

## **Is God Angry at the World?**

### **Confront Uncertainty. Engage. Do Not Flee.**

By Aaron Finestone, Minyan Masorti, Kol Nidre 2021.

As we gather tonight we confront uncertainty. After a year and a half of Plague, we have lost loved ones. We have not been able to mourn as we would have wished. People in our circles have been sick. We suffered in lockdown. Each of us has been put to our own test.

The uncertainty we experience every year is capped with an additional layer of uncertainty. The Fourth Wave. The Mu Variant. Break out cases. The Plague is evolving, raging again.

At times one could ask, Is God angry with the world?

Rabbi Moshe Hauer, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, suggests a response:

Having experienced the upheaval of the pandemic, we must ask ourselves not why it happened, but what we will do to ensure that we build on this experience, to ensure that we come out better, Rabbi Hauer writes.

Tonight we reflect on the sound---and the text---of Kol Nidre.

In the words we recite after Kol Nidre we pray to Adonai "Please pardon the sins of this nation in accordance with the greatness of your loving kindness as You forgave this people from when it left Egypt until now."

Kol Nidre provides the sound of atonement," writes Dr. Annette M. Boeckler, a cantor and scholar of liturgy. (*"The Magic of the Moment: Kol Nidre in Progressive Judaism," in All These Vows, Kol Nidre, Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ph.D., Editor, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2011*).

When we recite Kol Nidre, God calls out to the soul in a voice the soul recognizes instantly because it is the soul's own cry, writes the late Rabbi Alan Lew. (*Rabbi Alan Lew, This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared, The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation, Hachette Book Group, New York, NY, 2018*).

In the hours ahead, we will proceed through the liturgy, the emotion, the hope and the fear of the Day of Atonement. Tomorrow afternoon, we will reach the Book of Jonah.

Jonah confronts the crisis of uncertainty. He fails God's test

Dr. Aviva Zornberg writes:

When God sends Jonah to *cry out* against Nineveh he flees God's presence, takes to the sea, and even in the danger of death, which draws prayers from all the sailors, he refuses to *cry out*. His flight is a resistance to *crying out*, to standing in the presence of God, in the human place between life and death.

Dr. Zornberg cites the Gaon of Vilna's allegorical comentary to Jonah, in which he recounts the history of the soul in the world. The Gaon sets Jonah's flight in a context where "everyone flees from God's presence, and is reluctant to *stand before Him*."

Dr. Zornberg writes, Jonah as Everyman is attuned to flight; the human soul is averse to standing before God. If this is a pathological refusal, it is a universal pathology. And if it leads to a death that is not conscious of itself, this, too is familiar territory.

To flee, to refuse to stand before God, means, then, to evade an essential uncertainty, Dr. Zornberg concludes.

*(Avivah Zornberg, The Murmuring Deep, Reflections of the Biblical Unconscious, Schocken Books, New York, NY, 2011).*

As we struggle this Yom Kippur, let us not flee from the uncertainty of the Plague. Let us accept God's challenges, not to flee, but to engage. Let us take care of ourselves, our loved ones, and each other.

In his novel *La Peste* (translated as *the Plague*), the French existentialist Albert Camus wrote about a fictional plague in the City of Oran in colonial Algeria. In concluding his novel, Camus said of the story's diarist:

Nonetheless, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could only be the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilence, strive their utmost to be healers.

*(Albert Camus, The Plague, Vintage International, Random House, New York, 1991)*

May God grant us reprieve and inspire us to heal our world at this time of uncertainty.