

On Eagles' Wings

A creative narrative on modern life.

Key statement: Stress in life is as old as humankind. Our response in faith is what makes the difference.

“What's the matter Jeremy? You look as if something is terribly wrong!”

“Well Mom, there is something that I don't know how to handle.”

“What's that Jeremy? You know we've always had an open relationship... There's the phone. Don't lose that thought. I'll be right back.”

“Hello.”

“Hi, honey! ...”

“Bye. Love ya!”

“That was your Dad saying he will be going straight from the office to an urgent meeting of the Medical Association. This latest government legislation relating to how he can practice medicine in this province is something else! So, he won't be home for supper.”

“Now let's see, where were we before the phone rang? Oh yes, you were going to tell me why you were upset.”

“Well Mom, I have a problem and I don't know how I can tell Dad.”

“At least we have a few more hours to find you an answer. Sorry, there's the phone again.”

“Hello...”

“Oh, hello Mr. Remington....”

“Yes, I'll discuss the issue with Shelley as soon as she's home ... I think she'll have an explanation since this is not typical of her. Thanks for your concern.”

“Jeremy, you were in the process of telling me what is bothering you and how to tell Dad something. I won't let the phone interrupt us again. The machine can take it.”

“How do you let someone know when you have betrayed the trust they have placed in you?”

“Is this some general philosophical question or one rooted in a recent experience?”

“Mom, you and Dad have really been encouraging as Shelley and I have been growing up and I have appreciated it so much! Particularly when I see how other kids' parents treat them – as if they were still in elementary school. No, you guys have been very open and trusting and that's where my problem is.”

“Hi, Shelley! How was your day at school?”

“Hi, Mom. It was OK, I guess. The usual – classes, teachers, lunch ...”

“Oh, by the way, I had a call from your science teacher about some assignment which you neglected to hand in. Any reason?”

“Well, 'yes' and 'no'. To put it plainly, 'time constraints' – the same kind of thing Dad's been talking about lately. Only mine has to do with Bible quizzing, youth leadership, worship team practice, cheerleading practice, band practice plus all of the practices our coach is having for our provincial finals in basketball. There is only so much time!”

“But Shelley, this is so unlike you to not have assignments in on time. Isn't Mr. Remington the teacher you were discussing the other night at dinner who is so unbending in accepting late assignments?”

“You're right, Mom. This is the first time I haven't had my work in on time. Isn't there any leeway?”

“I suppose he'll still expect it in late even though it won't count for much, otherwise he'll assign an 'incomplete.' Am I right?”

“Yes. Mom. I'll get it in for tomorrow.”

“Now where were we, Jeremy?”

“Mom, I think I'll leave our discussion 'til later since there is so much else on your mind right now. See ya!”

Much later that same evening.

“Hi, hon. I'm home.”

“How was that meeting? You've had such a long day and I know you have an extra early start tomorrow. Come on, let's sit down and have some tea before we go to bed.”

“Cara, it is so nice to come home to you! This place is becoming more and more an oasis of tranquility in my life. The stresses just continue to increase with each day and I am starting to wonder whether it's all worth it.”

“Here's your favourite Masala Chai tea. It will soothe your troubled mind.”

“This being a doctor is getting crazy. They sure didn't prepare us for this kind of continuous attack in med school! Cara, I'm seriously starting to consider ...”

Life is tough and getting tougher in our culture, more demanding, higher expectations from those who have responsibility but everyone else as well, it seems. The day-to-day routines are anything but routine and are becoming continual examinations of our competence, ability to manage, deal with patients, governments and hospital admin ... How are we living the full and abundant life which Christians are to experience? Where is it? Sometimes we feel as if we're rats on a treadmill! Round and round, always having to cater to someone else's demands and expectations with little or no time for self, family, things we enjoy, or for contemplating the important questions of life.

Fast Backward! 1580 BC.

“Eli! Eli! The sun is about to come over the horizon and you need to get going to work in the brickyard again.”

“I know. I know, Rachel, but my feet, my hands and my back, they are killing me!”

“Let me rub some olive oil into those cracked hands and feet so that they feel better. You work so hard and all we get is your breaking body. We have no time to sit and talk – you are always so tired, so hurting, so exhausted! Oh, Hashem (God) why is life like this? Where is the coming of the promise of a better land, of freedom from this tyranny of Pharaoh?”

“I must go and spend another day stomping mud. Rachel, look after Avram and tell Rebecca to help carry the water from the well.”

Yes, life in Goshen was becoming more than anyone had ever dreamed! The stories of Jacob's sons receiving the royal welcome when Joseph was Superintendent of Granaries seemed so distant, so unbelievable, now that his memory was merely folklore. The increasing pressure of the Israelite taskmasters made life virtually unbearable - mud, straw, water - bricks and more bricks baked in the sun. And quality - any bricks that were not 100% acceptable to the Egyptian overlords were smashed and the daily total diminished, making the possibility of reaching the quota more remote.

“Hashem in heaven, why did you bring us to this place? Is this what it means to be your chosen people? It appears that those who are not, are faring much better than we!”

Eli, like so many others, shuffled home on feet made raw by the constant exposure to mud, water, straw, the blazing sun and the drying winds from the desert. But whatever weariness may have been his companion during the day, was eased by the sight of his two children – Avram, just two, but such a happy, young boy, full of energy and oblivious to the reality of the adult world in Goshen – Rebecca, five and already exhibiting the qualities which he found so attractive in his Rachel: caring, concern, love, tenderness; and Eli could see the beginnings of beauty in such a young life. He was reminded of what had been so beautiful in his attraction to her mother so many years before – bronze skin, smooth and vibrant with youth, now showed the lines of caring and adulthood under the trying circumstances of Egyptian domination.

As he sat to rest his weary feet, he called to Rachel because he had news that would again change their lives.

“Rachel, I love you and find in you the peace for which our people long. Peace which Hashem has promised but which seems so long in coming!”

“Eli, Hashem is faithful and will bring to pass that which He has promised. I know we can trust Him.”

“I know that too, Rachel! But the news of today does not encourage us, I must tell you!”

“Eli, you seem distraught, disturbed. What is it?”

“It seems that our leader, Moshe, went to see Pharaoh and told him what the elders told us last week had come from Hashem.”

“Yes, yes, I remember that. Go on!”

“It seems Pharaoh just laughed at our Hashem and sent Moshe away!”

“Pharaoh laughed that Hashem would want His people to leave Egypt? He does not understand at all! ...

“That’s not all Rachel! To show his contempt, he ordered the taskmasters to no longer supply us with the straw for making bricks – we have to gather it ourselves! Oh Hashem, have mercy! Rachel, they have not decreased our quota but have given us more work for each day – make the same number of bricks *and* gather the straw. How can we do it?”

“Eli, Hashem will give us strength and wisdom. He will not leave us!”

Some months later on the shores of the Red Sea:

“Eli, I’m fearful. Before us is the wide expanse of the sea and behind us is the army of Egypt – their horses, chariots, weapons of war and their highly skilled mercenaries. Is this the end of life for us?”

“Rachel, you are weary from the journey these last few days. Our spirits are languishing because our bodies are weak and tired, in need of food and rest.”

“But Eli, I have a strange sense that the evil spirit of Baal is going to bring us to an unfortunate end here in the desert.”

“Look out of the tent, Rachel, and tell me what you see.”

“I see all of the stars of space etched against the blackness of the night. But more than that, I see the glow of a cloud of fire which seems to hang over our camp.”

“Yes, that is it! We can either look at the blackness of space and wonder where our future lies; is Baal a real god to punish us for our escape from Egypt? Or, is Hashem, present with us in the cloud of fire, able to protect us in these overwhelming circumstances?”

“Eli, I want to trust! Thank you for reminding me that God has chosen us, has guided us even in the times of hardship in Egypt, has guarded us, and has provided for us. He is faithful and will be faithful to protect us even in times such as these. Hashem, forgive me for questioning your ability to protect our family. I rest now in your peace. Thank you!”

The next day, they looked back over the Sea which they had just crossed and saw the same miraculous deliverance become the devastation of the proud Egyptian army. Fear gave way to song!

“God is my strength, God is my song,
and, yes! God is my salvation.
This is the kind of God I have
and I'm telling the world!
This is the God of my father –
I'm spreading the news far and wide!
God is a fighter,
pure God, through and through.”

Three days later that song turned to complaint. Trudging the shifting sands of the desert, following the endless parade of humanity as it snaked across the trackless sand Rachel called to Eli in tones of desperation:

“Eli, Rebecca is so thirsty! The water bags are empty. Avram, cries for a drink which I cannot provide because of my own need for water. Eli, help us!”
“Rachel, God will provide.”

As Moshe became aware of the growing restlessness of the people, his own confidence diminished with the news of the scouts that only one body of water was nearby – undrinkable due to its bitterness.

“Oh, Hashem, you brought us by your power out of Egypt and by your power opened the Sea for our safe passage and the death of our enemies. But now this clamouring horde you have given me to lead needs water, desperately. I can do nothing! What will you do to save us? Did you bring us here to die?”

It was the sweetened waters of Marah and the bountiful supply at Elim which drove the desperation from the lips of the Israelites, and from the heart of Moshe, for a while.

But in time, the testing of God, gave opportunity to doubt the provision they had seen.

“Eli, you know I have tried to make the food we have been carrying last as long as possible because we do not know how long will be our journey. We have eaten less and less these last few days and filled our bellies with water to keep the sounds of hunger from calling out our plight... But today, even the garlic which we brought from Egypt has been dried into uselessness by these desert winds and there is nothing left to give to Avram, to Rebecca or you.”

“Did you speak with Hannah or Sarai to see if they had anything to share with us?”

“I did. They looked at the ground when I asked them and could only say that they were preparing to die since they had no food to give to their children. Eli, why are we here in the midst of this god-forsaken

wilderness following Moshe to who knows where? At least when we were in Egypt we had plenty of bread and stew to eat, and our stomachs did not cry for filling all the long hours of the day. Eli, I am angry! We have these two beautiful children – Hashem be praised! Are we going to sit helplessly by and watch them die a slow death because we followed this horde and Moshe?”

“Rachel, I feel so helpless. I do not know what to do. When I talk with the other men, they too share the same desperation.”

“Eli, where is Hashem whom we sang about just two weeks ago as we stood by the shores of the Sea? Where is Hashem who made the bitter waters of Marah sweet so we could drink? Where is He, Eli? Why does He promise to be with us and seem so far away when we need Him most?”

“Rachel we have no choice. Either Hashem will provide for our hunger or we die.”

As they wrapped their cloaks around them for what they thought would be their sleep of death, they wondered if anyone would ever know why they had come to this desert and died; why the trust they had placed in Hashem seemed so misplaced that they died of hunger; why they had made the decision of what seemed so right while in Egypt, but now was only a series of lingering questions.

“May Hashem give you rest Avram; May Hashem give you rest Rebecca; May Hashem give you rest Rachel” and with that he closed his eyes, never expecting to see the light of dawn.

“Eli, Eli, wake up! The ground is covered with white dew and people are outside picking it up. They say that we are to collect all that we need for one day and it is our food which Hashem has supplied. Come quickly and help!”

As Eli reached down to pick some of the small white seed-like material from the ground, he lifted some to his lips and found it somewhat sweet and very welcome to his starving body. With renewed enthusiasm, Eli, Rachel and Rebecca soon had a basket full of *manna*. As they returned to their tent, they marvelled at how close they had come to total desperation, of completely giving up any hope and then Hashem had provided in a miraculous way.

But fear again found room to blossom and Rachel kept a small portion of *manna* under the cloth beside her as she slept so she would have some for the morning breakfast. When she awoke and reached in to prepare it for eating, she was shocked to see that it had begun to smell and was full of crawling creatures.

“It is true! We are only to collect enough for the day's need! I will look outside to see if there is more for today.”

“Hashem, I am humbled! You have kept your promise to provide for us, to meet our needs, to give us our daily bread. Forgive me, Hashem, ... forgive us, Hashem, for we have doubted you. We have allowed fear to capture our hope which you desire to live in us.”

It had been three torturous months since the journey from Egypt had begun, and Rachel, Eli, their family and friends were camped in the Wilderness of Sin at the foot of Mount Sinai. This was the same mountain where Hashem had appeared to Moshe in the bush which burned and was not consumed. It was here that Hashem had revealed to Moshe that he would, “*worship God on this mountain.*”

“Emah, why is the sky so dark today? I can almost feel the darkness! What is that loud noise that we keep hearing?”

“Rebecca, I don't know. Abba has gone to talk with the elders to see if they know what is going on. Run along and play now.”

“Eli! It is so good to have you back. What *is* going on? I'm becoming frightened! I have never seen anything like this before, even in the worst storms that we had back in Egypt.”

“Rachel I talked with the elders. What they said is starting to become clear. Hashem spoke to Moshe on this Mountain when he was still herding sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro, and told him that he would come back to this mountain and worship Him here.”

“Is God present in this thick dark cloud, Eli?”

“Yes, in this darkness which we see as never before, Hashem is present. But not only present, He has spoken to us through Moshe.”

“What did he say, Eli?”

“I'm not sure I fully understand and it will take some time to ponder what the words mean.”

“Eli, you're frustrating me! Just come out and tell me what He said.”

“He said, “You have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.””

“I think I understand a little.”

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Cara: “Rachel, are you trying to tell me that from God's perspective, in all of the trials that you experienced on the journey from Egypt to Sinai he was actually carrying you 'on eagles' wings?'”

Rachel: “Yes, Cara it seems that we often find ourselves so closely involved in situations that we allow them to colour our perspective on what Hashem is really trying to accomplish. I know that fear seemed to be so common in those days of uncertainty, of total dependence upon Him.”

“But Rachel, are you suggesting that when my family, Shelley with her school demands, Blair with all of the pressures he's sensing in being a doctor, that in all of these day-to-day routine experiences that God really sees us as being carried by Him through them?”

“Not only that Cara, but what became so clear to me as we lived those long years in the desert, is that Hashem uses the events of each day to bring us closer to Himself ... if only we are willing to allow ourselves to see that things may be different from His perspective. Yes, including the difficulty which Jeremy was telling you about.”

“Oh, Rachel! Thank you for reminding me. I should have taken the time to find out what was really bothering him.”

“Jeremy.”

“Yes, Mom.”

“I have to apologize to you. We talked the other day and we got interrupted so much that you left without really telling me what was troubling you.”

“Thanks for the apology Mom, but it's OK. Dad and I had a talk and it was so interesting. When I told him what had happened to the car, he was so calm and didn't get angry. I will never forget one phrase that he mentioned.”

“What was that Jeremy?”

He said, “In all of the experiences of life, God is carrying us on eagles' wings to bring us to Himself.”

“I wonder where he heard that!”

“Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all movements are key movements, and life itself is grace.” Philip Yancey

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