

Shabbat Shalom

FROM CONGREGATION BETH YESHURUN

A special Shabbat message for you from Rabbi Sarah Fort



Recently, I was working with a young student. They had to put their phone away, but I kept hearing ringing. It was their watch. One of those new-fangled smart watches, that can text and control music and God knows what else. It kept pinging with text messages. "Sorry," they said, "I'm on a group chat for a school project." Apparently, there was some disagreement over who was doing what and when. "I'm so fed up," the student said with a sigh, "If they don't get it together I'll just do it myself."

In parashat Shmini, we have another group project with members of differing viewpoints. Aaron's and his sons, the other priests, were tasked with maintaining the fires for the sacrifices. Everything seems to be going well. But then two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, veer off-course.

"Each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before God strange fire... then fire came forth from God and consumed them; thus they died at the God's insistence."

What was so terrible that they needed to die so violently and immediately? The rabbis offer an interesting answer, or rather four answers. It is possible, they say, that it was the "strange fire" that sealed their fate. Maybe it's that they didn't do exactly what they were told, or that they trod too close to holy space. But it's the rabbis' last answer that interests me.

They offer the option that perhaps it was because "they did not take counsel from each other." They clue in on the phrase "each took his fire pan" as proof. The rabbis posit that because Nadav and Avihu conspired separate from the group, and from each other, that they wronged God so horribly they deserved the most final of punishments.

God wants us to co-exist together, as difficult as it can be at times. We were not meant to be islands. After all, in the first story of the creation of humanity God created a single human being and promptly split it in two. In the second, Adam only lasted so long before God formed Eve out of his rib-either way, we were literally created to co-exist!

To refuse to seek counsel from others would be an insult to our very human nature. Yes, it is difficult to consult with and listen to others. And the rabbis aren't saying everyone must act exactly the same. But to listen to each other, absorb various viewpoints-"take counsel from one another"-that is what God desires. To be a world unto ourselves is akin to death-how much are we really living, the Torah asks, if we are not living in community?

May we all be blessed with ears and hearts wide open to others, this Shabbat and always.

~Rabbi Sarah Fort

STAY CONNECTED:

WWW.BETHYESHURUN.ORG

