

Your Burning Candle is Unique

In every wedding that I preside over, I begin by saying, hello, but besides that, I begin by saying that the Gemara in Nida, the Talmud says, in Masakha Nida, it says, Arbaim yom kodem leydas havlad bas kol yotses ve omeres bas ploni leploni In forty days, the Talmud says, before a soul is sent into the world, a divine echo resounds and says, this person will be with that person, you know. And whether you believe in bashert or not, whether you've met your bashert or not, or you missed your bashert, when two people find each other and are standing under the chuppah, two lovers, I say to them, we are here to celebrate a vow that has been fulfilled. And before we will take a second vow for the future, we have to at least acknowledge at this moment that the two of you journeyed a long way to find each other.

And that that finding is itself significant. And so I say, Mazal Tov on the promise kept. Mazal Tov on the promise kept.

Shabbos Shuvah, the Shabbos, is, as I said in my first drasha on Rosh Hashanah evening, Wednesday night, where we sit, changing our seat from the seat of judgment to the seat of compassion. To be Shuvah, right, to come back is to sit again where you once sat. And to know it for the first time, to paraphrase Eliot, to have a homecoming of sorts to that place where it was that you originally, you know it because you know it.

You feel it, it has a resonance, it has a vibration, something has remained. And so it isn't altogether new. Even Rosh Hashanah, even though it's new, it's not new.

So nothing's new. But everything is new. Shabbos Shuvah, we will read in Haftorah, Kechu Imachem Dvarim, take with you words, v'shuvu el Adonai, and come back to God, come back to spirit, come back to heart, come back to the place of recognized home.

In the Sfat Emes, the Sfat Emet, the Ger Rebbe says, a line or two that I really want you to sit with. He says, Ki hinei ikar ha'tshuvah hu letaken ha'shlichus she nishtalach ha'adam le'olam hazeh. That the essence of Shuvah, returning, is for a person, for us, to fix, to align, to calibrate the shlichut, the mission that you were sent to the world to do.

The promise that your soul made before coming into this world. And he says that in the Haftorah, in the prophetic reading that we'll read tomorrow morning, He says, He says that tomorrow we will read that God promised that the rain, the sun comes down and won't go back up. So my word, God says in the prophetic reading, my word will come and won't return until it is fulfilled.

And what that means for me on a psychospiritual level is, is that each and every one of us, he says, has things that we are supposed to bring out into the world. And there's a promise that you will. There's a promise that you will be able, that God says you will be able to bring forth those things.

That there is the strength within you to check and say, what is it yet that I haven't yet birthed? He says it's a birth, like giving birth to fruit. That every time Jeff or Marla or Eileen or Shulamit or Alina, whenever we ask ourselves, have I brought forth my fruit? We should

say to ourselves, God, goddess, spirit, life, the universe, the source of love, the source of Tao, the source of the Dharmakaya, you call it what you want. That source is saying to me, bring it forth.

Bring it forth. And we each and every one of us have to replace all tapes that has us saying that there's no room in the world for the fruits that I'm being brought here to bring forth. That's exactly what you were brought here to do.

He says it. And this guy had long pants. He had a kapota.

He had the whole thing. And he wasn't slamming his fist on a thing. You gotta come back.

You gotta start keeping Shabbos. He's saying, you have to be you. You, each and every one of you is a tree planted in God's garden and you, each and every one of you have fruits that if you don't bring them forth, the world is lacking those fruits.

And what gets in the way, what gets in the way is a perverted sense of judgment of ourselves and of others, a sense of justice that I keep wanting to keep coming back to this. Justice, justice shall you pursue. Right? Justice, justice shall you pursue.

But do you know something? It's compassion, compassion you shall pursue. Because when we pursue justice, and I'm not talking about justice out in the world. God should bless us with being able to have justice.

There should be real justice in the world. And it will only come from deep compassion because when we're not compassionate towards those whom we have to fight for justice, then it's a justice that is born of ego and not a justice born of love. I wanted to share this story and then we'll close the davening because it's late and there's been a lot in the last three days.

But this story, I read it years ago and I want to read it again. And just, I was up and I haven't gone to sleep in a couple of days and I just keep reading these stories and this story. The title of this story is called The Cottage of Candles.

There was once a Jew who went out into the world to seek justice because it is written justice, justice shall you pursue. Somewhere he was certain true justice must exist but he had never found it. So he set out on a quest that lasted for many years.

He went from town to town and village to village and everywhere he went he searched for justice but never did he find it. In this way many years passed by until the man had explored all of the known world except for one last great forest. He entered the forest without hesitation for by now he was fearless and he went everywhere in it.

He went into the cave of thieves but they mocked him and said, do you expect to find justice here? And he went into the huts of witches where they were stirring their brews but they laughed at him and said, do you expect to find justice here? He went deeper and deeper into that forest until at last he arrived at a little clay hut and through the window he saw many flickering flames and he was curious about them so he went to the door and knocked. No answer. He knocked again.

Nothing. At last he pushed the door open and stepped inside and now as soon as he stepped inside the cottage he realized that it was much larger on the inside than it had been on the outside and it was filled with hundreds of thousands of shells and on every shelf there were dozens of oil candles. Some of those candles were in precious holders of gold or silver or marble and some were in cheap holders of clay or tin.

And some of the holders were filled with oil and the flames burned brightly and while others had very little oil left all at once an old man with a long white beard wearing a white robe appeared before him, shalom aleichem, my son. The old man said, how can I help you? The man replied, aleichem shalom. I have gone everywhere searching for justice but never have I seen anything like this.

Tell me, what are all of these candles? The old man said, each of these candles is the candle of a person's soul. As long as the candle continues to burn that person remains alive but when the candle burns out the person's soul takes leave of this world. The man asked, can you show me the candle of my soul? The old man said, follow me.

And he led him through that long labyrinth of a cottage which the man now saw must be endless. At last they reached a low shelf and the old man pointed to a candle in a holder of clay and said that is the candle of your soul. Now the man took one look at that candle and he began to tremble for the wick was very short and there was very little oil left and it looked as if the wick would slide into the oil and sputter out.

He wondered, could the end be so close without his knowing it? Then he noticed the candle next to his own also in a clay holder but that one was full of oil and its wick was long and straight and its flame burned brightly and whose candle is that, he asked. I can only reveal each man's candle to himself alone, the old man said and he turned and left. The man stood there quaking all at once he was startled to hear a sputtering sound and when he looked up he saw smoke rising from another shelf and he knew that somewhere a soul had just taken leave of the world.

He turned back to his own candle and saw there was only a few drops of oil left and then he looked again at the candle next to his own so full of oil and a terrible idea entered his mind. He looked for the old man in every corner of the house but he didn't see him anywhere. Then he picked up the candle next to his own and lifted it above his own and at that instant the old man appeared out of nowhere, he said gripping his arm like an iron and the old man said is this the kind of justice you are seeking? The man closed his eyes because it hurt so much and when he opened his eyes he saw that the old man was gone and the cottage and the candles had all disappeared he found himself standing alone in the forest and he heard the trees whispering his fate and he wondered had his candle burned out? Was he too no longer among the living? He spent his whole life searching for justice out there.

He spent his whole life looking can I find justice out there? And the story wants us to remember that we have our own mission our own candle we each have our own light and God wants us to bring that light out. So I want to bless you I want to give you this is Shabbat that precedes Yom Kippur and we have a week I invite you to spend the week with your own candle I invite you to spend the week looking deeply into what it is that burns brightly for you and how it is that we that we impede our own light from being makrim from carrying

from going out into the world and as best as you can do I invite you all to cease and desist from judging and justicing and instead spend your time loving.