

Ki Tissa Exodus, Chapters 30:11-34:35

Cantor Deborah Martin

Congregation Emanu-El of Waukesha

13-March-2020 / 18 Adar 5780

This portion begins with God instructing Moses to collect a half a shekel from each person over the age of 20 while taking a census of the community. This is like our government taking taxes in order to pay for community services. Bezazel is a skilled artisan and is the one who makes the sanctuary furnishings and priestly garments. The people are told to keep the Sabbath and the words of the Veshamru prayer we still often sing at services comes from this portion. God reminds the people how Moses received the 10 commandments and how the people sinned when they built the golden calf. Moses later asks God for proof that God will continue to lead them. God's presence is shown to Moses as assurance that neither he nor the Israelites will be abandoned.

When things happen in our lives that we don't understand or have no control over, we are frightened and we feel abandoned, just like the Israelites felt when Moses did not return for so long. We often do irrational or destructive things when we are afraid. We are now faced with the coronavirus which is making people frightened and panicked. We feel out of control over this epidemic of the Coronavirus. We may feel abandoned when we have no control. However, we also need to realize that we can have some control over how to handle it. It may be difficult, but it is not impossible. We, at CEEW, are working hard to make sure that our members are safe and taken care of during this time. In Judaism, Pikuach Nefesh, or the preservation of life, is most important. Halacha or Jewish Law is very clear: Pikuch nefesh doheh et hakol, "the saving of life outweighs every other principle." That is why we are trying to have social distancing whenever possible so that we make sure

everyone is safe. That is why we are having ZOOM services, classes and programs. The less we are in larger crowds, the better. We will keep you apprised if we need to cancel any holiday celebrations or observances. We will take this one day at a time. We will also get you information as it comes in about things that you can do to keep from contracting the disease.

There is a Talmudic midrash that tells how Rabbi Eleazar once fell ill. He lay in a dark room, but when Rabbi Yochanan bared his arm, light radiated from him and light into the room as he approached Rabbi Eleazar. Rabbi Eleazar extended his hand and Rabbi Yochanan lifted him up in his bed and returned him to his community.

If you are being quarantined for any reason, please let us know, so we can reach out to you and be a spiritual presence for you, as well. Please feel free to call me if you are feeling lonely, isolated or depressed by all of this. It is quite overwhelming. If you contract an illness and cannot go out, let us know if you need us to pick up food or medications for you. You are not alone. We are here to help and take care of you. Sometimes when these dilemmas come up in our lives, we will find that we have more support than we can ever imagine. You can count on CEEW to be here for you.

We have seen this type of isolation of people done in the Torah, as well. In the portion Tazria, we are told that anyone with a skin affliction must go to the priest and the priest will determine if one should go into isolation. In Leviticus Chapter 13, verse 21 it says: "If the priest finds that there is no white hair in it and it is not lower than the rest of the skin, and it is faded, the priest shall isolate him for seven days. Of course, in those days, the priests were not Doctors and they did not have the same science and medicine that we have today. Now we have Doctors and tests to determine who has the disease and who needs to be in isolation and away from

others in order to prevent the disease. Back then, the person was truly in isolation, without cell phones or computers to keep them in touch with loved one and friends. Today, we can still connect with others and talk to them. They can still come to the door and leave food, supplies or medicine. We are in a much better situation today!

Although some of you may feel abandoned by God and lose faith during times of illness, turmoil and hardship, this is the most important time to connect with God and your faith. We are now given some extra time to reflect on our faith, pray to God, and give thanks for the many things we have in life. It will help those who need the strength to get through these difficult times in their lives. Again, I am here to help if you need it.

In Proverbs 12:18, it says: The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Therefore, at this time of a health emergency, make sure to read all the latest news and wisdom that you receive in preventing and/or curing the Coronavirus. We ask God to give our Doctors and scientists the wisdom, resources and strength we need to help us through this epidemic. In Genesis, our ancestor Joseph demonstrated the wisdom of preparing and leading the people through a famine. We can also prepare by having some extra food and supplies in the house, using wipes and anti-viral and bacterial wipes, not hug or kiss others or stand or sit close to others. These are simple and easy to do steps to help ensure your safety and the safety of others. We will be using Zoom for services, programs and classes until we learn that we are safe to have larger groups gather.

Take this time to connect with God and your body by meditation. I will send you a meditation on healing and wellness via our email blasts if you wish to try using them. It will calm your spirit and help you take away any anxiety.

Moses was able to feel a connection to God at the end of this Torah portion. I hope you will try to connect with God as well and feel his presence within you and within your loved ones, friends and this holy community to help you cope over the next several weeks. Kein Yehi Ratzon-may this be God's blessing and will for you and for all people around the world. Amen