

Second Day RH Teaching, R. Chaya Gusfield, rabbichayagusfield.com

Reb Zalman Schachter Shalomi, of blessed memory, used to ask us rabbinical students and rabbis how we were being deployed.

The underlying concept was that there was a someone deploying us to a somewhere. Our job was to listen to that still small voice and not ignore it. Was it Congregational work? Spiritual direction? Jewish education? Chaplaincy? Being a talmud chacham/scholar, or devoting ourselves to tikkun olam, as an activist.

The prophet Isaiah says, *Hineini, shelachayni*. Here I am, send me! This is a similar idea. There is a someone sending us to a somewhere.

Many of us have a deep connection to our own Judaism or other spiritual medicine. However, Reb Zalman's concept of a someone sending us to a somewhere might be quite alien. And yet, the prayers we recite, and sing, and inhale are asking us to turn towards Ata, or At, meaning You.

Baruch ata, At brucha, Blessed are You. You are Blessed. Kehilla's theme this year is mutuality and reciprocity. It might be wise for us to explore the YOU we are invited to be in relationship with. As R. Marcia Prager says, we call out to the Oneness where there is a potential for intimacy. Or better, all relationships have the potential for us to experience the Oneness within them. The great Jewish

philosopher Martin Buber teaches about the I and Thou relationship. We call out to God as You because we experience an awareness reflected back to us from the world, when we are willing to enter into relationship with it. You is personal, and in the language of relationship.

The truth? I have no clue what or who the You is, but I do think bringing the concept of **relationship** into our inner spiritual life can be transformative, expansive, and dare I say even delicious?

Until this year the closest way I experienced the You was through the concept of God we find in the Kaddish: *Shmei Rabba*. *Shmei Rabba* means the **great name**. As Rabbi Arthur Waskow says, *Shmei rabba* is the name of all creation: every color, sound, frog, blade of grass, cloud. Every animal, every insect, ever sea creature. The all of existence. *Mitziut*.

Being in a mutual relationship with Existence, past, present, and future.

That's the You I want to show up for. That's what I mean when I say *Hineni*, here I am. I am yearning to show up for You. All of existence. Or as Barbara Petterson taught, the thread that connects us all.

And then there was 2021. The year I questioned everything and felt spiritually lost. I dove deeply into my experience of a rabbinic ancestor from whose lineage I was ordained. 18th century R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He was a Chassidic

rebbe from Ukraine who lived at the time of the third generation of Chassidic rebbes. He loved our people and he loved prayer. But he didn't just love God. He was in a very intimate relationship with the You he prayed to. So much so that his prayers included great arguments with God during prayer services, during *davvenen*. He defended us, cried out for help, and fiercely scolded God. It was said that the people who *davened* with him often had to wait for some time while he engaged in great arguments with God out loud before the prayer service could continue.

Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the Berditchever, was also very human and suffered greatly because he was thrown out of many towns for his radical ideas. It was reported he was seriously depressed and nonfunctional for a year of his life. He eventually recovered and became the rabbi for the town of Berditchev for more than 25 years. It was partly his struggle that drew me to him, as I also was struggling.

His niggun spoke some of his story, both his grief and his resilience. His despair and his recovery. I wonder if you can hear it? (sing niggun)

This niggun became the path to regain my own spiritual strength. How he came through his period of depression, I do not know, but knowing how engaged he was with God, I imagine it was a result of this relationship that helped him recover. In

his commentary on the Torah portion *Shmot* from the book of Exodus, the Berditchever taught about a time when we cried out to God to save us because of our suffering in Mitzrayim (known as Egypt). Our cries were only for ourselves. He commented that God acknowledged how our minds and bodies were in an oppressed state at the time, so we could only cry out for ourselves. However, God heard our cries, but also heard what was underneath them. God heard our larger yearning for the healing of all of humanity.

Maybe during the Berditchever's year of depression, he felt heard by the God he was in relationship with. So much so, his prayers for only his suffering were eventually expanded into prayers for a greater healing of humanity. This may have put him in relationship with something bigger than himself. Having this feeling of connecting to something larger may have helped Levi Yitzchak out of his pit.

Also, his unique and special connection with God was demonstrated in one of the famous songs he wrote in Yiddish, called *Adudele*, meaning for You. *Du* means You in Yiddish. He sings: Ribbono Shel Olam (The Great Oneness of the world) let me sing you a You song. where can I find you, where can I not find you? You, You, You...The song demonstrates his feeling of being completely surrounded by and connected to God at all times and in all places. Especially from the six directions. The words in the song also resonate strongly with the ritual of shaking

the lulav and etrog during Sukkot. We shake the four species: the palm branch joins with three other species and we connect with the energy of the four directions, and the heavens and the earth.

There are many stories about Levi Yitzchak's total devotion to Sukkot, including begging the angel of death to let him live through one more Sukkot. Which he did. Maybe during his year of depression, he was also able to draw on his love of Sukkot to help him recover.

As I sing *Adudele* in English, allow yourself to experience the You meant just for you...(notice the faces around you, in your mind or heart, or on the screen. Can you experience the You? Or go internal and see what arises. And as is in Kehilla's tradition, let your imagination, your body, your heart move, and dance, or stay quiet).

Ribbono Shel Olam

Ribbono Shel Olam, I will sing you a
YOU song

You, you, you, you

Where will I find You?

Where will I NOT find You?

Where can I find You?

Where can I NOT find You?

You, you, you, you

Wherever I go, You

And wherever I stay, You

Just You

Only You

Again You

Nothing but You	On Earth, You,
You, you, you, you	Above, You
When something's good, You	Below, You
When God forbid it's bad, Ah You	You, you, you, you....
Ay, You x 5	You.....
East, You	Where I turn
West, You	Where I go
South, You	Voh ich kerh mich
North, You	Voh ich vend mich, du du
You, you, you, you.....	You, You
In Heaven, You	

I don't know anything about God or if God exists. I don't know whether the You is all of existence like how Rabbi Arthur Waskow describes it,

the Mystery,

the Shechinah,

the King,

Creation itself,

the Master or teacher of the world,

the Thread that connects us all,

or Hamakom, the place where everything dwells.

It isn't important to me. What is important is, here I am, in relationship. With You.

And You and you and you

Here I am, send me...*Hineini, shelachayni*. What You do you yearn for this season?

And let us say, Amen.

(To read more about my encounter with the Berditchever and hear the music mentioned in this talk [click here.](#))