

The Search Party
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A few weeks ago, some of you may have heard on NPR an intriguing news story from Iceland. Here it is:

On a Saturday this past August, a woman who was described as "Asian, about 160cm, in dark clothing and speaks English well" was declared missing somewhere in the vicinity of Eldgjá, in south Iceland. The search went on throughout the weekend, with no sign of the woman. On Monday morning, she was reported found - and had no idea she was missing in the first place.

This was apparently the result of a misunderstanding regarding her appearance. While it was initially reported that she had stepped off of a tour bus at Eldgjá and never returned, in fact she changed clothing before getting back on the bus. When the description of the "missing" woman was circulated, apparently the lady who changed her outfit didn't recognize the description of herself. So she joined the search party.

About 50 people searched the terrain by vehicles and on foot. The coast guard was even readying a helicopter to help. But the search was called off at about 3 a.m., when it became clear the missing woman was, in fact, accounted for and searching for herself.

What a great story for Yom Kippur! I'd like to think that all of us here are "accounted for and searching for ourselves." We're one big search party, sometimes more and sometimes a little less clear about what exactly it is that we're looking for.

Maybe we've come here seeking support and comfort, after a difficult year. Maybe we're in search of connection to Jewish community, or to memories from our past. Maybe something more amorphous draws us, a sense that there's something out there to be found on this day. Ultimately, though, here we are, searching for ourselves.

Leonard Fein has said that Judaism comes not so much to give answers, but to ask questions. And the most fundamental Jewish question is the first one we read in the Torah, God's question to Adam and Eve after they have eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and then hide themselves. God asks, *Ayeka?* Where are you? And the question isn't, "Which tree are you hiding behind?" It's - "You have choice now, you're grown up. Why are you hiding? When are you going to show up? *Ayeka?*"

Ayeka? Where am I? Have I have gone missing in some part of my life - somewhere that I'm just not showing up? Like the tourist in Iceland, am I furiously searching for someone else, waiting for them to show up, when it's me that's gone missing all along? Have I gotten so confused that I don't recognize myself, don't even realize that I've gone missing?

Ayecka – where are you?

The Biblical answer to that question is “*Hineni.*” Here I am. Present and accounted for. Ready for whatever is next. Ready for whatever God, Reality, my own life, has in store for me. *Hineni.*

This next 24 hours gives us the space for an exploratory mission on behalf of ourselves. Where are we? What parts of ourselves have gone missing? Which parts of ourselves do we not even recognize? Have we strayed far from where we’d like to be, or are we just a few steps off the bus? Yom Kippur is an invitation to do a bit of personal reconnaissance.

And it is comforting to know that - just like the "missing" woman on the bus - we're not doing this alone. While your search is an individual one, there's a whole search party here, accompanying you. Not just those of us in this room, but Jewish communities around the world, all engaged in this search. So I invite you to make use of this time, whether here at shul or at home or on a walk in the woods tomorrow afternoon. Take a look for any missing pieces of yourself; ask yourself if you’re showing up in your life in the ways that you want. Ask yourself: *Ayecka?* Where am I? Where do I need to be?

And may all of us, at the end of the day tomorrow, be happily back on the bus, fully accounted for, ready to continue our journey into this new year.