

A Jewish Spring Cleaning

There is an old Yiddish phrase, "*mentsch macht und Gott lacht*," loosely translated as, "a person makes life plans, and God just laughs."

So it was for nearly all of us this Winter! January and February were a blizzard (pun intended) of rain, snow, ice, and wind, wind, wind! Like many of you with homes not at the shore, my wife and I are still waiting for all of our ice dams to "burst" and for the last of the snow-ice clumps holding down our azaleas to "let our shrubs go free." Hopefully, as you read this, we will all be beyond the coldest storms and on to thinking about the arrival of Spring.

And Spring is what we look forward to with the coming of *Nisan* and *Pesach* (Passover). In the Torah, we are told that our ancestors were to commemorate their freedom by marking the Exodus in the first month of the year, the month of *Aviv* (today, this is the month we call, "*Nisan*"). The very name of this month and the commemoration celebrated in it are "in sync" with each other: "*Aviv*" is also the word for "Spring," and the Exodus, which is what we are to celebrate, are both about rebirth. Throughout the Winter, life does not disappear but rather it is sleeping, withdrawn if you will, only to awaken in the Spring. So, too, was the experience of our ancestors – while they did not cease to exist during their long suffering in Egypt, they went to sleep, only to be awakened 400 years later by Moses acting on God's behalf. It is their trek into the wilderness, a place without reference points like a clean slate, that enables them to remake themselves without all of the noise and influence of the dominant Egyptian society.

I am guessing that I would be hitting close to home if I said to you that many of us become complacent, attached even, to past ways of doing things, of living our lives. There is something to be said for that, but it is all too often a trap that leads us away from who we really are and that rigidity can be stifling as much as it can help us remember our core values. The confluence of the story of *Pesach* and the season of rebirth and renewal leads us to a simple lesson: Let us examine how we are stuck in the Winter of our own lives. And let us ask ourselves, "How might I benefit from the freeing nature of a little "personal Spring cleaning?"

Let us approach March and the *Pesach* holiday that arrives at the end of the month as an opportunity to examine our lives. And once we've found the ways in which we are bound in place, let us resolve to break our chains and make our way toward *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai) to receive God's Law and to free our lives from the smallness that restricts us within and around it. Only then may we approach *Pesach* with an open heart and a willingness to "Spring forward" to free ourselves and those around us.

In the end, we must remember that it is up to us: Each of us is capable of being our best, and we can always "awaken" ourselves to welcome that which is the very best of who we are – as a Jew and as a human being.

May you and all of yours find freedom from all that imprisons you and may your rebirth and renewal taste even more sweet than you could ever imagine.

"Ah zissen und ah kasher Pesach" – a sweet and a kosher Passover!

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