



Romemu Sermon Shabbat Dec 11, 2015

Jewish time is alive. Jewish time is textured. It has a feeling tone to it.

You can touch it, you can taste it, you can feel it. And tonight, this Shabbat is a special coming together, a confluence of a number of different textures that I wanna explore with you tonight for the next 15 or so minutes. And there are gonna be a lot of things that I'm gonna try to bring together and hopefully they'll come together.

But to begin with, tonight is Shabbat, of course. It happens every week. And it's also Shabbat Hanukkah.

It's Hanukkah, which happens every year. And it's also the new months, the new moon, tonight, which happens every month. And it's also a parsha.

There's also a story associated with the Shabbos, Shabbat Miketz, which I'll get to in a moment. There's a distinct quality to each of those times. Shabbat Hanukkah is the Shabbat that happens in the midst of an eight-day secular holiday for all intents and purposes.

Hanukkah is the only holiday that we have that is this long, that has no Yom Tov, no specifically mandated day of rest. Hanukkah happens in the midst of our lives. It comes into our life, it comes into our homes.

And it says, these eight days, like any other eight days. But no, different. This holiday called Hanukkah was created by human beings. It doesn't have a book.

Well, I personally believe that all of our holidays were created by human beings, but, there's no biblical source for this holiday. There's no event, as it were, sourced in a sacred script or a sacred literature. We have 20 lines in the Talmud, a distinctly human document that tells us something happened.

So Hanukkah is all human. Shabbat, pretty biblical. And then Rosh Chodesh.

Rosh Chodesh, the new month, is, found in the Torah, we are to make the new month, chapter 12 of the book of Exodus, but we are to make the new month. And so for the rabbis, the new month participates in both a divine givenness and a human action. Right, a month that isn't witnessed by human eyes isn't a new month.

And the rabbis were so bold to imagine that they could actually change facts on the ground when the new month actually occurs. Stories in the Masachet Rosh Hashanah and other places say, we didn't see it, it's not real. So, Kazeh Kadesh, hachodesh hazeh lachem Rosh Chodeshim, it's for you to make.

This theme of human action and divine givenness is sourced also in the narrative, as I said tomorrow morning, Parshat Miketz, the second of the three parshiot that are about the Joseph narrative, as someone I think on Godcast said, it's kind of the empire strikes back of the trilogy about Joseph, it's the middle. And in the Parshah, we are introduced, or not really introduced, but we have two characters, two heroes, two people who are actually representative of this tension. On the one hand, we have Joseph.

Joseph, the one who, as last week, Rabbi Jessica said so beautifully, shem shamayim shagur b'fiv. Joseph is homo religiosus. He is called, in our tradition, Yosef HaTzadik.

He's the frum guy. The Midrash says that whenever Joseph did something and was given credit, he would say, no, baruch Hashem, thank God. Someone says to you, wow, you have such a beautiful voice.

You say, did I do it? No, baruch Hashem, thank you, God. Yosef, in our tradition, becomes the man of faith. In fact, the entire story of Joseph's narrative as he is taken into the pit, both in the land of Canaan and in the pit in Egypt, and each and every time, his passivity is powerful.

Right, guys? He's not active. You don't see Joseph in the biblical story taking a rope and trying to get out of the pit. He's in the pit and he waits.

He waits in the pit. He's in the darkness. Gam b'choshech, Adonai or li, God is for me a light, even in this dark place called the pit.

12 years, Joseph is in the pit of Egypt, and then finally, in the beginning of this week's parasha, li'keitz, sh'natayim shana, at the end of that period, v'yiritzuhu menabor, they take him out of the pit, and everything happens very quickly, and every, can you interpret dreams? Yes, I can, but it's really God. It's really God, it's really God. Everything is God for Joseph.

It's W-G-O-D 24-7. At the end of the story, after everything happens to Joseph, he doesn't blame the brothers. He says, nope, what can you do? Atem chashav, tem ala l'ra'av, elun chashava l'tovah, it all happened from God.

Joseph is the eight lights of the menorah, a gift from God. He is Shabbat. Everything comes, it was a miracle.

I found it, I discovered it. But there's, in every menorah, a shamash too, right? What's a shamash? It's that one candle that has to light all of the other candles. Judah, Yehudah, the second character, everything about Judah's life is, I'm gonna take responsibility.

Judah goes down and has a horrible event happen in chapter 38 of the book of Genesis. His sons die, he's involved in some illicit relationship with his daughter-in-law, and she shows him that he's wrong, holds a mirror up to her face, his face, as I said last Friday night, and he says, she's right, I'm wrong. I take responsibility.

In this week's reading tomorrow morning, Judah wins the day because Judah says, anochi a'arvenu, I will take responsibility for this Benjamin character. Judah doesn't allow himself to say someone else will do it, it will be from God. Judah doesn't allow himself to imagine that there's a world order that is so perfect and so profound that the arc of history will bend inevitably towards justice.

No, that's not Judah. Judah says, I will be the shamash. I will be the one who lights the other candles.

You, Joseph, you can believe. You have to believe. But me, Judah says, I will take an action.

In fact, Judah wins the day. Judah is the hero of the book of Genesis, not Joseph. Judah is the one that we are named for as Jews.

We are named for Judah because we have always been the ones who have to some degree or another lived our lives with both of these realities. We try to be the shamash, and then in retrospect, we say it was God's will. But prospectively, we never allowed ourselves to imagine that we weren't implicated.

If there was an injustice somewhere, we had to right that wrong. We became that, we became that expression of Rosh Chodesh, of the new month, the month that is called and is already given, but not really real until we witness it, until we speak it, until we say we are responsible to make this world a holier place. Now, it's great if your religious leader has a little bit of Joseph in them, says, oh, listen, you're in the flow.

The force will be with you, young Skywalker. But you are not a Jedi yet. How to balance these two energies is part of the art of living, right? When do I let it go, and when do I take control? When am I supposed to be the one that says, it's me, and when should I say, you, God, you do it? I think it's fair to say that in the week since last Friday, the week since San Bernardino, the week since, I remember standing up here and thinking, could Donald Trump say something even stupider than what he said when I was asked on The View what I thought of his anti-Semitic remark that all of you are good negotiators, you know how to make a deal, right? And I said, listen, it wasn't ill-intended, it wasn't anti-Semitic, he's just a buffoon.

But words in our tradition are powerful. Words create worlds. To be able to speak, to be a ruach m'malala, to be someone who has the gift of oration is, in the medieval rabbinic mind, the very meaning of the image of God.

How you use your words creates a world. And to imagine somebody speaking out against an entire religious tradition, somebody undermining the very fabric and the very foundation of this country's greatness, let's not be fools. In every religious tradition, there is extremism.

It isn't only the province of religions, ideologies, secular, atheist, all the way across the board misunderstand God's children and other them. You don't have to be a Muslim to hate others. You don't have to be a Jew to hate others.

No one owns stupidity. No one owns fear. No one owns closed hearts and closed minds.

We all have it. We have it here, everybody, right here in our holiest ark. We have the history of fear mixed together with beauty and power.

We have it everywhere. If Mr. Trump and others like him would like to close the doors of our country to those who have ideologies of hate, he would be excluded from this country. It's important for us as Jews, it's important for us as spiritual practitioners to understand that we are Yehuda.

We are the ones who make the world a better place. We have faith that ultimately the light will overcome the difficulties. We have faith, as the Midrash says in the beginnings of this week's parasha, keit sam l'choshech, the darkest will not reign forever.

We're the absence of goodness. But we're the ones who light. We're the shamash, we're the Yehudi, we're the ones who take responsibility.

We are the ones who, in Rabbi Jessica's beautiful poem before, we could've been us. It's up to us to bring light into this world and to use speech to counter speech. Someone who feeds fear, we will feed love.

When someone feeds despair, we will feed hope. When someone feeds othering, we will say, no, me, you, us. In every single cab that I have been in this week, I've had the trepidation of asking my cab driver, he is Muslim, if I read the back of his, I try to know, I don't know, and I'm nervous that he's gonna think I'm gonna do something mean.

And I ask him, I say, excuse me, sir, are you Muslim? And he says, yes. It's happened four times this week, and I said, I'm a Jew, and I wanna say that we are in this together. I wanna say I'm sorry, and I wanna say we can't know each other's hearts, but we can treat each other with respect and with love.

To be a Yehudi, to be Judah, is to say, I take responsibility to light a little candle. And we shouldn't confuse these two postures, because if we are religious, when we should be active, we can, it's not up to God. It's up to me, it's up to you.

We have to renew the moon. That's our work in the world. So on this weekend, that is Human Rights Weekend, I wanna remind us that we began the year, Yom Kippur, by saying, I promise, therefore I am.

People remember that? From ito ergo sum, I promise, therefore I am. We also spoke about being on the hook. So we gotta get on the hook, everybody.

We gotta get on the hook with being a Yehudi in camps and in subways. We gotta be signing petitions against Islamophobia. We have to be speaking out against ideologies of hate that are here in our own religious tradition, in our own country.

I would love to see an Islam that has reform movement in it. I would. I would love to support the voices who want to say, we repudiate hatred in all of our religious traditions.

Any doctrine, no matter who said it and when they said it, that others, a Jew, a non-Jew, a black, a white, a red, a Christian, sexual orientation, gender orientation, none of those things. We repudiate that and speak that truth loudly and clearly into the world and say, it isn't Islam, it isn't Judaism, it isn't Christianity, it is those who understand it as a way to denigrate God's name instead of sanctifying it. That's who we are.

That's who we can be. That's Hanukkah, Shabbos, or Shodesh, all of it. You get it? You get it? That's what this weekend is, it's human rights.

It's up to us to build a better world. We can do it. One little jar at a time.

One little jar at a time. So as you leave tonight and as you're tempted to go back into your world and as you're walking around and you think, hmm, I don't really know you. Welcome, good to see you.

Walk around this place because it's gonna start in our small communities. We can go home and sign petitions but then we can come to Romemu and to B.J. and Nachi Chesed and Dorche Noam and we can go around and we'll be like, oh, I'm really on about this non-Islamophobia but when I see people in the shul that are a little bit different than me, I'm gonna make my beeline to someone I know. We gotta walk it.

We gotta walk it, right? Every Shabbat, you have 26 hours. If you come to Romemu, you have at least three and then four in the morning. You can practice being community and opening your heart to people you don't know.

I think I'm done. Olam Chesed Yibaneh, the world will be built by love. Let's rise and sing together.

Olam Chesed Yibaneh.