

ROSH HASHANAH 5782/2021
Rabbi Uhrbach's Teachings

אני ישנה ולפי ער
קול דודי דופק

פתח־לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי תמתי
שראשי נמלא־טל קנצותי רסיסי לילה:

I am asleep, but my heart is awake.

The sound of my beloved knocking!

“Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my faultless one!
For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night.”

(Song of Songs 5:2)

TEACHING #1 - ROSH HASHANAH EVENING - INTRODUCTION

The shofar exclaims: Wake up from your slumber!

Examine your deeds and turn in repentance, remembering your Creator. You sleepers who forget the truth while caught up in the fads and follies of the time, frittering away your years in vanity and emptiness which cannot help: take a good look at yourselves. Improve your ways. Let everyone abandon their bad deeds and their wicked thoughts.

This passage by Maimonides, the Rambam (MT Hilkhos Teshuvah 3:4) is certainly among the most well-known passages on the purposes of these HH, the work of teshuvah (Lev Shalem p 118)

I too want to focus us this year on waking up, but I'm drawing my theme not from the Rambam, but rather from the Song of Songs, specifically 5:2:

אֲנִי יְשֻנָּה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹלֵךְ! דִּוְנֵי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחֵי-לִי אַחֲתַי רַעֲיִתִי יוֹנְתֵי תַמְתֵּי...

I am asleep, but my heart is awake.

The sound of my beloved knocking! "Open to me, my sister, my lover, my dove, my perfect one!..."

This verse also has long been seen as a metaphor for teshuvah

And I'm liking it much better than the Rambam this year

- a) gentler - not the harsh piercing shofar shocking us, but our own hearts, or a lover softly knocking on the door, urging us to open
- b) we're addressed not as sinners, but as lovers and friends, or a sister, the perfect one
- c) less about judgment of the past, but opportunity for the future -- which we can open to, or tragically miss
- d) and yes, we're slumberers, and we're not. Part of us is already - always - awake

There's so much anger/harshness/judgment in the world - we don't need more on the HH. I think the language of love, of gentleness, connection - the softness of Song of Songs - is more conducive to change. We've been shocked enough. If we're going to grow, we need to be held.

And there's another reason I'm focused on this verse. For the new weekday siddur we're working on, Rabbi Ed Feld wrote a commentary on this verse that really affected me. The classical midrash reads:

אֲנִי יְשֻנָּה מִן הַגְּאֻלָּה, וְלִבּוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֵר לְגַאֲלָנִי.

I am asleep regarding the redemption, but the heart of HaKadosh Barukh Hu is awake to redeem me.

Ed Feld poetically but I think expressing the intent of the midrash, reads as follows:

"I am asleep," I am tired, I cannot do the work of redemption

"but my heart is awake," I have not given up dreaming of redemption.

And I read that and thought (with a big sigh) "Yes." Isn't that so much where we are this year? We're so tired, it's hard to keep doing the work of redemption.

And it's not just these 18 months of a pandemic, or even the last several years of utterly broken politics, divisiveness. Not just the ongoing serious threats to democracy and decency. We're approaching the 20th anniversary of 9/11, when we woke up one morning to find the foundations of our sense of well-being shattered. We were thrown headlong into a world of loss, change, fear -- and all the scapegoating, anger, destructiveness, and hate that followed in its wake. We've been living in that world for 2 decades, and it's been exhausting.

We're tired from being on high alert to one potentially existential threat after another. We're tired from being overstimulated, assaulted by an overload of information thrown at us, so little of it truly edifying. -- inciteful, but not insightful. We're tired from waiting/hoping/working for the happy ending, tired of living in the uncertainty of when and if it will come, and so tired of being demoralized when it doesn't. We've been facing problems that just seem too big to hold -- we're sleepless at night, and half-numb during the day.

"But my heart is awake," I have not given up dreaming of redemption. Isn't that on some level why we're here? We're tired, but we haven't given up on hope -- even if sometimes we're afraid to hope, or just too drained. And much as we sometimes want to just pull up the covers and go to sleep, our hearts are awake -- deep down, we know that giving into the fatigue isn't really an option. And more than that, it's not what we want and not who we are. We want to reclaim our vitality and joy. Our gratitude. We want to engage and re-engage in work that matters. We want to affirm meaning, and the possibility of real change -- not as a dream while we're sleeping, but as a reality that, along with the things that keep us up at night, *is also true*.

We're here because the part of us that is awake knows, that in our distraction and anxiety and denial and overload and exhaustion, some really important parts of ourselves have gone into hibernation. We're more than tired from the last 20 years -- we've been changed. So much around us has gotten distorted in these 2 decades. We've gotten distorted too. And whatever our choice of novocaine -- deep down, we're not ok with being numb to the things that matter most, within us and around us. Your heart *is* awake, knocking at the door, and it's saying: I miss you.

That's really what the High Holy Days are for - to wake us up. Sometimes in the Maimonidean sense of a wake-up call from complacency - the shofar blast shocking our systems, shattering our delusions. (My 1st year in RS I was horrified by a teacher insisting "We don't want to let the HH derail us." OF COURSE we want to let the HH to derail us - that's what they're for!!).

But also in this sense of the Song of Songs. The High Holy Days are the Lover gently knocking on the door, softly calling to our souls, "wake up - it's time to come out now" -- inviting the most vulnerable and vital parts of ourselves to awaken from the sleep of self-protection or habit or inattention.

A couple of clarifications up front.

1) We'll explore a bunch of interpretations of the asleep/awake metaphor -- some inconsistent with each other. That's ok - it's how Torah works. For example, in most midrashim, wakefulness is preferred to sleep. But not always. As with our bodies, spiritual/ethical/emotional sleep is necessary for wakefulness. Sleep is protective and restorative. It's only a problem if we're always and *only* asleep

2) A few things being awake is NOT about:

- a) obsessively consuming what passes for -- or even actually is -- news
- b) being freaked out about everything, or posting online our moral outrage or horror or devastation after terrible thing that happens
- c) being up all night with anxiety. "My heart is awake" is not the same as sleeplessness - they're actually opposed to each other.

"I am asleep but my heart is awake" IS a call to greater awareness of injustice in our society, AND more intentional action in response. Keep that in your mind as we go. But I'll say up front it's not going to be my primary focus this year. Not because we don't need to stay wide awake to the societal challenges and threats we face -- God knows we do. But because (a) you know that, you don't need me to remind you and (b) we need something different, not as an escape from justice work, but as a path to more effective engagement with it.

As I've said since Shabbat Hazon, no societal structure, no court or legislature, no economic or political or religious system can substitute for personal character and virtue. The response to the *eikha*/how (how did this happen?) of Tisha B'Av of necessity leads into and through the *ayeka* - where are you? - of the High Holy Days. That's what the HH are about: working on our character. That's what the Song of Songs verse is about -- the lover knocking at our door, open up -- where are you? And our own hearts calling us back to essential truths and values.

We may be sleeping, but our hearts are awake -- to the questions that *should* keep us up at night, and that if we attended to, we'd sleep better

- what really gives meaning to my life?
- how am I showing up in my relationships, my work, the world, to myself?
- who do I aspire to be? what's keeping me from being that way? what can I do about that?
- how am I needed? What is the need/demand/question to which my life is the response?
- *ayeka* - where are you?

That's what we'll lean into this year.

One more thing. Your heart is awake. You already know everything I'm going to say. These days aren't about taking in new information, they're about integrating and embodying what your heart and soul already know.

"The Torah is not in the heavens, or beyond the sea, or beyond your reach."

We just read it this Shabbat.

כִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ;

"The most important things are very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it." (Deut. 30:11-14)

So as we go along, I invite you to sit with the verse and unpack it yourself. How are you asleep in some ways and awake in others? We'll look at the list of ways that the midrash fills in "I am asleep in [blank], but my heart is awake for [blank]", and I'll offer some of my own. What would your list be?

TEACHING #2 - ROSH HASHANAH DAY 1 - PRE-SHOFAR

Most years, before blowing the shofar, we'd read the passage by Maimonides on page 118:

The shofar exclaims: Wake up from your slumber!

Examine your deeds and turn in repentance, remembering your Creator. You sleepers who forget the truth while caught up in the fads and follies of the time, frittering away your years in vanity and emptiness which cannot help: take a good look at yourselves. Improve your ways. Let everyone abandon their bad deeds and their wicked thoughts. (Rambam MT Hilkhos Teshuvah 3:4, Machzor Lev Shalem p 118)

As I said last night, this year we're focusing on a different text about waking up:

אָני ישָׁנָה וְלִבִּי עוֹר

I am asleep, but my heart is awake. (Shir HaShirim 5:2)

What do we mean by being awake? It's not high alert - reactive, outraged, frightened. Up all night with anxiety. "If you're not terrified, you're not paying attention." Staying informed is important. Doom-scrolling is not wakefulness. Neither is harsh self-judgment, rehearsing faults and failures, churning guilt and shame, or nursing grievances.

Think of what gets crowded out of your consciousness by all that - wonder, possibility, opportunity, gratitude. THAT's being awake. It's the activation of higher consciousness and awareness, in a way that gives us not angst, but agency.

And just as insomnia or restless sleep will leave you tired all day, so too spiritually/emotionally -- a constant state of reactivity/anxiety/anger /self-doubt drains us of what we need to be truly awake. Or put another way, it puts parts of us to sleep. Often the best parts.

Now as I said last night, I love the Song of Songs verse because it's gentler than Rambam. But also because it's more nuanced. Not, "Awake you slumberers!" but "I am asleep and my heart is awake." OK, true, I am indeed a slumberer. AND I am also awake. That's the key.

I am:

- absent AND present,
- oblivious AND really grateful
- ignorant AND learned, wise
- immoral AND moral,
- in denial AND facing truth,
- insensitive AND highly attuned,
- emotionally protective AND vibrating, vulnerable, raw,
- numbed by habit AND intentionally choosing
- sunk in material consumption AND a spiritual seeker.

Which brings us to the contemporary parlance of being "woke" (Can't deal with this verse w/out addressing that.) "Wokeness" is an easy target for mockery, sometimes justifiably. It's also a deeply Jewish metaphor for spiritual/moral insight, going back all the way to the Bible, as here, and especially in Jewish mysticism. The contemporary usage partakes of that vitally important and quintessentially Jewish idea of moral/spiritual development. I see injustice now that I didn't recognize before. I'm sensitive to aspects of others' experience I used to be clueless about.

The problem in contemporary usage -- where it departs from the Jewish concept -- is that it sometimes (not always) gets distorted into a binary *between* people. A person is either “woke” or not - often I’m woke and you’re not.

Here in the Song of Songs, being “woke” is part of an everpresent both/and *within* each person I’m asleep and awake at one and the same time. We all are. Always. In fact, the very tendency to divide people into such artificially clear categories is itself a form of sleep. If more of me were awake, I’d know that it’s absurd to speak of some people as woke and others not -- everyone’s awake and asleep in different ways and to differing degrees.

The spiritual, moral call of the verse is to figure out

(a) which parts of **you** are awake, and which parts of **you** remain asleep; and

(b) what are you awake and asleep to around you.

And that’s true whether we think of wakefulness as a metaphor for insight/ knowledge, ethics and morality, spiritual sensitivity or whatever else.

And -- quick sidenote to reiterate something I said last night:

Most interpretations elevate wakefulness as the preferred state. But the both/and reminds us that sleep isn’t bad. It’s necessary to wakefulness. It’s not possible for a human being to be fully awake all the time - we couldn’t survive physically, and we couldn’t bear it emotionally and spiritually. I am asleep and my heart is awake. And sometimes even my heart needs to take a little nap.

It’s hard to overstate how important this awareness of the both/and is, because we can be asleep to the fact that we’re sleeping -- like a really vivid dream that seems so real.

We may be unaware that we’re not fully feeling our emotions. We may think we’re fine, and then we find ourselves furious, or weeping, over one of life’s broken shoelaces. We didn’t know how much hurt, grief, anger, fear we were carrying. Maybe we have a really good deep body-shaking laugh, and suddenly realize how long it’s been since we laughed like that, we didn’t know how much we’ve been missing joy and play.

Or maybe it’s not our emotions but the limits of our knowledge we’re asleep to. Many of the people today who are most unhinged from reality -- believing the craziest conspiracy theories -- are absolutely convinced they’re the only ones seeing truth. And to some degree that’s true of nearly all of us -- we so quickly form opinions and make pronouncements, rarely pausing to reflect on how much we don’t know. We’re almost all ignorant of our ignorance.

Or maybe the realm of ethics. We’re think we’re awake, because we’re acting on our moral convictions; we may be asleep to the extent that our moral compass has lost its true north.

For now, I’ll close with the way this both/and “asleep and awake” relates to our ethical growth, and to our freedom and agency.

Rabbi David Jaffe, in his book *Changing the World from the Inside Out*, notes (pp. 84-85):

...much of our behavior lies in the area of positive and negative habituation...
Regarding certain issues, our habituation creates *more sensitivity*, and in others, *less awareness*....

Habituation - sleep. He gives personal examples. On the positive side, growing up he was habituated to sensitivity to the environment, and to not to throw litter out of a car window ("I just never do it, and I don't need to think about it"). On the negative side, growing up as a white person in an affluent white town, he was habituated "not to see or consider as important" the economic challenges of the majority Black and Latino communities in surrounding towns, which "just did not penetrate my awareness on a daily basis." He was asleep to them.

And then he says:

Only at the edge of our habituation do we have a live option to consciously choose...

That edge -- the point where habituation/sleep meets wakefulness -- is where we can push the limits of habituation. Where that edge is at any moment, that's mostly beyond our control. But wherever it is, that's where we have freedom -- we can choose reality and truth as we know it, or, not. And the choice we make moves the edge. If we choose truth, choose to grow, we wake up a little more. If we choose denial and self-deception, we're more asleep.

In the example he gave, he says, "I may not [now, yet] be at a point of choosing to be relaxed socially with people from that neighborhood, but it could be a live choice for me to read and learn more about their lives." The key is:

...our choice point is always moving. When we make a positive choice, more of reality and truth in a particular area are now clear to us, and our next choice point will be in a more refined place. If we make a choice toward self-deception, our point moves in a direction of dulled awareness and less of the truth is clear to us.

We have agency -- live choice -- precisely at the place where the sleep of habit, or denial, or ignorance, meets the heart that is awake. In this sense, I am asleep but my heart is awake is a metaphor for the growing edge - a constant process of awakening to understanding, learning, sensitivity that I didn't have before - to realizing that I was wrong, or ignorant, or missing part of the picture. And that's not shameful, it's human. It's where genuine human freedom is located. It's good.

Provided that in this new wakefulness, new awareness - I own that I'm also still asleep (there's that both/and again). I don't wake up a little bit, and say good - I'm done. It's an ongoing thing - every moment that I've just woken up, part of me is still asleep, waiting for me to wake up, waiting for me to move the edge. I am asleep when I'm unchanging, unchallenged - when I'm on autopilot or coasting. But my heart is awake, hungry for learning, insight, understanding, growth.

Thus, in the Song of Songs verse, immediately after I say, "I am asleep and my heart is awake," *kol dodi dofek*, the voice of the beloved calls out, and addresses me as *tamati* -- my whole one, you who are all of a piece. How can we refer to someone who is both asleep and awake as whole, unified? This awareness of being both asleep and awake *IS* wholeness - it's not hypocrisy, it's our integrity. The Kotzker Rebbe has a famous teaching: "Nothing is as whole as a broken heart, nothing is as straight as a crooked ladder, nothing is as crooked as a 'straight' falsehood." My riff today on the Kotzker: No one is as awake as those who know they are asleep.

Kavannah for Hineni (Rosh Hashanah Day 1)

Earlier today I talked about what being awake is *not* - reactivity, high alert. But what is it, and what does it feel like?

- Calm attentiveness and responsiveness,
- Openness, vitality, curiosity,
- Courage in confronting truth without and within
- Exercising agency in making choices;
- Acting on values rather than being led and controlled by emotions, needs or desires.
- Being centered, fully engaged.

To say my heart is awake, is to be in a mode of possibility, alert to openings for redemptive change, listening for a call. It is, in other words, to say “Hineni. Page 140.

Kavannah for Zikhronot (Rosh Hashanah Day 1)

We're about to pray the verses of zikhronot - remembrances. Memory is a complicated thing -- it's both necessary, even holy -- and it can be dangerous. Because it can keep us stuck. From the midrash:

אֲנִי יֹשֵׁנָה מִן הַקְּרָבָנוֹת, וְלִבִּי עֹר לְקִרְיַאת שְׁמַע וּתְפִלָּה.
אֲנִי יֹשֵׁנָה מִבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְלִבִּי עֹר לְבֵתֵי כְּנִסְיֹת וּבֵתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת.

I am asleep in respect of the sacrifices, but my heart is awake for the recital of the *shema* and Prayer.

I am asleep in respect of the Temple, but my heart is awake for synagogues and houses of study.

Here, holding onto the Temple and sacrifices -- old forms of worship that have fallen away, no longer possible -- is a form of sleep. Wakefulness entails embracing new forms that replaced the old, living fully in what is possible now.

As we turn to Zikhronot, we might think about ways in which our relationship to our memories may be keeping us from being awake to the present.

I am asleep in the past, consumed with regret, holding onto what is gone, what I used to be able to do but can no longer.

I am asleep in old habits, patterns and narratives about myself and my family, the roles we've always played -- so deeply engrained I don't even notice them, so I can't change or even question them.

I am asleep in old assumptions, things I'm used to believing, my old map of the world.

But my heart is awake to new ways of thinking, doing and being - to all that I'm learning
My heart is awake to my resilience, my creativity, my capacity to adapt and change.
My heart is awake, ready to turn from regret, and choose mindfully now.
My heart is awake to possibility before me.

Kavannah for Shofarot (Rosh Hashanah Day 1)

From the same midrash:

אָנִי יְשָׁנָה מִן הַקֶּץ, וְלִבִּי עוֹר לְגִאֲלָה

I am asleep regarding the end, but my heart is awake for the redemption.

The verses of shofarot we're about to recite are about revelation and redemption. When we speak of redemption, the "end," we speak of "olam haba" - but it doesn't mean (as sometimes translated) "the world to come". *Olam haba* is really the world that is coming, constantly, now. The shofar isn't about some long awaited future time - the end -- it's about hearing the call of redemptive possibilities right now. Living in the past is a kind of sleep, yes, but so is living in the future

I am asleep regarding the end. I am lost in anxiety, fear or despair, missing what is as I anticipate what's to come.

I am asleep waiting -- when I have the job I want, or the love I want, or the kids are settled, or the pandemic is over, or when I have enough money -- then I'll be happy.

I am asleep prognosticating, trying to predict and control the unknowable future.

But my heart is awake to the blessings I have right now - I am filled with gratitude.

My heart is awake to the choices before me in this moment. I know that's where my power is.

My heart is awake, listening for how I can help, heal, repair, right now.

TEACHING #3 - ROSH HASHANAH DAY 1 - AFTER KADDISH SHALEM

One thing we haven't touched on yet is the fact that the Song of Songs verse is erotic love poetry - the whole book is. What's the religious significance of that, and what's the connection to the High Holy Days and teshuvah?

Jewish tradition speaks of two kinds of teshuvah. Teshuvah from fear (*me'yirah*) and teshuvah out of love (*me-ahavah*). Teshuvah from fear is about avoidance of consequences (natural results or punishment), relief from the discomfort of guilt and shame. Teshuvah from love: not escape from unwanted consequences or feelings, but affirmative desire *for* something. Actively seeking to *be* better, to embody the holy, yearning for closeness with others and with God.

We might say that the Rambam's famous passage about the shofar (Awake you slumberers!), speaks to teshuvah from fear - certainly in tone. And yes, we need to "abandon our bad deeds and wicked thoughts." But that's not enough -- maybe not even the best starting place.

The Song of Songs calls us to do teshuvah me'ahavah, from love. *V'libi er*/my heart is awake might be said to refer to our yetzer hatov -- our impulse for good -- or our will, our ratzon, generally. What your soul yearns *for*.

Here's the great Torah commentator Rashi:

אָנִי יְשָׁנָה. כְּשֶׁהָיִיתִי שְׁלֵמָה וְשִׁקְטָה בְּבַיִת רֵאשׁוֹן, נוֹאֲשָׁתִי מֵעֲבֹד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּלִשְׁנָה וְנִרְדָּמָת:
וְלִבִּי עָר. זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. כִּדְ נִדְרַשׁ בַּפְּסִיקְטָא:

I am asleep. When I was confident and calm in the Bayit HaRishon (the first Temple), I despaired of worshipping God, as one who slumbers and falls fast asleep.

This is so radical, so shocking, I fear I'm misreading it (and I might be). The Temple is usually held up as the epitome of Jewish worship; we pray for its restoration daily - next week we'll re-enact the Temple service as part of the high point of Musaf. THAT was closeness to God. If only we could still do THAT.

But Rashi says actually, no. When the Temple stood, we were complacent. Maybe worship got routinized, on autopilot, dull - what Heschel famously called "religious behaviorism" (we wouldn't know anything about that today). Something didn't feel real, or true, anymore. God had gotten lost, and I was asleep, going through the motions. I despaired of really serving God.

It's a powerful critique of Jewish prayer, but it's not only about that. It's about life. Teshuvah isn't just about wrongdoing. It's also about things that aren't morally bad -- they're just meh. Living without kavannah/intention, without worthy goals, without authenticity and passion. That's where the eroticism of the Song of Songs comes in.

In the text packet, I gave you a long excerpt from a 1978 essay by the feminist writer, Audre Lorde, called "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power". You can read it later. Lorde was writing specifically about women's power, but much of what she says applies irrespective of gender.

In brief, when Lorde uses the word erotic, she's speaking not only of what happens in the bedroom, but more generally of "an assertion of the life force". The erotic is:

a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe...

I.e., not to settle for sleep. The erotic, she writes

... is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves... For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.

When I was comfortable/complacent, I despaired of truly serving God.

In a sense, what Lorde calls the erotic is really a kind of inner teacher, about our truest selves, "the nurturer and nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge", or "the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy." It teaches us the importance of being awake to the totality of our inner lives -- our feelings and desires -- and the cost to our agency and vitality when we're too scared to go there.

Now, Lorde is definitely not advocating a superficial "do whatever feels good", and neither am I -- not at all. Rather, she's talking about an inner guiding light that clarifies, and carries with it the responsibility of inner discernment and honest evaluation:

Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, *we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.*

I.e., which parts of me are fully awake, or wake me up, and which parts of me deprive of vitality, lead to slumber..

This is about the courage to face the fullness of who we really are, not in a predetermined "I am who I am, I can't change" but the opposite -- as a path to claiming our power and responsibility to choose. She writes:

...We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. **But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered.** The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined... But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. ...In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness,

or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial... Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world...

I think that's as good an explanation as I've heard, for why the love poetry of the Song of Songs is Scripture - why R' Akiva calls it the holiest book in the Torah. And she could easily have been writing about the meaning of *ani y'sheina v'libi er*.

The eroticism of the Song of Songs -- and specifically my heart, awake to the call of my lover -- is about claiming the fullness of our vitality, power and passion, and becoming less and less willing to settle for being asleep.

And again, what I'm passionate *for*, what I use my power *for* matters -- not "whatever I want is good". Once we're awake, then we have to evaluate honestly for meaning. The tradition reads the Song of Songs as expressing passion for God -- that's what's meaningful, worthy. Audre Lorde puts it in non-theistic language: "The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible." *Hai bahem. Uvaḥarta baḥayim*. I don't know that it matters. Either way, it's about discerning which of my feelings and passions are life-giving, - wake me up - fully claiming them, and letting the others go. So I don't despair of my life being a life of meaning.

When I was complacent I despaired of serving God. Sustainable meaning and purpose in life isn't going to just come, and no one can give it to you. To find it, you have to do that deep dive inward. Even a life of great works won't yield a stable sense of power and meaning if you're still living from the outside in. You can be the High Priest in the Temple, and despair of serving God.

So here's my midrash. *Ani y'sheina v'libi er*. I am asleep, but my heart is awake, regarding things within me:

I am asleep to my joys, pains, yearnings, potential). Parts of me are numb -- like my foot falling asleep when I sit on it too long.

But my heart is awake to my full self, crying out to me "I miss you."

I am asleep to how I behave in my relationships. I don't always pay attention to my words, my affect, the expression on my face.

But my heart is awake to how I want to treat others, how I want to show up, be present.

I am asleep living on autopilot, a passenger in my own life, taking the habitual or easy route.

But my heart is awake to my agency, to my power to choose my values, not my convenience.

I am asleep in passive consumption. I ingest negativity, toxicity, anger, and shame. I'm hardly conscious of how those things distort me.

But my heart is awake, imploring me to allow in only what helps me grow.

I am asleep to meaning in my life. I yield to resentment, envy, frustration, cynicism.

But my heart is awake to every need as a spiritual opportunity, everything I encounter a lesson in my spiritual curriculum.

I am asleep wasting my time and energy, on distractions that don't bring me joy or lasting comfort, that diminish my vitality.

But my heart is awake to my deepest needs and desires -- my passion -- I know what really nourishes me, and that I need only choose it.

I am asleep in despair, too stuck to change, too tired to work for redemption.

But my heart is awake to my power, if only I have the courage to claim it.

Kavannah for Torah Reading - Rosh Hashanah Day 1 (read at Minchah)

Our Torah reading describes Hagar sitting in despair, fearful that her son will die of thirst, unable to watch, when she discovers a well of water. But the text doesn't describe God creating a well of water miraculously for the occasion -- rather God opens her eyes, and she sees a well, that presumably was there all along.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (18th C, Italian rabbi, known as the Ramchal, author of Mesillat Yesharim, Path of the Righteous, ethical/musar):

[How do we build *zerizut* - alacrity, quickness, alertness?] By awakening to the very many good things that the Holy One blessed by God does for you moment by moment

Rabbi Alan Morinis (*Everyday Holiness*)

Most often, we are in a state of indifference toward the goodness in our lives. It's not that it isn't there, it's just that you may not be paying attention to it because you're working at this, or trying to fix that, or holding together some other thing, and as you struggle with one challenge or another, you've got your eyes fixed on the goal, or maybe just the next steps you need to execute....

I am asleep to goodness and blessings around me. I take for granted what are actually remarkable gifts. I'm so busy, so often distracted, I don't always notice the intricacy of nature -- it's beauty, and it's ability to meet my needs. I'm inured, indifferent, to so much that I should be grateful for, like a well of pure clean water.

I am asleep to the miracle of my body. I pay attention only when it disappoints, doesn't work as it "should". I notice every ache and pain. Rarely do I pause to give thanks for my breath, my blood, my neurons and senses, my ability to move.

I am asleep to the gifts brought by human ingenuity. Bread from wheat. Heat in the winter. Diagnoses, treatments, vaccines. I just expect electricity and internet, bridges, airplanes, food on supermarket shelves, a pill for what ails me. I am frustrated by brief delays, short-term outages and shortages.

But my heart is awake with awe at the magnificence of nature, the beauty of the human face.

My heart is awake with wonder and appreciation at the miracle of modern medicine, engineering, all the sciences -- the gifts of poets, artists, composers and musicians.

My heart is awake with "ordinary mysticism", aflame with gratitude, marvelling at these everyday miracles, everywhere and always.

Kavannah for Shofar Service (Rosh Hashanah Day 2)

Ani y'sheina v'libi er. Yesterday morning we closed by focusing on what we're asleep and awake to within us. We're also asleep or awake to what's around us

I am asleep to the people close to me, who I love and care about. I don't fully see them anymore. I take their good qualities for granted. Immersed in my own needs, I don't see what they need, where they hurt, how they've changed.

But my heart is awake to their hearts -- to how much I love them, to the ease of being together in silence, the depth of connection I treasure, and I miss.

I am asleep to the acquaintances and strangers I see every day. I sometimes treat them as instruments rather than human beings -- there to deliver my food, ring up my purchases -- providing something for me, or getting in my way. Sometimes I just don't see them at all.

But my heart is awake to how enriched my life is by the countless humans who populate my world -- whose smiles brighten my day, who are there when I need them, whose presence makes me less lonely. I know so many people sacrifice and give of themselves for my safety, security and ease, often for little in return. My heart is awake to my debt and responsibility to them.

I am asleep to human suffering and need everywhere, to unnecessary pain and loss, to loneliness, fear, sadness, oppression, dislocation. That pain makes me feel helpless, guilty. I am afraid of all that pain and sadness. It is better to be numb, than to feel that sad.

But my heart is awake to all other hearts. I know I can't not care. I do care. This ache is my heart, alive and awake.

I am asleep to the living ecosystem of which I am a part. I am asleep to the suffering of earth's creatures, to the damage being caused to the earth - damage I cause - every day. I am overwhelmed by this harm -- its vastness and intractability. When I think about the pain of the earth, I want to turn off the alarm, pull up the covers, and go back to sleep.

But my heart is awake to the heart of the world. I know there is no "out there" - there is only the here, and the "this", which I affect and am affected by, a part of.

My heart is awake that I can make a difference -- I can't fix everything, I don't have to fix everything, but I can help fix something, and I desperately want to. I must.

TEACHING #4 - ROSH HASHANAH DAY 2 - BEFORE HINENI

We're dwelling in the verse from Shir HaShirim: "I am asleep but/and my heart is asleep"
What do we mean by "my heart"? That part of me that is awake?

In Biblical Hebrew, lev/heart is seat of both emotions and intellect - our consciousness, our whole inner life (they were onto something -- contemporary research shows that the rational and affective are much more integrated than we think).

So maybe "my heart is awake" is taking about dreamwork - the processing and learning that happens when we're asleep, my subconscious or unconscious. There's a great Hasidic teaching that the soul ascends and learns Torah while body sleeps. Hozeh of Lublin (Seer of Lublin) claimed to be able to look in his disciples faces in the morning and discern which verse their soul studied during the night.

Or it might mean - my character. I may or may not ever think about it, but my character -- my virtue (to reclaim an old-fashioned word) or lack thereof -- is always awake and functioning. Like the body's autonomic nervous system, or the operating system on a laptop -- my character is always running in the background, driving everything I do -- for good or for bad. So I'd do well to work on it, to check for "registry errors" and clean them up.

Or, "my heart" may refer to the best in me - my higher intuition, my core values, my truest self.

By now I hope you've noticed an ambiguity in the verse - the seeming distinction between "I" and my heart. What's up with that? And the remainder of the verse gets muddier:

I am asleep, But my heart is awake.

קולו דודי דופק פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי תמתי ...

The sound of my beloved knocking: "Open to/for me, my sister, my lover..."

Who's the *dodi*, my beloved, knocking and calling out to me? Is that my wakeful heart, speaking to myself, or someone/something outside of me?

Like the verse in Psalm 27, we prayed this morning and through Elul:

לך אמר לבי בקשו פני את פניך יהוה אבקש:

To you my heart speaks, "seek My face". I will seek Your face, Adonai.

To whom is my heart speaking - who's being told to seek whose face? Is God speaking to me, am I speaking to God? Is my heart telling me to seek God?

I think this blurring of identity is intentional - it's characteristic of the whole Song of Songs. Because the indistinctness opens another whole realm of meaning.

Which takes us to the classic midrash. Both Shir HaShirim Rabbah and it's earlier source (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana) identify the "heart that is awake" with God. The pattern is always "I am asleep _____, but my heart is awake _____." And then suddenly:

אָני יִשְׁנָה מִן הַגְּאֻלָּה, וְלִבּוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֹר לְגַאֲלָנִי.

I am asleep in respect of the redemption, but the heart of the Holy Blessed One is awake to redeem me.¹

“My heart” has somehow become a reference to God’s heart. And in case it was too subtle and we missed it, the midrash makes it perfectly clear:

אָמַר רַבִּי חִיָּא בַר אֲבָא אֵיכּוֹן מְצִינּוּ שְׁנִקְרָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לִבּוֹ שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִן הַדִּין קָרָא, דְּכִתְיִב (תהלים עג, כו): צוּר לִבְבִי וְחֻלְקֵי אֱלֹהִים לְעוֹלָם.

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: Where do we find that God is called the 'heart' of Israel? In the following verse: “God is the rock, my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps. 73:26).

So “my heart is awake” refers here to God.

Here’s one reading:

“My heart” is not me -- “I” am asleep. I’m too tired to work for redemption. I’m despairing of redemption. I’m not capable of bringing redemption. But something external to me, that I call God but you can call the force for good or whatever language you use, is always awake, and will step in and redeem me.

Another reading:

“My heart” is indeed me, and also a part of God. The spark of the Divine within me, the part of me that is connected to God, I call “my heart” --- and that’s the part of me that’s awake (in all the ways we’re talking about). In this reading, the midrash doesn’t mean “only God and not I can redeem”, but rather: “there’s a part of me that can bring redemption, change, healing -- it’s the Divine spark in me, my essence, my heart. And no matter how asleep I may be in countless ways, that part of my is always vitally alive and awake, forever.” I like this second reading better.

First, I’m not a fan of throwing up our hands and leaving redemptive work to God. Waiting. From time to time, in prayer, as an exercise in humility, ok. But as an operational principle, no. It’s not about waiting for God, or someone else - it’s up to me.

And also, it points to one of the most significant implications of “I am asleep but my heart is awake”. That is, **the part of me that is awake is the part that is connected to something larger than myself**. Put differently, the definition of being “awake” is the awareness that I’m connected to something -- indeed everything -- beyond me.

Indeed, the midrash goes even further. The verse continues, “Open to me, my sister, my lover, my dove, and then תַּמְתִּי.” What is *tamati*? *Tam* means all of a piece, complete, even naive, innocent - so we translate “my perfect or pure one.” But the midrash is stunning:

תַּמְתִּי... רַבִּי יַנָּאי אָמַר וְתַאמְוִמְתִּי, כְּבִיכּוֹל לֹא אָנִי גְדוּלָה מְמַנָּה וְלֹא הִיא גְדוּלָה מְמַנִּי.

Rabbi Yannai said, “*Tamati/te’omati* -- my twin, as it were, I am not greater than she, and she is not greater than I.

1. NOTE: in Tanhuma (Buber) we have “אני ישנה מן הגאולה, ולבי ער להקב”ה (עוד) שיגאלני. “I sleep without the redemption, but my heart is awake for the Holy One when he redeems me....”, followed by the R’ Hiyya bar Abba teaching.

So twinning is first, a statement of radical equality -- I'm neither greater nor lesser than anyone. Not negation of self, but properly locating the self in relationship to every other. The foundation of ethics. That right there is everything. If we could just get that -- awaken our hearts to *that* -- we'd redeem the world. And the midrash goes on:

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ דְּסִכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לֵוִי תְּאֻמְתִּי מָה הִתְאַוְמִים הִלְלוּ אִם חוֹשֵׁשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֶן
בְּרֵאשׁוֹ חִבְרוּ מִרְגִישׁ, כִּדְּ כַּבִּיכּוֹל אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא (תהלים צא, טו): עֲמוּ אֲנֹכִי
בְּצָרָה.

Rabbi Joshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: It means, My twin. Just as, if one twin has a pain in his head, the other feels it also, so, as it were, the Holy Blessed One said, *I will be with him in trouble* (Ps. 91:15).

Twinning isn't just equal but connected, and not just to other people. God is our twin. God suffers, is in exile with us.

This is an extraordinary theological statement -- the opposite of where we started, that I don't have the wherewithal to redeem the world (I'm asleep) but God is awake and will redeem me. No -- we and God are in it together. God so to speak "feels" our pain, and we -- if we're awake, feel God's pain. We feel the pain of the world/the earth, the pain of all human beings and all creatures. And God is not greater than "she" -- in the midrash, it's *kneset Yisrael*, the community of Israel who is speaking - we can expand it to the human collective. God is only as "great" as the "God field" (as Zalman Schachter-Shalomi called it) that we create.

And beyond the strictly theological, it speaks to the interconnectedness, mutuality of all experience. There's a famous line from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, April 16, 1963, that's now everywhere, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It's often trivialized into a kind of camel's nose under the tent argument, that if we allow injustice here it will spread there. But King was saying something much more profound. Listen to the next two lines: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Similarly, here's Rabbi Alan Lew, from his book *This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared*, pp. 83:

We all share the same heart... Ordinarily we are taken in by the materialist myth of discrete being. We look like we are separate bodies. Physically we can see where one of us begins and another of us ends, but emotionally, spiritually, it simply isn't this way. Our feelings and our spiritual impulses flow freely beyond the boundaries of the self, and this is something that each of us knows intuitively for a certainty...

Deep down, we know this very well. But what we are usually not aware of is how much we feel other's pain and how much energy we waste trying to defend ourselves against it... We can't help feeling each other's pain. We all share the same heart. If someone else is suffering, there's no way we can shut it out. It spreads heart to heart and soul to soul, a movement that is absolutely irresistible, like the waters of a flood.

Or to go back to Tanakh, Proverbs 27:19:

בְּמַיִם הַפְּנִיִּים לַפְּנִיִּים כִּן לִב־הָאָדָם לְאָדָם:

Just as water reflects the face, so the heart of one person reflects the heart of the other.

We all share the same heart. Deep down, in the part of us that is awake, we know this very well. From theology to secular wisdom traditions, to the psychological research on contagious emotions, to the neuroscience on mirror neurons, to what we've learned about the various ecosystems of which we're a part -- whole forests as a single living organism! Pretty much every major discipline is teaching us that we are more connected than we usually perceive ourselves to be.

And it's not only suffering and injustice that we experience together, but joy, gratitude, vitality, hope. We know that fear and hatred are contagious; courage, kindness, love are too.

And look where we've landed in understanding the verse, *ani y'sheina v'libi er*. I am asleep. The "I" -- the ego that sees itself as discrete, separate -- unaware of a deeper reality of connectedness -- is by definition asleep. But my heart is awake. The very definition of wakefulness is my awareness of the mutuality of which Dr King and Rabbi Lew and the psalmist spoke -- that the I exists always as part of a We, of a larger whole, of the Divine. I am "twinned" with the Oneness of all that I like to call God (but we can call whatever you want), feeling the pains and joys of another who feels my pains and joys, affected by and affecting the larger whole.

In a short while, we'll sing Melekh Elyon (p 155). It's a piyyut contrasting the *Melekh Elyon* (the Heavenly Sovereign, God), with the *melekh evyon* (the pathetic, impoverished earthly king -- *evyon* means impoverished). The original alternates verses, but we have only one remaining verse about the *melekh evyon*.

If you look at the third verse from the end, you'll see that the Melekh Elyon is described as one who never sleeps (*sheinah ein l'fanav* -- literally, there is no sleep in God's presence, or sleep doesn't pertain to God). And the one contrasting verse about the *melekh evyon* -- impoverished sovereign -- "is chased by exhaustion (t'numah) and falls into a deep sleep" (tardemah). The pshat is that God can be counted on to watch over us always ("the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps"); in contrast, the human earthly authority is unreliable, confused, "asleep."

But playing with the image, and reading in light of everything I've said, we might now say that it's *our* awareness of interconnection, *our* being awake to the reality that we all share a heart, that so-to-speak creates the "God field" -- the Melekh Elyon. "I am not greater than kneset Yisrael", God says.

And conversely, when we lose our awareness of that, we create the *melekh evyon*. We create impoverishment and lack -- both physically, and spiritually -- the sense of scarcity and competition, instead of plenty and cooperation. And we empower it. It becomes "sovereign", begins to rule society (to go back to where we started Monday night, that's what's been happening these last 2 decades).

"I am not greater than she, and she is not greater than I." That's the whole ball of wax. If we could just get that... well, we could fix it all.

I'll close with a poem (page 9 in your packet) by Devon Spier. This is from her book *Whatever it is, gently: Quiet Meditations for the Noise of the Pandemic*

where are all the other hearts?
my Lonely Heart wondered out loud

dear Heart

they are
(quiet aching breaking)
all around you

listen
find them
cradle each other
so you can find life
and the words again

Kavannah for Malkhuyot (Rosh Hashanah Day 2)

Maimonides, in his Guide for the Perplexed (Part 3, 51:11), offers his own reading of our verse:

“When we have acquired a true knowledge of God, and rejoice in that knowledge in such a manner, that while speaking with others, or attending to our bodily wants, our mind is all that time with God; when we are with our heart constantly near God, even while our body is in human society”

That state, he says, is what the verse means, I am asleep but my heart is awake. This is really hard -- we grasp it and we lose it. We're awake and then asleep again. Rambam recognizes that this is an impossibly high level - beyond the prophets, at the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. And, he says, a person like me shouldn't imagine I could lead people to that degree of perfection -- but maybe the next level down.

Rambam advises praying to God to remove everything that creates an obstruction or partition between us and God, noting “most of these obstacles are our own creation”.

So that's what we're turning to now, in malkhuyot. One way of understanding what it means to “crown God as sovereign” is to ask for help in being more often aware of/connected to what I call God -- but we can call our highest values, our sense of meaning and responsibility beyond ourselves, our sense of wonder and awe -- not just in shul, but always -- when we're working, running errands, taking a walk, doing the most mundane things. Being more awake more of the time.

Kavannah for Zikhronot (Rosh Hashanah Day 2)

Remember that scene from “My Cousin Vinny”, when Joe Pesci cross-examines a witness about with some pictures:

V: What are these pictures of?

E: My house and stuff.

V: House and stuff. And what is this brown stuff on your window?

E: Dirt.

V: Dirt. And what is this rusty, dusty, dirty-looking thing that's covering your window?

E: That's a screen.

V: A screen! It's a screen. And what are these really big things that are right in the middle of your view... and your kitchen window, what do we call these big things?

E: Trees?

V: Trees, that's right. Don't be afraid, just shout 'em right out when you know 'em. And what are these thousands of little things that are on trees?

E: Leaves.

V: And these big bushy things between the trees.

E: Bushes.

V: Bushes. So, Mr. Crane, you can positively identify the defendants, for a moment of two seconds, looking through this dirty window, this crud-covered screen, all of these trees, with all of these leaves on them, and I don't know how many bushes...?

Alan Lew, in his book, *This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared*, (pp. 77-78), speaks of Teshuvah as involving a turn toward mindfulness -- being awake to, examining, our own perceptive mechanisms. He writes:

It is a shifting of our gaze from the world itself to the window through which we see it, because that window, the screen of our consciousness, is not just a blank, transparent medium. Rather it is a world unto itself, a world teeming with life, and that life affects what we see... When the shofar blows... it reminds us to turn our gaze inward... from the outside world to the considerable activity taking place in the window through which we see it.

The “window” is related to your character -- we see the world through it, through the accumulated record of our experience and our memories. That's not necessarily bad -- it may be very good. Or it may be a really dirty window with a crud-covered rusty dusty screen. The point is to be aware of it -- awake to it -- and to check for those registry errors, the way our memories have recorded our experiences, and how that alters what we see. So that we don't fall prey to the story my friend and colleague Rabbi Elana Zaiman shared with me, of the person who criticizes their neighbor for having such a dirty, unkempt house, only to walk outside and discover that the dirt is on their own windows.

TEACHING #5 - ROSH HASHANAH DAY 2 - AFTER KADDISH SHALEM

Sometimes I behave badly, I hurt people, I sin - and I don't even know. I'm not ethically or spiritually sensitive enough to realize. I don't know all the facts. Or I lack self-awareness. I am asleep.

And sometimes, I behave badly, and I know this is wrong. Even as I'm doing it, I know, this isn't how I want to be. I am asleep but my heart is awake.

I am sometimes in denial. I tell myself I'm right, or not really wrong, or justified. I know I'm kidding myself, rationalizing, cutting ethical corners.

Sometimes I lose my cool, get lazy, get hooked, replay a familiar scene. Even as I'm doing it, I don't really want to. Have you ever found yourself on a roll -- complaining, engaging in lashon hara, venting -- and 1/2 way through that rant you get a little sick to your stomach, like you're eating too much candy and you know you should just stop, and yet...

The verse speaks to the gap between what we know to be right and what we do, what we aspire to and the real-world people that we are

The Midrash offers a couple of versions of this:

אֲנִי יְשֻׁנָה מִן הַצְדִּיקוֹת, וְלִבִּי עֹר לַעֲשׂוֹתָן.

I am asleep regarding righteous deeds/justice, but my heart is awake to do them.

Or:

אֲנִי יְשֻׁנָה מִן הַמִּצְוֹת, וְלִבִּי עֹר לַעֲשׂוֹתָם.

I am asleep regarding mitzvot (mitzvahs), but my heart is awake to do them.

What does this mean?

I'm not doing those things physically, in action, but in my heart I'm able to do them - I could do them, I want to do them, I mean to do them (sounds like a routine by Jackie Mason, alav hashalom). So then why am I not doing them? How do we move from heart -- good intentions -- to action?

Or is it saying that I'm really *mamash* asleep to them -- I'm not doing them, they're too hard. But my heart is awake -- pangs of guilt? a wish, or a hope, that I could be that kind of person, the kind of person who does those things?

Is it a voice telling me, that I should want to do them, but the truth is, I don't.

I've said that the verse as a whole has been read as a metaphor for teshuvah. Several commentators read it as a particular kind of teshuvah: return from exile, *which we are resistant to doing*. For example, here's Yehudah HaLevi, in his masterwork the *Kuzari* (2:24), writes:

Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs. An allusion to them

might be found in the enigmatic words of Solomon: *I sleep, but my heart wakes* (Song of Songs 5:2-4). *God designates the exile by sleep, and the continuance of prophecy among them by the wakefulness of the heart...*

Literally, he (and others) mean the exile of the Jewish people from the land, and their reluctance to return from the Babylonian exile. But it's a very evocative image metaphorically as well. We are all of us somewhat exiled -- split apart, at a distance from who we really are, from that passion and power that Audre Lord wrote about. It's that aspirational gap

And we're comfortable, complacent. Teshuvah is hard. It means disruption, loss, uprooting oneself. It's a lot of work, and we don't always want to. Or we feel we can't. Or we don't even know how far off we've gotten -- -- we're asleep to our own exile and alienation.

Here's a medieval midrash, Midrash Lekach Tov on Song of Songs 5:2:1:

אני ישנה ולבי ער. אמרה כנסת ישראל אני ישנה במלכות כאדם שעברו עליו הרבה צרות ומתוך הצרות נפלה עליו תרדמה וישן לו.

"I am asleep but my heart is awake." The Community of Israel said, I am asleep with regard to sovereignty, like a person upon whom came many troubles, and as a result of those troubles, a deep slumber came upon him and caused him to sleep.

It's a strange formulation - "I am asleep to sovereignty." Most likely, it refers to God's sovereignty -- I've lost the sense that God has the power to help me. But listen to what follows.

כך ישראל בגלות כשינים ואינם יודעים מאי זו מדרגה ירדו ואלה הם צועקים לאלהים בחזקה אולי ירחם עליהם להשיבם למלכותם הראשונה ...

So too Israel in exile were like they were sleeping, and they didn't know the level to which they had sunk, and that if they cried out strongly to God, perhaps God would have compassion on them and restore them to their earlier stature...

"I don't know the level to which I've sunk." I've lost *my* sovereignty - my self possession and self-control? Some piece of my dignity, my stature as created by God, my sense of meaning and purpose in my life?

How did it happen? "Like a person upon whom came many troubles" -- a lot of tzuris. We're back to where we started Monday night, these last twenty years. "And a great sleep fell upon him." I've lost a part of myself, and I don't even know I've lost it.

V'libi er. My heart is awake. It is possible to come back. But here's the thing: if I'm exiled from my myself but I don't know it -- I'm asleep to how far from myself I am -- returning may feel worse at first. I'll be feeling dislocation I didn't feel before. Only when I start on the path back, when I begin to wake up, do I realize how lost I've really been.

I've been reading Joanna Macy (environmentalist and systems theorist). She identifies three concurrent stories that frame the moment we're in - she writes specifically in the context of environmental work, but these stories can really describe any moment, and the process of teshuvah.

Here are the three stories:

- The story of business as usual;
- The story of the great unravelling;
- The story of the great turning.

The story of business as usual is the story we tell ourselves when we want to stay asleep. Things are working. I'm fine. Status quo. Just keep going. It'll all work out. I am asleep - I am living the story of business as usual.

The story of the great unravelling is our awareness that things aren't fine, that business as usual can't, and shouldn't continue. Whether we're talking about the eco-system and societal structure as Macy is, or ourselves as individuals. It's not working.

Yesterday I brought us Rashi's commentary:

I am asleep. When I was confident and calm in the Bayit HaRishon (the first Temple), I despaired of worshipping the Holy Blessed One, as one who slumbers and falls fast asleep.

And we talked about it in terms of lacking kavannah, and passion.

But there's another implication we didn't discuss. The First Temple led me to despair of real worship, because I was complacent. That sounds a lot like Macy's "business as usual." And it positions the destruction of the Temple as a necessary -- and even positive -- loss, the great unravelling.

Sometimes the great unravelling comes from outside, like the shofar and Rambam's "Wake up you slumberers!", a shock to the system like 9/11, or a hurricane and floods, or raging fires. The destruction of the Temple.

And sometimes the great unravelling is a call coming from inside the house, discomfiting hirhurim, my heart that is awake, saying: "Oh come on, really? Business is usual is so not ok. And it hasn't been for a long time." What a relief it is to just say that. It's scary, but already I feel more alive. The great unravelling is our courage to say, I'm not ok with what's going on in the world around me -- and it's not just up to other people, or God, to fix it. It's the courage to say, I miss you, I miss me. And I'm willing to look honestly at who I am, how I behave, and how and what I need to change.

I am asleep but my heart is awake. The aspirational gap has opened. I am living the story of the great unravelling.

And the story of the great turning, teshuvah? Well, if it were a fairy tale, it would begin "once upon a time." But it's not a fairy tale. It's the truest, most real, most important story every told. So it starts with a call: *kol dodi dofek, pitchi li*, the sound of my beloved knocking, calling, open to Me.

The thing is, as Macy says, while the story of the great turning is actually happening in the world -- people are indeed waking up -- it isn't a done deal. We don't know where it will lead, and we don't know if it will "take." It invites us into the gifts of awakesness and uncertainty. That's true of teshuvah as well. It's just an invitation. The beloved is calling. There's a knock on the door to you heart: will you open it? will you answer? We'll pick up there on Kol Nidre.