

Messianic Rabbi: A Virus, a Table and a Testimony

I don't know about you, but every morning as I begin to wake up, the first thing I do is think, *What day is today?*

Once I recognize the day, the next thing I do is mentally prepare myself for my day. This is because I am a creature of habit, or maybe it is because I have a little bit of OCD in me.

You see, barring an emergency, I know exactly what I am going to do on each day of the week. I know which days I go to my office early, so I can finish certain tasks before others arrive. I know which days I go to my coffee shop and visit with the regulars. I know which days I will prepare for studies and which days I will be visiting the members of our congregation.

Each day of my schedule is organized; it is not written down anywhere other than in the imprint of my mind. I have always been a pre-thinker/pre-planner who starts out my days by thinking through the whole day from morning to evening. Then after prayer (one of the daily scheduled events), I rise up and begin to complete those items as close to my mental schedule as possible.

I don't mind when circumstances cause nominal changes, but major changes in my day can frustrate me because then I have to mentally reschedule the entire day and sometimes my whole week. There is an old Jewish proverb that says, "Man plans and G-D laughs," which I have spent my life trying my best to disprove.

Then came COVID-19 and with it, everything in my schedule changed. It wasn't so much that my entire schedule changed that bothered me the most. It was those first few minutes of

conscious awareness when I would recognize the day and find my places in my world were robbed from me.

Suddenly, getting up early on Monday and driving into my office to write my blog before the other people began to arrive changed to walking from my bedroom to my dining room table. Instead of having dinner on Tuesday evening with my congregation before Bible study, I was having dinner with my wife and then clearing the dining room table in time to livestream the study from my dining room.

On Wednesday, when I would normally drive to the Drowsy Poet Coffee house before my Torah study group, I was instead having coffee at my dining room table before logging in to GoToMeeting for the Torah study. On Saturday mornings, instead of getting up and having breakfast before synagogue service with my congregational family, I am sitting at my dining room table preparing my last-minute notes for my message before driving to my synagogue to livestream the service with a team of 10 (or less) people.

My dining room table has, in just a few weeks, transitioned to the central hub of my life and almost every activity that I do in service to my congregation in some way or other involves that table.

The truth is that we have a beautiful, antique dining room table we inherited from my grandparents. It is nearly 100 years old and was amazingly handcrafted. It was designed to seat from six people to 14 people.

We have had that table for years, but up until the past few weeks, we probably only used the table three to four times a year, mostly for special events like our Passover Seder, where we would have company. Most of our meals are normally eaten out because of our schedule. When we eat at home, it is usually at our kitchen table or on TV trays in our living room (don't judge us).

But somehow, when the world changed, something in my mind shifted and the dining room table seemed to become the central hub of our home. It wasn't until our Passover Seder meal last week that I realized why that dining room table so quickly changed its function and role in our lives.

It is because that dining room table belonged to my grandparents. It is because it was the place where my family would gather for dinners, for birthdays and for anniversaries. It was at this dining room table that my grandfather would lead our family through our Seder as he retold the story of our ancestors' exodus from Egypt. It was at this dining room table that I first heard both about plagues and G-D's deliverance of His people.

It was at this dining room table that I first understood that when we cry out to G-D, He will hear our prayers. But more than learning that G-D heard our prayers, I learned while sitting around that dining room table that our G-D *answered* our prayers.

You see, I realized that it wasn't the dining room table that became so important and central in our lives. It was the heritage and legacy of my people Israel that the table represented in my heart. On Passover evening as I sat around my dining room table, I was reminded how to obey the words from Philippians 4:11 (TLV): "I am not saying this because I am in need—for whatever circumstance I am in, I have learned to be content."

My antique dining room table reminded me of the value and strength of a legacy of faith; a legacy we all have that is found within the pages of a book that, like my dining room table, was handed down to us by our ancestors.

It's a book that, even more than my dining room table, provides testimonies of those who went before us and endured hardships and tribulations. They understood that no matter

where we are or what is happening in the world, if we allow G-D's Word to affect us like my dining room table did for me, it will remind us that we are not alone.

Or, as Hebrews 12:1 reminds us, "Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also get rid of every weight and entangling sin. Let us run with endurance the race set before us." {eo}

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