



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

PESACH > Last Day

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

April 11, 2015

Pesach

Can You See the Big Picture?



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

Pesach > Last Day > Can You See the Big Picture?

April 11, 2015

ABSTRACT

Do you have a vision for your life?

Do you only see things right in front of you or can you also see the big picture? Conversely, do you only see the big picture and don't know how to have it inform the small pixels?

One of the great challenges in life is not to be distracted by the moment and by the details and see the broader panorama and context. And then, to ensure that the vision informs the details.

But vision is something we often take for granted. Especially when it comes to the vision of our lives – how we envision our mission in this world, our reason for being, the purpose of our existence.

The final day of Passover – in the words of today's Haftorah – conveys the 20/20 vision of the Creator of the world.

This vision is full of very wet allusions, references to waters covering sea beds and knowledge covering the earth.

The ultimate result of all this water is, gratefully, wine.

Redemption is intoxicating.

CAN YOU SEE THE BIG PICTURE? WATER, WINE AND WISDOM

1. Eyeglasses (Joke)

Two octogenarians, Judith and Gertrude, meet by chance at a deli in Miami Beach. Gertrude takes one look at Judith and says, "I see you've bought yourself a new pair of glasses."

"That's very observant of you Gertrude," replies Judith. "Yes, I've just picked them up from my optician. They are the third pair of glasses I now carry around with me."

'Oy vey!' says Gertrude. "Your third pair? Why do you need to carry around so many pairs of glasses?"

"Believe me, Gertrude," replies Judith, "I need this third pair. One pair I use to see long distances, because I'm nearsighted; another pair I use to see things close to me, because I'm farsighted..."

"And," interrupts an impatient Gertrude, "what's the third pair for?"

"...And this here third pair of glasses is going to help me find the other two."

2. Vision

Vision is something we often take for granted. This is certainly true of our physical vision, what we see with our eyes, but perhaps it is even truer when it comes to the vision of our lives – how we envision our mission in this world, our reason for being, the purpose of our existence.

This kind of vision is often overlooked.

Some people can only see the here-and-now, the reality that is right in front of them, but they are blind to the big picture and the greater context. Other people can only see the big picture, the global narrative, but they are completely oblivious to all the small things right in front of them.

Some people are very farsighted and are blind to things near. While some people are very nearsighted and blind to things far.

A vision for life requires both nearsighted and farsighted glasses. More often than not, we need that third pair of glasses to remind us that the other two pairs exist and to help us discover them.

For us Jews, that third pair of glasses is called the Torah.

3. *Acharon Shel Pesach* – Final Day Of Passover

As defined by the Torah, every day in the Jewish calendar contains lessons and reminders of the purpose of life as envisioned by life's Creator, the Holy One Blessed Be He.

On special days such as Shabbat or holidays, these lessons are more pronounced.

And within the special days themselves, there are certain days that are all about life's vision, where the heavenly view of the world is revealed for all to see.

Today, *Achiron Shel Pesach*, the final day of Pesach, is one such day.

4. Haftorah from Isaiah

The focus of the last day of Passover, as stated in the Haftorah we just read,¹ is the Ultimate Redemption.

Fundamental to Judaism is the belief that one day very soon the world will realize its purpose and reach a refined state, where materialism will be just a means to spiritual awareness and growth; where wholesomeness, peace and harmony will prevail and everything antithetical will disappear.

¹ Isaiah 10:32-12:6.

What will this Messianic Era look like? We find a vivid description of this period in the Book of Isaiah, a segment of which is quoted in our Haftorah.

Isaiah's vision portrays the world of global peace and harmony, which teaches us how we are meant to live our lives today – to prepare the world for this coming age. This vision contains both farsighted goals, as well as nearsighted practicalities. This vision illuminates both the big picture, as well as the individual pixels that help us get there.

These two elements of the vision, the farsightedness and the nearsightedness, enhance each other: the farsightedness of the ultimate goal inspires us to act now in order to reach it, and the nearsightedness of the present concretizes the greater vision and integrates it into our detailed lives.

This Haftorah contains some of the most often quoted verses of the Hebrew Bible – such as the famous *and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb*.²

Somewhat less famous is its emphasis on “water.”

- They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the land will be filled with Divine knowledge as water covers the sea bed.³
- And the Lord shall dry up the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, and He shall lift His hand over the river with the strength of His wind, and He shall beat it into seven streams, and He shall lead them across in [dry] shoes.⁴
- And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of salvation.⁵

What does this all mean? Why water?

² Isaiah 11:6.

³ Ibid 11:9.

⁴ Ibid 11:15.

⁵ Ibid 12:3.

5. Psalm 66

A verse in Psalm 66 gives us a clue:

*He turned the sea into dry land; in the river they will cross by foot; and there we shall rejoice with Him.*⁶

This Psalm encapsulates the three different elements of the vision of life: 1) the past redemption from Egypt, 2) the beginning of the Ultimate Redemption, 3) and the culmination of the Ultimate Redemption.⁷

He turned the sea into dry land – which is written in the past tense, refers to the splitting of the sea during the Exodus from Egypt,⁸ which we commemorated yesterday, on the seventh day of Passover. This is the vision of the past precedent that sets the template for all freedoms. Once we have that precedent, the path to all present and future liberations has already been blazed.

In the river they will cross by foot – which is written in future tense, refers to the beginning of the final redemption, when God will split the river into seven channels, as we just read in the Haftorah – *and He shall lift His hand over the river with the strength of His wind, and He shall beat it into seven streams, and He shall lead them across in [dry] shoes.*⁹

And there we shall rejoice with Him – which is also written in future tense, refers to the joy that comes with the epitome of redemptive process. And when it comes to joy, we find that it is linked to wine, as the Talmud and the Book of Judges proclaim:

- *There is no joy but with wine...*¹⁰
- *And the vine said to them, 'Should I leave my wine, which causes God and men to rejoice...?'*¹¹

⁶ Psalms 66:6.

⁷ For the following, see the talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Achron Shel Pesach 5747.

⁸ Rashi and Metzudat David on verse.

⁹ Isaiah 11:15.

¹⁰ Pesachim 109a; Rambam Laws of Tom Yov 6:18; Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim, Laws of Yom Tov, 529:7.

¹¹ Judges 9:13.

- *You only sing a song (shira) on wine...*¹²

So we see that the first two levels – the past Exodus and the beginning of the Ultimate Redemption – are associated with water, while the culmination of the redemptive process is associated with wine.

6. Waterworks

Water represents a higher revelation, divine wisdom and Torah.

At the outset of creation there was only water.¹³ But then the Creator brought land into being:

*And God said, "Let the water that is beneath the heavens gather into one place, and let the dry land appear," and it was so.*¹⁴

And ever since, there has been a schism between the divine revelation represented by the water¹⁵ and the concealing nature of the earth,¹⁶ where one can look at physical, biological existence and be completely blind to the divine energy within.

Initially all of creation was submerged in water – that is, revelation, purity, divinity. But now, all we see is the surface level of matter, temporal molecular structures – that is, earth.

The Ultimate Redemption, as our Haftorah clearly states, will be the best of both worlds: *They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the land shall be filled with Divine knowledge as water covers the sea bed.* At the time when the world will reach perfection there will be land, but it will be completely covered by and saturated with water – i.e. divine knowledge.

¹² Berachot 35a.

¹³ Genesis Rabbah 5:2.

¹⁴ Genesis 1:9.

¹⁵ Alma d'Iskasya.

¹⁶ Alma d'isgalya.

Matter will exist as the canvas upon which the divine masterpiece is depicted. The earth itself will exist, but now it will be saturated with the Divine.

The final segment of Maimonides' monumental *Mishneh Torah*, describes this era beautifully:

In that time, there will be neither famine or war, envy or competition, for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know God. Therefore, the Jews will be great sages and know the hidden matters, grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full extent of human potential, as Isaiah states: "*The world will be filled with Divine knowledge as water covers the sea bed.*"¹⁷

7. Dry Shoes

Our Haftarah tells us even more:

And the Lord shall dry up the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, and He shall lift His hand over the river with the strength of His wind, and He shall beat it into seven streams, and He shall lead them across in [dry] shoes.

Just as there was a splitting of the sea at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, there will likewise be a splitting of the sea at the final redemption, symbolizing the fusion of earthy matter and watery spirit.

But this verse has an unexpected conclusion: *and He shall lead them across in [dry] shoes*. Why does the Haftarah feel compelled to add that the people will be led through this split sea while wearing shoes? Additionally, we know that we wear shoes to protect our feet. When the redemption comes, all negativity and danger and threatening impurity will be removed from this earth, so why then would we need shoes to protect ourselves if all danger is extinct?

¹⁷ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 12:5.

This verse teaches us something beautiful and profound about the nature of redemption: we will not need to wear shoes to protect ourselves; rather, we will wear shoes to elevate the materials from which the shoes are made.¹⁸

The world of the future will not change. What will change is why and how we do things. Today we are involved on material life as an end in itself – to survive. We eat, dress, work, communicate to solve problems, to feed ourselves, to protect ourselves. But then, every thought, speech and action will be a means to elevate the world.

We won't wear shoes to protect the soles of our feet; we will wear shoes to elevate the soul of matter.

We will not eat a sandwich to satisfy our hunger; we will eat food to fulfill the potential of the sandwich – release its spiritual sparks and use the energy we gain from it for altruistic goals.

And the natural result will be, as our Haftorah tells us, *And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.*

8. Water and Wine

If the spirit of water is the beginning of redemption – seeing clearly the purpose of all things – wine represents the culmination of the redemptive process.

Water is life. Wine is the epitome of life – a level of total celebration. This is the ultimate farsighted vision represented by wine.

When a winemaker begins planting the vines in his vineyard, he knows that his product will not peak for another twenty years at least. It takes a good five-to-seven years for the vine to set its roots and develop. It takes another one-to-three years before grapes can be picked and crushed, before the nascent wine can ferment and age in casks before being bottled.

¹⁸ See the sicha in note 7.

And then it takes another ten years on average for the wine to peak inside the bottle. Finally, twenty years after planting the vine, the bottle is uncorked, poured into a nice long-stemmed glass, and the wine is sipped, savored and enjoyed.

Aaah, peaceful completion!

And this is why joy is synonymous with wine.

What is the difference between water and wine? Water is clarity; wine is revealed potential. You need water to live; you need wine to live it up.

You can live without wine. But you cannot celebrate without wine.

The Ultimate Redemption will reveal the world's deepest potential, just as wine reveals the deepest potential of the vine and the grape.

9. Yizkor

One of the foundational principles fundamental to Jewish belief is *Techiyat Hameitim*, the Resurrection of the Dead with the coming of the latter stages of the final redemption.

Today, on the eighth and final day of Passover, we say the memorial prayer of Yizkor, remembering our loved ones whose bodies have shrugged this mortal coil but whose souls burn brighter than ever.

The past few months, including Purim and the days leading up to Pesach, have been difficult for the global Jewish community. From Jews gunned down in a kosher store in Paris and at a Bar Mitzvah in Copenhagen, to seven innocent children going up in flames on the (supposedly) peaceful eve of Shabbat. The Jewish people have suffered more than our share.

Yizkor is a time for us to remember our loved ones, but it is also a time for God to remember His loved ones.

Just as we remember today the vision embraced by our loved ones and which we perpetuate and continue in their memory, God must certainly also remember His vision, the vision that His prophet Isaiah shared with all of Israel.

Just as we bring alive the righteous, divine vision of our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents through our good deeds and righteous actions, surely God will do the same ... surely, very soon, God will manifest His divine vision in a tangible way.

10. Practical Lesson

One of the greatest voids in modern life is the lack of vision. Children are too often taught the technicalities of life but not the vision and purpose of life. One can master every mechanical detail of life, but not know where they are headed. Like someone who is an expert driver but has no destination.

Children are taught how to make a living, but not always how to live. It is so hard to live a meaningful and spiritual life when we don't know why we live in the first place, and what the ultimate vision for our life should look like.

Today, on the last day of Passover, that vision is spelled out for us very clearly - for us to absorb and embrace.

We must envision the past, the Exodus from Egypt, which in many ways is repeated every day. We must always remember the vision that we, the Jewish people, had when leaving the confinement and slavery of Egypt. This has a twofold purpose:

- 1) It sets the precedent that freedom is our natural state and exile/displacement is an unnatural one.
- 2) It is a template for how we can be set free from the forces that enslave us today.

So let us study the way to freedom forged back then and discover the tools for freedom today. And then we can cross the river wearing dry shoes.

11. Uncomfortable Shoes (Joke)

One *Achron Shel Pesach*, the last day of Passover, Aaron arrives in shul for morning prayers. As he gets to his seat, there, sitting next to him, is his friend Moses. "*Chag Sameach*, good Yom Tov," says Aaron. "And a *Chag Sameach*, good Yom Tov to you too," replies Moses, wincing in pain.

"What's the matter?" asks Aaron.

"My feet are absolutely killing me," replies Moses. "My shoes are way too small."

"*Meshugeneh* – that's crazy," says Aaron. "Why wear shoes that are too small?"

"I'll tell you why," replies Moses: "I'm having the worst time of my life, that's why. In the last few weeks, my wife Rachel has been depressed and all she does is yell at me, at the kids, at the neighbors, at everyone; my beautiful daughter Hannah has left home to live with a *goy*; my son Nathan has decided that he doesn't want to continue to study in yeshiva and decided he wants to be a NASCAR driver (tell me, is that a job for a nice *yiddishe* boy?). And, to top it all off, my company has made me redundant, leaving me with no money to pay my bills."

"Oy, that's terrible," says Moses. "But, Aaron, to be honest with you, I don't understand what that has to do with wearing small shoes?"

"Moses, it's very simple: when I take off these asphyxiating shoes, life suddenly becomes the epitome of pleasure – it's as if the Messiah has arrived!"

12. Redemption: Getting Better All The Time (Conclusion)

A misnomer often associated with the final redemption is pain relief – life right now is so bad that taking off our shoes is redemption. Talk about lowering our standards.

The Torah's description of the Ultimate Redemption, which we read today, is far more sophisticated.

Our goal is not to take off our shoes but to elevate their substance. To abolish the negativity or transform it, but never ignore it or shrug, "Eh, it could always get worse."

If we make elevation our focus, then we shall forever be climbing higher and higher, and then redemption never ceases. Like wine: the longer it ages, in the right environment, the better it gets.

May the "Wine of Torah" truly enter into our consciousness and into the consciousness of the world, and may the secrets, the mysteries, the divine levels that are deeper than reality itself be revealed and released for all the world to taste and enjoy.¹⁹

And may it happen right now!

Chag Sameach. May everyone have a redemptive and joyous summer and year!

© Copyright 2015 The Meaningful Life Center. By downloading this PDF file from Meaningful Sermons, you agree to respect the copyright of this written material. You understand that your right to this material is limited to using it to deliver sermons, classes or other oral presentations to your community. You agree not to publish this material or any part thereof, nor to email, fax, copy, scan, mail, etc. or otherwise share this material with others, nor to verbally share these ideas with others.

¹⁹ See Likkutei Torah, Tzav, 17aff.