

The Rabbi's Sermon for Yom Kippur Kol Nidre 5769

**The Need to Understand Mass
by Rabbi Asher Lopatin**

The Large Hadron Collider at CERN, in Switzerland, opened just a month ago. Basically, it is a giant tube that smashes together the tiniest particles and lets scientists see what happens from that collision.

Some people have theorized that this collider will end the world, by creating giant and powerful black holes that will swallow up reality as we know it. Most scientists think this is a remote possibility.

One of the most exciting positive things that the giant Collider may discover is the key to understanding all of matter: how do particles get mass. Mass basically means how much matter, how much substance, an object has.

Peter Higgs, almost half a century ago, proposed that the whole of space is permeated by a field. All matter – every “thing”, really - is created by tiny particles with no mass of their own moving through this field where they pick up mass for themselves.

Quantum theory tells us that fields have particles associated with them, and the particle – the mass-giver – that makes up the Higgs field is called the Higgs boson. Finding the Higgs boson is thus the key to discovering whether the Higgs field does exist and whether our best hypothesis for the origin of mass is correct. (*Roger Cashmore Department of Physics, University of Oxford, UK.*)”

But to find that little mass giver, the Higgs boson, takes a tremendous amount of smashing and crashing and destroying the order of subatomic particles. So basically, the Collider will smash and crash and wallop the world of particles to find out how everything exists.

Well, my friends, I know we are all sitting here, in relative comfort. But think about it: if we are looking on Yom Kippur for those things in life that can give us mass, or meaning, or a sense of purpose, then perhaps every Kol Nidre, every Yom Kippur, and, frankly, whenever we gather in shul to find meaning in our lives, we should expect some crashing and smashing to go on!

That is actually the process the Torah describes in Exodus: A great smashing of holy and unholy, then a realization of how powerful and deep our relationship is with God, and then a sense of purpose and security beyond what we could have imagined.

From the moment when Moshe saw the Golden Calf and shattered the tablets – Vayashlech miyadav et haluchot, vayshabeir otam tachat hahar – Moshe hurled the stone tablets from his hands and smashed them under the mountain – smashing them, like a Super Collider,

Moshe set the stage for discovering the powerful mercy of God that would bring the New Luchot, the new tablets down to us on Yom Kippur.

And the smashing and crushing of the Golden Calf as well – ad asher dak – till it was smashed into the tiniest particles – maybe even subatomic –helped people realize how meaningless it was, and move closer to discovering the mass and weight that a life connected to God consists of.

On his way up to get to the second set of tablets Moshe continues the collider, trying to smash the boundaries between God and Humankind: Har'eini na et k'vodecha – Show me all your glory, Moshe demands. God doesn't totally eliminate this boundary, but Moshe at least sees the back of God's head, in some metaphoric way, and the knot on the back of God's tefillin.

Finally, after all this smashing and crashing and colliding between the Divine and the human and the profane, finally, God shows Moshe – and all of us – the secret of God's merciful self, the Higgs Boson that gives the Jewish people the mass and heft to be eternally revitalized, the secret of t'shuva, repentance, for all generations. Tonight we will be turning to those thirteen attributes over and over again – attributes discovered after a lot of smashing and crashing – in order to create the atmosphere of mercy, and safety and hope that will permeate our entire year.

As we think about how the power of God's mercy was discovered, and unleashed, and how the Higgs Boson may be discovered, I think we need to reflect on our own community of Anshe Sholom. This shul asks all of us, our members and friends, to be open to smashing and crashing, breaking expectations people have especially for a traditional Orthodox synagogue: Non-judgmentalism is a value at ASBI; we try to be open minded, and make every effort not to be intimidating. We stand on the laws and tradition of Judaism to make our religion more open for people to rediscover it, not more closed and impenetrable. And there are customs that we do that do seem different than were done in the past – we just had eight women carry and guard the Torahs as they went through the women's section, something that stands on thousand year old teachings, but at the same time requires a new thinking, and new expectations. We sometimes smash people's comfort levels by our commitment to welcoming anyone who wants to come pray and learn in our shul – and we welcome kids at all times, and often it feel as if we are in the middle of a Super Collider with all the kids running around at Adon Olam.

And at the same time, Anshe Sholom asks of its members who come from non-Orthodox synagogues, or different backgrounds, to break from many cherished practices: We smash up families, in a sense, by sending the men to one side and the women to the other. We smash up our normal way of reading, where we try to understand what we read, with davening that is 99% in Hebrew – with a little bit of Aramaic thrown in. We plop kippot on men's heads, we ask married women to cover their hair while davening and we are constantly asking people to stand and sit and bow. And we ask everyone to break their attachments to so many parts of the world outside in order to discover what davening and learning have to offer.

Any shul has an element of crashing and smashing, but Anshe Sholom asks its members to be open to a lot of it. And many might fear black holes that may form by all this collision.

And yet, only by coming into such an environment of smashing the tablets, smashing the idols and challenging the boundaries between each other and ourselves and God, only through that effort can come the discovery of the Higgs Boson field of Anshe Sholom: of the power Anshe Sholom has to make us all feel massive: to make us feel we belong; to make us feel, I hope, that we count; to make us feel we are accepted for who we are, not for whom others want to make us. Only at a shul like Anshe Sholom do you find eighty year olds schmoozing with twenty year olds; singles in college and graduate school having children of young families sit on their laps in shul; people feeling they can come to morning minyan even if they have never put on t'fillin or attend a class even if they don't know how to learn Torah, and learning in a class with fellow students who are Torah scholars in their own right. Only at a shul like ours, do we have members who have been at the shul for generations act excited when they meet people who have joined yesterday, people seeking to learn more, to get a chavruta – a learning partner – or go to a class, or seek out a tutor for Hebrew. Anshe Sholom, thank God, is this Higgs Field, where you come in perhaps feeling drained, uncomfortable, unsure, and, with the help of all the modest, but massive, Higgs Bosons in the shul, you gain a sense of mass – a sense of self worth, of enthusiasm for Yiddishkeit, the Jewish people and Israel .

So at this time, where each of us – whether we have just started coming to Anshe Sholom, or we have been here for generations – can celebrate in the ASBI Higgs Field, the shul asks that we take a moment to reflect on two important pledges to build that field that can provide mass and meaning to all of us.

First, your financial pledge for the Yom Kippur Appeal. Nikki will address that.

But second, and this is equally as important, your spiritual pledge to help us make a minyan every morning and every evening. Certainly minyan is an act of kindness for women and men saying kaddish, who need the community as they go through mourning, or for a Yarzeit. But it is also a statement about who we are: We are every day Jews, we are Jews who want Anshe Sholom to be able to affect people every day – and we need a minyan to do that. We need your help – there are some mornings in the year, and about 10% of afternoons, when have not gotten a minyan. That's a terrible failure of the ASBI Higgs Field. When you leave shul after a minyan – whether you are a man or a woman – you have been given strength and mass. That is what we are all about as a community – to strengthen each other as we try to grow Jewishly. Yes, we need ten men, but we have women who come every day, and to really have a thriving community, we should have solid minyanim, and that means men and women, not the bare minimum.

Even if you don't know how to daven, or put on t'fillin – just come and sit. If you want to learn, we will teach; if you want t'fillin, we have extra – but if you just want to come and help the community and make sure we have a minyan – you are a Higgs Boson – you are

one of the massive particles that makes Anshe Sholom the powerful place it is for all who enter it.

May God let us all discover the eternal particles of power and mass that God taught us on Sinai and that our People have carried with us for all time.

G'mar chatima tova – a powerful and massive New Year, connecting all of us to God and our community, our great sources of meaning and strength.