

## **Pesach 5781**

### **The Coming of Spring**

This morning we read narrative of the actual exodus. Verse for verse it's a continuation of the reading for Shabbat Hahodesh a few weeks ago.

And if we look at them together we can see that the Exodus wasn't quite such a rush as it's made out to be in the pictures in our Haggadot. All of the instructions for Pesah - the lamb, the blood, the matzot - are given by Moses and Aaron to the people a full two weeks before the actual events happen.

That brings me to this morning's special Musaf. Twice a year, on the first day of Pesah and on Shemini Atzeret, we pray for water. In the fall, the prayer is for rain; in the spring, as Elliot is shortly to show us, taking up the mantle of Ashley Shocket z"l who made this part of the liturgy his own, we pray for dew.

Rain and dew are different manifestations of the same element, but generally speaking, dew is less understood.

Dew forms from condensation - the process that happens when a material changes from a gas - in this case, water vapor in the air - to a liquid - in this case, water. That change can only take place if temperatures drop and objects cool down. Since cold air doesn't hold on well to water vapor, the water in the air condenses around the objects nearby. The temperature at which this happens is called the dew point, which varies widely depending on geography, time and weather patterns.

Those of us who wear both mask and glasses know all about the dew point...

Dew does not nourish the environment in the same way as rain, but it is just as important. It turns out that dew saves plants - first, by reducing the amount of water they lose, second by cooling the plant down (think about how we become cooler when we perspire) and third, some plants are capable of absorbing dew directly through their leaves. And dew can help seeds germinate and possibly even create the conditions that help grasslands turn into forests.<sup>1</sup>

So when we consider dew, we are once again looking at a process that is gradual, and delicate, and unfolds without fanfare. And perhaps it isn't too much of a jump from that thought to thinking about the arrival of spring. One of Pesach's names - it has three - is *hag ha'aviv*, the festival of springtime. My mom of blessed memory used to play a piano piece by Christian Sindig called 'The Rustle of Spring' - Elissa Bluth probably knows it very well. It's a piece that is also gradual - it builds harmonically and acoustically<sup>2</sup> (I'll put a link in the version of this sermon on the website so that you can listen after Shabbat).

And there's this verse from a poem by e e cummings:

spring is like a perhaps  
Hand in a window  
(carefully to  
and fro moving New and  
Old things, while  
people stare carefully  
moving a perhaps  
fraction of flower here placing  
an inch of air there) and  
without breaking anything.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.neonscience.org/impact/observatory-blog/whats-all-dew-doing-maybe-more-you-think#:~:text=Dew%20reduces%20water%20stress%20for,occur%20until%20the%20dew%20evaporates.>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3DIE\\_9gBLg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3DIE_9gBLg)

And one more thought. The manna - the first food of freedom for the Israelites - is introduced by dew:

*In the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp. When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness lay a fine and flaky substance...<sup>3</sup>*

They find it so confusing that they aren't sure what to do with it at first, which is how it gets its name - *man hu*, 'what is it?'. It is only after Moses reassures them that they slowly begin to gather it in - and they don't get the hang of the process until they have gotten it wrong a few times.

The arrival of the manna, the coming of spring, the fall of dew - all of them are gradual.

I spoke a couple of weeks ago about patterns. Here they are again - a collection of ideas all pointing towards the same conclusion: that big changes - even if they are radical - happen gradually.

That is exactly where we stand, this Pesach, our second of the pandemic. An end is in sight though it may take a while to come; we hope and we pray that things will continue to open gradually and safely as we unfold into a new normal - because it won't be possible to go back to the old one, nor should we. Over the course of the past year, we have gradually changed too.

So let's let this new phase of our lives settle, like the dew.  
Let it nourish us like the manna.  
And like our freedom, let it grow.

Hag kasher v'sameah