

Aug. 3, 2012

Beth Chayim Chadashim

Parshat Va'etchanan

Shabbat Nachamu, Shabbat of Consolation

Deuteronomy 3:23:- 7:11

Drash by Davi Cheng

I love Live streaming. Don't you? Don't you? (Gesture to camera)

I got up early last weekend, logged onto the computer and watched the live streaming of the Olympics. I watched the women's Judo competitions that were not being broadcast in the regular channel. I was so excited that there is live streaming for sports that are not so main-stream.

I competed in Judo in college and beyond; to most of you, Judo probably looks pretty rough - two people in pajamas yanking at each other, trying to throw one another onto the ground. To me, judo matches are intense, and when a technique is executed correctly, it is so beautiful to watch. The duration of a women's

judo match is just four minutes, and all that hard work and training for the athlete can end in a split second. (I know - I have been there - on the ground). I can't help but feel the nervousness of the athletes. Right before each match, the competitors would stand there with their coaches behind them, talking non-stop into their ears. I could only imagine what they were saying. I'm not even sure if the Judoka heard a word of what was being said, they were so focused, and ready to compete, waiting for their names to be called. This image somehow reminded me of a scene from this week's Torah portion.

Each year at Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of Consolation, we read from the Torah portion Va'etchanan. This portion continues from last week's where the Children of Israel were at the edge of Jordan ready to cross over. Moses has been talking to them non-stop, giving instructions and re-telling of stories from the past 40 years.

Moses told the Children of Israel that he had pleaded with God to let him into the Promised Land, "Pray let me cross over that I may

see the good land that is in the country across the Jordan!”

(Deuteronomy 3:25) But God denied his request, God said, “Enough for you! Do not speak to me any more again about this matter!”

(Deuteronomy 3:26) Instead, God commanded Moses to go up to the top of the mountain, to see with his own eyes the land that he is NOT to enter. (Deuteronomy 3:27)

I always wonder why we read this portion on this Shabbat. For me, it is not very comforting at all that Moses was banned from the Promised Land. Moses, now sounding desperate to me, continued with his instructions to a group of new generation that doesn't even share his experience, and may not even relate to what he was saying, “O Israel, hearken to the laws and the regulations that I am teaching you to observe, in order that you may live...”

(Deuteronomy 4:1)

“Take you care, take exceeding care for yourselves - remember your covenant with God”. Moses then repeated the Ten Commandments and bla, bla bla, you get the idea.

However, after watching the Olympic Judo matches, I somehow changed the way I felt about this portion. The Judo coach who was talking non-stop was merely trying to comfort and calm her athlete, giving her instructions to survive her match, telling her that she will do well. Moses, like the coach, was giving instructions in hope to calm the Children of Israel who were about to embark on a journey to the unknown. Moses was merely trying to comfort them and ensure them that things are going to be ok, even without him...that God had already planned out the land for them, and these instructions will ensure their survival so that they can receive the land and live in it.

On the other hand, God was merely trying to comfort Moses, by live streaming, yes, live streaming - the images of the Promised Land for Moses to see on the top of the mountain, so that Moses, without physically entering the land, still gets to enjoy it --- Kind of like our BCC live broadcast.

So there is a lot of comforting going on in this portion: Moses was comforted by God, and the Children of Israel were comforted by

Moses, and Moses must feel comforted that he took care of his wishes, his will before he died.

So what did I learn from watching Judo and reading this portion? I learned that our lives too, are delicate and filled with the unknown. I know that my life can end in a split second just like the Judo match. Am I ready for it when it comes? Will I have time like Moses to recount and make plans?

Since this is the Shabbat of Comfort, I want to bring up something that BCC has that some of you may not know about. The L'Chayim Legacy Circle. This is a group made up of BCC members who have left a bequest to BCC in their will. Bracha and I are a part this circle. BCC has been such a comforting place for us that this is only a small gift from us in return. It gives us comfort to know that we are contributing to BCC's Legacy even when we are gone, to know that we are helping to keep BCC alive, for that someone in the future, who may stumble upon BCC in need of comforting just as we did. If you are interested to be a part of the L'Chayim Legacy Circle, stay tuned, there will be more information in next month's G'vanim.

Now back to the women's Judo. It was really comforting for me to learn recently, that one of my Judo instructors; she is like the Moses of women Judo, sensei Fukuda, has finally won her battle in sexism. She was finally being acknowledged officially, as the highest ranking woman judoka in the world, and received her 10th degree black belt. She was 98 (for a long time women cannot move beyond 5th degree black belt) and last weekend, she taught a class in San Francisco at age 99. And in the news this morning, some of you might already heard - 16 years old (I know I am mispronouncing her name) Wojdan Shaherkhani became the first Saudi Arabian woman ever to participate in the Olympic. It doesn't matter that her match only lasted 82 seconds, and that this was her very first competition, and she is not even a black belt. After she lost her match, she received a standing ovation from the crowd for her courage. She has opened the door and gave hope to a new generation of women athletes in countries that still do not allow females to compete in public.

May all of you find comfort here tonight among your friends at BCC. And for those of you who are live streaming, may you be comforted

by watching us from afar.

Shabbat Shalom.