

Shamor and zachor - these are the commandments we're given for Shabbat. At Rosh Hashanah, as we encountered the new year, we explored the concept of Zachor - of memory and narrative. In the context of Shabbat, the commandment crystalizes in one of its highest forms - a commandment to remember this sacred day and why it matters - because we have known the heart of the slave, we know what it is like to run ourselves ragged in pursuit of survival, or success, to serve Pharaoh, to serve our needs, to serve our aspirations, and God knows our instinct to forget the need for rest and refreshment. On penalty of death, God demands that we remember that it is Shabbat and that we not pretend we are above the need for rest. But simply remembering is not enough. I remember I should go visit the dentist, but then I magically remember a bunch of other things I need to do. I remember I have to write a sermon, but then I suddenly remember how great it would be to clean out my emails! Remembering is one thing - doing is another. So Torah gives us two commandments - to zachor - to remember, and to shamor - to protect. Just as with the act of remembering, the act of protecting is also a central tenet to Jewish life. We are told to protect Shabbat. We are told to protect God's laws. We are told to protect the earth, to protect our land, to protect our integrity, to protect our families, and to protect ourselves. Much of Jewish life and Jewish law is about remembering, and then protecting that which we remember as the two-fold path to creating holiness in the world and in our lives. Today, Yom Kippur, is the Shabbat of Shabbats. It is a day of heightened holiness as we confront ourselves, our missed opportunities, our aspirations and hopes for the new year. Today we confront the capacity of humanity's propensity for evil, and the capacity of humanity's capacity for generosity and goodness, expressed especially when we partner with God and work together to alleviate suffering. This is how we build a world of holiness. Central to this whole process is the concept of Shamor - of protecting; protecting that which, we acknowledge tonight, is sacred. Any and all sins we face are because we have fallen short on being guardians of the essential four components of our lives - our planet, our community, our families, and ourselves. Accepting our responsibilities to serve as guardians and protectors of the very things that make our lives livable and worth living is the central component to being God's partners, creating a world of wholeness and holiness. God has given us tremendous gifts and it is our job to cherish them and keep them safe and protected.

In a Talmudic discussion one rabbi asks why Torah begins with the creation of existence rather than with the first laws given to the Israelites. After all, if Torah is a document whose purpose is to convey God's will and covenant to the Israelite people, the ancient understandings of creation and our most ancient ancestral stories are interesting but ultimately, unnecessary. He is answered with the explanation that Torah begins with the beginning of existence to make it clear that the earth, and everything upon it belongs to God as the maker of existence. It is from within this context that we can appreciate the deeply and widely held Jewish emphasis on environmentalism and conservationism.

In Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 humanity is created and is given the instructions to subdue the earth and have dominion over all that is upon it. In a self-serving reading of the simple meaning of the text, one could theoretically surmise that humanity is given permission to use and abuse this planet and all that is on it as per our will, comfort, convenience, and pleasure. This maximal meaning of subdue and dominate has in fact been used over the centuries to justify many forms of environmental, animal, and human abuse. On the other hand, interpreting these words in this manner is inconsistent with the overriding principles of leadership and authority given every other place in Torah. Broadly speaking, throughout the Tanakh, when people are put in charge of other people and animals, they are expected to care for them, provide rest and respite for them,

and maintain them with dignity and a lack of suffering. To use the instruction to subdue the earth and have dominion over it as a license to abuse is itself an abuse of sacred text. Significantly, nearly everything in creation is given the adjective of “good” after it is created - nearly everything except humanity. We are given no adjective. Rabbinic tradition notes that is because we can only earn the adjective of goodness by God if our actions merit it. When we think about what it means for us to be shomrim - guardians and God’s partners in building holiness, it has to include working in partnership towards real and immediate mitigations to curb human contribution to global warming. This is not a political issue. It is a covenantal issue. Jewish tradition teaches, we’ve been entrusted with the stewardship of this planet and all her creatures, her tides and her seasons. The planet is not ours to harm, it belongs to God and God alone.

Throughout Jewish history, one of the strongest consistencies has been the view that it is God who decides our fates. It is God who decides who will live and who will die. It is God who sends plagues as punishments for the misdeeds of humanity. It is God who expels us from our homes and stability when we have failed to uphold our end of the covenant. While most of us as modern Reform Jews today reject these theologies, myself included, tonight is an important moment to consider what it means to live in that theology... to recognize God’s ultimate dominion over existence and to ask ourselves if we would be comfortable with God exercising divine dominion over us and our lives in the way we exercise our dominion over this planet and all her creatures.

I am profoundly inspired by our children and this generation of eco-activists. They are leading us by example on what it means to be guardians of this planet and her inhabitants. My prayer and hope is that we will all be inspired by them and will partner with them to support them as we hold ourselves accountable for the sacrifices of planet wellness we have made in the name of convenience and ease and financial gain. Collectively we have made choices on the lives of every creature who has died because they could not ingest the plastic we put into their environment, every animal that has died because we’ve destroyed their eco-system or their homes, and every animal and person that has drowned by our now seasonal once-in-a-lifetime storms or wild-fires so severe they actually create their own weather systems within themselves including biblical proportion fire tornados. Who by fire and who by water indeed.

At the same time, I encourage us to take heart in our own great state of California where we have chosen a more difficult path for the sake of our beautiful home. Right now our California government is partnering with the Israeli government on approximately 150 separate environmental development projects around arid land use and water reclamation including the local desalination plant. Our state has been a leader in the development of organic and hydroponic crop production. We’ve worked to raise car emission standards. We’ve worked collectively to block attempts to increase off-shore oil drilling and we’ve even decided that sea lions get their own prime real estate water front in La Jolla. True - their overwhelming presence and accompanying odor really made the decision but they’ve been supported by a host of San Diegans who have deemed it essential to share our spaces. We’ve embraced cleaner energy and as a community, we are actively supporting some of the best scientists and researchers in the world right here at our amazing local universities. There is hope. Our job is to pledge ourselves tonight as guardians of this beautiful and precious rare blue rock we call home because it is a gift from God and deserves our respect, our good stewardships.

Protecting the planet is not just for ourselves - it is a gift for our children and their children’s children. Keeping our children safe is a priority I think we can all agree on. Growing

up as a so-cal kid we regularly had extra lessons on safety that I later came to understand were truly regional. As kids we had duck and cover drills to prepare ourselves for earthquakes. We also had ocean safety training in which we learned how to safely and calmly swim out of a rip tide so as not to be carried out to sea. That was the reality of growing up along the coast in Orange County.

Two days ago we had our first lockdown drill of the school year. In the midst of t'fillah, our students were preparing to do a meditation on the meaning of the opening line of the Amidah prayers. They had just arranged themselves on the floor with their eyes closed. The drill began. We quickly got the students up and moved them into the designated safe space. The staff was fast and prepared. The students were obedient and compliant. And I was filled with rage. I was filled with rage as I watched my t'fillah teaching parter run to secure the front doors knowing that if, God forbid, this was real, he would have put himself in mortal danger to keep the kids safe. I was filled with rage as one third grader reached up, and put her hand on my arm asking if someone was really here with a gun or if it was just a drill and the relief on her face when I affirmed it was a drill. We never use the language of guns or active shooter in front of the children here but this third grader knew - a lockdown could mean someone was here with a gun. I thank God we have an amazing security committee and the incomparable Cathi Marx to lead us through these trainings and to help us be as safe as possible. But I wish to God this wasn't our reality and I pray to God that we never become accustomed to it.

As a rabbi, and as an American, I truly don't understand how we've arrived here. The number of Americans who have been killed in mass-shootings and random gun violence is profound. I respect the second amendment and people's rights to bear arms. I also respect human life and the right of our kids to go to school without fear of being murdered or maimed by an evil person who had easy access to military grade weaponry. This year, our Advocacy Committee will be focusing on gun violence prevention as a way of furthering our Jewish values of creating a safer world for, not just our kids, but for everyone's kids. Too many innocent people have died for us to continue in the sin on silence on this issue. Tomorrow afternoon our Limmud Hour will be a moderated conversation on gun violence prevention in which we will engage in the art of respectful dialogue and listening so that we can hear a range of perspectives on this topic, challenge our assumptions, and gently walk together to, God willing, find terra firma of common ground on which to stand. Our hope is to move the conversation past the usual accusations each side lobs against the other and to have a truly meaningful exchange of ideas and voices in which we express our shared hopes and visions for how we can make the world a safer place for everyone. Some might question the wisdom of addressing such a divisive topic on Yom Kippur. I offer back that Yom Kippur is exactly the time to have the conversation because last year twelve Jews were murdered in their synagogues by people whose online content should have prevented them from having access to high powered assault weapons - 11 in Pittsburgh and 1 in Poway. That is twelve too many. This number doesn't include the number of people in other houses of faith who were also shot over the last few years. And kids in schools. And young people in a country western line-dancing bar. And kids in schools. And people at an outdoor concert in Vegas. And kids in schools. And people shopping at Walmart. And kids in schools. We can and we must do more to be Shomrim, to be Guardians of the safety of our children and the safety of our communities in addition to the safety of our first responders. Our children are a precious gift from God and they deserve a world of better safety than the world we have offered them thus far.

Just as our planet has been struggling with wellness, and our country has been struggling with violence, so too do we see struggle in the human spirit. In so many important ways, our modern world offers us luxuries and convenience that our ancestors could only have dreamed about. First of all there's indoor plumbing. I mean - we could mostly stop the list there and realize our lives are infinitely blessed. But more than our modern conveniences, we have long life, complex and rich society, the ability to go skiing and surfing in the span of one weekend. And yet, we know that people today feel more isolated and lonely than ever before. While technology allows us to stay in contact with loved ones and friends across the globe, too many of us live without enough of a sense of belonging. This is why our community is so important. It is why youth group is so important, and Torah study is so important, and coming to services more than twice a year is so important, and serving on committees and volunteering and connecting here is so important. I often tell our students, we can't control the outside world. We can't fix all of the world's problems. But we can and must begin here - to construct together, one little corner of the world where can make safe space, where people can be loved and appreciated for exactly who they are, where we help each other grow, where we support each other, show up for each other, and celebrate life together. Nothing that I'm saying is radical or revolutionary but it's vital for us to hear over and over again because every day we walk through the world painfully aware of our smallness, our loneliness, and our powerlessness.

Yet, here we have the ability to shape the world, to make it look like it should. Here we have an invitation to come and get fired up to do some social action, community service, and volunteering. And here we have an invitation to stop the craziness, to slow down, to breathe, and to be. Just to be! To be welcomed with authenticity and sincerity. A place where we are seen. And loved. What we build here is a place where we measure our worth and success, not in social media likes, but in knowing that we have alleviated the loneliness or suffering of another; in knowing that someone who has been struggling with the big questions of life found a room full of people also struggling, also asking, also learning; in knowing that we filled the room with joy and shared happiness as we help friends celebrate the best moments of their lives. This is what we do here and this is who we are. It is rare, and precious and important. I am asking each of us this year to think about being a Shomer Kehillah - a Guardian of our Community. By volunteering, attending, studying, participating, just by showing up, we become guardians of our community and we are simultaneously enriched by the community we are helping to build. It is a continuous cycle of giving and receiving and it's not something that can authentically happen over social media, emails, or text messages. Protecting our community is one of the easiest ways to demonstrate our gratitude to God for what we have here and by making sure our community is safe and strong, we commit as God's partners in creating holiness, not just for ourselves, but for the generations to come. In the face of despair and cynicism, safeguarding our community is a statement of hope and optimism.

Speaking of hope and optimism... One of my favorite trick questions is to ask students and people beginning their Jewish studies what the most important holiday is. Depressingly, the first answer is usually Channukah. I'm not even responding to that one tonight or we'll be here another hour. Then comes, Passover, or Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. They're all important holidays but they're wrong because the correct answer is... yes! It's Shabbat!! When people ask how and why the Jewish people have survived all these years, there are many answers but at the heart of the answers is Shabbat. It makes sense - if something is actually going to be our most important holiday of the year, why would we only celebrate that once a year? If it's really that important, we should celebrate it all the time and guess what - we do! Ahad Ha'am observed,

“more than the Jewish people has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.” At the core of maintaining, guarding and protecting our communities, is the radical act of being a Shomer, a Guardian, of Shabbat - which at first might seem to just be about Shabbat but in actuality it’s about us. Shabbat is about our wellness - spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and personal. Shabbat comes every week to remind us that each and every single one of us is a person of infinite value - that our lives are precious, and our wellness is of the absolute utmost importance. By commanding us to be Shomrei Shabbat - Guardians of the Sabbath, God is actually commanding us to be guardians of our souls.

Each week Shabbat invites us to come to a full stop; to turn away from our stress, our worries, our woes, our business, and to turn instead to our community, our families, our friends, and ourselves. We are asked to disconnect from the dis-chord, distraction, degradations and difficulties we face every day, and to turn inward to our soul, our wellness, our connection to Eternity, and to each other. Shabbat reminds us weekly, if we don’t take care of ourselves, nothing else that I’ve said tonight matters.

And yet, self-care and self-love seem to be so difficult for people that Torah commands us to observe Shabbat on pain of death. It is so easy to be seduced into the falsehoods that allow us to pave our road of compromised self-love and self-care. We’re too busy to rest! We have important work to do! Payroll isn’t going to finish itself. The laundry isn’t going to wash itself. The kids aren’t going to chauffeur themselves. All of these things are true. Everyone in this room is either responsible for running a business, running a family, or running their own life. Our obligations are of paramount importance. But if we don’t take care of ourselves, we do a profound disservice to the people who rely on us and who trust us.

Moses’ worst moment as a leader comes as he loses his patience with the Israelites and smashes his staff against the rock - bringing forth water, but not confidence and faith in God. I imagine he had had a bad week where something came up and he had to work through Shabbat. Maybe a few in a row. Then, after too many weeks without rest and restoration, instead of being ready to face the people and perform a miracle to allay their fears, he loses his cool, yells at everyone, and smashes a rock. He has met the physical needs of his people. However, his own internal depletion leads to a situation where he deprives his people of spiritual nourishment. He gives them exactly what he has inside of him - anger and frustration. Moses’ sad failure is a reminder to each of us of what happens when we don’t take care of ourselves. When we don’t take care of ourselves, we become arid soil where nothing good can grow and thrive.

5779 was not an easy year for most of us. Our sacred work, in the face of the difficulties of life is to do as our ancestors have always done - it is to hear the message and the call of Shabbat. It is to remember every week how sacred and how important we are; to affirm every week that we are loved and that there are people who are depending on us, who need us to take care of ourselves. We come into tonight with visions of the people we want to strive to be in the year to come and the visions of the communities we want to strive to build. We can do none of that if we don’t begin with caring for ourselves and watering the garden of our soul - daily if we can and minimally, weekly, with Shabbat - with a day of sitting with family and friends, appreciating this beautiful world and our beautiful corner of this magical place we are blessed to call home. Shabbat - a day to count our blessings, to eat delicious food, to sing and listen to music, to rest, to refresh, to restore ourselves and to just be. This is why the rabbis teach that if we want to make peace in the world, we first have to make peace in our homes and at the center of our homes are our own hearts. If we want to help heal the world, help curb, not just gun violence, but all violence, help make our communities strong, safe and beautiful, help our

families thrive - all of it, all of it begins with caring for our own souls. Healing the world begins with healing ourselves so that when we turn outward, it is not with the anger of Moses, but with love.

May 5780 be a year in which we affirm these sacred commitments - may we commit to guarding our souls so that we can face the world grounded in love. May we commit to guarding our community so that it can continue to thrive as a small taste of what the world should and could look like. May we commit to assuming the best intentions in each other and working together to make our communities and our children safer than they currently are. May we commit to guarding this beautiful planet and all her creatures so that we can be God's faithful partners in delivering this beautiful gift, the only one of its kind the like of which we have yet to discover in the cosmos, as a gift for our children and the generations to come. May we and all those we hold precious be sealed for goodness. May this be God's will as it is ours.