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Daily Reflections

Journeying through Lent



Center for Spiritual Development

GLIMPSING THROUGH A PRISM

By Julie Mussché

A Quote

"The more I am able to affirm others, to say 'yes' to them in myself, by discovering them in myself and myself in them, the more real I am. I am fully real if my own heart says yes to everyone..."

THOMAS MERTON, CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER

Reflection

It's hard to believe that it's been over sixteen years since friends and I traveled to Israel to attend a wedding and tour the Holy Land. From our home base in Tel Aviv, we traveled all over the country, from Jerusalem, to the Galilee, to the Yarden, Akko and up along the Golan and fit in as much geography as possible in a ten-day period. We visited with family and friends, which included spending the night in a cottage at Ein Hod at the foot of Mt. Carmel,

surrounded by banana plants and olive trees, while visiting a cousin of one of my traveling companions. Another stop included touring and visiting and sharing a meal with “Kibbutzem” family living at the Kibbutz HaZore’a. Oh, and then there was the wedding.

The festivities were traditional and numerous with much visiting and eating, and included the bride’s *Mikvah* (ritual immersion) and the groom’s *Shabbat Chatan*. The *Shabbat Chatan*, or Groom’s Sabbath, usually takes place during the Shabbat service before the wedding, where the groom is called up during the service to read Torah. The invitation to read Torah is considered an honor and referred to as an *Aliyah*. In this case, the *Shabbat Chatan* took place during morning services at a Sephardic synagogue located in Petah Tikvah, an Orthodox community east of Tel Aviv. The experience was personally transformative.

Of note, Orthodox communities in Israel can be very insular and so the wedding party, which included people who were not Orthodox and a number -- such as myself -- who were Christians, was remarkably and graciously invited to attend the service. Our group entered the small neighborhood synagogue and the women were escorted to a separate area off of the main part of the building. We soon realized we were sitting in what seemed to be a large maintenance closet with a window facing the Ark and worship area, which was visually separated by a yellow gauze curtain. There we were, about twenty women sitting on folding chairs tightly fit into an area about 250 square feet, looking out at the groom and other men sitting in a spacious and beautifully appointed wood-paneled area. It was obvious some of our party may have been a bit miffed by this arrangement. For some reason, I wasn’t.

As I looked around, the women who were members of the temple didn’t seem at all disturbed. In fact, some people prayed, while others took a moment to solidify wedding plans or briefly introduce visitors. Generally speaking, there seemed to be considerable freedom amid our snug setting, much more than what was going on in the main part of the building. As the service picked up steam, everyone settled in to the familiar rhythm of prayer and song.

Then, one of the women opened a bag of candy and I wondered what was going on as candy was being distributed to our group. With the moment of honor, we smiled at the groom reading the selected Torah portion and immediately after, women started rising up and hurling the candy toward the groom with robust “Mazel Tovs” being chorused. I certainly got into the joyful expression of “sweet” salutations and at one point, a bearded gentlemen gave me the “settle down” eye. I just smiled and continued on with everyone else.

The service was beautiful, full of joyful energy and community. The wisdom

that fell to me was plentiful. One inspiration: hospitality is mutual; guests as well as hosts are offered a moment to be generous. Embracing a spirit of generosity engages an egalitarian posture where differences are acknowledged, yet appreciated. It means paying attention to the gift of relationships and the sacred treasures of life and God's magnanimity.



Photo by Cottonbro Studio

For Pondering

- What are some ways you extend welcome and hospitality?
 - How do you find signs of the Sacred in moments of hospitality?
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For Prayer

*O God, we are one with You.
You have made us one with You.
You have taught us that, if we open to one another,
You dwell in us.
Help us to preserve the openness
and to fight for it with all our hearts.
Help us to realize that there can be no understanding
where there is mutual rejection.*

THOMAS MERTON, DIALOGUES WITH SILENCE: PRAYERS & DRAWINGS

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