



## The Still, Small Voice of the Climate Crisis

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There is a famous scene in the Book of Kings, when, after challenging the idol-worshiping King Ahab and Jezebel, the prophet Elijah flees for his life to the desert. He finds temporary shelter in a cave on Mount Sinai. Alone and terrified, he cowers in the cave and looks on as a great storm swirls outside:

*There was a great and mighty wind, splitting the mountains and shattering rocks by God's power; but God was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake; but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, fire; but God was not in the fire. And after the fire, **a still, small voice**....and the voice addressed him. **Why are you here, Elijah?***

As Elijah witnessed the great storm in all its intensity, he was both safe and profoundly vulnerable at the same time. And it was in that perplexing mix of relief and overwhelm that the *kol d'mamah dakah*, the still, small voice, addressed Elijah with the deepest question of our High Holidays: *why are you here?* What do you stand for, and who do you want to be? The natural calamity occurring just out of reach shook something loose in Elijah, and he was able to consider this existential question anew.

“Why are you here?” is the backdrop question of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but it tends to fall away by Sukkot. We are exhausted from the High Holy days, we are spiritually spent, and we are ready to relax in our backyards and enjoy the quiet, cool, fall breeze. But it’s precisely when we finally have a sense of who we wish to be in the year ahead that we must begin to heed the call of that voice. The real challenge comes in continuing to listen as the new year gets underway.

For Elijah, the voice came not from nature but from an angel. But we must hear that voice in the wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire as the climate crisis intensifies. It is crying out to us from the forest fires of California, the crumbling coastlines, and the soaring heat. It can be heard in the silent death of coral reefs, the melting of the Arctic, the extinction of species. **The great shofar of Rosh Hashanah has sounded, but the *kol d’mamah dakah* of our planet is still begging to be heard.** Will we heed its call this year?

In Mishnah Sukkah 2:9, we learn that we are allowed to leave our sukkah if it’s raining hard enough that the water would spoil our food. But what if we saw the weather this Sukkot not as a hazard, but as the wake-up call we need, as the still, small voice of our planet? And what if we let that voice shake something loose in *us* this year? This year, let’s pay closer attention to the cries of our planet. And let’s answer the angel’s question with courage: *Why are we here?* To heal a broken climate. To leave our descendants with a healthier ecosystem. To partner with God in the protection of creation.