

April 25, 2008

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Passover!

The sunshine and warm weather over the last few days has demonstrated that it is definitely spring (and, at this writing, Passover). Even if it rains and gets colder in the coming week, it will still be spring. We know that we can count on this very gradual, inevitable and welcome change in the seasons!

“To everything there is a season,” we read in the book of Ecclesiastes. That passage (which we read every Sukkot in another season) starkly proclaims the extremes of life (e.g., “a time to tear down, a time to build up”), but an optimist would look at those opposites as a sign that things can and will get better. It is also a reminder that the positive and the negative, the bad and the good are intricately connected in our lives. There are times when the “building up” happens because of a conscious decision to take an active role in our own self-improvement and healing.

I have not yet “publicized” one aspect of my February Israel experience in print. I told congregants gathered at Temple on February 29 about my unplanned, unscheduled and accidental dislocation of the middle finger on my right hand on February 14. I had hoped for more rapid healing after my initial visit to an orthopedic physician once I was back home, but that was not to be. So, as I am now on my second molded, removable cast, I am used to the question, “Rabbi, what happened to your finger?” Some people have urged me to create a better story than “I slipped on the slick-when-wet marble ramp by the entrance to my Tel Aviv hotel.” I have decided it would best to stick with that very accurate account of my mishap!

What I didn’t realize is that the process of healing would take so long. I am learning how our hands are very much the sum of their parts, and how taking one “part” out of the system, even to a small extent, can have an all encompassing effect. Although I am a proud southpaw, I usually open a jar with my right hand (such as gefilte fish on Pesach!). I am opening jars with my left hand now, and it’s even difficult to make a “thumbs-up” sign with my right hand.

“Building up,” in this case, the road to recovery, is a necessarily tedious process of engaging in exercises to get everything working together again. This process requires cooperation with the physical therapists and a commitment to accept their guidance, even when progress seems slow or even non-existent.

“Building up” in a community offers a similar challenge. Any group is the sum of its parts. Taking one person and what he or she brings to the group out of “the mix” may require that others in the community, or someone new to the group, try to take over the task or role that is left undone. There is a “learning curve” for this new community configuration because, with ongoing members and newcomers taking on different responsibilities, it is as if the community has become different and new. To learn to work together takes commitment, cooperation, patience and a willingness to do the required “exercises” that can facilitate “building up,” healing and renewal.

I know that I am doing my best at “building up” when it comes to my right hand and its progress towards returning to “normal.” Any community – or congregation – inevitably goes through change that requires members to dedicate themselves to “building up” with an optimistic eye toward the future. I look forward to your partnership as we continue to “build” Temple Israel together!

**-- L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.**