

Shabbat Sermon 11 10 17

Veterans Day or what it was really called as Armistice Day, the day of peace, the cessation of war, has always been a very important day for me for a reason other than the traditional reason, it's because it's 11-11. And 11-11, I have to admit, as somebody who loves numbers and signs, I was always into signs. I don't know how many of you are into signs. How many of you are into signs? Can I get a sign? Anybody? Any sign? Looking for signs? I was a guy who looked for signs, I have to admit it. It seems a little bit foolish to find kind of arbitrary symbols or arbitrary signs as a communication from the beyond, but there was a point in my life where the desire to witness that which was not easily beheld, something like the sense that God was with me and that I would

find God in places, ironically or weirdly, absurdly, found its way into the number 11-11. And I started, of course, once you set up a sign, you know what happens after you set up a sign. You see it everywhere. So I started keeping 11-11 journals, believe it or not. It didn't help that the first woman I fell in love with after my yeshiva days was born on November 11th, and that just threw me over the top. So Aviva Goldstein, happy birthday to you tomorrow.

Signs and the confusion of evidence and whether or not we live in a world which is confirmation biased and the things that we bring to moments and whether or not we observe and change that which is observed if you can apply Heisenberg's uncertainty theory to kind of the way we live our normal days. We want to see something, and then there it is. Just thinking about you, and they called. Carl Jung called the synchronicity and wrote about it. For those who have doubts about whether or not this has any scientific validity or it's something empirical, let's just say that there are enough of these synchronicities that point us towards something somehow. We don't really know what it is. Whether we should hang our hats on it or our yarmulkes or anything else on it. But in tomorrow morning's Torah portion, we get a little bit of wisdom on how to work with signs and what's really important when we speak about signs because the truth is signs, like everything else, are in the eye of the beholder. And what we witness is, of course, absolutely inseparable from the one who witnesses it. We know that. The Torah itself says that when there are witnesses that are called to a criminal case or any other kind of case, we need two witnesses because we know that one person and their own prejudices and their biases, we just bring ourselves everywhere. So if two people can say they saw it, then that makes a difference. But tomorrow morning, we're going to see something about signs and what's really important in signs in a story that is a great story. Tomorrow morning, which is, of course, the story of Sarah's death and then Abraham's death.

Tomorrow morning, Sarah dies and Abraham dies in the same parasha. Chaye Sarah begins with the death of Sarah, the matriarch, and then ends with the death of Abraham, the first patriarch. And in between, sandwiched between these two parents, as he was also in their lifetime, is Isaac. And the story of Isaac's redemption, Isaac's consolation, Isaac's elevation. Isaac is, of course, one of the first victims of the very patriarchy which will empower him. Isaac himself, wounded in chapter 22, brought up to the altar and not sacrificed, will come back to find that his mother, the one whom at least we believe from the tradition loved him more than his father, is gone. But, of course, to Abraham, it's important that there's a

lineage. And giving it over to Isaac makes no sense if Isaac doesn't have a wife. And so thus ensues the longest chapter in the book of Genesis devoted entirely to the matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match. Find me a wife for Isaac, my son. Isaac. Isaac's the only one of the patriarchs that doesn't have a pickup line for his wife. He doesn't have any meeting, nothing happens. If anything, it's not a pickup line. There's a falling that happens. Who knows? Isaac's future is not in his own hands. Isaac's future is not in his own hands. And so here's what happens.

Abraham says, I'm too old, I can't go on this journey, but I'm going to send my servant, Eliezer, just reminding all of you, I know you know this story, I'm sending Eliezer, my trusted servant, to go back to the land that I came from. You are not allowed to take a wife for my son here in this land. And you're not to bring my son back there even if she says, okay, but let him come and get me. Nuh-uh. Right? She has to come. As my friend Mark Margolis, Rabbi Mark Margolis said, she has to be an immigrant just like me. She has to be one from the outside just like me. Go find the right woman. And so Eliezer goes there and he thinks to himself, okay, what am I going to do? It could be that he should just sidle up and find out who's there, maybe go on jay date. I say that joke every year. It's never funny, but anyway, jay date. And do something, you know.

I don't know what he's going to do when he gets there. But here's Eliezer's idea. Eliezer in chapter 24, the servant, the trusted servant, everybody with me? Trusted servant of Abraham gets to the land that Abraham sends him back to get a wife for his son Isaac in order to continue the lineage. And when Eliezer gets there, he says like this out loud. He says, God, Elohe Adonai Abraham, God who is the God of my master Abraham, please deal graciously with me today and give me good fortune. I will come to the spring as the daughters of the town will come out to fetch water, to draw water. And the woman or the young girl to whom I will say, please, may I drink from your water? If she will say to me, drink, and I will also water your camels, that's the one. I know you're all blown away by that, right? You're like, whoo. She has all of the bona fides. That's it. She's degree, you know. Good family. If she, this is a big deal, though. It's a big deal. It's a big deal. She's generous. She's generous. Now, what happens with the sign? By he who terim ki lau daber v'nei rivka yot seit.

He had not even finished speaking, and Rebekah comes onto the scene. She makes an entrance, right? She's related. She's, you know. And she does everything he says. She comes over. He comes over to her. Eliezer comes over to her. Yairatz ha'evet ha'kartave yomer. He says to her, please, can you give me some water from your jar? And she says, She says, great. Here, she fulfills the sign, and he's thinking, wow, that is so great, the sign. That's what I was looking for. I set it up, and sure enough, she fulfilled what I wanted.

But here's something interesting in the text that I want to focus on now for the next five minutes, and then we'll come in for a landing. She finishes, v'tchal ashkoto, she finishes, he finishes drinking, Eliezer, the servant. And then she says, I'm also going to give your camels to drink. Great, right? But then she adds this. Ad in kilu l'shtot. Until they have finished drinking. Until they finish drinking. Now, Eliezer never said in his sign that the woman who would show grace, who would show goodness, who would show generosity, had to then stipulate that she would be there until the end of the matter. And one of the great Hasidic masters, who also leaned towards Musar, says, this is the key of the whole story.

You understand this little moment, this phrase that is offered from a spirit of goodness, a spirit of quality, it has to be a character trait, not a state, not a moment, but something ingrained in Rebekah that was so profoundly important that this is what won the day for Eliezer. This was the trait, and not the sign. He says it was because she was willing to be there till the end. She was willing to be there because she knew that the camels were thirsty, and that was a sign to Eliezer, who knew Abraham and who knew Isaac, and knew especially Isaac.

Isaac was going to need somebody that would be there for him for the long road, the long road of healing, the long road of reconciliation, the long road of a parched son who never received his father's love, who was bereft of his parents, who was tired of suffering day in and day out in his life, whose amygdala had never fully recalibrated. He was going to need someone who knew what it was to not only offer water, but to be there until that thirst was quenched. Ad in kilu l'shtot, until they finished drinking, she would listen and see, do you need more water? I'm going to be there with you. Kilua ez avcha, I won't leave your side, Rebekah said. And in those moments, Eliezer moved from sign and symbol and interpretation to looking for a character quality, a behavior, that even all the signs in the world would not have been sufficient had she not given those words, those words signaled to him, you know something, you can bring us to water, right, you can bring us to a sign, but that's not the sign. The sign was, Ad in kilu l'shtot, says Rav Shemalka of Nickelsburg, Ad in kilu l'shtot.

How about us? How about me, how about you? Every single week of the year that we commemorated this past week has been yet another moment for me personally, I don't know about you, I'll speak for myself, I almost always do, has been a moment of I'm getting thirstier and thirstier, I don't know if I can make it across the desert, a yahrzeit a year, we can all remember where we were a year ago, this past week, November 9th was a commemoration of Kristallnacht, I can imagine that there's no exhaustion greater than the exhaustion of an anticipated suffering that's coming around the corner, or an anticipated newsreel that's coming this coming Sunday or next Sunday, another church, another mosque, another moment, each and every one of us is another Yitzhak, and we need our Rivka, we need a Rebecca to say we know it's going to take a long time for you to drink. Ad in kilu l'shtot, the evidence is everywhere, the signs are everywhere, we read them as we want to read them, but the character traits that we want are longevity, patience, love, and ability to say more than was expected of us, and to give more than we could or thought we could.

Ad in kilu l'shtot, I'll keep drawing water until you're finished drinking, Rebecca said to Isaac, and sure enough, when Isaac sees Rebecca, he's consoled, vayinachem, he's consoled, my mother was the well I went to when I was parched, my mother knew how to give me the nourishing waters of recognition, and what do I do without my mother? But Rebecca, Rebecca had the medicine, and she has the medicine for me, for you, because the quality that she offered is the quality that each and every one of us can cultivate tonight, tomorrow, to ask ourselves deeply, as St. Francis of Assisi wrote, you know, ask not to be consoled, but to console. Love that. Why don't I read that, since it's here, right? He said, God, please.

He prayed, O Divine, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, for it is in giving that we receive. What kind of world would we live in if Rebecca's and Rebecca in us was alive? What would it look like for you, tonight, tomorrow? How could we make that turn in our society, in our shul, in our friendships, in our love relations? What would it look like? How would you translate this, until you're finished drinking, I'm here? Translate it for yourself. Until antisemitism is over, we're with you. Until racism is over, we're with you. Until misogyny is over, we're with you. Until we put an end to sexual harassment by men in power, we are with you. Until we put an end, until it is done, we're with you. We're not going anywhere. What would that look like if we would be that way? The world would be a different place.

The world could be a different place, so let's be that way. Let's make that commitment. Because every Shabbat is an opportunity for us to make a promise. So let's make a promise tonight, tomorrow. I want to be like Rebecca. When someone comes looking for a sign, I say, I don't have a sign for you, but I have a character trait. I will listen until you're finished speaking. I will hold you until you don't need holding any longer. I will love you until you are healed. I will be patient with you. I will walk that talk and be that one. We can't all be matriarchs of the future, one of the great five religious traditions, right? The original one. But we can focus less on signs and more on traits that we can cultivate. And instead of looking for the evidence outside, we can find the qualities inside that will make the world a different place. Until you're finished drinking.

Let's rise.