

MADE OF ONE PIECE

WHAT CONNECTS US TO THE LARGER JEWISH COMMUNITY?

TORAH BLESSING

ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT

The sermon draws on the following verse, Exodus 25:31, which begins a detailed description of the ceremonial menorah that was to stand in the portable sanctuary that the Israelites carried with them through the wilderness:

³¹ You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece.

Rashi, the great classical commentator, interprets this verse as follows:

He shall not make it of parts, nor shall he make its branches and its lamps in different pieces and afterwards join them together in the manner of welders, but all of it should come from one piece.

Why was it so important that the menorah be made of one piece? Rabbi Lorge writes: “Because the menorah symbolizes *achdut*; the unity of the Jewish people. While we may be broken into different communities in different lands, we are all branches of a single menorah; all connected by our common heritage.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What do you make of the requirement that the menorah be made of a single piece of gold? Why would this be better or more special than a menorah made of welded materials?
- (b) What does it mean to acknowledge the “unity of the Jewish people”? What does such unity demand of us?
- (c) We know, of course, that Jewish experience and identity varies from community to community. How do we achieve unity without requiring uniformity?

DISCUSSING THE SERMON:

In his sermon, Rabbi Lorge describes a moment when he connected with a group of Jews from the Ukraine through music. In that moment of shared song, the ideal of Jewish unity or peoplehood became “real” for him. He writes, “Something bound us together that was greater than language, culture, and homeland.”

He then describes his recent trip to Spain with our 10th grade confirmation class, who likewise learned that it was possible to feel a connection to a Jewish community very different from theirs. Ultimately, one student noted, “I realized that Judaism is not what I see at Central, and it is not just what I see in Madrid (or Israel), it’s everything combined. We are the same and we are different.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) Rabbi Lorge says that in that moment of song, “something bound us together that was greater than language, culture, and homeland.” What is that “something,” do you think?
- (b) Have you experienced a moment when your connection to the greater Jewish people became “real” for you? If so, was it that allowed you to feel this connection?
- (c) How do you typically react when you are in a Jewish environment different than your own?

ANOTHER VOICE:

You are invited to read the poem on the following page, “The Jews,” by the modern Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

- (a) This poem is full of metaphor and images. Which particularly grab you? Why?
- (b) From the perspective of this poem, what is it that binds the Jewish people together? How does that compare with your understanding of Jewish peoplehood?
- (c) The poem repeatedly asks, “And what about God?” How does Amichai suggest that our understanding of God relates to our experience as a Jewish people? What role do you think God (or religion) plays in your Jewish identity, or ability to connect to the Jewish people?
- (d) The poem ends: “And what about God? Once we sang ‘There is no God like ours,’ now we sing, ‘There is no God of ours’ But we sing. We still sing.” What is the role of music in building a Jewish identity? Has hearing a particular song ever brought you closer to a feeling of Jewish belonging? Which song?

The Jews are like photographs displayed in a shop window
All of them together in different heights, living and dead,
Grooms and brides and Bar Mitzvah boys with babies.
And there are pictures restored from old yellowing photographs.
And sometimes people come and break the window
And burn the pictures. And then they begin
To photo anew and develop anew
And display them again aching and smiling.

Rembrandt painted them wearing Turkish
Turbans with beautiful burnished gold.
Chagall painted them hovering in the air,
And I paint them like my father and my mother.
The Jews are an eternal forest preserve
Where the trees stand dense, and even the dead
Cannot lie down. They stand upright, leaning on the living,
And you cannot tell them apart. Just that fire
Burns the dead faster.

And what about God? God lingered
Like the scent of a beautiful woman who once
Faced them in passing and they didn't see her face,
Only her fragrance remained, kinds of perfumes,
Blessed be the Creator of kinds of perfumes.

A Jewish man remembers the sukkah in his
grandfather's home.
And the sukkah remembers for him
The wandering in the desert that remembers
The grace of youth and the Tablets of the Ten
Commandments
And the gold of the Golden Calf and the thirst and the
hunger
That remembers Egypt.

And what about God? According to the settlement
Of divorce from the Garden of Eden and from the
Temple,
God sees his children only once
A year, on Yom Kippur.

The Jews are not a historical people
And not even an archeological people, the Jews
Are a geological people with rifts
And collapses and strata and fiery lava.
Their history must be measured
On a different scale.

The Jews are buffed by suffering and polished by
torments
Like pebbles on the seashore.
The Jews are distinguished only in their death
As pebbles among other stones;
When the mighty hand flings them,
They skip two times, or three,
On the surface of the water before they drown.

Some time ago, I met a beautiful woman
Whose grandfather performed my circumcision
Long before she was born. I told her,
You don't know me and I don't know you
But we are the Jewish people,
Your dead grandfather and I the circumcised and you
the beautiful grand-
daughter
With golden hair: we are the Jewish people.

And what about God? Once we sang
"There is no God like ours," now we sing, "There is no
God of ours"
But we sing. We still sing.

הגירושין מגן עדן ומבית המקדש
אלוהים רואה את בניו רק פעם
אחת בשנה, ביום הכיפורים.

היהודים הם לא עם היסטורי
ואפילו לא עם ארכיאולוגי, היהודים
הם עם גיאולוגי עם שברים
והתמוטטויות ושכבות וגעש לוחט.
את תולדותיהם צריכים למדוד
בסולם מדידה אחרת.

היהודים משויפי סבל ומלוטשי ייסורים,
כמו חלוקי אבן לחוף הים.
מותר היהודים רק במותם
כמותר חלוקי אבן על שאר האבנים:
כשהיד החזקה משליכה אותם
הם קופצים שתי פעמים או שלוש
על פני המים, לפני שהם טובעים.

לפני זמן מה פגשתי אישה יפה,
שסבה עשה לי ברית מילה
זמן רב לפני שנולדה. אמרתי לה,
את לא מכירה אותי ואני לא מכיר אותך,
אבל אנחנו העם היהודי,
סבך המת ואני הנימול ואת הנכדה היפה
זהובת השיער: אנחנו העם היהודי.

ומה בדבר האלוהים? פעם שרנו
"אין כאלוהינו" עכשיו אנו שרים, "אין
אלוהינו",
אבל אנו שרים, אנחנו עדין שרים.

היהודים הם כמו תצלומים מוצגים בחלון ראוה
כולם יחדיו בגבהים שונים, חיים ומתים
חתנים וכלות נערי בר-מצווה עם תינוקות.
ויש תמונות משוחזרות מתצלומים ישנים
שהצהיבו.

ולפעמים באים ושוברים את החלון
ושורפים את התמונות. ואז מתחילים
לצלם מחדש ולפתח מחדש
ולהציג אותם שוב כואבים ומחייכים.

רמברנדט צייר אותם חבושי תרבושים
טורקיים ביפי זהב מועם.
שגאל צייר אותם מרחפים באוויר
ואני מצייר אותם כאבי וכאמי.
היהודים הם שמורת יער עד
שהעצים בה עומדים צפופים, ואפילו המתים
לא יוכלו לשכב. הם נשענים, עומדים, על החיים
ואין מבדיל ביניהם. רק האש
תשרוף את המתים מהר יותר.

ומה בדבר האלוהים? אלוהים נשאר
כמו בושם אישה יפה שעברה פעם
על פניהם ואת פניה לא ראו,
אך בשמה נשאר, מיני בשמים,
בורא מיני בשמים.

אדם יהודי זוכר את הסוכה בבית סבו.
והסוכה זוכרת במקומו
את ההליכה במדבר שזוכרת
את חסד הנעורים ואת אבני לוחות הברית
ואת זהב עגל הזהב ואת הצמא ואת הרעב
שזוכרים את מצרים.

ומה בדבר האלוהים? לפי הסכם