

Kol Nidre 5772 – Camille Shira Angel
Carrying the Light Into the Shadows

When I was a little kid, I used to love to try and spook my big sister and her husband when they came to visit, by sticking fake, little, plastic bugs in their bed. My sister seemed to always know that they were phony...but predictably, as soon as the lights went out, I would hear Joseph shriek. In the next moment, the lights would come back on and he would see that the spiders in the bed were only rubber, and the spell would be broken -- nothing scary anymore.

If only life were like that....when we are afraid, in the dark, all we have to do is cry out, and someone will turn on the light and everything will be okay.

But in life we discover that darkness cannot be dispelled that quickly or that completely, that the lights cannot just be snapped back on; that shadows hover over our lives and they are *not* make believe and that we often don't know what to do. It can happen in an instant. As the psalmist says, "We come and go like grass which in the morning shoots up renewed, and in the evening fades and withers." Our holy day liturgy is replete with reminders: "We are like broken pottery, like dry grass, like a withered flower, like a vanishing cloud, like a dream that flies away."

The Psalmist asks,

Adonai, Ma Adam Va'-tay dah ha-ay hu?
Ben enosh va- t'chash-vay hu.
Adam l'hevel da-mah
Ya'mav c'tzael ovaer.

Eternal God,
What are we that You have regard for us?

What are we, that You are mindful of us?

We are like a breath;

our days are like a passing shadow-

"c'tzael ovare," our life is like a passing shadow. (Ps. 144)

Rembrandt used to sit in front of his canvass with a candle on his pasteboard cap so that he wouldn't cast his own shadow onto the canvass. What a beautiful image this is for what we all try to do - we try to drive away our own shadows. Especially in today's world; blessed as we are with artificial light and artificial means. We chase shadows away with nice music and effective medicines, video games, chocolate, and all sorts of self-soothing and distracting behaviors. We don't want to struggle with them, but on this day we are called back to the shadows.

We don't have to look farther than within ourselves. Part of Yom Kippur is coming to grips with what modern psychology calls our "shadow side," with our deepest fears, our anger, our regrets, our jealousy, our competitiveness, our judgments, our unconscious contracts and vows to ourselves and to others –the darkness that lurks inside of us and that we can either confront or ignore, embrace or avoid. (Our shadow side is like an inner cave where we tuck feelings and experiences that we are least comfortable with far away).

Yom Kippur beckons us to consider the shadows of the things we have done that we wish we had not done; of past shames that pursue us; of ways that we've hurt others and created damage in the world. When we are not in touch with our inner shadow then we risk walking around completely oblivious permitting ourselves to think that we are blameless or that others are to blame.

Yom Kippur asks us to reconcile ourselves with our shadows and make amends accordingly. It also asks us to consider: what shadows do our lives cast upon the world? If our lives are, in fact, passing shadows, *"c'tzael ovaer,"* on whom do they fall, and how?

In a Midrash, one rabbi comments, that there are three kinds of shadow: "There are shadows of the bird; shadows of the wall; and best of all, shadows of the tree." I think the rabbis are asking us: Which kind of shadow do we want to cast? What kind of life do we want to lead and be remembered for?

Think first of all of the shadow of the bird. The perspective of a bird can be very valuable. The rabbis say this in many other places, that sometimes it's good to see things with detachment, from far above. The perspective of rising above the earth can be useful, but the shadow of a bird does nothing. It is small, provides no shade then passes quickly. And some people's lives, say the rabbis, are like the shade of a bird. You were here. You are gone. And there isn't even a shadow left behind.

But then there is the shade of the wall. Some people are like walls. They are steady. They are sturdy. They provide shade but they are inflexible and generally uncompromising. They provide support for houses, and yet, walls divide us, divide people and places. And when the sun moves and the circumstances of life change, people like this can't change, because they're walls.

Best of all, say the rabbis are the shadows of the tree. This idea is incorporated in a lovely story about Ibn Gabirol, the great Spanish, Jewish poet of the 11th century. Ibn Gabirol died young. He died in his thirties. And when he was sick, the story goes that he said to his students, "When I die bury me with a fig in my hand." And when he died and was buried, we are told that the most beautiful fig tree in the world grew up from his grave and his students and disciples would sit under the shade of his tree and eat from his fruit and recite from his poetry.

If we live a rewarding life, we can cast long shadows for those we leave behind; not the shadow of a bird, or the shadow of a wall but the shadow of a fig tree, (or in the case of Steve Jobs, an Apple tree) - something that provides a shade that is nourishing for those who come after us to take shelter and grow.

In our tradition, we read, "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, You will comfort me" and that makes the shadow seem terrible and frightening. But, we also need shadow. We need darkness or nothing will grow. Life is always a mixture of light and darkness.

In fact the person who built the *Mishkan* in ancient times, the Tabernacle was named *B'tzalel* - "in the shadow of God". And if you live in a really harsh desert climate, as our Israelite ancestors did, sitting in the shadow can be life saving. If we live a certain kind of life, a life in which we reflect *B'tzelem Elohim*, the image of our divinity, than our life casts a shadow of a sheltering kind over those who follow.

This is a lesson we hope to learn from each other and last year, many of us learned this lesson from our friend, and member Noah Nacamulli, *zicharon l'vracha*, may his memory be for a blessing.

One year ago, September 23, Noah received a phone call while he was in his college English class. During that call he learned the shocking news that he had cancer. Noah kept a blog in order to openly share with us the painful, debilitating disease and his brave and courageous battle to live and love to the fullest. With permission from his family, I want to share a few of Noah's words with you.

" Today I... did a self inventory and I don't believe I'm long for this world.... But I don't know for sure... I have, in the last few days become scared. Not of dying, I am at peace with being dead at a tender age... My biggest worry... what if something goes wrong. I mean really, what can go wrong while dying. Isn't that just called living. ..."

Those who were close in and part of Noah's care-giving team walked with him a short way into the Valley of the Shadow, where they witnessed Noah step full throttle into his life – taking emotional risks, finding his voice, – even as he was losing his ability to use his voice. And even though he did not believe in

God, as many don't, it seems that Noah found some unifying principle that became meaningful to him; that he moved through his Shadow and came into another place of meaning; that he could see and appreciate the impact he'd had on us; that his written legacy was inscribed upon our hearts. I invite you to read Noah's blog yourself and see his courage and his bravery in confronting his shadow, which is the legacy he left to all of us.

One last midrash. The Rabbis imagine what happened to Adam the first night that the sun set on Eden. Think about it for a second. All Adam's ever known is the first day and suddenly there is darkness and the darkness terrified him. He thought that the sun would never return again. And God instructed Adam to take two stones – one called "*Afela*", "darkness" and one called "*Mavet*," "death". And God said, 'strike those two stones together, "death and darkness" and you will make a fire that will keep you warm.'

As I think back on my childish rubber spider pranks, which I used to play on the grown-ups – I realize now something significant about the context. My father was living with terminal cancer – and this fact lurked in our consciousness in a creepy crawly kind of way that none of us could eradicate; we were all terrified. But in the years since my family and I have wrested blessing from the sadness and we continue to sit in the shade of Camillus's tree.

"Darkness" as Rabbi Aharon of Apt once said, "is the throne upon which the light must sit."

The great novelist Henry James wrote, "We work in the dark – do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion, and our passion is our task." We all work in darkness,

unknowing, uncertain; but if we do what we can, our passion can ignite each other's souls. Light does not erase difficulty or doubt, or even death. But it allows us to seek a blessing.

May we have the courage to face the shadows in our lives and make for ourselves a tree of life.

Gmar Chatimah Tova – May we be inscribed in the Book of Life – for another year, one of meaning and reward, that we may make our lives a blessing.

Ken Yhi Ratzon, May this be God's will. Amen.