

Rabbi Lewis' message for October 2003

“If you can look at the stars and yawn, I created you in vain, says God” – Aaron Zeitlin, Yiddish poet.

There I was at midnight, standing in line next to total strangers who were also waiting to glimpse Mars through some kind of mega telescope. It felt like a replay of Close Encounters; first I wove around dark roads, feeling like I was the only human being for miles, then suddenly I drove around a bend and into a clearing where hundreds of people stood patiently waiting their turn. What drew us all to this place was the unusual circumstance of Mars being so close to us that we could see it with the naked eye.

We were just there to look, but how powerful it is to look. I was reminded of an account given by Rabbi Jack Riemer about a conversation between his friend Rabbi Arnold Turetsky and the rabbi's son as they were walking home from shul. It was fall; Rabbi Turetsky looked at the ground, hoping to pick up some beautiful fall leaves, and said to his son: “I guess there are no nice leaves today.” His son said: “Yes, there are. You're looking in the wrong place. Look up instead of down and you'll see them.” Sure enough, there were lots of nice leaves – still on the trees. He had to look up in order to see them.

At this time of year, we are reminded to look in the places we don't always look. There is so much to see. We look within ourselves, we look up at the heavens, we look into the faces of loved ones. The Hungarian poet Hannah Senesh once looked up at the heavens and was inspired to look both back and forward in time; “There are stars whose light reaches the earth only after they themselves have disintegrated. And there are individuals whose memory lights the world after they have passed from it. These lights shine in the darkest night and illumine for us the path...”

And we must also look at the misery in the world around us, lest we be blinded to the needs of others. Again in the words of Aaron Zeitlin:

“If you look at the stars and yawn, says God,
If you see suffering and don't cry out,
If you don't praise and don't revile,
Then I created you in vain, says God.”

May the introspection of these holidays lead us to light the world with our love and illumine the path with our deeds. May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis

In my preparation for these high holy days, I was touched by a prayer from New Prayers for the High Holidays. I include it here so you can use it during the holy days and ask that you let me know whether you found it to be meaningful.

A PRAYER THE FAMILY CAN SAY TOGETHER AT HOME ON EREV YOM

KIPPUR

Let us now make the confession that we so often feel, and so seldom say.

We have done our share of evil along with the good that we do.

Let us admit it, and may this admission prepare our hearts for the fast,
just as this meal prepares our bodies.

We did not mean to do evil, but too often our failure to listen,
to respond when we are called, to appreciate and to say thanks,
caused more harm than any deliberate wrong could have done.

Frequently we acted in haste, wrongly, and to our sorrow.

Many times our judgment was needlessly rash and harsh.

We resorted to excuses many times, and we blamed others instead of ourselves.

We hurt most the ones we love the most. Therefore let us admit it, and let us say we are sorry.

More than that, let us promise each other that we will try our best not to repeat our mistakes.

Let us now make up with each other, and resolve to love each other more than in the new year.

May God forgive us as we forgive each other, and may this be a good new year.

Amen.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis

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