

A Sense of Place, A Sense of Home

Sermon for Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781

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Terroir means “earth”, but in the wine world, this word indicates so much more. Terroir is that sense of place that one can find in a bottle of wine. In the bottle, they say, you can taste the soil in which the grapes grew round and plump. You can tell if it was rocky, or sandy. You can smell the cool nights and the warm days that created the sugars in that purple globe. Terroir is that indescribable amalgamation of the environment, the touch of the grower, the insight of the winemaker, and the miracle of fermentation that can only occur in that particular place at one specific time. It gives us a snapshot of a hill in the French countryside in 2015, a sense of place that one cannot get from anywhere else at any other time.

Terroir doesn't end with the wine industry. Terroir, in a broad sense, is something we experience throughout our lives, in those special moments and locations that make us feel at home, that show us something

special that cannot be replicated anywhere else. It is a sense of safety and security, of familiarity and knowing there is no place we'd rather be.

Perhaps many of you feel the very same thing when, in normal times, you enter into our sanctuary at the DCJCC and feel the embrace of community, of people with whom you have worshipped many times before, of melodies that you have sung many times perviously, but renew with breath and life each week. We feel this sense of place in a synagogue that is our own - a space comfortable for LGBTQ+ folks and supporters, because it was created for this very purpose. Sure, Shabbat services are held all over the world, but this one is ours. These days, I've been thinking a lot about where we worship, and what makes a community a community, even if we are not in the same physical space.

The word for place in Hebrew, *makom*, fittingly is also a name for God. In Jewish tradition, God is *Ha-Makom*, The Place. For in that sense of place, we find holy belonging. We find comfort and familiarity that is Divine. It is a place where you can be your truest self, where you can rest and rejuvenate, and heal. In this place, you encounter memories of family

and friends, of regrettable fights and loving moments. In this place that is your own, you breathe, you look around and know that while it might not mean much to someone else, it is everything to you. It is sacred space, *makom kadosh*. And in this *makom*, you are able to encounter *Ha-Makom* – The unique aspect of God that exists only in this place.

In the Book of Genesis Jacob took a long journey, and evening fell. Along the road he found a certain place to rest and lay down. He fell asleep and had a dream in which he saw angels going up and down a ladder that reached all the way up to the heavens. He awoke, realizing the significance of his experience in this particular place and time, exclaiming “*Achen yesh Adonai ba-makom ha-zeh v’anochi lo yadati*/Behold, Adonai was in this *makom*, this place, and I did not know it.”¹ Jacob found God, *Ha-Makom*, in that particular *makom*. It was surprising and unexpected, but he was insightful enough to see that holiness existed in this sense of place. Jacob continued, remarking, “*Ma nora Ha-Makom hazeh*/How

¹ Gen. 28:16

awe-inspiring is *Ha-Makom*/This place, this God.”² This realization, finding God in this sense of place, changed him. It helped define his relationships, both human and divine, for the remainder of his life. In this place, in God, Jacob found that he belonged, that he could have a home, that he was connected to those who came before him and established their own sense of place, their own understanding of where and how to encounter the Eternal.

We, like Jacob, can open our eyes, and awaken to the existence of holy presence when we find a sense of place, and sense of belonging, a sense of home. It might occur when we walk through that front door and kick off our shoes. It might occur when we celebrate Shabbat with familiar faces - even if they appear as boxes on our screens. It might occur when we cook a favorite family recipe smell it wafting throughout the house.

I am encouraged and in awe of the fact that the places where I feel most at home, the places that have a special terroir in my own heart and

² Gen. 28:17

memory, may be very different from yours. How wonderful it is that you and I can both find *Ha-Makom*, God, in our different places, and we can both be absolutely correct. My *makom* and I do not have a monopoly on *Ha-Makom*. To acknowledge this reality is to realize that other people can be just as right, can have just as valid a claim to God and holiness as myself. To understand that a person can experience Godliness in a place that means nothing to me is to see the Divine image within that person, and not only in myself.

As we enter into the year 5781, I wonder, where is your *makom*? In which moments do you encounter *Ha-Makom*? In which places do you find reflection, renewal, and rejuvenation unlike any other? Let us all find our own *m'komot* this year, and let us also honor friends and strangers as they search throughout the world for their *m'komot*, for in them will we collectively encounter *Ha-Makom*.