

Lech L'cha

On the edge of the forest that cradled the town, on the farther most side of the meadow, was a clear, cool stream. To this stream went the water carrier back and forth, day after day, supplying his village with water. He was a big, barrel chested man with strong muscles who carried two huge buckets hooked onto a large pole which rested on his strong, wide shoulders. It was a monotonous job, and difficult as well, because the buckets, when filled, were extremely heavy, but it was a job, and the water carrier was happy to have it.

But what made his task even harder was that there was a small crack in one of the buckets.

It wasn't intentional, and the bucket felt really bad about it because she knew that if it wasn't for the crack, the water carrier wouldn't have to work as hard as he did. You see, the water carrier would fill her up in the stream, but by the time they arrived back at the village, half her water had leaked out on the path, on the way home from the stream. It also didn't help that the other bucket didn't miss a chance to remind her of how perfect he was and how he had not lost a single drop on the path back home.

One day, as she felt her water leak slowly out on the path, the leaky bucket couldn't stay quiet anymore. She cried out to the water carrier at the end of the day, "I'm so sorry I leak so terribly and I cause you so much more work! I only want to help you and do my job, but I can't hold the water in! I feel so awful" "You have shown me only kindness. You could have thrown me out long ago or thrown me away by the side of the road, and yet you did not..... I just don't know how to be a better water carrier for you."

The water carrier listened patiently, and said, "Let's talk in the morning as we carry the water into town."

The next day, the water carrier hooked his buckets onto the pole, hoisted the pole onto his shoulders, and went down to the stream. He filled both buckets, hooked each on it's end of the pole and began walking down the path leading into town. The water carrier first turned to the pompous bucket- the one without a crack in it- and asked, "What do you see?" The un-leaky bucket replied, "What do you mean, 'what do I see?! I see the path. The same path I see day after day, over and over again. dirt, dirt and more dirt." Now the water carrier turned to the bucket on his left- the leaky bucket- and asked, "And you? What do you see?"

"Oh, It's beautiful!", exclaimed the leaky bucket. "There are wildflowers and berries all along the path! And because of the flowers there are butterflies and bees!" Suddenly, the leaky bucket knew what was going on. The water carrier said to her, "You see? I know that you leak. I know that life can sometimes be hard. But I also knew that that crack you have could be a blessing. So I began to scatter and plant seeds on your side of the path all the way down to the stream, and allowed you- with that beautiful imperfection of yours- to water them on our way back home. These flowers have brought me and so many others great joy over the years. You may be broken, but that is exactly what makes you a blessing in this world."

In this week's Torah portion, Lech L'cha, Abraham is told to take his family and all that he has, leave his ancestral home and go to a new land. God will guide him to this new land which will be the future of a great people made up of Abraham's descendants- and God has promised that this nation will be blessed. The letter 'hey' is added to Abraham and Sarah' names to reflect their unique covenants with God, naming them Abraham and Sarah, and it is revealed to them that together, they will have a son.

In the first paragraph of the parasha alone the word Blessed is used 5 times. God blesses Abraham throughout the portion, telling him that his descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars of the heavens. Based on this, Abraham is looking very much like a shiny, perfect bucket of a person.

But although Abraham speaks with God, and he and his wife Sarah are the recipient of so many of God's blessings, we begin to see the cracks in that perfect image of them as well.

When detouring through Egypt because of a drought, Sarah is taken by the Pharaoh because Avram- afraid for HIS OWN safety- passes her off as his sister. He sacrifices his own wife so he could be safe. It was only because of God's intervention that she was released and they were reunited.

Later in the portion, after God came to Abraham twice and gave him blessings, Abraham cries out to God asking, "What is the point of blessing my descendants if you haven't even been blessed me with a baby! " (I'm paraphrasing). To be fair, it's a good point, but my parents always told me that you're supposed to say 'thank you' even if you don't like the gift.

And Sarah gives Abraham her maidservant Hagar, so that through her, Abraham could have the child that Sarah could not provide. Sarah, however, becomes so jealous of Hagar that she sends both her and her kid out to wander in the desert to be eaten by scorpions.

When my mom heard this story for the first time, she actually apologized to me for naming me Sara.

Avraham and Sarah, and all of the characters in the Torah, are not perfect. They emulate such compassion and righteous, show us the consequences when we slip up, - and how to overcome those dark times to live a life of blessing gratitude.

Because of their stories- the entire warn out, blemished, moth-eaten beautiful bucket of their lives, cracks and all, we learn how to live our lives and gain the knowledge to help us navigate its ups and downs.

We are all flawed. We make mistakes and make bad choices. But It is often those mistakes and bad choices that help us become better, stronger people. By making mistakes we learn to empathize with those around us who do the same. It is the flaws and weaknesses that force us to both reach out to others for help, and allow us, in turn, to lend our own strengths to others. Said another way, our strengths AND our weaknesses bring people together and create strong and loving communities.

On this Shabbat, Shabbat Lech L'cha, may we all be blessed with cracks in our buckets,
and the creativity to bring forth beauty from the wisdom we gain from them.
Shabbat shalom