

Shabbat shalom. Permit me to begin with a riddle. It's a true or false question. Are you ready? True or false: there are more hydrogen atoms in a single molecule of water than there are stars in the entire solar system. If you know this riddle, give others a chance! (work this out with them).

So why begin tonight with the sun? Because this week, we start reading Torah again from the very beginning - parshat B'reishit. And it is glorious to revisit these first days of creation, when anything is possible. When the breath of God hovers over the deep and from the fog of chaos, piece by piece comes order, a growing crescendo of order as the natural world begins to take shape. And as the 6 days of creation unfold in this sacred myth of ours, the sun appears on day 4.

While there was already primordial darkness and light, which are created on the first day, on day four God creates the luminary bodies. God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; ... to shine upon the earth." And it was so.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שֶׁנִי הַמָּאֲרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת-הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-הַמָּאֹר
הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night and the stars.

These are the verses that explain how the sun, the moon, and the stars have come to be. And in tractate Chullin in the Talmud, the rabbis try to explain how one of these got to be the bigger light, the sun, and one of them got to be the smaller light, the moon.

They say that the moon, wanting to be the most powerful luminary, went to God and said: "Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown?" (insinuating that the sun and the moon cannot possibly be equal in power). And in this story, God apparently agrees with the moon, but says: "Go then and make yourself smaller." This is understood as punishment for the moon's attempted power grab. As a concession, though, while the sun will get to dominate the day, which is prime temporal real-estate, God allows the moon to dominate both the night, and also the stars.

Immediately, we have a problem. Anyone see it? The sun dominates the day. And is dominant over the diminished moon. But the moon dominates the stars. ... And what is the sun? A star - placing it under the domination of the moon - an impossibility. And so, at the moment that this concept of domination is introduced into our story, as soon as the components of creation experience a desire to control each other - things go immediately haywire and become confounded and a touch of chaos is reintroduced into our story of otherwise increasing order.

The word that gets us there - *l'memshelet* - *to dominate* - should catch our attention for its jarring introduction of forcible control and attempted intimidation into a creation story that

otherwise appears to be about growth, abundance, and co-existence, the essence of the rest of the creation story. It should catch our attention especially in these times we're living through. *Memshelet* in the TaNaKH can mean dominate, or rule over, or exert authority. And when it's written in relationship to human beings exercising it, it often describes the power of people or governments over other people or governments.

It's no accident that as soon as *memshelet*, this idea of domination, shows up in our story, the rabbis seem to pick up on this discord and write a midrash of - argument, ego, jockeying for position, a desire to diminish the other, anger, and humiliation. The idea of domination as how we interact with each other unleashes a deep and unsettling rift into existence on the fourth day of creation.

Is it meant to be here? Is it an error? A flaw in the plan? How could the tools of domination - threats, fear, force, and violence - be components of the same story that recounts the magnificent beginnings of sky and water and seeds and vegetation and animals all living in the sanctuary of the Garden of Eden?

And yet, we can see that domination surely did make it into the blueprint of our world and that it can take hold - for here we are, living with humanity's inclination toward it - more and more each day. We don't have to look far.

The federal government has recruited and deployed aggressive ICE agents into multiple cities, with the instructions to dominate and threaten and scare people into submission. Every day there's a new video of masked ICE agents wrestling an unarmed person to the ground, sometimes being torn away from their children. ICE agents raided a Chicago apartment building from a helicopter in the middle of the night, dragging people, including children, from their homes, terrifying families and disappearing neighbors. ICE agents pulled a 15 year old girl from a car and knelt on her neck to pin her down. That is all domination. ICE agents, as reported this week, are now using full body wrap restraints on immigrants who are not resisting at all. ICE agents, standing on a roof, shot pellets with chemical irritants, hitting the head, face, and body of Reverend David Black and others who were protesting and praying outside an ICE facility. Is this courage? Is this dignity? This is embarrassment. This is a government's attempt to govern through exerting dominance. This is the moon trying to trick God into diminishing the sun.

BUT! And this is important. When a government acts through domination - violence, threats, fear-mongering, attempts to humiliate and diminish and dehumanize - these are not signs of strength. These are signs of weakness and the growing desperation of powerlessness. The German and American historian and philosopher, Hannah Arendt, wrote: "Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course, it ends in power's disappearance."

Which is to say: Resorting to violence often shows a lack of power for at such a point when a person or a government turns toward violence, it is because they believe it is the only tool they have - not the will of the people, or consent, or legitimacy. It is coercion at best. Domination, like it is in the unfolding days of creation, is a rift, a blip, an aberration in need of correction, a

corruption of the world coming to be in parshat B'reishit. If the only way you can govern is through domination, then your power is *not* waxing, but waning.

Now don't get me wrong - such domination, such an exertion of physical power, will cause profound suffering, and pain, and fear, and injury, and heartbreak - sometimes for a very long time . . . But - it is weakness on display. And it is temporary. AND - it is not how our story ends.

The Prophet Isaiah holds the corrective chapter, the repair, the rest of the story. Prophesying about what will happen in the days of redemption, he tells the people:

וְהָיָה אֹרֶחַ-הַלְבֵּנָה כְּאֹרֶחַ הַחֶמֶד ...

And the light of the moon shall become again like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, ... when God binds up the wounds of this people and heals the injuries it has suffered.

Redemption will see healing, an end to this suffering, the wounds of this people bound up and cared for by God - and at that time - the moon will be restored to its equal size of the sun. There will no longer be *memshelet* - domination, but rather a shared existence and collaboration. And in that repaired way, the light that they will emit together won't just be one light plus one light, it will be seven times as great, shining together. Dominance replaced by equality and cooperation and co-existence and shared dignity - that is a symbol of great power and extraordinary illumination.

Tomorrow, when we march in the No Kings March, that is the world we're marching for together. The antidote to domination is actual power. Going outside in the street together, standing side by side, showing up for one another and for those most vulnerable targets of the government's attempts to dominate bodies and hearts and minds. Standing shoulder to shoulder with our immigrant and refugee neighbors. Building the slow, and deep, and real relationships of trust with each other, and with others, so we can discern together and decide together what kind of city we want to live in. Remembering that all of NYC's children are our children and being accountable to *them*, showing up for *them*. Listening to each other's stories, hearing where we disagree, being curious and honest and thoughtful and brave. These are the things that allow us to build and exercise real power. The power of shared values. Shared vision. Empathy. Love. This is the power of laughter and joy and seeing the equal humanity in every human being.

There will always be moments in history when the human pull toward a desire to dominate will manifest. But ours is to remember that the climax of creation in B'reishit is not Day 4. It comes when we learn that every human being is created B'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God. That is the true expression of our selves and of each self. Not the desperation of dominance, but the sparks of holiness. Let that be what we march for. What we work for. What we stand for. Tomorrow and every day after. Amen and Shabbat shalom.