

# MALCHUT/SHEKHINAH - DIVINITY

## HOW DO I EXPERIENCE THE DIVINE PRESENCE?

### CHECK-IN

Share your name and response to the question, when you hear the word “God,” what image or idea springs to mind?

### OUR BRIT (COVENANT)

- ❖ Everybody’s story is sacred: we commit to respectful communication.
- ❖ Listening is important for understanding: we commit to active and thoughtful listening.
- ❖ Our hearts are open when we feel safe: we commit to confidentiality.
- ❖ We will not try to fix, explain, or judge one another.
- ❖ We will allow for silences within the discussion so that everyone has the space to speak.
- ❖ As our Omer Groups are under the umbrella of Isaiah Together and the broader umbrella of Temple Isaiah, we will keep the values of each front and center.

### COUNTING OF THE OMER

*Hineini* – I am ready to fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֵּנוּ  
עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu al sfirat haOmer.*

Praised be You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, instilling within us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to count the Omer.

Today is the \_\_\_\_\_ day, which is \_\_\_\_\_ weeks and \_\_\_\_\_ days of the Omer.

May I be open and attentive to divinity in my life.

## WHAT IS MALCHUT/SHEKHINAH?

Translated literally, *malchut* means sovereignty. This aspect of God as ruler pairs with *Shekhinah*, which is the In-Dwelling Presence. One way to think about this is to understand *malchut* as describing the majestic, transcendent aspect of God, while *Shekhinah* describes the more immanent, intimate sense of God's presence. By pairing both aspects, we recognize that the idea that is "God" can be experienced in different ways and expressed using diverse language. As we attune ourselves to the sacred, we become sensitive to the language we use to describe what we experience as sacred. In this final week of counting the Omer, we will ask: where do I experience divinity, and how can I become more aware of it in my everyday life?

"If two sit and discuss words of Torah, the presence of the *Shekhinah* is with them." – Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:2

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) Why do you think the rabbis imagined God's presence resting with a pair of students studying Torah? Can you relate to this idea?
- (b) What are the "holy" moments in your own life? What does that tell you about the divine presence?
- (c) How might you foster more moments of holiness in your life?

## WISDOM FROM OUR TRADITION:

The following two texts present God in ways that contrast the distance and power of *malchut* and the immanence of *shekhinah*. In the first, we find God addressing Job's impudence at seeking to understand God's majestic power:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Speak if you have understanding.  
Do you know who fixed its dimensions or who measured it with a line?  
Onto what were its bases sunk? Who set its cornerstone  
When the morning stars sang together and all the divine beings shouted for joy?  
Who closed the sea behind doors when it gushed forth out of the womb,  
When I clothed it in clouds, swaddled it in dense clouds,  
When I made breakers my limit for it, And set up its bar and doors,  
And said, "You may come so far and no farther; here your surging waves will stop"? –  
Job 38:4-11

*Written by Rabbi Lydia Medwin, Rabbi Jill Perlman, Matthew Emmer, Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, and Nicole Berne.*

By contrast, in the following text, God's presence is experienced on a personal rather than cosmic scale:

There he [Elijah] went into a cave, and there he spent the night. Then the word of Adonai came to him. God said to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I am moved by zeal for Adonai, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life."

"Come out," God called, "and stand on the mountain before Adonai." And lo, Adonai passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of Adonai; but Adonai was not in the wind. After the wind—an earthquake; but Adonai was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake—fire; but Adonai was not in the fire. And after the fire—a soft murmuring sound [or: a "still, small voice."]. – I Kings 19:9-12

---

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) How is Job told to understand God? Where does Elijah find God?
- (b) Which seems more familiar to you?
- (c) Have you had an experience of God or the sacred that was like the majestic vision in Job? Have you experienced divinity as like the still, small voice heard by Elijah?

#### A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE DIVINE OR ASPIRATIONAL TRANSCENDENCE:

Syd Lieberman's poem "A Short Amidah" expresses one understanding of communicating with an immanent divinity:

They say we're supposed to be in a palace.  
So we bow and take certain steps  
as the prescribed supplication drips  
from our lips.  
But do we really know  
of castles and kings?  
My kitchen faucet constantly leaks  
and the kids' faces  
usually need cleaning.  
If a door opened to a real palace,  
I'd probably forget  
and carry in a load of groceries.

*Written by Rabbi Lydia Medwin, Rabbi Jill Perlman, Matthew Emmer, Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, and Nicole Berne.*

No, the door we stand in front of  
when the Amidah begins is silence.  
And when we open it  
and step through,  
we arrive in our hearts.  
Mine's not a fancy place,  
no jewels, no throne,  
certainly not fit for a king.  
But in that small chamber,  
for just a few moments on Sabbath,  
God and I can roll up our sleeves,  
put some schnapps out on the table,  
sit down together, and finally talk.  
That's palace enough for me.

Mary Oliver's poem "Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End?" captures the distance between human experience and a more remote holiness.

There are things you can't reach. But  
you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,  
out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing  
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around  
as though with your arms open.

And thinking: maybe something will come, some  
shining coil of wind,  
or a few leaves from any old tree—  
they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.  
Everything in the world  
comes.

*Written by Rabbi Lydia Medwin, Rabbi Jill Perlman, Matthew Emmer, Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, and Nicole Berne.*

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake.  
Like goldfinches, little dolls of gold  
fluttering around the corner of the sky

of God, the blue air.<sup>1</sup>

---

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) Both poems use the word “God.” Are the same qualities applied to “God” in both poems? How do you respond to each poem’s portrayal of God? Does God feel more “divine” in one or the other?
- (b) Reflect on your reaction to the use of “God” in the biblical texts and in the two poems. How does the term “God” make you feel?
- (c) What kind of a relationship with God does each poem describe? Is this the kind of relationship you have or aspire to have with God?
- (d) In what circumstances does either depiction “work”? When does it not “work”?

#### A FINAL WORD:

After this journey through the weeks from Passover to Shavuot, studying the *sephirot* has brought us to this moment. Shavuot serves as the culmination of this journey, a memorial of the moment we encountered God at Sinai.

Looking back at the previous weeks, where was God in your understanding of the journey of study you’ve experienced?

What questions, challenges and growth have you seen within yourself? Where are you right now on your journey through the Omer – and beyond?

---

<sup>1</sup> “Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End?” Mary Oliver, *Why I Wake Early* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 8-9.