

Sermon Shabbat Dec 4 2015

I had a pivotal moment this week with my boys. It was a milestone. We watched Star Wars for the first time.

I know some of you judgmental parents out there are thinking a little bit too early. But they had lightsabers already and wondered what they were. So I showed them.

And Tal, Or, and Baer said to me, Abba, what's the force? All great mythology has a story about the hidden child. The per-eternus, the eternal child who is lost and who is discovered at some point. The child has to awaken to their own capacities.

They have to be convinced that they have that within them. Yeah. Luke doesn't know who he is.

He has a dark father. And like all great social movements, when something becomes a part of the zeitgeist, it becomes a part of the common culture, the popular culture, there's something deeply embedded in its truth. That within each and every one of us is a knowing, within each and every one of us there is a light, there is greatness, uniqueness that we are called to. That's why it spoke to so many of us. Gifted children, dramatically gifted children perhaps.

Another great myth that has made its way into the Jewish people's psyche came at the beginning of the 16th century after the expulsion from Spain in 1492, that horrific moment, catastrophe, homelessness, absolute chaos.

In the northern part of Israel there was a rabbi named Isaac Luria, known as the Ari. And this Isaac Luria Ashkenazi introduced a myth into the Jewish psyche that has made its way in so many different forms in so many different places. And in our Kabbalah Learning Institute this last week and weeks before, we discussed the myth of the Tzimtzum.

That amazing word, Tzimtzum, which is Tzam, Tzam, fast, fast. A fast that which is like we don't drink, we don't eat. So Tzimtzum is the myth that God constricted, contracted God's essence in order for our world to be.

Introducing us to mythology of absence and presence. That in order for the world to be, God must be absent for it to be. That without that absence, without that darkness, there can't be a light that is visible, that it is in the vacuum of God's absence.

That a world is born. And that myth, it sets up something very profound. We are born into the world with a sense of both fullness and lack.

And that which we feel as lack, we know it as absence and we want it. We have a yearning for meaning, for purpose. In the vacuum that is created by that dark constriction, we go searching for that trace, that Rishimu, that Roshem of God that we know must be hidden there, but we can't see it.

It's dark. This time of the year when it gets very dark, we have our own story in our own sacred mythology about a hidden child, a child who goes missing. And in that story, that

story of Joseph and his technicolored dreamcoat, those remaining 13 chapters of the book of Genesis that always appear at this time of the year, tell the story of that hidden light.

That Joseph who goes down to Egypt, who is hidden, whose greatness can't be completely revealed. And there's one character, one character in this story who sets up a lesson for each and every one of us working with absence. We're told that when the brothers, as we know the story or the show, the brothers throw Joseph into a pit, he's sold down into Egypt and there he goes, Vayeret Yosef, he goes down to Egypt and the brothers, trying to cover up their tracks, take off his technicolored dreamcoat.

They rip it off and they pour blood on it after they've slaughtered an animal and they bring it back to Jacob. And Jacob sees the technicolored dreamcoat, he sees his beloved son's coat, the coat that represented his specialness to Jacob and Jacob cries. And then the Torah tells us something very powerful and Jacob could not be comforted.

Jacob refused to be comforted. Why wouldn't Jacob be comforted? Jacob has already lost Rachel, Jacob knows what it is to lose years and people, Jacob like no other character in the Bible knows suffering, he knows lack, he knows pain, he knows suffering, he knows pathos. Jacob can't be comforted? Me'ana lehi nachem, does he get it from Rachel? Why can't he be comforted? 20 years he can't be comforted.

Says the Midrash, because Jacob knew inside that Joseph must be alive. Joseph must be alive. And he refused to give up hope.

He refused to say that in the darkness there isn't a trace of God still hidden there. He refused to say in his deep grief that there isn't some way, some hope. He refused to despair of life even if life seemed to despair of him.

Jacob becomes the paragon of our resistance to the absolute darkness. It's not easy waking up morning after morning, week after week, year after year to see the same ridiculous headlines. Right? Right? It's not easy waking up knowing that like Adam Gopnik said in the New Yorker that the resolution to some of the things that we pray for with words are simple actions that our government and our leaders could take.

It's not easy to say I'm not giving up hope. It's not easy to say like Jacob could have said, well, the evidence is before me. You see, people will always be this way.

It will always be thus. Jacob refuses to give up hope. Jacob refuses to give up hope on that little jar of oil, that little can that could because he knew deep in his heart that life still beats, that hope was still regnant underneath the darkness, the hidden absence of God in his history and in history and in our own midst.

Jacob refused. I wonder what gave Jacob that strength. I wonder what it was that kept Jacob going in those dark hours.

I wonder what it must have been like for him. How he could have Jacob, who are you? But Jacob refused. Jacob had a deep abiding belief, a deep faith in that which was unseen.

The hero of the story, though, is not Jacob. That's one piece. Refusing to give up hope is just one piece of this weekend's drama.

The second hero of the story and maybe the hero of Jewish history is Judah. In chapter 38 tomorrow morning we'll read about Judah and the story of how he was himself exiled. He himself took himself away from the family.

Judah in a very powerful moment Judah becomes involved in a scenario with his daughter-in-law Tamar. Those of you who don't know the story in brief, Judah leaves his father and his family to go down just as Joseph is going down, the two parallel. Joseph goes down and Judah goes down and Judah gets himself involved where both of his sons marry a woman named Tamar and the third son, who is supposed to marry Tamar, he's afraid to give his son Shelah, whose name means Shelah, belonging to her.

He refuses to give his third son to Tamar thinking that Tamar is the reason for the death of his two sons. He's afraid. And Tamar takes the law into her own hands and Tamar dresses, covering her face the only thing that could be seen were her eyes and she stands by the side of the road and she sleeps with her father-in-law Judah.

And Judah, when he hears that Tamar is pregnant, not knowing that he had slept with Tamar because she had been, after all, hidden Judah pronounces a very severe sentence against Tamar, thinking that she's guilty of being, of being a whore. And just as this sentence against Tamar is about to be carried out Tamar reproduces the collateral signs that she had asked Judah for and shows the whole world that it was Judah. And Judah has a moment—look at this in chapter 38—Judah has a moment when he can use his power negatively, he can actually shut Tamar down. And Judah becomes the hero of the entire Genesis project because Judah, in that moment, when he had power, admitted that he was wrong. And Judah then becomes the one who saves the story. He's the one who finds the hidden Joseph for his resistant father Jacob; Jacob holds the hope and Judah delivers the humility of leadership that when faced with evidence succumbs and says you know, you're right, I made a mistake these two moments.

Jacob's deep abiding belief and Judah's strength to say no, I screwed up. She is more righteous than I, Judah said. Could we use more of that in our culture at this moment? Is there any greater biblical archetypes that we could bequeath to our friends, that we could live than the archetype of no, in Palestine in Israel, we will not give up hope in this country which is riddled with the idiocy of firearms. There are more guns than people.

Could we ever use a Judah to stand up and say you know, even though I will look as a politician like I'm wishy-washy on various issues. This is kind of scientific evidence. Countries that move towards gun control save children's lives, and I'm gonna speak that truth. Sadkami meni, you know I was wrong, I was wrong. I see the light could we get a politician to stand up. Could we get some leadership to Judahize this conversation and in our own lives. Friends, it's not enough just to talk about politics out there. What about in here, inside each and every one of us.

I sat with a congregant this week who looked straight into my face and said you know, you hurt me. And I was thinking Judah give me strength. Judah give me strength. I said you're right, I'm sorry I could have done better. I should have done better. How many people here would walk away from a leader or a friend who would sit in front of you and say you know I

screwed up. I'm sorry I hurt you, I acted selfishly. I acted with the awareness that I had but it was limited, and I hurt you. How many of us in that moment would say you know dig in my heels.

Judah who publicly, who publicly consecrated, who sanctifies God's name by saying I was wrong, that is called kidush shamayim—to sanctify God's name. I was wrong.

So, I want you to take away a couple of things. My friend Rabbi Sharon Brous wrote this week that we are at war, and our weapons, she said are love and justice. With justice, I want you each and every one of you to say I'm going to do something to let my voice be heard to make this a safer country. Do something. Decide before you leave those doors and I think I'm going to do something. I'll go on a website, I'll speak out against Islamophobia, I'll speak out against gun violence, I'll do something that's justice. And then love one, hug one open door, one paid forward. Take a moment—pay a bill for someone else.

Man we need a revolution of small acts of kindness. We need lightsabers everywhere. We need Jedi knights who say right here, here's a moment. Here's a dark place.

Let me bring some light right here—Hanukkah is coming. There's a little jar of oil right there. Into the midst of this temple, this world where no jars of oil seem to be possible. We have to continue to look into the absence of that divine absence and say here will be presence, right here will be love. We will build a world from love [Hebrew] We will build a world from small acts of love. Be just. March.

But right here, tonight, you can already start Hanukkah. Before you leave, hug Anderson, because he loves hugs. Am I right Anderson? And not all for you. We got a lot of other people that use hugs. On the way home tonight think let me think of a kindness strategy for the week. I'll put it on my list of things to do today I'm going to do some act of kindness, some small deed that will say the world is now built a little bit more so I want us to rise in a moment with these sheets that we handed out with the words olam chesed ibaneh the world will be built with kindness. Please rise. Olam chesed ibaneh olam chesed ibaneh na na na, na na na olam chesed ibaneh na na na, na na na olam chesed ibaneh na na na, na na na olam chesed ibaneh. I will build this world from love