

Temple Aliyah

Shavuot 2017 Sermon Slam

Peter Krupp

The Torah is offered to me
each year,
an unchanging story,
a scroll, a book of laws,
a book of stories justifying laws,
coaxing, coercing compliance.

Words
inked and etched
perhaps rewritten, but codified;
static words written from another
time.

From thousands of years ago,
the Torah is offered at this time,
now in this age of reason.
Deafened by science,
by rationality and criticism,
I cannot hear much of the story.
I am hard wired by my day.
I do not know what I cannot see,
what I cannot feel, or smell,
what I cannot deduce or test or
calibrate.
I believe in random, not divine,
mutations.
I have not been to Mount Rushmore,
but I know in my soul that it exists.
I am as sure of it as anything.
I have watched the laws of nature,
of natural selection and specialization.
I marvel as the seed cracks open
and miraculously sends down roots,
and upshoots stem and leaves,
without the need to see a divine
design.

I know as sure as day

the miracle of rebirth will
grace my garden in the springtime,
and bear fruit in the summer and fall.
I am not from the world of the Torah.
Revelation is not rooted
in my experience.

The Torah is offered to me
each year,
an unchanging story
written for people who
believed things that I do not,
lived in a way I cannot imagine,
and adorned their lives with customs
long gone from the world.
The Torah offers a story revealed
in an age of revelation –
or recorded in the name of revelation -
-
in a time when revelation
was as achingly reliable
as critical thinking is for me.
I cannot put myself in that time.
My shoulders, my arms, my back
are frail and human.
My insights are rooted in the present.
Yet as the Torah is offered to me
each year it seems
an unchanging story to be
rediscovered.

I know the pull, the allure. I am part
of the unchanging story.

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The story is mine. Ours.
The story belongs to me. Us.
And year after year the static words
seem never the same.
No idea I ever had was not improved,
Was not tested and refined,
by rereading,
by discussion with even one other
person,
by time.
How effective, how valuable, then
to test truths about human
interactions,
to distill essential do's and don't's,
by patient rabbinic discussion
over generations,
over changing circumstances,
grappling with ambiguity and nuance,
humanity and doubt.

Peter B. Krupp
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This is our inheritance.
This is our unchanging story, the
Torah,
offered to us each year,
to be received anew each year,
rediscovered,
reapplied in our own time.

I accept the Torah offered to me
as this year I am able to accept it:
an unchanging human story
coaxing, coercing,
words inked and etched
in another time,
but leaning forward into our day.