

Higher and Higher: Into the Fire”
A Tribute to the Firefighters of the 20th Anniversary of 9/11
and Shabbat Shuvah

On 911 our world change.

The unimaginable became imaginable.

The images of planes directed at buildings, and seeing those two iconic structures collapse, people walking in shock covered in dust will forever remain in our minds.

On 911 we saw the face of evil in this world, not only the planners but those who celebrated the murder of 2996 innocent American civilians: non-combatants around the world.

But there are other sounds and images as well.

The phone calls of those trapped in the World Trade Center professing love for their husbands, wives, and children

The phone calls made from United Flight 93

The sounds of those who fought so courageously to subvert the terrorists plans to crash into the Pentagon and died in a field in Pennsylvania to spare others injury.

After 911, there are the cries of those deprived of a father or a mother, a sister or a brother, a son, or daughter or, a friend.

This Year Shabbat Shuva coincides with the 20th Anniversary of 911.

Shabbat Shuva, the Sabbath of Return, the Sabbath of turning exhorts us to look within and without. To strive to be more, to reach beyond ourselves as we embrace the possibilities of Teshuvah. This idea is beautifully expressed in the Kaddish prayer. Normally we say that L’ela, that God is in the heights, but during these days between RH and YK we say L’Elah L’elah: Higher and Higher.

As God is raised up in the universe so are we during these holy days. L'Elah L'elah: is a powerful testament to the potential that we have as individuals and a nation to rise up from the ashes and the rubble.

But where shall we turn on this day as Jews, as Americans?
Where shall we find the inspiration today at a time of such tension and dissension?

What image can raise us up: L'Elah L'Elah 20 years after 911?

I am thinking of those courageous fire fighters who ran toward the fire while everyone else was running away. Those incredible men and women climbing up the stairs of the world Trade Center, carrying people on their backs, saving anyone that they could through the smoke, and the fire, putting their lives at risk to save others. 343 Firefighters died that day, protecting the sanctity of human life, or as we might say: they died Al Kiddush Hashem: for the holiness of the divine name.

L'Eyla L'Eylah: Let us be raised up by them.

Bruce Springsteen beautifully captured the bravery and sacrifice of the firefighters in the poetic lyrics of his song: "Into the Fire". He tells their incredible story through the eyes of loved ones who watched them run towards the flames. I will share some of the lyrics with you and have asked Cantor Brook to sing the refrain and add the word L'Eleh L'eleh to honor those who acted so selflessly, with such courage, and **who** on this Shabbat Shuva: raise us all up!

Michael:

The sky was falling and streaked with blood
I heard you calling me, then you disappeared into the dust
Up the stairs, into the fire
Up the stairs, into the fire

I need your kiss, but love and duty called you someplace higher
Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire

Rachel:

*May your strength give us strength
May your faith give us faith
May your hope give us hope
May your love give us love*

L'ela L'ela...

Michael:

It was dark, too dark to see, you held me in the light you gave
You lay your hand on me
Then walked into the darkness of your smoky grave
Up the stairs, into the fire
Up the stairs, into the fire
I need your kiss, but love and duty called you someplace higher
Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire

*May your strength give us strength
May your faith give us faith
May your hope give us hope
May your love bring us love...
L'eyla L'eyla*

We are raised up through them.

Tonight, let us honor all those who died on 911, and the lives that were forever changed as I invite everyone to say the mourner's kaddish as we remember them.