

Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah - Khayae

I have struggled with writing this week. It seems that given the political climate, I keep needing to point out the pieces of text that support the presumption that power corrupts. I have a bumper sticker that says, "Under Republicans, Man abuses man. Under Democrats, it is exactly the reverse." There is a "peace and justice" group in town that published an item calling a world figure a "War Criminal" even where no charges have been made against the individual, and dismissed the notion that calling uncharged people "War Criminals" somehow was antithetical to promoting peace or justice. I heard the circles of a parent whose child had been ostracized from a play group because her parents were the only Democrats in the group. And then I look at the text and cannot get past the make-over job that tradition has done with Rebekah. She is the arranged bride of Isaac (making her a matriarch), though her literal story sees her give birth to twins (Jacob and Esau) and choosing one (Jacob) as favorite over the other. Interestingly, Esau is the patriarch of the Edomites, the forefathers of Rome. As such, Rebekah is the mother of the people who destroyed the Temple and sent Israel into a two thousand year diaspora. She then also helped her favorite child cheat her blind husband into blessing the wrong child (Jacob), depriving Esau of his rightfully deserved blessing. This is not a good way to walk into writing an uplifting commentary on a weekly Torah portion.

After writing and trashing four different papers, it finally hit me. This is exactly what this portion should call on us to do. I remember from the movie "Network." William Holden was classic in a role of a reporter who had had enough with the "yellow journalism," the seedy politics that drove the news, and the whole political atmosphere that cause such mistrust between people. I think of the Rush Limbaughs, Glenn Becks, Stephanie Millers, and even Ed Schultzs of the pundit circuit and have to wonder how they think that any of the venom they spew against each other helps America. I keep going back to William Holden's line, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this any longer." He found his way back on the air, asking America to stand up and join him. Of course, by then, he was outcast from society. But with Republicans and Democrats caring more about party lines than progress, such that a Republican Senator who voted for Health care was notional news, we have to take a step back and see that what is happening serves only to divide us more. No national healing is happening as we seek to provide health care for all. If anything, "Health Care" is making us more ill.

And I go back to the Rebekah story in Torah. As the story is given, Eliezer asked for specific signs from God that Rebekah answered, exactly. Thousands of commentators go on to talk about the "meant to be" relationship of Isaac and Rebekah. If true, then God must really have not liked Isaac. Or perhaps, the text is telling us that even when the people in charge tell us that something is good for us, it does not make it so. So intent are powerful people in getting their way, that we abdicate reason to their will and their support lists. Al Franken was right (book title), "Rush Limbaugh Is A Big Fat Idiot." The "Right" is correct, in his one sided characterization of the right, Al Franken demonstrates none of the tools necessary to actually serve in the best interest in bringing the country together as a United States Senator. That the Bible tells us God ordained the Isaac and Rebekah marriage only calls more attention to the problem with power. Here is my blasphemy. Routinely, the Bible calls the character of its version of God into question to teach us about power, and I have written about it many times. So, maybe it is time to join William Holden and say. "Enough." I do not want to judge someone's moral fiber because of their party

affiliation. I do not want to “have to” accept as gospel something simply because it came from an authoritative mouth. I do not have to support people who make a living out of demeaning or dismissing other people in society.

In all of this, I find the Rebekah lesson to be even more valuable than I had ever read it to be. Her story reminds me that I have to pay attention to the facts on the ground and that when I abdicate my obligations to pay attention for myself, I let other people’s agendas, some that are only destructive – speak for me. It is time to say “No!” to the folks who only destroy. It is time to return from our exile from each other. I am mad as hell --- mad that we have all bought into this nonsense for as long as we have and allowed our society to fall apart to the point that children do not speak to each other because of their parents’ politics. Enough is enough. Shabbat Shalom.