

Shalom L'Kulam (Peace, Everyone),

A few weeks ago, at our congregational second night seder, we retold a story we've told annually for at least 3500 years. At Temple Sinai, we asked the questions, drank the wine and ate the symbolic foods. About 110 people across four generations created new memories and accessed old ones. Grandparents smiled watching little ones sing the same melodies of their own youth, and I imagined them connecting with the spirits of their own grandparents and the rituals of their own youth.

At the right moment, I poured a tall silver goblet of wine for the Prophet Elijah and, as the adults sang his song, Eliyahu HaNavi, I invited all the children to run to the front doors of the synagogue to open them for his arrival. As soon as the last kid was out of the social hall, I tipped the cup as high as I could and gulped down every last drop of that wine – just like my grandfather did every year in the 1.5 seconds I was looking away to open the front door of his home for the very same magical visitor. When the kids returned from their errand, I feigned surprise and proclaimed a miracle: the wine was gone! Everyone smiled and the kids were dutifully amazed/confused/dubious save one...6 year old Meyer accused loudly, "You drank it!" With a big smile, I assured him I did nothing of the sort and to prove it, I asked the whole room, "did anyone see me drink this wine?" and they answered in resounding unison, "No!"

After the seder ended, Meyer approached me with his parents in tow and asked me, "Rabbi Jay, did you lie to me?" Without hesitation, I said, "Yes, I did." He wanted to know why, so I told him that it is the kind of thing that adults do with little kids because we know that they have better imaginations than we do and we like to encourage that for as long as it lasts. I explained that we grownups are remembering the times that we believed the stories like this one. We are reliving the fun of it and I assured him that if he ever comes to ask me a question directly, I would never lie to him – I'd tell him whatever truth I believed.

Sooner or later, we grow self-conscious and it gets more difficult to return to that delicious space in which we set aside certainty and allow our wonder to free us to enjoy ideas and stories. Don't misunderstand: to know me is to know that I am deeply grounded in the truths of scientific exploration, the extreme reach of physics and the ability of the human intellect to capture increasingly complete understandings of reality. But, and I say this with complete confidence, I feel no qualms in speaking about the things beyond our understanding in the same conversation. I experience no discomfort when the myths that have kept our people vibrant for four millennia begin to bump up against the claims of science. I find them both compelling in their truths.

I take neither no comfort nor irritation in scientific explanations for how each of the plagues can be explained through natural occurrences. I embrace the science of geology and paleontology which disproves the seven day creation myth. But, I also find the power of stories to be wonderfully rich. When Meyer asked me if I was lying to him, I guess what I was really confessing was that I was lying to myself a little bit and it felt wonderful! I sacrifice nothing of my intellectual integrity or spiritual seriousness when I spend time fully in one mindset. I know that I can slip effortlessly back into the other whenever it's called for. Care to join me in one or the other? I promise the conversation won't be boring!

L'shalom, In Peace

Jay TelRav