

Shabbat 02 09 18 Sermon

One of the more remarkable two days that I've spent in my life, in certain ways, over the last couple of days. Went out to San Francisco early on Wednesday morning, involved with an amazing cohort that Romemu, as a community, is involved with called the Jewish Emergent Network. The Jewish Emergent Network is seven communities from around the United States of America, each of which is kind of emergent, whatever that means exactly, we haven't defined it yet, but we're doing something together that's common, and because of that we've had the blessing of having a rabbi in each of those communities for two years.

Many of you know Rabbi Josh Buchan. At the end of the year, Josh will be moving on to another community, unfortunately, but we're blessed that we went out to interview for another rabbi, another emergent fellow. And the setting, if you've never been to San Francisco, into Silicon Valley, we were blessed to be in one of the rabbi's brother works for Airbnb.

So we weren't staying in Airbnbs, but we were actually interviewing and doing the process in their corporate office, which is like a full block in San Francisco. And one of the things you note there is maybe one of the first things you note after you've noticed the yoga rooms and the quiet rooms and the four kitchens on every floor and coffee at any moment and yogurt pretzels at any moment. How did they know? Unbelievable. Popcorn, I mean, is that... Who would want to leave? Who would ever want to leave? And probably that's intentional. There's not a sense from anyone that, you know, that they go home ever. And that's probably intentional.

Something remarkable to notice is that, then you're there, is that all of these pieces seem to be at first pieces of hospitality. And if I, and I'm not cynical, so I ran around thinking, you know, I said, wow, this is so amazing. How, this is the way all employees should be treated. This is amazing. When Romemu has its own building, it's gonna have yoga rooms and mats any moment of the day. This is gonna be like, that's the way we create, I mean, everything was a whiteboard and a corkboard. You could stick anything up on any wall anywhere and it would hang forever, probably. But what was, I think, underneath it, after a moment's notice, of course, is that there's something about wanting you not to leave. Wanting us not to leave something that feels so good and yet probably isn't that great for us. That on some level there's a kind of being lured in to some kind of relationship that, again, not abusive. I'm gonna call a good working space an abusive space. How dare you treat us so nicely and incentivize us to work really hard.

But and there's a certain quality to a place or a relationship or a situation that feels at once really, really, really good and at once maybe not so good. And the theme of not leaving a place, not being able to say, I want to go home, is a very, very powerful theme in our tradition. In fact, the word to go out, Latset in Hebrew, can all say that? Latset. Latset. Or Yatza, I've been saying, we left Egypt. Exodus is part of the DNA of our people.

A willingness to leave a situation that on one level certainly we would say is nothing like Airbnb. Notwithstanding, you know, Israelites, we had a good back there, a little great. We had, you know, whatever we had, it was great. We had the watermelons. Watermelon in

Egypt? We had watermelon. So we don't want to go. Now that we're, the ambivalence, right? The ambivalence. We're not sure if we want to, let's say it. And the Exodus is named as a proper name.

Yitzi, I've been trying. Moses is the great executioner on the Exodus plan. He's the one in the Bible that says, Vayetze Moshe Alechav. Vayetze Alechav. Moshe is the man of going out. The only one who ever went out. And like the great Bodhisattva that we've said before, he goes back in to take out those who are still left there. Moses knows how to get out. And if you can't get out of Egypt, you get left behind. And so the quintessential moment of the Yitziyat Mitzrayim story is leaving the house. It's like, you know, you can see the Jews like this, you know, some of them, like this. Things are falling. Everything is going to pieces. And they're holding on for dear life. They're like, no way, I can't get out.

And in fact, we even have in Midrash, we even have a rabbinic folktale that only one-fifth, only one-fifth of the Israelites left Egypt. What a profoundly troubling Midrash. One-fifth? Luckily, at this moment, we can say, oh, it's just a Midrash, right? Four-fifths of the Jews didn't get out of Egypt.

The long, arduous journey to freedom begins with the ambivalence of freedom. Do I really want to be free? Do I really want to leave? What will I have to give up? Relationships are rooted in a kind of tension between wanting to leave and wanting to stay. Should I stay or should I go now? So it should come as a tremendous shock to us that immediately after the Israelites leave the land of Egypt, they're free from slavery and they are free to receive revelation. That's one of the great divisions. Philosophically, Isaiah Berlin said there's freedom from and freedom to. They were free from slavery and they made their way to become, to pick up their great mission statement.

We, the Israelite people, are here to receive Torah at Mount Sinai, and that was last week in Parshat Yitro, and then we arrived this week at the laundry list of things that we have to do to walk Mount Sinai out into the world, and the first mitzvah, the first listed thing on our laundry list is be like God, as my friend Ramadan Cholera says about God's identity. Be like God. Just as God freed slaves, the first mitzvah, the first commandment in Parshat Mishpatim in tomorrow morning's portion of the Bible will be, if you have a Hebrew slave, free him after six years.

And so you're thinking, great, great, that's great. I mean, not so great that they have Hebrew slaves. Okay, I'm with you. But at least there's a structure in the Torah that gives you this moment. You, too, will become someone who is motzi. Someone who exoduses others. You give them their freedom. How shocking then, after all of this preamble, should we as readers be when the Hebrew slave in the Bible, in this very first post-Sinaitic moment, says these words. If the slave will say, I love my master.

My wife and my kids. I'm not going. What's that word again that means to go out? La-tzet. The slave says, lo-etze. I'm not going. No, thank you very much. I have a beautiful wife. I have kids. The owner is not giving me what Deuteronomy will give me later on, which is money and a kind of severance package. I have a good year. I have a good owner. Life's good.

And so what does the Torah say to do in this most bizarre and amazing ritual? V'higisho Adonai ve'l Elohim, v'higisho ve'la delet. Twice. V'higisho. You will bring, let the master bring him, the servant, to God or to the magistrate, probably to God. Doesn't say what happens there. V'higisho ve'la delet. And then bring him a second time to the delet, to the doorpost, o ala mezuzah, to the lint, like the liminal, the lintel. Ve'ratzah Adonai ve'et azno ba'martzeh. And let his master now pierce his ear. Doesn't say where, but probably against the doorpost. Ve'abado le'olam. And let him be a servant forever.

You can imagine the rabbis reading this and going, this is craziness. What happens at the doorpost in Jewish history? What happens at the doorpost? What's the door? We are the people of the door. What happened at the door? I just modeled it for you as I tripped over the tape. What happened? Passover. Of course, the rabbis hear this resonance and say, in the Midrash, the Mechilteh says, Ozen she'shamah ve'harsinai. The ear that heard on Mount Sinai, you shall never be slaves but to me, is now willing to be a slave to another human being? Amazing.

It would seem that this ritual is a kind of, in the rabbinic mind, the anti-Paschal offering. The blood of the individual will certainly be on the doorpost. You don't get your ear pierced against the door and have it come out clean. Maybe now this ear will become a walking mezuzah, reminding you wherever you're walking that you didn't choose freedom. Maybe. Maybe, as a friend of mine last night, my friend Rabbi Scott Perlow said, maybe, and this is brought down in some of the sources, maybe now you become a fixture of the house.

There's something about not being able to leave a situation that is, somehow, there's revach, something comes to us in some way. And even though we know that it's good for us to leave, it's not easy to leave. Even though we know that what lies ahead is absolutely, without a doubt, better than what lay behind us, it's not easy to leave.

But maybe, maybe bringing the slave to the doorpost is a whole other thing. Maybe bringing the slave to the doorpost isn't just puncturing his ears so they can hear that God was one. Maybe bringing the slave to the doorpost is not just about you didn't choose freedom, but maybe bringing the slave to the doorpost in the Torah for me and for you and for all of us sitting here is actually a public invitation for those who are outside to say, hey, you can do it out here.

Maybe bringing the slave to the precipice of freedom, the very liminal place where the house, which is supposed to be safe, but in this perverted way, is not the safe place. Maybe on the other side of that house, we bring the slave there. The Torah says bring the slave to the doorpost so that everyone who stands here can say, we got you. Come here. Come on over. We made it. We'll take care of you. I know. We'll pay. We'll redeem your wife and your kids. Come over here. Maybe we make a mark on the doorpost as a sign to everyone who passes by that house to say not that the slave chose slavery, but that the master didn't free and that we didn't do enough.

Maybe we are the ones, the audience in this text, that are being bid to make a safe space for those who think that a slave home is a safe place. Or that maybe on this weekend where the first lady of our city, in collaboration with many other faith communities, have told clergy, rabbis, imams, and ministers to wear purple in solidarity with the faith community, stand

against domestic violence. Those two terms coming together in one phrase, a *tarte de sasve*, two things, the house that should be a safe place, the house that should be a place where there is familiarity becomes violent.

And so often in the statistics in that world, it's unbelievable to think more than 75% of women who are aged 18 to 49, 75% of women who are aged 18 to 49, who are abused, were previously abused by the same perpetrator in the same house, that go back. Because faith communities in other places don't say, you know what, we believe you. We trust you when you told us a story. We hear you. We know that that story is true. We know that we don't know what's going on inside of your house.

We know that someone can make it seem on the outside like everything is great, but on the inside everything is horrible. We know we don't have to read the news today to know how easy it is to manipulate it, to make it seem like everything is hospitable. And all the strangers who come in will be shown the beauty into the living room. And look, look at these yogurt pretzels. It's all great. But we don't know what goes on behind the scenes. We don't know what goes on when the curtain is down and lights are off. We don't know what happens in homes to women. One in three women and one in four women is a victim of physical violence by an intimate partner.

One in three women, one in four men. We don't know. 20 people are victims of physical violence every minute in the United States. 10 million Americans are victims of physical violence annually. 15% of all violent crime in America happens in the home. In the home, in the bayit, in the house, in the place where we were told to leave slavery, to create a bayit.

The Torah says tomorrow morning there are situations in that home where people will choose to stay. And maybe, maybe, maybe this unique, odd ritual of taking that ear and puncturing it is not to punish the eved, the slave, but to say to all of us, what are you doing? What am I doing? What are we doing to encourage people who are afraid to leave? What are we doing? Our response as a religious community is profoundly important in raising up these things that are often not spoken about, about these situations, what happens behind closed doors. It isn't meditation. It isn't yoga. It isn't even coming to learn Torah, but it is vitally important that we know that people live dual lives. And we as a Jewish community are witnessing now, or my dear friend and colleague Rabbi Sharon Brow said, where the rubber meets the road. The bifurcation of religion and ethics. You can be religious. I think it's okay for 30,000 refugees in the state of Israel to be jettisoned.

As we speak, Holocaust survivors in the state of Israel are stepping up and saying, not on our watch. Because if we are to be a model in some way, we have to bring together, not just external religiosity, but internal moral reflection and ethical standards. To be *echad balei v'echad baper*, to be able to stand in front of people as a religious leader and go home and do one thing, that's hypocrisy. To be able to stand in your office and treat your co-workers in a beautiful way, but then go home and treat your husband, your wife, your partner in another way, that's like, horrible. But common. How can we, how can we train ourselves and invite those who are in situations like this to come forward and to speak their truth? How can we make safe spaces for those people who live a life of secrecy, not being willing to say, you know, I keep choosing my master.

I keep choosing the domestic situation that is abusive because I'm afraid to leave. Ahavdit Adoni. I love my master. We can do more. We can invite more. We can listen more. We can march more. We can educate more. We can train more.

And we can start here too, which is this. We can ask ourselves, not only what are we doing in order to raise up domestic violence and all other forms of violence in the home, in our own awareness and in the awareness of our friends and our communities, wherever we are, but we can also ask ourselves, how are we also sometimes needing to work on our nonviolent communication? How can we lower the temperature in our intimate relationships? How can we be more gentle, more benevolent, more loving, more compassionate? Those are great questions to ask. It doesn't require that you write a big check to a domestic violence shelter right away, although that's also good.

But maybe when we leave tonight and we reflect both on the social implications of this sermon and other things in the Torah, we might also ask ourselves, how are we implicated by this as well in some way, shape, or form, something small? How can I own that I could be more loving with my wife, my husband, my partner, my children? What would it look like if we asked ourselves every morning, every night, a pledge to non-violence in our homes? Coercion, manipulation, games. It's a tall order. Start with one thing.

There'll be literature out here at Romemu throughout the rest of the year on this very important issue, and I invite you all to read up on it, to learn more about it. There'll be trainings that will come as well. We have to build a world of love, and it starts in the home. So let's be a mezuzah for love. Let's be a place where people will touch in and say, this person is someone I can trust. This is someone that might bring me from a place that I don't want to be into, a place that I need to go to.

May all of those who are listening, for whom this is a real reality, know that this is a place where they can come. May all of those who feel at this moment in some way, shape, or form that they can't say the words, I need to get out. We know that it crosses every ethnic boundary, every color, every socioeconomic strata, and if you are listening tonight, whether you are online or here, and you say, there's no place I can go that will give me the safety and seat me, this is that place.

And there are many others like it. May God bless us with Shalom Bayit. Shalom Bayit, a house of peace. Let's say amen.

Please rise.