Ramblin' No More: *Yishuv Ha-Da'at* & the Blessing of Contentment
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Parashat Vayeshev 5785 / December 20, 2024

As I was developing my sermon for tonight, this song kept coming to mind, so I have to sing it. It's by The Allman Brothers:

Lord, I was born a ramblin' man
Tryin' to make a living and doing the best I can
When it's time for leaving
I hope you'll understand
I was born a ramblin' man.

For most of his life up to this point in the story, our patriarch Jacob has been a ramblin' man—just tryin' to make a living and doin' the best he can, with, of course, a little deception and family drama along the way.

It was no doubt unsettling when Jacob's mom goaded him into duping his blind father and stealing his brother's birthright. Stressful to have to flee because Easau wanted to kill him. Soul-crushing to work for his father-in-law for seven years to marry Rachel, only to be deceived on his wedding day into marrying her sister instead. Terrifying to be attacked by a mysterious assailant while he was sleeping alone in the middle of the desert. Frightening to have to face his brother again after so many years.

By this point, Jacob's got to be at his wit's end—and who could blame him?

But then, something Jacob has been waiting for his whole life—and it comes in the very first word of this week's parashah: "*Vayeshev*—He settled down." Finally, the ramblin' man could take a load off and breathe.

This word "*vayeshev*"—meaning "to settle"—is the basis for the rabbinic term "*yishuv ha-da'at*," which means "settling of the mind."

When you're disoriented and then regain your equilibrium, that's *yishuv ha-da'at*. When you're on edge or riled up and finally chill out enough to see things clearly, that's *yishuv ha-da'at*. When you're ramblin' from place to place—physically or spiritually—and you finally get your bearings, that's *yishuv ha-da'at*.

It's balance, perspective, and presence of mind all wrapped into one.

It doesn't mean perfect bliss, because life will always present challenges. But *yishuv ha-da'at* enables you to navigate them with clarity and, perhaps paradoxically, contentment.
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As we head into Hanukkah and the secular New Year, I am so grateful to be able to say that I'm in a place of *yishuv ha-da'at*.

My family and I have been ramblin' around the country for nearly 30 years trying to find our place.

Since graduating from college, I have lived in Houston, Denver, Chicago, DC, Jerusalem, Cincinnati, Chicago again, Omaha, and now Great Neck. Karen has been ramblin' with me since DC, and our children have been ramblin' their whole lives. At ages 15 and 11, they've lived in three different houses in three different cities.

But I am so happy to be able to say that we've found our place here. We're all New Yorkers now. Even Zac, who was the last holdout, has come around to the view that the skylines and the pizza in other cities are pretty lame compared to New York.

Karen's happy. I'm happy. My kids are happy and doing great in school and discovering their interests and growing as people.

Do we have challenges? Absolutely.

I've got a teenage daughter who's said maybe 25 words to me in the last 3 months—unless you count the "hmmph" I get when I say "good morning."

And I've got a precocious son who told me the other day (I kid you not) that I was wrong when I said he has to listen to his teacher, because it's just like when people told the colonists they had to listen to King George, and if they had taken that advice, there would be no United States of America today. So, yes, refusing to follow his teacher's instructions is basically just like the American Revolution.

But hey, it's just a phase right?

What gives me contentment is knowing that, after all that ramblin', we're home.

I feel the same way about Temple Beth-El.

From the moment I got here, it's felt so natural and clear that y'all are just my kind of people.

I've got the best team ever who are all such a pleasure and joy to work with. We have the best lay leadership who are all thoughtful, smart, and dedicated to the temple and the vision. They just "get it": they lead with grace and respect, and they're not afraid to make big decisions to secure the future.

Yes, we have challenges ahead to navigate and big decisions to make. And yet, I don't feel stressed or anxious about it all, because I know we've got great people steering the ship. That's why I go to work each day with a sense of ease and inner peace I've never had in my career before.

So, no more ramblin' for me: I'm home here with you at TBE.

Like Jacob before me, I am finally in a place of *yishuv ha-da'at*. And just as the Hanukkah candles pierce the darkness and light the way, I feel ready to start the new year with contentment and clarity.
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How about you? Do you feel *yishuv ha-da'at* in your life?

If not, what will it take for you to get there? Now's a great time to start working on it.

It's the age-old human struggle. King David himself wrote about it extensively. Here's how he puts it in the 13th psalm:

For the leader. A psalm of David.
How long, Adonai, will You ignore me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long will I have cares on my mind,
grief in my heart all day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?
Look at me, answer me, Adonai, my God!
Restore the luster to my eyes,
lest I sleep the sleep of death;
lest my enemy say, “I have overcome him,”
my foes exult when I totter.

Va’ani b’chasd’kha batachti
Yagel libi bi-shua’tekha.
I trust in Your faithfulness,
my heart will exult in Your deliverance.

Ashira la-Shem ki gamal alai.
I will sing to Adonai,
for God has been good to me.