

Last weekend I went to not one, not two, not three, but 4 performances of Kirby school's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. You might have guessed the main reason why; my son was in it. There were also 5 other Temple kids involved in the production, and even the play's director is a member of Temple Beth El. I got involved early on when the director invited me to meet with the cast to explain the meaning of some of the Jewish references in the play, so it is not surprising that I was excited about it all. But that was not the only reason. I love this play and I know it well. I first saw it as a child on Broadway with Theodore Bikel playing the lead character Tevye. We had the album and I probably listened to it thousands of times. I have watched the movie 3 or 4 times and also attended the wonderful production at Cabrillo college a few years back. I know almost all the lines in the play and certainly know all the songs and the characters. So I was so pleased that my son was getting to know this play which says so much about Ashkenazi Jews and was so important to me and everyone I knew growing up.

I knew how the production is supposed to go. But that doesn't mean that I knew how this play *would* go. I certainly had my doubts that these kids could pull it off. But, in fact, the whole thing knocked my socks off. It was fantastic, especially the kid who played Tevye. I was surprised about that, but what surprised me the most, was how much the experience of the play hit me in new and deeper ways than ever before. Each of the major themes of *Fiddler* seemed more relevant and more profound to me than I had ever noticed; the emotional struggle of loving parents letting go of children reaching adulthood, the tension between the beauty and joy of tradition and the potential constriction of the tradition's norms, gender roles and defensive enforcement of boundaries against marrying outside of the community, the anguish of persecution and expulsion and its effects on a family. The pathos, the poverty, the love, the humor. The hope. I laughed and I cried—a lot! When Tevye sang about losing his daughter Chava, it re-opened the grief I felt when I lost my grandparents and along with them, so much of my anchor to traditional Judaism that they represented to me. As we enter the weekend of American Thanksgiving, I thank G-d that my ancestors survived such hardship to get to America and the haven it was for us.

Also, as my son Jordan played Perchik, the revolutionary in the play, I was stuck by the fact that this young person being arrested for trying to right the world's wrongs is exactly like the thousands of young activists in Iran and other places who are being arrested and imprisoned *right now*. I finally understood that *Fiddler on the Roof* is not just about Jewish shtetl life. It is about me and you, our ancestors and our children, and all people who face similar struggles. It brought up so much emotion from deep within me.

In this week's Torah portion, Toldot, Isaac re-opens the wells that his father Abraham had once dug but had gotten plugged. The Kabbalists equate Abraham with *chessed*, "loving-kindness," and Isaac with *gevurah*, "restraint." Abraham was an extrovert—that is why we say his tent had doors on all 4 sides to welcome people from all directions. Isaac seems more of an introvert in the Torah stories. Why did he come to be a person who represented restraint? What is he holding back?

As the Torah describes how Isaac reopened the wells originally dug by Abraham and found water there, we might wonder how this digging also opened Isaac. Is he finding something from his father that lay blocked deep within himself?

What are the wells of *your* ancestors and how do you find water there? What has been plugged? What is there for you to uncover and how might it open you to draw deeply from this well?