



#StaySafeWithAlyth



## Zoom Shacharit – Rosh Chodesh Special

Thursday 14 January 2021 / 1 Shevat 5781

### Study Passage – Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

Kafka once wrote in his journal: ‘You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world. That is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature. But perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.’

The ‘you’ that Kafka is addressing might be himself, or it might be each of us. But it could also be – and here’s the stunner – the God of Exodus. It accords with God’s nature, too, to hold back from the sufferings of the world something God is quite free to do, and apparently does rather well, withdrawing into the completeness of remove until wrenched out of it by receiving suffering humanity’s revelation, which comes in the form of wails.

Wails come straight from a soul stripped down to the bone, and they are always a revelation. To hear someone’s wails is to see a self revealed in ways usually kept hidden, driven by extremes to dropping poses and speech. Wailing draws the hearer into an intimate space, whether the hearer wants to be there or not – and the God of this passage would appear not to have wanted to be there, and we can all sympathize with the desire to be anywhere else. But then God is there, summoned out of remoteness by revelation. Revelation is generally presented as proceeding from God to man. Here the revelation travels in the opposite direction. The God of Exodus is not so unlimitedly free after all, but bound by moral obligations, even if it takes an unwelcome revelation to be reminded.

It is in the intimate spaces that the unwelcome and necessary revelations come, and we withdraw from intimate spaces at our peril.

## Torah Reading – Genesis 1:14-19

<sup>14</sup> God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times – the days and the years; <sup>15</sup> and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.' And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. <sup>17</sup> And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, <sup>18</sup> to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. (JPS Translation)

יֵד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם  
לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת  
וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם: טו וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת  
בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:  
טז וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים  
אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגְּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־  
הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת  
הַכּוֹכָבִים: יז וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: יח וְלַמָּשָׁל בֵּין  
וּבַלַּיְלָה וְלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ  
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: יט וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר  
יוֹם רְבִיעִי: