

Dear Friends,

Compassion! What a sweet and timely message from the Torah this week!

We read in Deuteronomy – from a book more commonly known for an angry God filled with fire and brimstone – the following verses: “When you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to and obey the Eternal your God. For the Eternal your God is a compassionate God, who will not fail you nor let you perish; God will not forget the covenant made on oath with your fathers.”

Sometimes a kindly reassurance is incredibly vital. Sometimes, even from one who may seem distant and even terrifying, such as the reproachful God of Deuteronomy, or a short-tempered parent, it is exactly what one needs amid calamity or anguish.

Oddly, It appears that we humans may be, or may become, dubious about compassion. Torah – or Deuteronomy which is infamous for an intemperate and furious God – seems to describe a people more fearful of authority figures such as God or Moses, and less expectant of kindness and compassion. Yet, isn't that exactly what we expect our God, or God, in general, to offer?

In the High Holy Day and festival prayers, which I am reading seemingly daily at present as we are preparing a new Machzor for these virtual High Holy Days, we repeatedly call God: “Adonai, Adonai – God, compassionate, gracious, endlessly patient, loving and true, showing mercy to the thousandth generation; forgiving evil, defiance, and wrongdoing; granting pardon.”

It seems that we must convince ourselves, again and again, that God really *IS* this God of compassion. It appears for we human beings, whether in the home environment, with siblings or schoolmates, at work or out in the neighborhood, that once we have been bruised or have witnessed retribution, we become skittish. And, rightfully, so. Hurt doesn't dissipate so easily, even for the one with the thickest skin. In fact, the thick-skinned one likely became thick-skinned exactly because of too many bruises.

Thus, our verses, today. In a world of surging COVID virus, of incessant street-demonstrations and anger at policing, and job loss and recession and economic uncertainty hanging about like a smoke cloud, we are in a world of distress and anguish. And, a nice, kindly, thoughtful, compassionate word would be sweet and well-received.

Perhaps, here is just the tonic which we need: “When you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to and obey the Eternal your God. For the Eternal your God is a compassionate God, who will not fail you nor let you perish; God will not forget the covenant made on oath with your fathers.”

Shabbat Shalom,

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