

Tikkun Olam Chavurah, Yom Kippur 5787

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Lately, I've been listening to Adrienne Rich recite her poem **Yom Kippur 1984**. What a blessing it is to hear her voice speak these words.

What is a Jew in solitude?

What would it mean not to feel lonely or afraid

far from your own or those you have called your own?

What is a woman in solitude: a queer woman or man?

In the empty street, on the empty beach, in the desert

what in this world as it is can solitude mean?

This world, as it is, right now. This world that has somehow convinced us we don't belong to one another.

Where our fight against repressive forces of fascism and greed isn't working.

What we're doing isn't working.

Can we be with that for a moment?

Naomi Klein calls this moment we're living in end times fascism- where powerful actors strive to make the world unlivable and then seek to protect themselves from the fall-out.

Frances Weller, writer and soul activist, dubs it the long dark. "We are in a time of decay, a time of collapse, a time of endings, a time of sheddings," he says.

No matter what you name it, it's clear- we are in a moment of collapse. We are witness to this last gasp effort to try to uphold the old structures. To keep capitalism going. Weller continues, "They're all going to collapse. They have to because the system . . . is unsustainable. Not only in terms of world resources, but just in terms of human capacity to endure that kind of emptiness."

And in this moment, I keep coming back to the very beginning of Torah- to Genesis 1:26 and 27. In a moment of solitude, God creates humans.

And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ

And God created humankind in the divine image,
creating it in the image of God—

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים

אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ

In the span of three short verses, we read **three** separate times that God creates humanity in their image.

These verses provide such powerful grounding to our work in the world. Every single human is divine.

Every single human is worthy of dignity, of respect, of awe.

Every single human is an entire world.

And I think - to be created in the likeness of God means that each person is not only a whole world but also, like God, has the potential to create the world.

Haamek dvar, a 19th century Lithuanian commentary written by Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda says that humans created in the likeness of God means “All of nature was included in them.”

All of nature is included in us.

All of it is godly.

All of us is godly.

Yes, too, the parts of ourselves we are afraid to touch- that we struggle to love. They too, are godly.

When we stop to take in that truth-that beauty- that majesty- in one another, in ourselves, what might we risk to protect it?

My housemate invited me to join a book club he was organizing this summer. I like reading, and talking to people about books- So I joined this group of 5 psychoanalytic therapists and we read Lara Sheehi's recent book “From the Clinic to the Streets-Psychoanalysis for Revolutionary Futures”

I don't know that much about psychoanalysis but Sheehi promises that this book is a tool for praxis in movements, a guide to help us become more aware of all the ways in which our psychic apparatus- the *mental structures and mechanisms of our psyche*- is coopted to perpetuate the very repressive structures that so many of us work so hard to dismantle.

Do you ever have the experience of reading a book, or watching a documentary, or listening to a song, and suddenly being able to see parts of the world you didn't even know existed?

Sheehi gives language to so much of my experience- to the ways in which repressive systems become lodged inside of us as normative, uncontested fixtures.

How when I see an unhoused neighbor I feel deeply sad, and some shame for all I have and think about how much money in that moment I can give away- instead of questioning the assumption that there will always be people without homes and that individual charity will somehow provide a collective solution. That humans living unsheltered is an inevitability.

These are the concrete ways in which our interiority- our thoughts, feelings, memories, and psychological reactions- are worked on by empire.

The ways in which our ability to remain connected to material reality- the things we can see and touch that exist independently of human thought or belief- is directly undermined.

Pro-Palestinian college students building encampments become violent extremists. We feel crazy for knowing that not to be true- that the violent extremists are the ones calling for the depopulation of and genocide in Gaza.

Remarkably, these messages invade our interiority, causing confusion despite our intimate knowledge and experience of the world around us. They work on us and cause us to distrust our own moral knowing.

Sheehi calls these psychic intrusions, because she says that reminds us of the directed attack on our psychic worlds. They fill our psychic space with fear, distortion, exhaustion, and doubt. Because they are so much a part of our world- they are the air we swim in- we barely even hear their gears so hard at work.

How often have I thought to myself, if I prove that I am in fact good and useful at being a rabbi, in spite of my anti-zionism, perhaps Zionist colleagues and Jewish organizations would be open to listening to what I have to say? If I was softer, more rational, less "intense" made them feel less "wrong" maybe I would be more legible to those in power?

These intrusions directly serve the systems of genocide and apartheid I work so hard to fight- I self discipline, self-censor- take away my own power.

And when these intrusions are working on us all- which they are- we don't stop to think how much more powerful our movements could be if we stopped doing the work of empire for it.

To combat these intrusions, Sheehi calls for psychic militancy- an unbending affixation to material reality. Naming over and over again what we see, what we experience, what we know to be true-independent of value judgements or thoughts.

Over 20,000 children have been murdered in Gaza in the past three years.

Our tax dollars, our government, is directly funding this violence.

Sheehi does not speak of militancy as something rigid- flexibility isn't the same as compromise. This militancy offers us the opportunity to cast into question every story that violent systems of power intend to implant in us, even if the new story that will emerge is not yet clear.

As Katherine McKittrick writes, "the work of liberation does not seek a stable or knowable answer to a better future; rather, it recognizes the ongoing labor of aesthetically refusing unfreedom."

The Pennsylvania State Treasury holds a total of \$64.5 million in Israel Bonds, \$25 million of which were added in June 2025. *Pennsylvania State Treasurer Stacy Garrity* said in a statement "Israel is our greatest ally in the Middle East, and I will continue to stand by them in their fight to achieve peace... it's especially important to show our support at a time when Israelis and Jews — both abroad and here in the United States — continue to face horrific acts of antisemitism."

In their fight to achieve peace, she says...

I refuse the premise that peace could ever possibly be achieved through fighting. I refuse the premise that to support the Jewish community, to fight antisemitism, one must invest in military, bomb and starve human beings. That Palestinians fighting to free themselves from an open air prison is a horrific act of antisemitism.

I know for saying these things, I risk being labeled extreme. Our unbending commitment to refusing unfreedom is so often received as an "extremist" position.

In 1964, Malcom X gave an interview on his way back from Africa to the USA. One audience member presents a challenge to him:

"Mr. Malcolm, you want to form a movement which is extremist, and you have said that there must be a movement of Afro-Americans towards Africa..."

Malcolm responds:

"Number one, if we are extremists we're not ashamed of it. In fact, the conditions that our people suffer are extreme and an extreme illness cannot be cured with moderate medicine. ..Those of us in the West were sold. We didn't sell ourselves...We didn't go to America voluntarily."

Here, Malcom models that psychic militancy is in fact about consistently taking this "extremist" position- despite attempts to make him feel shame about it.

And he's clear- this "extremism" exists in contrast to the violence of the state. Malcolm brings us back to the original source of extremism.

Chattel slavery is what is extreme.

Stealing Black folks from their homelands and selling them is what is extreme.

Refusing to name how the carceral violence of the state remains intimately linked up with this history of violence against Black folks is what is extreme.

To be clear- this work is not easy- and it is so powerful, so necessary. And every single time we engage in this psychic militancy and refuse to accept intrusion- we resist the rewiring of our interiority.

We free ourselves from the grip of these systems, we take back space to connect, to fight, to dream new ways of being.

And in doing so, we do not allow these abusive structures to do their work in secret- or to feed off their belief that we will not confront them in real time; we do not retreat away from our extremism with shame.

There's a Hasidic story about **Moshe Teitelbaum**, also known as **Yismach Moshe** a Rabbi in Uhely Hungary, who had a dream one night in which his soul was transported to heaven. He was led to the chamber where the sages of the Talmud were spending their eternal lives. When he entered, what did he see? The sages sitting around long tables, studying in chavruta, the exact same passages of Talmud that he was studying on Earth. He was deeply disappointed- could that be all there is to heaven? To which his guiding angel cried out "You are mistaken. *The Sages are not sitting in Heaven. **Heaven is sitting inside the Sages.***"

In our struggle for revolutionary futures, we must not overlook our interiority. **Heaven is sitting inside us.** Liberation must be the non-negotiable starting point in our minds, in our souls.

Submission and compromise—that is, normalization—will inevitably translate into liberation being an impossibility.

And this powerful work of empire, of repressive systems working on our interiority ultimately cuts us off from one another- from the truth that there are so many of us in this struggle-that state violence backs down when an entire city risks their lives in MN and occupies the streets and refuses to let their neighbors be kidnapped.

Psychic intrusions whisper seductive lies in our ears that distract us from our deep knowing that each and every one of us is created in the likeness of the divine- each and every one of us has **all** of nature within us.

There's another story I like to tell that goes like this- once upon a time, there was a little wave. The wave loves being a wave – loves going up and down and playing all day and night.

Then one day, the little wave notices that something is happening to the waves in front of them. It notices that it, along with all the other waves, are coming up to something big and dry... the shore.

The little wave sees a wave in front of it going up, higher and higher and then it comes crashing down onto the shore and smashes into bits. The little wave watches another wave in front of it do the same thing...and the little wave gets really scared.

It turns to the wave next door, who somehow is not freaking out, and points out what is happening. The wave next door says, oh I can explain that to you- but the little wave is so freaked out, they decide to go to therapy to work through this fear.

Therapy doesn't work so well, and their insurance doesn't cover that provider anyway, and the wave next door offers again "want me to explain? It's simple" But the little wave decides somatics will probably help and so they join a practice group.

But that doesn't work either- the waves ahead are still crashing into the shore and the little wave is still really afraid.

So finally, the little wave turns to the wave next door and asks "okay okay, what's the big secret? Why aren't you freaking out?"

Gently, the wave next door replies- "oh little wave, you're not a wave, you are the ocean."

Yom Kippur is one of those days that reminds us that we are the ocean.

The work and healing we do in our individuals lives, in our individual minds has a deep and lasting impact on the waves next door.

We must refuse unfreedom for ourselves and for one another, and for the beloved on the other side of this world we will never get the chance to know. Because each and every one of us is worth fighting for and saving.

And each and every one of us has the capacity to do so.

Adrienne Rich continues in her poem:

Find someone like yourself. Find others.
Agree you will never desert each other.
Understand that any rift among you
means power to those who want to do you in.

close to the center, safety; toward the edges, danger.
But I have a nightmare to tell: I am trying to say
that to be with my people is my dearest wish
but that I also love strangers
that I crave separateness
I hear myself stuttering these words
to my worst friends and my best enemies
who watch for my mistakes in grammar
my mistakes in love.
This is the day of atonement; but do my people forgive me?
If a cloud knew loneliness and fear, I would be that cloud.

When we risk to speak aloud the horrors we have been conditioned to accept as inevitable, our fears become smaller, our loneliness shrinks. I can hear my ancestors whispering courage in my ear. And in those moments of refusing unfreedom, we are reaching for one another.

We might not be alive as individuals to see the revolutionary futures we're fighting for in this moment.

I'm not sure what it will look like, but I know someone will be there, maybe a descendent of mine. Maybe they'll be dressed in white, praying in community.

I know the ocean will be there- and I'll be so proud of what I did to help build that world I dared risk this one for.