

SERMON - April 10, 2020, 17 Nissan, 5780

Rabbi David Edleson, Temple Sinai, S. Burlington, VT

LONGING TO BE WITH YOU

On Sinai, Moses and God are having another serious meeting; let's think of it as a Zoom meeting on Sinai between two beings who can't really be in the same space safely. They are discussing important business matters, like who is going to lead us out of the wilderness. Moses says, 'you have to do it,' but God is hedging, so Moses convinces God to say, "OK, enough with this, I'll go in front." is leading the next part of the Torah, and is God going to come with or join up later. Moses is having a pretty good meeting, and as the Talmud tells us, he gets his three wishes.

But then in the midst of all this, Moses suddenly blurts out:

"Oh God, Let me see Your Presence!"

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Like us, Moses longs for direct connection. It's not the same communicating through a great divide.

As Psalm 27 reflects,

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
⁸ "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!"
Your face, ADONAI, do I seek.
⁹ Do not hide your face from me.

How we long for the presence of those we love especially when there is an unbridgeable divide. How often in the middle of all these ZOOM meetings do we have a sudden longing to just be together in the same room, near one another.

But we can't be together and also protect one another from harm.

God, it turns out, was in the same dilemma. Even if he wants to hug Moses, he knows that will place Moses in mortal danger. So in one of the most moving passages in the Torah, God asks Moses to stand in a cleft in the mountain and then God gently puts his hand over the cleft, over Moses to keep him safe. That is as close as they can come and yet it is a moment of great love and tenderness. As Psalm 27 reads,

For God will hide me in a shelter
in the day of trouble;
God will conceal me under a tent;
and will set me high on a rock.

Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, the Piaseczener Rebbe from Poland, in sermons he gave in the Warsaw Ghetto pointed out that God didn't have to cover Moses. God could simply have not become visible, so why did he do that? The Rebbe answers because he wanted Moses to feel protected, to feel what it is to be protected even at a distance.

Kabbalah teaches us that Moses in the cleft longing for connection with God being protected is a moment of 'd'vekut' or cleaving to God. It is what all of our spirits long for, union. But here, it is also a moment of unbearable separation.

At the very moment of cleaving to God, seeing God, there is also a moment of separation, or protection.

What we long for is sometimes, often, more than is what is good for us.

This also teaches us that moments of distance, or separation, can also be moments of profound longing, for in longing there is connection.

Longing connects one's heart to another.

So, in this time of being kept separate, acknowledge your longing for connection. Let your soul feel it, but not as a irritation and frustration, but as an opening of the heart to how precious connection is to us. This longing is but a sign of love.

Let this be a time of longing for closeness, for 'd'vekut' to those who we love, those who remind us who we are, and let that be a path toward cleaving to God, and to one another, to the sacredness of family, friends, and community, the holiness of reaching out across divides, and finding what is truly sacred in our lives.

Ken Y'hi Ratzon