

Sermon Shabbat 10 19 18

Ah, it's so good to be back with Nadav, and with Laura, and Yuval, and Rabbi Revere. It feels like we're back at the Chagim, back at the High Holidays. Tonight I want to finish essentially what's been a three-week teaching, a three-week exploration together of the *raison d'être* of the Jewish people, to some degree, or maybe we'd say for all human beings. Something known in our language, but not exclusively in our language, as the Holiness Project. The Holiness Project began with a recognition that in our tradition we have a three-fold axis. We have an axis that works along the sacred dimension of person. That was our first week we talked about holy people, and the holiness of each and every human being, made in the image, right? Zez, Sefer, Toldot, Adam, each person. Last week we talked a little bit about the Ark, and the sanctity of the Ark, that gestation container for life itself. The holiness of life. The window in the Ark representing that sacred space has a dimension not only of containment and security, but also connection and integration with what's happening out in the world. Sacred space, not for its own sake, but for something greater than it, too. With an eye not only on the sacred space, as it were, of our holy lands, wherever they might be, but also of the earth itself, and all humans who inhabit it. And so we'll come in for landing tonight with sacred time. The third axis. In nefesh, olam, and now shana, in time.

So I just want to begin with a story that, when I was a young man, I came across a book that had a profound impact on my life for a couple of years. It's called *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior*. Anybody read Dan Millman's *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior*? *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior* was a book that was given to me by a friend of a friend of a friend, and it was on my bookshelf for a number of years. And then finally I took it off my bookshelf, and I read it when the time was right, right? Books happen to us when we need them. And I'll never forget the story. The story he tells, fictional, but really it's about him.

But he was a gymnast in college, and he had a profound meeting with a mysterious character in a gas station by the side of the road, a character whom he lovingly called Socrates. And Socrates kind of educated him in the ways of something beyond the physical dimension of gymnastics, but into a much deeper place of spiritual practice. And the two questions that Socrates asked him all the time, does anybody remember this or know this? He would say to him, What time is it? And where are you? What time is it and where are you? What time is it? And the answer always, the right answer was, Now. And where are you? It's a bit of a different take than *The Wizard of Oz*. Or really, it's the deeper truth of *The Wizard of Oz*. Not that there is a place to get to, but you have that place already where you are.

So here, in the dimension of time, where are you? I'm sorry, what time is it? What time is it? So we have a cathedral or a sanctuary in time called Shabbat. Heschel, the great theologian, said that Shabbat, for these people who sanctified not space, which is not true, but not exclusively space, we lifted up time. But tomorrow morning in our Torah service, we're going to have a remarkable moment where we have a teaching about time that will intersect Abraham from the Bible, a Hasidic Rebbe from Russia, and Dan Milman Socrates by the side of the road in their understanding of the great moment in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis.

It begins, We all know this, or many of us know this. If you don't know it, this is it. This is the moment, chapter 12, where God calls to Avram, known then as Avram, the artist formerly known as Avram, who later becomes Abraham. Avram is told by God, Go from the land, right, of your father, of your parents. Leave that place and go to the place that I will show you. And no sooner has Avram landed in the land, as it were, of course, for Jews, we begin our journey as refugees.

Abraham is a refugee. He leaves the land, he's homeless. And no sooner has he arrived in the land that he thinks belongs to him, what happens to him? He is confronted by a famine. And Avram, seeing the famine, decides of his own accord, not waiting for God's phone call at this moment, Avram now says, You know what? I better go. This couldn't be the place that God showed me. Chapter 12 begins with Abraham being told where to go. Exclusively, God says, You should go where I will tell you. I will show you. But Avram arrives in the land and immediately decides that he will leave the land because, of course, the conditions aren't right.

This bothers Rav Lev Yitzhak Berdichever great Hasidic Rebbe. He writes in his great work, How could it be that Abraham, having heard God's call to go to the land that he would show him, would not only endanger his wife Sarai by going to Pharaoh's Egypt, but how could he be of such little faith that he would leave the place that God would expect him to be? And the Berdichever answers, No. It's very clear that where he was supposed to be was to be available, he writes, to hear the word of God coming from the conditions as he met them and to change course. He doesn't say change course. But this he saw, that for the reason that he will not stay here, he will only go to another land and he will find that it is from God that he will go to the land where there is desire. And the Berdichever says, Where is the land that God will show you?

Wherever it is, wherever it is, that the conditions are present that call you to go there. Wherever you need to be, that's where God wants you to be. Now that's a radical teaching, my friends. If you come from a place where all of this makes sense because you study a little Buddhism, a little New Age, but for the Berdichever, this Polish Rebbe to say, you know what? It was God's will that he left to go down to Egypt. It was God's will, in fact. He wasn't lacking faith. He was listening deeply to what God wanted. He was listening deeply to the moment in space. Where is sacred space? Oh, God's calling me. And not only that, the Berdichever goes on to say that every detour is a destination. Everywhere you go, there you are. So what's true in space is also true in time.

I was 19 years old and I was ultra-Orthodox. With long past, you would have walked by me right now on the street. You wouldn't recognize me from anywhere. I would just walk by and be like, wow, who is that guy? And I was on my way to visit a friend in Lakewood, Yeshiva Lakewood, very ultra-Orthodox seminary, academy, and I left my home at that time in Long Island to get to Lakewood on time for Shabbat, and of course, the worst traffic jam in the history of humanity. I'm on the road and I get... I think this is the Queen's English here, I got completely lost. I wound up 30 miles from Lakewood with about a half hour until light, until light and candles. I pull up to the side of the road, I am sweating, I am sweating, I am so nervous. I'm thinking to myself, okay, I guess I'll have Shabbat on the side of the road. Long story short, I pulled into Lakewood with like three minutes left. And like at least 20 people came out of their homes to help me unpack my car so that I wouldn't wind up

carrying. But I kept thinking to myself, okay, Shabbat would happen wherever I am. Shabbat would happen wherever I am. Sacred time will happen wherever I am.

One of the most remarkable things as we stand here tonight, finishing the holiness project, is that one week ago tonight, I was standing here with keys to Romemu's first sacred space. We are now the proud owners of a baby building. And one of the most remarkable features, when people ask us how we raised the money and how we went about doing it, it was a traditional capital campaign. Will it be named after someone? I said, no, no naming. You see, everyone who gave asked that they be anonymous. And with that insight, I remembered a story.

And I just have to tell you this story, and we're coming for a landing here. This story is told, it's a lot of different traditions tell this story, but let's just use the one that I read it in. It was a Christian monastery. It was a monastery in a forest in Germany, a black forest, that had fallen on hard times. And they had called in all kinds of wise men and women to come in and tell them what had happened. How did they lose that love and feeling? How did they lose that fire? What was it that they were now not doing that they had once done? And no one could give them an answer until finally some, of course, in the story probably told by Jews, but a nice old rabbi came to the monastery, and he proceeded to give them good advice.

But first, before he wanted to give them good advice, he said, I have to tell you something. It came to me in a dream last night that one of your brother monks, one of the brothers here, is your long-awaited foresavior, your Lord, the Messiah. Hard to imagine a rabbi saying that, but the Messiah. Quickly, word spread. They trusted this holy man, and people started wondering when they were standing next to someone, hmm, hmm, could be. I wonder, is he the one? Is he the one? If it's true in sacred space, it's true in sacred time, what if in any given moment we said, is this the moment? Is this the moment that I was born to meet? What if this challenge, what if this circumstance, what if this refugee were the Messiah? What would it be like then?

The Holiness Project is an ongoing project because in God's time, we don't know. We don't ever know if we're there, but there's no question that we are here, and it's now. So on this weekend, where we remember that not only was Abraham a refugee, but in our theology, the deepest strand of our theology says that this whole world is God's refuge. That God left God's aloneness, became a refugee for the sake of living in a world that said, will you house me here? Mis'aveh kodesh baruch ho l'yoslo yisbarach dira b'tachtom, and God said, will you house me? And every moment says the same thing, and so the lore is that that monastery in the Black Forest, oh, it flourished. Word got out that they treated each other with deep respect and honor. There was a great mystery there. There was a great revitalization.

A gospel could be heard everywhere. The good news heralded each human being, a locus of the holy, each human being a locus of sacred time and sacred space, and so the way of the peaceful warrior tonight, when you leave, I invite you to ask yourself or friends at a table, what time is it? What time is it?

Please rise.