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 Beth Chayim Chadashim, Los Angeles
 More in memoriam Rabbi Carole Meyers

“Why do I deserve to live more years than she did?” a colleague said to me this week – so sad about the death of our colleague, Carole Meyers, who died at age 50.

“You don’t deserve more years than she,” I shrugged, “nor fewer – you just got more.”

So did I – so did many of us in this room and here too - look around - are many more who will get more years. None of us deserve more years – or fewer – we just got more. Which for me begs the question, not why did we deserve more years, but what will we do with these “more years”?

A few minutes ago we read a passage of Torah that appears in our siddur week after week, and that we read tonight mostly because it appears in this week’s Torah portion, Eikev. We don’t read it often in liberal circles – in fact it even gets left out of a lot of liberal prayerbooks -- I guess because we think it highlights a reward and punishment style of leadership. If you do what I tell you, it will rain when it’s supposed to rain, but if you worship other gods, Adonai will hold back the rain and the crops will perish.

Let’s look together at the passage with English and Hebrew – don’t worry if you don’t read Hebrew, we’ll mostly look at the English.

[Someone read it in English]

Is this really about reward and punishment? How else might we read it? [cause and effect -- global warming, etc.]

The reason I handed out the Hebrew also is for someone to look at what person it’s in in Hebrew – this, unfortunately, doesn’t come through in the English – most of it (not all) is in 2nd person plural, as opposed to the verses we usually chant which are 2nd person singular – you shall love the lord thy God with all thy heart.

So what do we do with the pluralness of this passage?

[discuss]

it’s about community, and acting in community, and life continuing through community

Talmud also tells us that the plural in this paragraph instructs us that the education of children is up to the whole community, not just the parents of children. A good thing for us at BCC to remember as we launch this year into an “official” family education program.

The community aspect of how what we worship affects the rain and the crops and the food that we eat seems also relevant as our BCC Green Committee gets under way this year with its mission to help us green our synagogue and our lives.

[by the way if you want to be a part of either of these projects, you’ll let me know, right?]

I’m told that my friend Rabbi Meyers in her last days of life expressed sadness for the days she wouldn’t have with her family and on this earth, but also expressed gratitude for the days she did have and the blessings that had come to her and that, she hoped, she had brought to others.

Which makes me think of yet a few more verses from this remarkable Torah portion

One ½ verse tells us:

“And you’ll eat and be full and bless God...”[8:10] – It’s the verse that inspires the Jewish tradition of reciting a long blessing AFTER we eat, rather than before (before we eat we offer a short blessing) – for after we are satisfied, rather than when we are very hungry, we can take the time to say thank you, to appreciate what we have just received.

It’s a wonderful thought, but not so easy to do. As Moses notices even way back when. For a few verses later he reminds the Israelites:

When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget God your God—...lest you say to yourselves: "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me." Remember, says Moses, from where you got your power and the might of your hand, "remember that it is God our God who gives us the power to produce wealth," says Moses [Deut. 8:17-18].

Few of us have final say in the number of years allotted to us. As we study these verses this year, reminding ourselves of the losses and the births, I for one am grateful for this week’s Torah portion that comes along to remind me that long ago our ancestors chose some of these verses to read not just once a year, but every day, more than once a day. I’m not so sure why they picked these verses, but I’ll keep them for their power to remind me that we are – all of us -- in this together, that God and God’s creations – every one of us – are all connected, interdependent, reliant on one another at all times. And I’ll keep these verses around to remind me not to forget Who is with us -- all along the way -- giving us the strength, inspiring us with breath and desire to make the days and lives we’ve been given into the days and the lives we want to live.

Shabbat shalom