

Shabbat Tzav Shalom



by Phyllis Chesler

Oy, how I wrestled with this parsha, there's too much blood in it for me, and too many animals sacrificed... why do we need to sacralize an abbatoir? The late, great Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quotes the 15th century thinker, Rabbi Joseph Albo, in his *Sefer HaIkkarim*. Rabbi Albo theorized that since God preferred Abel's animal sacrifice to Cain's vegetables, that Cain, bereft, decided to "offer the highest living being as a sacrifice to God"—a human being, his brother, Abel. (What a shocking but plausible interpretation.) Precisely because humanity is violent, God permitted "meat eating after the Flood." Further, animal, rather than human sacrifice, would be a more acceptable channel for man's bloodthirstiness. Reb Sacks briefly considers whether a "judicial system" and "justice" itself might allow for even better resolutions—but concludes that humanity is not yet sufficiently evolved. Sadly, he is right.

But I also stand with Ellen Frankel (*The Five Books of Miriam*) in terms of her concern for the Levite women in this parsha, especially the daughters, who are only allowed to eat some of the priest's leftover sacrifices. Are they meant to semi-starve? Do they have the status of slaves—apparently, they do. Frankel's sages are Beruriah the Scholar, Huldah the Preacher, Mother Rachel, Lilith, Our Mothers, and Our Bubbles, all of whom have important and interesting things to say. She quotes the Rabbis, too. Read it, you'll like it.

I found many Great Paintings of Cain killing Abel but they were so violent, so primal, so awful, that I decided to spare us. Instead, a whimsical image of golden Jerusalem as the sun sets and Shabbat begins.

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