

Rosh Hashana Day 2

September 30, 2011

A kavannah for Le'el Oreh Din - - Which can be translated "To The Judge"

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In the years since we established residence here on the island I have had several opportunities to enter the Dues County Court house - - to report for jury duty, to offer testimony, to accompany a friend on the day of trial. The experience of ascending the front steps of the courthouse and passing through the security guard's scrutiny is intimidating.

There is something about entering the local halls of justice that evokes feelings of discomfort – depersonalization - -alienation. The courthouse is not a friendly place. Fear and suspicion stalk the hallways. Requests for information and directions are answered tersely. Individuals seem to shrink and contract – not wanting to see or be seen.

A flight of aging stairs leads to the courtroom on the second floor. Even in its simplicity the courtroom is daunting. The benches have descended from another era - -wooden - -stiff backed - un-upholstered and uncomfortable.

Adversaries face each other - -avoiding contact. There are whispered conversations between clients and attorneys - - lives change here – for better or worse - - and everyone wants to know which judge is sitting in order to gauge their chances for a favorable outcome.

A ritual announcement by the bailiff: "All rise" – The honorable judge so-and-so, presiding, is seated. The hushed conversations cease - -the tension rises another notch - -and the proceedings begin. For many in the room the day of judgment has come and it is a fearsome, sometimes de-humanizing thing as cases are heard and punishments are meted out.

We celebrate Rosh Hashana as the day marking the creation of the world. We also mark it as a day of judgment. However, the courtroom is a sanctuary filled with light and prayer and music. We do not rise before the Judge - - we bend the knee and bow.

In his book "To Heal A Fractured World" Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes *Judaism is a faith suffused with love - - but infinitely transcending human love for God is God's love for humankind. For this (in the necessarily anthropomorphic language which is the only one we know) God suffers every time human beings wrong one another, yet God is prepared to suffer rather than take back from humankind the gift of freedom God had bestowed upon us - - which is necessarily the freedom to do wrong as well as the freedom to do right.*

*According to Judaism, the classic questions of theology have been framed upside down. More than we search for God, God searches for us - - asking us as God asked Adam and Eve* "Where are you?"

*We are here because of an act of supreme love on the part of the Author of Being. Despite whatever wrong we do, our judge does not relinquish faith that we will change. However lost*

*or confused we might be, the Source of All Being does not cease to believe that one day we will find our way back.*

The One before whom we stand in these days of awe-filled prayer and tshuva works not through intimidation and alienation and de-personalization. Rather the Master of the Universe calls us back into relationship - - into a covenant bond that elevates our humanity into the presence of The Creative Force that brought all things into being in the first place. Here, in this light filled sanctuary where our prayers and songs and our tshuva fill this space, creation continues –even, and perhaps especially, as we bow before the Judge whose mercy and compassion and wisdom shape us as we pray.