

Sermon Shabbat 081817

There's a phrase in the Talmud, it's actually a proverb, but the Talmud quotes it, and says, God is the God who hates lies. **עִינֵי יֹשֶׁבֶן לִגְד עֵינֵי** says the proverb, the one who speaks lies won't. I don't want to see that person. And the Talmud then goes on to conclude, **חֹתֶמֶת הַיְיָ אֱמֶת**. The signet, the signature of the Divine One is truth. God's ring is truth.

Truth. So let's be real. Let's be honest, let's be truthful tonight.

Sitting with a young man in my office this week, and he was telling me his story, he's got an ancient story, and because he comes from an extremely affluent family, every time he started to tell me about a dilemma, he'd say, well, it's not going to really be that much of a problem, so let's just be real about it. Kept saying that to me, he said, like, let's just be real. Kept saying, let's be real, let's be real. Let's be real. If it's God's signature, it's good enough for God, I certainly want to have that kind of signature. חותמו של דוד אינגברר אמס, חותמו של, חותמו של נדב ליב, של מרק אמת, אמס be חותם, let our signature, let our truth.

So let me tell you something. I remember as a kid in my history class seeing a movie about something that took place in the spring of 1967 in Palo Alto, California, some of you might know this, where a history teacher named Ron Jones conducted an experiment with his class to sample the experience of the attraction and rise of the Nazis in Germany before World War II. In a matter of days, the experiment got out of control.

It was known as the wave for the salute that they had, the wave. Students who doubted that fascism could ever take hold of them. Students who looked at history as something that happened way back when but can't be repeated. Students who thought we are too sophisticated to be deceived as the German people were deceived, found themselves within a couple of days violently, violently excluding and violently, aggressively bullying those who were not a part of their group. So is it really a shock or maybe it still is a shock that just past week we watched throngs of white supremacists marching in the streets of one of this country's most storied cities just one week ago. We watched them proudly waving confederate and Nazi flags, symbols of hatred and the lowest and most base elements of humanity right in the streets with their Tiki lights. Right here in America. Right here in the golden Medina. Right here. They chanted blood and soil and death. And Jews will not replace us. We witnessed them murder an innocent woman.

And I've been struggling and I'm sure all of you have this week. I've been struggling to make sense of it, struggling to kind of figure out where and how and what. And with each passing day as people have been saying and making statements and statements and statements, I want to know what's at the root of this. Because tomorrow morning in communities around the world, the Torah portion's name will be Re'eh, which means give a look, it means look. Use your eyes, Moses the great teacher says tomorrow morning to the Israelites as they stand on the precipice of entering to the Holy Land. And he says to them, Re'eh Anochi, Nosei lefnei chamayon baracha u'klala. Behold, today I am giving you blessing and curse. But that word Re'eh, that significant first word of the parasha tomorrow morning has to do with

ocularity, with vision, with the ability to perceive, to discern, to know. And it's not always clear. It's not always obvious. There's seeing what's true, then there's naming it as true, and then speaking it and hopefully acting on it. So, seeing it, speaking it and then maybe acting on it.

But something didn't happen this week. And so I look tomorrow morning to tomorrow morning's reading and I want to know what's real. I want to know from Thomas Merton, that great Catholic mystic who wrote, We make ourselves real by telling the truth. I want to be real. I want to tell the truth and I want the Torah to inform what it is that happened, the failure this past week. What is it that is being forgotten? What is at stake? What is it that we are fighting for and about? Tomorrow morning, in that very parasha that begins with look, see.

We'll hear a story about something that you can't trust when you see it. Something that when you visualize, when you actually comprehend what is taking place before you, you are not allowed to trust your eyes. You are not allowed, says the Torah, to trust what it is that you have seen, because it contradicts something much more fundamental. Tomorrow morning we'll read about what is known as the Navi Sheker, the false prophet. When amongst you, a prophet or a dreamer of dreams will arise and will give you a sign. And this sign, this miracle, will come to fruition and then he'll say, Go after gods that you didn't know and serve those gods. Don't listen to that false prophet, no matter how sexy the signs, no matter how slick the spin, no matter how supernatural is this sign that he offers, she offers, don't trust it, for God is testing you. It doesn't matter how seductive it is. There is something that transcends the miraculous.

There is something that the Torah says, and by the way, amongst the rabbis of the Torah, of the later tradition, the Talmud, it wasn't clear how it would be possible that God would actually allow a prophet to have miracles if that prophet was a liar. It was a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yossi Aglili and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yossi Aglili said, this is a prophet who comes and uses some kind of great magic and the miracle really takes place, don't trust the miracle. And Rabbi Akiva says, God forbid that God would allow a miracle worker to work miracles. It must be a different scenario. Either way, though, the Torah wants us to know that there is something that transcends the prophet's words. There is something that transcends the prophet's promises. There is something that transcends the prophet's miraculous capacity to convince us with what we see with our eyes. And what is that? What is it? What it is if the prophet will come and tell you that the highest value of your Torah has been abrogated.

If the prophet will come along and say to you, you know everything right here in this ark? I'm bigger than that. It was given by another prophet but I'm bigger than that prophet. If a prophet were to come and no matter how many promises that prophet would procure and offer us but in that moment would completely invalidate the fundamental tenet of Torah, that prophet is not to be adhered.

We don't listen. It's an amazing moment. It's an amazing moment because there is a fundamental tenet that is at stake for me, for you, for all of us in this country at this moment. It is clear that it isn't right against left. It isn't north against south. It isn't the union against the confederacy. It isn't those who believe in identity politics versus those who

believe in economic stimulation. None of those categories are what's at stake at this moment in our country and in our lives.

What is at stake is a fundamental tenet of the Torah of the United States of America. A fundamental tenet of what it is to be an American. To call oneself an American. And so the Torah tells us tomorrow morning, it doesn't matter if someone promises you that the economy will rebound. It doesn't matter if that comes true. It doesn't matter if a prophet comes along and tells you I love you and I'm here for you. It's gonna be tremendous.

What matters to us as a Torah to define this person as a is does this person abrogate one basic fundamental principle of Torah. If it's even one little fundamental principle, one small little iota let alone something bigger don't listen. And so we have a man in leadership who would be king. A prophet who began his political career with a lie about our first black president's birth certificate. A birther who made his name by calling into doubt the birth certificate of Barack Obama. Who is now without any shred of a doubt any longer, without any yeah buts, without any we might see, perhaps he could no matter what promises come to bear in the next month two months, ten months. No matter how many people he fires or quit, resign mutually, who abrogates a fundamental principle of the United States of America's Torah.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all humans are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness we hold in contempt of Torah. The leader of this country, a Navi Sheker, a prophet full of deceit and manipulation who has fanned the flames of hatred. The most base elements that exist within each and every one of us but who has acted with criminal disregard for Torah. And it's not just the Torah of of the Declaration of Independence. It is our Torah, the Torah that we will read tomorrow morning.

We will come upon this verse a little bit later on and it is the antidote to the prophet and funny as it was, I was sitting and reading Howard Thurman, the great great African-American theologian. In his book Jesus and the Disinherited, who wrote about himself when he was a youngster, he said that there was a moment in my life when my ego was unstable ,when I felt fear. And he said I'll never forget the moment that my fear congealed into courage when it was swept away. It was one moment, one story, one mentor. It was his grandmother. She was given the idea he says by a black slave minister who on occasion would hold secret religious meetings with his fellow slaves.

Howard Thurman writes how everything in me quivered with a pulsing tremor of raw energy when in my grandmother's recital she would come to the triumphant climax of the minister, you are not slaves he would bellow. You, you are not slaves. You, you are not slaves. You are God's children. Howard Thurman says being a child of God established for them the ground of personal dignity so that a profound sense of personal worth could absorb the fear that they experienced.

Endowed by our creator with dignity tomorrow morning echoing Howard Thurman we will read banim atem ladonai eloheichem you are children of God says the Torah. Tomorrow morning in the very parsha, in the very wisdom section that teaches us about the prophet

who is a liar and a deceiver, we are reminded banim atem ladonai. You are children of the most high, and because of that lo titgo didu v'lo tasimu korchu b'ineinichem lameit. Because you are all children of the most high do not overly mourn death. Don't cut your hair or gnash your skin, you are children of the most high.

What could that possibly mean? It must mean there are some things that are worse than death: to deny one's own integrity, to forget that one is a child of the most high. That is the fundamental Torah of the United States of America that each and every human being who steps foot on this soil, though we never as of yet have lived up to that aspirational goal. We have that as our beacon. That is our beacon. Every single human being regardless of their skin color, their sexual orientation, even their political preferences is a child of the most high, child of love's expression in that person. And when even one of those children has been taken because of violence that is rooted in that ignorance, that is racism and bigotry.

A true prophet, one who holds up the values of the Torah, and this Torah, and the Torah of the United States would say let us all remember that we are children of the most high. And children of the most high respect one another. Children of the most high treat each other with dignity. Children of the most high. Children of the most high. That is our raison d'etre. To serve a false prophet, to forget that we are all children of the most high is also a risky moment because we become slaves to the fears of retribution and reaction.

How else to explain how modern orthodox institutions, like the one that I went to as a college student up at Yeshiva University, sent out an email today a full week after what took place and said this. Dear members of Yeshiva University community. Americans people of conscience across the world we are all still struggling to come to terms with the shocking racism and bigotry on display in Charlottesville over the past weekend. We are committed to modeling for the world how to apply our values rigorously and substantively to the pressing moral issues of the day.

Shame on you. Let's be real. That's what God asks. I sat with members of my family this week I said well you who taught me as a child that the holocaust should never happen again and that we have to be vigilant you who decried every moment of anti-semitism that you sensed coming out of our first black president. You, where are you now to make a claim against the one who would be king and his failings, where is your voice you see the truth? You can speak it in private, but are you going to act on it? Children of the most high remember that they have nothing to fear, because even death even death is small compared to that integrity that they hold as their ultimate value. To be true to that.

So here we are tonight reminded of the story of the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe who in Russia before the war was sitting in his study as the Nazis came and placing a gun into the Rebbe's face asked him to say I don't believe in the one God of Israel, and without batting an eye the Rebbe from Lubavitch the Raya'ats looked at this Nazi and said, you think you can scare me with that little pistol? You don't understand. I believe in one God and two worlds. I believe in one God and two worlds, and you many Gods and only this world. You think a pistol is going to scare me?

Can you hear Heather Heyer saying that you think you're going to scare me? You think you're going to scare me with your hatred? Jews will not replace us over and over and over again because we are Banim, Banot. We are children of that source and we have nothing to be afraid. So Mr. President and to all of those who cower and are cowardly at this moment, each and every one of us in our own way will say we see the truth, we speak the truth, and we will act on the truth. We will protest, we will speak it out, we will march with love to replace hate. There's no other way Ki Yakum B'Kir Bechan Navi. When amongst you a prophet of lies arises remember you are children of the Most High. Banim Atem La'Adonai Eloheichem we replace love hate with love, hate with love.

We rise now to sing Olam Chassidi B'nei