

**Rabbi Lisa Edwards
Parashat Ki Tetze
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BCC, LA

"my Phranc mother"

Some of us had the delightful experience this week (or during Outfest in July) of watching the documentary about Phranc, the Tupperware Lady. It's called, "Lifetime Guarantee." Who has seen it? It's a wonderful film about Phranc - spelled, of course, P-h-r-a-n-hard c -- Phranc, everybody's favorite all-American-Jewish-Lesbian-surferdyke-folksinger -- and her latest venture, latest adventure - being one of Tupperware's top-salesladies!

For those of you who don't know Phranc, she gets "sirred" even more often than I do. You know what I mean by that, don't you? She gets called "sir" even more than I do when [LISA: take your earrings off] I'm not wearing any earrings. She startles more women when she walks into public restrooms than I do. As I'm sure you can imagine by now even if you don't know Phranc -- she looks kind of out of place at a Tupperware sales convention in her gray man's suit and tie and flat top haircut - (though I'm not sure she looks more out of place at a Tupperware sales convention than I would). The documentary, as you might guess, is about more than Phranc or Tupperware or Phranc as a Tupperware lady, it's about being oneself wherever one is - yes, it's about the courage and ease with which Phranc does that (how does she do that?) - but it's also about the ways in which, surprisingly, one can be very successful by being one's self even in a world of people who gasp and raise their eyebrows or stare furtively when they encounter you. It's a film about being out 24 hours a day and never apologizing for who you are. It's a film about honesty and humor. and the way those two things (and music) can open up hearts and minds of people who couldn't be more different from you. And, as Phranc earnestly says many times in the film (though I am probably paraphrasing because I don't have a good memory), it's a film about a person whose values in life are these: to be of service, and to always be yourself, and to sell a product to people that you really believe improves the quality of their lives. Besides being "sirred," a lot, it turns out Phranc and I have even more important things in common - no wonder I am SO VERY FOND OF HER -- we share the same values and we do the same thing in life: we strive to be of service and always to be ourselves in every situation, and we both sell a product to people that we really believe improves the quality of their lives.

Tupperware, Judaism - take your pick - there is no doubt in my mind that both of them improve the quality of our lives. I'm hoping Phranc and the film will accept an invitation to bring a Tupperware party to BCC next spring. In the meantime, I bring up the film and Phranc and the film's messages tonight for a specific reason.

This week's Torah portion, Ki Tetze, as it happens, contains the following verse: Lo yiheyeh khli gever al eshah - There shall not be a man's item on a woman, v'lo yilbash gever simlat esha - and a man shall not wear a woman's garment, ki toavat Adoani elohekha kol oseh eleh because everyone who does these is an offensive thing (toevah) of God, your God.

[Deut. 22:5]

I have long been fascinated by this verse. Perhaps because I get "sirred" a lot. Perhaps because, ever since I was a little kid, my mom let me, even helped me, dress most of the time "like a boy," and keep my hair short even in an era when every other little girl had long hair. [When the Beatles appeared, I was the only one - among the boys and the girls - who already had a Beatles haircut.] I dressed, as I said, "like a boy," but that's a phrase really that other people would use, not me, and not my mother, who would sometimes counter their remarks with something like, "no, she dresses like herself." How did my mother get so smart? How did I get so blessed as to have such a smart mother?

When I was a child, though I wanted to "dress like a boy," I never wanted to be mistaken for a boy, and would often feel insulted if someone, like a waiter, called me, "son," or "sonny" - the kid equivalent of being "sirred." "What would you like for dinner, son?" the waiter might say. "I'm a girl," I would say first, and then order my hamburger. [As long as I'm in to true confessions, I thought I might as well confess that I haven't always been a vegetarian.] I'll have more to say about this Torah verse on cross-dressing, I hope, when I get back from sabbatical next March. It's part of the research and writing I hope to be doing during my 3 months away.

Tonight, though, I want to draw our attention not only to this verse, but also to the seemingly unrelated verses that immediately precede it, four verses that contain commandments about returning things - animals and clothes -- that your neighbor has lost and you have found; plus helping lift up any animal of your neighbor that has fallen in the road. The translation of these verses that we are most used to say: "If you see your fellow's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your fellow" a bit later it says about returning any lost thing to your fellow: "you must not remain indifferent." And finally it says "if you see your fellow's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it [note: "them" is a more accurate translation]; you must help him lift it up." [Deut. 22:1-4]

Do not ignore it; you must not remain indifferent; do not ignore it, says our familiar translation, but both Everett Fox and Richard Friedman point out in their wonderful, more literal, translations that rather than saying "ignore" or "remain indifferent," the Hebrew actually says *hitalamtah* and *hitaleim* not "ignore" or "be indifferent," but rather, "do not hide yourself."

"Ignore" and "be indifferent" are nice interpretations, but they are not translations. Hiding yourself is different from ignoring something or being indifferent to someone else's plight, don't you think? Hiding yourself is not only about shirking responsibility, it's about closeting yourself. It's about hoping no one will notice you, maybe it's about hoping you won't notice yourself-won't notice who you really are: someone who keeps rather than returns what belongs to someone else even though you know whose it is; or someone who doesn't try to find out whose lost object this was before you kept it for yourself (by the way, in this season of *tshuvah*, of repentance, Tracy and I need to say that we have kept the watch that was found in the sanctuary a few months ago after Friday night services, the one no one claimed, but we didn't advertise that it had been found. So if anyone is missing it - let us know, we'll give it back, even though we really like the watch. It was, we think, a man's

watch. . .but then again, we've been happily wearing it these last few months. . .). But I digress.

Maybe "hiding ourselves" means hoping we won't notice that we're people who don't want to risk throwing our backs out in order to help pick up a fallen ox, or that we're someone who doesn't want to take care of a lost puppy while we put up flyers and wait for someone to claim her. What if she's not housebroken yet? What if we fall in love with the puppy while waiting for its original "pal" to turn up? These aren't easy commandments, these ones that tell us not to hide ourselves, these ones that tell us to do the harder thing, to do the right thing, to be who we know we can be, to be who we really WANT to be. But then again, most of the commandments are difficult - if they were easy to do, if we inclined toward them automatically, God would not have needed to demand them of us. And from these instructions not to hide ourselves, the Torah goes directly to the instruction to women not to wear men's gear, and to men not to wear women's clothing. "Everyone who does these," says Friedman's literal translation, "is an offensive thing of God, your God." The literal translations have made me look at this verse in a new way, so has its juxtaposition to the commandments not to hide oneself, so has its juxtaposition to Phranc; so has its juxtaposition to who I am, and to how my mother perceived me in my youth. Perhaps this verse is about: not hiding yourself behind clothes that do not belong to you, that do not show who you are, that do not allow you to feel like yourself when you are wearing them. Perhaps this verse is about Phranc being frank about who she is. About dressing, not as the typical Tupperware Lady she is NOT, but rather as the not typical Tupperware Lady she is.

It's not that you're dressing like a boy, my mother's explanation taught me, it's that you're dressing like yourself. A side note: my mother was in the women's clothing business for much of her adult life, and her theory of dressing people was that you had to feel comfortable in the clothes you were wearing, or else you'd never feel like yourself, never feel comfortable being yourself.

"You shall return to your neighbors their donkeys, their clothes, any lost thing of your neighbors that will be lost by them and you find it. You may not hide yourself." Another nice touch in this month of Elul: the Hebrew word for "return" here -- "You shall return to your neighbors their donkeys" is, you guessed it, t'shivim - same root as tshuvah to turn, to return -- that activity of self-reflection that we're charged with this month of Elul [22:1].

When I was in danger of losing some of my clothes, for fear of being teased, for fear of being mistaken for a boy, my mother "found them and returned them to me" by saying, "No, she dresses like herself." Who knew my mother was such a Torah-true Jew?! By the way, we always read this portion as the Elul moon waxes nearly full. The full moon of Elul is the only one at which you'll hear me and Fran sighing deeply, a little panicky, for the full moon of Elul means we're only two weeks away from Rosh Hashanah. One of the little known names for the Holy day of Rosh Hashanah is Yom ha-Keiseh hs,Ke -- Day of Concealment. It comes from a translation of a verse from Psalm 81 [v. 4] that is part of the liturgy for Rosh Hashanah: Sound the shofar at the covered time of the month for our chag, our festival. The Talmud tells us that this verse must refer to Rosh Hashanah because it is the only holy day on which the moon is covered, the only one that falls on a new moon [RH 8a-b, just as the page changes].The midrash plays some with this verse and this idea. It

says that God is hidden when Rosh Hashanah begins, and the sounding of the shofar, and our tshuvah, our returning to God, draws God out. By Yom Kippur on the 10th of the month, some say by Sukkot at the full moon, God is ready to receive us -- no longer in hiding, we and God return to each other. Some reverse the story -- it is not God, but we who are in hiding when Rosh Hashanah begins, and first the shofar, and then God, draw us out over the next few days, so that by the end of Yom Kippur, or some say by Sukkot at the full moon, we can embrace God, our own true selves and souls fully revealed.

Lo tukhal l'hitaleim - "You may not hide yourself," says God, in our Torah portion [Deut. 22:3], just two weeks and a few days from Rosh Hashanah. In this month of Elul, in this season of tshuvah, of turning, may we quit hiding, may we be of service by turning our hearts outward toward others and helping them find what they have lost (by helping them improve the quality of their lives); may we turn inward and help ourselves find what we have lost, may we don our own clothing -- our own true colors -- and thus turn into our own true selves.

Shabbat shalom