

For this *d'rash*, I will not be spending much time on the actual text of Jonah. Rather, I am using the story as a stepping off point to talk about the notion of being called.

The stories of our tradition reveal to us the essential place of calling in coming to know God, coming to know ourselves - to being in relation with God individually and collectively. The figures who reveal this are called in varying ways and to varying tasks with each story revealing some aspect of the nature and significance of being called. Among them...

Abraham - to move from "where" he is, and called to give up something (that is precious) on faith that all will be well

Moses - to be a founder in the face of a powerful force against freedom

Samuel - to be a spiritual guide when the people want a king to rule them - not

someone to instruct in accountability

David - to be a leader in a time when surrounding forces are much mightier

Ruth - to a life some question why she would choose, even caution her not to -> ever the Moabite - the outsider; but one who knows herself even as those around her see her as the other

Jacob - to take his position in life despite contexts that work to "keep him in his place"

Jonah - to tell people what they do not want to hear - a challenge and a risk at any time and in any place

All of these figures have their strengths and their faults, their limitations and their assets. Yet, each is called!

Some say "*hineni*" (whether literally or figuratively), some respond with a "who me?" reaction, some wrestle to understand that which calls them, and Jonah even attempts to run away. But a calling can not be escaped, and...we each are called in some way.

The challenge of a calling aside from recognizing it and accepting it - it takes Samuel three times and a bit of direction from Eli; it takes Moses a burning bush and a side kick in the form of Aaron; it takes Jonah being spewn back from the belly of a great fish... Anyway...The challenge of a calling aside from recognizing it and accepting it, is that it demands a balance of self-reflection and wrestling with humility. It requires a striving toward right relation - with oneself, with God, and with each other.

Culturally, humility often is associated with downplaying oneself. From a therapeutic perspective, humility is best thought of not as an act of downplaying oneself; rather it is a balancing of one's strengths and limitations, one's faults and one's assets.

From Talmudic tradition, it is reflected in that notion of keeping in one pocket the note that reads, "For me the world was created" and keeping in a pocket on the other side a note reading, "I am but dust and ashes." For some the balance better is reflected in keeping a note, "I am but dust and ashes" and in another pocket the note that reads, "For me the world was created." Nonetheless, the striving for balance is essential.

Traditionally, just before the *musaf* service on RH and YK, the Cantor or *Hazzan* recites the *hineni* prayer. It is a personal prayer of the service leader; specifically, a prayer for the ability to pray - to have the capacity to fill the role of praying on behalf of the congregation. In its larger context, it is a personal moment made public as the *Hazzan* seeks introspection to find balance. The *Hazzan* recites:

*Hineni he'ani mima'as.*

"Here I am, impoverished in deeds and merit. Nevertheless, I have come..."

A few years ago (2016), Leonard Cohen released the song *You Want It Darker*.

Some say Cohen was wrestling with self-reflection as he reflected at age 82 with a sense of his life drawing to a close. Regardless, like the *Hazzan*, he sought balance. The lyrics read:

If you are the dealer, I'm out of the game

If you are the healer, it means I'm broken and lame

If thine is the glory then mine must be the shame

*Hineni, hineni*

*Hineni, hineni*

I'm ready, my lord

*Hineni*

*Hineni, hineni*

*Hineni*

In particular, for the *Hazzan*, it is a matter of role: the *shàliakh tsibur*. In context, the *shàliakh tsibur* is the spiritual emissary of the congregation - the prayer group. More literally, the phrase is "the emissary of the public." I argue that this call to be an emissary "on behalf of" is not limited to the role of *Hazzan*. Each of us can and does - is called - to act as *shàliakh tsibur*.

Jonah takes issue with God that God mitigated the judgement – arguing that the punishment would be renounced so why should he have put himself out and acted on behalf of the people in the first place. Setting aside the particular of Jonah's call – that he was to announce God's judgement, I want to consider the matter of acting in the interest of others. Sometimes simply being who we are in as authentic a way as possible allows others – others more vulnerable than ourselves – to live authentically.

When I speak openly – admittedly, sometimes on my own behalf – about my experience of living with disabilities, in general, or being autistic, specifically, it makes visible the lives of others often rendered invisible. When I introduce myself or tag my name in a Zoom meeting with my pronouns, that is not something I do on my own behalf since when people see or hear me and make an assumption of my pronouns whether consciously or unconsciously, they are correct. I specify my pronouns as a small gesture – perhaps making space for those who may be uncertain about doing so for themselves. In a sense, one could say that we each are called – along with any specific calling – to be authentically ourselves so that others may be as well. It matters not whether our (individual) actions are what makes a difference for any person, group, or community; whether we know they did or not. It matters that we act.

The whole of our tradition is a calling to right relation. Jonah never quite gets there, but...The YK liturgy provides a framework for what we seek – atonement. At our core - in our essence, we seek at-one-ment; a oneness. God is everywhere, in everything. That can not be escaped. The covenantal relationship may be specific to Jews and God, but its purpose is instructional in the sense of teaching a path to right relation with all. We live a relational faith so that we learn - and have the support of one another - in striving for right relation in the world; the experience of the oneness of all made manifest. A world in which no one is too little or too big (in stature, in influence), no one has too little or too much (of resources, power, control)... in which each person is able to live authentically.

So to what are you called?

Will you run away, will you wrestle, will you feel daunted by forces seeking to keep you in your place or obstacles that seem too great, will you be speechless and think “who me?”, will you fear having to let go or give up too much?

What will it take for you to remain true to who you are even when seen as the other?

How can you act to make space for those otherwise vulnerable or rendered invisible?

In the year to come, especially with all that we know may be challenges, my prayer for all of us - for each of us - is to find the balance between our limitations and our assets; that we have the resources to be who we are meant to be: to find our way to say, “*hineni.*”

Shanah Tova