

Of Lambs and Men – Yom Kippur 5769
Rabbi Zoë Klein

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Most of us know these words by heart,
When I recite them at a funeral
Mourners close their eyes and recite them with me...
The 23rd psalm,
One of the hundred and fifty *tehillim*,
Psalms of David...

I know there are some who hear it and think
It is from Christian liturgy,
Maybe from the New Testament,
But no, it's one of ours...A Hebrew original...

Mizmor l' David, Adonai Roi, lo echsar...

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

To me it is one of the most exquisite
Of all our holy texts,
I've said it at many graves,
I've recited it when I've been alone and afraid,
I've sung it as a lullaby to sleepy little heads.

I'd like for us
On this holiest of nights
To enter into this familiar prayer together,
In new and unfamiliar ways...
To stretch out upon the green pastures,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Staring up at the twinkling stars...
Reflecting on what is good in our lives...
To drink deep from the pure waters,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

and to understand the heart of its message
which is healing,
wholeness,
oneness,
and love.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.

In the psalm,
We are sheep,
We meander through gardens,
Satiated and quenched,
We are protected.
The shepherd is like a good parent,
A mother or a father...
Who makes certain
We are clothed, that we are fed,
Bathed, content.
We are only sheep,
So we have no claws or sharp teeth.
We aren't even so fast...
We are vulnerable,
And we are outside,
In the pasture,
By the still pool,
Even though we are exposed, we are protected...
Because we have a shepherd, a parent...

Speaker of the California Assembly
Karen Bass once told me
That when she worked with foster children,
And she would ask them,
“What is it you want most?”
They would say,
“I want someone to watch me if I'm in a school play,
I'd like someone to help me with my homework,
I want someone to help me pick out clothes for the year,”
And she said it made her sad,
Because what they really wanted to say
But didn't know the word,
Was “parent.”

Throughout our lives,
Many of us
Continue to look for that parent,
Even as adults,
Sometimes people are fortunate enough
To have the constant love and acceptance of a parent,
Sometimes we try to find it inside ourselves,

Sometimes we hope to find favor in other's eyes...
Sometimes we find it in God,
The Shepherd...

The rabbis say that this particular psalm was written
By David when he was hiding from King Saul.
King Saul was so jealous of the young shepherd David,
Who had already proven himself by felling the giant Goliath
With his little slingshot.

“Who is that little punk, trying to upstage me, the King!”
David knows that King Saul wants to kill him,
So he hides in a cave, deep in the forest...¹

And King Saul comes closer...

All the Temple priests were saying that David is the one,
That he is blessed,
This angered King Saul so that he had all the priests killed,
And David heard this and ran deeper into the forest,
And while he was hiding,
And while Saul was circling,
He composed this psalm...
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...

In other words,
The rabbis want us to understand
That this psalm was composed by one who
Was being pursued,
Who was afraid for his life...

The first part of the short psalm,
The part which you see on the screens,
Is referred to by scholars at the ‘sheep metaphor.’

David himself had been a shepherd,
When David has first approached King Saul
To ask for permission to fight Goliath,
David had said,
“Your servant used to keep his father's sheep,
And when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb
Out of the flock,
I went out after it and struck it,

¹ And while he is there, it is written in the Book of Samuel, “Everyone who was in straits and everyone who was in debt and everyone who was desperate joined him, and he became their leader...” Everyone who was desperate, all who were pursued, afraid, in straits, hide with him, over four hundred people...

And delivered the lamb from its mouth.”

The sheep metaphor...
In the psalm it seems safe outside,
Because of the shepherd,
The *bears* and *lions*
that would eat us
are subdued...

From an early age, though,
We learn that
it is not always safe out there...
In the wilderness glisten the teeth
Of *bear markets*, and *lyn' eyes*.

I grew up in a place of green pastures,
Beautiful,
Magical,
A pond,
The waters not exactly still,
But bubbled over stones...
I went to preschool
My first venture into the outside world,
And I remember very little from preschool
Except that I was a princess in a Halloween parade,
And that every day at naptime
the teacher would say put your heads down on your mat
or I'll chop it off.
And I remember, as if it were yesterday,
One boy, who knew it was only a joke,
Kept popping up his head and laughing,
And nothing ever happened to him of course,
But that didn't convince me,
-- I was always a believer --
And I spent every naptime
With my hands holding down my head
Liked a terrified detainee,
Trembling and wildy awake.

I didn't tell my parents,
Who knows why,
I could have, should have,
But the mind of a child
Is like the mind of a lamb...
My family moved,
We switched schools,

I became a happy child again...
It wasn't much, really,
But there are people
For whom it goes on and on,
Every day is full of trembling...
And the fear is not based on a misunderstanding
Of a bad joke, but rather, full understanding
Of very real danger...

The very ones who are supposed to shepherd them,
Torture them daily...

Moses, like David, was a shepherd.
One midrash tells that he was
tending his father-in-law's sheep
when one of the lamb strayed.
Moses left the flock to search for it.
Finally he found the lamb by a stream, drinking.
Moses said, "I didn't know you were so thirsty,
You must be so weary..."
And he placed the lamb over his shoulders
And carried him all the way back.
According to the legend, a heavenly voice then said,
"Because you had compassion in leading the flock of a man,
You will certainly shepherd My flock Israel..."

At some point,
We little lambs wander out of the sheepfold,
And are confronted...
Bears, lions, bullies,
We get lost,
We fall in with a tough crowd,
We are subject to bad influences,
We want to fit in,
We are emotional hurt,
We are excluded from a group,
We might try to do everything right,
Try to please everyone,
But like driving,
Your safety is not only dependant
on how well you drive,
But on the *other* drivers on the road.
The other kids in the playground...
The competitive coworker who would like nothing more
Than to see you fail...

He leads me beside still waters,
That's what we want our leaders to do,
To lead us, lovingly,
To a place that is tranquil, secure...
But the system by which we elect our leaders
Weeds out the mild and the humane,
You have to be made of iron as well as flesh,
Be able to throw an insult as skillfully
As you can propose an agenda,
You have to be a little malicious,
In order to win.

<p>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.</p>

It's a culture of bullying,
We live in a culture that bullies...
From bottom to top...
From lunch money on the playground
To petroleum in the world arena...

Once kids worried about shoving in the hallway,
Now it's online death threats...
The average child today sees 16,000 murders
on television by the age of 18...
Every day approximately 160,000 students
Stay home from school because of bullying.
30 percent of youth in America talk about being bullied...
75% of kids who are gay or perceived to be gay are bullied.
60 percent of boys who were bullied in middle school
have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24,
1 in 4 elementary school bullies have a criminal record
by the time they are 30...
Victims of bullying greater risk of dropping out,
lower grades,
bringing a weapon to class,
depression, anxiety disorders,
Distress...
Abuse, threats, jibes,
Cruel comments,
belittling, teasing,
Spirit crushed,

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Confidence drained,
Punches, kicks,
Laughing...
Schoolwork suffers, health suffers...
And the internet is a bully's paradise...
Where mean texts, emails, ims are unsupervised,
Where one can easily photoshop and post destructive pictures
On blogs or web sites,
Where anyone with mediocre skills
Can use someone else's user name to spread rumors or lies,
Can create an internet pile-on
Against their victim...

Trouble is,
People believe what they see in print.

May this past year a mother was charged with criminal conspiracy
For opening a My Space page and pretending to be a 16 year old boy...
Endearing the make-believe boy to a fourteen year old girl
Who the mother wanted to teach a lesson to
for allegedly bullying her own daughter...
then one day, posing as this boy she sent a message to the girl:
"You are a bad person and everybody hates you.
The world would be a better place without you."
The girl went into her closet and killed herself.

In some ways, bullying gets worse when we get older...
Children can go to their parents...
Teenagers have less, maybe go to a guidance counselor,
Adults...

I learned once of someone who hated her coworker,
So he went home, opened 20 gmail accounts
In 20 different names,
And over the course of a week sent complaints about him
From each of them to management until he got fired.

Survival of the fittest society...
Reality television...

From losing your lunch money
To do what you're told
Or say goodbye to your job,

In many ways it gets worse as we get older...
Person who opened twenty email accounts
And sent complaints about a coworker,
As children we can tell an adult,
As teenagers it becomes harder,
As adults,
Where does one go?
And if you are a people who has been targeted,
The Darfurians in Sudan,
Gays in Iran,
And who knows more than us...
Georgia, Israel

Psalms 49:10: Like sheep man descends to his grave, death leads them and strikes them
day after day...

Lambs to the slaughter,
Bullied so often in our history...
One of the ways it is said to best thwart a bully is to use humor...
To show that you are not easily rattled...
And in many ways,
Jews survived that way,
Endearing themselves to the larger community
By making them laugh...
"The Holy One said: An ox is pursued by a lion, a bull by a leopard, a goat by a
wolf. Offer Me one of the pursued, not the pursuers." (Midrash Leviticus Rabbah
27)
And now we have Israel,
Surrounded by enemies,
And a couple fragile alliances,
And we are so uncomfortable
With the idea,
Maybe we are the bully at times...

Our history should teach us more than ever...
What have we learned?
Take care of the widow, the orphan, the poor,
Because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
Have we learned it?
Never again,
Have we learned it all the way down...

If you've ever raised your hand against someone,
Raised your voice with malicious intent,
You haven't learned it all the way down...
It never leaves us, if we survive it,
Stays a part of us for our lives...

<p>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.</p>

The rabbis point out with this verse,
That the rod is used for striking recalcitrant animals,
And the staff is used for leaning upon.
The rod is atonement, the staff is love.
RADAK, a 13th century rabbi, said:
“Sometimes God directs us gently and lovingly; other times He guides steadfastly;
at still other times His hand may deal what seems to be a harsh blow. The degree
to which we can see each level as a comfort is the measure of how deeply we
comprehend the beauty and love of His ways.”
The rod represents repentance, discipline and justice,
And the staff represents the Torah,
Both of them are guides.
What we cannot learn from the Torah
about meaning and commitment in our lives,
sadly, we must glean from our suffering.
Law, anti-bully programming,
There are many programs now,
Anti-bullying...
Kindness is Contagious campaign.
Taking a pledge seems to help...
Taking a pledge.
The lamb is standing up. We've established law...
Bullying programs (ADL)
Kids taking a pledge
Laws against torture, how people are treated...
Your rod and your staff...
How do you exercise power...
Ask someone...
Ask a child,
Ask your spouse,
How do you feel when I talk to you this way?
And listen.

The people who you bullied,
So many years ago,
Call them
And apologize.
Protect each other,
Take a pledge.
Help others,
Santee, mentorships and internships,
And if we do this...

Something has happened in the psalm...
There are two surprises already...
Maybe you've noticed.

Amos Chacham says the first part is called the sheep metaphor...
But suddenly we have a soul.
He restores my soul...
The sudden appearance of the soul is surprising.
We were sheep.
The word soul is distinctly used for human beings...
Sometimes we are surprised by our own soul,
By our own strength,
Sometimes we are surprised by the soul of another person.

The second surprise is that
God has become You, a shift to second person...
You are with me.

<p>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.</p>
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And all at once,
It seems,
We are no longer sheep,
We are no longer grazing in the pasture...
The shepherd is no longer leading us...
But serving us,
Preparing a table for me...for you...
We are sitting at a table...
Biblical scholars say

That we have moved from the sheep metaphor
To the banquet metaphor...

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You have anointed my head with oil.

And we realize, as the oil spilled down over our face,
Our neck,
That something amazing is happening.
Saul may be lurking outside the cave...
Our bruises may still be raw,
But the spark that has always been inside,
Self-worth which had been nearly extinguished,
The pleasure of living
Which had been nearly taken all away,
It returns, our soul, restored,
Humanity restored...
We are deserving of beauty, of love, of goodness. Of mercy.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You have anointed my head with oil. My cup overflows.

No longer drinking from the still water,
Rather, from a cup,
Which overflows,
I have everything I need...

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You have anointed my head with oil. My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

In fact, in the psalm, we are ascending...
For in the beginning we were being led,
We were being guided in paths...
And now, goodness and mercy are *following* me...
We are the leaders...
We are the shepherds...
How do we lead?
How do you lead?
How do you lead your life?
How do you lead your family?
How do you lead your office?
To be a shepherd is to care...
To seek the lost lamb...
To protect from the lions and wolves...

We started outside...
And this Yom Kippur, we come in.
Into the house.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You have anointed my head with oil. My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

We belong.
From the pasture to the temple...

When Jacob is lying on his death bed,
And he musters his last strength to bless his grandsons,
He says, "God who has been my Shepherd
from my birth to this day...
Bless the lads..."

