

The gift never given - Yom Kippur 2015

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Forgiveness is an *unconditional gift* that I ask from you

Unconditional because anything else would make it a transaction
a gift because you have it, and you don't *have to* give it

Here's how these gifts work
they're given by dust-people, earth-people to one another
I harm you or maim you
I deceive you or unclothe you
I make you Less: in your eyes or mine
perhaps Less in your eyes *through* mine

Then I come to you, in my free-choice
and I say:

Please, gift me an Unburdening. I promise to like it.
I won't say it's gross like that knitted jumper Nanna gave me.
I promise to like it. Please, give it.

But where did you get it?

Well, you will say, it was planted here.
In these cracks that you made.
And then it grew.
That's how I got it.

What a scale-shifter that is

when a wrongdoer becomes a pleader
a breaker becomes a clumsy builder
a biter and a wild-swinger becomes a hands-cupped-upward *waiter*

What a scale-shifter

that after I wound you – whether you know it or not
I should then turn on myself
I should suddenly feel a weight growing
suddenly – I am Atlas
and only your gift can throw off the heavens

Now we have a forked crisis

if I come to you and ask:
Please, gift me an Unburdening
you will crush me, surely
they will know me, this imperfect pleader
I will face *me* – this atomised *dust-man*

Nowhere to walk, this is where I'll stand

So, am I destined and doomed?

In this moment, hear something that Atlas felt
why was Atlas condemned to hold up the sky?
the myth-makers tell it was because, with hands occupied under weight of sky
he would be prevented from embracing his brother, Menoetius

He would be prevented from embracing his brother

But Atlas had it wrong
failing to see that as he held the heavenly spheres

he was still standing on earth

he could put the spheres down
and step forward toward his brother
and everything would be okay
he didn't realise this because, with his head inside the black heavens
nothing else existed
nothing else seemed possible

A fish knows only water, Foster Wallace says

Just so for me, the dust-man
when I thrash in the blinding, heavy, heavens I built for myself
and see no way forward
I forget that there *is* earth on which to walk
to step forward
and ask for my gift

Emmanuel Levinas warns

between two dust-people
there can be no guarantees
of anything

But Rav Steinsaltz reassures

where there is courage to confess
there is the possibility of repair

Before Yom Kippur, the Talmud says, if a victim will not forgive
you must plead for that gift three genuine pleadings

three steps out of the sky
three steps onto dry ground
three steps is what it takes:

Adonai, sephatai, tiftach...

Open, your, lips

And the gift can be yours

the only gift that was never given