

Pesach (First Day) 5780

Exodus 13:8

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"And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Eternal One did for me when I went free from Egypt (Exodus 13:8).'"

I am sure that we have all been mulling over, ruminating this Pesach on the metaphors, similes and parallels between our current predicament and that of our ancient Israelite ancestors.

We are all suffering from coronavirus – personally, vicariously through association to other's suffering, and through loss of security, experienced in multifarious forms. For some this may be, or at times be, too acute to look beyond its immediate impact. That is completely understandable; and I have heard so many congregants say when I have called to offer support, 'but I am lucky'...then reciting instances of those they feel worse off than themselves.

As a pebble hitting water, we first feel the impact of crisis inside of ourselves and those nearest to us. We look to those we are in relationship to in our closest circles: We have been overwhelmed by the benevolence you have shown to each other in our sacred NPLS community. May I say, 'thank you,' on behalf of all those members who have received your help and support, and to all those who have accepted support.

What will be the story we tell our children in the future? When God bought us out of Egypt, bruised, scarred and with those having not made it with us; but free, what will be our message?

We are beginning to see much that we had taken for granted unravel. We are aware of the fragility of life amongst all in society and yesterday perhaps bought home the cracks in Anglo-Jewry. Many Jewish charities have already suffered, closing or having to furlough their staff; and yesterday, the world's oldest Jewish newspaper, the Jewish Chronicle along with its almost partner the Jewish News, entered a creditors voluntary liquidation.

Having grown up in a house where the JC was always on the Friday morning breakfast table, this does feel like a symbolic moment when one asks, 'will things ever be the same again?'

It is easy get down when we are still mired in a dark situation. What do explain to our children to day?

Our Haftarah for First Day Pesach, Isaiah 43:1-15, reminded the exiles of his time in Babylon that, just as God was with the Israelites in Egypt, to provide their redemption; so too would the Eternal deliver the People of Israel in the future.

How to survive now? We acknowledge all keyworkers, represented by the NHS and including many whose services for too long our society has taken for granted. Tonight, during our Communal Seder at 8pm we will open our doors, not for Elijah but to acknowledge those who are putting their lives on the line for us day in day out, to help us get through this crisis.

May we pledge our support to them all by doing what we can do best, no matter how hard it is for us, to remain isolated.

It is hard to consider the optimism of the future when this plague has been conquered by human ingenuity and viewed in the past tense. Yet God has blessed humanity with those whose wisdom, knowledge and understanding will discover a cure and a vaccine to protect us from this disease. We have also been reminded that humanity achieves most when it collaborates. There is such a notion as 'healthy' competition. We know that future prevention and response is best placed when we work together.

Coming into this crisis we had so many – perhaps too many – Jewish charities, that sometimes even competed with each other. We have the time to consider what serves our community best. There was already a recognition that two Jewish media organisations would struggle to survive. What will be the most fit for purpose Jewish media organisation in the future? We have often stated our pride at 'how many' Jewish charities there are. Perhaps our future measure of Jewish organisations, charities and institutions will be more qualitative and holistic.

And finally, we will surely tell our children in the future about the incredible sederim that we have experienced. Seeing the plethora of photos of zoom room sederim flying around social media shows how determined we were to be free – to acknowledge that physical isolation did not preclude our celebration of the exodus from Egypt and all our People's liberations.

Emerging from Babylon, exile, the Egypt of the Deutero-Isaiah's was Judaism. It may have taken the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, hundreds of years later in 70CE to confirm it, but Rabbinic Judaism was conceived in response to those dark days. At times it is not easy to see the end of this situation, yet we know that what we will emerge from this crisis, we pray, stronger than when it began. We pray for the time that we can explain to our children: 'It is because of what the Eternal One did for me when I went free from Egypt.

Let us now hear the words of the prophet Isaiah and may these words of optimism, with the promise of future redemption help us through this Pesach and into the freedom that we will all once again experience.