

Romemu Shabbat 050517 Sermon

I want to dedicate tonight's sermon to some new friends of mine and family. And I want to start off with a confession. We're in a church. You know? Laughter. It's amazing, I... I really firmly believe that we all, each and every one of us, in some way, shape or form, we perform our lives. We perform who we are in the world. And what I mean by that is that each and every one of us is born with an innate, and I believe this firmly, an innate yearning to be whole. An innate yearning to be complete. An innate yearning to find ourselves fully blossomed and formed. That's my belief.

And I believe that that is innately a part of who we are, both as spiritual beings and also organismically. And that when we break and if something is broken, our organism, our wholeness, pulls us towards completion. Pulls us towards a sense of fullness. We are drawn to complete what is incomplete, to fill out what is not yet filled out, to mend what is broken, to fix what is torn, to sew, you get it, you get it, right? And so we, in every way, shape and form, we don't even need analysis. We don't need fancy systems, although they are useful, because we perform our brokenness. Our lives are an expression of beauty, but anyone who has eyes to see our lies, can see how it is that we perform the very thing that we need in order to become whole.

This truth hit me in such a deep way this week when I was blessed to be a part of a leadership training that was done off-site with some very talented human beings and some very capable and gifted facilitators. And one of the first things they did as we gathered together, each and every one of us, each in our own way, successful, strong in our areas of life, each and every one of us in our own way, having performed our lives in order to achieve.

They asked us to do a simple exercise. They had us sit down, and they gave us a tabula rasa, an empty frame. And they asked us to make the mask we wear in the world. Those of you who don't know me for more than ten years, I've spent at least a thousand hours with a mask on my head like this. Exactly like this, because I was an ice hockey goalie. And from the time I was six years old, hundreds of hours every week, month, year, were devoted to having this down and then up. I'm not going to tell you what was on my mask exactly, but seeing it, seeing it made all the difference. Seeing the mask that I wear in my life to achieve what I need to achieve, to be seen in the way that I want to be seen, to have what I want to have, to display what I want to display, it comes with great benefits and costs.

The cost that each and every one of us pay for the mask that we wear is that often we don't realize that the masks we wear are already the performance of how it was that we learned to lie about who we were. Often the masks that we adopt early on in our lives and then forget we're wearing later on are the masks that hide some of the very aliveness that we think the mask we're wearing will get us. The aliveness that we have, the truth that we hold, the person that we are, the person we want to be and that which we want to receive is often harder to actualize because of the masks that we wear. More often than not we live our lives with a very intense sense of if only I could take off this mask and show, but I dare not because.

It really hit me in the gut over the course of a couple of days as I began to shed masks and kind of take off different stuff that I was wearing and as I became more and more exposed and more and more clear and more and more real. It was absolutely radically clear to me that what we call life 99.9% of the time is not life and that when I found myself and others found ourselves saying well out in the real world back there we say no, no, this is the real world here that I wind up thinking that maybe I was in Plato's cave. That the shadows are not in the cave but in our lives that we live our lives without touching what is true. How deeply we long to be seen and loved. How deeply we yearn for community. How deeply we wish to giggle. How deeply we want to rip off some of the masks that we wear socially and just connect with each other. And even come into shul. You can walk into shul.

I'm going to do it right now. Here we go. I'm walking into shul and here's my mask. Man, what am I doing here, mask? Man, what am I doing here? Who dragged me into this for cock this place, mask? What is this god place? This is weird. What the hell is going on here, mask? Oh, I don't want to look at strangers, mask. Oh, I'm a really religious person, mask. Oh, I know how to be in a synagogue, mask. Are they going to judge me, mask? Do they know how important I am, mask? Can they hear me sing, mask? Oh, we have so many masks. In New York City and other places like New York, you can't live without one, can you? It's hard.

So we go to Doctors of Philosophy with a poster of Rasputin and a beard down to his knees. We go to our therapist, we go to our work, we wind up opening, we come out in New York City and then... And here's my mask. Here's the thing about how we perform our life and about that innate goodness and innate yearning for wholeness that I said we each have. It won't go away. Meaning, the things that we cover over with our mask don't go away, they just go underground.

So there I am at the age of 18 years old having masked my whole childhood. I suffered so much in my childhood. I suffered. I wanted to be understood, I wanted to be seen, I wanted to have dear friends, and they were, eh, high school. And then I went into a trip where I became like Mr. Religion Guy. Everybody thought, oh, Inger, he's so religious. And I was crying in my room wanting to connect. And I venture a guess here that each and every one of us on some level, when there's safety, meaning when no one's looking, we take off our mask and we're like, here's what I really want to say. Here's what I really want to do. Here's what I really wish I could long for and say it out loud. Here's what I wish my community would look like. Here's what I wish my Monday nights would look like, my Tuesday nights, my Saturday nights. Here's what I'm going to admit. Here's how lonely I feel. Here's how happy I can be. Here's what dancing feels like for me. Here's what it feels like to be alive and to be human. And each and every one of us has that place. How many people here can say honestly? That they don't.

So here's the question. Tomorrow morning when the Torah turns to the story of Nadav and Avihu, the story of the two sons of Aaron who died because they bring some strange fire and the book of Leviticus tells us that they were taken by God or some really painful moment. Why did they die? And the Torah tells us when they were taken, meaning killed.

The Torah tells us that Aaron, the father of those two children who passed away, the Torah says when his two children who went into the Holy of Holies, whatever that story is, you can look it up, they walk in, it's uncensored, it's spontaneous, they were drunk, whatever the

reasons that the Rabbis give in the Midrashim, in the folklore, the Rabbis say like at least ten different things that they did wrong. None of them make any sense.

And there is Aaron, the father of these two children who have just been taken and the Torah tells us, and Aaron was silent. Aaron didn't say a word. Aaron, the father of those two children, doesn't say a word. And here is the amazing thing, everybody, the story of Nadav and Avil is the most oft-repeated story in the whole Bible. It appears no fewer than five times, mentioned in strange places, the Torah kind of has an ellipsis, it says, oh, and the two children of Aaron that were killed.

Of course, the Torah itself is trying to work its own pain out. The Torah itself keeps repeating it like Freud's repetition compulsion, it keeps telling us the story of something painful, something that broke, because the Torah itself seeks wholeness, like each and every one of us, it keeps performing its wound, seeking healing. And so do we.

And here's the thing, we don't have to. Here's the thing, we don't have to. Here's the thing, we don't have to. There's a way for us to connect. And in tomorrow morning's Torah reading, there's great advice, the Torah gives us great advice. And God says to Moses, tell your brother, now's the time, Aaron, to come back into the Holy of Holies. Now's the time when you were wounded. Now's the time when it was painful. Now's the time when you had trauma. Now's the time when you're willing to put on a mask and say, I'm not going back to where it hurt. Aaron, go back in. Go back in gently. You got dumped, go back in gently. Something painful happened in your life, go back gently. Touch that place, go through that place, feel what it feels like, because if you feel it, you will go through it.

Now you might be thinking, okay, Rabbi Ingber is talking tonight about something very personal, it's very individual, it's only about him. Or about her, or about you. But the personal is political.

Wilhelm Reich, a great student of Freud, once said that the roots of fascism are located in the individual's inability to deal with what is true and what is real. He wrote a book on it. The Roots of Fascism. We are such creatures of aliveness even as you all fall asleep right now. Each and every one of us has incredible aliveness. But the only way to touch that is to be willing to take off the mask long enough to see it in front of you and see for a moment how it is that you hide, how it is that I hide, how it is that I protect myself, how I armor myself from feeling both the pain and pleasure of my promise.

So you'll leave here tonight and you might talk about the sermon, you might not, but here's what I want you to do when you walk out. Make a promise to yourself tonight or the next time you remember this. Ask yourself, what mask am I wearing right now? Am I feeling really angry and projecting I'm really got it all together? Am I feeling really joyous but I have to be really businesslike so I'm like hmm. What mask are you wearing in any given moment? That's question number one.

Question number two, you might want to take it off. You might not. But ask yourself, what cost? What's the cost?

And then the third thing I want to ask you to do. Promise me, promise yourself that when you're feeling what you feel, you're going to give yourself permission to be true to that. We're all going to play games, we're all going to walk through doors, we're all going to be in situations tonight, tomorrow, next week, in a month where we are going to be in our masks. That's going to happen. It's natural. It's the way it is.

Aaron wanted to shut down. He lost his two boys. His life was over. How would he ever regroup? The Torah tomorrow morning says to Aaron, here you go, Aaron. Gently enter that place again. Walk in. Walk in. Because if you don't, Aaron, it's going to keep coming up again and again and again. We'll keep recycling it over and over and over again. Let the mask down and let life come in.

Please rise.