

Romemu Dvar Torah January 06, 2017

We spoke earlier tonight about the word om or aim or homelibi. The word aim, mother, and the sound om in Sanskrit and the homelibi says, many of the Jewish mystical sources, the same quality, the same quality of mother, home, belonging. Homelibi, the humming bird, the humming of a resonance, of some roots, of some ground, right? We spoke about that earlier, about shalom and shalom it's not just for new age Jews, it's really there in the early sources.

Shalom, of om, of mother, of that sound. The earliest acquaintance with what the great German theologian Paul Tillich called the ground of being. The mother, the matrix, from where we all came, as it were.

We hear that in shalom, we hear it in aim, mother, we hear it in emunah, in faith. And what is, to some degree, a religious calling, a religious practice, a religious culture, if not a vehicle for emunah, for faith, for a sense of connection with something greater than oneself, a connection with a larger story, a larger narrative, a larger place that we all emanate from. The greatness of faith.

Religion itself, the word religion from the word ligament, to religament, to religare, to reconnect, to some greater matrix, some greater whole, of which we are all important parts, but that whole is greater than all of our parts, yes, yes. That is emunah, faith in things unseen, a faith, a trust that is an answer to the primordial question, which is, is the universe a safe place? And when it isn't, when the when we don't feel connected to that greater matrix, that greater source, that greater ground, we can feel uprooted, we can feel confused, we can feel dislocated. The ligaments are not working well.

Thinking about what it feels like, right? What I want to talk about tonight is what it means to have faith in something that you should have lost faith in, and how you keep it. What does it mean to have that sense that things will be okay, but there's a great storm and things are not okay, and you've been knocked around, and you don't feel it, and you're confused, and everything in you is searching for something to land on, and nothing. So I was thinking about this, of course, because this is where we are.

For many of us, at this point of the year, when things get dark, and the great Leonard Cohen passes away and says, you want it darker? It'll get darker. I was watching a movie, and it's a movie that, it feels like it was just yesterday, but it was in 2000, Tom Hanks, in maybe the role of his lifetime, amongst other roles of his lifetime, right? Castaway. And I'm watching this movie about a man who is, got everything.

He has a beautiful girlfriend, he has a great job, he's a man that can make anything happen. He's a manager with FedEx, and he's always on the call, but he's right, that's his, he's a great manager, right? He takes care of packages, and makes sure they get where they need to go, but in the movie, of course, which is based on a true story, he's called to Malaysia, and he has to board a plane, and at that moment he turns to his girlfriend, Helen Hunt, and he proposes to her, those who don't know the movie, sorry, this is a spoiler alert, obviously, but it's called Castaway, so, I mean, he turns to his lover, he turns to his girlfriend, and he says to her, be home soon. And the last exchange that they have is a pocket watch with a

picture of her in it. And he boards a plane, and people don't know this, but you can imagine, imagine the plane goes down, and he is stranded on an island in the South Pacific, and what happens to him? How does he pull himself together? He's gone, he's a castaway, nobody, there's no help for miles, it's far fallen, it's done, there's no chance. He should give up. And he almost does, many, many times, but here's what gets him through, looking at the watch, looking at his girlfriend, fiancé, and one other thing, which is significant for me.

You see, onto that island washed a lot of FedEx packages, and he opened all of them, and they had very useful objects in those packages that he used in order to make it through the four years, almost five years that he was on the island, but there was one package that he refused to open. It doesn't tell us why he chose that package, there's no way for him to know that there's anything in that package that should be significant, but here's the significant piece, he doesn't open one of all of those packages, and that package, when the movie ends, we find Tom Hanks, of course, for those, again, spoiler alert, he gets off the island, but it's that package in the last scene of the movie that he is seen returning to Sender, five years too late. He didn't open the package, but something about feeling deployed, something about refusing to use that package kept him going when he should have given up.

Something about that package is emuna, in a box. Faith in a box. Something in that package reminded him of who he was, of what he was here to do, what he had been deployed to achieve, to accomplish, to see through to the end. Something about not opening that package kept him sane, along with a volleyball, but we won't go into that. I couldn't help but think about tomorrow morning's reading, in the Parshat that we read every year at this time of the year, Parshat Vayigash, the Parsha of Reconciliation, the Parsha which in some way should end the book of Genesis. It is the final moment of this great narrative of the brothers and Joseph, and Joseph's incredible way, the literary way that Joseph brings the brothers to do what's called tikkun, to fix the sin that they had already committed, and the emergence of Judah, Judah the leader, Judah the fourth son went up and broke through to Joseph, the one who could recognize Judah found the one who could not be recognized, Joseph, and it's this great moment, and it's 20 years Joseph had been a castaway.

20 years Joseph had lived a life and as the Midrash says, he could have easily just called his father. He could have sent him a message, hey, Jacob, I know you love me, I know that this crushed you probably, but I'm not very far away. No message between Joseph, the beloved son, and Jacob, the doting father. No communication, no expression of hope. Jacob has been mourning, and he has probably given up, and Joseph, right, in the most mournful and beautiful way, every year I cry, I can't read it without crying, Joseph hugs his brothers, there's a reconciliation, there is a reproachment, and then here's what happens. Joseph says, go back to Jacob, go back to my father, tell him that I'm still alive, and tell him to get his tuchus down here, because I want to see him.

So he goes back to, right, he sends the brothers back, al tirgu zu badarach, hurry up, go home, and tell Jacob, and just like in the movie, for those who saw the movie, Helen Hunt finds out that after four years, someone she thought was dead is still alive, and she faints on the floor, here's the scene in the Torah, vayah alumi mitzrayim chapter 45, verse 25, vayah alumi mitzrayim, vayavoh eretz k'na'ani aler yakov avihem and they, they went up from Egypt and they came to the land of Canaan to Jacob, their father, vayagidu l'leemor and they

told him, od yosef chai right, od yosef chai, Joseph is still living od yosef chai, Joseph is still alive, v'chihu moshel b'chol eretz mitzrayim, and he, not only is he alive, you're never gonna, you're not gonna believe this he rules the whole land of Egypt I mean, what were they thinking? And the Torah uses this, this phrase, this term that's not used in the Torah other than in this place. Vayafagli bo and his heart is really not a good translation. Vayafagli bo, his heart skipped a beat, his heart became numb, says the translation JPS. Vayafagli bo Jacob has a heart attack. Ki lo he'emin lahem, he didn't have faith in them. Lo he'emin emunah, he didn't have aim, he didn't have faith, he didn't trust them, you are something to me, you are there's no way you are telling the truth.

And now listen to what happens, vayidabru elavit kol divrei yosef asher didera lehem, and so they told Jacob all of the words of Joseph that he had said to them, vayar et ha'agalot asher shalach yosef laset oto. And Jacob saw the ha'agalot, he saw the wagons that had been sent by Joseph to carry him. Vatechi ruach yakov avihem and the spirit of Jacob was revived. Vayom er Yisrael and now Jacob becomes Israel once again. Rav anaf od yosef b'nichai it is true my son Joseph is alive. I will go and see him before I die.

The rabbis who read the Torah smell things that we just gloss over, they can sense something's happening. Jacob doesn't believe them. They say hey Joseph's alive, it's been 20 years but we found him, he's in Egypt, and he's also ruling Egypt. And Joseph says no that can't be true, and then the very next verse the Torah tells us that he believed them. And in between his lack of faith and his belief in them, there's a small little moment where he says the Torah, that Jacob saw the chariots that had been sent. The rabbis pick up on that and say why does the vision, the ability to see the chariots bring Jacob back to life. What about those chariots, why the chariots. And says the Midrash, because it was a sign that Joseph sent along to his long lost dad and said you know 20 years ago dad, 20 years ago we were learning something about these chariots. In other words, all of these years all of these years there was some locket, there was some package, there was something that kept me going. I knew that I was gonna see you again. There was some secret that we shared. There was some knowing. There was something powerful that kept me believing in dark moments when I was in the pit, when I was looking like an Egyptian, walking like an Egyptian. When I was not Joseph, there was something that I had inside of me that no matter what no matter how dark, no matter how difficult, no matter how catastrophic, no matter how despairing I felt, I went back to that thing. And you know what it is Jacob because you probably thought about it too in your 20 years, wondering if I was a castaway, wondering if you would ever see me again. There was something that kept you in faith, and these are those things. These agalot which by the way the Hasidic masters say are ba'agala which means quickly, a reminder of it can happen quickly.

Transformation can happen in a heartbeat. But the significance of the Torah's lesson here is to each and every one of us no matter where we are, no matter what island we're stranded on, no matter how difficult the situation might be, there is something, some deployment some job, some task that only we can do that keeps us going through the night. That keeps us going through the dark times, that keeps us in a sense of rootedness especially when things are moving everywhere. Call it family, call it friends, call it love, call it your life's purpose, call it to see the world become the world that you had wanted to see no matter

what happens. Lo laziz, it doesn't matter, for the children for the youth, for whatever it is. If you hold it up and you say no matter how bad it gets this is what I'm holding on to.

The Talmud records that there was once two great rabbis who boarded a ship, some of you might know this story, I've told it in the Temple in the Shul. Rabbi Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva two great Talmudic rabbis, they boarded ships together, different ships they said I'll meet you on a certain island, also a shipwreck story and one of the rabbis, Rabbi Shimon, made it safely to the island and he said when he got to the island, he said I saw this great scholar Rabbi Akiva I saw him on that boat but the boat went down and then the story in the Talmud says that Rabbi Akiva came up onto shore and Rabbi Gamliel was sitting there learning Torah and he sees Rabbi Akiva come up onto the shore and he looks at him incredulously like wait a second, what happened? And Rabbi Akiva says one line to him, he says I went down, I was in the ocean happened to see a plank from that ship and I grabbed hold of that plank. With every wave that came over me, I nodded my head and I held on to that plank, I held on to that package, I held on to that locket, I held on to those chariots, I held on to that vision no matter what came.

This week's Parsha tells us something very powerful about this period of the year and where we are I think collectively, many of us, all of us in a Parsha that begins with the power of one human being's speech to change history how he spoke to Joseph, how he spoke to his father, the power of Judah to remind us that the way that we speak can change the world, the words we choose the choices we make. We are also reminded at the moment when Jacob didn't believe the brothers that faith requires us to find a plank and to hold on to it. Because it's gonna get darker and there's gonna be a lot of shaking and if we're not holding on and we're not clear what it is that we're holding on to, we can get pulled down to places that we never imagined, we would get pulled to.

You cannot go onto Facebook you cannot go anywhere on social media without the toxicity that is everywhere. People can't talk to each other, spiritual practitioners, those who are in the religare business, in the business of ligamenting, we have to have faith and we need to practice speaking in ways that lift each and every one of us up. So I want to ask all of you, you know, take it on if you want. If you don't it's up to you obviously, and I'm done. Find a plank. Find that thing that you're holding on to and saying this is what reminds me that there is goodness, there is something to work with. This is what will bring Joseph and Jacob back together. This is Rabbi Akiva's moment when he kind of nodded his head. We got a lot of work to do, and each and every one of us is deployed to do the work. Let's stay robustly connected to the root of all having faith in goodness and working to make it more and more available.

Please rise