

Shabbat Shalom

Passover is just about over and after seven days of this holiday, I think that all of us could join together in a rousing round of Dayeinu. Certainly, we can say Dayeinu to matzah consumption, perhaps you'll join me in seeing Dayeinu to brisket, but I think we can say it to different aspects of the holiday also.

One of the things we learn as we age is that too much of anything and even a good thing is not good. When we get used to having too much of something, we do lose a sense of appreciation. So, even the recitation of Hallel, Songs of Praise to God, is saved for special moments. My grandmother used to have this express, "Genuch is Genuch." She would use the expression in reference to things that were good. So, if the kids were playing and getting a little bit wild, you understood that if you allowed the kids to continue to do what they were doing, they were going to get out of control. Or if you are eating something delicious, some tasty treat, there is a point at which you know as good as it is, you have to stop eating. "Genuch is Genuch." This morning I hear the resonance of the word Dayeinu.

But there is something that I think we can never have enough of. There is something I think that feeds us, nourishes us in a way that material things never do and that is learning. I don't think we can ever stop learning. I may have had enough Sederim for the year, but I haven't had enough learning about the Seder and all of its implications. My colleagues and I taught Lunch and Learns and teacher seminars and Melton and Melton graduates and High School kids and we spoke from the pulpit about the Seder...and yet there is more.

We learned that the Seder needs to be understood on so many different levels. There is the ritual and the personal and there is the spiritual, and there is the political and there is the historical. It entertains and it informs and it creates obligation. There is the religious and there is the seasonal and we could go on and on and on. Each one of those has a very special meaning.

Dayeinu...we may say it about the matzah and the maror and the brisket...but not about the learning. And so, on this seventh day of Pesach I want us to look at Dayeinu. It would have been enough if it was a very simple, but from it we have lots to learn.

And, as I have been thinking about Dayeinu I have come to understand that there too, there are levels of meaning. I'd like to speak to three levels.

When we read the words of Dayeinu, when we think that we are singing to God. If he had brought us out of Egypt, but didn't bring us to Sinai, it would have been enough. Or he brought us to Sinai and didn't give us the Torah, it would have been enough. Or if he gave us the Torah and didn't give us Shabbat, it would have been enough. We realize that on some level it's simply not true. We needed to be brought out of slavery, we needed to have the sea parted, we needed to get to Sinai...without any of these steps the enterprise would have been lost. None of those things would be enough. No, Dayeinu doesn't work on that level. In order for us to have come to where we are, to have become what we have become we needed each of those steps which showed God's miraculous power.

But, we have learned ways of looking at Dayeinu. There are ways of understanding the progression of verses that has helped us make sense of it. Rabbi Riemer taught that every step along the way was a step for which we should feel gratitude. The truth of life is that none of us

are going to ever achieve everything that we want to achieve or most have everything we want to have. But, on the journey we have to be grateful for what we do have, for everything we do achieve and everything we do receive. Sometimes it takes a missing piece in our lives for us to be appreciative of the rest of the pieces that we do have. All of us have missing pieces. If we live life thinking we need to have it all, then our lives are filled with desperation and frankly an unhappiness that will lead to despair.

There is a wonderful story that Rabbi Riemer shared about a woman who had a ring that had been passed down from generation to generation. It was a simple ring with many stones and one of the stones fell out. The woman was quite distraught. She kept the ring with the missing stone, because it taught her to appreciate the stones that were still there. That's a message of Dayeinu. How true it resonates with each of us. We are always looking to have more and more and more, to be more and more and more. There are times we have to be able to stop and appreciate what we do have. That is the spiritual challenge of Dayeinu, to be able to feel that sense of gratitude. When we can create that attitude of gratitude, then there is a greater sense of ease about how we live our lives. Our tradition teaches many ways to do this. We do it through the simple act of the brachah, we do it by recognizing life's simplest pleasures, and we do it by sanctifying time and not things. And that's a beautiful message of Dayeinu. And it works for most of us. Dayeinu...we do have enough. And we are challenged to say it and feel it. The human tendency is to want more and more and more...but we are a lot better off when we can say...Dayeinu.

Recently, however, I have come to another understanding. And that is that we are living not in a world where we have to sing Dayeinu, but we live in a post-Dayeinu world. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Not long ago I was teaching a group of our sixteen year olds and I asked them if they could tell me something that they wanted something they didn't have that they would like to have or perhaps something that they needed. The question was met with silence, not one student was able to share a thought about something that they wanted or needed. Imagine! Think back to your childhoods. Imagine saying that you have everything! And then imagine what it means to have it all!!!!

The conclusion is that we are raising a generation of children who have everything that they need. What do we do when we have everything that we need? The desire for things, the need for things, motivates us to act and to improve ourselves, but when we no longer have that motivation, then where are we. What can we learn when we never struggle. What can we give when we never earned.

This week I heard a story on NPR about one of the greatest growth industries in America. You know what it is? Storage space! We need more room for our stuff! We simply have become overwhelmed by what we own. And the executive who was interviewed said most people who put things into storage don't come back for it for years and then often to find a way to dispose of their stuff.

And there are other issues. Products are made to become absolute. Tape decks and VCRs and so many electronic things are no longer repaired...for they have little use, have been replaced by bigger and better and faster models and so we simply throw them away. And we have the capacity to replace them and to get new, better products. And we have them all!

I guess the first question might be, is there something wrong with having everything that we want. Isn't that what we strive for? Isn't that what our parents wanted for us?

There is something wrong when we see the great imbalance in this world. We who have lost connection with responsibility to the have not's and having everything leads to a sense of entitlement. And we lose sight, not only of others, but also our selves, our inner selves and other dimensions of being. Should there ever be anything that is missing; our assumption is that we can't live without it! The problem is fed by a culture of materialism and consumerism. A culture which overvalues things, such as shopping and owning. It is a culture that begins to lose a sense of deeper values and spirituality and...responsibility. Because in this environment where our students have it all...there are those who are seriously challenged and deprived.

At the same time, that we have it all, we are a few miles from Haiti where mothers are making their children cookies from mud. We are living in a county with more than twelve thousand homeless and that number is going to increase. More than one-third of our population is one pay check away from homelessness. This is a world where some have so much, but so many have so little. Rice is now in shortage. Gas, oil, energy dependency has led to grotesque abuses of people and the environment. And unless we get it together, individually, communally, nationally and globally even those of us with so much will feel the pain of what has happened.

That's the challenge in a post-Dayeinu world.

Our tradition says something about ownership. It teaches us that nothing is ultimately ours and that is a perspective that needs to be developed. Our tradition does not frown upon wealth, but it does frown upon unbridled wealth. It teaches about modesty, and that is not just a concept of dress. It's about a way to live in this world. Our tradition doesn't frown upon ownership, but it does frown upon ownership that leads to advantage over those without.

In our tradition we have this notion of the Sh'mita and the Yovel, the seventh year and the Jubilee Year. Those are more than agricultural events. These are about the distribution of wealth or the prevention of wealth becoming radically disproportionate so that there are generations born into poverty and getting trapped in that cycle of poverty.

Our tradition teaches through these concepts and agricultural celebration that we are partners in creation. We can't continue to consume and consume without realizing and responding to the damage we do. That message is very clear.

We are now thinking about this, but truly we are doing very little and until we change the way we live our lives, the nature of industry, until we change the direction in which we manufacture our cars and build our homes, then we will continue to do damage.

Pirket Avot asks who is rich, who is the one who has it all? The rabbis knew that it wasn't literally about having it all, but it was about being satisfied with what you did have. That is the challenge; to be satisfied with what we have and understand that the more won't create greater happiness or a sense of fulfillment.

So, let me get back to the first question of Dayeinu. Why do we say each step is enough? Because the poet understood that each step was a sign of God's presence. And once that is experienced, is realized, then we internalize our responsibility...to create holiness, to live with meaning, and to fulfill our obligations to humanity...

That has great power.

Truth be told, we forgot in the wilderness...a short time after experiencing the signs and wonders...the miraculous deliverance...we forgot our purpose and direction. That's what Dayeinu's author is teaching.

For, I believe, when we truly understand God's presence, we then know that there is a way to live in this world...and so we learn that we aren't fulfilled by anything...rather by responsibility and values.

Dayeinu...it should have been enough.

But it wasn't. And so we must remember every step of the way is a blessing. Everything we know, everything we have is a blessing...and in this post-Dayeinu world...let us learn and teach that we have much to give, knowledge to share, and resources to protect. And then we will continue to sing Dayeinu and understand that it truly would have been enough!

Chag Sameach
Shabbat Shalom