



Torah Reflections for the Intermediate Days of Passover

Passover begins sundown on April 6 to April 14, 2012

15 -22 Nisan 5771

The festival of Pesah/Passover highlights freedom on many levels: freedom from physical, social, and mental slavery. We rejoice at leaving the bitterness of bondage. With heads held high, we venture off toward Sinai. The Torah readings for the opening and closing days trumpet that victory, and speak of its ancient celebration. Yet, right in the middle these festive moments, the Torah and Haftarah (Prophetic) readings for the Shabbat of Hol HaMo'ed Pesah reflect a very different mood. Exodus 33-34 finds Moses pleading with God following the appalling acts surrounding the creation of the Golden Calf, and in the prophetic portion, Ezekiel copes with a people dispirited and depressed after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. What a change of tone from victory and thanksgiving, to dealing with apostasy and defeat.

Yet, isn't that what life is all about? Sometimes even in the midst of joy and celebration, we are faced with moments of anxiety and upset.

Moses, no doubt with a heavy heart climbs Mt Sinai again and acknowledges that Israel has faltered. We are an *am k'shay oref*, stiff necked; and we have been wicked (Exodus 34:9). Ezekiel sees a valley of dry, desiccated bones and in his mind, he thinks of his own dispirited congregation, depressed after the Temple's destruction. Ezekiel does not know how to answer God when the deity asks "Can these bones live again?" (Ezekiel 37:3).

God says to both Moses and Ezekiel, I am giving the people another opportunity to get it right. They did not succeed the first time around, but that is not the end of the story: they will get a second chance. That chance, however, does not come without effort. Moses carves the tablets a second time, and has to re-ascend Mt. Sinai. Likewise, Ezekiel needs to act, at God's behest he prophesies over the bones.

Judaism stresses action and deeds. We have to effect change within ourselves. Yet, change is possible. Both Zechariah (1:3) and Malachi (3:7) preach the message that God says, when you do your part, I will do mine: "Turn to me and I will return to you."

When we have failed, that is not the final story. Even when we have been stiff-necked, or defeated there still is the possibility of renewal, regeneration, and rebirth. We can have a second (and maybe a third, and fourth) chance to get it right. God says: begin again. Carve new tablets. These bones *can* live.

Life is not a series of ongoing victories. There will be moments in the valleys of deep darkness, but when we persevere, we can begin anew. As the people learned, we can again live, with God's spirit within and beside us.



This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi David J. Zucker, Rabbi/Chaplain and Director of Spiritual Care at Shalom Park, a senior continuum of care center, in Aurora, Colorado. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties).

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