

8/1/22 - Rosh HaShanah Morning

We are Supposed to Be the Heroes of the Story

We are supposed to be the heroes of the story. Adam and Eve begin humanity. Noah saves humanity to give us a fresh start. He's not perfect, but with his family he does his best. He's apparently a great yachtsman and loves animals. Abraham and Sarah, two of the best and brightest of their generation, see through all the lies and misunderstandings of idolatry and human sacrifice. They walk away from everyone they love and everything familiar to them, walking towards their own understanding, truth and vision for how they want to raise children and live their lives.

They are the heroes in the story. God chose them and we follow their successes and failures. Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilcha, all heroes in our communal story. They are human. They are imperfect, but every hero has imperfections that help make them relatable. Joseph lives his actual dreams, heroically saving his family and the entire Egyptian empire from famine and devastation.

Moses, our ultimate hero, redeems us from centuries of being enslaved in Egypt. Moses holds up his imperfections to God to disqualify himself from the job and God brushes them aside. God explains to Moses, I want to work with you, I created you inside and out, you are perfect for what we will do together. Let's be really clear, I think Moses and Aaron hated their jobs, but look who they worked for? The Children of Israel? Am I right? Never satisfied with anything! Millions of complaining, ungrateful wanderers in the wilderness who rarely understood the big picture. "Wah, we should have stayed in Egypt. Are we there yet? Are we lost? Do you even know the directions?"

But God picked Moses and Aaron. They trusted God's vision even if the Children of Israel didn't. Don't get me wrong Aaron and Moses were pretty certain they were going to die at the hands of the angry mob at times, but God was always there to straighten things out. I'm sure they told the

Children of Israel many times, “You just wait until Adonai get’s home! The Creator of all that is good will not be happy with your behavior or attitude.” Moses dies of old age at the conclusion of the Torah which we read about in a few weeks as we do every Simchat Torah. Joshua takes over, the hero in his own story, but the experiences of the Children of Israel seem to get worse and worse the further we get from the life of Moses.

King David and King Solomon rule imperfectly and egotistically despite how much of a modern fan base still laud their poetry and wisdom. They’re followed by generations of their offspring, kings who can barely hold the kingdom together. As the ages move closer to us sitting in these seats, empires rise and fall, time and again, trying their best to eradicate the Jewish people, our history, our culture and our religion. The Babylonians, the Assyrian-Greeks, the Romans. New baby religions spring up, they co-opt some of our characters and they make “US” the villains of their stories.

They’ve been making us the villains of their story for nearly 1900 years because they wanted to, they needed to. Many continue to do it today, not because they have to anymore, but because they still want to. You cannot control people if they don’t have something, someone to fear. You can’t get people to do your dirty work if you don’t give them a villain that is the root of all their problems, the root of all their self defined evil. Their lies, their system is the root of all the historical massacres of Jewish people throughout the last fifteen hundred years or more.

Pope Urban the III called for the Crusades in 1095 to regain what was called Palestine from the “Infidels.” The Crusaders killed over 12,000 Jews as they marched across Europe on their path to Jerusalem and holy victory. After they captured Jerusalem in 1099, they collected all the city’s Jews into a synagogue and burned them alive. Who is the hero in this story and who is the villain?

The very existence of Jews irritated Pope Innocent III so much that in 1215 he declared that Jews living in Christian lands were at all times to wear a

solid yellow badge on their clothing. We see such a badge in Nazi Germany nearly 700 years later during the Holocaust that led to the destruction of six million Jews.

In Spain, in 1263, Nachmanides stood as one of our greatest philosophers. Yes I know, they gave out the coolest nicknames back then. I am still waiting for mine in the mail with my Torah decoder ring. King James, of The King James Bible fame, ordered Nachmanides to participate in a Jewish-Christian disputation. It was thought that if the Christian opponent defeated the Jewish representative that masses of Jews would recognize the truth of Christianity and convert. However, to make it more challenging for the Jewish representative the Church hierarchy set near impossible rules on the arguments the Jewish representative could use and forbade them from saying anything they regarded as offensive to Christianity with the highest priests set to judge what they deemed offensive. There was no winning in this. To lose the debate might mean forced conversion for the Jewish population and to win might draw physical attacks and communal violence against them. For this debate Nachmanides secured rare permission from the king to be able to speak without fear of censorship or retribution.

The three questions of the debate were:

1. Has the Messiah come as Christians say, or has he yet to come as the Jews say?"
2. Is the Messiah divine as Christians say, or human as the Jews say?
3. Do the Jews practice the true law or do the Christians?

The first question is easy for Jews when we explain that the true Messiah is supposed to usher in an age of peace. In all times since before and after this disputation nations have never ceased from waging war against each other to this very moment. In fact most other religions are the worst perpetrators of wars for the last 1500 years.

The second question, Nachmanides argues that "the central issue separating Christianity and Judaism was not the issue of Jesus' messiahship, but whether Jesus was divine. There was no basis in

Judaism, Nachmanides said, for believing in the divinity of the Messiah, or indeed of any man. To Nachmanides it seemed most strange “that the Creator of heaven and earth resorted to the womb” of a random young Jewish woman, “grew there for nine months and was born as an infant, and afterwards grew up and was betrayed into the hands of his enemies who sentenced him to death and executed him, and that afterwards...he came to life and returned to his original place.” Nachmanides told the Spanish monarch, “You have listened all your life to priests who have filled your brain and the marrow of your bones with this doctrine, and it has settled with you because of that accustomed habit.”

And as for the third question Nachmanides answered that nothing had changed in the character of the world or of mankind to make the Torah’s commandments superfluous.

Jewish Literacy Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, p. 191

As for the third question, do we even need to address it? I think it is clear which religionsists try to follow a set of laws and which religionsists have flouted them in the name of God over the last thousand years and more.

The Jewish people have retained faith and spirituality despite the bloodthirsty and ruthless nature of humanity. As Jews we’ve dug deeper into spirituality, philosophy, sociology, and the depths of the human condition through education, reading, writing and arguing with each other. We’ve persevered over two thousand years despite humanity throwing every destructive force and act of violence they could at us.

We are the heroes in our own stories because despite all of history attempting to wipe out our ancestors, our culture, our history and our religion, our people somehow managed to keep our families alive over the last two thousand years. To sit here today we each represent the genetic survival of the fittest of our lineage for over 15,000 years let alone the last 500 years.

We are part of the success story, we are numbered among the lucky who somehow avoided every empire, the dark ages, every pogrom, and the

Holocaust to be present in this modern age that looks to be going down the same dark paths of the past despite all the historical evidence of the violent cost of theocratic and race wars that seek to destroy those who don't fit into their religious beliefs.

In our world we need more heroes who stand up for what is right. We need more humans to stand against the theocratic tide that threatens our very existence and the existence of Europe as we know it, the existence of the Middle East as we know it and the very existence of the United States of America as we know it. A true modern hero works for the common good of all humanity. A real hero puts away differences and lifts up our shared experiences and shared values in order to create a better world that represents all of us.

In the theocratic holy war we are witnessing in America and throughout the world human decency, understanding and acceptance are at risk. The most fundamental elements within each religion are espousing the worst values of their faith to win a spiritual war in their minds and a violent, destructive war within the communities we love and share with them.

We must stand as witnesses and stand against the tide of corrupted religious individuals, baseless hatred and antisemitism. We must find our allies to fight the religious war we reluctantly find ourselves in. We must fight to create the world we want to live in.

We have always been and always will be the heroes in our story. We know we can do better, but we are the wanderers who crossed the desert to bring enlightenment and knowledge to the rest of the world for the good of all humanity. We must never stop fighting for what is right in this world. We must never stop being the heroes in the story. We must never stop shining our light upon the villains of this world and expose their villainy towards creating a world without villains.

May this Rosh Hashanah give us the strength to wage this war with love and words in hope of avoiding more violence and bloodshed. May we unite

in our faith to be the heroes we know we can all be, that we've always been in our story that shows us wandering the desert, creating a country from nothing, and carrying our faith across the millenia so we might sit here and pray for the world filled with kindness we wish to see made real.

Be the hero. Fight for justice. Be the peace you wish to see in the world.

Cayn yehi ratzon - May this Be God's Will

L'Shanah Tova metukah

[Anthem - Heroes by David Bowie \(performed by Peter Gabriel\)](#)