

“The still, small voice”

Today, we live by many alarms and reminders both on our computers and smartphones. Beyond setting alerts for waking up in the morning, we now have alarms for meetings, doctor’s appointments, and even social events. We count on these, especially the 15 or 30 minute reminders we set up to give us plenty of advance warning of what’s coming next. On my watch, I regularly receive a reminder to breathe. Just breathe. For one minute. Who has time for that, I recently thought as I quickly dismissed the message. But, then I paused and realized that’s exactly the point. We all need those moments throughout the day to stop, to pause and to breathe.

In our fast-paced, high speed world, we are so caught up on checking things off our lists and getting through appointments. Professional and personal tasks get lumped into the same category and many times we’re just wading through it all.

But Judaism reminds us of the need to stop on a daily and weekly basis. Traditionally, we wake up in the morning praising God for the gift of life, and we go to bed at night asking for God to watch over and protect our souls. Our holidays remind us of the cycles and patterns of creation and God’s presence in our lives. Even when it doesn’t seem possible, we make time to observe and cherish these sacred moments. Shabbat is a reminder to breathe. To live in the moment and allow ourselves the important break we crave from all the busyness of the past week.

One of the most meaningful prayers in our liturgy speaks to this. Earlier we shared the moving words. It’s part of the Tefillah section, which contains our prayers of gratitude to God. It includes the phrase, “Kol D’mamah Dakah-You, God, are the still clear voice within us.” What is this still clear voice? In the book of First Kings, we find the phrase as it relates to the prophet Elijah and his relationship with God. Elijah needed God’s presence in his life and he found it. Discovering the soft, murmuring voice within us takes a great deal of patience and persistence. For our biblical leaders, they had easy access to the wilderness. Perhaps for them, finding a quiet moment in nature was a regular habit. At such times, connecting with the Kol D’mamah Dakah- a voice of stillness was exactly what brought them peace and comfort.

We search for this too. How can we connect with God? Where do we find the soft, divine voice within our souls? We know we need it. As we stand on the threshold of the New Year, we seek a level of calmness – a chance to be at one with ourselves.

Finding this voice or whisper is like re-discovering our own moral compass. It’s not about achieving goals that are so far reaching. It’s about opening ourselves up to being in the moment. Staying still and calm doesn’t come so easy. We are full of over scheduling and

constant distractions that don't make this a simple task. But we must overcome these obstacles.

God's presence can assist us even in the most challenging moments, if we are open to receiving it. The diversions of life interrupt us as we seek the divine support we need. We must make take the time for ourselves. We must strive to connect with our still voices from within.

With God's assistance, we can accomplish this. We can find the moments when we are able to breathe freely and calmly. Living in the moment is not simple. It is a practice that takes time. We must train ourselves to be ready with our hearts open. We must enter into a vulnerable state, ready to acknowledge that we have been endowed with a Divine Spark.

Harold Kushner, in his work, *How Good Do we have to be*, explains the importance of God's existence in our lives. He writes, "God does not stop loving us every time we do something wrong, and neither should we stop loving ourselves and each other for being less than perfect." (p.4). We don't strive for perfection. Rather, we seize the opportunity to hear God's voice from within. The New Year comes exactly when we need it. This past year had many rough spots for us individually, and as a community it was extremely challenging. But we have survived. We have prevailed. Now, we are ready to return to the beauty of our faith, which reminds us of God's illuminating path.

As our special liturgy reminds us, the High Holy Days are both awesome and full of dread. We can feel overwhelmed with the details of correcting our ways and changing our behaviors. Perhaps, we would serve ourselves better by finding the Kol D'mamah Dakah, the still, quiet voice within. As we do this, we don't have to act out of fear. We don't have to despair. We find exactly what we need. Our bodies are strong and powerful vessels. God truly dwells among us.

Taking a break from our routine is necessary and healthy. It restores our souls and reminds us of what is most lasting and enduring. With so much uncertainty we must give ourselves permission to take the time we need to promote a healthy spiritual practice. By stopping, listening and breathing we fill ourselves with an important gift.

This is a special time in our calendar. We seek security to carry out our days with meaning and intention. As much as we focus on the needs of our family and our community, we must remember our personal needs too. God is the source of our strength and comfort. God inspires us in countless ways.

As we return to our faith, we are mindful of the important teachings of our tradition. What we need is already part of who we are. We change, but our tradition remains. With clarity, we are prepared.

As we long for God's presence, let us be aware of the still, clear voice within us. Let us remember to stop, pause and listen for what we need most. May the Divine spark help guide us and strengthen us as we stand ready to accept a New Year with increased joy, health and peace. Amen.