

Beth Messiah Drash  
August 4, 2018  
Adam Brickley

One thing I've noticed about recent BMC messages is that we've had a high number confessional speeches. You know, the ones where people talk about the sort of deep-seeded personal issues that occasionally cause crises of faith. So, I guess it's my turn. I've had a lot of time to think about life recently – and I've actually spent a lot of time talking to HaShem about how I see him and how I view our friendship.

Specifically, I've apologizing for how I internalized some things that happened right after I moved to DC about ten years ago. That's a long time ago and frankly quite disconnected from my life now. However, a few things happened that, while they didn't challenge my belief in G-d, made me wonder if he liked me very much. So, let's talk about Adam Brickley, circa 2008. That guy has just graduated college and moved out from Colorado to the DC, wide-eyed and ready to chase all of his political dreams – and trust me, if you think I'm political now, I have nothing on that kid. I'd just finished two years as chair of my College Republicans chapter, was deeply enmeshed in the world of right-wing political blogging, and having already interned at the Heritage Foundation (where I still work) I was starting what would be the first of two consecutive internships in conservative online media. I'd also spent most of my senior year trying to distract myself from the fact that several of my College Republicans officers wanted me ousted as chair by burying myself in a few crazy activist projects.

One of those projects, the one I started mostly so that I had one political thing that no-one could take away from me, got pretty wild. In February 2007, I cooked up a “harmless” anonymous blog plugging an obscure governor for the 2008 Republican Vice Presidential nomination. It was as much a thought experiment as anything else – seeing if it was possible to create enough online noise to get the media to insert someone into the national discussion. Harmless fun, right?

Yeah.

Within a few weeks, my little blog was cited as a novelty on the Anchorage Daily News' local politics blog. After a few months I was amassing a mailing list and some committed-if-eccentric online allies. By September I had to publish my name because I was getting minor media interviews that I couldn't do anonymously. By the time John McCain won the GOP presidential nomination; we had updated the site to look more professional, built a loyal comments section, and had one guy spamming the McCain campaign office with home-printed leaflets. By March, we figured out that our 300-strong mailing list was big enough to hijack Congressional Quarterly's online “VP Madness” bracket poll in favor of then-unknown Gov. Sarah Palin – we pushed her all the way to the “finals” against Mike Huckabee, when we got smacked by the only OTHER mailing list gaming the poll.

As a footnote, I would note that until August of 2008, Sarah Palin was primarily known for being a bi-partisan figure who got work done across the aisle in Alaska. Things change.

Now, let me tell you a secret, my plan for that blog had been to get a good night's sleep the day before the veep nomination, yawn when it was someone boring, go dark for a few months while Barack Obama ran over John McCain, then relaunch the day after the election as a still-longshot but slightly-more-plausible “Draft Palin for President in 2012” site. I went to bed the night before McCain's chose his VP, ignoring my pumped up comments section, because

unlike them I was grounded enough to know that it sure as heck wasn't going to be Sarah Palin and my blogging fun was over.

I slept through the part in the middle of the night where those same overzealous (and very awake) commenters used air-traffic control websites to locate a mysterious flight from Alaska to Dayton, Ohio and promptly freaked out. I also wasn't awake for that anonymous commenter claiming to be a McCain staffer letting us know at like one o'clock in the morning that we were going to be "pleased." I still have no clue who the heck that guy was.

Needless to say, I woke up the next morning to a reality where I was fielding media requests, getting booked on multiple news networks, taking a phone call from Todd and Sarah Palin thanking me for the website (yes, that happened), and within the next week or so I'd been on a whirlwind tour to the GOP national convention and an in-studio appearance on the Colbert Report. On top of that, I was living in the Heritage Foundation intern dorms at the time, so I was a bit of a folk hero there. I told everyone, and still believe, that our little website was mostly about building publicity around the idea of Gov. Palin as a potential national figure, getting her on the media lists - and we succeeded at that end - but that we weren't a driving force in the actual VP selection process (or at least I hope we weren't). Still, the world was my oyster, and I was having the time of my freaking life.

The reason you don't hear this story from me more often, in addition to me not wanting to be the moron who basks in his college glory days, and aside from the fact that I avoid discussing any disagreements I have with Gov. Palin's current positions out of respect, is that all of the euphoria came to a screeching halt after about two weeks.

I don't think I need to remind you about how much of a roller coaster that election was for Sarah Palin. By the end of it, everyone has a strong opinion, and many of them felt a strong need to inform me personally of those opinions. Let me tell you, it stinks when people's perception of YOU is tied to their perception of a political figure who you have no control over - even when you largely agree with that figure. By the end of the campaign, I was getting of earfuls from my conservative intern friends who felt compelled to talk to me about their frustrations with Gov. Palin. I got a few job interviews that came with the caveat "would you be willing to not endorse Palin in 2012 if we hire you?" Some chuckleheads started a left-wing Facebook titled something like "Thank you Adam Brickley for Killing the Republican Party," and there's a guy named Clay who still occasionally sends me scary hate tweets ten years later. I think the last round of harassment reports to Twitter finally shut him up, but now that I've said that, I'll probably find a Twitter notification later today that says something like "Nobody ever forget what Adam Brickley did to our country buy convincing creepy grandpa John McCain to pick that chillbilly witch!" Although, in fairness, I did also get a brief mention on Page 210 of "Going Rogue" and a spot on the Palin family Christmas card list for a few years.

About the same time I started attending a congregation that took a rather extreme Wesleyan Holiness view of spirituality. To put briefly, that's the belief that believers are empowered to be sinless post-Salvation, and in this case, overtly preaching that if you continue to sin as a believer, G-d will purposefully stop listening to your prayers. That's not a healthy thing to hear when you've just almost gotten all your hopes and dreams and then been smacked down hard. I really shouldn't have internalized that, because frankly I had more than a few "G-d-moments" during that time, and there is no good reason I should have been able to stay in DC through those (ask my Mom about the altercation with my old landlady after I landed in the hospital with athsmatic pneumonia and got illegally evicted from my house while still recuperating.) I really should have been learning to trust G-d during that time. Instead, I

developed the idea that G-d was probably mad at me, and that my sudden and abrupt shift from success to pariah was a rejection from Him – maybe I hadn't done enough with my moment in the sun to get done whatever He wanted from it. I got over that theology after a while, and honestly I never totally bought it in the first place. but that idea still kind of sticks with you. You get to thinking that G-d might care about the world or other people – but that He's probably had it with YOU and your foolishness.

I haven't said anything about the parsha yet, so here it goes.

Parsha Eikev is basically one long spate of G-d telling Israel that he's going to bless them but warning them against breaking the commandments. Actually, with all the curses, you can totally make G-d out to be transactional here - the type of guy who punishes anyone who steps out of line with fire and brimstone. But listen to this:

*Who fed you with manna in the desert, which your forefathers did not know, in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to benefit you in your end, and you will say to yourself, "My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." But you must remember the Lord your God, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:16-18)*

Or, to put it bluntly, HaShem sticks with Israel even when he's mad at them.

The Haftarah opens like this:

*And Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me." Shall a woman forget her sucking child, from having mercy on the child of her womb? These too shall forget, but I will not forget you. (Isaiah 49:14-15)*

I'd pull more quotes, but really the whole parsha and Haftarah go on like that for pretty much the whole time, and they don't show a particularly transactional G-d. Yes, HaShem punishes people for their actions throughout the Bible, but if there's one thing we know about G-d from the whole Bible narrative, it's that he has this maddening habit of loyalty to people who mess up. Even the Brit Chadasha portion deals with the same subject. The risen Yeshua spends hours the road to Emmaus talking to two disciples who are basically complaining that everything is all over after he died – and then he talks them off the ledge, reveals himself, and tells them that everything is going to be okay.

Israel complains a lot throughout the Bible that G-d has forsaken them. A lot. And he keeps coming back and telling them that he hasn't. That includes, by the way, many passages where G-d is declaring punishment for Israel, and a lot of passages where G-d is expressing exasperation with Israel for complaining! Even the worst bits usually end with promises that punishment is going to end and things are going to get restored. That, and G-d continually heard the prayers of deeply flawed people like David, Solomon, Jacob, Isaac, and the entire cast of HBO-ready psychos that comprise the Book of Judges

Yeshua shows a lot of patience with His friends too, if you haven't noticed. Matthew the tax collector had a past. I really don't want to know what Simon the Zealot did to earn that nickname. Peter of all people could always be relied upon to complain, question, deny association with Yeshua, and (in extreme cases) cut people's ears off. Thomas flat out questioned the resurrection!

I said I've been talking to G-d more lately about trusting him – actually I've even been doing it vocally a la Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof (when I'm alone, obviously). That's because I've decided that maybe I should operate on the idea that he kind of likes me and wants me around, which is a bit of a change for someone who worries about annoying G-d and making Him angry. I've been a little more honest about actually asking Him for things I want, which is something I used to be really scared of, and I've been talking about my issues trusting Him not just as something I need to apologize for but as something I want to work through *with* Him. Part of the reason for that is that when you read things like this parsha, you get to realize that HaShem might be perfectly just, but that doesn't mean he cuts people off and stops being nice to them. Sometimes I think we in particular need to keep that in mind as Messianics. I've heard people criticize the Evangelical Church for fixating on G-d's mercy and ignoring His justice, but you can also take the justice too far and forget the mercy. Maybe, in the end, it's better to assume that is neither all hugs nor all burning anger. Maybe we should stop thinking of G-d as an extremist and assume he's socially well-adjusted and balanced. He is, after all, perfect – and he seems pretty chill about hanging out with messed up people. So, maybe in addition to worshipping Him and fearing Him and praising Him, sometimes it might be best just to be actual friends with Him. That's how you learn to trust someone.