

Sermon

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וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבָדִים אֹתָם וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת־
בְּרִיתִי: וְלִכֵּן אָמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה'
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם
וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֹתְכֶם מֵעַבְדוֹתָם וְגָאֵלְתִּי
אֹתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים:

EXODUS 6:5-6

I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am ה'. I will free you from the labours of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.

SHEMOT RABBAH 6:4

וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר: וְגַם הַקַּמְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי, שֶׁנִּתְּנָה לָהֶם כְּמוֹ שְׁאִמְרָתִי לָהֶם שְׁאִתּוֹן לָהֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא הִרְהַרוּ אַחֲרָי. וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִי שֶׁהֵן לֹא הִרְהַרוּ אַחֲרָי, וְגַם אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל שִׁבְּאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר לֹא הָיוּ נוֹהֲגִין כְּשׁוֹרָה, שֶׁמַּעֲתִי נַאֲקַתָם בְּעִבּוֹר הַבְּרִית שֶׁכָּרַתִּי עִם אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם, הַדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (שְׁמוֹת ו, א ג, יד): וְלִכֵּן ה': וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי. לִכֵּן אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אִין לִכֵּן אֶלְמָא לְשׁוֹן שְׁבוּעָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת ו, יג) וְשָׁבַעְתִּי לְבֵית עֲלִי, נְשָׁבַע הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁיִּגְאֵלְם, שֶׁלֹּא יִירָא מִשָּׁה שְׁמַא מִדַּת הַדִּין יַעֲכֹב גְּאֵלְתּוֹ. וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם, אֲרַבַּע גְּאֵלוֹת יֵשׁ כָּאֵן, וְהוֹצֵאתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, וְגָאֵלְתִּי, וְלִקְחֹתִי. כְּנֶגֶד אֲרַבַּע גְּזֵרוֹת שֶׁגִּזַּר עֲלֵיהֶן פְּרַעֲהוּ. וְכִנְגְדוֹן תִּקְנֹו חֲכָמִים אֲרַבַּע כּוֹסוֹת בְּלִיל הַפֶּסַח, לְקַיִם מַה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תְּהִלִּים קטז, יג): כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׁא וּבִשְׁם ה' אֶקְרָא, וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יְדִי, אֲעֲשֶׂה לָהֶן מַה שֶׁאִמְרָתִי לְאֲבוֹתֵיהֶן שֶׁאִתּוֹן לָהֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְיִהְיוּ יוֹרְשִׁין אוֹתָהּ בְּזִכְרוֹתָן.

“We are going to fix this.” “We are going to make this better.” That is the language of a good supportive friend, partner, parent or another person. The reality we know is that “getting better” or “fixing” any part of ourselves is in fact a long and often tough journey.

Our Parashat this week, Parashat Vaera, begins with the laying down of some of the plans for the Exodus from Egypt, the big and dramatic exit of the Israelite tribes from their slavery. G-d’s language is of reassurance to Moses that the Israelites will be freed from Egypt and released from slavery but the reality is that the journey is more complex than perhaps either Moses or G-d anticipate.

Ten plagues later and after lot of kvetching (trouble and strife) the Israelites finally get

released and then chased out of town.

There is a good model here in this Parashat for our own personal journeys to healing and recovery: first, call out; second, make a plan; third, carry out plan.

Start at the top. Crying out is the only way we can begin. When we are suffering, often-times, saying out loud that we are in tough times is the hardest and most frightening of steps. Sometimes, even when we say we are in trouble, it takes time for those around us to actually, clearly hear our words. Finding a way to tell those closest to us or support organisations like Jami about our trouble and our distress is a crucial step on a path to finding the support we need and better mental health.

The second part is making a plan. The exchange between Moshe and G-d is a dynamic exchange. Moshe is 'כַּבְּדֵנִי', cannot speak up with any ease and he is anxious about the mission he is assigned. G-d, too, has likely underestimated the scale of the project he has taken on, how tough Pharaoh is going to be and how unruly our Israelite people are going to be. Despite the challenges, a plan is laid out and like all best laid plans, they will be changed and adapted as you go. This too is the story of finding support and gaining strength; that often our immediate plan of action might actually not be the final plan that crosses us back into a world of good mental health and managing the pressures that our life presents. Our Parashat teaches us flexibility and adaptability as a core part of the journeys in our life.

The third part is Exodus, when we actually get there. We've done the work, our life is back on track, we are feeling healthier and more balanced out. It is here that celebration and storytelling come into play. It was Miriam and the Israelite women who went out of Egypt with musical instruments for celebration. They went out of Egypt with great faith that there would be celebration around the corner and they were not disappointed. The point here is how important celebration is. When we reach milestones, we must find even the smallest way to celebrate ourselves and mark progress. The Israelites knew this

and in the ark of Jewish history, this is what our festivals are there for. We are here, in strength, let's celebrate!

Our Passover Seder, which we will celebrate in the spring, embodies each of these parts. We retell this story of crying out, of journey and adaptability and of celebration. We double down on celebration by putting four cups on the Seder table which, too, mark the stages of this journey from slavery and suffering to freedom.

This Shabbat we are marking Mental Health Awareness Shabbat. In part this Shabbat is a celebration of all the work Jami is doing in our community. It is also an opportunity to share stories of tough times that each of us have faced individually, sharing some of our own journeys from darker to brighter days in the hope that more people who are struggling right now can cry out and say: "I am in a tough place". Talking about mental health has always been hard and for this reason it is on all of us to raise our awareness of how many people are in tough times at the moment and make clear that there is support for us in our Jewish community.

The journey is not simple but it is a path worth treading: cry out, speak up, make a plan, celebrate moments of strength and achievement on your path to better days. This Shabbat and going forward we are celebrating you and here in your support.