

MORASHAH
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 811 Palisade Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666
www.utj.org 201.801.0707

Rabbi Yaakov Siegel

Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Pinchas

The story is told of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, that one year in his synagogue on the High Holy Days, an unlearned man cried out in prayer "Oh God, I am a poor tailor. I admit that sometimes I steal some cloth, and sometimes I overcharge. But what are my sins compared to Yours? You take parents from children, husbands from wives! Let's make a deal. I'll forgive you if you forgive me!" The entire congregation was in shock at this blasphemy. The Rabbi approached the man, looked him in the face, and said "Dear Jew, you had God over such a barrel and you only asked Him to forgive you?!"

In this week's *parashah*, Pinchas, (Numbers28:15), we read that we are to bring a goat as a "sin offering for the Lord." There is a shocking Midrash, quoted by Rashi, that God asks us to bring a sin offering for Him, for having diminished the Moon. The Midrash relates that the Sun and Moon were originally created with equal brilliance, when the Moon asked "Can there be a King with two crowns?" (Or alternatively, two kings with one crown). God says, "You're complaining? Grow smaller!" The Moon says, "I only asked a question!" God says, "OK, I'll give you the stars as ornaments!" The Moon repeats, "I only asked a question!" God says, "OK, in the future, Israel will fix its calendar by you." The Moon repeats, "I only asked a question!" God finally says, "I have sinned! Let an atonement be brought for me!"

From this theologically difficult Midrash, the Kabbalah interprets that at this point in Creation, evil comes into the world, but the possibility of *Teshuvah* (Repentance) and renewal do, also. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (Bratzlav) interprets as follows: In this Midrash, the rabbis are presenting a metaphor of God being less than perfect. (A devout Maimonist would cringe at this!) As a result, we can come before Him with our imperfections and hopes of renewal. Furthermore, Rosh HaShanah comes out on the New Moon. We ask God for renewal at the very time when He is asking the same!

The lessons here are many, but let's examine two. First of all, God wants us to relate to Him without being intimidated by His perfection. He shows us an imperfect face! Secondly, when we look at other people's faults, let's remember our own shortcomings!

The monthly renewal of the Moon is a symbol for the renewal of our People, as well as our own individual quest for coming out of darkness into the fullness of light, with the hope of a future, infinitely brighter light.

With Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, let us look at our imperfect world, and see the promise of Redemption and Renewal!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Siegel is spiritual leader of the Jewish Center of Island Park, Island Park, NY.

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