

I promise - this will be my last Erev Shabbat Message that leads with Australian wildlife! But I learned a fun fact about kangaroos while I was abroad last month, one that happens to be true for emus as well, and I think there just might be something here that connects a little bit to our world today and to Judaism and to the Purim holiday that we've been celebrating all week. So I hope you'll bear with me; I couldn't quite resist!

You see, the fun fact about both kangaroos and emus is that they are unable to walk backwards. It seems that the science is better understood when it comes to kangaroos – it has to do with their tails which are thick and muscular and not very flexible. While the tail serves as a sort of “third leg” that helps the animal keep balance and walk, it – along with kangaroos' very large feet – prevents the species from moving in reverse. As for the emu, it is less well established why they can't walk backwards although many speculate that it has something to do with their knee joints. Whatever the reason, both of these animals go exclusively in a forward direction.

Some may know that the kangaroo and emu stand facing one another on Australia's Coat of Arms. Here, the kangaroo seems a reasonable choice; it is, after all, one of the animals most identified with the country. But an emu? Instead of a koala or wallaby or Tasmanian devil? As it turns out, the two animals were selected precisely because of their unique characteristics mentioned above. Able only to charge ahead and advance rather than to dally in reverse, the animals were chosen to represent Australia's passionate embrace and commitment to progress. Only forward and never back!

Jews, of course, don't really have a coat of arms, but if we did the kangaroo and emu would work well for us too. Despite our small numbers, our difficult history, the many stumbling blocks put in our way, we manage to continually forge ahead with hope, strength, and perseverance using the lessons of the past not to scare or dispirit us but rather as points of inspiration and learning. Our experience of slavery led us to conclude, “You must befriend the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19). Our long period of exile led us to nevertheless assert, “As long as within our hearts the Jewish soul sings...to Zion, looks the eye, our hope is not yet lost...to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem.” And our near extermination at the hands of Haman led us to develop traditions that bring more generosity and caring into the world such as *matanot l'evyonim* (gifts for those less fortunate) and *mishloach manot* (packages for our friends). We don't move backwards into places of resentment or enmity, revenge or despair. We simply go forward, working to make things a little bit better for ourselves and the world around us.

Purim may have concluded this past Wednesday and Thursday but I hope you'll join us for our superhero themed carnival this Sunday morning from 11-1, open to our congregation and to the general community.

*Chag Purim Sameach* (Happy Purim)!

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Annie Tucker