

Parashas Shemos

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However, though they afflicted them, they [nevertheless] increased and grew, which made the Children of Israel disgusting to them. (Shemos 1:12)

LET'S SAY YOU'RE 60 years old, and you're able to go back in time to your 10th birthday. What would it be like? Would you be able to relate to who you were, or to anyone from that era? It's one thing to look at pictures from a previous period of life, but something altogether different to actually be back there.

What about the people from 100 years ago, or 200 years ago? Wouldn't you feel like an alien compared to them? If you wanted to stay back then, wouldn't you have to re-orient yourself and learn their ways, as if you went to live in another country altogether? It probably would not take much time before you'd become "homesick."

When you look at a picture from the past, you view it with your mind, not your emotions, especially if you

weren't there at the time, or even if you were. In order to understand the picture, your mind will use its own data base to create a relationship to the image, which amounts to INACCURATELY superimposing current experience onto past events.

People mistakenly think that if they can still remember something from years ago, then they can still feel what they did at the time. It's possible, but only if the person was really aware at the time of what they were feeling, and it is still close enough in time to access the emotional memory. Otherwise, once we move on, we move on for good.

When we moved to a street behind the shul in which I had gone to Cheder as child, I tried to see the area as I had as that child. I thoroughly remembered it, but though little had changed since that time, I could not recover the emotional memory. I could "see" it in my mind's eye, but I could not experience it, as hard as I tried, as I once had.

And yet, we read about history from thousands of years ago as if it just happened last year. We assume that what we feel about it is accurate enough, and continue reading as if we're getting it. We take for granted, or possibly don't even consider, how monstrous the gap is between what we are learning and what we are feeling about it, and how inaccurate that gap makes our overall perception.

The Seder tries to change that a little. Unlike the weekly reading of the parsha that can cover hundreds of years in just 20 minutes using an emotion-less narrative, the Haggadah tries to put us back into Egyptian slavery—a little. But, we're usually too busy enjoying the fun and freedom to notice or complete the mission.

Sympathy is a POWERFUL ability, but empathy is MORE powerful, a LOT more powerful. Sympathy never really changed anyone that much, but empathy does. Sympathy doesn't mean you necessarily relate to an experience beyond your own. It just means that you can recognize what someone else is feeling and pick a supportive response. Empathy means that you are THEM as they go through what they go through.

That's life changing.

Actually, it's MORE than that. A LOT more.

Because, one of the faultiest assumptions we live with is that "today" is so very different from "yesterday." Of course in many ways it is, but in some VERY fundamental ways it's not, and the assumptions we have made are the reason why we have not only made tragic historic mistakes over the millennia, but the SAME ONES.

And we're doing it again today.

We're beginning, with this week's parsha, our descent into the worst slavery ever known to mankind. Yet, at the same time, this was the place where we became a nation for the first time. We didn't multiply much back in Canaan like we did in Egypt, which only increased the more the enemy tried to stop it, thanks to Divine Providence.

That's right, DIVINE PROVIDENCE. But, if God was with us all that time, through all that torturous slavery that last 116 years in total, why did He not step in and end it much earlier? We see what He EVENTUALLY did to Pharaoh and Egypt. Why didn't He just do it a lot earlier? We started off on such a high with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. Why did we have to reach such a low before getting back there again?

This is not a question that SYMPATHY can answer. It's not something you can relate to by standing emotionally

in 2018 and looking back in time to Egyptian slavery. It's a question that only EMPATHY can answer, by transporting us back in time EMOTIONALLY, while fulfilling the Haggadah's direction of looking at ourselves as if we too left Egypt. If we don't, then we're not going to have a good time leaving exile again, today, one last time on our way to Yemos HaMoshiach.

This is the time to think about it. The next six weeks are called "Shovevim," a word comprised of the first letters of the names of the next six parshios, from "Shemos" to "Mishpatim," in order. The word itself means "wayward people," turning this period into a special one of teshuvah. But the teshuvah of this time is not the Yom Kippur type, but another kind of teshuvah. And THAT will be the theme of PERCEPTIONS over the next six weeks, b"H.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Issue #13: Wolf!

American troops first arrived in Syria in large numbers in 2015, to beat back IS, which had captured land the size of Britain. Today nearly all of their territory has been recaptured by local forces, many of whom worked with the Americans.

About 2,000 Americans remain in Syria, mostly in the north. They guide airstrikes, hunt senior IS leaders and train the SDF, a predominantly Kurdish group of fighters. America's presence was also intended to hinder Iran, which wants to create a land corridor running from Tehran to Beirut, to more easily send arms to Hizbullah, its proxy in Lebanon.

From an Israeli standpoint, having a powerful ally just to the north has its advantages as well. America is going to be more attentive to the common interests in Syria if it has to watch out for its own troops. Take them out and Syria becomes someone else's problem, Israel's in particular. For the time they were there, the US Army was Israel's "boots on the ground." Once they lose that, Israel has to pay closer attention to the shifts in Syria.

That's all, of course, from a secular standpoint. We can afford to talk messianically. The Israeli government has to think in immediate military terms. They have to be pragmatic, because the situation can change at a moment's notice, with catastrophic results. Since we DON'T have to talk militarily, because it would change nothing if we did or didn't, we can speak in messianic terms.

And should, because that's all there really are, messianic terms. I know, I know, we've been doing that for YEARS and still Moshiach isn't here. Conflicts have begun and they have also ended. What we thought were close calls have since become long shots, or no shots at all. Even I get tired of hearing myself talk like this year-after-year-after-year, and not seeing the results I expected and hoped for. Yes, you do start to feel like the little boy who cried "Wolf!"

But then I remind myself that the reason why the wolf got away with killing all the sheep is because people got tired of hearing the call to arms. The classic approach to the story is that you can't believe a liar, even when tells the truth, and that is in fact the truth.

But was the boy in fact a liar? Paranoid perhaps, but a liar. He was entrusted with the flock of sheep, and any harm that would have come to them would have been on his account. He would have been responsible. So, can he

be blamed for being overly anxious about a wolf that he knew was bound to come at some time?

I don't think so. On the contrary, if anyone is to be faulted, in my opinion, it is the townsfolk. If they knew they had appointed an outright liar to do the job, then they were definitely at fault. If they realized after a few times that he was a liar, they should have removed him from his position. By not doing so, again, they were at fault. If they thought he was overly jumpy, they should have also replaced him, or left someone to accompany him.

Leaving the boy in his position meant that they townspeople trusted him. If they trusted him, and knew that wolves were around, they should have come EACH time he cried "Wolf!" The fact they didn't means that they were negligent, and therefore, deserved their fate.

No offense to Aesop, but if you think about it, the fable has flaws. The lesson is good, but not borne out by the story without some serious editing. Sorry. If you want to learn anything out from the story as it is, it is the nature of people to take things for granted that they get used to, and don't want to have to deal with for one silly reason or another.

Then the story teaches one of the most important messianic lessons of all time. It teaches about what the Talmud says, that Moshiach is one of those things that come when people stop looking for him (Sanhedrin 97a). Huh? But aren't we supposed to anticipate his arrival ALL the time (Shabbos 31a)? How does that work?

It means that people gave up on Moshiach (Sanhedrin 90a). They got tired of the predictions. They grew weary of from all the potential moments for redemption that came and went. Like the townspeople in the story,

they just figured the latest cry for “Wolf!” was also a false alarm, and they ignored it, and later wished they hadn’t. As they say, “better safe than sorry.”

So, we KNOW Moshiach has to come. For those keeping track of the years, we know we’re close to the end. For those who have also read my writings, I’ve showed you how we’re a lot closer to THE end than most people think. The “wolf” is out there, and you can be sure he has an eye on the flock, planning his entry.

So, at the risk of sounding like that little boy in the story, I am going to tell you that the American pullout in the north, the place from which Moshiach is SUPPOSED to come, is no simple development. It is a moving around of the pieces ... meant to shake up the situation, especially given how ridiculous the move seems to be.

I don’t know where it will lead, but it has my attention. You can decide to roll over and go back to sleep if you want. But if you decide to count sheep, at least count the ones the wolf ended up eating.