks of affection for these simple shoes? Why keep this dusty sheepskin jacket? Why have you given so much of your soul's love to these two things and kept them in such a special place?"

"It is fit that I do so," said Iyaz. "From a simple tent my life has brought me to marble halls. I know that all this eminence is but a gift, and without this gift, what am I?"

"A shepherd boy," smeared the courtiers.

"True," said Iyaz, "A keeper of sheep, with nothing but a sheepskin jacket and a pair of sandals. Yet these things oh king, teach me how to know myself, and he who knows himself, knows God. The seed from which I came lies in these sandals, my blood is in this sheepskin jacket. Therefore, in the uppermost chamber I commune with my beginnings. 'Do not regard your present greatness,' the sheepskin jacket tells me, 'remember,' say the shoes, 'your

humble beginnings'. So I keep them, oh master to remind me. That is all my secret." lyaz bowed low before the throne.

"All honour to your jacket and your sandals," the king said, " keep them my friend, forever with you, for I see now what a treasure they are."

And as it was that the wise lyaz, faithful to his original self, preserved his tattered sandals, and returned everyday to the stillness of that chamber. The stillness and quiet out of which all his wisdom proceeded.

**Yom Kippur is the simple chamber into which we can retreat in order to commune with ourselves. Here we can get to know ourselves and thus get to know God. Inside Yom Kippur, this palace of time offers us a shelter from the world as we experience it on every other day, a serene haven of stillness and quiet where we can connect with our beginnings and cultivate our wisdom. This is the place from which we can take stock of our exciting world and make meaning of it. lyaz felt the benefit of entering this quiet space and made a choice to make it part of his daily routine. We have an opportunity today to choose to make Yom Kippur our chamber. Indeed we might all benefit from being as diciplined as lyaz and finding our chamber every day.**

### **Stillness and deep rest..**

My friend recently inspired me. She was speaking at the naming ceremony for her first child spoke of her desire to find deep rest and really value what comes from that place. (She admitted later that this was an ironic moment to be searching for any kind of rest,...) This idea of valuing deep rest and the fruits it brings resonated profoundly with me. Learning to value the quiet, still, calm that may result from deep rest seems a contradiction in a world where people so often answer the question, "How are you?" with, "Busy."

The imperative on this day is to be still, rather than to create; to seek out the authentic and eternal, not the artificial or temporal. Perhaps our only hope of touching what lies beyond space and time is our capacity to stop and rest in the pause between the actions. In the words of the poet David Whyte: " In silence, essence speaks to us of essence itself and asks for a kind of unilateral disarmament, our own essential nature slowly emerging....."  
( *Consolations*, p. 213)

Over the next 24 hours we are going to experience a deluge of words, both in the foyer and in shule. Yet, our machzor says: v'shofar gadol yitaka, a great shofar is sounded, v'kol d'mama daka yishama, and a still, small Voice is heard. On Rosh Hashanah, Yom Teruah, we hear 100 blasts of the shofar. On Yom Kippur, we quiet ourselves enough to hear the still, small Voice in the faint echoes of those blasts. Today we stop, cultivate stillness, and turn inward, journeying into ourselves -- and glimpsing there, if only for a moment, the Face of God, Holiness, the Infinite.

I like to refer to a poem called the Quartet, compiled by TS Eliot:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is...

For me, Yom Kippur is absolutely the still point of the turning world. I perceive that each of us is standing strong and tall at the motionless centre from which everything can be seen. At the still point of the turning world we can see clearly, our focus is sharp and with gaze set on the horizon our balance is strong. It brings to mind the image of a tightrope walker... I am not the first to bring this image to our community on Kol Nidrei. Eight or nine years ago my friend and teacher Debbie Masel stood here and inspired us with her "Man on Wire" drasha. She left me with an image of myself as strong, connected, focused, vulnerable, powerful and flexible. Held up only by the tension of a God and a world full of contradictions. These tensions keep us suspended... and the pause we take at the still point of the turning world makes us come back to ourselves, be present, whole and powerful before we take our first step.

Once, a student of the Baal Shem Tov was watching a tightrope walker. He was so absorbed by the circus act that his disciples asked him what he found so interesting. "This man is risking his life," said Rabbi Chayim, "and I can't say why. But I'm sure that while he's walking the rope, he's not thinking of how much he's earning, because if he did, he would surely fall." (*Tales of the Hasidim*, Martin Buber, p 174) When we are fully immersed in what we are doing, when our awareness is united with our experience, when we are fully present to a moment, this enables us to have the confidence in our strength and power to step onto the tightrope without fear.

Cultivating habits of mindfulness to make ourselves more present to each moment is on trend at the moment, schools and gyms are equipped with meditation rooms and gratitude journals are kept by people from 7 to 70. According to The World Health Organisation Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. Stress and anxiety are debilitating ailments and there is evidence to suggest that gratitude, empathy and mindfulness are useful antidotes. I believe that these antidotes can be interpreted in our tradition as tefila, tzedaka and teshuva respectively. Gratitude is the noticing and naming of something that is going well- this may be tefila/prayer. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, easily becomes the giving of time, money and social justice, tzedaka. And mindfulness, moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience without judgment is the teshuva of returning to ourselves, to the Infinite. Yom Kippur is our chance to reset and bring these practices into our lives, perhaps for 1 day, perhaps this is the first day of a new routine...

### **So how can we make the most of this important day ahead of us?**

We can sit in stillness in the chamber, reflecting on what the sheepskin jacket and tattered sandals mean to us. Iyaz felt no shame about his humble beginnings, he embraced them. Can we embrace those parts of ourselves that make us feel vulnerable and ashamed? Iyaz was open to knowing himself deeply. Can we open ourselves to true knowing? I would like to bless us all that this Yom Kippur we can then step out onto the tightrope, strong in our bodies with our balance and our gaze centred profoundly inward and outward. May we be blessed with the clear perspective from the still point of the turning world, to allow the quietness to penetrate and help engage our spirit in its journey through the Tshuvah, tefilla and tzedaka, the mindfulness, gratitude and empathy of Yom Kippur.

## **Meditation**

I would like to invite you all now to close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Travel within. Find the stillness. Feel yourself centred in your body. This place of quiet is a deep well of nourishment to which you can always return. Find yourself here.

### Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the earth,  
let's not speak in any language;  
let's stop for one second,  
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment  
without rush, without engines;  
we would all be together  
in a sudden strangeness.

If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,  
and for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.  
Perhaps the earth can teach us  
as in Winter, when everything seems dead  
and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go.