

Rabbi David Ingber's Kabbalat Shabbat Sermon

March 6 2026

The first words that I say every morning when I wake up are very old words: "*Modeh ani lefanecha*." Thank you, God, for another day. Before my phone, before the news, before the world rushes in... just a quiet moment of gratitude for being alive.

And every morning I hope that the soul of the world that is entering my consciousness will be a little more whole. But these days, right after those prayers in the morning, I pick up my phone and the world again rushes in very quickly – Israel, Iran, sirens, missiles, friends texting from Israel simply to say they're okay.

And I noticed something that happens inside of me. There's a kind of a tightening in my chest. A quiet question rises within me.

And it's not a political question, it's a spiritual one: Where is God? Where is God in all of this, at this moment? Not the God of theology in books, but the living presence that Judaism promises moves through history? Where is that presence when the world feels like this?

And then I opened the Torah portion this week, and I noticed something that I had never quite noticed before: the moment when Moses asks God the most intimate question in the entire Torah. It happens right after everything fell apart – right after the Golden Calf, right after the betrayal, right after the covenant nearly collapsed, the tablets are lying shattered at the foot of the mountain and the future of the Jewish people feels uncertain.

And in that moment, Moshe turns to God and says, "Please, God, show me your glory. Please show me your face. I want to know you. I want to see you, I want to feel you, I really want for you to be alive for me."

That question that we can only imagine Moshe was holding from the moment that he met the divine in that crazy burning bush, pyrotechnic phenomena, from that very moment where Moshe was introduced to the divine, he must've been waiting for this moment, I'll pop the question now.

If he doesn't ask it at the Ritz when the, right, the Yitzhagin army is drowning, he doesn't ask it at Mount Sinai, presumably that's a pretty intimate moment. This short phrase, *har eni na et kizvodekha*, show me your kiod, your glory, show me a deeper level of connection, a deeper level of intimacy, a deeper level of knowing you, a deeper level of comprehension, a deeper level. I really feel like Moshe waits until this moment, Moshe's not asking for victory, he's not asking for reassurance, he's asking for something more profound, he's asking for understanding, he's asking for understanding.

Help me understand you guys, help me understand how you move through a world that can break this badly, that's the key, Moshe's desire to know God more intimately and to feel God's connection is specifically now when the world has gone crazy. They were at Mount Sinai, everything looked great, we were humming along and then the next thing you know, there's a golden calf, who invited this golden calf to the party, it's a rupture, it's a

cataclysmic, chaotic, traumatic moment for the Jewish people. The rabbis liken this to being adulterous at the moment of your chuppah, at the moment of the wedding ceremony between God and the Jewish people, they're receiving the covenant and we betrayed that truth, we become alien to ourselves and to the Torah and that rupture leads to this brokenness and God gets angry in the story and then Moshe says, I need to understand how you move through history, I don't feel your presence now, I need your presence and God gives an answer to Moshe that has puzzled readers for thousands of years, God says, you can't see my face, I'm sorry, you can't and as if that would be a rejection and a sealing off of the question, God then says, no, but here's what I will do.

He named me, God says, I have a place with me in the cleft of the rock and when my presence passes by, when my presence passes by, you will see my back, you will see my back. Ufanai lo yira'u, v'ra'ita et achorai ufanai lo yira'u, you will see the back of my achorai, my back, but my face, lo yira'u, that's a strange phrase and the Hasidic tradition lingers on that phrase. The Sfas Emes, the great Hasidic Rebbe from Ger points out something very beautiful about the Hebrew, the word God uses is achorai, my back, but the word achor in Hebrew also means afterwards, achorei chen, achorei, something we only understand after the fact and now you can hear the verse in a slightly different cadence, a different feeling tone.

You won't see my face means you will not know me in the moment, but you will know me afterwards. You will not understand me while history is unfolding, you might only have a glimpse of me and the meaning afterwards, achorei, only looking back. When we're inside of a storm, whether the storm is literal or historic, everything feels chaotic, it feels confusing and terrifying.

We want clarity, we want reassurance, we wanna see the face of God in the story that we are living in, but the Torah suggests something much more humbling that may not be given to us. We live history facing forward, meaning often appears in history and in our own lives only looking backward, right? Now I see and maybe that is the spiritual challenge of the moment that we're living in right now. Right now we are inside of history, I was sitting in the shul a week ago tonight and I went over to a congregant and the congregant said to me, something historical is going to happen this weekend.

I don't know what she knew, when we're living inside of history, inside feels uncertain, inside feels scary, inside is fear and so tonight in Israel, families welcoming Shabbat will also be listening for the siren, lighting candles with one hand and checking the safe room with the other and from inside moments like these, it's impossible often to see the face of God and the meaning of history is hidden to us, but Jewish faith has never required us to see the whole picture, we don't have to see the whole picture, we have to only trust that the story is not finished yet.

There was a great Irish poet, a current Irish poet and mystic named John O'Donohue, people heard of John O'Donohue, amazing poet, he once wrote something that stayed with me. He wrote, "Sometimes the divine presence comes disguised as the next step in the dark." It doesn't come as certainty, it doesn't come as revelation, it doesn't come as clarity, but simply as the courage to take whatever the next step is and for thousands of years, the Jewish people have lived just like that, empires have risen and empires have fallen and the

hatred of us still remains, believe it or not, history breaks our hearts again and again and yet somehow, the Jewish story continues which means that somewhere, somehow, the divine presence is still moving through the world with us and telling us to take the next step in the dark. It's not always visible, it's not always in ways that we understand, but it's moving nonetheless.

So tonight as Shabbat entered, I was thinking deeply about this and wondering whether the invitation of this week's Torah portion of Ki Tisa with its chaotic, traumatic ruptures and fissures and fragmentation is an invitation for us not to solve all the mysteries of history, but something much gentler, to rest for a moment from the storm tonight, to rest. All over the Jewish world tonight, candles were lit. All over the Jewish world tonight, in LA and in Toronto and in Mexico, even in Ukraine, in Ireland, in Tehran even, in Israel for sure, candles were being lit in Tel Aviv apartments and in Jerusalem balconies, in homes across America, in places of safety and in places where people are listening carefully for the sound of a siren and they just lit two small flames, fragile and flickering.

And yet, generation after generation, the Jewish people have lit those same lights against the darkness and the uncertainty and the not knowing of history. Maybe those candles, like Moshe's beautiful, intimate requests, gentle and vulnerable, I really want to understand, God, please show me the meaning. Maybe those candles, like his requests, are our way of saying something very simple to God.

God, we can't see your face at this moment and often we don't. But we light these candles to say not yet. We believe that somewhere in the unfolding of this mysterious story, just beyond what we can see tonight, you, God, are still passing by.

And if we squint closely enough and focus our eyes on your back, we might just see you pass and have a glimpse of the meaning and the purpose of what is happening. But until then, we light the candles and we follow. We light the candles and we take that remarkable step in the dark that is the camouflage of the divine presence for us in our lives.

At this moment, in this ongoing night that we are living through, that the Jewish people are living through in some way, shape, or form, that Israel is living through and that peoples are living through at this moment, with all of its uncertainty, it's a profoundly powerful statement to keep looking for God in the rearview mirror. May God give us a glimpse of her presence, a taste of that meaning, and kavod, and may we have the resilience and the perseverance to keep asking God, ha'enina et kavodekha, God, I really wanna see your face.