

Your Jewish GPS
Kol Nidre 5770
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Elie Wiesel, in his book *Souls on Fire*, recounts the classic tale of a poor and pious Jew named Isaak son of Yechiel, who lived in Krakow. One night, Isaak had a strange dream that carried him to a distant city under a bridge which led to the King's palace. A voice spoke to him in his dream saying, "Isaak, this is Prague, and over there is the grand palace of kings. Now look and look well for under this bridge, at the spot where you are standing, there is a buried treasure waiting for you. It is yours. Take it." Isaak dismissed the dream as insignificant. But night after night the dream recurred until finally Isaak began the long and difficult journey to Prague, leaving his family behind. After a few weeks he arrived in the great city to claim his fortune. The bridge, however, was heavily guarded. The watchful eyes of the king's soldiers afforded little opportunity to retrieve the treasure. Every day the poor Jew spent hours pacing back and forth across the bridge waiting for his chance. After several weeks, the captain of the guard grabbed him and demanded to know why he kept returning to this bridge every single day. Isaak told him the story of his dream. When he finished, the soldier broke out into uncontrollable laughter at the man who had traveled so far from home. "Because of a silly dream, you old fool, you have merely worn out your shoes from walking! Who believes in such dreams" he roared. "Why if I were foolish enough to pay attention to dreams, I would have made a trip long ago to Krakow to dig for treasure buried under the stove in the house of a poor Jew named Isaak son of Yechiel. Can you imagine that a man of my position would go on such a wild goose chase!" With that, the old man bowed to the guard, turned his face to Krakow and made his long journey back home. When he arrived there, Isaak dug the ground beneath his very stove and to his astonishment discovered a great treasure. Of course, the treasure was always there in his own home. He just did not know how to find it. Only after Isaak found his true direction, was he able to enjoy life's treasures at home. If we follow our directions then we too can find riches in life.

I have always considered myself naturally gifted with an internal compass-able to plot out trips without a map and just know which way to turn. Inevitably, on every big trip we would take- we would get lost even with my keen sense of direction. Miss a turn or misread a sign and we would have to

pull off the road and much to my chagrin ask for directions. We always found our way back on track and often those miscues led to great finds.

This summer we purchased a GPS- Global Positioning Satellite system- to help guide us during a long car trip to the East Coast. The trip was great but somehow we still got lost. We took wrong turns that were not on the latest updates to the satellite or the computer screen. At times, we did not listen to the computer voice telling us to bear left off the highway instead of the right hand exit we had already taken. A few hiccups and wrong turns aside, the GPS worked wonderfully to lead us to all of our destinations.

So where is your navigation system leading you? As we begin Kol Nidre, marking the final point in the journey of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, The Ten Days of Repentance, we need to ask for directions. At some point this past year, we each took a spiritual or emotional wrong turn or were just plain lost. Tonight, we beat our chests in the Ashamnu confessional and admit "Tee'avnu"- We have turned astray and veered off course. We will chant the Avinu Malkeinu prayer and plead hachazireinu lefanekha- help us to return home. Kol Nidre is about finding our way back home. On a GPS, we can program in our home address and then at any moment, wherever we are- whether it is Connecticut or across the street- with one push of a button- the GPS will guide us straight home.

It seems so easy, just listen to the computer and follow it home. Tonight we will chant Ki Hinei Kachomer- "We are clay" and read Rabbi Hecht's adaptation of that prayer: "We are the rudder, You are the helmsman, Who steers us to the left or to the right. Direct us to the shore You choose, Do not let us idly spin even if we consistently resist Your grasp." The same concept is repeated in Ki Anu Amekha, "We are Your sheep and You are our Shepherd." We need a lot of help even with directions. With the GPS politely telling me to turn right at the next intersection, there are times when I think I know a better route and follow my hunch or I turn the wrong direction by mistake. At this point, does the GPS sound an alarm? When I am veering off-course, does the computer yell at me, call me names or punish me? No, the GPS calmly states "recalculating." Without any hint of anger or disappointment, it suggests a new route to get me back on course and home. And even if I continue on my wrong trajectory, the GPS continues to gently advise "recalculating" providing yet another path to get back on track.

The High Holidays are our Jewish GPS system. At the beginning of these days we heard 100 shofar blasts. And today, we repeat Kol Nidre three times and recite the confessional prayer five times over the course of the next 25 hours. These are like the GPS' recalculating message, each giving us an opportunity to return to the proper path. Teshuvah, repentance, means to turn implying that one must redirect or turn in the correct direction away from any mistakes or misdeeds. The GPS is our tool for teshuvah today.

The journey is important but with a GPS the goal is reaching the final destination, home. This is also true for us- as the story of Isaak teaches- there are great riches to be found at home we just have to know where to look. This year, we should program three home addresses into our GPS to guide us as we explore for the year. They are Israel, B'nai Jeshurun and our own homes consisting of our family and ourselves.

There is so much excitement in Israel, as the 100th anniversary of Tel Aviv is concluding this fall and countries throughout the world have sent special presents and delegations to the land. Technology and innovations continue to boom in Israel- most of our computer's insides were designed there. And archaeologists have found many artifacts dating back between two thousand and three thousand years to the times of King David and the Maccabees further proving our rich history and settlement on our Promised Land.

This has also been a very tough year for Israel. After 8 years of continual rocket strikes in Southern Israel, Israel launched its Operation Cast Lead mission to neutralize the terrorist rocket launchers and bring safety to the people of Sderot, Ashkelon and all those in the rockets' reach. We still hold out hope for the return of the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit in captivity for more than three years. And our news is filled with vicious anti-Israel, anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial messages from Europe and Iran including Sweden's claim of a Blood Libel. The most chilling and worrisome is the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program and a possible bomb to destroy the entire country of Eretz Yisrael.

We all have to plug Israel into our GPS as a home address. Whether that means physically taking a trip to Israel this year, and there is no better way to energize your soul and find direction than with a trip to the Holy Land; making a commitment to supporting Israel at our Israel Bonds dinner or through so many other organizations; or by staying informed and being a vigilant advocate for Israel among your friends, colleagues and the media.

We gathered on Public Square on a cold winter's day this January in support of Israel and witnessed with our own eyes those who raise their voices against Israel. Israel needs us now. And we have to keep that spirit of Israel support that we shared in Public Square with us throughout the year.

The second home to program into your Jewish GPS system is our shul community. We hope that the community at B'nai Jeshurun is your family's second home. Celebrating Shabbat, marking a lifecycle, studying Torah, cooking a meal for a congregant in need, Mom and me classes, or joining in prayer, B'nai Jeshurun is the place for all these and more. We are actively forming chavurot- smaller, more intimate groups of 10 couples, families or individuals to meet regularly and create community within the larger synagogue framework. Social scientists have long been discussing the benefits of belonging to communities. In a recent issue of the New York Times magazine, the cover story advises that people who associate with friendly, happy and healthy people are much more likely to share in those same feelings. Our community is actively engaged in Jewish life, in volunteerism, in learning, in prayer and connecting with Israel. Becoming more involved and active in the synagogue community will make you more connected. The shul has offerings for every age and every interest so please join us at every opportunity. We want you to be a part of us so help make us your second home.

The final GPS destination is your own home, your family and yourself. The goal for every house is peace and harmony- shalom bayit. In fact, the rabbis consider this among the highest priorities and give it the power to override many other laws. The Rabbis knew how important creating a warm, loving, Jewishly-involved and Israel-conscious home was to building a Jewish family. A Jewish home is not judged alone by having mezuzot on the doorposts, a separate dairy and meat side to the kitchen or Jewish books on the shelves. While these are central to instilling Jewish values and teaching to a family, a Jewish home must also be warm, open and loving.

Finally, our souls are the destination for the wandering Jew in all of us. We spend the year searching for answers and strength. When we get off course and we hear our soul warn us with the words "recalculating," we should be mindful and steer back on track. Dorothy left the wonderful world of Oz with her repeated declaration, "There is no place like home." And she returned to Kansas filled with vigor.

I will share with you a story I have told before about the beauty we can find at home. Yankel was in need of finding a new home for he found no love, warmth or honesty in his village and he thought his job was worthless and unfulfilling. Yankel was given the directions to Paradise and began his journey but stopped for the night. Leaving his shoes on the road to point the proper direction to Paradise, someone moved his shoes and turned them to face back to his home village. The next morning, he rose with a start jumped into his shoes and began to travel to what he thought was Paradise but was actually back home. When Yankel arrived at the village and then his home, he thought things looked vaguely familiar but was struck at how beautiful, peaceful and kind this village was- so different than his own. He was amazed that everyone knew his name and that a woman who looked like his wife had made dinner for him. It was the most delicious dinner ever. He slept in the most comfortable bed. And when Yankel woke up, the woman who looked like his wife handed him his tools and sent him off to work. He figured there was even work to be done in Paradise. Everyone was so pleasant, work was actually enjoyable. Yankel lived the rest of days in Paradise never realizing that it was really the same home.

May this be a year of homecomings for us. May the recalculations of the season inspire us to seek forgiveness and find our way back home to our Paradise. And may we all be sealed in the book of life for year of good health, peace, love and the warmth of our three homes- Israel, B'nai Jeshurun and our family. G'mar Tov.