

**Rosh HaShanah 2 5785 – Home**  
**Rabbi Lina Zerbarini**

Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul.  
Return to who you are  
Return to what you are  
Return to where you are born and reborn again  
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*Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach*

For so many, Kehillath Shalom Synagogue is that land. This is the place you have marked personal familial moments: Baby namings and b'nai mitzvah and reciting of kaddish after a death and commemorating a yahrzeit.

It is where your kids grew up and where you grew as well – in friendship, in leadership, in community, and also grew older. We have come together and have seen a lot of life together in this building – celebrating each other's joys and supporting each other through sorrows. We have shared weddings and also deaths.

It is a tremendous loss to leave our home – and some of you have that experience personally, as well. Downsizing for space or financial reasons from the place you lived and raised your children and spent most of your life: leaving the location of those memories is not easy.

Last month, we gathered to share our feelings and discuss the process ahead of us. You spoke of the great sense of uncertainty ahead: we do not yet know where our new space will be. You shared your feelings of great loss, and even resistance to the process.

In recent times, folks have spoken of the memories of 58 Goose Hill Road: The Silver Shekel Saloon where Barbara Heller got her daughter to teach a very irregular line of men to do a can-can in drag. A Night in Casablanca, complete with very authentic looking passports. Hail to the Grief, with Sara Palin carrying a toy rifle and an oversized white bear. Morty and Tina's Wedding. The plays with Cliff's elaborate sets. The poison ivy in the back that got us after the Sukkah blew over.

A number of you recall your learning and preparation for your Adult b'nai mitzvah – gaining skills and confidence and connection and a true sense of ownership of our sacred tradition.

And how you have literally built this community – physically, as well as spiritually. This beautiful atrium, the classroom addition. You did not just hire people and leave it to them, but were hands on in every way. In her book, Kindling the Flame, about her experience at Kehillath Shalom, Roberta tells a story of Carol Rubin on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor – perhaps for the first time ever doing so, anywhere!

Those of you who designed this atrium were (are) brilliant. So many have highlighted this wall of windows where, as Barbara said: “birds alight in tree branches and deer may wander past. The trees carry us through the seasons on their limbs – from those pure newborn green buds, full cycle and back again.” As a physical space, this may well be the most difficult thing to lose.

Caring for our home has been a labor of love. Lots of love, and plenty of labor. The flood, the fire alarms going off in the middle of the night and your having to come over at 2 am (I'm looking at you, Abby, and Peter, and Howard, and Deborah). Worry about freezing pipes and – is that the compressor going off again? You have put your hearts and souls and resources and elbow grease into this building.

At our gathering, David Schwartz opened his update by saying, Change is inevitable. While this is perhaps the truest of truisms, it does not make it easy.

Yesterday, I spoke of the Nachman of Breslov teaching: the whole world is a very narrow bridge. We are moving from one end to another, and it is swaying in the wind. How do we stay upright? How do we find and trust our feet?

It seems that the Creator knew this would be a challenge. The Talmud tells us that seven things were created before the world; one of these was teshuvah. How is teshuvah – so often translated as return, or repentance – going to help us with the precariousness of our life's journey?

The rabbis derived the source of the tradition that teshuvah preceded creation in Psalm 90, which reads: **Adonai, You have been our home** throughout the generations. Before the mountains were born and the earth and all that fills it was conceived, from forever to eternity,...You whisper “**shuvu, b’nai adam/return, human beings.**”

To what or where are we returning? In this psalm, teshuvah is not repentance. We are not returning to some higher, unachieved aspect of ourselves, but to our home. Adonai you have **been our home** throughout the generations.

We typically use the name Adonai as a substitute for the four-letter divine name that we don't pronounce. In this case, the psalmist chose to use the name Adonai itself. While Adonai is often translated as Lord or Master – that is not the only meaning. This word is the same used in the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert – adanim. The adnei hechatzer are the silver bases which were planted firmly into the ground and the upright beams of the structure were placed into them. These held up the entire Tabernacle. Adnei/Adonai – the base that anchors all that exists.

Everything changes - *and* we do have a permanent, unchanging home. Adonai, **you** have been our home throughout the generations.

This concept of God as home clearly is not referring to a man on a cloud. God as home is not a person, or even a being. This abstract image is not new – the sages of the rabbinic period referred to God as HaMakom – the Place. It's not coincidental that that is the name used in the Rabbinic Period – the time after the destruction of Beit HaMikdash – the Temple, literally, The Holy Home.

As my friend Rabbi Toba Spitzer writes in her book God is Here, “the irony of calling God HaMakom/the Place is that there isn't just one place to encounter godliness – that can happen in any place. ‘Place’ is here in this moment, right where we are.”

Perhaps that is why the rabbis chose this name after the second destruction and exile of our people from both the Temple and the Land.

We learned then, and over and over again throughout our history, that no home is permanent.

But what is permanent? God. That's a challenging word, so: Creation. The Universe – not specific things in the Universe – planets and stars come and go, but the Universe exists. And our main name for God isn't God, which would be "El" in Hebrew. God's most sacred and personal name is Existence or Being: YHVH, or as God told Moses when he asked: who shall I say sent me? Ehyeh – I will be.

Life, the universe, continues to unfold. And it always will. The forms it will take are beyond our knowledge and imagination but, continue it will.

We have a representation of that permanence in the synagogue. There's just one item that uses the language of continuity: can you think of what that is? The ner tamid – the eternal light. The light itself is small – it can be carried with us, and even shared.

Sharing is what you have all done – joys and sorrows, nurturing and holding each other through life. For some, the community is where God is found or expressed, as in Rabbi Rami Shapiro's poem that's in our Shabbat prayerbook:

We are loved by an unending love.

We are embraced by arms that find us  
even when we are hidden from ourselves.  
We are touched by fingers that soothe us  
even when we are too proud for soothing.  
We are counseled by voices that guide us  
even when we are too embittered to hear.  
We are loved by an unending love.

We are supported by hands that uplift us  
even in the midst of a fall.  
We are urged on by eyes that meet us  
even when we are too weak for meeting.  
We are loved by an unending love.

Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled,  
**Ours** are the arms, the fingers, the voices;  
**Ours** are the hands, the eyes, the smiles;  
We are loved by an unending love.

As the psalm says: "Before the mountains were born, from forever to eternity" – unending.

Today is the second of the Ten Days of Teshuvah. Teshuvah is coming home. These Ten Days are designed to help us do that. We remind ourselves of what is true for us. Our loss, our grief is true, and our home is in each other and deep within. We, you, have been that, and can continue to be.

Our Board and others are working hard to shepherd us through this transition. We hope that we will be freed from financial worry and from the burden of caring for an old building. After the holidays, we will have conversations with a number of communities that have invited us to discuss sharing space with them and explore our options. We hope that, by this time next year, we will be in a lovely, dedicated space that will continue our sense of warmth and heimishness and open us up to the next stage of the life of our community.

Cheryl Latif's beautiful poem, commissioned for the dedication of a synagogue sanctuary, expresses some of the multiplicity of meanings of place.

makom

it is not the jewish people who carry the ark,  
but the ark that carries the jewish people.  
— bamidbar rabbah 4:20

beyond the gates of faith we wandered,  
infinite horizon before us,  
the taste of unleavened dreams  
on our lips; our lives mishkan.\*

we bear more than tales of pharaohs and prophets,  
absolution granted at the altar of sacrifice.  
the sight of ash falling like snowflakes  
the stench of hatred carved into our skin

the miracle of faith is not contained in structures.  
the times of man find us nearly spent. we tear  
at the veil of injustice, find our way past reason  
discover imperfection is our salvation.

keepers of the sacred scrolls, our history is our future.  
we gather in sorrow or celebration, temples built,  
destroyed and built again; inner chambers of our forebears,  
holy thresholds we prepare, we swear tikkun olam.\*

our prayers seed this valley, resound from the mountains  
we answer the call to build a new home — not from ruins,  
but promise, our many hands one hand of God,  
the sacred breathed into each stone, beam, window and tile.

the beauty of this place is the beauty of our hearts;  
how far we have come.  
in our shoes grains of sand remain  
lest we forget.

hear, O Israel, we have found makom.\*

*\*makom: place/\*mishkan: temporary structure/\*tikkun olam: repair of the world*

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