

ROSH HASHANA DAY 1:
RABBI SHAWN ISRAEL ZEVIT
[Sovereign Self - Sacred Community](#)
[Returning to, Revisiting and Renewing our Personal](#)
[and Communal Values and Principles](#)

Shalom and welcome back to a New Jewish Year, and a new year at our spiritual home, Mishkan Shalom.

As we regather again, and yet in ways we never have before in our own sacred space, we re-enter our ancient and contemporary inquiry this time of year invites.

At the same time as we enter a second year of re-examining our community's original and amended 1988 Statement of Principles, our tradition asks us to audit our own souls, reflecting on and taking responsibility for our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual lives.

Entering this annual communal regathering, we come face to face with ideas, liturgy, metaphors, beliefs and disbeliefs, identities and images that have served us well and brought us to this time, and then those that no longer do and in fact may be distracting, problematic or a hide-out.

Last year I asked you to come and explore Judaism and the Long Path. While keeping that lens on the bigger picture, I invite you to join Noah and I, and other Mishkan members who already have and will offer their words, poems, and prayers on this theme throughout the Yamim Noraim-these Days of Awe, in exploring the continuum of Sovereign Self and Sacred Community.

I also spoke last year about how my own activist faith journey and my parent's deaths (and since then my father-in-law Dave and my mom's dear Brother my Uncle Max's deaths both weeks from their 95th birthdays), and the global challenges of our times, stripped away and rewired many of the prior theological and belief structures that had carried me to this point. We all continue to navigate profound personal and global alterations to how we live and understand life.

In my recent [Kol Shalom article](#), I laid out the theme we have developed for this year to embrace and continue to meet our times. Today, I am asking us to look at our own personal principles and values and how we live them. Tomorrow Lynn and Mordechai will share with us their perspective on the individual-communitarian balance, and on Yom Kippur I will offer you some of my emerging thoughts on our human journey.

I invite you to do your own reflection between now and Yom Kippur in each of the classic Jewish mystical dimensions of life: body, emotion, mind and spirit. I am asking us to do this sacred work during the ten days of Return and Reflection, and beyond, not only within the scope of three days of intense High Holy Day experience.

Our goal here is to live in the fullest possible relationship with reality as it is and aspire individually and communally to build the world as we long for it to be together. This is what compels us to do what we do here at Mishkan. We are a community by intention, not default or even for most of us convenient geography. We do not subscribe to a God who is a Supreme Person picking the “chosen people”. We advocate for being a “consciously choosing people” who, with those from all backgrounds and identities, choose each other for greater purposes, service and caring for each other in this world.

We arrive at these Days of Awe interacting with our Reconstructed take on traditional liturgy, the legacy of our ancestors’ experience, theology and sensibilities, updated with our own contemporary contributions a la Mishkan Shalom 35.0 (we held our first HH in 1988).

Yet, prayers and rituals that do not encourage and challenge us to these ends, are not particularly helpful, especially if we do not participate in the ongoing life of the community and any regular spiritual practice, beyond these peak Jewish year cycle times.

At the same time, I don’t want to let us off the hook, and rest or hide in our theisms, atheism, agnosticism, humanism, isn’t-ism, etc. Here is where a few of my teachers, living and gone, are helpful in my quest- and I hope for you too. (Rabbi Shawn gives a variety of examples: **Reb Zalman, last conversation, April 2014, when he was 89 and just before he died. Belief/Existence/Isness; Zohar- garment and essence; my granddaughters; Our bnai mitzvah; Neurotheology and Dr Andrew Newberg, “Why God**

won't go away"; [Brian Cox- little window of our existence- Ashrei Yoshvei-Dayenu!](#)

In exploring evolving modern understandings of “kingship” (or queenship) and “Sovereignty” in his 1937 classic “The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion”, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan writes:

“To speak of God as King is to employ a metaphor that would not readily suggest itself to any modern person. When we are using it in our ritual, we are speaking, as it were, in the thought-idiom of an earlier age...We are asked to affirm the Sovereignty of God precisely because the authority of the divine aspect of life has not been universally recognized or fully established...What is needed in modern life is a conception of God's sovereignty that can function as an aid to the regeneration of society by direct human agency without the reliance on an illusory hope of miraculous intervention...the establishment of a social order that combines the maximum of individual self-realization with the maximum of social cooperation.” (p. 106-110).

“At the dawn of the New Year, [we] are therefore encouraged not only to reevaluate [our] own personality and society...[we] are also impelled by the message of the day...to bring [our] ideals themselves before the bar of judgment, and to examine them as to their adequacy in light of whatever truth experience has revealed to [us].” (p147-8)

Kaplan was flipping the metaphors of the Yamim Noraim to still have meaning in the world he found himself, while still holding to a God-idea as a given- experiencing the God-idea as a verb: Energy, Force, Power, Life calling itself into Creation.

Since then, there has been an emergent field of self-development in relationship to the communal concerns of our time. [Self sovereignty, also known as self-ownership or individual sovereignty, is the concept of having supreme power or authority over one's own body, life, and mind. It is expressed as a moral or natural right of a person to have bodily integrity and be the exclusive controller of one's own choices and actions. Self sovereignty is related to spiritual self-awareness, personal accountability, purpose, and inner peace 45. It involves holding a non-](#)

judgmental space for oneself and working through the shadows in each transformation 5.

As we return again and again to these Kingly and Queenly metaphors- I hope you will struggle as I do, and feel liberated as I do, by keeping myself in the question of what they mean and call me to account for, not only what they meant for our predecessors, or even for each of us at an early stage of life. Kaplan often challenged his students at JTS or the original Recon flagship, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ, founded a century ago), to move beyond pediatric religion. We may not be swimming with or wrestling with our ancestors, we may be frozen at age 3 or 7 or 13, etc.

My work now: Ahavah and Lev Patuach on the altar- longing for others to become who they truly can be- where my soul purpose most comes to life! In each of the four-worlds of human beingness, mirroring Divine dimensions in Jewish mystical tradition, we ask ourselves:

- 1) What am I doing now that is enlivening, healthy and generative in this area?
- 2) What do I need to stop doing, do teshuvah for and/or do differently?
- 3) How will I be supported and held accountable for the change I aspire to?

- Spiritually:
- Intellectually/Cognitively:
- Feelings: Seat of Wisdom- Compassionate Heart:
- Physically:

Take a moment now, in the quiet of your own soul and reflect on your own "Sovereign Self". As you look at the Book of Your Own life- what chapter do you most want to write this coming year- and what do you need to work on in each world: Physical, Emotional, Cognitive and Spiritual/Intangible.

(SZ sings- w/m, Let Go, Rabbi Shawn Zevit, 2022)

There was a call, long ago.

Its echo still lingers in my soul.

I answered the call into the unknown

It said, "Get up and Go",

CH: Get up and go
Leave the home you've known.
Get up and go.

Once you were my father, brother, another.
Once you were all that I'd known
Then you became mother, sister, each other.
Now you're no-thing and the all of all

Let go.
Get Up, Show Up, and Go!
And keep letting go, let go, let go...

I ask you to join me on this day, and then get to work with your own four-world self-audit, so we can regather for Yom Kippur and set the course for our year.

I look forward to getting to work together to close that gap between the smaller, reactive, less manifested Selves we may be hiding out in and the greater Selves we aspire to, long for and may in fact hold ourselves to be!
Shanah Tovah u'mitukah!