

Shabbat 07 21 17 sermon Rabbi David Ingber

It isn't easy. It's not easy at all. It's not easy knowing if in a given moment in my life, in our life, it's not easy knowing if at any given moment the things that arise inside of us when we are in relationship with others are based on fear or based on love. It's not easy to know that. There's no crystal ball, no therapist, no enneagram or astrology chart. There isn't a rabbinical text necessarily that will point out how to work with difficult feelings, difficult emotions that arise for us.

One of which is jealousy. Ha'kina'ah, ha'ta'vah ve'ha'kavod, motzi'it adam min'a'ulam. In our ethical tradition, jealousy or envy is one of those feelings that removes us from the world. It takes us out. We can be beside ourselves with competition, a feeling that someone else has something that really belongs to me or you or... It's not easy. It's not easy at all.

Another feeling that I think is something that all of us struggle with is a feeling sometimes of whether or not we are on the inside or on the outside of something. Anybody ever have that? Whether or not we're actually on the inside or on the outside, where do we belong in relationship? Is our reason for being on the outside because really we want to stand out on the inside? Or maybe our reason for being on the inside is so that we can stand out on the outside. What motivates us to be on any particular side of anything? Where is our place? What belongs to us? They're all wrapped together in one cluster of associations that could be spoken of as a religious question but really it's an existential humanist question.

It's kind of me and you. And in a society, I don't know if you ever get this, we're... Constantly we're being reminded that other people have things that we should want or have. I don't know if anybody has as ever a feeling of chisaron, of I'm lacking something. And then when we look outside we gauge what it is that we should have or what should be a part of where we are by what we see others having. Feels to me like a universal issue. Feels to me like something that is a struggle, something that is unclear, needs berur, needs to be clarified.

And the Torah comes along in chapter 32 tomorrow morning in the book of Numbers and gives us some really good advice. A really interesting case study in exactly this issue. Known as the story of the Transjordanian tribes. The Torah tells us in chapter 32 as the four books of Moses come to a close. Meaning that the five books of Moses are really four books plus a repetition in the fifth book. So as the fourth book closes we're basically at the end of the Torah. And whenever you come to the end of something you want really to make something stick and give a kind of really important essence. So at the end of the Torah tomorrow morning as it were, as the fourth book of the Bible will be closed, we have a double portion called matot masae which means tribal sticks and journeys. It's a story about tribes.

It's talking kind of like who will inherit what part of the promised land if you need a kind of refresher now maybe your first time in a shul in a long time or a church shul ever. Maybe. The Israelites have been promised through Abraham a certain piece of property. It takes from Avir HaYardim from over the side of the Jordan river. The Israelites are on the move. And already once in their story a group of 12 spies who went into the land to see whether it was beautiful came back and gave a really horrible gossip report about the land. And that was the very reason the Israelites died out in the desert. And their children now are

standing at the precipice of that Jordan river about to cross over to that goodly land. And all of a sudden out of nowhere as the Torah is coming to a close I know you're excited because so am I clearly.

Two tribes and a half two and a half tribes step forward and say you know what we have a lot of cattle. And this little area over here that's not quite the promised land that's kind of a good place for us. We kind of want to be here on the outside of the land. And if you're reading the story you're thinking it's nay. No! Have you not learned anything thus far? The very thing the ur sin of the book of Numbers is not wanting to enter into that goodly land that had been promised to our ancestors. Oh ye of little faith and Moses in fact the great leader that's where Moses goes.

Right? If you'll read the story if you haven't read it in a while Moses goes to that place gets triggered right away. He's like uh oh we've been here before. And he actually rebukes the two and a half tribes and says wait a second are you guys repeating that sin that your ancestors had already committed? Are you repeating that sin? Is that what you're doing? Are you telling me that you don't want to go into the promised land? You want to just set up shop here on the outside of the promised land because you have a lot of cattle? In fact many many many rabbinic commentators read this story as a rebuke. These two tribes were interested more in money than they were in spirituality says one Midrash. No no these two tribes were focused on capitalism. They were interested in what it would take to feed their insatiable need for more cattle.

So Moses gets triggered and he tells them wait a second are you going there? And they say something very powerful. They say no no no. We're not afraid of the promised land. In fact we will go into the promised land. We will go first. We will actually go armed. We'll lead the fight into the promised land. We ourselves will go into the promised land. But you know something Moses? What's motivating us is not fear. What's motivating us is not a sense of what should belong to us based upon what has been given already. But we are motivated by a very simple deep expression of our individual karma. This is where we belong. And I'm so sorry Moses that the plan was different. I'm so sorry that the original plan was that all twelve tribes would enter into the land. But we are not motivated by fear. We'll go inside in order to go outside. We will enter the land but then we want to leave. Because that's not our place. That's not what was promised to us. We have a different inheritance.

Man, I can feel this as a parent. I can feel this story as a parent. A child coming to me and saying, you know, I know you thought that I was going to be like you and be a lawyer or doctor or rabbi. I know you had plans for me when I was born. But guess what? I've got different plans. You see, the inheritance that you had for me is not my inheritance. It's not my chelik. It's not what belongs to me, said the two and a half tribes. And guess what happens? If you're thinking in this moment, wait a second, I've been in this story before because Moses on a number of occasions is kind of confronted by something he should not know when he says, hold on, time out, I'm going to make the lifeline call to God and find out what the story is. But that's not what Moses does. If you read the story, Moses knows right away that as soon as they said that they would go into the Holy Land, that they weren't motivated by fear, but they were motivated by love. Love makes room. Love makes room.

The Torah ends its own tale with a story of someone who came along and without Moses needing to be mediated by God, they ask for a different portion, an individual portion within a tribal culture, something unheard of, and that love makes room. Unmotivated by jealousy, but connected to a deep sense of where they belong. They're not looking at anybody else's plate or anybody else's suburban setup. They know where they are. And when I read this story, I tell you something, it reminded me of a deep Kabbalistic teaching that each and every one of Romemu and others should know about. You've heard of it before.

It's the notion of the sparks of holy light that are trapped all around the world. In the 16th century, there was a great Kabbalist named Isaac Luria. And he said that the world was created not in the way that you think it was created in the book of Genesis in the first chapter, no, no, it was created by a great cataclysmic moment where God made room for the world and then the world couldn't hold God's light and the world shattered and everywhere you go, there are shards of light trapped in what he called Klippot. And here's the upshot of all this. He said, the Ari, that wherever you go, whether you're eating or traveling, working, playing, making love, making music, you are redeeming sparks of holiness that you alone can redeem. No one else will have the exact objects that you have in your life, said the Ari.

No one else will have the exact people in your life, the partners in your life, the lovers in your life, the synagogue in your life, the church in your life, the mosque in your life, the music in your life. None of that will belong to anyone else but you because only you can redeem what you can redeem. This amazing theory is an anti-jealousy theory. It is the great antidote to envy, my friends. What someone else has doesn't belong to you, it wasn't meant for you. What those other nine and a half tribes had coming to them was unique to them because love makes room. Love makes room. And what belongs to you was destined for you. With that in mind, it's a very powerful image for me.

It's a very powerful image for all of us to imagine that the things in our life, the people in our life are part of this redemption of sparks, this achuzah, this inheritance that belongs to you and to you and to you. And whenever we look at it, we say, Wow! Blessed is the one who gave me my chelek in this world, my portion, my inheritance. With what I have inherited, I can out-herit. I can then step outside and say, here is where I belong. And Moshe got that. He said, you weren't motivated by fear. You're gonna go inside the land and fight for us. You're gonna be on the inside.

Imagine this notion writ large in a Jewish community right now that is rife with conversations about interfaith marriage, rife with conversations about who is in the right position to speak on behalf of Judaism. Imagine everyone standing up and saying, if you're in, then you can also be out. If you're inside the conversation and you've shown us that you're not motivated by fear but by love, then you are in the conversation. And regardless of whether or not you step out of line sociologically, wherever it might be, I feel deeply that you are speaking your chelek, your inheritance is true.

So I won't exclude you, I want to include you. This, my friends, in my personal opinion, is the deepest Torah that our tradition wants us to know. That each and every one of us has a unique moment. And if we could imagine that in this community and in other communities and in the world itself, where we weren't looking so much outside but inside and saying, am

I motivated by fear or by love? If I am motivated by fear, it will never be enough. But if I am motivated by love, it will make room for my portion and others' portion too.

So I bless you tonight and I charge you. Think deeply about the sparks of light that are in your life tonight. Think deeply about the people that are in your life and the places that are in your life and the objects that are in your life and ask yourself a very simple question. Could it possibly be that nothing that anyone has, nothing anyone else has been gifted with or been charged with is absolutely connected to you at all in terms of what you are meant to do? Could it be? And what would happen if we were to sever that thought net? What Mark has is not mine. What Josh has is not mine. What this person has is not mine. What is mine? And then tell somebody what is yours. Tell somebody at dinner. Tell somebody you haven't told them yet. What is your unique chelet? What have you come to this world to do If it is motivated by love, let it roam and make room.

Please rise.