



SoulSpa 3.28 • P. Emor
May 2, 2026 • 15 Iyyar 5786
30th Day of the Omer • Gevurah she'b'Hod

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

Barukh Atah Adonai
eloheinu melekh ha'olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH, our God,
eternal sovereign, who sanctified us
in God's *mitzvot* and commanded us
to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Orientation to the Book of Leviticus

מוֹם (*mum*) defect, blemish

ק.ר.ב (k-r-v) proximity, inwardness > *sacrifice*

The Curse of Long Eyebrows

For any man who has a defect should not approach (Leviticus 21:17)

Behold the **defects** which prohibit you from
dwelling in the Lord's presence.

(I use the word *Lord* anachronistically as
the idea that God is a man is as ridiculous
as the things on this list.)

If you're blind (Seems cruel.)

If you have a sunken nose
(Unclear if they mean your nose went
down with a ship. Look for treasure!)

If your limbs are mismatched
(Didn't God make everyone's limbs?
Surely that's not their fault.)

If your arm or leg is broken
(We're, literally, adding insult to injury here.)

If you have long eye brows
(Finally those long eye-browed maniacs
are getting what's coming to them!)

If your testicles are crushed
(No comment.)

There are more...the commingling eye
the weeping sores.

Any excuse to separate human
from holiness, it seems.

I prefer Abraham's whole open-tent vibe.
Let all who are anything

dwelt amongst the holy presence.
There's enough of God's food
to go around

@<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDRhUMTOB-k>

Rick Lupert

Back then - we couldn't treat these things. No chiropractors.

Leviticus 21:16-24

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר
אִישׁ מִזֶּרְעֶךָ לְדֹרֹתָם
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בוֹ מוֹם
לֹא יִקְרַב לְהִקְרִיב
לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיוֹ:

16-17. YHVH spoke to Moshe saying:
Speak to Aharon and say:
No man among your offspring in their generations
who has in him a *muim*
shall be qualified to **bring near**
the bread of their God.

Socio-political Q: how
were these conditions
treated / considered back
then?

These are
physical -
not
emotional /
mental /
spiritual.

כִּי כָל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ מוֹם
לֹא יִקְרַב אִישׁ עֵגֶר אוֹ פֶסֶחַ
אוֹ חָרָס אוֹ שְׂרוּעַ:
אוֹ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִהְיֶה בוֹ שֶׁבֶר רֶגֶל
אוֹ שֶׁבֶר יָד:
אוֹ-גִבֹן אוֹ-דֹק
אוֹ תִבְלַל בְּעֵינָיו
אוֹ גֶרֶב אוֹ יִלְפָת
אוֹ מְרוֹחַ אֲשָׁד:

18-20. No one at all who has a *muim*
shall **draw near**: no man who is blind, or lame,
or has a limb too short or too long;
no man who has a broken leg
or a broken arm;
or who is a hunchback, or a dwarf,
or who has a growth in his eye,
or who has a boil-scar, or scurvy,
or crushed testes.

These would
be chronic
problems -
would not be
physically
"whole" and
might wear
on the
person who
was living
with pain.

This takes
us... no
place good.
How does it
fit with "love
your
neighbor"?
No Shekhina
vibe.

כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ מוֹם
מִזֶּרַע אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן
לֹא יִגַּשׁ לְהִקְרִיב
אֶת-אֲשֵׁי יְהוָה
מוֹם בוֹ
אֶת לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיוֹ
לֹא יִגַּשׁ לְהִקְרִיב:
לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיוֹ מִקֹּדְשֵׁי הַקֹּדְשִׁים
וּמִן-הַקֹּדְשִׁים יֹאכַל:
אֲדָ אֶל-הַפְּרֻכָּת לֹא יָבֹא
וְאֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא יִגַּשׁ
כִּי-מוֹם בוֹ

21-22. No man who has a *muim*
among the offspring of Aharon the priest
shall be qualified to **offer**
YHVH's burnt-offering;
having a *muim*,
the bread of his God
he shall not draw near to **offer**.
From the bread of his God, holy of holies,
and of the [merely] holy he may eat;
but he shall not enter behind the curtain
or come near the altar,
for he has a *muim*.

Interesting that
Deafness is not
mentioned here.

Maybe in some way
this was a mercy -
like a draft
deferment? Though
there is strength that
comes out of
suffering.

Maybe the
people with these
"mum" conditions
were also
sanctified by their
conditions, like
these places.

וְלֹא יִחַלֵּל
אֶת-מִקְדָּשָׁי
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדְּשָׁם:
וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן
וְאֶל-בָּנָיו
וְאֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

23-24. He shall not **profane**
these places sacred to Me,
for I YHVH have sanctified them.
Thus Moshe spoke to Aharon
and his sons
and to all the Children of Israel.

Maybe this is about needing to care
for people in these situations.
And yet - "profane"? As though
presence would "foul" the sacred
places.

Thinking about how long it took our country (most countries) to take seriously the needs of people with disabilities - e.g. curb cuts.

Think of Jacob wrestling with the angel - wrenched his hip - he walked with a limp. That didn't make him any less sacred. And Moshe had a speech impediment! But / and: these figures were not priests, placed in front of others in a role of sacred service.

So this is about distractions?

Thinking of Rev. William Barber - disabled - wears colorful vestments.

THE PROBLEM ISN'T THE *MUM*

Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 15:2

הַמוֹמִין בִּיצַד. כִּהֵן שֵׁשׁ מוֹמִין בְּפָנָיו אוֹ בְּיָדָיו אוֹ בְּרַגְלָיו כְּגוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ אֶצְבְּעוֹתָיו עֹקְמוֹת אוֹ עֹקְשׁוֹת אוֹ שֶׁהָיוּ יָדָיו בּוֹהֲקָנוֹת לֹא יִשָּׂא אֶת כַּפָּיו לְפִי שֶׁהָעַם מִסְתַּכְּלִין בּוֹ. מִי שֶׁהָיָה רִירוֹ יוֹרֵד עַל זְקָנוֹ בְּשַׁעֲהָ שֶׁהוּא מְדַבֵּר וְכֵן הַסּוֹמֵא בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינָיו לֹא יִשָּׂא אֶת כַּפָּיו. וְאִם הָיָה יָשׁ בְּעֵירוֹ וְהַכֵּל הָיוּ רְגִילִים בָּזָה הַסּוֹמֵא בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינָיו אוֹ בָּזָה שְׂרִירוֹ זָב מִתֵּר לְפִי שֶׁאֵין מִסְתַּכְּלִין בּוֹ. וְכֵן מִי שֶׁהָיוּ יָדָיו צְבוּעוֹת אֶסְטִיס וּפּוֹאָה לֹא יִשָּׂא אֶת כַּפָּיו. וְאִם רַב אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר מְלַאכְתּוֹ בְּקָדָךְ מִתֵּר לְפִי שֶׁאֵין מִסְתַּכְּלִין בּוֹ:

Physical **blemishes**: A priest who has **blemishes** on his face, hands or feet, as, for instance one whose fingers are twisted inwards or sideways, or whose hands are covered with tetters, does not perform this rite, as the people will stare at him. One who slavers, when speaking, or is blind of one eye, shall not perform this rite. If however, the person who is blind of one eye or slavers is a well known and familiar figure in the town, he is permitted to perform the rite, as no one will stare at him. So too, a person whose hands are stained with indigo or other colouring material, shall not perform this rite. But if the majority of the residents in that town are engaged in the dyeing industry, he may do so, as they will not stare at him.

OR MAYBE THE *MUM* IS INTERNAL

Megillah 29a:10

דרש בר קפרא מאי דכתיב (תהלים סח, יז) למה תרצדון הרים גבנונים יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם למה תרצו דין עם סיני כולכם בעלי מומים אתם אצל סיני כתיב הכא גבנונים וכתוב התם (ויקרא כא, כ) או גבן או דק אמר רב אשי ש"מ האי מאן דיהיר בעל מום הוא

Bar Kappara interpreted: "Why do you look askance [teratzdun], O high-peaked mountains, at the mountain that God has desired for God's abode" (Ps. 68:17)? A Divine Voice issued forth and said [to the mountains that demanded that the Torah be given upon them]: Why do you seek [tirtzu] to enter into a legal dispute [din] with Mt. Sinai? You are all **blemished** in comparison to Mt. Sinai, as it is written here: "High-peaked [gaunnunim]" and it is written with regard to blemishes that disqualify a priest: "Or crookedbacked [gibben]" (Lev. 21:20). Rav Ashi said: One who is arrogant is considered **blemished**. The other mountains arrogantly insisted Torah should be given upon them, and were therefore described as **blemished**.

Kli Yakar on Lev. 21:17

על כן אומר אני שהקדמונים שהיו בקיאים בהכמות, היו יודעים בכל מום שנתהוה באדם טרם היותו, מצד איזו עון שראו בו. דרך משל, אם ידעו שהוא מקבל שוחד, ידעו בו שסופו בא לידי ערור.

Therefore I say that the ancients who were experts in the sciences knew about every *muim* that would develop in a person before it happened, due to what sin they saw in him. For example, if they knew that he accepted bribes, they knew that he would eventually become blind.

Concerns about stigma. Also: some of us have no poker face - should we be knocked for that? ("That face is too expressive / too Jewish"?)

And yet: what an insight - that internal imbalance can provoke illness.

It's moving that our ancestors were trying to discern what made someone unfit for service - though we are troubled by the implication that a physical "defect" was a sign of inner defect.

ואם ראו בו רגל גאוה, ידעו בו שסופו לבוא לידי שבר רגל. והפרת פניו ענתה בו, שהפירו במראה פניו איזו תכונה רעה שיש בקרבו הפוגמת איזו אבר דוע, וסופו לבוא לידי מום נגלה, וראוי לגאלו מן הכהנה על שם סופו. לכה נאמר "איש איש מזרעך אשר יהיה בו מום", שהפרת פניו ענתה שלסוף יהיה בו מום, כי מתוך מעשיו נכר שלסוף יבוא לידי מום זה שיהיה בו, הרי הוא נפסל על שם סופו. ונתן טעם לדבר, "כי כל איש אשר בו מום וגו', אי אתה מודה אם המום כבר יש בו, ונדאי אינו דין שיקרב משום "הקריבהו לפחיתך" (מלאכי א ח)

And if they saw in him a haughty walk, they knew that he would eventually suffer a broken leg. *The expression of his face testified against him*, meaning they recognized from his facial appearance some negative trait within him that would blemish a specific limb, and he would eventually develop a visible *muim* and should be disqualified from the priesthood based on his eventual outcome. Therefore it says, *Any man from your offspring who has in him a muim*, meaning that his facial expression testifies that eventually he will have a *muim*, because from his actions it is recognizable that he will eventually develop this *muim*. Thus he is disqualified based on his eventual outcome. And it gives a reason for this matter: *For any man who has a muim*, etc. — don't you agree that if the *muim* is already present in him, it is certainly inappropriate for him to offer sacrifices, as it says *Try offering it to your governor!* (Malachi 1:8).

In the 1500s: didn't everyone have some kind of physical flaw? Doesn't this disqualify everyone?

על כן גם זה אשר יהיה בו מום להבא ראוי שיתגאל מן הכהנה. ומטעם זה לא אמר בנתינת טעם לשון "יהיה". וכה זה מדבר במי שאינו נולד במומו, שהרי מעשיו גרמו לו מציאת המום, כי במעשיו פגם אחד מאבריו. לכה נאמר בשני פסוקים אלו "בו מום", שקדמה מציאתו למציאת המום, כי מלת "בו" מדבר במציאת האדם שקדמה, ואחר כך נולד בו המום.

Therefore, also one who *will have* a *muim* in the future should be disqualified from the priesthood. For this reason, when giving the reason, it doesn't use the future tense "will have." All this refers to someone who wasn't born with his *muim*, since his actions caused the occurrence of the *muim*, as through his actions he damaged one of his limbs. That's why in these two verses it says *in him a muim* — his existence preceded the existence of the *muim*, because the phrase "in him" refers to the existence of the person who came first, and afterward the *muim* developed in him.

Are these verses designed to keep the priesthood exclusive, like a country club? Can we find anything redemptive?

AWE CANCELS OUT ANY MUM

Likkutei Moharan 14:8:3

Can we see our sages here as trying to make this about internal qualities rather than appearance?

כשיש שלום בעצמיו, אז יכול להתפלל. כי עקר התפלה על-ידי היראה, בבחינת (משלי לא): אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל, כי התפלה במקום קרבן, ובקרבן כתיב בה (ויקרא כא): כל אשר בו מום לא יקרב; וכשאינו בו מום, הינו באתרא דאית דחילא, אזי יקרב לעבד עבודתו תמה

When a person has inner **peace**, they are able to pray. For the essence of [praising God in] prayer is achieved through **awe**/fear, corresponding to (Proverbs 31:30), "A woman who fears God, she shall be praised." This is because prayer is in place of the **KoRBan**, and of the **korban** it is written (Leviticus 21:18), "Any man who is blemished shall not **yiKRaV** (draw close)." But when he is not **blemished**—that is, "In a place where there is fear"—he can then **draw close** to perform a complete service.

So now it's about - if we have awe, we can draw close. If we don't have awe, that is a blemish.

Awe puts us in proper relationship with the divine.

Emily Landau (quoted by R. Deena Cowans)

My needs are not “special” just because they’re not met in ways identical to the needs of nondisabled people. I need a ramp; you need steps. Not special, just facts. I need a wheelchair; you walk. Not special, just facts. Moreover, the needs of non-disabled people certainly aren’t all met in the same ways. Just like every other living, breathing human being on this planet, I am a person who has needs that must be fulfilled in ways appropriate to my abilities.

The Diné / Navajo people put an imperfection in everything they weave.

Rabbi Shefa Gold, Emor

WE ARE COMMANDED to be a nation of priests, each one of us fulfilling the priestly function of mediating between human and divine. In *Emor* we are told that the priest must be **unblemished**. He must radiate perfection. The offerings that she brings must also be perfect.

what is perfection in an imperfect world?

As I seek to fulfill my priestly function I look at my life, I look at the physical universe that surrounds me, I look at Nature, I look into the human predicament of every person that I meet. **And I cannot find something that is unblemished**. The closer I look, the more imperfections I find. Everything and everyone is in process. We are all searching for balance in a world that is in flux. We are all flawed; our physical bodies are slowly or quickly decaying. This is the paradox of *Emor*: I and everything that I offer is likewise flawed, marked with the limitations of my particular perspective and prejudice. And yet, the truth of perfection permeates the atmosphere of my life.

See “Loving Our Own Bones,” Belser’s book

R. Julia Watts Belser

During ... Shavuot, Jewish communities around the world chant from the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, reciting the Israelite prophet’s striking image of God. In those verses, Ezekiel describes how “the heavens opened” and he “saw visions of God”: a radiant fire borne on a vast chariot, lifted up by four angelic creatures with fused legs, lustrous wings, and great wheels. The wheels, Ezekiel says, “gleamed like beryl,” they were “wheels within wheels” and “the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels.”...

[S]ome years ago, sitting in synagogue on Shavuot morning, Ezekiel’s vision split open my own imagination. As I was reading that description of God’s divine chariot, I felt a jolt of recognition, an intimate familiarity, a whimsical sense of kinship. I thought: **God has wheels.**

God isn’t just in the mishkan - God is in us / within us / in our wheels.

When I think of God on Wheels, I think of the delight I take in my own wheelchair, the satisfaction I take from a life lived on wheels. My wheels set me free and open up my spirit. I draw a powerful, sensual joy in tandem with my chair: the way her tires grip into asphalt or concrete, the way I lean into a curve and flow down a gentle grade, the way I feel the twinned vibration of earth and wheel through the soles of my shoes or the balls of my feet.

My sense of Spirit is bound up with this bone-deep body knowledge: the way flesh flows into frame, into tire, into air. **This is how the Holy moves through me**, in the intricate interplay of muscle and spin, the exhilarating physicality of body and wheel.

R. Diane Cohler Esses, [The God of the Damaged Vs. The God of the Perfect](#)

Torah is full of people with **disabilities**. Jacob became lame; Isaac was blind; Leah had weak eyes; Moses had a speech impediment; Saul struggled with mental illness. As it says in Psalms, "God is close to the broken-hearted." That's the God I love, that's the Torah I want! It's not the whole Torah that's a problem, but this text...

God's enterprise in this book is to create a world and create a people, and through the Israelite people to bring down holiness to the world. And God, in this project, is disappointed again and again... When God looks into a mirror, and the people before Him are so, in God's mind, imperfect – God can't always handle that.



...We find in Torah both a loving God, and a demanding perfectionist God. We find these traits also in ourselves. How do we move ourselves from perfectionism and judgment to compassion and love?...

There's a wonderful midrash that says that human beings don't like shattered vessels. But God appreciates shattered vessels, God appreciates the broken hearted. And that reminds me of the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, restoring broken pottery with gold so that the fractures are illuminated.

May the cracks in us become visible, and may a golden light shine. May we amplify in our minds the voice of the God who cares for us – who accepts us as the broken, **blemished** creatures that we are.

Brakhot 8b

וְהִזְקֵרוּ בְּזָקֵן שֶׁשָּׂכַח תּוֹלְמוּדוֹ מִחֻמַּת
אוֹסוֹ. דְּאֶמְרֵינָן: לוֹחֹת וְשִׁבְרֵי
לוֹחֹת מוֹנְחוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ.

Be careful to continue to respect an elder who has forgotten his Torah knowledge due to circumstances beyond his control. As we say: Both the tablets of the Covenant and the broken tablets were placed in the Ark of the Covenant.