

Sermon Shabbat 09 21 18

One of the great things about being a pulpit rabbi that has weekly services is that you get to say the things after Yom Kippur that you wanted to say on Yom Kippur. So one of the things that I wanted to say and was on my heart and mind the entire day of Yom Kippur was a friend of mine was there, Richard, my friend Richard, and Richard once invited me to go to take a yoga class with him. He's a devotee of a kind of yoga named Ketona Yoga. You've heard of Ketona Yoga? And he took me down to Ketona Yoga downtown. And the founders of the Ketona Yoga system, it's a system, it's not just like a place called Ketona, but it's a system. The brilliance of the system is that it's kind of a combination of Taoism, it's kind of a number of different things meshed together, a little bit like Romemu.

And one of the founders of the system is a genius when it comes to body posture and mathematics and geometric form. And I've been a devotee of yoga for 30 years. So I was going in, I thought, you know, I'm going to go meet with this amazing person, but like I know my stuff, you know. I know my yoga. I know my Shavasana from my Tadasana. So I walked in, and we had this private room together, and she sat me down. And I'll never forget this. She just said, why don't you sit, and we'll look at your posture. Just sit on the meditation cushion.

I sat in like a little fancy yoga position. And she said, just tell me when you think you're straight. So I got all straight, you know. Tucked my chin in, a little Alexander technique, a little something, all fancy, you know. Did like a whole thing. And then she came over, she said, okay, good. Now close your eyes, and we're going to go to work. She took out a yoga strap, and she moved my legs, she like moved them to the right about 45 degrees, and she took my right elbow, put it on a yoga block, and put my left hand in front of me here, and then did a couple of other adjustments, and then she said, okay, open your eyes. And I opened them, and I was like... She said, you're straight now.

And I forget that, because to me, that's what I feel Yom Kippur is doing, the whole holiday. You come in, and you think, if you're like me, you're thinking, okay, it's going to be a long day, it's going to be a long 10 days. And by the end of it, you kind of, you thought you were straight, and then you walk out, and you've got a new posture, and it's the posture that is your true posture, but it might not feel normal. You might walk back out into the city and look like this. You're walking out like this. Hi.

Some people walk around 83rd Street. I remember years of doing silent retreats, as a practitioner and as a teacher, you would always say to people, now drive home carefully from the retreat. And if you've gone to a good Yom Kippur service, ideally, you're walking out, and you're like, you need a little bit of protection, because you're going out into New York City. Just thought of that, because I think one of the more profound things that the rabbis did was the rabbis, of course, connect thematically Yom Kippur and what comes after Sukkot. Of course, the Torah connects them. The 10th day of Tishrei is Yom HaKippurim, Yom Kippurim in the Bible. It's the Day of Atonement, and then five days later is the harvest festival of the, right, the harvest festival of the full moon of the fall.

But the rabbis make even deeper grooves between what it means to do the work of Yom Kippur and then come into Sukkot. And one of those things that I'm thinking about is, of course, the rabbinic adage that is found in Masechet Sukkot, in the tractate known as Sukkot, dealing with the laws of Sukkot, that the structure known as a sukkah, which we just sang about for at least three times that I counted in the service, sukkah, this flimsy thing that we go into, say me dirat keva, b'shev b'dirat arai, say the rabbis, leave your stable place, your kavua place, leave your home, which is made of something solid, and live in a dirat arai, which is like an impermanent transient space. And then it goes on to say the things that one should bring into it in order to establish it as a dirat arai. Setting up a marble kitchen in your sukkah is not dirat arai. Right? I used to have a friend growing up that had chandeliers and a sofa.

The fundamental Jewish value that is being expressed is something that I learned as a memorable phrase, which all of you have heard, I'm sure, also, but I heard it in the funniest of places. I was a waiter, as many of you know, at Carmines on the Upper West side for many years. And Carl Del Ponte, who was the general manager of the establishment, back in 1998, trained me to be a waiter at Carmines.

Up to that point, I'd just been working in delis, cutting pastrami and things like that, and I wasn't up to the level of Carmines. Those who don't know what Carmines is, it's lost on you, but it... And he saw me one day at lunch making an espresso, and he came running back, and he screamed at me, and he said, Ingber, what are you doing? I said, I'm making an espresso, what's wrong? He said, that's not how you make espresso. There's too much water in that espresso. You just made a triple espresso, and you diluted the whole thing. Less, she's more. That's what he said, less, she's more.

Less is more. The value of minimalism, the virtue of paring down, the virtue of doing with less, the virtue of being unencumbered, the virtue of recognizing ballast, the virtue of leaving the day of atonement, and then not seeking kviot and keva, but seeking araot, not seeking the stable again, but being so powerfully alive and generously connected with what really is aliveness, that you don't need the things that you think you need. That there's a sense of openness, is that openness in the rabbinic mind to go from the openness of, and the clarity and the tahara, the purity of Yom Kippur, into the festivity, the joy, joy and less.

Just reading an article in the New York Times about this amazing, there's a whole movement of letting go of possessions and living with less, a whole movement on how to build a life around having less and doing less and experiencing less. I remember a dear friend of mine, Nigel, during the year of Shemitah, during the year of letting agriculture, letting land lie fallow, he kind of expressed it, he said, I'm going to bring that with me into the world and I'm not going to buy a book this year from Amazon because I already have 300 of them that I haven't read yet, and he packaged them, he kind of wrapped them in newspaper and set them, and he said, whenever I have the urge to buy a new book, oh, there's a fresh new book that I bought two years ago that I haven't read yet. It's like the whole Sukkot is structured around the value of Shemitah, of doing less, of having less, of being strong with less, because of less.

When I sit with couples who are getting married, and we have a couple here tonight, a couple of them, and I discuss with them my particular Torah on marriage, I speak about

what it is to enter a chuppah, and the chuppah is, of course, representational of a sukkah shalom. Often when we speak of the peaceful sukkah, we think of a space that contains, that can hold. And what's remarkable, of course, about the sukkah that wedding couples are under is that there are no walls. Like, that's pretty minimalist. I mean, that's maximally minimal. No walls.

Even a sukkah that we're going to be in has to have at least two walls and a little bit. And when I sit with those couples, I say, well, when love is present, you don't need walls. When love is sufficiently thick, you don't need walls. Maybe you need a shared heaven together, a shared dream, a shared aspiration, but something that can hold you, but not hem you. Less, she's more. Never forget it.

In Taoism, which is what we began with back at Ketona Yoga about eight minutes ago, there's a principle called the 70% rule. We know it also in Tai Chi and other forms of expression of Taoism. They generally say, go to 100%, then back off 30%, and then you'll know where you are. That's your strong place. When you're singing, and you're singing full throttle, and instead of singing, you're screaming, come back to 30%. When you're loving another person, and you think, I'm giving it 100%, pull back 30%. 29, 32, it's okay. Being committed to less is more. Less is stronger. Less is more vibrant. Less is an expression of fundamental rootedness, groundedness, stability. That's what it means to be in a groove.

As the year progresses, we might find ourselves thinking that we're standing straight or sitting straight, and then the holidays come, and they really make us straight. Then we move into Sukkot, and here it is, and we say, less is more. Less, do less. Stay straight. Adjust. Ask for help. Do less. Stay straight. Adjust. Ask for help. It's a good thing to go with ourselves and that energy into tonight, into Shabbat, and into the power of Sukkot on Sunday. Not less is more as another gremlin. Not less is more because I have to, and if I don't, I'm bad. Not less is more because then, in a year from now, I'm going to have to do Al-Hayth because I did more instead of less. Not that.

But less is more as a mantra that we come back to as a gentle reminder when we find ourselves doing too much. We want our espresso to be strong to wake up this year. Less is more.

Please rise.