

## Silent Language

Hello. My name is Josh Ostroff and I am in my 16<sup>th</sup> year at Kahal B'raira, I think. I am very grateful for the time and presence we are sharing together at Kol Nidre. I also want to welcome everyone tonight, whether you have been here longer than 16 years, or if tonight is your first time at KB,

I wish for each of us a day of atonement in which we can contemplate and focus; for us each to remember, and look forward; to look inward and to see out; to find some resolution or to let some things be. To reflect and resolve; to forgive ourselves, to ground ourselves and to free our selves.

Tonight I want to reflect on the subject of silence. I think – well, actually, I have told myself that I am “all talk.” Well, not all talk, there's some action, but still a lot of talk. Yom Kippur can be a time to let words rest

Now of all the senses, among those I treasure most is my sense of irony. And the irony of talking about silence is not lost on me, so I thank you for your indulgence.

Just as rest is essential to rhythm, quiet is the balm of a turbulent life. Not just stressed and busy people, but every person needs time to stretch and grow those non-verbal muscles. We can convey and receive a great deal by non-verbal communication. Take a moment and look into the eyes of someone near you. There is a lot to be learned without words.

Like many others, this community is be nourished by quiet intervals when we may reap a gentle harvest of our time and place together. And every individual and every relationship needs time to flow unfreighted with conversation, email, text, instant messaging, and all the other threads we use to interact. It is good to trust one another enough to let pools of quiet envelope us, and to trust that the bonds between us are deeper than the spoken or written words that pass from you to me, or me to you.

Silent moments are seldom enough: we need long troughs between the waves of words that wash over us and assume the forms of our feelings and thoughts. Words are

not what we feel – they are not what we say or what we do. They are interchangeable articles of clothing on our lives. They convey ideas and they convey us, but they are not who we are.

Who are we, right now?

We are our deeds; we were whatever actions we took in the past, and we will be the things we do in the years to come.

We are our families; we were our ancestors and all they endured and achieved, and we will become our progeny and their lives yet to be lived, and their history yet to be.

We are our feelings; we were the love and anger and attraction and habits of yesterday stretching back through time. We will live in tomorrow's frowns and smiles.

We are our world, in its order and chaos and discoveries and hidden knowledge. We are the storms and the tides and the forests and fields and mountains, and the rivers that connect the land to the oceans. We are the atmosphere and near space, and we are the far cosmos at the dawn of time as we now strive to see and understand it.

And we are a constellation of worlds within us, of a scale of life both vast and small.

We are strands of interconnected knowledge. We are curves, algorithms, systems, structures. We are consciousness.

We are our bodies. We are able in some ways, disabled in others; we hurt and we heal; we age, we grow and shrink and change shape.

We are cultures and communities and causes and constitutions. We interpret and we create. We are art, music, dance, sculpture, letters, cinema, architecture.

We are solitary, yet we are one. We are independent and interdependent. We are the authors of our own dreams and we are the objects of the dreams of others.

We are these things and more – yet we are not the words I speak to describe them.

For me, there's something sharp and fragrant about words. They sting and they tempt me. They spill out of my head and wrap around all my senses, forming thoughts and giving structure to my sentiments. I sometimes don't know what comes first – my ideas or the words that convey them. As I think about the year past, my good deeds and misdeeds, my triumphs and tantrums, it is verbal language that coats my thoughts and coaxes me into the year to come. But that is not enough.

At the core of what I seek to achieve and that I share with you tonight --- silence to let the world grow a little while we sit back and contemplate. Let our words not make new footprints on the page; let us go there ourselves.

Yom Kippur is a time to strip away the words we use to explain our lives. Whatever the joy and pride, or hurt and shame, the goals and obstacles and forces that have pulled and pushed us in the year past, let us suspend the sentences we speak and think to describe them; let us pause the processing of words we use to understand them. Then, in the still white space that comes to the surface, we can use our latent visual, tactile, emotional and experiential vocabulary to interpret our actions and to transmit our ideals into resolve. Instead of making a to-do list, let us become a to-be list.

Tonight's gathering, like many others, has great human potential. In millennia past and for the rest of our future, people have and will come together to commemorate, and to exercise some unity of purpose. We come together tonight and tomorrow to mark a day when we mean to look frankly at our selves. Let us go forward with quiet and dignity, and reflect with an appreciation of silence and the opportunities it can nurture within us.

###