

A Year of Encompassing Torah



Prepared by
Rabbi Steven J. Rubenstein
Temple B'nai Abraham
Beverly, MA
Rabbioli.Steven@verizon.net

Parashat Metzarah

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This is how we shall accrue our mitzvah points:

**Barukh atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam,  
Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah...**

**Praised are You Adonai, our God,  
The Sovereign of all worlds,  
Who has made us holy with your mitzvot,  
And commanded us to engage ourselves  
with words of torah.**

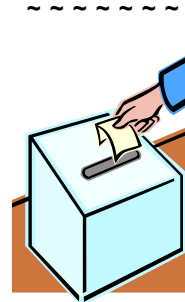
***To be fully engaged with Torah  
Is to wrestle with Torah –  
To challenge our tradition while loving it,  
To question it while celebrating it.***

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An Added Blessing For Spiritual Direction

*"Yihyu l'ratzon imrey fi v'higion libi
lifaneycha Hashem Tzuri v'Go'ali*

May the expressions of my mouth
and **the thoughts of my heart**
find favor before You, G-d,
my Rock and my Redeemer."



Parashat Metzarah 5768

I have been asked by many people how I plan to vote this coming November. Like many of you, I have been catching snippets of the candidates on the local news channels each night and each evening, listening somewhat attentively as the newscasters review the latest jabs that each candidate has taken at one other during their numerous debates. From the very outset, the candidates promised the American public that this campaign would indeed be different from the others. "This will be a race decided by the issues!" they promised. So, what are the issues they wish to discuss between punches at one another on the campaign trail?

While the number of houses that are being foreclosed on by the banks increase weekly, what have we heard about resolving the recession that is causing home owners to choose between home heating oil, mortgage, and food for the family? In the Jewish community of the North Shore, three of our young adults have pooled together their interest in helping others by offering people the opportunity to purchase a coffee travel mug for a minimum donation to the Jewish Emergency Fund that helps support families in crisis with the mortgage payments or a supply of home heating oil. At the ADL Community Interfaith Seder I suggested that people use them as spill-proof kiddush cups at the seder, well-worth the price considering how much it costs to launder the table cloth afterwards.

While the price of gas at the pump fluctuates daily, what have our candidates proposed to stabilize the supply so that consumers can afford to go to work, and the products that we use on a daily basis do not go up in price due to increases in the delivery charges?

While war continues to rage in Iraq, and nuclear weapons threaten other parts of this region of the world, what do Senator McCain, Senator Obama, and Senator Clinton propose to bring an end to the bloodshed and the fear that this world will come to an end at the hands of tyranny in the very near future?

While our current diplomats attempt to broker a peace between Israel and her neighbors, how much more do they plan to give away to the only democracy in this region before she, too, is put in jeopardy for her continued survival, and the survival of the Jewish people?

While the candidates debate the ills of our own country and what we ought to do with the immigrants who came to our shores seeking shelter here, who will have the courage to speak up in their behalf in the same way that President John F. Kennedy did fifty years ago when he crafted a policy of respect and decency, as well as justice for all, in his treatise "A Nation of Immigrants"?

While the privileged who have health insurance continue to have access to physicians and hospitals, who will ensure that those who can't afford such insurance be given equal access to our health care systems so that they do not have to live in fear of dying from something that is curable?

The candidates may indeed be exchanging ideas about how to resolve all of these issues, but the media certainly has not highlighted many of their responses, other than a sound bite or two on how as a country we need to endorse "change." Even the Republicans are admitting we need a "change" in the White House. Whether their candidate will lead to a new direction in policies is something that can only be the subject of another debate and more conjecture on how this candidate's ideas are more of the same or are indeed different.

What concerns me most on this Shabbat is the health care system and the need to reform it so that more of the under-privileged in our country have greater access to medical care, especially preventative medicine. I find myself blessed to have a doctor who is concerned with my physical well-being, ordering tests that are indirectly related to his expertise, but influential in how he is choosing to care for my entire

welfare. I am grateful for his aggressive posture. However, how many Americans are there who do not have similar medical care – simply because they cannot afford it with the income they are earning. Children and seniors are most vulnerable to the diseases that are a part of our world, given the frailty of their immune systems.

What we do hear about in the media is about age, and youth, and experience or the lack thereof, and it is usually directed to the candidates themselves rather than to the nation as a whole. Race and gender also persist, again as it relates to the candidates, and not to the work force of this nation and how disparity continues to be a problem in the business world of the executives.

This week's Torah portion, *Metzora*, has been a significant help to me to focus on the issues of the campaign trail. Many of its verses are related to the ritual cleansing of the community. It does not limit itself to just people who are ill. The Torah also speaks about the cleansing of homes that have become damaged by mold and mildew. "Hurricane Katrina, anyone!?"

My daughter, Batya, returned from a week in New Orleans with her classmates after spending several days cleaning up a local church and painting a house that is being rehabbed for a poor family in District 9, which is the area that was most affected by the levee break several years ago. I, too, was in New Orleans, seeing first hand the area that was under water. Yellow lines mark the level to which the waters rose. The majority of the homes that were flooded by the levee break and the surge of water, still remain uninhabitable, because people cannot afford to rebuild. They live in the small trailer homes supplied by FEMA, with no cars to remove them should the levee threaten to break with the onset of another storm. Batya heard two stories, one told by a Jewish family that was able to rebuild their home after the bottom level was submerged. The other tale was told by their housekeeper who was locked up in the Superdome where rape and crime were rampant underneath a wind-torn roof. But I digress... And so have our political candidates.

Each one wants us to believe that they will be the advocate for change in America, that each of them has the right answer to correspond to the ills of our nation that will allow us to recover from

the economic crisis that plagues our country, from the foreign policies overseas that has left over 4000 of our young men and women dead on the battlefield of foreign soil, from the lack of quality of education for our children, from the poverty that threatens to strip the middle class of all the things that they worked so hard to achieve. What Metzora seems to be teaching us is that any healing will not take place at the hands of the politicians nor the physicians. Rather it is the priests who have the answers, that establishing a firm foundation in faith and an equally strong belief in God is what will save us from certain disaster. As Rabbi Joshua Heschel once said when he marched with the great Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama, "My feet are praying!"

How will I vote in this next election. I, too, will allow my faith in God to guide my conscience as I seek out a candidate whom I can trust will do the right thing, by bringing healing to a nation that is in great need of tikkun olam. As each of us take up our spoon and our feather at the end of the week, to search our homes for the last bit of chametz that remains, may each of us be conscious of those homes that have become uninhabitable because of the "chametz" that remains, because of our indifference, our lack of response, and may God continue to guide us along the right path, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, as we follow the dictates of the Passover Seder, "Let all those who hunger, and all those who are in need, come and be a part of our seder..."