

Romemu Dvar Torah May 6, 2016

Rabbi Jessica, in the poem that she read earlier this evening from Rumi, speaks of this place where everything is music. They derive, she read from Rumi, Rumi says, they derive, the songs, they, derive from a slow and powerful root that we can't see. Music derives from a slow and powerful root that we can't see.

I want to talk a little bit tonight about that root. And begin by telling you that my whole life has been dominated by the theme of twinness. I'm a twin.

And that doesn't mean if you see someone that looks like me on the street that it's me. We're fraternal, but you might as well go over to the person, it doesn't matter. But my childhood was shaped by a story that my mother would talk to us about, the feeling of having twins, of what it was for us to be in the womb, the two of us together.

Usually it was in the theme of the reason why I'm vigorous, because I fought for the ice cream more than my brother did, that kind of theme. But more often than not, it was the experience of being held, that sense of a holding that a womb is, the sense of a container, a place where life is growing, a place where things are happening, and how she would talk to us and how she imagined us listening. And of course, many of you know that my wife is two weeks from her due date, and so I'm thinking a lot about this theme.

It's on my heart, it's on my mind. And I couldn't help but be thinking about twins, of course, this week. And brothers.

Because within this community, last Saturday, Tom Kranjak passed away. Unexpectedly, tragically, suddenly. And as I said at Tom's funeral, Paulette, I said that the name Thomas comes from the Hebrew word ta'om, twin.

And tomorrow morning, in our weekly wisdom installment, the parashat will also speak about brothers, the brothers who meet a fate much like Tom's. Tomorrow morning's parashat, acharei mot, which literally in Hebrew means after the death. Acharei mot, after death.

It's a reference to an episode that is earlier in the Torah, the episode of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron, the brother of Moses who entered into the Holy of Holies unsolicited, and were struck down by a divine fire, an eish, a fire that descended. And in the immediate aftermath of that traumatic event, the Torah describes what becomes the rite of the Yom Kippur rituals. In the immediate after effect of the death of Aaron's sons, the Torah tells us about the Yom Kippur ritual, the purging and the purification of the temple precinct, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh Kadashim.

And if you look at that frame, essentially it is a frame that follows Jewish history up to the present day. Trauma and then entering into that Holy of Holies where death now is and inducing, creating a ritual of life, a ritual that is purifying, a ritual that brings life again to blossom in a place where death has appeared. After Egypt, we as a people, we stood at Sinai to receive Torah after the suffering of slavery.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 of the Common Era, what we now refer to as Rabbinic Judaism was born. After the expulsion from Spain in 1492, we had the renaissance in northern Israel and Sfat of Jewish mystical learning and so much of what is vibrantly, dynamically Jewish life today is rooted there. And of course, in our own century and what we commemorated past Thursday, Yom HaShoah, after Auschwitz, after the Holocaust, the global Jewish community once again rose from the ashes of trauma, creating a vibrant and dynamic center for Jewish life.

These moments were moments of profound paradigm shifting. Where power and worldviews needed to comport with new facts on the ground, new realities. The call of the day after these traumatic moments was not why, but now what.

Not how come, but how do we rise again. What is necessary, what are the conditions that are necessary for us to push forward in order to bring Chayyim life again, where now there is only acharei mot, after death. Essentially, in a way, the theologian Richard Rubenstein, who wrote a book called After Auschwitz, says something very profound, and in this he reminded me of what happened in Sfat, in northern Israel, after the expulsion of Spain, and what I think is present for me today, talking to all of you after a week like the week we had.

Richard Rubenstein said that after Auschwitz, of course, joining Protestant theologians, God was dead. Or at least the God of the Bible, the God of the father, the king, the father of a certain root metaphor. And instead though, and many think that Rubenstein said this, but he didn't, he said, I still believe in a God.

They thought he didn't, but he did, and here is his God, everyone. Here is Richard Rubenstein's God, a theologian who proclaimed God is dead after the Holocaust, after the trauma, after the death of the sons of Aaron, after, after, after. Listen to what he says.

He says, terms like ground and source are my God. They stand in contrast to the terms that we use for the biblical God, the supreme king, father, creator, judge, maker. The God who created the father, creator, judge, maker, produces something external to himself, remaining essentially outside of and judging the creative processes.

But as the ground and source of being, here echoing the great German theologian Tillich, God creates as does a mother. As ground and source, God creates as does a mother. The image of a mother to replace.

A mother to soothe. A mother to hold. A mother to be present.

A mother to say it's not happening outside, but we are all in this. A mother who says, it's all me. And I'm holding you.

And I read this and I thought to myself, this is what the Kabbalists did in Tzvat. The Kabbalists in Tzvat, who said that the world wasn't created outside of God, but in a massive consuming, in a massive withdrawal, God creates a great womb and the world is born from within God. How many people have heard in Judaism that God is a woman? How many people here in Judaism have heard of the Shekhinah, of the divine presence, of the great birthing metaphor, the root metaphor? So wonderful.

So I was thinking about this, Richard Rubinstein, and what he's saying to me and to you and to all of us today. And how it comforts, what's the comfort? What's the comfort of a God who is mother that isn't father per se? What does that do for me and you? And with this I want to bring us back to music and to the root that is slow and the root that is powerful. I was visiting with a rabbi friend of mine who lost his mother a couple of months ago and we were sitting together and he was trying to tell me about his mother and all of these images and all of these experiences and he kept getting so choked up.

And immediately I remembered something that my rabbi Reb Zalman said to me and he said it in front of a lot of people, but he reminded me of this when my wife was pregnant with our first child. She said, you know, David, you know your mother is the source of all your music. And I said, well, thank you, I know my mom's musical, but she doesn't really, we didn't have that much music growing up in the house.

It wasn't like she had an instrument. She wasn't, you know, my dad was the more musical one. Thank you, Reb Zalman, I'm not really sure what you mean exactly.

And Reb Zalman said this, he said, listen to this. So I told this to my friend. He said, the first drum beat you ever heard was your mother's heart.

Your mother's heart was your drum beat. It was the music of your soul. As you gestated in your mother's womb, she sang to you with her heart beat, her rhythm, her life, her everyday, her running around, her slowing down.

That was the music of your life. That was the soundtrack of your birth. Your mom.

The heartbeat of the mother. The heartbeat that soothes. The heartbeat that holds.

And regardless of what our actual mothers were like after we left the womb, as someone famously said, if it's not one thing, it's your mother, right? What would it feel like? What would it look like if all of us, each and every one of us, were united in the great heart of the Divine Mother, and that each and every one of us knows the deep, slow, powerful, rooted music of that one, of that great source, that great ground, that great loving being, known in Arabic as Rachman, in Hebrew as Rachamim, the great Tiferet, the great holder, container. What would that look like? It would mean, for me, that in the aftermath of tragedy, there is the music of solidarity. In the aftermath of sudden shifts in the tectonic plates of our life, there is a responsibility for us to be together in one holding, one listening, one resonance, one heart beating, together, syncopated with that beat of life.

That twinness that all of us carry, all of us together in one womb. It means that we are not outside of God, but we are each and every one of us a part and parcel of that music of the Divine that we are called to embody and to share and to hold, to sing and to listen. That is the great healing promise of Shekhinah.

That is the great healing promise of the primordial Om, which is aim, which is mother, which is shal'eim, shal'om. We are together of that great mother, that root, that power, that source, and that we sing together. So a world is built from love when theology doesn't separate us, but unites us and rooted in that ground of being, which is why we can begin a week the way that we began it last Saturday, together with you, Paulette, and your family.

And we can come to this Shabbat, to this simcha, to the joy, the togetherness of celebration of a young woman who has reached her age of bat mitzvah, to be able to hold both of those together, those twin realities of after and now. Now we sing, now we hold, now we cry, now we dance. That's the Shabbat.

That is the Shabbat of Rosh Chodesh, of healing and promise. May we all be blessed this weekend of Mother's Day to remember that beating heart that gave us life, to remember the beating heart that still joins us with all of our brothers and sisters in solidarity with their pain and with their celebration. May the one whose heart is the music of the world remind us that we too have that music in us.

May we share it with others and listen to their song and let us say amen. Please rise.