

tKol Nidre 5779 Just don't be Amatzia.

As many of you know, the romemu theme for the holiday is truth. Last week I talked about being kind...recognizing the truth that we ourselves are imperfect... and allowing others around us to be imperfect.

That's the kind of truth the midrash means when it said in order to make a world, the angels needed to throw truth to the ground. A certain kind of truth will not allow us to have a world of peace... We are told that Aaron Hakohen was famous for fudging, when he would tell couples who were fighting: "He said he was so sorry..." "She said she REALLY wished she hadn't done that." In our most intimate relationships, we could probably use less truth, and a little more forgiveness.

But I want to be clear. I do believe our world needs forgiveness, but that's not the ONLY thing we need!!!

Last week, a community member approached me to thank me for my forgiveness sermon. She said she was a journalist, covering-- let's just say-- political things...!

She said she's been really angry... and she was glad to think about forgiveness and giving people the benefit of the doubt. She would like to be less angry.

So I said, whoa. Wait a minute. I know I said be kind. Be forgiving.

BUT PLEASE!! Keep some of the rage! We need people today who feel rage. We need people who will keep us accountable as individuals and as a society!!

Yom Kippur is of course about FORGIVENESS... but it is also about DIN-- law... the letter of the law. We want to be forgiven, we want to be seen with the generosity of spirit that we hope God will have for us on this day, but we also want to live in a world where we are held accountable for our actions...where we are asked to live up to something.

Truth of perhaps a harsher, angrier kind, HAS to have a place as well. And in our own lives.

I want to invite us to be a little tougher with ourselves and with each other on an ethical front.

The Jewish tradition is not ONLY about forgiveness and letting go.

Yes, it's true, too much anger is a scary thing. The Talmud teaches that one who throws things and destroys things in anger is committing idolatry... when you rage in vain, you are somehow choosing an alternate God... forgetting WHO's in charge.

And we know from other traditions that anger is not healthy.

Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

Buddha

But for better or for worse, Judaism is a bit harsher than Buddhism, isn't it?

Have you seen Zen Judaism... I think it's by a guy named Brad Feld? I saw it on Facebook.

Here's a Jewish approach to Zen.

Zen is not easy. It takes effort to attain nothingness. And then what do you have? ... Bupkes.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out ... Forget this and attaining Enlightenment will be the least of your problems.

Be patient and achieve all things ... Be impatient and achieve all things faster.

There's something appealing about a tradition that INVITES us to get angry... to be REAL, to get HONEST. In a way, that may be the very thing that makes Jonah so angry in our Haftarah tomorrow. He describes God as a little TOO merciful for his taste. Wait, you're letting Nineveh-- the EVILEST nation in the world-- repent and that's it??? You're just letting them off the hook after everything they've done? They are forgiven after three days of repentance?? When he talks to God at the end of the book, he says, YEAH I know God. You're merciful... patient and loving... El Rachum v'Chanun, Erech APAYIM v'rav CHESED. He leaves off the word we KNOW is at the end of God's attributes of mercy. EMET. TRUTH.

Jonah is hinting to God that God is NOT a God of truth. ANGRY that God is too easy on NINEVEH. Where's Your justice? Where's Your truth?

We know this... we see evil flourish and we may also feel like, HEY GOD, enough mercy! Show some justice.

Jews know that a little righteous anger is part of our tradition.

As Edward Abbey wrote,

Love implies anger. The man who is angered by nothing cares about nothing.

Look at the section we read from Isaiah tomorrow... he rages against us, the very Jews who sit here, fasting and trying to repent. You think you're so holy?? Forget fasting and pretending to be all spiritual. What about the poor people?

Last week I spoke about the NYTimes readers who chose an article about love as their most read... and I suggested that that meant most of us want to feel love and kindness.

But tonight I want to ask: what about the people who AREN'T reading the NY TIMES? What do THEY need?

The truth is, We need a little righteous anger about the world...our forgiveness, our lovingkindness, our serenity are only so good as long as everyone is living above the poverty level, as long as the environment is not about to be destroyed for generations, as long as children aren't torn from their parents, as long as everyone is safe to live a life of freedom and lovingkindness.

This is no fun.

I don't want to give an angry sermon.

It's no fun to be the person who holds all the rage for a community.

In his classic book, *The Prophets*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote about the HORRIBLE horrible job of being a prophet in ancient Israel. Of being the one to hold the anger, to feel everything so deeply that we can't ignore it. He wrote about the feeling of loneliness, the feeling of living an octave higher than everyone else... where what seems trivial to others becomes a SCREAMING CRISIS to the prophet. HOW CAN YOU IGNORE THIS??? While the rest of us are shaking our heads and saying, I know that's terrible, but look, there's a rainbow, the prophet can't bear it for another second. The prophet is raving mad, saying WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?

It's really hard to feel like a prophet. Especially when other people don't want to listen to you. People try to silence prophets. In the book of Amos, the prophet Amos yells at the people of Israel: don't you see the corruption? The hypocrisy? Don't you see the poverty? The crisis? And the people try to push him away... The governor of Israel, Amatzia, even says to him Get out. CHOZEH LECH BRACH LECHA. Seer, get out of here. Go do your prophesying elsewhere. We don't want to hear it.

So I'm sorry for this angry sermon. The truth is, I'm not a prophet. I like saying sweet good things. I want to be liked. And I certainly don't have the strength to speak truth to power all the time. I get scared. I get XXX (confused?) I second-guess myself. ... But I'll tell you one thing. I refuse to be Amatzia. I refuse to shoo someone away who has truth to tell. I want to LISTEN when the prophets rage... I want to heed their call. I want to be the one who RECOGNIZES truth when it is spoken.

The prayerbook asks us to be *Dover EMET b'lvaveinu*... to be people who speak truth in our hearts... I want to speak truth to myself and to others. I want to hold myself accountable to the prophets of today.

So what does that look like? How can we HEAR the voices of the prophets among us?

Here's what I'm planning to try.

I'm going to try not to shut down conversations, in my personal AND in my professional life. Too often, we shut down the message because we are uncomfortable with the messenger. Or we shut down the messenger when we're uncomfortable with the message. You never know where or WHO your prophet is. Last week I said that self-righteousness was the enemy to love. YES. Self-righteousness will not allow me to hear what I need to hear about myself. And SMUGNESS is the enemy of the true. This year, I'm going to try not to believe I already know what I think about everything! That means I have to read everything, not just things written by the people I already agree with. I have to be willing to talk to everyone, not just my friends.

I also have to put my money where my mouth is. This year, I am opening my wallet. I will support the prophets of today-- journalists, truth tellers, our own courageous family and friends who are willing to tell us what we may not want to hear, but what we absolutely need to hear.

It's not enough to just be angry. I have to channel my own fears, my own angers, into productive action.

A chassidic story...

A man goes to his rebbe and he says... I've always wanted to meet Eliyahu Hanavi, the great prophet who will bring redemption.

Wonderful! I know where you can find him. I want you to go to the little house at the end of the forest right before Rosh Hashanah and I want you to bring a huge basket of Rosh Hashanah foods... apples, honey, challah, meat, vegetables, dessert. New fruit. EVERYTHING you can think of. Just place it outside the door and walk away... you will find Eliyahu.

Okay!! I'll do it! He goes through the forest to the little house at the end... and he does exactly what he was told.

He goes back to the rebbe. I didn't meet Eliyahu!

Okay, here's what you do. Go gather up foods for Yom Kippur, an amazing pre-fast feast... chicken and challah, soup, and salad (nothing too salty!)... and an amazing Break FAST-- bagels and lox, whitefish and ruggelach... go to the same house and leave the food on the stoop. You will find Eliyahu.

He does as he is told. He puts the food on the door stoop and walks away.

Rebbe I didn't meet Eliyahu!

One more time, I want you to prepare THREE baskets for the upcoming holiday of Sukkot... get every amazing food you can possibly think of and put it in the baskets...

He does it. He walks through the forest and he walks towards the house. As he walks towards the front of the house, he hears the voice of a little girl... Mommy I'm hungry. And then an older man... honey, I'm worried. We have no money for food, and there will be no food for the holiday of Sukkot.

"Don't worry, he hears a woman say. Just keep believing... we will be fine. God sent Eliyahu on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur... perhaps he will send Eliyahu again today."

The truth is, we never know where we might find redemption or prophecy. But we know we can help to BRING redemption. The power is in our own hands. It feels harder than ever these days to change our world, but the good news is we have Yom Kippur every year to keep trying. We do not yet give up on humanity. Tonight, we can try to BECOME the prophet ourselves, or at the very least, we can hear the voices of the prophets and help to bring lasting change to ourselves and to our world.

May it be God's will. Ken Yehi Ratzon.