

**A CALENDAR OF REPENTANCE FOR THE MONTH OF ELLUL****WEEK 3 – *Mah anachnu* – What are we?****15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> September/ 15-21 Ellul, 5779****Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September****15 Ellul 5779*****Why were you not?***

There is a tale of a chasidic rabbi named rabbi Zusya. Zusya was a timid man, a man who lived a humble life.

One day Rabbi Zusya stood before his congregation and he said, ‘When I die and have to present myself before the celestial tribunal, they will not ask me, ‘Zusya why were you not Moses?’ because I would say ‘Moses was prophet and I am not.’

They will not say ‘Zusya, why were you not Jeremiah?’ for I would say ‘Jeremiah was a writer, and I am not.’

And they will not say ‘Why were you not Rabbi Akiba?’ for I would tell them, ‘Rabbi Akiba was a great teacher and scholar and I am not.’

But then they will say ‘Zusya why were you not Zusya?’ and to this I will have no answer.’

*All of us strive to be great leaders, the best parents, exceptional partners, who are we being?*

*How do we know what is the right thing to do, and how do we live a life without having regrets about ‘Why were you not?’*

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September****16 Ellul, 5779**

Sovereign of all worlds, we lay our supplications before You, relying not on our merit but on Your abundant mercy. For what are we? What is our life, and what our piety, what our goodness, and what our strength? What can we say in Your presence, Eternal God? Are not the mightiest of us as nothing before You, the famous as though they had never lived, the learned as if they had no knowledge, the wise as if without understanding? For most of what we do is futile, and our life on earth is but a span; our superiority over other animals amounts to little, for all is vanity.

Nevertheless, we are Your people, children of Your covenant and called to Your service. (From the morning service, *Siddur Lev Chadash*, page 123).

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September****17 Ellul, 5779****And what is my life span?**

And what is my life span? I'm like a man gone out of Egypt:  
the Red Sea parts, I cross on dry land,  
two walls of water, on my right hand and on my left.  
Pharaoh's army and his horsemen behind me. Before me the desert,  
perhaps the Promised Land, too. That is my life span.

Open closed open. Before we are born, everything is open  
in the universe without us. For as long as we live, everything is closed  
within us. And when we die, everything is open again.

Open closed open. That's all we are.

(Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, translated from the Hebrew by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld)

*How do we measure the days of our life? Do we hear the 'ticking of time, the whirring like a distant prayer...?'*

*What does it mean to be 'open' or that 'everything is closed/within us' for as long as we live?*

*Are there significant moments in our lives – in our past? Are there moments we are still waiting to happen?*

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September**

**18 Ellul, 2019**

**‘Funny you don’t look Jewish!’**

Rabbi Tony Bayfield tells this story in his book *Being Jewish Today: Confronting the Jewish Issues* (Bloomsbury, 2019):

The Hebrew word [for ‘people’] is *am*, with root meanings of being united, connected, related. The Jewish People is made up of smaller units, families, with strong ties to other families and to the larger unit, the people. But the ties are not blood ties, racial ties, ethnic ties... Jews come in all shapes, sizes and colours – at which point, a story. Ever journeying, Jewish merchants reached China during the Tang dynasty (seventh to nine centuries). One Jewish community at least – in Kaifeng – survived into the twentieth century. It is said that a modern-day Jewish traveller reached Kaifeng and was directed to the synagogue; there he was greeted by a man of Chinese appearance and dress. The traveller was effusive, explaining he was a visiting Jew from the West. He was greeted with a cool, quizzical stare. ‘Aren’t you thrilled to see a fellow Jew?’ he asked. After a pause, back came the reply: ‘Funny, you don’t look Jewish.’

**Thursday 19 September**

**19 Ellul**

**Requests, by Esther Raab (transl. Catherine Shaw and Moshe Dor)**

I want beautiful trees –	in the ravines
and not wars!	and pinecones
And a coat of many colours	on a scented bed
and not uniforms	of pine needles –
for all my dear ones;	and bulbul birds rejoicing
I want rain	among leafy orchards
and green furrows	and sails of peace
and houses	on the Mediterranean;
full of babies;	and white chrysanthemums
a calendar of alliances	in the parks, their fall manoeuvres;
and a ‘brotherhood plaza’	and red balls rolling
and lightning and thunder –	and the sleeves
in the sky;	of babies’ garments signalling tranquillity
and bountiful rains	on clotheslines.
on earth/ and a pink crocus	

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September**

**20 Ellul, 5779**

**Global Climate Strike – 20–27 September, 2019**

‘This shouldn’t be the children’s responsibility; now the adults also need to help us. So we are calling for them to strike from their work because we need everyone. There is nothing we can’t do and if not you should do it, then who else? And if not now, then when? (*Greta Thunberg*)

‘For most of us trauma and disaster affecting us directly is something we look back at as a part of history. We have lived in comfortable security for a long time, have got used to a mindset that looks to the future with reasonable confidence. We are used to mass disaster being a thing that happens to other people. This may have led us to an unconscious sense of entitlement, that there is no question about it, our life is meant to be fairly comfortable. That this assumption of future ease is no longer correct is an enormous shock and many of us may be in a time of massive adjustment’ (*Hilary Totterman*)

*We must be life. We must celebrate life.*

*We need our hearts and our brains and our hands to be alive and engaged with the challenge humanity is facing. We may not desist from this task.*

*Yes we must take breaks and look after ourselves and keep our batteries recharged. But we face the greatest challenge humanity has ever known and it is our responsibility to engage with this.*

*We need to be kind to ourselves. We need to hold ourselves through the shock of this time. And ask for help if this is too difficult.*

**Shabbat 14 September**

**14 Ellul, 5779**

‘The heavens belong to the Eternal One, but God has given the earth to human kind.’

This means that we are like God’s stewards on earth, charged to exercise responsibility in God’s name for all that exists. (*Commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra on Psalm 115:5*).

*As we celebrate Shabbat in our families and communities, on our own at home, outside underneath the sky, our feet planted firmly on the earth, let us open our eyes and see what is around us; let us listen to the deep sounds of the earth with its beating heart, to the birds of the air and the rushing sound of water. Practise silence as a conscious action.*

*With thanks to Rabbi Igor Zinkov and Hilary Totterman*