

Romemu Dvar Torah Dec 25 2015

If you follow, never lose the leader within. And if you lead, never lose the part of you that follows. Leaders and followers complicit in this project of life and death.

On this week, a week which began with the death of our amazingly beautiful congregant, Robert Berlin, succumbing to a year and change, over a year battle with cancer. On a week in which we witnessed the longest night of the year, the shortest day, the day that the sun stood still, the solstice. And a week where the very next day, another beautiful, incredibly talented Neshamah soul named Lily Shad also passed from this world.

A week full of light and darkness. A week of both this and that. A week where my son, Be'er Le'havdil Ben Ameisen Ve'achayim, where my son Be'er said to me, Abba, I know about the yin-yang symbol, you see.

There's a little bit of dark in the light and a little bit of light in the dark. Yeah. On a week that held the death at the beginning, the sun standing still at the top, we arrive tonight on this day commemorating for our Christian brothers and sisters the birth of the son.

The birth of the sun, S-U-N, the birth of the son, S-O-N, the great Redeemer being born. Christ has come to Bethlehem. And the birth of hope on this week when we complete a 12-month cycle and also a 12-parsha cycle.

Precisely this Shabbat tomorrow morning, the 12 parshiot, the 12 portions of the book of Genesis will be completed on this week of the force awakening. On this week where the battles for light and dark for the potential redemptive core, the essential question, will dark or darkness or the absence of light prevail or will light prevail? We have a teaching from someone whose name was Yaakov Yosef, whom I mentioned last Shabbos. Yaakov Yosef of Polonoia, the great student of the Baal Shem Tov, whose book told to Yaakov Yosef the generations of Jacob Joseph.

Give us the first glimpse, the first taste into the great teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, the great shaman of the 18th century who birthed the ecstatic Hasidic movement, the great revivalist Yisrael Ben-Eliezer, his prime student, Yaakov Yosef, in this week's Torah reading begins and these, right, Yehi Yaakov eret Mitzrayim sh'va'as re'shanayin. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years. And the days of Jacob were seven and 40 and 100, 147 years.

Vayikiravu yeme Yisrael lamus. And the days of Yisrael, of Israel, came to die. And just as two lights were snuffed out in our community this week, two men will die in this week's parasha.

Yaakov and his son Yosef will die. And as the book of Genesis had begun with fecundity, with fertility, with promise, the book of Genesis will end with reconciliation but also with a closed aron, a coffin, and a closed land, the Egyptians will close themselves around Yisrael, around the Israelites. And Jacob, Joseph asked this question.

We know from the story of Genesis that Jacob's name means to be a sneaky heel, the one who was sly, who got things surreptitiously, got it kind of circuitously, he did it in a very backhanded way. And when he finally is called Yisrael, when he graduates to Yisrael, that's a

great thing. Lo yikarei shimcha od, Yaakov, ki yim Yisrael, ki sari sa'im Elohim v'im anashim v'tuchal.

Your name will no longer be called Jacob but Yisrael. You are Yisrael, you are a prince, you are one who struggles, you are royalty. And yet here, in the opening of the Parsha, and Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years, and the days of Yisrael came to die, says Jacob Joseph of Polonoia.

Why is the name associated with Jacob that is the heel, the part that is elevated as though he lived in Egypt for 17 years, and why is Yisrael the part of Jacob that is elevated, the one that is mentioned when we're told about his death. Why Jacob lived and Yisrael went to die. And says Yaakov Joseph of Polonoia, this--

He says, you see, in the Kabbalah and in Chassidut, in the mystical side of Judaism, Mitzrayim or Egypt is the place of intense constriction of intense confusion. He says, you can look at someone who's a Yaakov, you can see somebody who's a Jacob, who's someone whom you think on the outside, who is that? It's just a simple person, a populist, just a hamonam, just your average Joe or Jacob. And they're living in a place of constriction. They live with tremendous suffering in their lives, a land of Egypt, meaning a constricted place. They suffer immensely, they wake up, they go to bed, they have struggles. We have no idea.

We're looking at them from the outside and we have no idea what's going on for them. And that person is a vayekhi. That person can be living in the midst of constriction, of pain, of smallness, of vicissitudes that we couldn't imagine.

And we think from the outside, no, there goes a Yaakov. That's a little Jacob, but vayekhi. And then he says there can be somebody who's a Yisrael. He teaches Torah, he's got 20 books on the bestseller list.

Oh, what a spiritual person that is. Look at them, the way they meditate. What a Yisrael.

Oh, I want to get his autograph on my meditation cushion. Oh, I wish, I wish, oh, I want to be like that guy. Maybe I'll go study with him.

Maybe I'll travel—continents, countries. Oh, I heard about a Yisrael, oh, what a holy person. Maybe they'll bless my water.

It says Yaakov Yosef, a Polonoi, that person, vayekhu yimei Yisrael lamos. That person, they're dead on the inside. It's a show, it's a sham, it's a joke.

And in a parasha where the essential core question of Genesis is answered, can I trust you, my brother? Can I trust you? Are you trustworthy, who are you? Are you Joseph, are you the dreamer, are you the viceroy? Will you kill us when Jacob dies? The core question of Genesis, haker na, can you recognize something? He looks like the eldest son, but he's empty. Nu, re'uvin, bini, re'uvin bechari az pachaz kamayim. You are so strong, but you're unstable.

You. You look like you're the eldest, but you're not the wisest. You, menasha, you're the eldest, no, Ephraim is the eldest. Don't sleep, spiritual teachers who stand and hit tables.

We're made of this, we're made of stuff with our own projections, our own stuff. We know some Torah, we do some work. We might be a mirror to others at times, and at other times, they will be a mirror to us, all of you.

Someone came to me this week, he's in the community, said, you know, rabbi, I have to tell you something. I've been angry at you since Yom Kippur. See, on Yom Kippur, there was a moment at the end of Yom Kippur when you were in ecstatic state and you started chanting, Adonai hua Elohim, Adonai hua Elohim, God is God, and we didn't know in the community that it's only you that are supposed to chant it. And then we started to chant with you, and you waved your hand like that. And it felt so flippant to me, rabbi, like you didn't care, and he was right.

I said to him, you know, you're absolutely right. I was upset in the moment because I wanted you guys to learn. I was so thankful that he told me that. I can't see that.

There are so many things that we project in so many different directions, it's a wonder that we ever live in the same universe with each other. It's a wonder. I had the opportunity this week to be on stage to teach Kabbalah with somebody who's a very well-known teacher in the non-Jewish, out there in the spirituality world, and the whole time I was thinking to myself, what's my responsibility being up here on this stage? Like, how did I get here? The Kabbalah is so much bigger than me and you and all of us, and I have a responsibility if I'm teaching to you to be honest and transparent, to be true.

It's so important, it's so vital. That we do the work of owning our projections that we send out into the universe, and seeking saviors, on a day that is suggestive of a savior, but there are so many that we hope will save us. Judaism will save me, Romemu will save me, BJ will save me, this course will save me. If I spend this much money on this energetic healing, this will save me.

V'kesh Yaakov legalos etzakets, Jacob wanted to tell his sons about everything that would happen in the future, v'nistami, man, we couldn't see it. There are some things that you can't tell, there are places you can't go. So why am I all worked up? Tomorrow morning in the New York Times, an article will appear about a spiritual leader who once lived in the Jewish community.

A spiritual leader who for 30 years has abused women and students. A spiritual leader that has used Torah in the most nefarious way to bring people close, and then to do the worst thing a teacher can ever do, which is to take the trust that has been given to them and to abuse it. Tomorrow morning in the New York Times, an article will appear that should have happened 25 years ago, it should have happened at least 15 years ago, maybe without a doubt 10 or 11 years ago, but projections got in the way, and fear.

Fear. Teachers were afraid of their reputations, people were afraid of the retribution, and someone was allowed to continue to hurt others in the name of Torah, in the name of God, in the name of spirit. You'll read it for yourselves, but Yaakov Yosef of Polonoia, the great student of HaShem Tov, teaches us a valuable lesson tonight.

True spiritual practice is when the gap between outside and inside is closed. To be the person who I think I am and ought to be and the person I really am. It's not that I'm one way, but chutz, in the outside, and then at home, I'm another way.

It isn't like I'm the celebrity spiritual teacher, but when it comes to my wife and to my children, I lose my temper. When I was in yeshiva, they used to say, I think I've mentioned this in the shul a couple of times, that out in the veld, in the world, celebrities are really great on the outside, but the more you get to know them, the more you realize that they're so ordinary. And tzaddikim, righteous ones, are so ordinary on the outside, but the more you get to know them, you realize how amazing they are. So let me ask you a question.

As a rabbi, my rabbi would probably want us to know and to ask, are you being honest with who you really are? Are we being true to who we could be? How can we become stronger in our own sense of our own power and not give it away to other people? How can we maintain a sense of our own inner integrity as we're called to evolve? And most importantly, if there are any hypocrisies in our life, how can we heal those hypocrisies? How can we bring together Yaakov Yisrael? How can we bring together the one who presents and the one who's the real one so that we are Yaakov Yosef, we are Yaakov Yisrael? That's our work in the world. I wanna bless each and every one of you as we begin a new year next week. Jesus said, when we make that which is outside inside and that which is inside outside, then the kingdom will have arrived.

When we turn these duplicities and binaries into unities, when we find a way to unify who we are in love and stand for what is true, we bring redemption. I wanna bless each and every one of you, each and every one of you with a sense of safety and a sense of strength that comes with living with integrity. And I want you to bless me back and help me to be that teacher.

I'll help you be that teacher too. Let's do it together. And let's rise.