

Rabbi's Column – August 5, 2019

Some Not so Random, Random Jottings:

In other towns where I have worked, when there were local Jewish newspapers, there was usually a page with the synagogues listed and their service times. If they had a Rabbi and Cantor, services were always listed as being led by the Rabbi and Cantor - even when they were gone on vacation or at home for another reason. In our community we have the weekly newsletter, and it always lists services and Torah Study. In one sense this is always true, as everything one can learn about the world and oneself is a matter of Torah - and if one is approaching Tefillot with the appropriate intention (Kavvanah), then you are learning something new about yourself every week. In another sense, this may not always be true. One of the strengths of the Mount Sinai Congregation's community is that the leader does not have to be a carbon copy of any other person who leads. Sometimes, the tradition of the leader on a given Shabbat morning is that Torah Study as part of services is only done when there is a minyan. When there is no minyan, then Torah Study is done as an individual, at home.

When this happened recently, somebody complained that they were not told in advance. Advance notice of anything but musical enhancements of the service should not be expected, as the service structure here in Cheyenne has always been dependent upon the choice made by the leader for that particular morning. Ambiguity and uncertainty is what should be considered the norm - reflecting life in general. Tefillot are not an opportunity to escape life - they are an opportunity to see how well we are doing as partners with God in making the world a better place. (I will be saying a bit more about this during the High Holidays.)

Only one thing is certain. God gifts each of us with a life, and this gift is renewed every time we wake up and find an entire world around us. There are no guarantees about the quality or the length of the life that we are gifted. These are the realities that are reflected in the traditional ways of attaining God moments: Tefillot, Learning and Actively making the world a better place.

In Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, the importance of training in believing in the unseen is stressed. Children need to, for at least a while, think and feel that something like the Tooth Fairy exists. This is so that as adults they can think and feel that things like mercy and justice exist - for there is even less proof of those items than there is for the Tooth Fairy within a child's life. As he puts it - if I do not replace Santa Claus tonight then tomorrow the sun will not rise. A fiery globe of hot gas will be seen ascending over the horizon instead, and with it will disappear any thought of people behaving better than they do.

I forget if it was Pratchett or somebody else who had a character state, sometimes more than once: There is no justice. There is just us.

As Jews it is normative for us to say to this - yes, we agree and "just us" should strive to enable justice/mercy, for that is the job we have taken on as God's Junior Partners.

I do leave compassion to God. Everything that wakes up in the morning does so with God's help and compassion. If I were in charge, there might be some people and whole classes of critters that I might declare to be as necessary for today's world as the dinosaurs, and those critters could just stay gone.

May your week be filled with those delightful fictions - harmony, kindness and justice/mercy.