

Shabbat Ki Teitzei
2 September 2017/11 Elul 2017
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Returning Home

On Tuesday, I had a strange experience. I went to a Jackson's Row's family's house for Friday night dinner – yes, on Tuesday. And I didn't just knock and enter their house once – I knocked and entered their house a total of ten consecutive times.

This odd experience marked one of two of my first official jobs as Rabbi at this shul. Leona, Darren, Poppy and Poppy's Grandma, a JR family, and me and Gabriel, my son, were filmed this Tuesday for a BBC Cbeebies series called 'Treasure Champs'. They had an episode on 'sharing' and wanted to film a Reform family celebrating Shabbat. It was great fun and having a mid-week Shabbat four course meal was particularly lovely!

Anyone who has been filmed for TV will know quite how long these things take. We were filmed entering Poppy's house, ten times, from different angles, close ups and wide shots. An hour in, it was deemed that we had arrived, and we made our way to the dinner table. The candle lighting and blessing of the bread took around 90 minutes as Shabbat was slowed right down. Poppy lifted the bread, held it and blessed it around 6 times. Time slowed right down and we experienced the everyday in a much more detailed way. It was quite an experience.

As we arrived at Poppy's home, again and again, I reflected on the concept of 'home'. Today, in many ways I am returning home. I grew up at Jackson's Row, celebrated my Bat-mitzvah, decided to become a rabbi, did work experience with Rabbi Silverman at the age of 14, taught at cheder, got married, worked as a student rabbi and much more. I am at home.

Yet, every time I have arrived here, this home has changed. The building has changed, aged, but yet, it also remains the same. Our prayers remain the same but the context has shifted and some of our loved ones are no longer here with us. We stand at Jackson's Row but the buildings around us have changed, the landscape has been transformed, the choice of restaurants is overwhelming, the Metrolink system has grown, smartphones have transformed the way we live our lives and communicate, the numbers of homeless people on the streets is alarming.

In this sense, time and our concepts of home are not linear – they shift, and circle each other, overlap and depart. As Jews, we understand this as we return to Shabbat every week and utter the same words from hundreds of years ago in new contexts and spaces. In fact, the rabbis, when trying to explain the strange contradictory timelines in our Torah, concluded that there is no end and no beginning in the Torah – time is not linear but circular. Jewish thinkers, such as Franz Rosenzweig and

Walter Benjamin, examined our concepts of history and we could say that, Jews are outside of history, as we understand it. We don't experience history as linear but rather in overlapping circles.

Perhaps we can understand and experience this most strongly given the heinous attack on our city on 22 May this year. The bombing has changed Manchester – it has shifted our landscape and added a scar to our collective identity. A scar that is grafted on to an older one from the 1996 IRA bomb, which happened on Shabbat.

I am reminded of a saying, taught to me by Rabbi Sheila Shulman (z"l) my teacher and friend. It is by Ursula Le Guin. She wrote, as part of a dialogue in the book 'The Dispossessed' - 'you can go home again...so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been.' It took me a long time to understand this phrase. It's a strange thing – to say that you can return home but at the same time – it is a place you have never been. But I am beginning to understand this phrase more and more.

This is home for us but in every arrival, it changes and becomes something new. It is re-born and we experience a *teshuvah* – a returning – a theme of the *yom tov*. As we change with every moment so does our home.

And this returning, this new home, demands something of us. In order for the next re-birth of our home to be a better one, to be a healing one, it asks us to take charge, to be active and contribute. That's why, my other first official job was to be appointed as a trustee of the We Stand Together campaign which is a national campaign, which started and continues to be Manchester based. It is an initiative which brings communities together to celebrate the diversity and work together for good, against hate and division.

I want our home to be a welcoming one – where we, and others can arrive in peace, celebrating what makes us different whilst remaining as a community.

It's strangely apt, some may say, *bersheyt*, that the name of this week's Torah portion is *ki teitzei* – when you go out – and the name of next week's Torah portion is *ki tavo* – when you enter.

And it's even stranger that *ki tavo*, next week's portion, was Rabbi Silverman's first Torah portion when he took up the post here, and *ki teitzei* is mine. There are many arrivals and changes. There is no end and no beginning – time overlaps. But yet our home remains – it is a constant.

I am looking forward to talking with you all about this home – about how to ensure its continuing re-birthing is positive. If I don't know you, introduce yourself, if you do know me, come up and let's deepen our conversations! Let's continue to build a welcoming home that isn't afraid to look at ourselves and outwards, to commit to a home that includes all and fights injustice.

Ken Yehi Ratzon, may this be God's will. Amen.