

A Drash for Shabbat
By Rabbi Rick Rheins

Draft Day Prophets

If you are a football fan, in all likelihood, you are like so many of us, a bit caught up in the NFL Draft that begins Thursday evening (April 26). For months, the Sports pundits, announcers and reporters have offered excruciatingly detailed analysis on the virtues and risks of various college athletes who just might lift the home team back to the realm of Super Bowl contenders.

The draftees are Juniors and Seniors who have starred on the collegiate level. The experts have compiled notebooks from the scouting reports. They have offered predictions as to which player should be drafted by which team. These Draft Day Prophets have also predicted possible trades: some teams moving up to select the “chosen one” who will lead them to football glory; others trading back to acquire even more draft picks because, well, their team is so awful that they need as many decent athletes as possible to plug in the holes of their line-up.

As hysterical as the pundits get before the draft, there is an entire new wave of prognosticating Football Nostradamuses who give each teams grades as to which had a great draft and who made bone-head selections that will haunt them and their fans. (FYI, Nostradamus was a 16th century wannabe prophet----and not a former Linebacker at Notre Dame.) Note that grading the quality of a draft pick is done months before that player ever plays a game for his team. Indeed, it may be years before certain draft picks are given an opportunity to shine. Nevertheless, someone with a sports blog or column is already passing judgement on a person’s worth.

Just to put things into perspective, Tom Brady was selected by the Patriots in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft. In his first year, he played in only one game, mopping up in a losing Thanksgiving Day game, throwing 3 passes and completing only one. From an “experts” point of view, it was a wasted 6th round selection. His first start wasn’t until the following year, and that was simply because the starter was injured. The rest, as they say, is history.

So, who will history judge are the real stars of the 2018 NFL draft? Ah, for that we have to wait. Players, even some who are undrafted, will apply themselves, grow and improve and eventually star. Others, prematurely tagged as future Hall of Famers, will have far lesser success and be cruelly labeled by pundits as “busts.” Can you imagine calling another human being a “bust?” Hopefully not. And then again, we all know that there are those among us who do not hesitate to send cruel, unfair, and hurtful judgements in unsolicited messages to others.

Which brings us to this week’s double Torah portion, *Acharei Mot-Kedoshim*. One of the most significant passages in the Torah is found in this week’s reading, chapter 19 of the

Book of Leviticus, which is often called “the Holiness Code.” It is called the Holiness Code because of the extraordinary commandment for each of us to be holy (“Be holy, for I, Adonai, Your God, am Holy”).

Here’s a selection from Leviticus, Chapter 19:

¹Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: ² Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy. ³ You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I Adonai am your God. ⁴ Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I Adonai am your God.

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I Adonai am your God. ¹¹ You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another.

¹² You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am Adonai. ¹³ You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. ¹⁴ You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am Adonai. ¹⁵ You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly. ¹⁶ Do not deal basely with your countrymen. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am Adonai. ¹⁷ You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. **Love your fellow as yourself: I am Adonai.**

That we are commanded to “be holy” just as God is holy is arguably the most significant of all the mitzvot. This commandment is bracketed and reinforced by the charge to love others as you love yourself. Together, they form an expression of the Jewish belief that we all have the potential to be special, to be loving, and to be loved. We all are deserving of fair and compassionate treatment. We all are frail and vulnerable but we are also all capable of loving acts that elevate the life experiences of those around us.

This vitally important message is too often forgotten in a world where draft day prophets and others who position themselves in the role of judge and jury over others can blog, text and email jaundiced critiques and harsh condemnations about other human beings. Yes, that point is all but lost on these so called experts. Their hurtful, insensitive words and judgements cause other humans to suffer. Regardless of whether you like a person, a player, or a politician, the Torah urges us and Jewish teaching exhorts us to treat others as you would like to be treated.

Ah, that old Golden Rule. It’s still pretty important after all these years. Indeed, with our hyper-ability to spread whatever rumor or biting comment to hundreds and even thousands with the simple press of a button, that Golden Rule is more important now than ever.

Let us begin to create a nicer, kinder, and more forgiving society. It starts one person at a time. As the Torah teaches, let us strive to be holy.

Shabbat Shalom!

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