

When it's broken... who you gonna call?

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Introduction

L'shana tovah. For 15 years we've been conducting High Holiday services and working in Australia. What a joy to say this yet again to you, some who are gathering with us for the first time and others for the 15th!

Who you gonna call?

Last week we got new floors in our kitchen and rumpus room. It's been needed for about 15 years, but last week we got them. And the tradespeople who were scheduled to come on Wednesday no showed. I rang the agent. I rang the company who was supposed to be laying the floors. I finally got hold of someone who sorted the problem. The men got busy at another job and promised to be at my place the next morning at 7. Everything got sorted fairly easily, but it took some calling and some pushing. Maybe you've had a similar experience. When things are broken, you want someone to come and fix it. When the pipes leak; when the left arm goes numb; when the child falls and screams. You want something done. Something has to be fixed. Now. Not tomorrow at 7, but now.

Setting/ History

So tonight we begin New Year. 5774 years ago God created the world and all that is in it. He made Adam and Eve and gave us laws and instruction to follow. Adam didn't comply and as a result we humans were exiled from the Garden of Eden, and have been struggling to find our way back ever since.

If things are broken, I guess we have to see to their being fixed.

These 10 days, which begin tonight, are called the Ten Days of Awe or the Ten Days of Repentance. It's a season in which we Jewish people make things right with neighbors and with God. We seek atonement at the end. We seek His favor. And we often do that in synagogue where most Jews do not attend all the rest of the year. So if this is your first time with us, that seems about right.

About 2500 years after Adam and Eve, God delivered the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt after we had been in that 400-year detentions centre there. Immediately on leaving, we Jews wandered in the wilderness, and made our way to Mt Sinai where God gave more laws and instructions for Jewish people in particular to follow.

God's assurance of His presence in power transfer

After 40 more years, near the end of his 120 years of life, Moses spoke the words we heard in our reading today. Chapter 31 of Deuteronomy records his encouraging words to the people of Israel. Verse three says "God will cross ahead

of you...destroy those nations before you... you shall dispossess them.” (31.3) In other words, God Himself will be the warrior and general to conquer the land of Canaan, and you Jewish people will live securely in the Land there, which will later be titled Israel. In verse 6, God says to our people to be strong and courageous. Nothing to fear!

Now you might think there was nothing to fear, but this was a tough time for us Jewish people. We had been walking with this old guy Moses for four decades and now he’s checking out. He was the founder, if you will, and all that the wandering Hebrews had known for almost their entire life, was his responsibility. Now he’s leaving. That had to be difficult for the millions.

I was part of transfer of power a couple times. One from a congregation I founded in Kansas in 1972 when I stepped down in 1977, and the other in Jews for Jesus, when we elected a new executive director after Moishe Rosen stepped down in 1996. Moishe had founded the organization. Both were tough transitions and both had commensurate problems. Here in our text, God wanted to ensure a smooth transition and thus in chapter 3 (21-28) and chapter 31 (8), like bookends around the rest of the book, he strongly charges Joshua who would be the next man in charge.

Here in Australia this coming Shabbat we will elect officials to lead us the next few years, and we may or may not see such a smooth transition as God was hoping for from the children of Israel.

Joshua hears the charge from Moses ‘in the sight (eyes) of all Israel’ that not only would God be leading them to battle, but **וְהוּא יְהוָה עִמָּךְ** (Hu yih’yeh imach) that is, God would be with them! The assurance of His presence would strengthen the 85-year-old Joshua and give confidence to the people that they should trust him as his mentor’s replacement.

God will hide his face

Then moments later God tells Moses and Joshua in the commissioning service, from inside the cloud, **וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ** (v’histarti fanai mayhem) that is, God would hide his face from the people. So on the one hand he says his face would be with them, that is guaranteeing presence, on the other hand he says, not so.

But the next verse amplifies the hiding of God’s face with

וְאֶנֶכִּי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי. (v’anochi hastair aster panai) That’s even worse (.18) than verse 17. Utterly or completely hide my face. That’s darkness times 10. We are alone.

Confused? Let me unpack this for us.

Rabbi Chaim Ingram lives here in Sydney. He wrote last week the following in regards to this passage and about Rosh Hashanah. [“The concealment is deliberate. For one thing, G-D’s greatness is matched by His humility \(*Megila 31a*\). He has no wish to force His people to ‘proclaim me your king through the blowing of bugles!’ so He conceals the commandment as simply a *Yom*](#)

teru'a. Indeed exhortations to love and revere G-D are as a rule proclaimed only by Moses and only in *Sefer Devarim*, not by G-D Himself. But in addition to this, G-D has no wish to impose Himself on man **because He wishes man to discover G-D for himself**. This is the secret of Rosh Hashanah.”

Still confused? Listen to these words from the daughter of Billy Graham after the tragedy of September 11, 12 years ago.

Interviewer (Clayson): “I’ve heard people say, those who are religious and those who are not, if God is good, how could God let this happen? To that, you say?”

Anne Graham Lotz: “I say God is also angry when he sees something like this. I would say also for several years now Americans in a sense have shaken their fist at God and said, ‘God, we want you out of our schools, our government, our business, we want you out of our marketplace.’ And God, who is a gentleman, has just quietly backed out of our national and political life, our public life. Removing his hand of blessing and protection. We need to turn to God first of all and say, ‘God, we’re sorry we have treated you this way and we invite you now to come into our national life. We put our trust in you.’ We have our ‘trust in God’ on our coins; we need to practice it.”

God is the most amazing King ever on the planet. Every other king rules and dominates according to his own strength. And those who are conquered are well advised to submit to his ordinances and taxes. The King of the Universe on the other hand is as Anne Graham Lotz says, ‘a gentleman.’ Stunning. The one who created all things, which we note and in which we rejoice today, offers himself to us to know and love him. He does not demand, but rather offers. Would you like to be part of this kingdom? Would you like to join us? An invitation, not a suzerainty treaty. Amazing!

Maybe that helps us with the real story in today’s reading.

God will judge Israel

It is found in verse 16: “*Behold*, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.”

The problem was not with God, but with us as a people. God shows the dying Moses that Israel would forsake the Almighty down the proverbial road. And as a result God would hide himself. Ouch. This has to hurt.

Hear these words from our text:

God told Moses to “write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for me against the sons of Israel. ... Then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn me and break my covenant. . . When many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness...So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel. (31.19-22)

Should we have sung that song tonight? Would you have wanted to sing that song? Out loud? Together? With others?

A song from Moses. This is the 2nd song of Moses in the Bible. There will be three all together. The first was as they left slavery in Egypt and walked through the Red Sea. This is the 2nd. The third is in Revelation 15. John Phillips is a Bible commentator who contrasts the first and 3rd songs of Moses. He titles the 3rd song as the Song of the Lamb, which is the song of Jesus, who is like Moses on so many levels and yet greater!

“The first song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the 3rd song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes.” (John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 187

But you must know that the reasons for the Deuteronomy chapter 32 song are twofold. One, to witness against us, like a prosecuting attorney’s key witnesses, and second, to remind us as a covenant-breaking people of God’s love and to draw us back. What? Tell someone they are bad, and that you predicted they would turn away, as a reminder to draw them back? Yes, that’s exactly what I said.

So the song of Moses given to indict the Jewish people and to prove our failings is found in chapter 32. It’s painful to read. When we grow fat and thick and sleek, we will turn to other gods. (.15) And so we have. Throughout history. And to this day.

After all the message of the Aseret y’mei t’shoovah is that we have failed. Ashamnu. Bagadnu. Gazalnu.. we admit our sins. More about this next week, but for tonight, listen to the first four confessions.

ASHAMNU: We have become desolate. We commit ourselves to recognizing that our failures are self-destructive.

BAGADNU: We have betrayed our potential, our families, God Himself. We can question who we have been in our multifaceted role as a human being and as a Jew? Whom have we betrayed? Is it not ultimately ourselves as well as others?

GAZALNU: We have stolen. This includes not only financial theft, but theft of time, and misleading others into thinking that we are more accomplished than we actually are. This sin is especially damaging in that it reflects the fact that we have rejected the role in life that God has given us.

DEBARNU DOFI: We have spoken with "two mouths" – we have been hypocritical. We can confront our fear of rejection, and the dishonesty that we use to "cover ourselves." Of whom are we afraid? Why? Should we not be more willing to tackle the reality that confronts us?

Judgment brings jealousy and hope

The song says something which might be familiar to some of you who read the book of Romans in the Newer Testament. "They have made me jealous with *what* is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with *those who* are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." (32.21)

In other words in the same way that your following a non-god as if he were God, I will make you Jewish people jealous by calling a non-people to be my people. Sounds like Romans 11.11 ("Jewish people did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.")

The text gives hope. I know it doesn't sound like much hope with vengeance and sword and bloodshed. But in verse 36 God says, "I will vindicate my people" and strangely includes you who are Gentiles among us tonight in the final verse of the song, "Rejoice, O *nations*, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land and His people." (verse 43)

Wow, Gentiles will have hope as God brings Jewish people and the land of Israel back to Himself. Isn't that exactly what Paul wrote the Romans later in chapter 11, verse 15? "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

So the Song of Moses in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy is a sample of God's passion, his compassion, his hatred of evil for what it does to us, and it is his invitation.

If broken, call the Fixer: Tikkun Olam

One of the big theses, by the which Jewish people have lived for hundreds of years, is the phrase *Tikkun Olam*. This phrase translates to 'repair of the world' and is probably one of the main core values of Judaism today. If the world needs repair, then the questions are begged, "Who broke it?" and "When did it break?" and "How can anyone fix it?" Even deeper is the question, "Who can fix it?"

The record of Moses here seems to indicate that God called Israel before creation and certainly in the Exodus, and reminds us that He and He alone has the power and the right to do what He wants. I suppose the simple answer is, "We broke it; God alone can fix it." It's borderline presumptuous to think world repair is our purview. We read in 33.29, "Blessed are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the LORD"

God created. God judges sin. God saves to the uttermost. No wonder we shout "Hallelujah!" And no wonder believers make such a big deal about the Roman cross of Jerusalem, on which Jesus died. It's there that the solution to our problems is found.

So when the pipes leak, you ring the plumber. You might like the carpenter. You might have a great relationship with your dentist. But you don't ring them. You call the one who is able and who is assigned the tasks of repair. He is certified. He is qualified. And you trust him.

When your left arm goes numb, you don't ring the chiropractor. You don't ring the football coach. You ring the doctor and get yourself to emergency at the hospital.

Therefore, when the Lord tells us of our sin, that we are going the way of all flesh, when we hear ourselves say, "Our hand is triumphant, and the LORD has not done all this." We forsook God and scorned the God of our salvation" (32.15, .27) When we are ready to admit our sin, and our failing, and our self-satisfaction, when we admit we have turned from God and chased after other things, beauty, power, money, love, devotion from others, security... when we admit our failings, God is ever ready to forgive. He loves us. He longs to give us hope and success. And he wants us to praise Him so that we live a full and meaningful life. That's how it works.

And the consideration we Jewish people have on Rosh Hashanah and during the 10 days is to get our names written in the Book of Life. Tonight, I can guarantee you a place there. Not on the basis of what you have done, but because God is ready and willing to forgive and in Yeshua he has done just that. By your placing your faith in Him, you can be sure your name is inscribed there, not only for one year, but forever.

The invitation: Getting it right

Remember, the people said in chapter 31. "Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?" (verse 17)

The people got it exactly wrong. Because God IS among us that these evils come upon us. That happens so that we turn back to him.

So the invitation is issued. Do you know yourself well enough to know you are not the one who can repair the world? Do you know today on whom you should call to find such repair in your world?

God loved us enough to send His Son into the world to repair our situation. Sin was the problem and as a kipporah, as a korban, to bring us back into relationship with Himself, God sent Yeshua to die for us. To repair what was broken.

Our sins separated us from Him.

On the mountain of Jerusalem, where Yeshua died, God brokered the deal to make us His again.

My brother is going through radiation therapy for his stage four liver cancer. He is unwell and yet has a very positive attitude. And he knows that when the script comes for his medication he has to go to the pharmacy to fulfill it. When the doctor rings to discuss his situation my brother doesn't ring the gardener to discuss this; he listen to the doctor. Getting it right involves the problem, the diagnosis and the right professional to resolve the issue.

If you want to get your life right, you have to admit the problem, consider and agree with the diagnosis, and go to the God who has all the answers. It's as difficult and as simple as that.

You here at Jubilee don't have to be Jewish to admit your sin. You don't have to wait until Yom Kippur to find out the solution to your problem of walking away from God. Hear it today; believe it today; receive God's forgiveness in Jesus today. And be forgiven today!

God loved the world so much he sent his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Do you believe that?