

“Every Means Every” (as in “In every generation”)

D’var Torah for Shabbat and 7th Day Pesach April 2, 2021

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I imagine our ancestors standing dumbfounded on the far side of the Reed Sea shore. They have just participated in the most unimaginable miracle of all time. They turn to one another and say, “What the heck just happened?”

I know that’s not what the text tells us. The text would have us believe that everyone broke out in rapturous dancing, like a great *chassuneh*, a freilach wedding. Moses led the men, and Miriam led the women. Timbrels were everywhere to be seen and heard.

But think about it. When you experience something uncanny or unexpected, you don’t really notice it while you’re in the middle of it. You’re just trying to cope; to get through; to avoid getting hurt.

When it’s all over, you begin to reflect. You try to recollect. You compare notes with others. You try to reconstruct the events in your mind. You wish you could see a replay! But you can’t. It happens once, and then you’re on the far side of the shore.

Is that what we all experienced this past year or so? Do we really have a grasp of what we went through? What we’re still going through?

Is there any possibility that we would be able to recount this tale for the next generation, especially with the hope that they would learn from our smart moves

and our dumb moves? So that they would fare better than we did? So that they would keep from getting sick themselves, and so that they would save countless lives? So that they would identify the neediest in society before they drowned in the closing waters of neglect, as did so many hundreds of thousands of our neglected fellow human beings?

B'chol dor vador, says the Haggadah. In every generation we have an obligation – *chayav adam* - to remember what someone else experienced, but in way that allows us to imagine ourselves as if we ourselves experienced the joys and the horrors of that particular time. Even if it happened thirty-six hundred years ago. And how much the more so if we actually did experience it!

We are now the generation who had to patch together two consecutive Passovers without the benefit of family, friends, proximity, and all of the customs and traditions we created for ourselves over our lifetimes. I imagine that some of us simply gave up under those circumstances. It was too hard, too cumbersome, and, especially, too unrewarding.

But so many Jews figured it out and went onward. So many Jews made Pesach in whatever way they could, to the extent that they could, and with whatever resources and people they could cobble together. Did we love it? Not in the usual sense. Was it wonderful? Not in the usual sense. Were we fully aware of what we were doing while we were in the midst of it? Not really. We mostly faked it.

But that experience of celebrating our holiday of retelling – in the compromised ways we celebrated it - forced us to own the reality of what we went through, and to try to retell it and learn from it. It was not a year “off.” It was not a hibernation, a negation, or a cancellation. It was as real as anything we have ever

done, even as the legendary Reed Sea crossing was still a trek like any other trek, toward a place of refuge like any other refuge, away from danger and toward safe harbor. This Pesach was as real as any other.

Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and in the camps devised ways to make a seder and tell the story of the Exodus, even those who were dead twenty-four hours later. Jews on the run throughout history found a way. I would say that “where there’s a will there’s a way.” But it’s more than that. It’s “where there’s a *chiyuv*, an obligation, there’s a way.”

So in the end, our obligation is two-fold. One step is to see ourselves in the story, even when it’s a story of long ago. The other is to realize that we *are* in the story – the story of right now - and that we need to pay attention to it so it can be retold and retrieved. This, too, is *y’tzi’at mitzrayim*, the exodus from the narrowest circumstances that life forces us to know.

And when we reach the far shore, we need to look up – and in – and take note – and begin the telling all over again. Not only in convenient years, but *every* year. *Every* means *every*.