



Torah Reflections on the Month of *Elul* August 20 -September 18, 2020

Elul is the Jewish month that is the on-ramp to our New Year. Across the Jewish world it is a time of preparation. Elul's preparation is to arrive at the New Year with a spiritual openness to honest reflection, deep yearning, and change for the better. It is as if Elul is the month of packing for an important journey; a journey that could be life-changing. Typically, we have some sense of what to pack, we have some sense of what to anticipate; a familiar place to sit, familiar music, prayers, people. But, in this moment we all know we are embarking on a journey so new we are not sure even what preparation is needed. How do we pack for the unknown? What do we bring to a place we do not recognize? What do we bring when we yearn for things taken away, relinquished, that we may never have again?

Maybe we pack what is honest: Our disappointment, our lament, our yearning for something inspirational. Maybe we prepare by reflecting on the feelings, perspectives, learnings we have discovered so far: A cup of morning coffee can be savored not gulped down, impatience can inspire change, asking for help is hard, giving help can be complicated but yet important. Perhaps our preparation this Elul is the honesty of where we find ourselves in this moment.

Maybe we carry an empty suitcase to fill along the way: A new insight that will be revealed at some unexpected moment, a word someone may say or even type into a chat box during a service, a calm moment of meditation, a word we say spontaneously to someone else. Perhaps our preparation this Elul is the hope to discover something better.

We all know that some of us have discovered resilience. Some of us have discovered a breaking point. Some of us are relieved by the resources we have and some of us are devastated by what we have lost. Some of us have a quiet pride in what we can give and some of us are pained by what we need. Some of us have relationships reconciled and some of us have relationships shattered. Whether we find ourselves in a hospital bed or in the comfort of a family room couch, as this new year arrives, we all hope for a new year that will beckon wholeness.

Across the millennia, our people have gathered on hewn stones and cushioned seats. We have listened to our cumulative story written by the fingers of scribes on scrolls carried from place to place against the breast of every wandering generation. Our journey has taken us across continents, across societies, across

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the inner terrain. We have never really known what the future might bring, but we always gathered, somehow: Sometimes in full public view, sometimes in hidden corners, and even now on the ether of energy waves of technology we don't fully understand.

From Creation to Sinai, we have culturally built ourselves upon the understanding we are uniquely created in the Divine image: Our diversity is a testament to God's unfathomable creativity. And that we are covenanted to one another: Each of us was together at Sinai. We are forever held together, in this world among ourselves, and by something Transcendent. Perhaps the truth is that Elul's preparation always was a combination of honest self-reflection before God and an empty suitcase waiting to be packed with our own unique capacity to discover ourselves and community in sacred caring at the unknown horizon before us.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Eric Weiss, CEO and President of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. Gracious support is provided by the Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.