

Rest Ethic

By Kochav Yehudis

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I believe a better world is possible.

I do not always believe this wholeheartedly. Some days I do not believe it at all. I hope I will see this better world in my lifetime, but I fear the *world* to come - *tikkun olam* - will arrive in a *time* to come when my own time on this earth has passed. Still, I see that better world as inevitable. What does that have to do with this week's parshat about building a place to keep sacred text? I see reflections of what I long for in *tikkun olam* in Vayakhel-Pekudei.

Vayakhel-Pekudei starts with the very gravest of commands; to keep shabbos. Before a seemingly endless description of work needed and labor provided, it is important to remember that even in the midst of all that effort, rest is sacred. I make no secret of the fact that I am a convert to Judaism, or rather that I came home to it. It was a sort of open secret that my father's mother was Jewish, but I am the first practicing Jew in my family in two generations. Five years ago now, I attended my very first shabbos service, which coincided with a bar mitzvah. The celebrant's father spoke about this sacred, separate nature of the holy day. He noted that it's a time for shaking things up, and that it was so beautiful that Judaism made this not only special, but a *regular occurrence*. I think it's important to note that the man who said this was not Jewish. Rest, doing other than we would normally, is a ritual that should be open to all, and I believe it will be in the world to come.

The world does not become better without rest recognized for the sacred act it is.

I am not very good at rest. I'm autistic and have been officially declared on the borderline of ADHD. I need things to occupy my mind, my hands. An insomniac, I'm bad at rest in its most - basic form, sleep. I'm what many would label "high functioning" but to maintain that I have to work constantly. Not necessarily at wage labor, mind you, but at keeping track of time, to-do (or "could-do" as I prefer to think of them) lists, compulsively masking in most social situations and my body always vigilant to face down sensory overwhelm.

Of course, it doesn't help that the soil of the culture I am grown in is one that idolizes "work ethic." We glorify overexertion. Everyone from ordinary people to celebrities show up to work with the flu. Sometimes they are fine. Sometimes they have strokes. I myself have more than once worked through month-long respiratory illness. The main motivation for any work toward vaccines during the first year of the on-going covid-19 pandemic was so that businesses could re-open. Ordinary people working checkout lines were suddenly "essential workers" and supposedly deserved a round of applause while no material support was given on a systemic level to them and their families.

For most, there is no choice. It's hustle or starve. And there seems to be less and less to show for all this hard work. Pension plans vanish. Companies increasingly hire part-time employees to avoid paying out benefits. And then there are those of us for

whom regular employment is not an option. Up to 85% of autistic adults are unemployed or under-employed. I live in that statistic.

Now seems like a good time to remind you that I think a better world is possible. I think you should too, and as I said toward the start, there are threads of one worth tugging on in Vayakhel-Pekudei. It starts with the very first line. Before you work, remember this; rest is sacred. Rest comes first. Imagine it, if you can, a world built on Rest Ethic.

Much is made of skill in Vaykhel-Pekudei. G-ddess-given skill is laid on the capable shoulders of important builders, all the women with weaving skills weave, including those who specialize in goat hair. Everyone who has been blessed with skill works to their utmost not because they *have* to, but of their own free will and only after a reminder that rest is sacred.

“And everyone who excelled in ability and everyone whose spirit moved him came...men and women, all whose hearts moved them...”

A world built on Rest Ethic is undoubtedly one where no one will be asked to labor outside their skillset, and instead encouraged to find their particular blessings and strengths. A world where our hearts speak to us and are heard. This particular *tikkun olam* I imagine is also one where communities will work together, as we see in the Parshat.

“and all the skilled women spun with their own hands...”

This world we now find ourselves in, before *tikkun olam*, scarcity plays a big role. Or rather the invention of scarcity. Scarcity of work, food, money, time, rest. But in a world of Rest Ethic? In that world where everyone - *everyone, the whole community* - works within their specific skillset to meet the needs of the all, the people are so overly generous of heart that they bring more to their fledgling holy space than is needed.

“...their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.”

I will tell you one more time that I believe a better world is not just *to come* but *will come, must come*. My personal cosmology is one that draws from not just one sacred text, but many. One that speaks to me loudly just now is *Forrest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature* by the incredible Patricia Ononiwu Kaishian. In the chapter *Community Time*, her optimism comes through in her belief that two broods of cicada whose emergences rarely intersect will rise together again,

“I hope that in 2245 when these two broods synchronously erupt again, they will be proud of us.”

Not if. *When*. Kaishian is a doctor of mycology. She sees more clearly than many of us what work ethic's logical conclusion - over-industrialization - has wrought on this planet. And yet she has the heart to imagine a “when” the cicadas emerge in two hundred and twenty years. A cicada life cycle does not start with emergence. It starts as we all must - nourishment and rest.

Now, in this world, people work too much, burnout, push their bodies past the limit. This can be especially true for disabled people, with bodies and minds that are at a disadvantage to begin with. We are made to feel the work won't get done if we, ourselves, *right now*, don't do it. The solution? Community coming together. All people working toward their personal skills, their own calling. And rest. First and foremost, we must remember to rest. It was held up as sacred in my first shabbos service, and it is the first order of business in Vayakhel-Pekudei. While it may be a dream, a far off future, in *tikkun olam* there is more than enough labor to meet the needs of all, "enough for all the tasks to be done."

Kochav Yehudis (she/her) I am an autistic Ashkenazi lesbian deeply invested in multidisciplinary work, multireligious ritual, theater (and other) artistry, homemaking, storytelling, and cultural research, seeking the path of the Hebrew Priestess. My dream and calling is to connect people to the most honest story of themselves through artistry, scholarship, and ritual. I believe deeply in the body as a source of the Divine and want to open access to that embodied connectivity for others. As a settler, I hope, pray, and fight for Indigenous sovereignty from Palestine to Turtle Island and beyond. I am driven in this and all of my work by the Jewish concept of tikkun olam; I perceive the world is broken, I perceive the world is beautiful, and I commit to sacred repair. I believe great change starts closest to the heart. I live out my values in a sacred multi-religious partnership with my wife Olivia. You can see more of my work, hers, and our work together at cosmic-well.com.