

### What are We Birthing?

Today is a Rosh Hashanah like none other in our lifetime. We have read and sung and chanted much of the same texts and melodies that we remember from last year, yet we do not need to be reminded that this is not the way we are used to celebrating the Jewish new year.

I am lucky enough to have a couple of our Kol Nefesh board members and their families here with me today. And I am so grateful to have many more connecting from your homes via the magical internet. Even as we miss being in each other's physical presence today and so many days this year, I can feel the energy of our community radiating through my computer and I hope to send some of it back to you. This is not a "virtual" service today. We are socially distanced yet fully connected as a community. Our prayers are being shared live and in real time (with a few prerecorded exceptions). We sense a genuine exchange of emotions and smile at the inevitable missed notes and words, reminding us that THIS and WE are REAL. While you may be experiencing this service on a screen, this is not passive tv watching. I really hope you can feel the difference.

Last Rosh Hashanah, I talked to you about getting outside of our comfort zones to learn, grow, and create the change we want to see in the world. It seems we spent more of 5780 out of our comfort zones than any of us could have imagined. And many of us spent a lot of time learning, growing, and working for change. All this living outside of our comfort zone has made us anxious. And all this working for change has made us tired. We are so ready for the world we live in to catch up to our hopes for a more just society and a healthy environment for our families. Everyone is impatient with the pace of finding a vaccine for the virus, not to mention a cure for the inequality that this pandemic has revealed.

People talk about this being a time of transition - a transition between life before COVID-19 and afterwards, a transition in government leadership through the upcoming election, a transition from a society that ignored inequality to one that acknowledges where we've missed the mark and commits to do better. When I hear the word transition, I am reminded of the birthing process. Many of us in Kol Nefesh have had the honor and challenge of giving birth or assisting a birthing mother. Some have witnessed animals giving birth. And all of us have attended at least one birth - our own.

Rosh Hashanah is celebrating the birth of the world so what better time than today to talk about birth? I'm thinking about the births I remember most clearly - my daughter 24 years ago, my son 22 years ago, and the son of my friend 16 years ago (she chose me to be her partner in the room since her 6-foot-tall husband faints at the mere sight of blood). I also spent many years supporting new moms as a volunteer with La Leche League and our gatherings were filled with birth stories.

Giving birth to new life takes time. And it takes work. There is a time in the birth process (known as "transition") where everything looks impossible, pain is at its peak, hope is at its lowest point, and the midwife says that "This is a great sign!" and "You are almost there!" (This makes most women raise an eyebrow yet we know from experience that the midwives are correct.) If the birth is an animal in a barn, you'll see the mother turn inward, putting all her focus on the enormous task at hand. If the birth is in a hospital, there may be a frenzy of activity as medical staff prepare for the imminent moment. This period of transition leads to the next phase - pushing the baby out into the world. The infant (or lamb or puppy or whatever you have been picturing) is transformed, no longer a part of its mother. The ecosystem has changed. For weeks or months they have been floating in warm liquid and now they must breathe air. Can you imagine trying to

explain this process to a baby still in its mother's womb? Impossible! Yet we know this transformation takes place every day around the world. It's remarkable, really.

As I try to sort out all that has transpired this year, I feel the intensity and anxiety of so many moments piling higher and higher on my heart. Surely this must be our time of transition. I pray that our transformation is coming soon. We have learned too much to return to whatever we thought was normal life. We have renewed our sense of life's fragility. It has been a painful lesson yet an important one. We have focused inward and reminded ourselves what is important - our family, our friends, our health, our environment, our connection. Now that we see this amazing gift of life that has been hiding in plain sight all along, could we be ready to birth a new life together?

I invite you to spend some time during these 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to consider and write down some of your plans for the new year.

What have you learned from this intense time of transition? How has your focus shifted or sharpened? What do you want to bring into the new year? You could turn your words into a piece of art to display as a reminder of your intentions each day. Or you can keep them in a journal and add thoughts as your new year

unfolds. You might share them with your family or a close friend. You might choose to keep them all to yourself.

Our Jewish tradition teaches us that we are here to co-create the world in partnership with G!d. We have seen more evidence this year than ever before that we are connected to all life on this planet. Let's channel our creativity and get to work. Together.

Wishing you a Shanah Tovah u'Metukah - a good and sweet year for you and your family. May 5781 be the year we birth a more just, more kind, and healthier society for all.