

From The Rabbi's Study.....

Gratitude In Good Times And Bad



One of the blind spots of human nature is our recurrent ingratitude and our appalling lack of memory. Saying 'Please' always comes more readily than stopping to say, 'Thank you.' Somehow, acknowledging assistance never seems as urgent after we've already accepted the help we wanted in the first place.

We seem capable of recalling our dependence on others only during moments of weakness - which we insist are transitory and brief - but during periods of health, prosperity or abundance, we revert to the mistaken idea that somehow all of that abundance is purely the result of our own intelligence, ingenuity or strength.

What is true for human dependencies is all the more apparent in the realm of the sacred. There may be no atheists in foxholes, but once the victory celebration is seriously under way, it's hard to find any G-d-fearers either.

We all have the need, it seems, to believe in our own invulnerability. And since dependence on others is susceptibility toward those others, we deny it as quickly as we possibly can.

Similarly, in moments of illness, poverty or terror, we readily pour our hearts out to G-d. But

after the crisis has passed, after the cure has taken hold, how many of us remember the urgent promises we made to G-d? How many of us live up to the implications of our own deliverance?

Apparently, what is true of today's people was no less true in ages past. The human heart has not changed, only the means of our own self-deception.

The story of the Haggadah addresses that ingratitude, looking at the example of Pharaoh as he is confronted by Moses and the insistence that the Israelite slaves go free.

Unwilling to accept the liberation that Moses demands, Pharaoh determines to keep the Jews his slaves. As a way of educating him beyond his stubbornness, G-d begins the series of plagues, which will culminate, with the death of the Egyptian firstborn males.

The first few plagues leave Pharaoh unmoved. But then G-d sends a rain and hail so powerful that crops are levelled and those upon whom it falls are killed. The Torah recounts that this was "a very heavy hail, such as has never been found in Egypt from the day it was founded until now."

Terrified by the devastation it produced, Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and admits his guilt before G-d. He then asks Moses to intercede on his behalf, to persuade G-d to stop the storms. As soon as he leaves the palace, Moses does so, and the rains immediately cease.

And Pharaoh, what of his terror-induced piety? What of his newfound insight?

The Torah relates the sad truth

of human nature: "When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he became stubborn and reverted to his guilty ways, as did his courtiers."

As we sit around the Seder table this year, tell your children about the little Pharaoh in each of us. As the Rabbis in the Midrash observed, "So it always is with the wicked. As long as they are in trouble, they humble themselves. But as soon as the trouble passes, back they return to their perversity."

Independence is an illusion. Each of us is dependent on countless others. The many who preceded us and who paved the way for us; our parents and grandparents, who nurtured and raised us; our siblings and friends; our teachers and peers; our community and our faith, our nation. Every day, we depend on people we don't know to provide us with the necessities to live and function in the world.

And beyond our human dependencies remains our total dependence on Hakadosh Baruch Hu - the Holy One Blessed be He, who bestows health, sustenance and shelter, who makes the world a habitable place.

When the going gets tough, our dependence on others and on G-d may not be surprising, but, let us not forget that the secret is remembering to say Thank You even after the recovery sets in and things are going well!

Ruthie and I together with the Children wish you all a Pesach Kasher V' Sameach - a Happy and Kosher PesachLeshanah Haba'ah Biyrushalyim Hab'nuyah!!