



LT TORAH TO GO

Volume 13 - Issue 33

Edited by Rabbi Mara Nathan on behalf of generations of Torah Learners at Larchmont Temple.

EXPERIENCE TORAH THIS WEEK: May 3-10
EREV SHABBAT 8:00PM
SHABBAT AM SERVICE SATURDAY 10:30AM

SHABBAT EMOR 5769

LEVITICUS 21:1-24:23

pp. 912-938 in Torah, a Modern Commentary

PSHAT...*The plain/simple story*

In *Parashat Emor* Moses presents the laws regulating the lives of priests, who presided over the sanctuary and its sacrifices. They are to be scrupulous as they carry out their duties. Mention is made of the donations and offerings that are acceptable for the sanctuary. Then Moses speaks to all the people about the holy days in the year including the Sabbath, Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. On all of these holidays, the Israelites are told not to work at their occupations, and special observances are prescribed. The portion concludes by describing an incident wherein a man, born of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man, fights with another man born of two Israelite parents. The half-Israelite blasphemes God's name in the course of the fight. God tells Moses that the man is to be stoned to death as punishment. So Moses tells the Israelites the penalty for blaspheming God or pronouncing God's name, and also of the rules by which restitution is to be made for crimes such as murder and the maiming of others.

REMEZ...*Looking for clues*

Speak to Aaron saying: Any man of your offspring throughout their generations in whom there will be a blemish shall not come near to offer the food of his God. (Lev. 21:17)

KOSHI.... How can Torah teach that everyone is created in the image of God and yet priests have to be perfect in order to offer sacrifices in the Temple?

RASHI....A blemished Kohen is forbidden to perform this service for it is not proper for him to do so.

RABBI HIRSCH....The Kohen is not merely an individual; as a representative of the Sanctuary, he is responsible to the nation.

DRASH...*Discovering Meaning...*

RABBI RACHELCOWAN....As disturbing as the idea that a physically defective man will profane the places of sacred worship to God is the notion that spiritual leadership depends on wholeness. For a long time, we have wanted our leaders to be as male, as handsome, as physically perfect as possible. We wanted ideals, not role models. But in recent years our thinking about spiritual leadership has changed....[now] we seek leaders who have learned to find meaning in the domain of the broken, who find pieces and fit them together, who understand that the divine can be sensed in many places, and grasped in the wake of devastating experiences....The spiritual figure who the parasha rejects a the blemished priest we may embrace as the wounded healer.

RABBI SUSAN LIPPE...Because I know that the priests believed offerings were good, then I feel confident in assuming that blemishes, since they act as obstacles, must be bad. As a result, I can imagine how those badly blemished people felt about not being good enough in God's eyes. However, I have trouble believing that the High Priest or God....would want those of use who feel blemished to stay far way from God. The text must be understood as "If something is wrong with you, you can't be close to God. What makes matters worse is that since the Hebrew is in the future tense, you can infer that this horrible situation will exist forever. On the other hand, since the Hebrew is in the future tense, maybe this statement is not a prescription but rather a prediction. As long as leaders don't support people who are struggling, those strugglers will not get close to God. As long as rabbis, educators, cantors and parents, don't work to help people heal, those who feel broken will not get close to God. As long as problems are judged to be bad or kept secret, those problems will always prevent people drawing close to God. But don't we want to believe that God wants all of us to approach holiness? Don't we love God because we feel invited to draw close to the Sacred?...What can we as a community do to ensure that all Jews learn that no blemish, no injury, no mistake can keep them from choosing to draw near God?

Yashar Koach to this week's B'nei Mitzvah:
JESSICA KOGAN & MICHAEL STRUMWASSER
Come hear them teach Torah this Saturday at 10:30AM

SOD...Finding Ourselves

...Why were priests that had physical or mental defects not able to offer sacrifices to G-d? The 11th century commentator, Rashi, looks at verse 18 of Chapter 21 which says that any person that has a blemish should not approach G-d. He says this means that it is not proper to go up to G-d if there is something wrong with you. He says that just like you wouldn't want to present a ruler or governor with something less than perfect, you shouldn't offer G-d something or someone that isn't perfect. As an example, he points out that your governor wouldn't be pleased with you if you gave him such a gift, so G-d might not be pleased either. I think this is ironic because the current Governor of New York is legally blind himself. I'm sure he is very grateful to be governor and there are a lot of people who look up to him because even though he has a disability and is less than perfect, he still has accomplished a lot.

I understand what Rashi is saying but I don't think that G-d really cares what people look like and I am sure that most people agree with me. It is not right to judge people by a physical defect that they can't help. Many people have the kinds of defects that are named in the Torah, but that doesn't mean they aren't able to make a meaningful offering to G-d. What we feel on the inside is a lot more important than our appearance.....

My Torah portion has taught me that you can't judge people by the way they look. This will help me grow as a person and help me to make people feel better about themselves. I want other people to take this in too, because it is a very important message in life. It teaches you that who we are on the inside - our personality, how we treat other people, and our interests - is much more important than what we look like. If someone looks or acts differently than you, it is worth getting to know them even more because they will have had different life experiences than you and will make your life more interesting....

-JESSICA

...Why do priests have to be perfect to offer sacrifices in the temple?...If we were all created in God's image, did God really need the priest to be perfect?

This is a really confusing thing if you consider all the biblical leaders who suffered from handicaps. Jacob limped, Moses stuttered and Isaac was blind. These leaders overcame their disabilities and successfully led the Jewish people. So what was it about the Kohanim that made it necessary for them to be physically perfect in order to offer a sacrifice in the temple?

Rabbi Michael Gold teaches "perhaps the answer is that the sacrificial offerings were meant to inculcate in the people a sense of holiness of God's presence and God's perfection." I think this means that the goal of sacrifice was to model a perfect relationship between God and Israel. Rabbi Gold goes on to say "to watch a priest with a disability, bring an offering would have the opposite effect. People would say, "Look the priest is blind" or "look the priest is hunchback" and never even sense God's presence in the moment. The Torah knew a fundamental truth about human nature- we have difficulty seeing beyond the disability to actually see the real person." After reading this I now believed that God didn't need physical perfection as much as humans did. I believe this because humans are often distracted by people with physical disabilities, and can only see what is on the outside. This rule shows that there was a fear that the people would not be able to focus on their offering with full concentration, if the priest who was offering it for them looked less than perfect in some way.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson sees this idea as unfortunate because as he says "in a very real sense, we are all handicapped, all of us disabled. Each of us balances personal weaknesses, inabilities, and injuries, working to compensate for them so they don't prevent us from living our lives to our fullest."... Not only is no one perfect, but our imperfections are part of what can make us loving and sympathetic people....

-MICHAEL

MITZVAH of the WEEK...

JESSICA is working with Guiding Eyes for the Blind. *"I am socializing puppies from six to eight weeks old to get them ready to go on to more advanced training to become guide dogs. This relates to my Torah portion because I am helping people who are blind to become more able to do things that everyone else can."*

MICHAEL has been volunteering for the last 6 months with kids in the Special Olympics. *"I have met kids with various handicaps, and I have learned not to judge people by the way they look. At first I really noticed what was different about them but now that I've gotten to know them each as individuals, I really connect with them and see them as people first.....I have learned so much from the kid's I worked with. I learned to always be a good sport, and never give up because anything is possible. But the most important thing I have learned is never to judge a person by the way they look because what's inside is what counts. I've concluded that God created us all in his image, and nobody is perfect. Part of being human is having faults and learning from them."*