



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
304 E. Midland Avenue – Paramus NJ 07652- 201.262.7691

A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday May 5, 2023 ~ Parsha: Emor

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

One Law For Everyone

This Shabbat is the 49th anniversary of my Bar Mitzvah.

Even after all these years, there is a lot that I remember from that wonderful day. I remember that mine was the last Bar Mitzvah held in our synagogue before the social hall was renovated, and the room in which the celebratory kiddush luncheon was held made the Stark Hall (our synagogue's gymnasium) look like the Waldorf Astoria.

I remember my parents being annoyed (to put it mildly) that the family of the other Bar Mitzvah that Shabbat, (in those days there were often 2 Bar Mitzvahs on the same Shabbat) spent more money on flowers than my parents spent on the kiddush luncheon.

I remember my Bar Mitzvah suit that my parents bought at [Robert Hall](#) (that famous purveyor of men's clothes) for the princely sum of \$32.50 including alterations!

I remember how months of study in preparation for the big day really paid off, leading to my understanding of one of my favorite rabbinic lessons, *according to the effort, so is the reward.* (Avot 5:23)

But perhaps my most enduring memory was the study of the Torah reading for that Shabbat, *Parshat Emor*, with our Rabbi and my personal hero, Rabbi William Lebeau. As a child, I was convinced that he was the greatest Rabbi in America. 49 years later, I'm still convinced. Those hours of study with him meant a great deal to me and that is why I have engaged in similar study of the weekly *Parshah* with every Bar and Bat Mitzvah student over the last 34 years.

I remember what my Rabbi taught me about a particular verse:

There shall be one law for you, whether a stranger or citizen, for I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 24:22)

I don't remember every single word or explanation Rabbi Lebeau shared with me. But what I do remember was that he explained to me what the verse meant and why it was so important. There must be one law for everyone, because God is the God of everyone. As a child, there was a lot I intuitively understood about the beauty and importance of Judaism. There was plenty I did not understand until years later. But even as a child, I understood this verse.

I want you to consider the meaning and value of this idea at this particular moment in history. Imagine how an action plan to translate this profound idea into a reality could address so many of the problems that we face in our great nation, especially regarding our criminal justice system, the funding of public education, issues surrounding the marginalized communities, and the difficult choices that must be made when allocating scarce resources. Imagine how the conversations about these issues could be elevated, and the lives of our neighbors uplifted if we paid attention, instead of lip service to this great principle.

Years ago, the Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, writing for the majority in [*Griffin v. Illinois*](#) (1956), made the following statement

There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has.

In that same ruling, Justice Black acknowledged that “... Providing equal justice for poor and rich, weak and powerful alike, is an age-old problem. People have never ceased to hope and strive to move closer to that goal.”

And as our Rabbis taught: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it. (*Avot* 2:16)

Want to really build a better world? There is no better place to start than by doing our part to ensure one standard, one rule, and one law for all.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner