

During the years I taught for Niagara University located in Lewiston, N. Y. at their extension campus in downtown Toronto, I found tremendous satisfaction teaching two courses, one each semester in the school year. I taught the elementary school teacher education candidates' courses in how to approach the teaching of the Language Arts one semester and how to approach the teaching of Science and Mathematics in the second. During my first couple of years with that program, I saw myself as a real novice. I had retired believing myself to be at the top of my game as an educator in 2004 after 30 years with the District School Board of Niagara and its predecessor boards like the City of St. Catharines and which became Lincoln County. I really felt like I was an expert educator. Then I plummeted to that of a novice all over again when I started teaching candidates for the teaching profession in Toronto in the fall of 2006.

Those hiccups in my life's journey were always brought up in my farewell address to my students at the end of the two 15-week courses. I used to spend my last couple of hours with my students expounding on the merits of the profession I was still a part of and the one they were hoping to enter. I remember so often choking up when I used to expound on all the joys and satisfactions of being a classroom teacher. I did it in such a way that I could use my own journey as a professional to illustrate what lay ahead. You see, I did not get my first classroom in 1974 until the last week of the summer and I only got that because the list of available teachers was down to next to none. I was not exactly anyone's first choice for a variety of reasons. Then, it took me two EXTRA years to earn a permanent certificate because I was not quick to acquire the skills required to be an effective classroom teacher. I got moved to a second school because I was having such a hard time as a classroom teacher. No lessons in life ever came easy for me. But slowly, surely, I made my way from novice to expert because I wanted to succeed so badly and after many hard knocks, I became a master teacher. I hoped that all the hard knocks I had experienced and overcome would provide them with inspiration to be able to say that if I could become a classroom teacher, from the ashes of adversity, so too could they.

I bring this up because I often think about my last day's farewell address when I consider Moshe standing on the middle ground between the twelve tribes arrayed on two

mountains forcing the Israelites to consider life after he was no longer there. Indeed, Moshe speaks about all the wonderful things that lay ahead for the Israelites in the new land, under the protective and sheltering wings of the almighty. He reminds those assembled of all the blessings of their position as the most favored of the Almighty. Then he warns them of what might befall them if they chose to stray from HaShem, the same way I used to tell my students that ignoring the lessons we'd covered in our 15 weeks together would make it impossible for them to get a job and ever succeed as classroom teachers. Moshe could point to the errors of the past as ways to avoid in the future.

New teachers start off with such high expectations and hopes and within a couple of years, seemingly hit a plateau, neither novice nor expert. From this analogy in time between my experiences with my students hoping to enter my chosen and most favoured profession. There are striking similarities between what HaShem says to the Israelites will happen to them if they ignore the lessons of Sinai and the protective embrace of HaShem and the teachings driven home by Moshe. HaShem through Moses urged his chosen people to maintain their connection with his Torah and to encourage their children to do likewise. If they forgot the commandments to teach their children as if they themselves had experienced the exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in Sinai and the mistreatment at the hands of the Amalekites then all manner of dysfunctions would befall them. The protective shield provided to the Israelites by HaShem compared to the wings of an eagle flying high above the ground will disappear and they will be left at the mercy of the vagaries of persecution and failure. But operating under a protective shield does not mean that shield will be there forever. One has to constantly struggle by aspiring to achieve ever higher goals.

IN many ways, one could argue that is exactly what has happened to World Jewry especially after the tragedy of the Holocaust. The gates have been lowered for us to acceptance and equality and plenty in the 20th Century and over the generations after the Second World War we assumed that given our levels of success, we didn't need to teach our children about their people and its history. We didn't need to really worry about guaranteeing the next generation of Jews cared enough about their roots, about the heritage embedded in Torah, to insist they listen and think about the exodus, or hear the sound of the shofar and learn about what its message was conveying, or even come to

understand how the idea of Israel as our homeland has defined us and kept us as a people for 20 centuries. Similarly, there was a time when every Jewish child grew knowing the joys of sitting together at a Shabbat table and learning that that single observance has helped to keep the Jewish people together. And so, we see how our children place importance on travel and friendships and financial success and sports before the continuity of the Jewish community and keeping the doors to our synagogues open and making a Jewish home for the next generation.

We have the lesson of our people's history to turn to, to remind us that when we have lost our way, and strayed from the lessons of Torah, bad things have happened to us. WE have lost our collective identity and grit in the face of adversity. We can only allow ourselves to become so complacent before history repeats itself and we are threatened with the very same things that Moses suggested would befall his people when they forgot HaShem and the Torah he gave to us. Somehow, we must find a way back to that time when we payed it forward to the next generation and thereby did our part to ensure our people's continuity. Surely there is a happy medium to aspire to where we can accept and benefit from the riches of the 21st century and our acceptance, generally, by the world around us without losing our sense of identity and commitment to our separate but equal community. Shabbat shalom.