

Shabbat 02 16 18 Sermon

Every year at this time of the year, we get excited because we get to sing that song and have it be a part of our Torah service every Friday night. During the latter part of the the book of Exodus, the last two-thirds of the book of Exodus, we'll be dealing with the sanctuary. And so, v'yasu li mikdash, make li, make for me a mikdash, make for me a sanctuary v'shachanti v'tocham, that I may live with them, I might reside with them, in them, together with them.

Sanctuary is vital, and tonight I want to talk about a piece of the story of sanctuary that is vital for me to remember at this moment. And maybe you might resonate with it too, so thank you for listening. But I want to begin with something that's so common that we that we don't notice it, which is the things that we forget tell us a lot about ourselves, and the things we are afraid to forget tell us even more.

It's no mystery that there is no word in Jewish or in Hebrew for history, right? I mean, ask our Israelis here, there's just historia, historia, historia. We have zikaron, we have memory, zikaron, memory. So the things that we remember form us, and the things that we're afraid to forget are the things that we're afraid that were we to forget them, yeah? We won't be formed properly, we won't be informed properly, yeah? We want to remember certain things we tell our kids, don't forget. Or as a kid in high school, I remember the song, don't you forget about me. Don't, don't, don't, don't. Don't you forget about me.

Maybe cross-culturally, maybe cross-continents, maybe trans-geographically and trans-historically, the most fundamental forgetting that we fear is being forgotten. Not just our values, and not just the way we live our lives, not just the eulogy that will be said about us, but the fact of our own existence. Don't forget about me, don't forget about me. I made an impact, I was here, and my presence mattered in some way.

I find myself, those of you who are part of the community know that my, my, my uncle Joe passed away around Sukkot this year, and I have a picture of him right above my desk in my house. My uncle, my, Yasella, Yasella, Yasella Ben Alexander, Yosef Shalom Ben Alexander, Medina. And I was walking out of the door tonight, and I was looking at his picture, and I thought, I don't know if I thought about you this week, Joe. I don't forget about you. After a week like this week, it's impossible for us to hear that and not immediately think of all of those who were lost, and say to them, we won't forget about you.

But in sanctuary, in the conversation about sanctuary, in the conversation about what makes a sacred space, in what we define as the mikdash, there's a moment in Torah where that fear, that fear of being forgotten, falls on someone or something that I would imagine isn't afraid, as it were, to be forgotten. Hard to really grok what it means to be forgotten when you're God, as it were. Tomorrow morning, when we open up our sacred wisdom literature to give us advice on how to live a good life, the Torah will begin its story about the sanctuary with a very odd moment, a moment that isn't lost on those who read the Torah very carefully.

The Torah will begin this conversation about a physical structure for God's presence and says, tell the children of Israel, speak to the children of Israel, God says to Moses and says,

Speak to them that they may take for me a truma, for me an elevated offering. That little word *li* is really problematic. That little word *li*, for those who don't read Hebrew or know Hebrew, *li* means for me, towards me, with me.

The Torah would have been fine had it just said, God said, listen, take a truma, take an offering. But what is this *li* business? For me? It leads Rashi to say, the great medieval exegete, *li* means for my name. Rashi doesn't have to say that. As if to say, it's not really for me because I don't really need a house, I don't really need this tent. It's not really for me, but the audacious Midrash that says, that God says, take for me, doesn't mean for me, but take me to, take me with you, is a deeper structure of the Midrash, at least according to the Ramban, according to Ramban and others. The Midrash is essentially a portable Mount Sinai.

When things were great between the Israelites and God, God says, here, make a Mount Sinai to go. But wait a second, Ramban, what do you do with this little *li* business? Oh, the Midrash takes care of that. You see, I told you to make a little Mount Sinai, but as you were leaving, I said, here, I'm giving you my Torah on Mount Sinai, but don't forget, even though I gave you Torah, take me too. Don't leave without me. Don't forget about me. This Midrash is so subversive, because wait a minute, didn't we just have Mount Sinai, and then didn't we just have all the laws of *Mishpatim*? And now God says, wait a second, I gave you Torah and I gave you laws, and now what you need, lest you leave the scene with only revelation and then a good checklist on how to lead a good legal, lawful, law-abiding life, don't forget about me.

You can be enlightened. You had a great weekend up at Esalen. You can be a dutiful little girl, little boy, nice, upstanding citizen. You dot your I's and cross your T's. You're punctilious. You're dependable. You're reliable. You make sure to wait six hours between meat and milk and not a minute less. And God says, you can still leave me outside of your holy sanctuary. Don't forget about me. Take me with you. Take me too. I'm in part of the deal. I'll throw myself in. You can have a revelation. You can have *Mishpatim* or laws and all kinds of legal structures and torts. But you know what? For this time only, you can get God with you. Go, go. God goes too. Don't forget about me. As if to say that we would. As if to say that the Chava Aminah, as if to say that our presumptive stance as human beings is that we will get focused on that peak experience. That's for sure, because we live for those. As if to say that we as human beings will live in the law too. We'll know everything we have to do. We'll parse every word. We'll try to find original intent or not original intent.

What was God intending? What were the authors of the constitution intending? We'll spend our hours focusing ourselves on how to be legal and lawful too. That's wonderful. And that's also necessary, but insufficient. Don't forget about me, God says. Unless you say to me, Rabbi, make sure you define what God is. You define God. Or as Rabbi Chazan Bassi said, you know, God for the 21st century, but let that God be present in your sacred sanctuaries. Let your sacred spaces be full of that presence. And don't self-satisfy ourselves with checking off the boxes.

You have a vision of a business, it turned you on. And then you got into the details of the business and every day you're working hard and making it work. And then you stop yourself and you say, did I bring anything with me? Start with why or maybe get back to why. What

was the original vision? What was there? What animated the relationship? You're just checking off the boxes every night. You tuck the kids in. It's all good. You were loved once, but you know, you're not so much looking forward to that or you don't want to do the work to get back there. And the marriage or the relationship was saying, will you bring me too? Will you bring me with you as you deepen your roots?

How crazy it is in our country to have conversations about the meaning of the Second Amendment. Is that what any of this is about? Whatever happened to the vision of who we were supposed to be? Whatever happened to the dream of what we could be? Whatever ever happened to the sanctuary that promised our children in schools that they would be safe? And law misses the boat. When we go down that road arguing about minutiae, about original intent versus not, about militia versus not, that's the conversation.

I sat on a panel this week of denominations expressing and relating Judaism. And in the room were a group of kids who grew up just like me, modern Orthodox. Maybe a couple in the room grew up like I became, which was ultra-Orthodox. And here I was, a tzitzit-swearing, halachically observant guy who's saying, you can keep halacha and forget about God. And forget about the ethical and moral reasons to change halacha. There's a spiritual reason. Because the reason for the whole thing has been lost. We forget.

Don't you forget about me. I can imagine the Divine One walking through Parkland this week on Valentine's Day, a day devoted to love and asking, is this the country you envisioned? Is this God bless America? Is this your freedom and your liberty from sea to shining sea? Is this it? Is this the best we could do? Forget about the law of it. Look at the life of it. When we forget to bring the most important thing into our sacred sanctuaries, whether they be literally physical schools, or countries, or social groups, or a synagogue, or a relationship, or an I-Thou moment, when we forget that, it's dead. For me, for the sake of this principle, let love win. Let love in. Make room for that one that principle, that desire, that place that creates the need itself. Bring it in.

So what will it take for me and you in our moments of digging in our heels to take a breath and say, can we invite God into this moment? Goddess, spirit, love, presence. Can we allow those principles, that experience, that one to animate, and our decisions will come from there? Are we really living our highest place when we act the way that we act sometimes? I think not. I'll speak for myself again. David, don't forget about me, God says.

So God should bless us on a Shabbat that is the Shabbat after Adar. And the Hasidic masters say that the word Adar, which is the month that we're in, is Aleph-Dar, that God, Aleph, the One, wants to live here. This Abba, Kodesh Baruch Holi, also Yisbaruch Dir, Batachton, and God wants to live here amongst us. So when you leave tonight, and you go home, ask yourself, how do I invite God in? When do I hear that during the week? When do I hear that during the month? When do I hear God whispering, or whatever you think God is saying to you, please don't forget about me, don't forget about me. May the source of life bless me, and bless all of us, and this country, to remember the most important values and principles, the most important things, and bring those things in, and let that set our sails straight. May God bless us, and heal us, and let us say, Amen.

Please rise.