



Pesach, Day Two
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What Really Matters — a Contemporary, Coronavirus Dayeinu
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One of the consequences of our surreal season has been greater clarity about what really matters in life. I hear that again and again—what really matters—from people in various stages of life.

There was a bride and groom who were going to get married this summer. It was to be a glorious venue, with a stunning view of the water, in a historic villa, uber elegant, with hundreds of guests. The tables were going to be set with the finest linens, china and flowers. Now all of that is up in the air. When I asked them how I could be helpful, they said: simple. Just hold the date. We want to get married. The venue, the view, the villa, it doesn't matter. The linens, the china, the flowers, it doesn't matter. What really matters is our love and our marriage. If we have to do it privately, virtually, so be it.

There are the Bar and Bat Mitzvah families who had planned big festive gatherings. And they had to work to make peace with the fact that the festive parties they had planned for were not going to happen now. But in the end, they were deeply moved by their children's celebrations, reflecting that what really matters is not the party, but the resilience of playing the hand you are dealt with grace and strength. These families could not have been prouder of their resilient children and the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service that showcased their grace and strength.

There are the people I have talked to who get their hair and nails done every week. They haven't gotten their hair and nails done now for many weeks. They don't love the way they look. When they wake up in the morning, ahhh! But they have come to realize that what really

matters is not my hair or nails. There are just so many more important things going on in the world right now than my hair and nails.

I have been thinking about these insights born of the adversity of Covid-19. What are we to make of these insights? How durable are they? Will these insights survive the return to normalcy?

Let's play the counter narrative game. Just imagine that all relevant health and governmental authorities decree that the shutdown is over at the end of May. Starting in June, we can go back to having big, festive gatherings. Indeed, suppose they say that for the sake of our economic health, as well as our physical health, please get back to traveling, to spending, to eating out, to being with lots of people in crowded spaces.

Now what would the bride and groom think of their view and their villa, their linens and china and flowers?

Would the Bar and Bat Mitzvah families want to reschedule the parties?

Would our beauty salons be filled with people who had realized during the Covid-19 shutdown that hair and nails were not ultimately important, but the first thing they did when life resumed was get their hair and nails done, and are back to doing it every week?

The seeming fragility of the clarity of insight about what really matters born during the shutdown has enabled me at long last to understand a core part of the Passover seder that I had never understood before: *dayeinu*. The word *dayeinu* means: it would have been enough! The song invites us to think about the concept of enough. When is enough enough?

The song recounts all the wonders and kindnesses that God did for the Jewish people and famously asserts that if only God had done this one favor, it would have been enough. The

problem with the song is that its basic premise is false. It is flagrantly, floridly not true that if God has only done this or that particular kindness, it would have been enough.

Consider only one example of a line that is obviously and violently—literally violently—not true. *Ilu natan lanu et hatorah v'loh hichnisanu l'eret yisral, dayeinu*. If God had given us the Torah, and not brought us into the Land of Israel, it would have been enough!

What can we possibly mean when we say this line, when we know that Jewish history belies this line? Pesach begins Jewish history month. How did it work out for the Jews, with the Torah, without the land of Israel? Answer: 2000 years of expulsions, persecutions, pogroms, massacres, demonization, marginalization, ghettos, blood libels, total vulnerability, culminating in the Shoah, which we mark on Yom Hashoah, every year less than a week after Pesach. The Torah of Israel, without the land of Israel, means lots of spilled Jewish blood. That is just the fact. And it is incontrovertible. The answer to the vulnerability of Jewish history is our beloved Eretz Yisrael, which we celebrate one week after Yom Hashoah.

So why do we sing that the Torah of Israel without the land of Israel would have been enough when we know it is not true?

I never had an answer to that question until this year. The Covid-19 shutdown reveals what the concept of enough really means.

The concept of enough is contextual and fluid, not absolute and static. What is enough in one context may well not be enough in another context. What is enough changes as *our world* changes, and as *we* change along with our world.

When the pandemic rages, when unbearably large numbers of people are getting infected and dying, when our health care system is threatened by collapse, it is true that hair and nails

don't matter; linens and china don't matter; festive parties don't matter. If everybody I love is healthy, that would be enough.

And that is true. But that is true for this severe context. Change the context, change the world, change what I am dealing with in the world, and the concept of enough changes too.

It's now post-Covid. The love of my life and I are getting married. This has been the dream of our lifetime. It is going to be tied for the number one best day of our whole life. The only day that could possibly compare in beauty or importance to our wedding day will be the birthdays of our children. We want our wedding day to be just right. To be perfect. How we look matters. A lot. Hair, nails, clothing, venue, catering, guest list, all matter. A lot.

In other words, when we say X is enough, that is not a statement about X. That is a statement about us, about where and how we are doing in life at that particular moment. And the basic point of enoughness is that we want to cultivate the mindset that, wherever we are, and whatever we have or do not have in our lives, *we have enough, we have all that we need, to be full, to be content, to thrive*. We cultivate a mindset that what we don't have, we don't need. After all, what's the point of needing what we don't have. That only leads to frustration. A better mindset to cultivate is what we don't have, we don't need. And what we have, is all we need.

Which brings us back to dayeinu. For the ex-slaves liberated at Egypt, the land of Israel was a long way away. Sovereignty was not going to be theirs. But Sinai *would be* theirs. So for them, who would be blessed to have the Torah, who were not going to be blessed to live in a Jewish state, dayeinu cultivates the healthy mindset: I don't need what I don't have. I don't need what I am not going to get. I have all that I need to be full, to be content, to be good. I have Torah. Torah is all I need.

When people say in this challenged season what really matters is..., that is a statement of resilience and adaptability. A statement that I have what I need.

When people sing dayeinu, that too is a statement of resilience and adaptability. We have what we need.

When the world changes, when our horizons expand, when what we have, or can have, changes, then what we need will change too. But until then, what is will have to be enough.

I felt this viscerally this year setting our Pesach table. Shira and I have a tradition for many decades now of taking a photograph of our seder table, right before the seder. It is the loveliest and most gracious table we set all year. There are the seder plates, of different shapes and sizes, all beautiful artistic creations. There are colorful tulips deftly arranged. There are linens and plates and place settings. There are bottles of wine. There are the matza covers, the bowls for washing hands, the plates of appetizers that we eat during maggid. There are the beautiful Haggadot at every seat. Depending on the night, the table is set for 20 or for 30-something family and friends.

This year, the table was set for 3. For Shira, Sam and me. And a big screen.

Is that table for 3 enough?

Yes, that table for 3 is enough--for now. But not enough forever. Chag sameakh.