

Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz
Sunday, February 4, 2024

We are a People of the moon. That is why we constantly think that our holidays either come early or late. They come neither. It is just that the Jewish calendar runs according to the moon, which needs to be reconciled annually with the Gregorian calendar. And so, as the moon cycles, so do we.

As Shlomo Artzi (my favorite Israeli singer and one whose songs I am translating these days), writes in perhaps his hallmark song, "Moon":

There was a time where happiness came through rage,
We laughed at everything, burned what we could get our hands on,
We got nothing left but to embrace the sorrow,
To say, "Yesterday all was good, and tomorrow will be as well".
Yesterday all was good, yesterday all was good,
Yesterday all was good, and tomorrow will be as well.

That sums up what is happening here these days. We cycle according to the moon, but sometimes it feels as if there is nothing left but to embrace the sorrow. For sure, as Artzi writes in another part of his masterpiece, it is a time that for sure, pleasure and pain come as a couple.

And so, I had lunch with one of our former tour guides...a lovely, gentle, and wise man. He had much to tell me about his life here these days. I could fill up this entire space with his stories. But, instead, I will tell you one. He told me about one of his former students who was so sadly killed here some twenty years ago by a terrorist attack at the Hebrew University. A parent's worst nightmare, they send their children to learn for a year in Israel and they don't return home. My friend has always kept in touch with these parents of his former student. They spoke recently and the mother reflected from America on the war today here in Israel. She said, "You know one of the things I remember about the day my son was killed is that Hamas leaders were giving out candy to the children in the streets of Gaza and told them to dance in celebration that they had successfully killed a Jewish American in Jerusalem. Can you imagine", she continued, "...those same children who were given candy to celebrate my son's death are the same ones who came in to cause such terror and horror on October 7th."

Indeed, the cycles of humanity and the lack thereof. That is exactly right, a whole generation of young people in Gaza were brought up to hate Jews and Israelis....how will that cycle be broken, I wondered? And, given the separation and the trauma and the anger here, there is unwinding that must happen in Israel as well.

The cycles of the moon. Of humanity. Of healing. How to find humanity and healing? Well, one way is to make sure there is enough.

This morning, I volunteered at the Wholesale Marketplace for fruits, vegetables and the like in Jerusalem. Lauren found the opportunity for me...even from 6,000 miles away, she figures it out for me! I met a woman named Rutie there. I am not sure how I found her in the mess of a market. This is not a place for the everyday citizen to buy fruits and vegetables. It is a clearinghouse where the goods are delivered from the farm and readied for distribution throughout the city. What was our job? To rescue fruits and vegetables that can still be eaten,

but for some reason are discarded. We literally went through every garbage container; scanned the ground; and went from dock to dock to ask if they had “leftovers” that they wouldn’t sell. I must admit that it was disgusting to be in the garbage, but it was even more astounding how much we were able to save. Indeed, 150 families will come to pick up what are (now that they are washed) fresh fruits and vegetables which have become exorbitantly expensive. A cab driver told me that he went from paying 5 Shekels for a small container of tomatoes and is now paying 20 Shekels.

Just a quick word about this Rutie who sort of runs this volunteer gig at the Market. If I tell you that I didn’t meet another woman at the Market Place this morning, I do not lie. Literally, except for Rutie there was not a woman to be found (at the end indeed, another woman came to pick up the goods). This industry must all be men. And they acted like, well pretty Middle Eastern. They didn’t want to be bothered with us. They just wanted to get their jobs done. But all she did was charm them, ask about their families and their health. If they had for us; or if they didn’t, it didn’t matter to her, she was just as lovely, with a guarantee that she would be back later in the week for more. She wore these roughened men down with her generous spirit. It didn’t bother her if they acted with aggression, her goal was clear. I asked her when she started this work. She told me a year ago. She said she wanted to do physical work because her whole life has been thinking (she just retired) I asked her what she did...and I could tell even before she said it, she is a psychologist. She just had that calming way about her...and she uses those same skills to get her work done in the Marketplace. And, if not, there would be some who wouldn’t eat tonight.

The cycles of the moon! In that way, I wish our youngest, Sadie Rose, such a happy 15th Birthday. She is a deep and magnificent young lady. Lauren and I are incredibly proud of her for many reasons on so many levels. She loves her birthday, and I am so sorry to miss it. I love you, Rosie!

Please continue to pray with me about my dear “younger brother” who is in Gaza. I literally don’t stop thinking of him.

To days when the moon reflects joy that doesn’t have to be coupled with sadness.
Love from Jerusalem.