

Practicing Patience: Yom Kippur 5779

Once upon a time, in a faraway kingdom, there lived a prince. Being a prince, he had a good life. He ate the most scrumptious meals, and he drank the most expensive wine. He wore the finest hand tailored clothing, rode upon the most beautiful horses, and sat upon the most luxurious furniture. His parents, the king and queen, adored their only son, and doted upon him so that he never wanted for anything.

But one day, everything changed. Suddenly, in the middle of the great hall, the prince took off his clothes, squatted down on the floor, and began to act... like a rooster. He squeaked and squawked, he flapped his arms, and he began pecking at the floor. He stopped using human language, and he only ate corn, on the ground, that he pecked at and gobbled up with his mouth. At night, he slept on the floor in straw that had been gathered from the nearby stables.

The king and queen were shocked and upset. They didn't know what to do! They called in everyone they could think of to help- all the doctors and nurses of the kingdom, the mystical healers, the soothsayers, the fortune-tellers, even the royal psychologist. But nobody was able to make a difference. The rooster-prince continued to squeak and squawk and flap his arms and peck.

Time passed, and the rooster-prince didn't improve. Then, one day, a wise woman who had heard about the prince's condition arrived at the palace. "I would like to try and cure the prince," she said. The king and queen asked, "What is your technique? What medicines will you use? How exactly do you hope to accomplish this?" They had grown weary, tired, and skeptical that their son would ever return to his princely self. "Just give me a year," the wise woman said. The king and queen, with nothing to lose, agreed.

The next day, the wise woman returned to the palace. As usual, the price was squawking and strutting around and pecking at the floor.

The wise woman got undressed, jumped under the table, and then she started squeaking and squawking, flapping her arms, and pecking at the floor. The prince flashed a strange look at the wise woman, and in his best rooster voice he said to her, “What are you doing here?” And the wise woman answered in her best rooster voice, “I am a rooster. Can’t you tell?” “Oh,” said the prince, “Well I am a rooster too. Welcome!” And for the next few weeks, the wise woman and the rooster-prince would squeak and squawk and peck at the floor together.

One day, the wise woman squeaked and squawked, but then she got dressed. “What are you doing?” said the rooster prince, “Roosters don’t wear clothes!” And the wise woman squawked back “Well I was getting a little chilly, so I decided to put on some clothes. But even if you wear clothes, you can still be a rooster.”

The rooster-prince thought about this for a moment, but then he said, “It is a bit drafty in here. I’m going to put on my pants and shirt

too.” And he got dressed. Then they squeaked and squawked and pecked some more.

More time passed, and then one day the wise woman got up from squeaking and squawking on the floor and pecking at her food, took a fork, and told the rooster-prince, “I’m still a rooster, but I’m a little tired of pecking at corn, so I’m going to take this fork and eat a meal at the table. You’re welcome to join me.” The rooster-prince thought about this for a moment, and then he decided that he too would join the wise woman at the table.” The two of them feasted on soup, salad, fine meats, and chocolate cake for dessert. The rooster-prince was so happy that he crowed and the wise woman crowed with him.

One day, after even more time had passed, the wise woman got up from her squeaking and squawking and told the prince, “I’m not so comfortable on the floor anymore. Roosters can sleep in a bed, don’t you think?” And after she retreated to a bedroom, the rooster-prince went back to his old room to have a nice long sleep in his own bed.

Even more time passed, and one day the wise woman got up from her squeaking and squawking and pecking at the floor and told the rooster-prince, (in regular voice) “I’m tired of all this squeaking and squawking and pecking at the floor. We can be roosters and have conversations. We can read and write and sing together. We can talk together and talk to other people.” And to that, the rooster-prince replied, no longer in a rooster voice, “Yes. Let’s talk and be friends and then I shall read books and eat delicious food and ride upon horses.” And the prince did all these things with the wise woman at his side. He was back to his princely self and one day, he became a great king who every so often crowed with delight at the taste of corn¹.

I tell this story to you this morning because it is a tale that teaches *savlanut*, patience. The prince can return to his princely state because, above all, the wise woman is patient. As we observe Yom Kippur, reflecting on our accomplishments and our misdeeds, we may discover

¹ Adapted from “The Rooster Who Would Be King” in Three Times CHAI, pp. 8-10

that patience is often that critical piece that determines whether we failed or succeeded. If we can cultivate a sense of patience, we too can be like the wise woman and improve and mend our relationships with others. Let us take some time to examine patience, what it means, and how we can find more of it in our lives.

The tradition of mussar, Jewish ethical behavior, looks at the Hebrew root of patience and discovers some interesting connections. *Savlanut* means patience in modern Hebrew. The word shares a common root with the verb *lisbol*, meaning to suffer, endure, and tolerate. Think about all the things that make you impatient; waiting for a spouse to finish getting dressed, a slower swimmer in your lane, traffic on the beltway. In these moments, we may feel like we cannot tolerate the situation. But another word related to patience can help. The word *sabal* shares the same root as *savlanut* and *lisbol*. A *sabal* is a porter, as in someone who carries luggage. So according to the modern mussar master Alan Morinis, cultivating patience means bearing up,

enduring, and tolerating your impatient inclinations and carrying them with you like you would a heavy piece of luggage.

We know this is not easy. When we are feeling impatient, we want relief from whatever is ailing us. And we often get it. We live in a society where a quick fix is a click of the mouse or a phone call away. Sitting impatiently and trying to bear it up seems counterintuitive and discomfoting. But that is often what Jewish tradition teaches us to do.

Our Torah reading for this morning, Nitzavim, guides us toward becoming more patient. In the opening verses of Deuteronomy chapter 30, the root *shuv*, which is the root of *teshuvah*, repentance, and also means turning, appears seven times. That means that turning is important and that turning is difficult. It's something we try to do over and over again. That is why we have Yom Kippur every year. We know that even though we will do some things better this year than last, we will continue to mess up. As Rabbi Alan Lew of blessed memory writes, "transformation does not have a beginning, a middle, or an end. We

never reach the end of teshuvah. It is always going on.”² The wise woman in our story was successful because she kept pace with the prince. She took his transformation one step at a time, befriending him and meeting him where he was. She did not chastise him or try to make an instant fix. She patiently guided him back to himself. She helped him to turn and to do teshuvah with her seemingly infinite reservoir of patience.

We would do well to emulate the wise woman on a personal as well as communal level. We can all think of things that are broken in America. It seems as if especially during the past couple years, our country, like the rooster-prince, has not behaved how it should. But we would be wise to remember that the problems of our country go much deeper than the current administration. The midterm elections will not solve our problems and nor will the eventual election of a new administration. To turn our country will require that each of us act like

² Rabbi Alan Lew, [This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared](#), 154

the wise woman, meeting each challenge with patience and persistence. If we become impatient, we risk making things worse.

A group of patient and wise women and men in our community is the Temple Sinai Gun Violence Prevention Group. Following the November 2016 election, the group decided to turn their efforts to the Maryland state government where the legislature was struggling to pass a bill to take away guns from domestic abusers. The bill's fate was unclear, but our group patiently organized, called legislators, went to Annapolis, and made the case for why this bill needed to pass. In April of this year, the legislature passed the bill and Governor Hogan signed it into law. Now, our Gun Violence Prevention Group is working on a program designed to bring gun safety advocates and gun owners together to talk and build bridges of understanding. We will not solve America's gun woes in one day or with one law, but with patience and persistence, we can make a difference.

Today we stand before God and we resolve to make ourselves better. We know that the quest for self-improvement is difficult and ongoing. Stopping our squawking and pecking habits will not happen overnight. But if we can cultivate patience, we can succeed. May 5779 be a year of growth and change for each of us. May we work patiently and steadily to heal our country. And may each of us, like the rooster-prince, find ourselves blessed to have wise woman and men in our lives who can guide us, turn us, and teach us patience.