A time to celebrate ‘Dayenu’ moments

Passover is a time of year when Jews tell the core narrative of the Jewish people which goes like this: We were slaves for over 400 years in Egypt, then G-d brought us out of Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Passover story is a powerful account of redemption through revolution which reminds us annually of our deep-rooted connection to God, freedom, community and Torah. But it’s interesting to note that within the first few weeks of freedom, the Jews began to complain bitterly about how rough life is in the desert. Food was scarce, nights were cold and no one seemed happy with their new life. Definitely a lot of kvetching for a group who, just weeks before, had been building pyramids under the yoke of Egyptian bondage!

Perhaps a way to understand the Seder part of our story is to view it as a reflection of the tendency never to be fully satisfied with our lot. The Exodus story suggests that its part of human nature to complain about what we don’t have rather than to be grateful for what we do have. We spend most of our lives in relation-ship with others so it’s natural to compare ourselves to those whom we know, admire, live with or work. But often, comparing ourselves to others leads to our own dissatisfaction because somehow, others just seem happier richer, more popular or successful. Just like in the movie “When Harry Met Sally,” we think to ourselves “I’ll have what she’s having!”

The issue of being unhappy with what we have and always wanting more has been around since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve thought, “It’s a great example,” so G-d told them they can eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden but the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. G-d goes straight for the apple from that tree.

Over 2000 years ago, the rabbi discussed this problem and gave the answer that it’s never been around since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve did not think, “It’s a great example” so G-d told them they can eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden but the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. G-d goes straight for the apple from that tree.

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One who is happy with his lot!

Passover is a great time to renew our commitment to become more aware of what we have. The Seder leader can provide an oppor-tunity to reflect on and share our appreciation for the people and things which make our lives happy.

During the Seder, we sing the upbeat song “Dayenu,” which is over 1,000 years old. Dayenu: “it would have been enough.” Dayenu is the quintessential Jewish Gratitude Song.

It reminds us over and over again, that whatever we have, it is enough. Each additional blessing is a gift, a bonus, from G-d.

Dayenu: “If G-d had brought us out of Egypt, and not punished the Egyptians, Dayenu! If He had fed us manna in the desert but not given us Shabbat, Dayenu! If He had brought us before Mt. Sinai but not given us the Tablets of Stone, Dayenu.

It’s hard to imagine Jews saying it would have been enough had we not been given the Torah — and yet that is what we sing. From this we understand that Dayenu doesn’t literally mean, “it would have been enough; as in no more, you can stop now, game over.”

Rather, the words remind us that no matter what we might lack, we should be grateful for all that we have. In Dayenu, we thank G-d for doing all that we could even think of, and all that happens in between. In Dayenu, we thank G-d for every moment of our day, not what we have rather what we lack.

This year at your seder, consid-er the Passover moments. You can use a simple statement about gratitude and let your fami-ly and guests fill in the blanks. For example: It would have been enough if my sea graduated college, but he also got a job. Dayenu! Or: It would have been enough that I reached my 65th birthday, but... my parents are also alive.

Another way to celebrate Dayenu moments is to have a discussion with your family about moments. This way, all the guests can share what they are grateful for at this point in their lives.