

Parshat Ki Tetzei, Ma Nishma, Leffell School Newsletter

“Repetition is the only form of permanence that nature can achieve.” -- George Santayana

When it comes to doing *tshuvah*--the inward reflection that is incumbent upon us this time of year-- most of us struggle with the built-in “forgetter” in our brains. What was it again that we said we would change last year? Thanks to a healthy sense of denial, we may actually forget some of our worst spiritual flubs of the year. Even when we do remember them, it’s hard to keep them in mind on a regular basis. The moment we decide to change some aspect of our personality (“I will never gossip again”), some temptation comes around and we immediately forget the commitment we made only moments ago. It’s not as if we are purposely living counter to our deeply held values; it’s just that it can be hard to remember them when life is moving along.

No wonder, then, that the Days of Awe are known rabbinically as Yemei Hazikaron, the days of memory. If only we could remember! We seem to forget our commitments as soon as we remember them.

Maybe it is for this reason that the rabbis instituted the “Six Remembrances” that are recommended to recite each day of the week after the morning prayers. Remember the Sabbath. Remember the Exodus from Egypt. Remember Amalek. Remember the Golden Calf, Remember the Revelation at Sinai, and from our *parasha* this week:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמִרְיָם בְּיָרֵךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the journey after you left Egypt. (Deuteronomy 24:9)

In the midst of a series of laws that includes everything from kidnapping to fairness in employment, the Torah instructs us to remember what God did to Miriam in Numbers 12. How does remembering what happened to Miriam help us with any of the many person-to-person laws that are listed here?

Midrash Sifrei Devarim suggests that by remembering what Miriam did, we will guard ourselves against speaking slander, as she was accused of doing when she was stricken with leprosy. Ramban, the 13th century Nachmanides, explains that remembering something aloud is actually a positive commandment. These rabbis intuitively understood that remembering the punishment of Miriam-- internalizing a deep ethical commitment-- is at the core of being a person of character.

The wisdom of the Six Remembrances reflects that very idea. The more we remind ourselves of our most important values, the more we may be able to actually live them. It takes more than one Yom Kippur to become the people we were meant to be. We could use a few reminders to fight that inner “forgetter” that keeps us in the same patterns, year after year. .

As we head towards the days of remembrance, Yemei Hazikaron, may we recognize our need for repeated attempts at *tshuvah*, even if we need to remind ourselves again and again. Shabbat Shalom and Shana Tova.