

Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah - Tazria

Weeks ago, over the matter of the “Blessing of the Sun,” I called into question the whole matter of God controlling life and death; creation and destruction. I made the statement (that I have made many times) that I do not believe the Torah to be a literal history – nor do I believe God to be all doing. Celebrating the sun being in the exact position that it would have been in a creation story we absolutely reject is problematic. Since then, some have challenged me on the value of any ritual that might be tied to things that are at best theoretical and at worst abject fiction.

Why Chanukkah? Why Purim? Why even Shabbat? The easy answer (for me) is that these holidays are not about the timing of the event as much as they are about the spirit of the event. It is not important that the stories of Chanukkah or Purim might or might not be tied to a specific date, it is that it happened. There a host of reasons that the Torah gives for observing Shabbat. One is tied to creation, another to the Exodus, and still others simply acknowledge the need to step back and regroup. As to the Sun – at creation – it is not that we honor creation, it is that we stand in the proverbial miracle of being in a certain moment/place in the time and space continuum. If we were to choose one day a year to celebrate creation and life – for the every day miracle – that would be different. We have, by the way. That date is Rosh Hashanah, and more true to the spirit of the text, it acknowledges not that this was the very beginning, but that it was the first day of the seventh month. Even literal to the text, there were six months before the first sun rise. We celebrate birthdays, because we know specifically what day people are born. We celebrate life, though, everyday.

This week, the Torah and Haftarah give us stories of faith healing. Naaman, the general, is a leper. He seeks the prophet Elisha who is said to have healing powers. Elisha tells him how to go about healing. At first he rejects the prophet’s words. He leaves believing he was mocked. He later returns, understanding the prophet spoke not in sarcasm, but with sincerity. Naaman heals when he comes to understand that the prophet genuinely cares for his well being – wants him to heal. Each week, we read a list of names of those people we care for who are in need of strength and healing. The pain can be physical, emotional, or both. Often times, we read names of people who are returning to health, but are as yet, not full strength. We offer a prayer for healing and ask God to restore them in health. I do not believe that God chooses to heal some and not others, and I especially do not believe that the chances of God bringing healing increases or decreases based on the number of prayer lists upon which someone’s name appears. I do believe, though that a large portion of healing has everything to do with the patient’s emotional state. And, I believe with perfect faith that the odds of healing increase and decrease in accordance with how much the patient thinks he or she matters to the world. When someone knows that lots of people are praying for his/her health; that psychological lift helps them help their bodies and spirits heal. The healing may restore them to physical health and strength or it may be that they obtain the strength to face whatever the news that comes their way. But faith healing is not God’s intervention on behalf of some and not others – it is the result of our having enough faith to genuinely care for each other.

It takes almost no energy to let people know that we care and that even if only vicariously, we want to participate in their healing. What it takes a lot of ... is love and attention. We need to look beyond ourselves to see the pain and challenges that people around us experience. That is the hardest part – looking past ourselves to see the needs of others. Once our eyes and hearts are open, our arms open more easily and our love is given more freely and more completely. Take stock of those you know who are in need – let them know you know ... and that you care. Their healing will become more whole. Shabbat Shalom.

