

Dear Friends,

Every year, I get to the final verses of Parashat VaYechi and the end of Bereshit, the story of Jacob's final journey, and wonder if perhaps this year things will be different. And every year, I am amazed once more – what a tragic missed opportunity! How is it that we missed such an enormous and obvious opportunity to be redeemed?

Jacob dies and his sons embark on an unprecedented funeral procession that ends at the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron. But then, they return to Egypt! Every year, I want to call out to them, or better yet, yell: "Don't go back – it's a trap! The famine has long passed, you don't need to go back, stay in the Land of Canaan. There is nothing in Goshen for you. You will simply sink in the Egyptian quicksand! Please, don't return to Egypt!". But they don't hear me, or perhaps I haven't actually made a sound, I just think I have. And what is left is just the bitter taste of a missed opportunity.

Haim Weitzman called out to the Jews of Europe in the 1920s, when the gates of Aliyah opened for the very first time: "Am Yisrael - where are you?". A rare opportunity was missed, and twenty years later, the Jews of Europe, who did not heed his call, were murdered.

Esther and Mordecai requested from Achashverosh the right to defend themselves, and even asked for an extension, so the Jews could take revenge against their Persians neighbors. But they too, missed the chance to ask for that which would have changed the course of history, to return home, to the Land of Israel!

And in our own lives...

How many times have we preferred the comfortable and familiar path, and not pursued our greatest dreams?

How many times, through inertia and habit, have we missed the opportunity for redemption?

How many times, while making one journey, have we missed the signposts for another journey entirely?

But perhaps this is not how it works.

Perhaps Jacob's sons (including ourselves, of course) haven't yet finished with Egypt.

Perhaps it is necessary to sink further into suffering and slavery.

Joseph and Esther's parallel stories illustrate this shared and difficult discovery: both rise to greatness after years of suffering. Both are orphaned at an early age. Both exiled from the land in which they are born. Joseph is sent by Yehuda to his fate, and Esther is sent by the first person to be called Yehudi to meet her fate. Both find themselves high up the royal palace. Both are adored by the king. Both, we are told, are exceptionally beautiful. Both are saved by wine (Joseph by the wine bearer, and Esther by the wine feasts). Both hide their true identities, and then exposing them in one dramatic moment. Both learn the hard way that there is divine wisdom behind their distress: "For sustenance did God send me ahead of you", said Joseph to his brothers, and "Who knows if for this moment you became queen?", said Mordechai to Esther. Both receive the king's ring, along with great political power and "half the kingdom". They both saved their people from physical annihilation. Both Esther and Joseph could have brought about full redemption of their people, yet choose the riches of palace life over the possibility of returning home.

This week, we have an amazing chance to redeem ourselves **now!** To save our children and grandchildren terrible suffering. To turn a funeral procession into an affirmation of life. And this week, we will once again bow our heads in confused embarrassment and admit the truth: that we do not truly want to be redeemed, rather, we prefer comfort to redemption.

And if this is the case, then perhaps it is not really a missed opportunity. Perhaps we simply don't really want it. And what is an un-wanted redemption? Maybe things happen when the time is ripe, when the palace and its pleasures are simply not enough, and when **we want more, much more.**

Perhaps King Solomon was right when he said "I swore to you, maidens of Jerusalem...do not awaken love until it is desired." (Song of Songs,2:7, 3:5, 8:4). Love and redemption apparently cannot be hurried. Later in life Solomon concluded that "For everything there is a time, and a season for every *chets* (meaning object but also means desire or will) under heaven." (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Apparently redemption comes only when it is truly desired, and not a moment before. All happens in its rightful time.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha