



Sparks on February 2010 Torah Portions for Disability Awareness & Inclusion



The Torah portions for the month of February--Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month--provide rich material for sermons or studies on topics related to disabilities and inclusion. Board of Rabbis rabbinic intern Miriam Philips uncovered the following texts and topics as potential sermons in Torah portions for February 2010.

Terumah, Shabbat 2/4-2/5

(Exodus 25:1-27:19; Rosh Chodesh)

Also relevant for the second and fourth Shabbat portions in February, **T'tzaveh** and **Vayakheil**.

- The construction of the ark, *Mishkan* and Tent of Meeting may be used as a metaphor for a diverse community that engages and includes all its members. In *parshiyot* Terumah, Tetzaveh, and Vayekheil, the construction of the *Mishkan*, the Tent of Meeting, and/or the ark, is described. Each of these holy dwelling places for God is made up of very different pieces. Missing any, though, they could not exist. The *Mishkan* and altar are made of acacia wood. Acacia trees are small and limb and trunk are very twisted. In order to make the *Mishkan* or the ark, pieces that were very different and oddly shaped had to be pieced together to make up the whole. We need each part of our community, cherished for its individual beauty, for our Tent of Meeting to be holy, for God to dwell amongst us, for our community to shine like gold (Parshah Terumah, Ex. 25:8). "And there [the Tent of Meeting] I will meet with the children of Israel, and it will be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting, and the altar . . . And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Eternal their God, that brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them; I am the Eternal their God." (Parshah Terumah, Ex. 29: 43-46)

T'tzaveh, Shabbat Fri. 2/11-12

(Exodus 27:20 – 30:10; Ezekiel 43:10-27)

- "And you shall speak to all those who are wise-hearted (*chochmei lev*), who I have filled with a spirit of wisdom (*ru'ach chochmah*), and they shall make the garments of Aaron to consecrate him to his service as priest to Me." (Ex. 28: 3)

- “And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel on the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goes in to the holy place, for a reminder/memorial (*zikaron*) before Adonai continually.” (Exodus 28:29)
- *Especially* in our holiest places do our leaders need to “bear the names of *all* the children of Israel upon” their hearts, our hearts. Knowing someone’s name means knowing *them*, acknowledging them as a person.
- Aaron wore the names of all the children of Israel to show God that his community was a complete community, striving for holiness. Individually, each child of Israel was worthy of a gem. But only together did they make a holy breastplate. Only together were they a whole, a community complete. Together, the strength of one complemented weakness in another; only together could the creativity of the one be fully realized in the energy of all. Individually we each have strengths and arenas in which we thrive. But community is holy because it has the almost-divine potential to complement one person or group’s weaknesses with another’s strengths, to help one another overcoming challenges and to help one another fully realize strengths. Even more, together, the community’s combined personalities have capabilities and strengths that no individual has.
- Haftarah, Ezekiel 43:10-11. A further drash on inclusion: The whole, *complete* structure of the Temple or *Mishkan* acts to teach people God’s instructions, what God desires of us, and helps us individually and as a community keep God’s commandments, be good people (verses 10-11). Thus, if any part of God’s dwelling place on earth—the community of Israel—is omitted, the people will not be able to learn fully God’s instructions.

Ki Tissa, Shabbat, 2/18 – 2/19

(Ex. 30:11 – 34:35; Haftarah I Kings 18:1-39)

- Each person has an equal stake in the sanctuary, in the community of God: a half shekel to redeem the soul of every man/person amongst the children of Israel (Ex. 30:11-13)
- It’s important that each person (or, each adult man) be *counted* amongst the Children of Israel (Ex. 30:11-16).
- Ex. 34:29-35, Moses’ shining face: Moses face shone after his communing with God on Mt. Sinai forty days and forty nights, but Moses did not realize it. His shining face frightened the people, so Moses veiled his countenance, except in God’s presence. Might we merit Moses’ shining face? Although Moses’ radiance was a badge of honor, its strangeness and extra-worldliness frightened people. Can we look at strangeness and see the radiance of God’s presence, or will we ask people to cover up what disturbs us?

Vayak'hel, Shabbat, 2/25 – 2/26

(Ex. 35:1 – 38:20; Haftarah, I Kings 7:40-50)

- Ex. 35:2: Shabbat teaches us to stop and savor and appreciate each moment and each person for what each is.
- Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson's sermon on learning to keep Shabbat from his autistic son Jacob, who delighted in each Shabbat moment and refused to rush, can be found at:
<http://judaism.ajula.edu/Content/ContentUnit.asp?CID=1527&u=5160&t=0>