

D'RASH FOR YK 2020 – JONAH Linda Kallin

Each time I listen to the story of Jonah, I wonder, “What am I running away from? And what am I running towards?”

Over time, I've come to realize that the very thing I'm running from, IS (becomes) the very thing I'm running towards. And that's what I'd like to try to explain in my d'rash. It's also one of the reasons I think we read the story of Jonah on YK.

Our tradition teaches that we are created b'tzelem Elohim – in the image of God, or Divine, or Source. And I believe that we each carry a spark of the Divine within us – and that spark is what keeps us always connected to and in communication with something greater than ourselves. For some, that connection and communication is experienced through friends, family or community; for some it is experienced within the natural world; for some it's found within written words – texts, liturgy, poetry; and for some that connection and communication is more visceral – an inner knowing or resonance, perhaps even a direct experience with an unknowable/indescribable energy.

But however we understand, connect or communicate with God/ the Divine/ Source, and in whatever way we experience that relationship, we are resonating with something that is already part of who we are, something baked within us, because we are created b'tzelem Elohim with that spark of the Divine.

So when I'm running or turning away from something, when I'm feeling scared or confused, overwhelmed, angry or hurt...I'm running or turning away from that inner spark or “still, small voice” and from whatever truth it holds for me that I don't want to deal with. Certainly what I don't want to have to act on or be responsible for.

In the words of Rabbi Amy Perlin from Temple B'nai Shalom in Fairfax Station, Va.,

““I believe that we read the Book of Jonah on Yom Kippur afternoon to remind us that sometimes we are Jonah.

We run, we are swallowed up, and we are spit out. We have times when the responsibility of the world is thrust upon our shoulders and we have times when we feel very much alone. Sometimes, just like Jonah, we feel that life is too much for us. Who wouldn't want to book a cruise, get on a ship, and run away from such burdens? Perhaps, we are more like Jonah than we even want to admit.”

So Jonah may think he's running from God and from the responsibility God has thrust upon him – to go speak to people he considers unworthy of forgiveness. But I think he's really running from his own fears – fears that the spark of God within him has brought to the surface.

However, as a great saying reminds us, “Wherever you go, there you are.”

So Jonah can't escape his fears or his reluctance to participate in what God - through that inner spark or voice – asks of him.

I think that Jonah's time in the fish forces him to confront his fears – to turn toward that Divine inner spark he was running from, and then to ask for and open to receive the help he needs which is beyond what he can give himself.

It's that turn *towards* his fears – recognizing and opening to receive support from his connection with the Divine in whose image he was made – which gets him back on dry land and allows him to complete the task he's been called to do.

I believe that when we turn and acknowledge and face our demons, our fears, our insecurities, we're no longer running from ourselves, or from the Divine within us. Our fears become a signpost pointing in the direction of the help we need and the help that is always available to us. What we're initially running from can then become what we are running towards, turning towards, when we ask for God's help so we can grow beyond our fears and become more of who we're called to be. I believe it's what our YK liturgy asks of us.

So this year, Jonah can be a reminder that our inner spark, our connection with the Divine, may call us to act in the world in uncomfortable and difficult ways, but if we turn towards rather than away from that spark, there can be awakening, empowerment and healing.