

Rabbi David Ingber's Shabbat Morning Sermon | August 8 2026

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So, I just want to start with a revelation that shouldn't be a revelation to those who have known me for the last couple of years, and certainly if you've known me for longer than the last couple of years, it won't be a revelation. I don't like heights. Ivan, why don't you come sit here? I don't like heights.

Is that how you say tights? Lights? I don't like lights. It's just like, you know, I don't like heights. Things like up there, I don't like.

If it's up here, I don't like it. I don't like heights. I don't like drops.

I don't like, you know, I don't like being on a roller coaster. I don't like being, I don't like looking at something that's precariously hanging between two mountains like a bridge. I don't like, I don't like being on the, a subway that's careening.

I don't like turbulence. I'm not unique. I'm sure there are many like me, who the minute there's like a drop in cabin pressure or anything that remotely resembles what people will say, it's just, you're driving along, it's Ingber.

Turbulence is just like driving on a street with potholes, right? And you're just moving around in the car, you don't think about it at all. It's no big deal. But there is a big deal when I'm dropping, dropping, it's a little scary, my body.

I tried my best when I was in Disneyland this past, last, a couple weeks ago in LA, I tried my best to, to go on a, like a, to go on something like, like a, a ride. Millennium Falcon. It was a simulator.

It wasn't like a real ride, it was like a baby ride of a ride, a baby ride. I was so green for the next three hours, so it was more than a little bit shocking to me when I trusted my amazing wife, who told me that I should go take a really beautiful scenic route with my son from LA up to San Francisco, go up Route 1. Maybe even in a convertible, that was the original idea, to be in a convertible. What a great idea, what could be wrong? Such a beautiful, scenic route.

I'll be able to relax and take in the transcendence of vistas and unbelievably, you know, divinity that is expressed through nature against the finely hewn roads of human hands and engineering. There's the contrast with divine brilliance, colors. There wasn't a moment through the entire eight hours or so, over two days, where my hands were not clutched on the steering wheel, trying to tell my 10-year-old to look out the window at the beautiful sights, as I looked literally 100 feet in front of me.

I'm joking, of course, I took a couple of glances every now and then, took it in and breathed it in. The experience that I had mirrors or aches the experience of feeling precarious or endangered.

It's not unique to driving on Route 1, anybody here has ever driven a car or been in any other context.

You're driving down the highway and maybe you're half listening to a podcast, maybe thinking about where you're going, and when suddenly that happens, there was a great Modern Family episode. Do you guys remember the Modern Family? They're in the minivan, everybody's yelling at the phone, and they're in their lives, everything, all the day-to-day. One of them is in the back putting on, I think one of the kids is putting on lipstick.

And there's a moment, like that, and a car runs a stop sign and she hits the brakes. And the rest of the episode is the exploration, the Modern Family episode, the rest of it is the exploration of that incongruity, of that moment of the ordinary with the extraordinary, the ordinary, the mundane, with life's contingency. I think that's what happens for me, probably, is that I take a look at that and I feel like I'm only one moment away.

It's like the Kimat of Sarah in the great Rashi in Chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis where Sarah dies and everybody's wondering what happened. She was just alive and there's a Midrash that says that she heard that Isaac was almost killed and her soul left her body. That word almost, the contingency of life, the Kimat, the Kimat.

So here's, you're driving down the road and you're half awake and you're half asleep. Something happens. And your hands grip the wheel and your eyes take in everything at once.

Something becomes really acute in that moment. You see the car ahead of you, the mirror, the shoulder, the narrow opening that might save you. Every color sharpens, every ground, every sound becomes louder.

And somehow, the brush with death makes you remarkably present to life. Did anybody ever see the movie Fearless? I think that's what it's called with, what's the amazing, Perez, Rosie Perez? You know who I'm talking about? Rosie Perez? Bueller. Anybody here? Bueller? Anybody have, what? Chat GPT.

Look up Rosie Perez. There's a movie, I think it's called Fearless, it was about like an airline accident. And I think Rosie Perez, and maybe you forgot, it'll come to me, she's one of the survivors of the crash.

And in the movie, like, she literally walks out of the crash, like, the scene, the foreground, right, the background is the crash, and she's walking through the fire and smoke, scarred, and she's in a daze. And everything after that follows her and a number of other survivors trying to put ordinary life back together again, because they have seen, they've seen how flimsy this is. It's an amazing thing.

A friend of mine called me this week, someone that I work with, not here, Roma Moon, another

context, not here, not the Y, but another work relationship. And she called me to tell me that she had cancer. Young woman, two young children.

And she said, I have to go in for surgery this Thursday, two days ago. She told me on Tuesday. So this, two days from now, I'm going for surgery, when did you find out, last week? Not uncommon, maybe people know that stories like that, but for her, what do you mean? I'm working.

I went in for a routine exam, and now I'm going to be on the table? Something happens. Because if you ask those people, if you ask them, in the minute before, would you be able to tell me the color of your kitchen? Would you be able to tell me the sights on the side of the road that you pass by each and every day? And most people would be like, no, but all of a sudden, that experience heightens their sensitivity and their sensory experience, their sight, their sounds, their visual acuity, all of a sudden everything becomes vibrant. And what the Yishpitzer Rebbe says on this week's Torah portion, is why do we need that? Moshe Rebbe to Moses in chapter 11 of the book of Deuteronomy, comes to the people and says, behold, see, look, give a look, I am giving you today life and death.

And Yishpitzer says, shouldn't they know that every day? What do you mean today? I'm placing before you today life and death. You mean today is the day? You mean every day when you're walking out of your house, or you're driving to the building, or your health is actually working, it's not today, isn't the day? Why today, Re'eh? And he says clearly, because Re'eh, you can see when I tell you that you have a gift, which is every moment, life and death, or before you would ever give a moment, that's a lot to hold. But when you hold it, if you can intentionally hold it, if you can practice that mindset, you will see what you don't always see.

You will be held, you will notice. But that's hard. It's really hard.

See, I said before you today, blessing and curse, the Yishpitzer is saying something really amazing. Here's what the Yishpitzer is saying, I think. Every major crisis makes us into theologians.

It also, it also can wake us up. Crisis makes each of us into theologians. There's a way that crisis will destabilize us, unsettle us, and the Torah is almost inviting us to extract that quality and bottle it like you would a Bach flower essence.

Extract it and use it in some way. We were saying in the open book this morning that religion at its core, religious teachers, real religious teachers, like the ones we were studying, the mystics, the masters, the Hasidic teachers, they want us all to remain teenagers. They wish we could be teenagers.

Because they recognize that teenagers, as mature as they are, haven't seen enough in the world to really acquire the kind of wisdom that only experience can provide, but they have something

that most of us inevitably, impossibly, it's impossible not for this to happen, we lose some of that turbulence. We don't want life to take us into the places that feel unstable. I don't want to feel as if the only thing that separates me from plummeting to my death is this little thin piece of steel.

You look out the window and you think, really? The only thing between me and the abyss is that? Can I have a Coke, please? Why is my Wi-Fi working? What? We don't want to think about that. We can't think about that. That's what the philosophers call the danger of mortality.

If we think about death too much, as an entire school of psychologists says, if you think about death too much, you can't get out of bed in the morning. Those Hasidic masters said, we wish you were teenagers still. You were turbulent.

You were unsettled. You were willing to take risks. You weren't just happy with where you've arrived in your career.

You weren't just happy with your religious standing or your social standing. You were restless again. And the sense of life's fragility, its instantiality was so much more present for you because then you would live a little bit more like it mattered.

So every year, around this time of the year, we have this portion as we are about to walk into Elul to say, maybe we didn't do it all year. Maybe every single year we ask ourselves, why do I forget? If we're lucky to forget, not like my friends who had a very rude awakening, but Elul comes and says, notice the ordinary is extraordinary. Don't wait for a crisis to notice the color of your kitchen.

Don't wait for a crisis to recognize the little habits of the people who live in your house who are really strangers. No matter how close you get to them, they're still strangers. They still will surprise you, can they? Well, they.

Along comes Moshe Rabbeinu and he says, Every day is a day. And if you wake up, every day will become a day of renewal. Rav Nachman writes so beautifully.

He writes, Tshuva is not a grand gesture. It's not a dramatic spiritual reinvention. Tshuva is not becoming someone else overnight.

The essence of tshuva is found in the moment when someone humiliates you and you remain silent. The essence of tshuva, he says, is when everything in you, every instinct, the most fundamental self-preservation instinct, which is automatic. Somebody hurts you, you fight back.

Then we begin to interrogate some of these automatically habitual ways of responding and thinking. The moment of tshuva is the space where you don't defend yourself to show them who you are. The space of tshuva is the breath before.

The moment that something that was automatic is no longer automatic. And it begins with the eyes, says the Ishvitser. So here's the challenge for me.

And if you want to, this is my challenge, my LO challenge. And you're more than welcome to sign up with me as well, but there's no real place to sign up. But if you want to sign up, you can sign up.

Ingber, I'm challenging you during the month of Elul to not wait for a near miss or wait for the shoe to drop or to wait for an absence in order to feel a presence. I'm inviting you to challenge yourself each and every day to feel that each and every day things are anew. And it could have been otherwise.

There's a great meditation that I was using at one point this year, I'm going to come back to it, from the Stoics. And I heard it and I've been using it in the morning. It's helping for like at least 10 minutes, which is more than it was helping before I started doing it.

The Stoics invite practitioners to close their eyes and to imagine, in that moment, imagine everything that you love is no longer there and to sit with it for a minute. And then to imagine a feeling when it comes back, what we call trias hamesim, when the resurrection of the dead happens. The one who's no longer there is now back with you.

To imagine those who are with you are not here now and to feel their absence and then to bring them back. And to do that with anything in your life. To imagine your eyesight and imagine what it would be like now to walk around the world without seeing the things that you're seeing right now.

To do that with your hearing, to do that with your apartment, to do that with, you could make the list. It's a long list. I imagine that there are some things that we would like to close our eyes and see are gone and then don't come back.

That's also true. That's real. It's such a bracha to hear the Ishvitzer this morning.

On a week after I narrowly survived my harrowing drive up the coast from LA to San Francisco, on a week after a dear friend and colleague got really scary news, but Baruch Hashem we'll be okay, and on a week when we're about to now prepare for Ani L'Dodi, coming to see the Beloved and really seeing them, and the Beloved could be this moment, this music, this, whatever it is, I'm going to try to work on that over the next month in my preparations for Rosh Hashanah this year, taking to heart Rav Nachman's insight that Shuvah begins the moment that which is habitual is no longer habitual. May God bless me and all of us with more wonder, more surprise, a greater flexibility to go on rides that life will offer us, even if they sometimes scare us. Please rise everybody for Aleinu on page 205.

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