

Romemu Dvar Torah November 18 2016

I was sitting with a friend of mine this morning, who, after hearing me describe how inspired I was to sit with him and his fiancé to talk about their marriage, in a week, again, where I was finding it really tough, for all kinds of reasons, to feel hope. I was describing to Matt and to Sarah, his fiancé, how, in the Jewish tradition at the wedding ceremony, it's a triumph of love. I always say to couples, love won today.

Love won. And Matt threw out a popular culture reference that I felt guilty that I didn't know, because I probably was a Hasidic kid at the time. But I looked it up, and it's from *Do the Right Thing*, a Spike Lee film.

So I went home and I watched the scene that he talked about. In the scene, it's Radio Rahim. Did I get that right? Radio Rahim? So Radio Rahim is this towering, menacing-looking black man, right? In the scene, he's kind of running around with his *Fight the Power* by Public Enemy, wherever he goes. It's on his boombox. And he's on his way to Sal's Pizza Shop. And he's going to get a couple of slices, and he runs into Mookie. Is that right, Mookie? He explains to Mookie that the meaning of something that Mookie noticed as he was moving his hands around, he saw these big brass rings that Radio Rahim is wearing. And he says to him, let me tell you the story of the right hand, Radio Rahim says, and the left hand. The left hand, he says, it's a tale of good and evil.

Hate. And he points out his left hand with the ring that says, hate on hate. It was this hand that Cain iced his brother with. And love. These five fingers. These five fingers that go straight to the soul of man. The right hand, the left hand, and the story of life. Static. One hand is always fighting the other hand, and then the left hand is kicking much ass. It looks like the right hand, love, is finished. But hold on! Stop the presses, because the right hand is coming back. Yeah, you got the left hand on the ropes, that's right, you're boom! It's a devastating right, and hate is hurt. Hate is down. Left hand, KO'd by love. Left hand, hate, KO'd by love.

If I love you, I love you, but if I hate you, hate was KO'd by love. A knockout punch. I had an experience of that Sunday night in, of all places, Lincoln Plaza Theater. Named for the great uniter, emancipator. At Lincoln Plaza Theater last Sunday night, a movie that Beth mentioned disturbing the peace. A movie about the organization that Beth mentioned, combatants for peace.

Israeli soldiers, who having been in the occupied territories, Israeli soldiers who having seen what the occupation was doing to them and to their country, and Palestinian terrorists, freedom fighters, Palestinians who had harmed Israelis, had been to jail, hated one another passionately, found a way across the walls, across the divisions, across the storylines, across all that understandably is between them. I met Suleiman, someone who I had met in the movie earlier, I'd seen it two times, so I was waiting to meet Suleiman, Sule, beautiful man from the West Bank. Suleiman, in the story, in the movie, was so full of hatred towards Israeli soldiers that he had taken a knife, and with a friend of his he had crept up to two innocent Israelis and stabbed one of them in the back.

And then there he was in an Israeli prison, sitting with his prison mates, and they found themselves watching Schindler's List. And before he knew it, Sully was crying uncontrollably. So these are the grandparents of those whom I call oppressor, and he began to read about Israelis and on both sides. And they stood there in Lincoln Plaza Theater after this movie called Disturbing the Peace about a non-violent movement for peace. Neither one of the groups that were represented were going to talk about politics. Nobody wanted to talk about Bibi or about Abbas or about the leadership that's incalcitrant on this side or that side.

Who's right? Who's wrong? No, no, no, no. They wanted to talk about what it's like to non-vitally stand together against hatred. To non-vitally stand together for the sake of a heart that can break into a thousand pieces when we demonize and dehumanize the other for all kinds of good reasons. There are so many good reasons to see the other as anything but us. It's them, not us. And there they were, combatants for peace, love.

So powerful to be in the presence of those who can overcome. That's what it's all about, isn't it? Being able to find light in dark places as we spoke about last week. Being able to overcome when things look dark and bleak to find ways to KO hate. Tomorrow morning in the weekly wisdom in the Parshat we'll read an amazing story about someone known in the rabbinic tradition as Avram HaOhev, Abraham the lover. I love thinking about Abraham as a lover. It's very, very exotic, very romantic.

I usually think about him with, like, robes and camels and, you know. Abraham HaOhev, the lover. At the end of chapter 18 after Abraham has been told that his long-awaited son, the heir to his lineage, the promise fulfilled from a god who was really getting past overdue for a promise that he had made a long time ago. Abraham, in the tension of will I have a child? In chapter 18, tomorrow morning, Abraham and Sarah will be told, you will have a child. And immediately after that news is given to them, the Torah hands us these verses that no less than Nechama Leibowitz the greatest, maybe the greatest Torah scholar of the 20th century said are the most important verses in the book of Genesis. And the angels or the messengers who came to give the news to Abraham and Sarah, they left.

And verse 17 of chapter 18 the text turns to us to give us the intra-divine dialogue. All of a sudden God is talking to God's self and we get to listen, the Torah says. And God said to God's self, says the Torah Will I hide from Abraham what it is that I'm about to do? Abraham will be a great nation. He will be blessed and will bless the world. And then verse 19 For I have known him I know him to be the one I've singled him out that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of God They will keep the way of God to do justice and righteousness so that God may do what God had promised for Abraham. These three verses, a conversation that God has with God's self, turning to us the readers who are listening to the story saying Hey, psst, Peter, here's what I'm about to do to Abraham. Can I conceal from my friend Abraham whom I love with all of my heart what it is that I'm about to do? What is God about to do in the text? Anybody? Who knows what God is about to do in the text, right after this? God is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, about to destroy these two cities.

And God says, I have to tell Abraham. I have to I singled him out as a lover, I singled him out to teach his children to give him the covenant, to have a special relation with him so that he

will bring about blessing in the world. I have to share this news that they will shomer derech Adonai to watch over, to observe, to be diligent and perseverant in the way of Adonai, in the way of of compassion in the way of that name of God which is love. That they know the way of love and the way of love, says the Torah will lead Abraham to demand, to protest to argue with God for the sake of those who live in those cities. The way of love, the shomer derech Adonai you have been chosen, Abraham is told, or we're told about Abraham, you have been chosen to give this way over to your children, the way of Adonai. To bring justice and righteousness to the world, you. And because of that Abraham has the strength now to stand up to God to say to the power beyond which there is none are you. God you yourself just told me that I am to watch over the way of love and you God are not acting in a loving way so I will protest. I will argue because love after all will demand that I do so. You after all God have told me that I am to watch over that way even with you what is derech Adonai.

I said it is to be loving for Nechama Leibowitz says it's even more powerful than that the way of Adonai, the way of justice and the way of righteousness is found in the book of Jeremiah in verse 22 of chapter 9 thus says God, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the strong man glory in his strength. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But only in this should one glory in that one who is earnestly devoted to me for I am the Lord who acts with kindness. I am God who is loving, who does goodness and equity with the world. For these I delight it says further. Jeremiah in this shall you glorify in chapter 22 if you want to know me, love the poor, love the weak, love the widow, and the orphan.

Last week here in Romemu in the midst of a week that was unparalleled in my experience as a rabbi in over a decade where the majority of this community was in grief. Where many of us were receiving phone calls from friends and neighbors what do I do, where do I go what's the path forward. How should I behave, how should I feel. There were a few here that were hurt by words that I shared last Friday night. It wasn't my intention. My intention is to be a pastor, not a pundit. My role in this world is to be a lover and not a fighter. Really my desire in this community and in every community is for every human being to feel loved, held, seen, honored, known.

I want to be one of Abraham's children. I want to live in the way of love. I want to be an Avraham Ohavi. I want to be a lover. I want to be a knock out puncher for love, and Abraham this Shabbat comes and kisses me on the cheek and he says to me David, it doesn't really matter ultimately if people are right or wrong. What ultimately matters, it says Abraham to me this Shabbat, is that I serve the God who loves the weak. That I serve the God who loves the poor. That I serve and genuflect before the principle of love that is ever present, manifest at every single moment. And it is that altar that I stand before at all times, regardless of public opinion, regardless of whether my sermons will be heard, regardless of whether people walk out.

I don't want to ever insult anybody but here's the point as my friend Rabbi Sheyheld wrote when he was asked why he was so vocal about this election given that he's a philosopher and not an activist. The answer is simple, I aspire to serve the God of the Bible. Many of us take the Bible and the Jewish tradition seriously and the Bible tells us that God loves the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and it challenges us to do the same. God challenges us to be to be observant, to watch, to be diligent and vigilant for the way of love. The God of

the Bible says is not impressed by wealth or political power or social status. The God of the Bible is not interested in access to White House Hanukkah parties, which all rabbis know we fight for with tooth and nail. The God of the Bible is interested in widows and orphans and immigrants in the poor, the downtrodden and the exploited.

The Bible says to us if you want to love God, start by loving those whom God loves, and God loves the weak and enjoins us to love them too. And on this there doesn't have to be any partisanship. All people of good faith. All of us together. If you're in this shul I trust and I know that you are a person of love and it doesn't matter to me if you voted for president-elect, I'm not angry I'm not pointing a finger.

We have to come together, all of us to say that we will march against God if God doesn't act with love because that's the way of Abraham. And Abraham was applauded by God. We will march to make sure that those who feel unsafe and insecure. We will march, we will protest with love with compassion holding our government, holding our elected officials to the standards that all of us agree upon that make this country a great nation. We all agree and so on both sides of everything the demonization and dehumanization has to stop pointing fingers at someone who voted differently than us has to stop and raising ourselves together with the fist of love to stand strong and say not in my lifetime. Not in my lifetime.

People of color are safe. People who are from a different nationality are safe. Women are safe. LGBTQ people are safe. These are all things that all people of conscience believe and we should have 50 million people marching together saying, not in my lifetime. Love has to win so let's not be equivocal. Let's not even be angry necessarily unless it fuels the compassion to bring about a world of greater justice, love, equality. Let's stop identifying by the parties that we have and the lines that we have drawn and let's find commonality together, to fight as Avraham did. That's what the Torah is telling us tomorrow morning. That's what the combatants for peace were fighting about last Sunday night, and it's what will happen tomorrow at Middle Collegiate Church with our friends Jacqueline Lewis and with Auburn Seminary and Lab Shul and Romemu. So to speak out for the sake of the way of love the Shomer Derech Adonai in the end of the day.

I have no doubt whatsoever more and more clearly with each passing moment that love will knock out hate let's join hands together let's raise hands together let's find the way to lift up love please rise.