



**FROM THE RABBI'S
FLASH DRIVE**

**TORAH PORTION
OF THE WEEK**

**TZAV
LEVITICUS 6:1 ~ 8:36**

Friday, April 3, 2020

**Commentary by
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A number of years ago I was asked to officiate at the funeral of a resident who was not Jewish at my previous nursing home. It is not something that occurs often. However, when I am asked to do so, it is an extreme honor to eulogize someone whose religion is different than yours. Carmalita was a former nurse's aide who was stricken down by a stroke a couple of months prior to her retirement. Following her rehabilitation, she was unable to speak and needed the help of a motorized wheelchair to help her get around.

I met Carmalita when she was at the nursing home for ten years, and followed her movements around the campus for seven more years, greeting the flowers along the path each day of spring and summer, and welcoming the stray birds on days when snow did not block her path.

The staff told me that she would often reach out with her good hand and pull up weeds, which she transplanted in her bedroom where she could watch them blossom. She thrived in this enviro-

onment where the birds sang to her heart and the mountains which she watched on a daily basis expanded that heart, as she listened to the prayer dogs bark to her, carrying on a conversation with God that she was incapable of having in a more conventional way.

When Carmalita was not traversing the campus in her wheelchair she could be found on her floor, stopping briefly at every door, before moving on to the next one. I was told by her son that it was her custom to stop at each resident's door and offer a blessing for their good health. This was who she was, a person who cherished God with all of her heart, all of her soul, and the core of her being ~ despite her disability ~ in the same way that she cherished the people who were a part of her life in the nursing home. The stroke may have slowed her down to a degree, but it certainly did not rob her of her independence, nor did it take away her ability to bring joy into her life and the life of others.

When I wrote that Carmalita was robbed of her speech, I was not totally honest. She loved music. Often she would hum along with the words as if the song was being drawn directly from her heart. It has heartening to me to see her soul smile when she hummed along with the music. Her joy was expressed in one other way, two phrases that brought a smile to everyone's face when she uttered, "Okie dokie!" or a "Mighty well!"

If there is a single lesson that I have learned from Carmalita it is the need to be more observant -- not just in a religious sense of having faith and being able to cope with life's adversities; but more so in observing the world in which we live and being grateful for the gifts that God has given us to delight us each day. "She woke up to see the beauty outside," according to her daughter. But, as her son pointed out in his conversations with me regarding his mother, Carmalita woke up each day to see the beauty inside each of us. All one had to do was to see the twinkle in her eye when she gazed at you and smiled -- mischievously!

I found myself taking a page out of Carmalita's book as I went around the JSL campus, going from floor to floor and then room to room, uttering a blessing, asking God to watch over our residents along with the doctors, nurses, aides, *adirim*, and other staff who take care of their daily needs. It is my honor to be the conduit of God's energy as we seek healing and holiness during this auspicious time when lives are threatened by such an unforgiving virus.

This Shabbat we read from the Torah portion, Tzav, which means "command." God tells Moses to instruct Aaron on how he and the priests shall keep the fires of the offerings burning by cleaning out the ashes from the previous day's activities each morning. This portion comes two weeks before Passover when Jewish home owners are intensifying their efforts to rid their homes of the *chametz* that has accumulated over the past year, that threatens us from being cleansed for the holiday.

In similar fashion, there is a spiritual component to cleansing ourselves. We, too, need to tend to the fires that keep us connected to God, through our prayers and through our actions. This year, things are even more difficult than in years past. The *toom'ah*, the impurity, that threatens us physically along with the fear that it has created through close contact, is real.

At this time of the year when asking questions is a part of the tradition of our *seders*, we wonder: What stories will we tell future generations about the coronavirus and how we stopped it from destroying all of humanity, enslaving us to isolation in our homes, a plague of unprecedented proportions? What are the ways that we shall bring freedom to our lives as we practice the second part of our seder, *ur'chatz*, washing the *toom'ah* from our lives.

May the prayers that we recite bring blessing to us all as we seek lives that are free from disease, free to hold hands with those who are isolated from us, free to be in the presence of other