

Remembering can be a tricky thing.

There are the individual quirks of remembering – how I may or may not remember what I learned quite well decades ago, or how good I might be at remembering to remind. “Remember to take your keys with you this time.” “I just had them in my hand. Where did they go?” “I don’t know. You’re the one who put them down.”

I have been on both sides of that conversation, making me wonder where my remembering muscle went.

The Jewish community as a whole exercises its community muscle this season. We remember the Exodus from Egypt, for example, through a semi-scripted intellectual melodrama which has been around for nearly 2000 years. Many will change what they do during the next couple of months, to remind ourselves of agricultural uncertainties and the death of Rabbi Akiba’s students, ostensibly for intolerance and arrogance. We remember the day none of the students died, and celebrate on that day. We remember more recent events, both tragic and joyful. In order, we commemorate the Holocaust at the time of year that some of the Jews left in the Warsaw ghetto refused to follow Nazi orders; we remember the fallen Israeli soldiers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who have fought to keep Israel a free democracy over these decades; we celebrate the return of the land of Israel to Jewish rule after so long being ruled by absentee landlords and despots; we celebrate Jerusalem reunification day, for when Jordan had control of that area we were not allowed to even visit the Western Wall; we end the season by remembering Revelation at Sinai.

It is interesting to note how many beginnings for the Jewish people take place during this spring-like season of agricultural beginnings (I grew up in Minnesota, so I always say this tongue-in-cheek, as spring and blizzards also go together). We began the process of leaving physical slavery and entering into the freedom of responsibility for our own choices. We left the chaos of anarchy and entered the freedom of boundaries which helped many of us develop compassion, sympathy and empathy. We learned that learning by itself does not ensure that a person embraces the paradoxical nature of human existence. We learned that not all oppressors are as tolerant as Rome, and therefore must be defended against instead of compromised with. We are also relearning the lesson that being merely human is worth celebrating and defending.

Here in Cheyenne, Mt. Sinai Congregation always invites the general community to attend, observe, and sometimes take part in our version of these communal observances. If you missed them this year, you will always have the opportunity to attend next year.

May we all continue to grow in the paths of remembering, tolerance and peace.