

Rabbi David Ingber on Parshat Ki Teitzei 5779 (09 13 19)

Mitzvah at Gordon Beach, Tel Aviv. Down the ramp to the sun sequined sea, I was musing over the time I was seven and living on King's Highway and practicing handball against the neighbor's brick wall when I looked down and found seven dollars lying on the ground and climbed the steps to ask the woman if she had lost the money. Went home a few doors down for my father to scold me. Of course she'll say it's hers. For days, I lived part fearing someone would knock on our door, part knowing I had entered an open sesame of good luck, whispering seven dollars into the air, into my father's ear, into my mother's, my sister's ear, a chant for chance, seven dollars, till my sister and I went to buy mousetrap and a teal vinyl dressing case for my Tressie doll. Her hair grows.

Back then, I only wanted dolls that were miraculous, could speak or record my voice or grow their hair. So what triggered me to think of this memory? Teal tinged more than 50 years later at Gordon Beach where I paid for chaise longue and umbrella after buying my coffee and approaching the sea. I remembered I had forgotten my coffee, went back and glanced down at the stone walkway where a zippered cotton pouch lay and I knew it was for me to discover and retrieve that I was brought into this moment through memory and forgetting so that I already knew without unzipping it, this portable beach wallet like the one I was carrying contained a wad of cash, cards, ID.

Having no local phone, I stopped an Israeli couple after knocking on the window of an empty police car, asked them to return the wallet as soon as possible, all of us were heading into the Sabbath. I knew I could trust them that I was sharing the mitzvah of returning lost objects to their owner. Then I dove into the Teal Sea where the sun made helixes and sign curves on the surface for me to swim through.

Rabbi Ingber begins :

It never leaves my memory because it was the first thing that I was asked to memorize in yeshiva as a young child after the blessings and all of that, but the first real piece of Torah that I was asked to memorize, eilu mitzvah shalov, eilu hayav lehachriz. These are the objects that one, when one finds them, can make claim to them and these are the ones that one must call out, must herald, must say, you lost something. If you find a dollar or seven, does it have simanim, does it have anything that distinguishes it? Is it someone's, would they be able to claim it? Is there a notion of ye'ush? Shalomidas, shamidas, does somebody give up? Depends. If it's very valuable, they never give up. So even if 10 years have passed, it's still valuable. They say, no, you can't claim that even though 10 years have passed, it's valuable. I always thought that I would find it. Finding and losing. Amatzia. Amatzia is Yiddish for like, find me a find, catch me a catch. Amatzia is, ah, on sale, what amatzia? Look what I've found. We use that term, finding and losing. Losing and finding. I found my voice, someone said to me this week. And I wondered where had it been lost? I found my bashert, I found my job, I found, I found, I found, I found.

The great German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas said that religion can be summed up in one sentence, something is missing. Some others call it the metaphysical blues. After four

yachts and eight homes, something is missing. Eilu mitzia shalov, eilu chayav lehachriz. These are the things that we lose and others find them. And the world of lost and found, the world itself of religion and making meaning, lost and found. It is a very simple expression in the beautiful poem of Sharon Dolan. The mitzvah of Hashavah Saavedah, the mitzvah, the divine or the biblical commandment of returning a lost object. It appears in the book of Exodus, it appears tomorrow morning in the part that has within it the most mitzvot. Lo tireh et shor achicha, ot tseyo nidachim v'italamta meyhlem, hashev tishiveim l'achicha. The Torah tells us in chapter 22 tomorrow morning of the book of Deuteronomy, don't see the ox of your brother. The Torah goes out of its way to say your brother twice.

Your brother's ox, yes, your brother's ox. And ignore it, keep driving along. But hashev tishiveim l'achicha, you have to, yes, you have to bring it back to your brother. But what, the Torah says, if your brother or your neighbor, your fellow citizen, what if your brother is not karov? Hear that verse, v'imlo karov achicha, if your brother's not close. V'lo yidato, and you don't know them. V'asavto el tokh beitecha, then bring him it into your house. Ad derosh achicha oto, v'hashivoto lo. Until your brother, your citizen, your friend, until the one to whom it belongs comes looking for it and then give it to them. The Torah goes out of its way to say, and that's what you do for their donkey, do it for their simla, for their garment. L'chola v'idato achicha asher tova mimenu mitzata, for any object, for anything that is lost to them, lo tukha lit'alim, you have no right, you have no right, says the Torah, or maybe more strongly, hopefully you are a person for whom it is impossible to ignore that.

So we hear the Torah every year as we approach Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Every single year as we are busying ourselves with the tshuva, with the returning, with the repair work, the Torah talks to us about what it is to return something that is lost. And it isn't lost on me or on anyone here. The Torah is not only speaking about objects, a pen, a garment, a favorite sweater, or a, I don't know, computer. The Torah here is speaking to the very existential depths of each and every one of us. Each and every one of us, it comes into this time of the year for whatever reason with a sense of something might be missing, something might be lost, some things can never be found again. Each and every one of us shows up at this time of the year. And we are both the one who finds what others lose and also the one who's lost something but isn't even aware of it yet. We don't know where it is.

And the Torah says that in the work of returning, we must return souls and hope. If your brother is not close to you, if you don't feel close to it, you feel you're walking into the high holidays and either on the one hand you're wondering what is wrong with me that I don't feel anything and I'm just a big imposter and it's that time of the year again and I'm just feeling numb. Or maybe not. Maybe you're one who is absolutely in that place. The Torah says, adirosh achicha oto v'hashivot olo. That even in that place where we don't know to whom it belongs, where to find it in this maze of responsibilities that are behavioral maybe but here existential. How do I work with finding what's lost? There's a modicum of derisha that's required of looking for it. Looking for what has been lost.

Derisha. I know that for myself, it feels that my amygdala has been constantly been triggered every day of every week of every month for a couple of years now. I don't know about you. It feels as if I have been living in the world of tohu vavoh, confusion, confounding, what shoe will drop next? Are there any shoes left to drop? Yes, I'm sure. Because nobody

here feels on any level confident that there is a limited number of shoes. And so to some degree, we're already pre-exhausted for the high holidays.

We walk in and we feel as though maybe the high holidays are not a time for seeking anything. There's just a time for, oh my goodness, I just gotta, let me get there. Did I get tickets yet? I forgot. Wait a second, what's going on? It's the high holidays again? But irrespective, the Torah says some people, it takes a while for them to start realizing something's missing and we're holding it. We're saying, okay, when you realize it's missing, come looking for it. So maybe it's September 13th and didn't think about it till now, or maybe, but we have 16 days. And then another seven, but it's not I have to, it's I want to. There's something beautifully available at this time of the year. And in many ways for me, I think often during the year that this time of the year is when God says to us, I've been holding this thing called your soul that you lost back in January. And whenever you want it, come get it. Remember that integrity that you had you started out the year with? And remember that promise? I'm holding it here. Just come and look for it because I've gathered it in and I'm holding it for you.

And so you go home tonight. I go home tonight. We go home this weekend. We have time to think. And I want to ask you to wonder what is it that you lost this year that you need to relocate? And maybe you have friends who lost things that you know they can never get back. Invite them by telling them you'll wait until that time you come looking for something and I'll be there. I'll be there. Because just like God did, God says, I'll hold it here for you until the right moment. Come looking for it. We say that to one another too. Keep looking. But if you're not yet there or perhaps looking is not exactly the right metaphor, I'm still waiting for you. I'm still waiting for you.

So I sat today with a couple who are getting married and I thought about the three incredible families that are having weddings this weekend. Our board members, the Hannins and Peter and Pam Takif and also Larry and Shelly, Larry Schwartz and Shelly Vian, thought about these. The weekend that we read about returning a lost object is the weekend when these lovers are coming together. And this person who sat with me today said, you know, this person was my best friend 20 years ago then I got married and we went our different ways and then we re-found each other 20 years later. I thought to myself, I didn't say, whoop, Hashavah Tevedah. That's finding a lost object too.

So I wanna bless each and every one of you tonight on this weekend of when you see a friend or a brother or your own self and something's missing that we're inspired to start looking a little bit. And if you're not yet ready to look, to have the patience until you will be. To hold one another with tenderness but with earnestness as we enter this most important time of our calendar. Return again, return again. And again, your soul is a matziah.

Please rise.