



RABBIDANIPELLAPIN.COM

..MODERN PROBLEMS ..ANCIENT SOLUTIONS

Thought Tools

Wind in your Sails

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5771

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There are many life-metaphors to be found in the wonderful world of boats. Boats and people both embark on journeys and both can reach their destinations or sink. When a boat is in the doldrums it is in that notorious windless zone near the equator. Old-time sailing vessels were often stuck there for weeks. When a person is listless and despondent, he is also said to be in the doldrums. But there is one major difference. While sailboats must await changing weather, humans have the miraculous capacity to bring about change in their lives themselves.

Being marooned in stagnant circumstances is enough to make anyone miserable. Change, growth, and progress are amazingly effective antidotes to depression. This is why New Year's resolutions are such a good idea. Most of us feel energized and optimistic when taking actions to improve our lives and the changing calendar serves as a useful catalyst. But wait! What's the point? We all know that most New Year resolutions fade away by spring.

One way to retain resolutions is to feel authentic, durable excitement in our souls about the spiritual magic of change.

See how God introduced Himself to humanity on Sinai 3,323 years ago.

I am the Lord your God who...

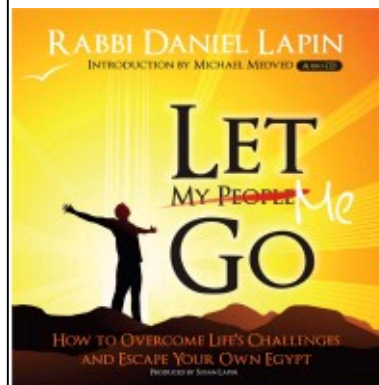
(Exodus 20:2)

Who did what?

Well, think of how 1980 presidential candidate Reagan might have introduced himself to voters. Depending on the crowd he could have said, "Hi, I'm Ronald Reagan; I used to be head of the Screen Actors Guild." Or he could have said, Hi, I'm Ronald Reagan; I used to be governor of California."

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Similarly, God could have said, "I'm the Lord your God who created heaven and earth," rather than what He did say which was:

I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt...
(Exodus 20:2)

God considered it more important to introduce Himself and His Commandments as God who took the Israelites out of Egypt rather than as God who created heaven and earth. Why?

Ancient Jewish wisdom explains that the purpose of the Ten Commandments is not to tell us history but to provide us with tools for life. These statements will help transform Israelite slaves into God-centric, independent people. Remember that until relatively recently once a slave meant always a slave. For transformation to happen, the children of Israel needed to truly know that it was indeed POSSIBLE for change to occur.

Today, we may not be physically enslaved, but we can enslave ourselves by not knowing, deep inside of us, that we are capable of change. Making positive changes in our lives is terribly difficult. Most of us find it almost impossible to overcome our own inertia and rather than undertake the massive effort necessary today, we simply condemn tomorrow to be a repeat of yesterday. Really internalizing the power of change can propel us to better times.

We're all stuck in our own particular Egypt, whatever it is. While we need to change behavior, we first need to change our image of ourselves. God's opening statement assures us that if the Israelites could escape Egypt then each one of us can also escape our own Egypt. A New Year resolution is a good way to start. Here are three tips to increase the probability of making the change permanent.

A. Make the first resolution reasonable. You can always upgrade later which will make you feel much better than downgrading. (The total transformation of a nation took 40 years. An individual won't need that long for most changes, but don't expect instant success either.)

B. At the outset, prepare a strategy to get you back onto your resolution's plan after an unintended setback. (Atonement and forgiveness often occurred during the desert trip)

C. Break your resolution into defined and manageable parts. (There were numerous way stations on the path from Egypt to Israel)

The Biblical Exodus equips us with tools for personal change. I encourage you to get out of your own doldrums with the help of three additional strategies which I teach in my audio CD, [Let Me Go: How to Overcome Life's Challenges and Escape Your Own Egypt](#). Wishing you a growth-filled 2011.

Susan's Musings

This week's musing - [An Old-Fashioned Reaction](#)

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[Ask the Rabbi](#)



Rabbi Lapin,

When Abraham sent his servant to seek a bride for Isaac, what is the meaning of asking the servant to place his hand under his thigh to take the oath?

Rodger A.

[See Rabbi Lapin's Answer](#)

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January 10, 2011

**at
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7:00pm**

I shocked both my husband and myself last week. A friend forwarded us a human interest article from a major newspaper, expecting that we would be as appalled by it as he was. My husband reacted as anticipated. To my amazement, I didn't...

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