

Friday 09 15 2017 Shabbat Sermon

One more time. Okay, one more. And now, back again. One second, Theo, where are you going? You gotta come back. Because my sermon is about going home. You gotta go home. There you go. And... There you go. So... As the second part of my sermon begins, just focus on the words, because we're gonna have people enacting it throughout the sermon. This time of the year is all about home. It's all about coming home. A couple of years ago, here in Romemu, on Erev Rosh Hashanah, on the evening of Rosh Hashanah, I talked about the word nostalgia and how the word nostalgia itself is from the root to go home. Nostalgia is the yearning for home. The transition towards home. Arriving safely at home, having left, run around, and then come back.

We come home. And when we're not at home, we yearn for home, we long for home, we wish we were home. Whatever that home might be, some idyllic home, some imagined home, some real home, whether Odysseus taking ten years, or whether it was Theo or Raelila taking ten seconds.

Running and returning is the motion of life. Running and returning, leaving and coming back, leaving and coming back is something that all of us do our entire lives, not just when we're children and we're playing in shul, but that experience of being dislocated and wondering where we'll find a place to land, to belong. It's a common theme in religious literature, it's a common theme.

I mean, I think about it all the time. And especially at the time of the year when we come home from our vacations and our breaks, especially the time of the year when people transition out of vacations and they come home, when they go back to the shigrav, go back to their day-to-day, moment-to-moment, it's not easy to sit still. It's not easy to come back to a place of stillness. It's not easy to do what is called in the tradition, teshuva or lashuv, which means to return. Teshuva, returning, you know, just coming back, just transitioning. In my son's school and in other places, we have a transition workshop. How to come home. Right? Transition workshop. How do you come home? As if we need to learn how to come home. The place that was home became foreign and now has to become home again, right?

But what if coming home was something that was super painful? What if coming home was so difficult and distracting and shattering? Have you found yourself like my friend Janice, who this week called me from Houston to let me know that even though she had been spared and had been in Colorado during the hurricane, she had lost everything. That kind of coming home, that kind of homecoming to the place that you longed to return to but that wasn't there. A homecoming without the home. A return without that sense of stability and that sense of being able to land. That sense that, you know what? This is where I belong. I don't know about you all, but if you could just focus here. I know it's very distracting with the kids and I got it until now, but focus here, okay? Thank you.

I don't know about you guys, but I feel like that. I don't compare my circumstances, God forbid, with somebody who's lost their home, but I know and I imagine some of you here

might feel the same way about coming home to Rosh Hashanah this year. The feeling like, wait a second. I'm so relieved to at least be able to say that I've arrived and I came back, but I don't feel stable. I don't feel like the place I left is the same place it was a year ago today. That my day-to-day living, the mores, the accepted norms, the conventions, my sense of what is stable has radically shifted. I don't know, maybe you feel that way too. I feel it in my body.

I'm wondering, where is the next moment coming from? Is it over now? Can we move forward? I'm struggling with that as we come into Rosh Hashanah. I'm struggling with it in such a deep way. I want to know if the Torah can give me some advice this Shabbat, this Shabbat before the big day, before Hayom, the day. The day that our tradition says is the birthday of the world. These ten days that are coming up from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur these ten days that are the power of ten. These ten days that parallel ten sayings in which the world was created, ten commandments, ten fingers and ten toes. The power of ten is coming up and I want to know before it even begins, Torah, do you have anything to give me this Shabbos because Nebuch, that's Yiddish for Oy Gevalt. Which is Yiddish for Oy Vezmir. It's turtles all the way down. The Nebuch of like, wow. Where's the ground underneath our feet? Where's the Roka Aretz Alamayim? Where's that solid ground?

My friend Jana said to me, How will I stand? She said, I'm supposed to lead services next Thursday evening, the evening of the second night of Rosh Hashanah. I said, how am I going to stand before my community and lead prayers? How can I do that? How can I pull myself together? So the Torah tomorrow morning is going to tell us something really interesting.

Because Moses had a feeling about the indeterminacy, the inconsistency, the contingency of the world that we live in and that Moshe lived in and the Israelites lived in. And so Moshe says to the people, tomorrow Atem Nitzavim Ayom Kulchem you will all be standing where you are. But there will come a time Emiyei Nidach Echa B'tzei HaShemayim Misham Mika Betz Chazan HaElecha Misham Mika Echecha that there will be a time where you will feel dispersed, where you will literally or figuratively or metaphorically or allegorically be dispersed everywhere. You will be in many different lands. You won't feel you have one center, one home, one place to go. But says Moshe, prophetically God will bring you together from all those places. You'll come back home. And he says, there's one thing you need to remember if you want to come home. There's one thing to remember if it is that quality of there's no place like home. Do you want that power?

Moshe says something that is at first glance, nuts. He says the key to that word we began with about 10 minutes ago, returning. Returning. Lashuv, tshuva. Coming back. The key to that return is not found in the wizard. It isn't found with a tin man. It isn't found with a scarecrow. It isn't found anywhere but on your own feet. Right where you stand. Atem Nitzavim HaYom. You are standing here. Ki Karov Eylecha HaDavar Me'od V'ficha U'bil Vavchal Asoto HaRei Natati Lachem HaYom Eta Bracha V'eta Kalala Moshe says something that is so counter intuitive to me. He says that thing that you seek, it's not in heaven that you might imagine. Who's going to go up there and get it from heaven? It's not all the way on the other side of the ocean to find out, how am I going to find out how to come home? Maybe some therapist in Switzerland will tell me the key.

Maybe, maybe coming home requires a long ten year journey. Maybe, could be. Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses, our teacher, the Torah is good advice. Gives us good advice. He says, it's really close. It's closer to you than you can imagine. You want to know how to come home. You want to know how to return. You want to know where home is. V'ficha U'bil Vavchal In your mouth and in your heart. You heard Amichai's poem that Rabbi Jessica brought tonight. In the heart. And I am in the museum, in the heart.

I told Janice, I said, Janice, I have no answers for you and nobody will give you an answer. But I think I know this about you, Janice. Like me, Janice, you've been at home and also been in exile before. You've been in a beautiful place and felt lost. I know, like me, you probably have a lot of memories that were kept in photos and in journals and in archives. You have a whole past. I get it. You live there too. I live there. But I bet this, Janice, I bet that your home is in your heart. And that when you return to your heart, everyone there will also find theirs.

Because at that moment when we stop and we say, okay, okay, here we are. I don't know how we got here or maybe I do. Conditions are infinite. Circumstances beyond our control. Things within our control. But we will not come home until we come heart. It won't happen. So Moses gives people, he says, listen, it could be unstable. You could be completely diffracted and diffused. You could be in a million different places. But before you even begin to plot your journey home, find your journey heart. What's happening here? That's the place to start. And I take solace in that. I take solace in that because everything in me doesn't want to talk about my heart this coming year. Because there are so many things going on in the heart of the world. As the great Reverend William Barber said, we need a defibrillator for our country. We've got heart problems. And all I'm thinking about are the heart problems of our country and the heart problems of the world.

And Janice said to me, you know what, I just want to pray for my heart. I just want to show up with my heart. I just want to ask my heart what it needs right now in order to find a home. What's the heart sutra? What sutures will mend a torn heart? Where will it come from? Ki karov eylecha davar me'od v'ficha u'bilu v'vacha la'asot'o. Stop. For a minute. Turn off the noise. Turn off CNN and the incessant addiction to the intoxication of a news feed that won't end. Turn off the Facebook feed for one week. One week. We'll go back. The world and its problems will not go away, unfortunately, in the next 10 days.

But for the next bit of time. During this time. What would it be like if the world at large said, okay, time out. Time out. Time out. We gotta take a time out. We gotta get really close to what it is that is going on in here. If we wanna come home, we gotta come hard. If we wanna journey home, we gotta journey hard. If we wanna do tshuva, we have to go to the heart. And the heart is not there. It's not there. It's not there. It's not yours and his and theirs and everyone's. It isn't the president's or the vice-president's. It's not in Europe. It's not in the Middle East. It's not in California. It's right here. There'll be time enough for hearts to know what hearts need to do.

But first the heart has to be open. The heart has to be soft. The heart has to be receptive. The heart has to be running at a rate that is possible in which to catch our breath, center ourselves, and feel the simple feeling of aliveness. So I wanna ask everybody here, this Friday night, the Friday night before Rosh Hashanah, the Friday night before Tzikhhot. When you go home tonight, your Shabbat meal, tomorrow with your Shabbat meal, tomorrow

night here at Tzikhoh, on Sunday, wherever you go, stop for a moment and feel your heart. When the mind races about problems, stop and feel your heart. When anger arises or fear arises, stop and feel your heart. When a friend presents themselves to you with a problem, don't fix it, just see their heart. Let's practice for four days, we'll see what the world will look like.

I have a pretty, pretty strong suspicion that what we do, the 300, 400 people here, and what we do beyond, might not change the world, but it might prepare us to be changed ourselves. So between now and Rosh Hashanah, I ask you, what journey could be more important than the journey to your own heart? What journey could be more valuable than the journey to your own heart? And what home could be more welcoming and more available because it's that close, than this place? May the source of life remove the barriers and impediments and obstacles that sometimes cover the heart. May we live with a soft, tender place and enter this year ready to come home.

Please rise.