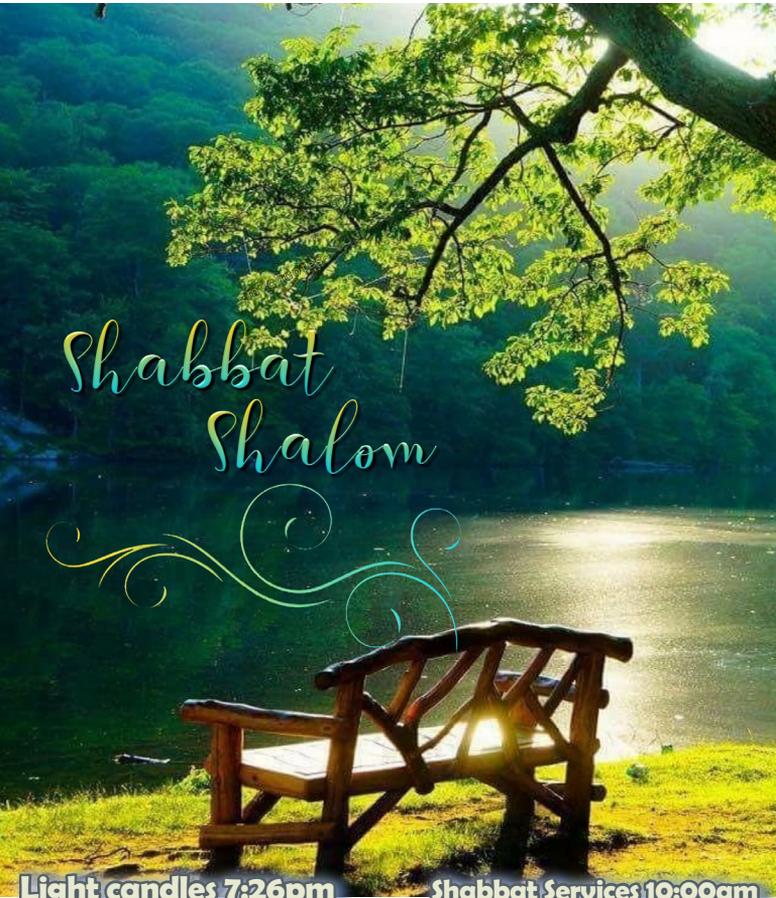




Carnegie Shul Chatter

March 30, 2022



Shabbat
Shalom

Light candles 7:26pm

Shabbat Services 10:00am

Zoom in for Services

Shabbat services are held by Zoom, at 10am and last 60-90 minutes. A link is sent to all Shul members; if you don't receive it, contact Wendy Panizzi at panizziw@gmail.com.

Partners in Perfection

“As we proclaim that this newborn, a seemingly pure creation of God, is in fact not whole, we assert that the world too is incomplete, and we are strengthened by our community to join together to partner with God to pursue justice and perfect creation.” What a great insight at the very end of this week’s parshah commentary.

I very much like the concept that we are partnered with God to pursue justice and perfect creation. Can we really perfect creation? If God himself is perfect shouldn’t the world that God created also be perfect?

We all know that the world is not perfect, and that man, God’s ultimate creation, is also far from perfect. Man has a good side, but he also has an evil side, and God has given man the free will to choose between which of these two inclinations he will follow.

But he has also given us a Torah of laws and mitzvot to point us in the proper direction, and he has given us the intellect and capacity to create beautiful things on our own. And so in our daily lives we see the influences of the evil side in the crime and wars that are always in the news, but we see also, and even

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more so, the good side in the beautiful buildings, works of art, and music that man has created and erected in this world. And we also see how man tries to bring goodness and justice into the world through acts of kindness, charity, and compassion.

Yes, wars like that which is taking place in Ukraine show the worst of mankind as people die and suffer needlessly at the hands of an oppressor, but they also show the better side of mankind, as relief efforts to help those who have been attacked abound.



God doesn't do everything for us. He doesn't totally eliminate the evil inclination from our midst, but He relishes the opportunity to partner with us to pursue justice and perfect creation.

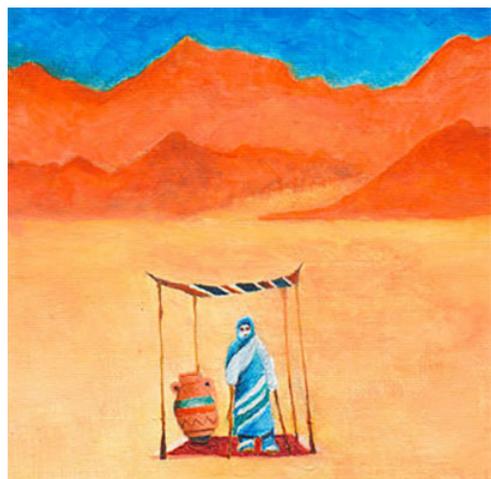
Tazria in a Nutshell

Leviticus 12:1–13:59

From Chabad.org

The Parshah of Tazria continues the discussion of the laws of tumah v'taharah, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.



Tzaraat (often mistranslated as leprosy) is a supra-natural plague, which can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on a person's skin (dark red or green in garments), a kohen is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the kohen pronounces it tamei (impure) or tahor (pure).

A person afflicted with tzaraat must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the tzaraat recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When discussing this week's parshah, ~~Tazria~~, many commentators focus upon the Tzaraat, or leprosy, discussed in the parshah. I have chosen, however, to include a commentary from the website of American Jewish World Service that discusses another topic discussed in the parshah, circumcision. We all know that circumcision was an important part of the covenant established between God and Abraham and that the circumcision ritual is still an important practice for Jewish boys to this very day, although some are now challenging circumcision as a cruel practice that society should condemn.

But what of circumcision? The following commentary provides an interesting insight into the relevance of this Jewish law and tradition.

Tazria

Posted by Dani Passow

American Jewish World Service

Parshat Tazria begins with the laws of circumcision: “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”¹ It’s striking how this child, made in the image of God, innocent and pure, is subject to such a radical “fixing” so soon after birth. A reference to circumcision in a midrash on Parshat Tazria sheds light on the meaning of this ritual:

Turnus Rufus the wicked asked Rabbi Akiva: “Whose deeds are better—Those of God or those of humans?” Rabbi Akiva answered, “Those of humans are better.”...Turnus Rufus asked, “Why do you circumcise yourselves?” [Rabbi Akiva] replied, “I knew you would ask me about that, which is why I pre-empted and told you that things made by humans are better than things made by God.” Rabbi Akiva then brought Turnus Rufus two items: stalks of wheat and baked rolls. Rabbi Akiva said: “These [the stalks of wheat] are the deeds of God, and these [the baked rolls] are the deeds of humans. Are these [baked rolls] not more beautiful?”²



Turnus Rufus’s initial question is audacious, surpassed in its daring only by Rabbi Akiva’s surprising answer. We would expect the great sage to laugh at the suggestion that the omnipotent and benevolent Master of the Universe can even be compared with earthly humans, who, we learn in Bereishit, are made from dust and will return to dust.³ And yet, Rabbi Akiva’s almost blasphemous response dares to rank the work of humans higher than that of God. In his estimation, circumcision—the symbol of our covenant—acts as a bold reminder that God did not create a perfect world; rather, God left the world unfinished, inviting us to be partners in creation.

The original context of the first circumcision in Bereishit provides some indication that perhaps the boldness displayed by Rabbi Akiva is itself a central part of the covenant—a covenant that is not merely God’s charge to us to complete the world, but a Divine mandate to repair it, to seek what’s broken or unjust and right those wrongs. Immediately following the story of Avraham’s circumcision is the epic drama of Sodom and Gemorrah. God tells Avraham that God will destroy these cities because “their sin has become very grave.” Avraham famously challenges God: “To bring death upon the righteous along with the wicked...It shall be a sacrilege to you. Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?!”⁴

God never rebukes Avraham for his courageous challenge. In fact, God seems to have even invited Avraham to stand up for justice by rhetorically asking: “Shall I conceal from Avraham



what I am about to do?”⁵ Moreover, God explains the rationale for consulting Avraham in terms of the relationship they have forged through their covenant: “[Avraham] commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God, doing charity and justice, in order that God may bring about for Avraham that which God had spoken.”⁶

The circumcision covenant gave Avraham the right to challenge God and protest injustice. As children of Avraham, it is the covenant, then, that allows us to boldly declare God’s world broken, to challenge the world as it is, and even to challenge God. But along with this right comes the responsibility to be soldiers of justice. Not only are we permitted to stand up for justice—even when it means challenging God—we are required to.

It has often struck me as odd that circumcision—such an intimate act—takes place as a public ceremony. Perhaps, though, circumcision needs to be a communal act. As we proclaim that this newborn, a seemingly pure creation of God, is in fact not whole, we assert that the world too is incomplete, and we are strengthened by our community to join together to partner with God to pursue justice and perfect creation.

1 Vayikra 12:2-3.

2 Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 5.

3 Bereishit 3:19.

4 Bereishit 18:20, 25.

5 Ibid 18:17.

6 Ibid 18: 19.

Yahrtzeit

This week the Carnegie Shul acknowledges the yahrtzeit of:

Rose Ann Tisherman

May her memory be for a blessing.

Donations

The Carnegie Shul is most grateful for the following recent donations:

Phillip H Harris

Yahrtzeit Plaque In Memory of Minnie Harris

Roger Wilk

In memory of Morris Wilks

“These are a few of our favorite Jewish things”

Western Pennsylvania Small Congregational Clergy Explorations

Clergy Explorations is a series of the Western PA Small Congregations initiative, in collaboration with Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and the Jewish Community Legacy Project. This series and future programs are designed to enhance the Jewish experiences of the members of the 13 small congregations in the Western PA region.

Program #4: PaRDeš:

The Garden of Biblical Interpretation

Sunday, April 10, 1:00 pm

Presented by Rabbi Bruce Gottlieb of Sons of Israel Congregation in DuBois

Rabbinic interpretation of the Bible is multifaceted and sometimes confusing.

This discussion will explore the different types of interpretation and will help unravel the mystery.

Register at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlucueqpjkiGd3QMlFsoff0WYtnlpjHhU9X>

Mark Your Calendar!

Program #5:

Conversion to Judaism: Different Eras, Different Views

Wednesday, June 1, 7:00 pm

Presented by Cantor Michal Gray-Schaffer of Congregation B'nai Abraham in Butler

In a Power Point and discussion session, we will explore the views and practices concerning conversion in the biblical and early rabbinic eras.

Prepare to be surprised!