

**A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner**

The Anger All Around Us

Friday, December 31, 2021 ~ Parsha: Vaera

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Americans are angry. We see evidence of it all the time on TV, in the news, even the videos that pop up on our phones and tablets.

* Violent interactions and behavior between passengers and airline staff have been a staple of the nightly news.
* Recent reports from right here in New Jersey that have documented an increase in violent attacks by students upon each other as well as teachers and administrators.
* Explosions of anger at government officials, owners of businesses and restaurants, and even at family members, neighbors and friends over issues regarding COVID-19 protocols and their attendant restrictions on our freedom of movement.

Someone recently shared with me an angry exchange they had with a member of their own family. In response to a text inquiring about their welfare after they were diagnosed with COVID, the responder, normally a reasonable person who could be trusted to exercise good judgment and self-control, responded with a paroxysm of anger and fury, blaming an international conspiracy, the Chinese government (well, to be fair, she may have a point about that one!) and even our own government for her admittedly unfortunate illness. And you could add a dozen examples of your own to this list.

Recently, there was a particularly humorous example of this, in a tragic-comedic kind of way. Two weeks ago, as the New Orleans Saints were about to hand the Tampa Bay Buccaneers not only a bitter defeat, but Tom Brady’s first shutout loss in 15 years, millions of football fans saw Tom Brady in his anger and frustration take a Microsoft Surface tablet and throw it on the ground. (For you non-football fans, Tom Brady is the GOAT, the greatest quarterback of all time. I'm a Jets fan, so it pains me to say it, but it is true)

According to ESPN, the league warned him not to do it again or risk a fine.

(In a humorous response the support team at Microsoft made the following public statement. *"We have reviewed the tape and while we don't recommend throwing your Microsoft Surface device, even if you hold the NFL record for career completions, here are some tips on caring for your device.")*

We live in an angry and violent nation. Mental health workers and psychologists have been reporting on this since the 1970's. But whatever the rates and statistics were before the pandemic, they have risen exponentially since it began. Violent crime has increased. Ugly, angry and dangerous interactions occur frequently at school board meetings, in supermarkets, and in our schools. And this anger and rage, when not being directed towards others, is now frequently directed internally driving suicide rates, especially among our young adults, to record levels.

This week's Torah reading of Parshat *Vaera* contains a lesson and a perspective that speaks to this sorry state of affairs. It won't fix the problem of anger in society, but may indeed give each of us the ability to lessen its impact on the lives of those with whom we interact. After Moses's first failed audience with the Pharaoh, God reminds Moses that He is the Lord and would free Israel from their bondage in Egypt. But the Torah says that when Moses told this to the Israelites, "*They would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage"* (6:9)

God understands, and Moses realizes that the difficulty of their lives as a result of the horrors that the Egyptians inflicted upon them made them incapable of hearing a hopeful message. It's a reminder to us that we need to understand what's going on in our great nation, and how it manifests in the lives of our neighbors. The very tactics that are needed to stop the spread of COVID, including at times lockdowns, isolation, social distancing, and the curtailment of our freedoms and autonomy, are the very factors that are leading to these unprecedented levels of anger, violence and despair.

We must understand what so many are experiencing, that even we are experiencing, and its ramifications. And if we understand it, then we must be in the vanguard of those seeking a solution. We must be the ones to refrain from responding when we are attacked unfairly by people who are angry, frightened, and in despair. The financial and political tensions in our nation are wreaking havoc in so many lives, and lead to fear, sadness, and anger. In response to the challenges of our times, and the toll it is taking on communal mental health and well-being, we need to be a little kinder, a little more forgiving, a little more empathetic because that's what the times call for. Making a conscious effort to do so may be the most patriotic thing you can do right now.

It's not up to the government, and it's not up to someone else. It's up to you.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner