

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg State University Digital Commons

Performances & Keynotes

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg Collection

March 2023

Malchuyot

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/cm_g_performances

Recommended Citation

Mirriam-Goldberg, Caryn, "Malchuyot" (2023). *Performances & Keynotes*. 13.
https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/cm_g_performances/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg Collection at Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performances & Keynotes by an authorized administrator of Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact lfthompson@pittstate.edu.

Malchuyot

1. King of Kings, or the Fire That Makes the Circle

In traditional scripture about Malchuyot, we revisit God's sovereignty in the metaphor of king of kings, which portrays God as made in our image, or at least in our medieval, male, hierarchal image. I turn to another metaphor: God as the fire we circle around. You can't stand in the center of the fire and understand fully what the fire is without causing yourself great harm. But you can stand beside it, feel the warmth, see the light, witness the nature of fire: powerful, ever-changing, a wisp of the smallest flame or a blazing roar.

Whether we talk of the king of kings or the fire, we draw on metaphor. "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant," Emily Dickinson writes of both poetry and the holy. We cozy up to what's beyond our grasp, largely invisible, diverse and infinite by telling this truth slant, which in Judaism manifests in many names for God: Lord, Holy One, Hashem, Adonai, El, Avinu, Yaway, Shekinah, Elokim, Creator of the Universe, I-am-that-I-am. God is "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower" as Dylan Thomas writes: the sudden wind that shakes the cedar, the red sky backlighting my husband in the field, the rain in the middle of the night, the lightning strike from cloud in the diagonal distance to pond before us, the laughter on the phone that snaps me out of my mind's trap, the rolling surface of ocean holding up the boat, the sky, the unfolding weather. God is the fire in the breath within and around us.

Whoever or whatever God is -- and even whether we believe in God, any variations of the holy one, or not -- this fire makes a circle of us, right now, right here.

2. Who's in Charge?

We Jews excel at making things happen. If we're going to be control freaks, we're going to be effective control freaks, which makes it harder to surrender, and see how the curtain between us and the actual world is often our thoughts and our thinking. I confess to be a control freak (at least in my crunchy exterior), yet I also know, increasingly as I get older, how little control I have, how even my best thinking, at its more expansive, only catches a microscopic sliver of good and bad, and to quote Sufi poem Rumi, what lies in the field beyond good and bad.

"Life has more imagination than we do," my friend Shelley told me 15 years ago when she and her then-partner, two very white women in central Vermont and their adopted one-year-old African-American daughter, came home to a voice on their answering machine that asked, "Do you want the brother?" Their daughter's biological parents had another baby. While Shelley's partner balked, saying, "We're too old, too tired, and we don't know anything about boys," Shelley just took her partner's face between her hands and said, "Don't you think we have enough room in our hearts?" Flash forward to now: Zora is 16, and Dashiell, 15, and Shelley's in a new long-term relationship.

Life did and does have so much more imagination than we do, so why wouldn't we want to surrender to a wiser, more creative force?

3. Surrender, Dorothy!

That's what the witch sky-wrote on the big, open sky, and Dorothy did eventually surrender, not to the witch, but, after the last balloon of hope vanished over the horizon, to having no control. She had

to break her heart open to discover what power she did have: the power to go home. Pema Chodron, a Tibetan Buddhist nun, writes:

The off-center, in-between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don't get caught and we can open our hearts and minds beyond limit. It's a very tender, nonaggressive, open-ended state of affairs. To stay with that shakiness -- to stay with a broken heart, with a rumbling stomach, with the feeling of hopelessness and wanting to get revenge -- that is the path of true awakening.

Chodron adds that human beings are wired to want ground under our feet, but life is groundless: unpredictable, chaotic, mysterious, as hard to catch as wind.

Surrender on the High Holidays is both an individual and collective act of faith: we pray, chant, sing, dwell and eat at the same convergence of time and geography. We use this space to cultivate awareness of life beyond our plans or hardened hearts. We let ourselves break, a little or a lot, open to not knowing. Someone or something else is driving the bus, and the sky unfolding us across our lives is vast, beautiful, changing. Surrender.

4. “Please Let the Power of Hashem Increase”

Malchuyot, at its heart, asks, please, to let the power of *Hashem* increase, explains Reb Zalman, who adds that only through awe and love do we give our prayers wings. He says, “It's not enough that we pray in our prayers, 'Write us into this or that book,' if we are not writing our own qvittel/note for ourselves,” evaluating our year and turning our lives toward holiness and uprightness. Rabbi Nachman of Bretzle talks about the mutuality of longing: us for God and visa-versa, and how Malchuyot calls on us to acknowledge this longing at the core of life.

I do a lot of writing workshops with people living with serious illness: chronic, overwhelming pain they can only escape for small stretches; late cancer diagnoses that leave them only a season or two left without knowing for sure; and progressive neurological diseases that vanish their ability to walk, write, speak. I love facilitating these workshops because the veil is gone. What matters most is what remains: the yearning to live, the love that survives us, and the the courage to go on. To me, this is what it means to let the power of Hashem increase.

Whatever or whoever is in charge, we've always had the power within us to surrender, and return home. Now that we're gathered around the fire together, don't you think we have enough room in our hearts?