



Temple Rodef Shalom

Cantor Allen Leider

Yom Kippur 5780/2019

Being Whole - *Shleimut*

India.Ari "I Am Light"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL-gxfx2QtY>

"We are not the pieces of the brokenness inside." "We are light!"

A story from Torah:

When Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the 10 Commandments, God told him about the sin of the golden calf. You can imagine how enraged Moses became! Maybe you know what he did... [take the tablets] Moses came down the mountain with the two tablets of the commandments and in front of all the Israelite community, he threw down the sacred tablets, smashing them into pieces. Moses later went back up the mountain to receive the second set of tablets. But what happened to those sacred fragments? Super glue? Were they put out with the next day's trash? Buried? Did they just sit there on the desert floor?

The Torah explains that the fragments were gathered up, and once the Ark of the Covenant was built, the fragments were placed in there with the other sacred items: the 2nd set of commandments, Aaron's staff and a pot of manna. The Ark was so holy that only Moses and Aaron could come into its presence. And once the ark with its contents was in the Temple in Jerusalem, only the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year, on Yom Kippur, to ask for forgiveness for himself and the Jewish community.

There's an essential lesson that comes from this story: The fragments, were still considered sacred, and, they were kept in the holy ark. So it is with us – experiences we've had that lead to feelings of brokenness need to be valued as important and sacred. They add to our wholeness. They don't take away from it. Hardship, life challenges, shame, guilt, small losses, large losses, unexpected life events that throw everything off – these things are not who we are. They are experiences that become a part of our wholeness.

The Hebrew word "shalom" has several meanings – you're probably familiar with "hello," "goodbye," and "peace." But "shalom" has a much deeper meaning. The root - *shin, lamed, mem* - really means "wholeness" and "completeness."

About a year and a half ago, my parents died, my mom from kidney failure and my dad, a few months later from Alzheimer's. It was a tough time for me and, as you might imagine, it's been crazy hard not having them in my life. For a long time, when attending services, I would tear up during the singing of "Oseh Shalom." How could I possibly feel whole and complete without their love, their laughter, their guidance, and simply – their presence? I didn't feel whole in any way.

It's taken me a while to learn that wholeness comes from within, and that for me, and anyone who experiences loss or tragedy of any kind, the pain remains. It's a new normal. But when our hearts break, if we allow it, space is created from the brokenness. Space to let others in. Space to let God in. We must embrace the brokenness. Though it still hurts not having my parents here, I do feel them with me, supporting and guiding me in a more spiritual way; reminding me of the values, life lessons, and love they imparted. I know that I'm more empathetic now to those who suffer loss. I can turn to others with greater compassion. Even for those who haven't experienced this kind of loss, we can all be reminded on this Yom Kippur to pass the values, lessons and love of our grandparents, parents and families to the next generation – *l'dor vador*. We can feel whole.

As we just confessed our sins communally, *al cheit shechatanu l'fanecha*, please know that we are not these sins. On Yom Kippur we admit our failings and we bring our brokenness. We lift up the broken pieces inside. Still, we are whole. As India Arie sang, "I am not the things my family did... I'm not the mistakes that I have made... I am not the pieces of the brokenness inside. I am light... I am divinity defined... I am the God on the inside... I am a star, a piece of it all... I am light.

Sometimes in life we may feel incomplete, that we're like the Torah fragments smashed on the ground. But know that Judaism teaches that our soul is pure, that within us, there is love and Oneness with God and all of creation.

The Kotsker Rebbe, an early 19th c Chasidic rabbi, taught "There is nothing as whole as a broken heart." Let us come to accept that which is shattered within us and repair what we can, in ourselves and in the world. May we all experience the exquisite wholeness that we are.

Kein y'hi ratzon – May this be God's will.