## Black Fire on White Fire – Rosh Hashanah Drash

Rabbi Yisrael, the Maggid of Koznitz, would travel to the city of Apt every year on his father’s *yartzeit*to visit his grave. While he was there, he would preach to the community in the synagogue. One year, on such a visit, he neglected to show up at the synagogue, so some people found him outside the inn where he was staying to ask him when he would come.

“I don’t think I will preach this year,” he replied. “I don’t see any evidence that my preaching has done any good.” He went up into his room and shut the door.

The people were dumbfounded, and didn’t know what to say. Then, a young craftsman stepped forward, went into the inn, up to the Maggid’s room and knocked on his door. The Maggid answered.

“You say that your preaching hasn’t had any effect,” said the craftsman. “But that’s not true. Last year you spoke about the practice of*Sh’viti Hashem L’negdi Tamid – I place the Divine before me constantly.* Ever since then, I always see the Divine before me in whatever I am doing, and in whatever is happening; It appears to me like black fire on white fire.”

“Hmm,” replied the Maggid, “Okay then, I guess I’ll come and preach.”

As we come into this new year of 5782, and as this world is going through so many profound shifts accompanied by so many catastrophes and so much suffering, we need so deeply to know that white fire on black fire – meaning, we need to know the underlying Reality behind all opposites; we need to plug directly into That Source.

We need to know that this Mystery which is at the root of all things, not separate at all from the awareness that hears these words right now, the field of consciousness that you are, fully within yet infinitely beyond your thoughts, your feelings, and your body, that which we call the Divine who is not a supreme being, but is rather Beingness Itself, That is the Source from which we can draw the strength and inspiration we need to meet this moment.

We hope and pray for relief, for healing and normalcy, and *b’ezrat* *Hashem* may it manifest speedily.

But instead of focussing too much on how we would rather things to be, I think we will be far better served to embrace, rather than resist this time of crisis, to accept that this is the moment in which we live, and do our best to meet it, to plant and nurture seeds of light in these opaque times.

How do we do this?

If we want to find Reality, if we want to find the Divine, if we want to find the truth of our own beings, all of which are the ultimately same thing, then we need to learn how, again and again, to fully bring ourselves to what is present, and to spend some time every day, in whatever way we can, in silence, in simple Presence with Reality as it is appearing to us.

כִּ֚י הַמִּצְוָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את אֲשֶׁ֛ר אָנֹכִ֥י מְצַוְּךָ֖ הַיּ֑וֹם לֹא־נִפְלֵ֥את הִוא֙ מִמְּךָ֔ וְלֹ֥א רְחֹקָ֖ה הִֽוא׃

*For this teaching which I enjoin upon you today is not hidden from you, nor is it distant.*

לֹ֥א בַשָּׁמַ֖יִם הִ֑וא לֵאמֹ֗ר מִ֣י יַעֲלֶה־לָּ֤נוּ הַשָּׁמַ֙יְמָה֙ וְיִקָּחֶ֣הָ לָּ֔נוּ וְיַשְׁמִעֵ֥נוּ אֹתָ֖הּ וְנַעֲשֶֽׂנָּה׃

*It is not in the heavens, that you should say, “Who will ascend for us to the heavens and get it for us that we may hear it and do it?*

וְלֹא־מֵעֵ֥בֶר לַיָּ֖ם הִ֑וא לֵאמֹ֗ר מִ֣י יַעֲבׇר־לָ֜נוּ אֶל־עֵ֤בֶר הַיָּם֙ וְיִקָּחֶ֣הָ לָּ֔נוּ וְיַשְׁמִעֵ֥נוּ אֹתָ֖הּ וְנַעֲשֶֽׂנָּה׃

*Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and get it for us that we may hear it and do it?*

כִּֽי־קָר֥וֹב אֵלֶ֛יךָ הַדָּבָ֖ר מְאֹ֑ד בְּפִ֥יךָ וּבִֽלְבָבְךָ֖ לַעֲשֹׂתֽוֹ׃

*For this thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.*

*- Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 30:11-14

This special day, the “head” of the year, tells us how. The Talmud says:

אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

*The Holy Blessed One said –*

אִמְרוּ לְפָנַי בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה מַלְכִיּוֹת זִכְרוֹנוֹת וְשׁוֹפָרוֹת

*Recite before Me on Rosh HaShanah – Sovereignty, Remembrance and Shofars.*

מַלְכִיּוֹת כְּדֵי שֶׁתַּמְלִיכוּנִי עֲלֵיכֶם

*Sovereignty, so that you should honor That which is above you –*

זִכְרוֹנוֹת כְּדֵי שֶׁיָּבֹא לְפָנַי זִכְרוֹנֵיכֶם לְטוֹבָה

*Remembrance, so that your remembrance should rise up before Me for the good.*

וּבַמֶּה בְּשׁוֹפָר

*And through what? – through the shofar!*

*- Talmud Bavli* 34b

These three elements – *Malkhyot, Zikhronot,* and *Shofrot,* are actually a recipe for waking up out of the dreams of the mind and heart, into the full potential of the spacious field of Divine Being that we are at the deepest level. They form the three sections of the *Musaf*, but they are also something we can practice right now and always:

We begin with *Zikhronot*- remembering. This is not a remembering something that happened in the past; it is remembering to bring our attention fully into the senses, out of the ever wandering thinking mind and into the richness of this moment.

When we do this, there’s a transformation – everything appearing now in our field of experience – sensation, feeling, emotion, the arising and falling away of thought, everything present literally becomes like *Shofrot* – it all becomes like the sound of the ram’s horn, waking up out of the dream and into connection not just with the forms that are present in experience, but with the underlying Beingness of things, that which we call *Hashem*, the Divine. In becoming present with the truth of this moment, whatever is present serves to help us awaken more deeply.

And from this awake-ness, there naturally arises a sense of openness and connection, a sense of receiving the truth of this moment from God’s hands, so to speak. This is *Malkhuyot*, bowing before the majesty of Existence as it is, and as it could be – which is the meaning of the Highest Divine Name, *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* – *I Will be What I Will Be.*

If all of this seems confusing, that’s okay. But I wonder, even if these words are not completely clear, might there be something in you that resonates on some level, either with these words or maybe just with the energy of this special time that is now blossoming into being?

Whatever resonance there might be, I want to encourage us all to nurture it. May this be a *Rosh Hashanah*, in the sense of *Reishit HaShinui* – the beginning of a change – a first step in a new transformation within each of us to move to the next level in our spiritual development both for ourselves and for bringing the best of ourselves to this world in need.

This is our fifth year of being so blessed to be collaborating with Urban Adamah. May these holy days inspire us all to gather and learn and practice year round, *b’khol yom* – every day for those of us together in the Torah of Awakening community. And for those here who are visiting from other communities, may you receive inspiration to take the next steps on your paths. And for those who are not yet part of a spiritual community – perhaps this will be your first step in connecting on this level. Know that you are welcome whatever your background, whatever your experience – come come whoever you are, this is no caravan of despair…