

Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah – Tetzaveh

I love finding commentaries that just seem off the wall. In reading over a text based in the teaching of Rav Avraham Kook (early Chief Rabbi of Israel), I found an article about the priestly clothing; part of the subject of this week's Torah portion. Given that I wrote about adornments last week, it caught my eye. The commentary made the point that clothing is a sign of our weakness. The Hebrew word for clothes ("*begged*") comes from the root-word *bagad*, meaning "to betray." In the Garden of Eden, being nude was not a problem. Once Adam and Eve had knowledge, they saw nudity as nakedness, and were ashamed. Not knowing how to handle this new knowledge, they defaulted to humiliation. In the Talmud, the same is true for the priestly garments. Each of the eight garments somehow reminds us of the transgressions of our own weakness [Zevachim 88b].

As juicy (sorry) as the thoughts on this matter were, I found myself marveling at a footnote to this conversation. In what is just barely a passing thought, this sage points out that in this entire week's portion, Moses is never mentioned. How odd it is that Moses is still atop the mountain getting instruction from God, and in this entire portion, Moses is not mentioned by name? I thought the timing of this portion was more than coincidental in that next week is Purim, celebrating the story of miraculous redemption in Persia, as told by a book (Esther) that never mentions God. We know that God is speaking to Moses in the Torah portion, just as we believe by reference and circumstance, that God is part of the Esther story. Still, even while presumed to be very much there, in neither place do we find these main characters mentioned.

And then I thought even more how appropriate this convergence of texts is; this week is also the first yahrtzeit for my late wife. In the same sense that neither God nor Moses tangibly appear in these stories, Cindy has not tangibly been with us for a year. In the same sense that one cannot imagine the texts without Moses or God being involved, the same can be said for Cindy's presence and involvement still here, today. The overriding atmosphere of the Torah text is filled with Moses' presence, after all ... God is speaking directly to him. In Esther, Mordechai reminds Esther that there are forces at work that must be used for the good. Whatever one's theology, the strength and courage demanded to take on the king comes from somewhere beyond what Esther thinks she has to offer. In the same sense, the part of Cindy that still moves Corey, Josh, Ilana, Rachel, Diogo ... our home and our community stays very much with us every day.

We all grieve the loss of those we hold dear. There is never a good time to lose the ones who have meant so much to us and our lives, but too often we treat their death as though it truly were the end. Yet, as long as we cherish the memories and continue to converse with those memories, there is no "end." The people who leave this world stay with us -- seemingly tangibly, as we keep them alive with us in heart and spirit. My father has been gone for 18 plus years yet we still speak. I have lost dear friends through the years, and yet I have dreams as though they are still here, and sometimes have an experience that brings me back to the last time we were able to see each other. I tell families to remember those they love who pass on, for they really never leave; they remain for us, a blessing. None of us are guaranteed even one day with people we love, therefore each one is a blessing. When those days are gone, they remain even greater blessings because having not been guaranteed to us at all, cherished thoughts and memories of our loved ones remain and continue to grow with us throughout our lives.

I have no idea what will happen when I go. I do, however, believe with all of my heart that I will never fully leave this world until I am completely forgotten. It is incumbent upon us to live our lives so that we

leave blessings behind. It is incumbent upon us to keep the memory of those we hold dear alive, so that through us, they can continue to teach and help us make sense out of the world. Shabbat Shalom.