

**On Shabbat New Year's Eve, 12/31/99 Rabbi Edwards and Cantorial Soloist Chalin each delivered a drash talking about endings and beginnings, there on New Year's Eve as the century ended. The cantor began, the rabbi continued, their talks follow here.**

**Cantorial Soloist Chalin's drash begins here:**

Last week, Eli and Rob were playing in the living room when a telemarketer called to talk to Rob. Not wanting to disturb Rob and Eli, and I think also not wanting to hurt the guy's feelings I told him Mr. Philips was not home now, please call back later. A bit later Eli walked into the kitchen and asked, why did you say daddy wasn't home when he was?

At that moment, I remembered the first time I heard my mom lie, and asking her about it, and her telling me about white lies. Then remembering how often white lying has gotten me in trouble, I told Eli that I was wrong and that I should have told him that Daddy could not come to the phone, I should not have lied.

2 days ago I was in a situation where I thought I had explained myself very clearly to a serviceman, we'll call him Fred who was installing a new sound system in my car. When I came back after having entertained Eli and Rae in a busy shopping center for 2 hours, Fred had done what he thought I had asked for, but it had been just the opposite of what I thought I had asked for.

Everything he did had to be undone, and, I lost it. I said, that's exactly what I did not want you to do! Don't you remember me saying this?! Fred quite calmly explained that he thought that was exactly what I wanted him to do. I was about to explain why that was not at all what I wanted, when his phone rang and he had to answer it. As I stood there trying to take stock of what had just happened, I saw Eli standing next to me, uncomfortable and upset. I turned to him and said boy this sure is hard isn't it. Fred thought he was doing what mommy wanted and I thought he was going to do something really different. He thinks he's right and I think I'm right, but you know what? I think I made Fred feel bad by yelling at him didn't I? Eli nodded. I made you feel bad too didn't I? He nodded. I told Eli that I felt bad that I yelled too. When Fred got off the phone, I spent the next 5 minutes or so apologizing to him and I called him the next day to do more of the same. Eli's witnessing of my behavior forced me to reflect on what I was doing to others, and ultimately what I was doing to myself.

I don't like those parts of myself, the part that blows up and becomes oblivious to my effect on another person. The part that would rather lie than just clearly state the truth. In having to deal with Eli's reaction to me, I realized that I could not just cut off those parts I didn't like, something I would rather do. I couldn't ignore it like it hadn't happened. Nor did I want to tell Eli that I really hate these parts of me. Instead, I had to bring them up for honest examination, I had to look at these demons, talk about them, I had to own that they were indeed part of who I am.

As I struggle to come to terms with the fact that Eli sees parts of me I would rather not see myself, I think about the words of the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke: Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once, beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being, something that needs our love.

I know in the past I have tried to disown parts of myself that I decided were undesirable only to find much later that it was only by facing them, accepting them, that healing, and change begins. Becoming whole, feeling entire, being at peace, the Hebrew word Shlamoot, from the word Shalom...

Well what if, for a moment, we think about the last story of Genesis as an illustration of this very idea. I am going to ask you for a moment to think about this guy we'll call Joseph, and his brothers, not as separate people, but as parts of one individual.

One way to understand the Joseph story is that it's a story of brothers caught up in an extreme sibling struggle, brought on in part by their father's unequal love for the their mothers and for them. The brothers' rage at Joseph results in him being thrown in a pit, and sold as a slave.

For a moment, think about this passage in a different way. What if Joseph and his brothers were all actually one person--were all part of Joseph. And what if the one who is called Joseph in the story were to stand for that part of the person that the rest of him didn't like. The boastful, arrogant, insensitive kid, that said things that angered, embarrassed, made the rest feel needy, or unworthy of love. Makes sense to me that one impulse would be to try to get rid of this part any way possible. And then move on!

But what happens? The brothers have no peace, no feeling of being freed of Joseph. They feel guilty, dishonest, they have deeply pained their father, and so now feel more distant from him. And the part called Joseph? It seems that he's doing well.

At the age of 30 he is now equal in power with Pharaoh of Egypt. He has material security, a high level of achievement and respect. Is he whole? Does he have shlamoot? Has he moved on?

When Joseph and his brothers again meet in Egypt, he is the first to recognize them. When he hears his brothers speak with compassion for their father, and for the Joseph they had lost, he dissolves. In pain for what was lost? Perhaps. In love? Perhaps he's starting to understand that he needs all these parts of himself for wholeness, for shlamoot to occur.

Perhaps it's because everything terrible within us, or everything we perceive to be terrible, is in its deepest being something that needs our love. Joseph tells them that he forgives them and asks them not to revile themselves for their actions. He asks them to gather up their families, and their father and live with him. He asks for the separation to end.

One of the teachings of Talmud is summed up in--Those who shame cannot teach and those who are shamed cannot learn. When we shame others or ourselves, when we try to

push a part of ourself aside, we remove our ability to be whole. We can neither learn or teach ourselves anything.

So what then is my message to Eli, what do I want him to learn? That we all have a dark side, a side we would rather not see, let alone have anyone else see. But being human is not about losing one's dark side. It's about honoring the lessons it has to teach. Achieving humanness can only happen when we value all of who we are, even the part we think are dragons.

Let this evening and the days that follow find us working toward the day when we will see the dragons in our lives as princesses or princes if you will waiting only for the moment when we will see ourselves as beautiful and brave, because our families, our children, this world, this century, will need our beauty and our bravery. Let us learn to harness the wondrous power these dragons have to offer.

### **Rabbi Edwards' drash begins here:**

They will need our beauty and our bravery, you know, Fran's right, and we need to see their beauty and their bravery as well. That's part of what this week's Torah portion is about, as we take on another transition in this week of transitions, the transition from the book of Genesis, the book of Beginnings, into the Book of Exodus, of exiting. If the end of a year, the end of a century, is a time of endings and beginnings, a time of walking through doorways (don't forget to kiss the mezuzah as you go), a time of transitions, then we have the perfect Torah portion for it, the beginning of the Book of Exodus, a story of transitions, of turning dragons into princesses and princes, of mastering our fears and admiring the brave and the beautiful.

The first transition is from the stories of Genesis to the stories of Exodus, for in the blink of an eye, with the turning of a page, well, okay, with the roll of a scroll, the story of our people fast forwards several generations (Y2K preparedness is not a problem for a Torah scroll!) from where Fran left off with Joseph a prince in Egypt to the moment when, as our narrator says simply, "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph"[1:8]. Oh-oh. And in just a few verses Exodus tells us how the Israelites became slaves in the land where Joseph had ruled. It tells how Moses, child of Israelite slaves, came to be a Prince in Egypt and how he left there to become a simple shepherd and how he then returned to Egypt in order to help God free the Israelites. All in one Torah portion. And at each twist and turn of the way in this story, there is someone willing to turn their dragons into acts brave and beautiful.

Let me just touch on a couple of these actions in the hopes they'll serve us all year, or even for the rest of our lives, as inspiration. First comes Shifra and Puah, the brave midwives to the Hebrew people. When that new king of Egypt becomes fearful that the Israelites will become so prolific as to overrun the place (a charge we still hear today

about various other ethnic groups), he first enslaves them, thinking that will slow down the procreation. When that doesn't work he calls in the Hebrews' midwives, Shifra and Puah, and instructs them to examine the Israelite babies as they arrive on the birthing stone, before their mothers can see them. Examine them and kill the boy babies, he says. He wants it to look like they died in childbirth. But as someone said in Torah study last night, like most midwives, these two hold life sacred. They're not about to kill babies.

Instead, they tell Pharaoh a white lie - oh, oh, Fran! They tell him the Israelite women are so much livelier than the Egyptian ones that they deliver the babies before the midwives can get to them. And Pharaoh, who as we said last night, clearly knows "nothing about birthin' babies," lets their explanation stand. Thus, according to Bible scholar Nahum Sarna, Shifra and Puah "followed the dictates of conscience," and "their defiance of tyranny constitutes history's first recorded act of civil disobedience in defense of a moral imperative" [JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus, Nahum Sarna, ed., p.7 note on v.17]. They turned their dragon, their fear, to bravery.

Many years and many transitions later, but still in this incredible Torah portion!, Moses lets beauty overcome his fears. Why Moses? Why does God choose Moses? It's a question everyone asks, even Moses asked it: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" And since God never directly answers the question, ever after each one of us must ask it again and find answers for ourselves. The answer that still most speaks to me is not Moses' repulsion to oppression, not his ability to act quickly, not his skills as a shepherd, but simply this: that when he saw the burning bush, Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" In the very next verse, we're told the importance of that one act. "And God saw that he had turned aside to look, and God called to him from the midst of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!'" [Ex. 3:3-4]. Now you may think, well of course anyone would turn aside to look at such a sight, but would they? How big was that bush? Moses had to stop what he was doing, he had to turn aside from the path he was on to see this marvelous sight and reflect on its wonder. Would just ANYONE do so?

Late this afternoon I had a phone call from Mara Silverberg, bless her. "There's an incredible rainbow outside but it's fading fast," she said, "go look and happy new year." I was in the middle of something, but I did go immediately outside and there it was big and beautiful as Mara promised. I ran inside to get Tracy who was taking a much needed nap. I wasn't surprised that she jumped up immediately, got dressed, and ran outside with me to see it. One of our neighbors was walking her dog near by. She was on the wrong side of the street to see it. "There's an incredible rainbow over there," we pointed. "Oh is there?" she said politely. "You have to come to this side of the street to see it," we said, "but it's fading so don't wait." Her dog was doing some business. I figured she'd come when he was through. It's one thing to drop what you're doing to turn aside and see an incredible sight, but it's another to

inconvenience your dog about it. But when the dog finished she just kept walking, though she clearly wasn't in a hurry. "You just have to cross the street. It's really beautiful," I said one more time. "Is it?" she said politely and kind of glanced toward the sky, but she made no attempt to cross the street, just headed away from the rainbow, and from us, and back toward home.

Not everyone, it turns out, will turn aside to look at a marvelous sight. Not everyone will even go ten feet out of the way to look at a huge, beautiful rainbow in the sky on the last day of the 20th century. "Because our families, our children, this world, this century, will need our beauty and our bravery," said Fran. Indeed they will, indeed they will. And we will need to seek the beauty and the bravery in ourselves and in them. Let us hope we can find what we need when we need it.

Shabbat Shalom.

Happy new year, happy new century.