

SERMON VA'EIRA 2019

Jan 4, 2019 28 Tevet 5779

BE AMONG THE DISCIPLES OF AARON -

So, it was a Jewish year ago when I came to Sinai to do my weekend interview. It was the Torah Portion, Va'eira, and tonight, we have rolled the scroll until we are back where we started together.

What a year! I want to thank everyone for being so welcoming, supportive, and tolerant as I have gotten started here. I am proud of what we have done so far, especially of how the congregation has come together.

Now that I've been here for six months, the holy days are over, the installation is done it is time to start phase II of working with you to make this congregation even better and our community closer.

In the next week, I'll be sending out announcements about adult education classes, both face to face and on line. We need to start planning for Purim because Judaism must be fun and joyful if it is to feed our spirits. I also am looking forward to working with the social action committee on expanding and deepening our work in the community. So stay tuned and stay involved. I can be a catalyst, but it takes a community to make a community.

Last year, when I spoke about this portion, I talked about the psychological drama going on in the battle between Pharaoh and Moses, and the tensions between God and Moses.

There are three key moments in our portion that will remind us of all the drama going on.

1. One is when Moses continues to say, "I don't want to do this! Don't make me do this! They won't listen to me because I have a speech disability. Even after doing these miracles, Moses feels inadequate. I don't know about you, but if I had just turned the entire Nile to blood, I'd feel pretty powerful. But Moses seems to stay focused on his fear of failure.
2. A second moment is when Pharaoh, seeing the massive environmental crisis all around him, the bloody river, the stinking fish, the putrefying mounds of frogs, Pharaoh sees it, and then promptly turns around and goes back into his palace. He refuses to see the results of his actions.

3. And the third is when the Israelites, being told that they are being freed, simply shrug and don't listen, "m'kotser ru'ach" because they are so bitter and stressed.

If we add that Moses was, in our tradition, Pharaoh's son-in-law, and grew up in the palace as the heir apparent, and is now in a Oedipal match of staves (staffs), the drama just gets more rich.

I can relate to each of them, and have behaved like each of them at various times in my life.

1. I'm sure you can think of times when you been stuck in your sense of inadequacy or failure even when you are doing great work.
2. I'm sure you can think of times when you've just gone back in your house and turned on the tube rather than deal with what you were seeing. Or maybe you turned off your tube for the same reason.
3. And I'm sure we can all think of times when we couldn't even hear that something was good because we were so stressed and overwhelmed.

But there is one person in this story that almost always gets overlooked. He does great things, but never complains, never seems to get wrapped up in the drama, but shows up, accepts his role, and does what needs to be done.

- That person is Aaron, Moses older brother.
- Aaron doesn't get a burning bush.
- Aaron doesn't get a reed basket.
- He doesn't grow up in Pharaoh's palace as a rich Egyptian.
- He doesn't marry a rich Egyptian, but rather marries a Jewish woman from a respected Jewish family.

Indeed, without Aaron, this entire story wouldn't be happening, but Aaron almost disappears amidst all the big personalities and big drama.

So tonight, I want to make a plug for all those like Aaron who don't get wrapped up in drama, don't let things get to them, and just do what they are called to do and what they believe is needed.

Those people are the foundation and heart of any living community. Dramas come and go, and they, like the Energizer Bunny, just keep going and going.

This synagogue would not have survived if not for people like Aaron.

To be honest, I wish I was more like Aaron. But I am not. I am attracted to community conflicts the way God is attracted to a sacrificial barbeque. I wish I was better able to handle it when things blow up, when people get made at me, or there's a big drama. I wish I could just shrug things off and not let it shake me. But Aaron I am not. Instead, I almost always end up in the middle of that, and my spiritual practice is often focused on keeping me centered and grounded when everything in my personality is screaming at me to storm off, or say what I think very loudly.

Spiritually, I think in this entire Egyptian drama, Aaron is the one to watch. He is not flashy, or witty, or charismatic, but he is SOLID, willing to serve, and fulfills his commitments.

Aaron is the overlooked spiritual role model here, and it is telling that he almost disappears.

As we move into this new phase as a congregation, I want to give praise and thanks to the many Aaron's among us, the people who do so much here without complaining, without storming off, or blowing up.

And I want to make sure that the Aaron's among us aren't overlooked or taken for granted.

Without Aaron, we would never have gotten out of Egypt.

We should always remember to pay attention to and thank those more quiet 'doers'. We should study them. Ask them how they do it. In Chassidic terms, it is almost always the person we least expect and notice that turns out to be the TZADIK, the saint in the group.

AARON IS A SPIRITUAL TEACHER IF WE LET HIM. He teaches patience. Commitment. Temperence. Balance. Duty. He teaches mediating instead of polarizing, listening instead of emoting.

Remember, that it is Aaron, not Moses, who is made High Priest, who is tasked with the spiritual life of the community.

And that it is Aaron who is called “Rodef Shalom”: the pursuer of peace. We are taught to be like his disciples, seeking peace and pursuing it.

Of course, that means peace from conflict, but it is not only that. It means inner peace, spiritual peace, or as the **Hebrew word ‘shalom’ means – wholeness.**

And isn't that what we all seek in our spiritual lives?

Wholeness? Calm? Shalom?

So as we pass our first six months together, and in some ways our first year, I want to reach out to all the disciples of Aaron here, and thank you. And I want to ask all the Moseses and Pharoahs here, all the kvetching Israelites to also reach out to the Aaron's in your own lives. Thank them, but also to learn from them how to remain steady, to not get swept up in all the “sound and fury”, but rather to find peace and wholeness, and calm by keeping our focus on the work to be done and what we can personally do to help it come to be. It may not be glamorous, make a good story, or go viral – but perhaps these days more than ever, the lesson we need is the lesson Aaron teaches us this week.