

Sparks

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You are Loved! *Don't Pass Up Passover*

I was once sitting and learning Torah with the Hollywood Actor, Kirk Douglas,^{z"l}, when suddenly he turned to me and said, "You know, Rabbi, I love being Jewish."

"Oh, yeah? Why?" I asked.
"Because being Jewish is dramatic!"

I was surprised by his unusual answer and thought to myself, I guess for these big-time actors, everything is showbiz.

"Dramatic? I am sorry but I don't get the connection," I told him.

"Rabbi, I know drama, and let me tell you, Jewish life and Jewish history is dramatic. In fact, there are several archetypical themes to all films, and they are all from the Bible. Here, let me show you what's drama."

Kirk then jumped out of his chair and began to improvise a drama.

"Now, watch this. Let's say we are shooting a scene and it's about a guy named Jerry who is going to get some challenging news about his mother. How do we make it dramatic? We would not have Jerry sitting relaxed at home reading a paper, when suddenly the phone rings and someone breaks the news to him that his mother is fatally ill. No, that's not interesting, not dramatic. Rather, this is how it's done. First, Jerry is at a party. No, better yet, we'll put him in a big company event where he's the guest of honor and about to receive an award. Now imagine he is wearing a tuxedo, he has a martini in his hand and is socializing at the preliminary reception, surrounded by his friends. Just after he cracks a joke, amidst the laughter someone hands him a note."

At this point, Kirk becomes Jerry, masterfully acting out the entire scene. I'm on the edge of my seat.

"Jerry is smiling and casually reads the note, but suddenly a pained look appears upon his face. His friends quickly inquire, 'Jerry is everything okay?'"

Kirk intones with a deep and drawn out, painful voice, "It's my mother." His head drops into his hands. After a few theatrical moments of silence, Kirk perks up and says with a big smile, "Now that's drama! Get it Rabbi?"

"Huh?"

"You see, drama happens in the sharp contrasts of life—between happiness and sadness, failure and success, defeat and victory, darkness and light. And that is the story of the Jewish people. It's dramatic."

Kirk was right. In fact, all the Jewish holidays plug us back into the drama of Jewish life. The sharp turns and striking contrasts in Jewish history inspire powerful clarity. Remembering what *was* in the past awakens us to see what *is* in the present and what *can be* in the future. The holidays empower us to recognize how G-d's love is with us all the time.

Love is in the Air

Passover celebrates the getting out of Egypt as an event greater than just a political emancipation of the Jewish people. It was a spiritual transformation. The Jews were not only physically enslaved but also spiritually enmeshed in Egyptian culture. Egypt was the epitome of egotism and haughtiness. But in truth we all know that in actuality, a person is egotistical because he lacks true self-esteem and confidence of his self-worth. His haughty airs are really a cover-up, a guise. He is trying to compensate for his painful sense of inadequacy and insecurity.

Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher living in the Twelfth century, explains that humanity's lack of self-worth was what led them to idolatry. He explains that the ancients were unable to fathom that G-d would personally care about them. Therefore, they sought out help from an intermediate power other than G-d. They believed that their lives were guided by the power of the stars because G-d, the Creator, does not personally care about them. They reasoned, "Of what worth are we that the Creator would have any regard for our situation?"

The Passover story teaches us that this despairing attitude is false. A verse in the Torah reads, "Don't make intermediate G-ds, guard the Festival of the Matza." The Sages explain this odd juxtaposition: "This is to teach us that anyone who disgraces the Festival is as if performs idolatry." In other words, celebrating Passover affirms our belief that G-d loves us and personally takes care of us; there is no need for any intermediaries between us. To think otherwise is the beginning of idolatry.

Judaism teaches that G-d's love and care for us is unconditional. Therefore, in the times when the Temple stood in Jerusalem we were obligated to come there and, so to speak, greet G-d face to face. Of-course the presence of G-d fills the earth, and we are in His presence wherever. However, in Jerusalem that truth is more readily experienced. On the holiday of Passover even a simpleton with no preparation could experience a sudden quantum leap in his spiritual level and feel worthy to enjoy a personal loving relation with G-d. Each and every one of us is befitting to bask in G-d's loving presence.

The Torah refers to a Festival as a Moed, which literally means "to meet." The portable sanctuary that the Jews carried with them in the desert was called the Ohel Moed—the Meeting Tent. It was a place to meet G-d. The Festivals, however, are a time to meet G-d. The Torah also refers to a festival as a Mikra Kodesh a "Calling of Holiness," because it calls forth from each of us our innate holiness and G-dliness. Therefore, to deny yourself the celebration of a Moed—a direct meeting with G-d --- is as if to accept the claim of idolatry; that G-d doesn't love and care about you because you are insignificant and, therefore, unworthy of His personal attention.

In truth, we are always connected to and loved by G-d. However, three times a year on the holidays of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot we are able to readily feel that truth without preparation.

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