

Kavanot
Speaking Up, Putting on Shoes and Pouring Tea

Rabbi Stacy Offner
Temple Beth Tikvah
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A Kavanah for Speaking Up

We are about to say our *Amidah*, the Standing Prayer, that we also call "*HaT'fillah*" which means THE Prayer. It is actually made up of many prayers; you know them, like the *Avot and Gevurot*. But what I find most interesting this evening is that these prayers are bracketed by two opposing prayers. Two opposites, really. We begin by singing "*Adonai Sefatai Tiftach*". We say "O God, open up my lips." And we end with a Silent Prayer. "*Elohai Netzor Leshoni*" We say: God, Stop my mouth." Open my Lips. Close my Lips. I suppose we do need to pray for both of these, but also for the wisdom to know when to do which. When should I open my lips? When should I be silent?

I have to share with you that rabbis across the country -- this new year more than ever -- have been doing serious soul-searching on just that question: Do I open my lips? Or do I shut my mouth? Do I speak about the political climate in our country? Do I risk offending those in the congregation who disagree? Surely, the divisiveness in our country today is not something I want to add to. We come here tonight as one: saints and sinners, Jews and those who have cast their lot with Jews, rich and poor, and Republicans and Democrats. This is our home, together. And together, we must find our Jewish moral compass, that helps us know when to speak up and what to say.

We begin our *Amidah* by saying "*Adonai Sefatai Tiftach*," Open My Lips, O God. Give me the courage to speak up. When we witness hateful words and hateful acts perpetrated against particular groups and communities, we must give voice to our horror. We must speak out against the swastikas that are defacing our synagogues and the public square. We must march shoulder-to-shoulder with our Muslim brothers and sisters and our African-American brothers and sisters when they are attacked only for the crime of being who they are. We decry any moral equivocation between neo-Nazis and those who stand up to them. We stand challenged on this first day of our New Year by the words first spoken by the German theologian Martin Neimoller in 1945 after he, himself an early supporter of Hitler's rise to power, reflected upon his own culpability.

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me

It is time for us to speak out. Neimoller was a Lutheran pastor who served as an officer in the German navy in World War I. He supported Hitler's rise to power but he became uncomfortable when Hitler explicitly asserted the supremacy of the Aryan race. Neimoller was eventually arrested and spent seven years in Nazi Concentration Camps.

Neimoller's poem reminds us of the dangers of not speaking out. What would his poem look like today if he were to proudly and openly speak out? What words would we hear? My colleague and friend, Rabbi Michael Latz, answers this challenge with a new poem, entitled *In Response to Martin Neimoller (z"l)*, which I share with you now:

First they came for trans people and I spoke up -- because God does NOT make mistakes!

Then they came for the African Americans and I spoke up—
Because I am my sisters' and my brothers' keeper.

And then they came for the women and I spoke up—
Because women hold up half the sky.

And then they came for the immigrants and I spoke up—
Because I remember the ideals of our democracy.

And then they came for the Muslims and I spoke up—
Because they are my cousins and we are one human family.

And then they came for the Native Americans and Mother Earth and I spoke up—
Because the blood-soaked land cries and the mountains weep.

They keep coming.
We keep rising up.

Because we Jews know the cost of silence.
We remember where we came from.
And we will link arms, because when you come for our neighbors, you come for us—
and THAT just won't stand.

Adonai Sefatai Tiftach, O God, Open our lips.

KAVANAH: TURN YOUR SHOES AROUND

A story. A Jewish fable for Rosh Hashanah. The name of the story? "Turn Your Shoes Around." The inspiration for the story? Hashiveinu Adonai Eloheinu, we pray at the New Year, Turn us O God, to You. Now, to the story:

There once was a man who had given up on his life. He found no joy in his work, his family, or his community. And so he prayed to God to let him leave this world. "Show me the way to Paradise!" he implored.

God asked him, "Are you sure that's what you want?"

The man replied, "I am sure with all my heart."

"Very well," replied God, who showed him the way to Paradise.

As it turned out, Paradise wasn't far away - just a few days' journey from his village. So late one afternoon he set out on his way. He walked until nightfall and then decided to rest beneath a leafy tree. Just before he fell asleep, it occurred to him that in the morning he might become confused and forget which was the way to Paradise and which was the way back to the village.

So he left his shoes by the roadside, with the tips pointing toward Paradise so that in the morning all he'd have to do was jump into his shoes and continue on his way.

But sometimes unexpected things happen. Shoes get turned around. Was it an imp? Was it an angel? Was it just a squirrel? Who knows? But somehow

the man's shoes got turned around. In the morning he arose, feeling rested from his sleep. He ate from the fruit of the tree, and prepared to set off on his journey. He went to the roadway, stepped into his shoes, and began walking - unaware that he was in fact returning home.

By noon he could see a village on the next hillside, and his heart leapt. "I've arrived in Paradise!" he thought. He ran down into the valley and up the hill, not stopping until he had arrived at the gates of the village.

"What a beautiful place this Paradise is!" he thought. My village was always so crowded, so noisy. This is different, so filled with life and joy!" He sat down on a bench in the square and witnessed the life of the village. He heard the songs the children sang at school and the sounds of the adults at work. He felt the vitality, the energy, and the love that filled the village. He sat in the square all day. In the evening he heard the joyful sounds of families reunited at home and smelled the meals that were being enjoyed by each family. And he began to feel hungry.

He thought, "Since Paradise looks so much like my village, I wonder if there is a street in Paradise like my street." And just where he thought it might be, there it was! Just as he was wondering at this marvelous coincidence, a woman came to the door - a woman who bore a striking resemblance to his own wife. The woman called his name and asked him to come in for dinner.

His heart leapt again. "They know me in Paradise! There is a place set for me here in Paradise!"

"I don't know what's in Paradise," the woman responded, "but your soup is getting cold. Come inside!"

He entered the house. This house in Paradise was nothing like his house in the village. That house was always crowded, cluttered, and filled with commotion. This place was cozy and homey and filled with life. He sat at the table and ate the best meal he'd ever had. He complimented the woman on her heavenly soup. Afterward he went up to the bedroom and entered the deepest, most restful sleep he'd ever known.

In the morning the woman (who looked an awful lot like his wife) handed him his tools and sent him to work. At first the man was incredulous. Who ever heard of working in Paradise? But then it occurred to him that even in Paradise there were tasks to be done. And he found that this work was different from the work he'd done before. It wasn't dull or tedious; it filled him with a sense

of purpose. And that night he returned to the same warm and loving home, the same kind woman, and more of her wonderful soup.

Do you know that in all the years that followed, no one could convince the man that he hadn't made it to Paradise! Every one of his days from then on was filled with more wonder, more purpose, more joy, and more life than the day before.

And that is the end of the story. But it is not the end of our story. In fact, this Rosh Hashanah marks a new beginning for each of our stories. *Hashiveinu Adonai*, Turn Our Shoes Around, O God, Turn Us, Towards Life, Towards Love, Towards You.

SING: Hashiveinu

~Story transcribed from *Capturing the Moon: Classic and Modern Jewish Tales*, by Rabbi Edward Feinstein.

A Kavanah for Kiddush

I have been thinking a lot lately about Kiddush Cups. In particular, I have been thinking about how they relate to buckets and to Bucket Lists. Kiddush Cups and Bucket Lists. You will hear a lot more on that subject from me on *Kol Nidre*. But let me share a reflection with you now. We hold up our Kiddush Cup at the new year – our *Cos Revayah* – our Cup that is filled to overflowing. But here is the dilemma. If our cup of life is already full, how do we do the change necessary to enter into the New Year? Perhaps we can learn something from the Buddhists.

Maybe some of you know the Buddhist parable of Nan-in and the teacup. Nan-in was a Buddhist monk, and someone came to him seeking wisdom. Being a good Buddhist host, he served tea to his visitor. He filled his visitor's cup and then kept pouring the tea, so that it literally overflowed. The visitor leapt up, angry, and demanded to know why Nan-in was making such a mess. "You are like this teacup," said Nan-in. "Your mind is already full of what you think you know. How can I pour in the wisdom you seek unless you first empty your cup?"

Sometimes spiritual life demands that we empty our cups, that we empty our granaries, that we let go of our certainties. Only then will we be in a position to allow new possibilities to enter, new possibilities to change us, new possibilities to help us grow.