

## “WE ARE MANY”

“We are Many” is a poem by Pablo Neruda that describes the many people who live inside each of us. “When everything seems set to show me off as a man of intelligence, the fool I keep concealed on my person takes over the talk and occupies my mouth.” The poet sees a burning house but, “instead of the fireman I summon, an arsonist bursts on the scene and he is I.” How various are the selves that live inside each of us?

Every person experiences a certain multiplicity of self. “I am large, and contain multitudes,” wrote Whitman. We are congeries of character, made of nobility, baseness, kindness, cruelty, faith and doubt. We change from minute to minute. In Emerson’s words, “my moods do not believe each other.”

This is the theme behind the rabbinic teaching that one day the evil inclination was captured. Suddenly, there were no houses built and no hen laid an egg. For all of our powers are intertwined, and to deny one is to diminish another.

Judaism teaches not that we eliminate bits of who we are -- we do not do surgery on ourselves -- but that we bring all of us to the service of goodness and of God. Arsonist and fireman alike. Rather than deny that we are many, we pull together the disparate threads of our souls for a greater service. At Sinai we come together as a community to support each other and to create something greater from all of our gifts. As we repent on Yom Kippur, we wish to change our deeds, and to elevate everything we are, complex and marvelous as God made us.