

On Kathy Griffin

A few days ago (May 30?), famed shock comic Kathy Griffin released a photo of her holding a mold of Donald Trump's head. The fake head was covered in presumably fake blood, and she had a 1,000 mile stare into the camera.

Basically, she had a Jon Snow moment.

The conservative leaning world had an incredible outrage, as would be predicted. Yet, I can't help but feel like it's mock outrage. Like it's just them complaining to complain and because some liberal woman openly thinks their losing (by almost 3,000,000 votes) President is crap.

I want to break this down into two areas:

Area One

The blood is so freaking fake, guys. If you decapitate someone, it bleeds from the neck, not from the implanted mink hairpiece.

Area Two

She didn't go to far.

Yeah, I said it. And if you want to stop reading here because you think I'm full of shit and don't anything, fine. Stay ignorant.

There are two directions humor can take: kicking up and kicking down. Kicking up is a peasant making fun of a king. It's a person at a disadvantage poking fun at someone who can take them down. Kicking down is a person in a position of power making fun of those underneath them. It's a bully disguising their hurtful comments as humor.

Area two-point-three

Let's take a look at some evidence for this false outrage, as the news organizations manufacturing this controversy are playing into the fragile emotions of the GOP's base.

First: Barack Obama received actual lynching threats.

I will remind you, twice-legitimately-elected President Obama is black. And black people were historically (as recently as May 20, 2017) lynched. A lynching is a terrorist in-deed-but-not-name action which serves to warn an entire group of people – in this case black people, to remain underfoot.

Let's see some of the "art" pieces that came out during Obama's presidency, shall we?







Yeah. Pretty historically disgusting and racially charged.

But, aside from a few people I knew who quietly condemned these, there wasn't *any* outrage against this in the mainstream media, in the GOP or even on Fox News (they were too busy giving air to conman Trump's assertions that Obama wasn't a legal citizen).

But one (female) comic has a terribly made up and bloodied head of their beloved eggshell-fragile emotional leader and *she's a TRAITOR DON'T YOU KNOW!*

Area Two-point-six

Black people were historically hanged. This happened. It was a warning to other black people. This is as indisputable as the Civil War being fought for states rights to *own gah-damn slaves*. We do not, in this country, have a history of beheading white people who renege on paying their workers (I'm tempted to say 'maybe we should' but I don't feel like dealing with the hate mail – besides Bannon's no longer in power so I don't really want anyone...um...Iron Throned...).

Let me reiterate: the effigies of Obama have real, historical precedent and served not only as a message to the President, but as a message to all black people, and arguably all colored minorities.

The poorly cast head of Trump has no historical precedent, serves only as a message to fellow liberals and Trump's family of "screw this guy". That's all. It obviously wasn't a threat, as it meets no legal definition of it. It was just marketing for a message. Simple as that.

Obama's effigies in alleys and parks, in my opinion, went too far. Their effects dredged up recent history of white supremacy (and look, their daddy Bannon was in office for a few months!) and reminded black people of the danger they face daily. Anyone who doesn't understand that is ignorant, either

willfully or not.

Griffin's public photoshoot with Trump's poor-semblance (I just used "poor" and "Trump" in a sentence – that's treason!) is just effective marketing and branding. Trump knows a thing or two about that.

Area two-point-eight

Bonus clarification, before I wrap this thing up:

Look at the Obamas' reactions to the original effigies. It was silence.

Look at the Trumps' reactions. It's bullying.

Their actions lack as much class as their décor.

Area two-point-nine: the conclusion

Presidents have been having their image violated since we've had presidents. Period, end of story.

Obama was the first to have historical ties to his.

Trump is the thinnest skinned to be tied to his. And seriously, that blood was wack.

I think this whole thing is hilarious. The photos are pretty *meh*, though I found them hilarious because I knew exactly what they'd bring. And they delivered like Dominos to a college campus.

This outrage over a mediocre photo session is absurd, overblown, and hiding actual problems. So get over yourselves, pseudo-angry denizens, and go do something with yourselves.

Emor, 5777

Emor

Leviticus 21:1-24:23

There's much to ponder in this *parashah*. Whether it's the outlining of the festivals or the responsibilities one has when damaging another's property; whether it's the outlining of the priestly duties, or the suitability of animals for donations or sacrifices, there's much to sift through.

I'm going to focus on a few relations here, starting with chapter 22, verse 23. "As for an ox or sheep that has mismatching limbs or uncloven hooves you may make it into a donation, but as a vow, it will not be accepted."

There's much to learn from this, and I feel it's the crux of this *parashah* and a good tip for managing one's life.

We're looking at two different uses for the same animal under different circumstances.

The first is any ox or sheep in optimal condition: no blemishes, with matching limbs, and no problematic quirks, being used as a vow or a donation. This is an animal that can be used as a sacrifice offering or a vow.

The second is that an ox or sheep with physical problems can be used as a donation, something to help a synagogue or family, but not to fulfill a vow or as a sacrifice.

Let's talk about vows in Torah. Vows go beyond promises. A promise in Torah is not taken lightly, a vow is even stricter. We go so far as to have prayers during *Kol Nidre* to ask for absolution from broken vows. Some people add "*b'li neder*" to their promises to remove any insinuation that it might be a vow, rather than a promise.

Our vows are held to a standard even higher than our promises.

Let's look at this again: a sacrificial animal with physical deformities which do not detract from its healthfulness can be used as a donation, but not to fulfill a vow. Only the animals most desirable can be used to fulfill the oaths held higher than promises.

What does this mean? *We are not allowed to shortchange or skirt around our oaths.*

Furthermore, I believe this is why the *Kohanim* have so many stipulations. They are the ones who are allowed to mediate the tasks between Israel and Hashem that have been prescribed. They are the human vow of action to Hashem.

Let's look at this today. We can see times when leaders make promises and give leftovers. Whether it's promising to bolster education with a tax increase, and instead using that revenue to pay for contractors, or promising to support minorities and instead oppressing them: it's endemic.

I get produce every other week or so from a group that rescues produce which is slated to be thrown away. Sometimes what they put out is moldy, slimy, and otherwise inedible. Sometimes it is perfectly glorious, crisp and fresh. They take the minimal cost for each box of produce and give it to various causes – which is good. Their inconsistency is not good.

Is there any wonder we have so much cynicism toward charities, leaders, and even each other? It seems that we live in a time when our word is taken lightly and the people brokering transactional promises are beneath the quality of our neighbors. I'm not accusing any of these being bottom of the barrel, but simply not as good as what we know we deserve. Again, I make no specific assertions of a leader being the worst ever, I am just stating that we deserve better.

Whether it's cancer foundations cutting funds for companies that screen for their particular type of cancer, hate groups disguised as social movements, or companies looking to exploit

both their workers and tax code, we have been made aware of long-standing traditions of deceitful promises.

Are we at an impasse? Are we, as decent humans, as those who want to help each other up and bolster our communities, silly for expecting our representatives to be better than us? I don't want to be the smartest person in a room. I don't want to be the most successful person in a group. I don't want to be the best fencer on the strip.

I want to learn. I want to be better. I want to have someone to look up to.

This is why business coaches have business coaches. Vocal teachers have vocal teachers. Peer groups support and nurture each other with each member's individual strengths.

That was the point of the *kohanim*. They were a group of priests who were there not only to broker our vows. They built up our religion through service. Service of ideas debated. Service of promises kept. Service of oaths and vows respected. They were to be looked up to, though we are not to be subservient to them.

What do I want to learn from this *parashah*? It's not the minutiae of what we can eat, what we can offer, or who can take what. That's a different lesson for a different day. Today, I want to learn that we not only can, but should, expect to see what we wish to be in those who represent us.

We were made in G-d's image. Each of us is a tiny reflective iota of her being. Just as we put our best face forward in daily life to try and inspire ourselves to live up to our own desires, should we not do the same with those we delegate power to? Should we not demand our leaders be the icons we wish to, ourselves, be?

My prayer this Shabbat is that we find the wherewithal as a people to support our own potential by not shortcutting our

vows to ourselves, our community, and our planet. My prayer is to bring people into our fold who not only inspire us, they kindle growth. There is an idiom: be the change you want to see in this world. Why don't we not only embody that change, but demand it from the people we give the honor of representing us? Shabbat shalom.