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Temple Emunah Inclusion Shabbat

Sermon: Speaking with the Universe

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As I read the portion each week, I try to find a story or lesson that is a bit off the beaten path. Something new that catches my attention. As I was reading this week's portion I found a story at the very very end of the portion. In this scene, I was struck by the character of Aaron. Here's the context: for the first time ever, the Israelites are defending themselves against invasion. As long as Moses hands are in the air the Israelites will triumph. Yet, if his hands drop... failure. Simple. So, Joshua leads men of the tribe into battle and Aaron and Hur go with Moses up to the mountain and Moses raises his hands. Imagine for a moment that you're Aaron, standing with your sibling at the top of a mountain watching the fate of your people unfold below you. Imagine that you were not told the details of special relationship that your sibling had with the universe and all you saw was your sibling with his hands in the air (raise arms). You might confused, you might surprised, you might be in awe, you might even feel dismayed. You might think, "Our people our fighting for our lives down there what are you doing with your arms out like a bird?" Aaron might have felt all of those things, he might have thought something like that. Yet, Aaron also brought his brother a place to sit when he grew tired of standing, and when Moses could no longer hold up his arms, Aaron helped him. Aaron did not ask questions, he did not demand that Moses "make sense" and he did not require proof that this motion was important. Aaron accepted

without a word that this was *important to Moses*, and that was enough for Aaron to do whatever he could to help him. I wanted to highlight this moment for all of you because in some ways it's similar to the best moments of a relationship between siblings where one speaks a different language with the universe. Aaron's language was shared with most of the Israelites; Moses's language however was flooded with an awareness that his people didn't have. He saw things, heard things, tasted things, and did things differently all because of this unique awareness.

My older brother is one of these people. He speaks a different language with the universe than most people. When I interact with the universe, I imagine train tracks, smooth, mostly straight with gradual curves, steady inclines and transfers as consist angles. When my brother interacts with the universe, I imagine a rollercoaster, full of sharp turns, dips, dives, corkscrews, loops, twists and sudden stops. Roller coasters are confusing, and exhilarating, and maddening and even a little scary sometimes. Now picture living with one.

For my brother, some things came so easily. Like slapstick and comedy; making people laugh. My brother can joke with just about anyone and make them feel good. He doesn't hesitate to be silly or loud if he feels inspired to be. Some things came harder though, like sitting at a desk at school, or remembering to turn off the stove, or making and keeping friends. In my brother's language with the universe "now" looms so big that "past" and "future" shrink into opposite horizons. He lives in "now", and growing up that sometimes meant that I held his past for him turning off the stove, remembering the homework, playing with the friends that came over and helping him navigate that. I keep

an eye on his future too, reminding him that money spent now won't be there later. I learned my brother's language without any knowledge that I knew it. I translated for him so often that it is second nature. But, I didn't know how much knowing the language of my brother shaped who I am and I how I see the universe until much later.

It wasn't until adulthood that I discovered sibling workshop. In sibling workshop I sat down in a room with a group of kids, and every one of them knew their brother's or sister's language. Everyone speaks with the universe a little differently. Some languages feel similar like Dutch and German or Portuguese and Spanish feel similar. Some languages seem intriguing and overwhelming like Swahili or Japanese. Yet for the first time, when we all sat together in the same room no matter what language we were learning we could talk about the struggles of learning these languages. Navigating our siblings' vocabulary. For example, Belle is wondering what it means when her brother chews on his clothes, Jack could relate because his brother rocks when he's sad and it took Jack a while to figure that out.

In workshop, we could talk about the challenge of interpreting our sibling's language to someone else, a friend or teacher or even a stranger. We could talk together about feeling embarrassed about having to explain, or mad a question made out of curiosity, or just at a distance with others. We talk about the journey to acceptance, we talk about the power of pride we feel for our family and the hopes-- and fears we carry about the future. Creating this space together, gives us the chance to learn about ourselves and to get to know the language's of our siblings a little bit better and we all become more talented interpreters and more knowledgeable protectors of our families.

The example in the Torah of Aaron and Moses as an example of this type of sibling pair is an imperfect one. Or more specifically a too perfect one, Aaron and Moses are not children together. We don't see them in tense moments, times when the boys are struggling to share space and parents' attentions. However, in the time we do see: Aaron spent his adult-life interpreting for his brother. Translating Moses's language of the universe; his language with G-d to the world through ritual. Aaron brought Moses's language with G-d to a place where the community to understand it and see its beauty. He worked to create a culture that not only accepted Moses's way of being in the world, but a culture that honored it and treasured it. Even or perhaps especially when the community's reaction to it was anxiety or reluctance.

I imagine Aaron standing on that mountain, watching his brother, drooping as he tires at his task, I wonder if he wishes that his brother were different, that somehow he could change Moses to be more like him. I ask this question in almost every sibling workshop: the magic pill question. "if you had a magic pill that could change your sibling, that would make him speak the same language with the universe as the rest of us; would you give it to him?" I think Aaron like most of the siblings I've met would answer, "No, I don't think so." I don't believe Aaron hesitated for a moment on that mountain. He just stepped up to help with acceptance.

I've been leading workshops here in the Temple Emunah community for two years. I've been honored and inspired to spend time with the siblings here and to be a part of their journeys. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to share this morning and I would love to talk with you morning throughout the day.