

## On Translation – Yom Kippur Day 5779

In the sermon last night [*Love and Its Opposite*], I mentioned a group of modern learned Jews creating a siddur who wrestled with the traditional model of blessing and curse in the Shema, but reconciled their rejection of that model by reinterpreting it. I also observed that in our ancient sacred texts the “heart” is not, as *we* use it, the seat of emotion, but rather is associated with wisdom and consciousness.

There are so many ways we need to re-understand our sacred texts. Two examples: First, the primacy of the individual in our society and the possibility that a person can live independently of their parentage and ancestors. In our ancient texts family is destiny. Now you can move to Seattle, change your name and live life as if you had no family at all.

Second: security and expectations. How much more than our ancestors do we have a sense of understanding of the world and feel control of what will happen next! We expect childbirth will be safe, understand clearly what causes the lightning and earthquakes, do not expect to be maimed for life from a broken limb or die from an infection, etc.

The words of our tradition have spoken to very different social arrangements and human experiences. From the beginning this required creative translation and re-interpretation. That is still the case. There is a strong tendency to read some of this material now and say “that’s not working for me.” Indeed, it is not working for us, we are supposed to be working for it. It is our job, our obligation, to make it ours and pass it on to the next generation.

Here’s a suggestion. You’ve probably had a variety of dreams with moments and images that were baffling or disturbing and you might mull those over for years and not come up with an answer, but you can’t reject it as not being yours because you dreamt it. So I suggest you take this material as part of the *Jewish spiritual unconscious* that, in all its strangeness and provocation offers us an opportunity to learn something about the world and about ourselves.