

# Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Nisan/Iyar 5767 (April 2007) Newsletter

## 'Round and 'Round Again

So you made it through the Winter! (Wait! Isn't that how I started my comments to you last month?!) So, let's say that I may have been wrong. Winter stayed a bit longer this year . . . then left . . . then came back . . . then left . . . well, you get the picture.

Most of our lives, like the Jewish calendar, are cyclical in nature. We keep seeing the same people at the same times (family members, doctors, even time with our parents or children). We keep a specific schedule with our errands and shopping. We even make the same mistakes in the same situations (gasp!). What is different about the Jewish calendar and from which we can learn a great lesson is that "Jewish Time" is like an ever-expanding coil; each year we pass the same point, but Judaism expects us to meet that moment personally.

How do I mean this? Nearly every holiday in the Jewish calendar requires us to do something physical, something that involves our personal response to the holiday. This is particularly marked with the three Pilgrimage Festivals, or Shelosh Regalim. Each one requires something significant of us, from building a Sukkah to making a Seder to standing to receive the Law. Each year how we fulfill these (and the many other) obligations associated with Sukkot, Pesach (Passover), and Shavuot, are that much different, that much more personalized, to the moment in the coil of time that is our life in the present.

Judaism reminds us that this is not the first time you will encounter these emotions and issues (whether we are speaking of ourselves or our ancestors) and it will not be the last. Our heritage grounds us because it demands that we remember that we are human, that we cannot waltz through life and live richly without consideration of our condition or an occasional honest look at our future.

Seeing ourselves honestly needn't be as horribly painful as it sounds when we have hope in one hand and faith in the other; we needn't fear who we are and that our life can be even better than it is today. Perhaps an important cast-member of "Rawhide" (whose theme song seemed to be a great hit at our Purim celebration) said it best in a low-budget Western later in his career: When faced by a bunch of "bad guys" and told that pulling a gun on them was a mistake, Clint Eastwood's character slowly replied: "It's not my first and it won't be my last."

Each year, we prepare and enjoy Pesach, but each year we approach the holiday from a different place. Each year, we read in the Hagaddah that Pesach is about what it means to consider ourselves free today, at this moment, just as our ancestor did in their own present-tense narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. And so, each year, we take a look at that which imprisons us; from excessive obligations to living without a plan, from medical conditions to the limitations of those around us, from the oversimplified voice of our conscience to the rigid way we greet each life challenge, from our financial strains to our stale relationships. No matter what the form of imprisonment, Pesach speaks with the voice of the Jewish soul: God freed our ancestors with our taking the first step just as we are directed to do today.

Mitzrayim (Egypt) can be literally translated as "from the narrow places." Ancestors left their narrow place to become a people and build a home in their own land. Re-enacting and re-living the Pesach experience reminds each of us that we have big choices in our life today, as well. We can begin to find the freedom we so desire with the help of Pesach this year. Let's not just remember what God did for our ancestors but also what God does for us today. We

needn't feel enslaved to every burden in our lives. It is time to begin our Exodus from our "narrow places." It is time for Pesach.

No matter your challenges at this moment, I pray that you are inspired by Pesach to find the path from slavery to freedom, from your wilderness to your Holy land.

*A Zissin Pesach* (Sweet Passover)!  
Rabbi Fox

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