

Ideals and Visions: Yom Kippur, 5770

The Hebrew language is a language not of words but of hyperlinks. To someone immersed in the world of Torah, every term in Hebrew evokes endless associations. If I say the word *Shalom* I am catapulted across time and space to the awesome creation of the world celebrated in the words of the morning prayer: *Yotzer Ohr U'voreh Choshech, Oseh Shalom U'voreh et HaKol*. God forms light and creates darkness, God makes *Shalom* and creates all.

At the same instant, I am standing with Aharon the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, his hands spread over the nation as he blesses them: *Ya'er Adonai Panav Elecha V'yasem L'cha Shalom*- May Adonai cause God's countenance to shine upon and grant you Shalom. And simultaneously, find myself in the academies of Babylonia in the 4th century BCE during the exile hearing the scribes reciting a new prayer they have created ending a study session. Called the Kaddish, it ends "*Oseh Shalom Bimromav, Hu Ya'aseh Shalom aleinu v'al kol Yisrael v'imru Amen*.- May the One who makes peace in the heavens make peace over us, over all Israel and the world and let us say Amen."

Nearly every word in Hebrew is a gateway to times, places, texts, images, memories. That is why trying to translate is so frustrating and ultimately impossible. Words that we hear in today's service like *Chesed, Rachamim* and *Emet*, usually translated as kindness, mercy and truth are really so much more. Hebrew is a language not so much of words but of associations, gateways, allusions. More than that, Hebrew is a language of ideals.

There was a time when to be young meant to believe in ideals. Ideals were what you talked about all night in coffeehouses with friends and people you'd just met. Ideals were audacious statements that challenged the status quo. They were words that were often said but if you took them seriously, led to daring and heroic action: the ideal of liberty and justice for all has created more than one revolution in this country. Peace on earth, equality, love- all radical concepts, all words that have great potential to change the world.

There was a time when ideals lit up the eyes of generations and led some of humankind's greatest triumphs. The American revolution was a movement centered on great ideals; ideals that have spread across the world and brought the dream of freedom and democracy to millions. The abolitionist movement that ended slavery and women's suffrage movement that gave the vote to over half of the population that had been denied were led by courageous idealists. In the last fifty years, the civil rights movement and the struggle for gender equality began with an ideal.

In the Jewish world, the young people who immigrated to Palestine in the early years of the twentieth century and laid the foundations of modern Israel were motivated by the ideals of creating a society infused with the values of the Prophets of Israel.

Our own great grandparents who immigrated to this country to found housing, educational and food cooperatives, join unions and dream of a time when social justice and mutual aid would replace competition were filled with ideals.

But idealism, born in the eighteenth nineteenth centuries was replaced by the ideologies of the twentieth century. Ideologies are ideals transformed, mutated from values and dreams to rigid social programs for the so-called betterment of civilization; and if some oppression and suffering accompanies that betterment, well, the noble ends justify the regrettable means.

Some ideologies maintained their links to true ideals, but many became monstrous and corrupt. In seeking to realize ideals, ideologies created vast theories and doctrines, conceived in hope but that would eventually enslave, corrupt and destroy: state socialism, communism and finally racism, facism...naziism. War, conflict and horror were the result.

And now, in a new century, some of these idols of human creation persist: fundamentalism, a destructive thirst for power masquerading as religion but rejecting religion's sacrosanct value of the primacy of human life; consumerism, the ideology of greed, insatiable hunger for novelty masking spiritual emptiness and egoism- belief that self-interest is the highest good, continue to haunt the human race and inspire acts of evil.

It is no wonder then that we have grown to fear ideals and look with doubt and suspicion on those who proclaim them. And yet...and yet... Read the words of the Haftarah that we just heard: *Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loosen the fetters of wickedness, undo the bands of the yoke, to free the oppressed and shatter every yoke? To feed the hungry, to house the impoverished, to clothe the unclad and not to hide your eyes from the needy of your own family? Who can not be stirred by the ideals contained in these words? The words of the Prophet calls us to something higher, something better, something just out of reach but something that somehow, some way, we can find and make real.*

Shalom, Chesed, Tzedek, Emet- peace, lovingkindness, justice and truth: these ideals, rooted in the Torah, the Word of the Living God, have never become isms because they are linked to the Torah and to the God who demands justice, mercy and humility. They have never become corrupted because they are not idols of the mind, but visions of the heart. The Talmud says that we Jews may not be Prophets, but we are the children of the Prophets. Within each of us lies the possibility of Vision- of a passionate calling to realize ideals that can infuse our lives with beauty and meaning.

Our synagogue and our community is the fruit of the vision of one Samuel Golob who, at loose ends, sitting in a park one Yom Kippur forty years ago, saw a rainbow in a clear sky and received a message in his heart telling him to build a Jewish community, here in this valley near the Delaware River. Vision can arise

spontaneously in the soul, or develop slowly. Our tradition teaches that the Voice that spoke at Sinai is speaking to us at every moment, if only we would learn to listen.

Amid the prayers, reflections and even the physical hunger we feel on Yom Kippur, listen closely within. Shema Yisrael, listen and do not be afraid to seek visions or to ask God to show you wonders.

Do not give up on ideals, for they can guide us higher, deeper and further. They can help us resist the forces of despair and negation that test our faith. They can help us repair the world.

Sixty-five years ago, a young girl wrote these words in a diary that is a testament to faith, ideals and hope. From the narrow spaces of the secret annex, Anne gave us words for this Yom Kippur that can light our way.

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them. In spite of everything, I still believe that people really are good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the suffering of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think it will all come out right, that this cruelty too will end and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

Perhaps the time will come when we will be able to carry out the ideals that Anne Frank dreamed of. Perhaps the visions of the Prophets can become true. Perhaps it can begin with an act of will and perhaps it can begin with us. L'shana Tovah.