

Rabbi David Ingber's Kabbalat Shabbat Sermon

January 30, 2026

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This has been a, it's been a heavy week. We finally buried Rodney Gively, or maybe more precisely, we finally brought his body home. The last hostage returned, not alive, but returned.

Returned to earth, returned to his people, returned to memory. There is something devastating and also holy about Kevurah, about burial. It's an ending, we know that.

But it's also an act of gathering in, a refusal to let life disappear into some abstraction or headline or politics. We place a body back into the care of the people who loved them and into the care of the ground that remembers them. This was also the week of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a week when the world once again says, together never again, and often Jews quietly say, to whom? And it was a week when a congresswoman was attacked, a reminder of how brittle our public life has become, how quickly violence erupts and slips from rhetoric to bodies.

How thin the membrane is between disagreement and dehumanization. And now as this Shabbat begins, a Shabbat known as Shabbat Shira, the Sabbath of singing, we are also approaching Tu B'Shvat, the festival of trees, the 15th day of the month of Shabbat, a festival that reminds us of the sap that is rising invisibly beneath the frozen ground outside, of planting seeds without any guarantees. It feels like a lot to hold all at once in one week.

We have grief, memory, fear, song, planting, and yet this is the week that we have. And I imagine that in my description of all that's happening this week, it's not very far from what many of you might be feeling emotionally. Some of us are carrying a lot of grief, that there's nowhere obvious to land.

Some of us feel caught between competing moral certainties, unsure where to stand without being misunderstood. Some of us are exhausted by the demand to have a fully formed opinion at all times, whenever anyone asks you, when what really we have is not fully formed opinions, but often fully broken hearts. Many of us feel we are living in and in between all of these things, trying to navigate.

We are after shock, but we're before full repair, after loss, but before clarity. When the body has crossed over into something new, but the nervous system hasn't yet caught up, we want to sing, and we don't know if we can trust singing. We want to hope, but we don't know if hope is cheap at this moment.

We want to move forward, but we're not sure how we can do that without betraying what we are still carrying. And that's why this week's Torah portion is spot on. Parshat Beshalach, the portion known as Beshalach, that part of the Book of Exodus that has within it both the last moments of being in Egypt and the moments before the Red Sea splits and then the moments after it, it is amazing.

It always happens to be connected with Tu B'shvat and the festival of the trees. It has in it Shabbat Shira, the song of the sea. But the Torah is very careful about when that song happens, yeah? That song doesn't happen when the Israelites are terrified.

It doesn't happen while the waters are churning. It doesn't happen when the Egyptian army is still closing in on them. Only after the people make it through does the Torah say, Then Moshe and the children of Israel began to sing a song.

Only then. Az, then. Az.

Like the wizard of Az. Then. Someday.

Over the rainbow. Then. Az.

The rabbis linger on Az. Oh, it's a great word. Alef, Zayin, Az.

Because Az doesn't just mean everything is resolved. Like Moshe doesn't wait until everything is fine. Okay, now.

Okay, great. Now everything's resolved. Let's sing.

It means the danger has receded just enough for him to exhale, just enough to breathe. This word Yashir, Az Yashir, and then Moshe will sing. Yashir is in the future sense.

It's a future tense, not the past. It doesn't say and then Moshe sang. It means then Moshe will sing, but he's singing.

Then he will sing. He's singing. Why not just say sang? And this bothers all the commentaries.

Rashi, the great medieval commentator, the French medieval commentator writes, quoting the Mechilta, this future tense of the verb to sing is pointing at Triatam Aitim, Trias HaMasen, to the resurrection of the dead. Then Moshe will sing again in the future. There are others who say, no, what is going on here is there's a timeless truth that's being revealed in Rashi because Rashi is like, oh, Triatam Aitim, it's nice.

And the others came along and said, no, no, no, you misunderstood Rashi. Rashi is saying that Moses is singing to the future is a deep idea. There's a song that never ends.

There's a song that moves forward carrying future echoes. Even a broken song today becomes the seed of a song tomorrow. Even the broken song today will become the seeds planted for the eventual song later on.

The song in the vision of the Torah, it's not a luxury of those who already are standing after. It's not for the healed already. It is the practice of the still fragile.

The people are safe but only for the moment, but they're not fully free. The desert will lie ahead of them. Hunger will be coming.

Complaints will definitely be coming. And fear will also come back. And yet they sing.

This is not a naive triumphalism. It's not denial. It isn't a distortion.

It's what it sounds like when a traumatized people discover they are still capable of spirit, still capable of breath, still capable of song. And they choose to shape that breath, however meek and meager it might seem, into something meaningful. And that is something that our tradition has given us for the last 2,000 years of our diasporic living.

It taught us something clear. Shira or song is never just about music. Song is theology on the air.

Song is theology carried on the air. Theology in vibration form. The soul saying what prose can't yet manage.

When words alone are insufficient, we open our mouths and sing. Not because everything is finished, but because silence would concede too much. And so we notice this Shabbat and every year on Shabbat Shira.

The sea did not part because they sang. They sang because the sea had parted just enough to let them through. They didn't sing their song because the sea had parted fully, but just enough.

And they said, okay, now we can sing. Their fragility mirrored in the fragility of the sea before them. They took their cue from the sea and began to sing.

Courage came first. Movement came first. We know about the famous Nachshon Ben Aminadav, this prince of the tribe of Judah.

The Talmud teaches us he stepped into the water. Kira knows this, right? He stepped into the water deeper and deeper until the waves reached his nostrils. And only then did the sea split.

The miracle did not come to those who waited. It came to the one who moved before certainty and before safety. And after that step, the waters parted.

After that, they sang. It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes from the poet Mark Nepo, who says that many a dance begins with a trip and many a song with a cough. Many a song begins with just that.

And we know that. We know this Oz space intimately, especially at this moment where we are in time as a community and as a country. We're not in Egypt anymore, but Egypt is not done with us, it seems.

We're not drowning, but we are not yet standing on dry land with confidence. We are again oscillating between and in between. This week asked us to hold memory and to do so without weaponizing it.

This week asked us to grieve without turning our loss into rhetoric. It asked us to condemn violence without surrendering complexity. And it asked us to stay awake to all of the suffering that has been given without the seduction of going numb.

B'Shalach teaches us that song doesn't require certainty, only the courage to stay human in the aftermath. So that brings us to Tu B'Shvat. It enters the conversation because Tu B'Shvat, the holiday of the trees, doesn't come in the spring.

It should come in the spring. It doesn't celebrate the blooming of all those trees. It doesn't celebrate the flourishing.

It doesn't celebrate the cherry blossoms. It celebrates the planting of the seeds and then the invisible, mysterious rising of the sap, of the life force that has not yet fully broken through. Tu B'Shvat doesn't deny the harshness of the winter outside.

It insists that life can begin underground, unseen and unspectacular. The Gemara, the Talmud reminds us, if you're holding a sapling in your hand and someone tells you the Mashiach has come, first plant the tree and then go greet the Messiah. If you are holding a sapling in your hand and someone tells you the Messiah has come, plant the sapling.

Planting is not denial. It is the stubborn refusal to let despair have the final word in this world. A stubborn refusal to let the winters of our life and the winters of our societies have the final word.

We will plant seeds and we will celebrate sap. That is the courage it takes to give rise to song, as Bruce Springsteen showed us this week. Not loud song, not polished song maybe, not any of those genres, maybe no auto-tune, but honest song, simple song, half a song, a quarter of a song, a breath of a song, the kind of song that trembles, the kind of song that remembers where it has been.

The kind of song that does not rush to resolution. Even Miriam, Moses' sister, who sings right after him, does not offer a full reprise. She takes her timbrel and leads the women in dance.

How do they have timbrels in the wilderness, says Rashi? Because they packed them with faith, he answers, believing that there would be a reason for them to use their timbrels. They took their timbrels out of the attic. They said, we're going to get to that, we're going to get to that raging sea and jokers to the left and Egyptians behind us, and right there and then it's going to happen.

They had reason to believe, they had reason, faith, and it didn't replace the grief, it wasn't the absence of grief, it was the presence of hope in holding that together. And if this way of being were to take root within us, if we learn to honor grief before demanding answers, to remember without flattering, flattening memory into slogans, to protect life without erasing difference, to plant even when history has scorched the ground, maybe, maybe our public life would have deeper roots. Maybe we would stop demanding instant miracles and learn instead how to step into the water together.

So this Shabbat of Shira, of song, we're not rushing, we're not rushing. We're walking, we're remembering, and we're planting. We're putting more love in the world today, because that is the only, it's the only real question at the end of every night of our lives, at the end of every season, is did you put more love in the world today? More love on your way to the setting sun? That's the question.

And if we do that and watch the sap rise, one incremental breath, half breath, quarter breath at a time, one half song at a time, that, my friends, is the promise of Moshe, Az Yashir. Then we'll sing, because we never stopped, we never stopped. Please rise.

We turn to page 78. It is upon us, Alayna,

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