

“Journeys”
D’var Neshama
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Shabbat Shalom.

We, the Jewish people, are on a journey during this time between Pesach and Shavuot. At Pesach we experience freedom and then we count the days to Shavuot where we experience revelation. And, in between we journey.

We each are on our own journeys – career journeys, relationship journeys, parenting journeys, grandparenting journeys, political journeys, community journeys, spiritual journeys.

This is supposed to be short so I can only share one journey with you tonight. But, at oneg, let’s chat about the ones I had to cut out and the ones in your lives you’d like to share.

The journey I choose to talk about tonight is the one I’ve had with Passover Seder over the years. The calendar gives us a chance to have markers to come back to, moments each year where we can reflect on where we were in prior years, moments that help mark our journeys.

About two weeks ago, I received an email from my cousin, Daniella. Reflecting about the s’derim we shared together as children, she wrote, “I think of our s’darim at the Kolodny house in Newton as the benchmark for excellent s’darim. I’ve attended and led other memorable s’darim, but none have compared to the Newton ones.”

Those S’darim were rockin! And, they were also late and long and sometimes boring. Dinner was around 10 or 10:30. The closing songs not until after midnight. Oy! But, ah, those closing songs. Ehad Me Yodayah divided up so each person took the part of one number, most people not able to remember their parts as the song progressed, resulting in plenty of giggling. Or, Had Gadya with sound effects. The dog arf arf that bit the cat meow that ate the goat Baa Baa. S’darim that included rousing singing, plenty of laughter and left me feeling full up with love and family and being Jewish. My aunt Emmy, Zecher Tsadik L’vracha, Daniella’s mom, died this past fall. And in this time of mourning, I especially remember fondly her at those Seder tables.

There were years when that Newton Seder was the perfect thing. And, there were years when, well, not so much. I remember some S’darim when I was a bit older, but still a kid, working with my sister on an original haggadah as we tried to save the parts we loved and ditch the parts that bored us. A Facebook post this year by a Shir Tikvah member referring to her kids putting together their own haggadah made me smile. It’s a good place to be on the Seder journey.

My Seder journey also included S’darim as a young adult, mostly as a guest at other people’s house. Those were usually weighed in comparison to something from the past. Usually falling short, but not always clear of what. Was it the familiar? Was it something I longed for? I never knew. A rougher spot on the journey.

Then there were the years of making my own seder. Those were years of longing to have more people to be able to invite. There were years where it seemed like everyone had someone to be

with except us. I remember one year when we invited so very many people to our house but at Seder night there were no guests. A lonely part of the journey.

For several years now I find myself in a great place at Seder time. I share Seder with dear friends, with simple and relatively short haggaddot, with good singing, with creativity and inspiration. This year at Seder we built pyramids out of snow before we sat down to the seder; and in the middle of the seder, we got up to trample them as a sign of our freedom. This year at Seder we did an improv game for the Four Questions. This year at seder we wondered how many generations the Jewish people really needed to stay in the desert to leave the legacy of slavery behind – 2? 3? Maybe 4? So, this year the spot on the journey I landed was very pleasing!

Each stop on the Seder journey has its place and serves a purpose. My journey has included so much change in Seder over the years. For others, maybe less so. Either way, I am struck by the fact that for centuries we've done the same thing, yet over and over we work to make it our own. To quote the new Shir Tikvah vision statement: "We creatively wrestle with tradition and innovation." Staying on the journey requires tenacity, it requires vulnerability, it requires courage. And, we keep on journeying. I find that inspiring.

Like my cousin Daniella there is part of me that longs for the days of the Newton S'darim. I miss singing Dayenu in two different tunes and doing every verse. I miss singing on and off key. I miss the closing songs. And, I love the S'darim I went to this year. I know that it is because of those S'darim in Netwon and the S'darim of creating haggadot and those s'darim without guests that I got to where I am today. And, it is because of this year's S'darim that I will get to where I need to be next year and the years to come. This year, I felt glad to be on a Seder journey, glad to be on many journeys, glad to be part of a people that knows about journeying.

Tonight I'm happy we get to eat challah instead of matzah, I'm glad to be free and not a slave, I feel blessed to have my cousins in my life as well as many wonderful memories of my aunt, and I'm honored to be part of a Jewish community that I can share my journeys with. Next year... well, next year the journey continues. Shabbat Shalom.