



From their little perspective, they have rebuilt their picture of G-d to look like themselves, or into some monstrosity that is nothing like the elephant whose part they are perceiving.

Did you know that as believers, we can fall into the same kind of spiritual trap as these reconstructionist unbelievers and become spiritual red necks? We are not necessarily building up a false picture of G-d, as much as we are refusing to see our lives from the perspective of G-d's bigger picture. Instead, we base our understanding of G-d and of His purposes only on our perspective, on our experience, and on what is going on in our little neighbourhood as we flit around like sparrows in search of seeds, bugs and nesting material.

This morning I want to challenge you to stop twittering and hopping about, as if the details of your life were the whole picture of what is going on in this big bad world. G-d is actually doing things other than listening to your chirping and to my chirping and He wants us to get a grip on His bigger picture. How? We need to learn to soar and we need to learn make our lives part of that bigger picture, instead of just repeating our little story again and again until we realize that we will never quite get it right. I have two more pictures I want to paint with you this morning and one of them has to do with Halloween.

First let's talk about soaring. How do we soar and get out of our little red neck neighbourhood? Four ways, my little sparrows, so let me introduce them to you as you sign up for the B'nai Chayim Flight School for red necks and blind men. The first and best way of learning to soar is to learn to pray. I mean to really pray and not just twitter at G-d until we run out of breath. There are things He wants to teach us and places He wants to take us even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Not physical places, although if someone wanted to buy this rabbi a ticket to Jerusalem, there's a wall I want to hug – I'll leave the trees to those green peace red necks.

He wants to tell us the amazing story of His love and show us His image in our hearts and teach us how to understand the world in a radically new way, which is opposite to how we have been seeing things. He wants to show us the whole elephant, so we can understand our little part of it better, rather than have us struggling to build the bigger picture by analyzing our little perspectives to death. Prayer is actually wrestling with our red neck, until we can rise up and fly above the neighbourhood and even learn to ride out the storms of life by soaring above them, instead of cringing and hiding through them.

Well that's prayer and every week, starting this Wednesday at 8:30 – after our Yeshiva, we will be soaring, as long as we don't mess up my office too much. This brings us to the second way of soaring – Bible Study. Not the kind which looks for verses to claim and principles of living to learn that are really just various spiritual versions of "The Power of Positive Thinking" or its grandson "The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Anal Retentives.". I am talking about the kind which wants to encounter G-d through His Word and see what really makes Him and His universe "tick". I want to be lifted out of myself, out of my little ghetto, not just buried deeper into my own little world.

Well, method number three is what you are doing right now – coming to shul and meeting with other believers and worshipping together. We can energize each other and

comfort each other and even amuse and annoy each other until we discover that even in our little red neck corner of the galaxy, there is more than one way of looking at our portion of the elephant – there is more than one story being lived out in our community – we are all full of stories (and I am not going to yield to the temptation of speaking about what else we may be full of, not this week, anyway).

So as we learn to soar in prayer and explore the treasures of G-d's Word, and as we energize each other week by week, there is another way to soar above the trials and tribulations of our own personal soap opera – we interact with people outside our community who are not even trying to feel the elephant with us. And in this interaction we need to do two things. We need to listen and find out what is getting in the way of their spiritual exploration of the elephant and we need to share with them about our own explorations – and here it is really important to move beyond our red neck sparrow twittering and prepare the ground to share some eagle insights.

When I was sharing my faith a few weeks ago, I was given an interesting insight. Now, I share my faith more often than every few weeks, but not in way you might think. I do not hand out tracks and tell people that if they do not accept the L-rd right now, they are going to burn in hell forever. My kipa helps me out here. They ask me about my faith, or in conversation, when it's my turn to have my say, I speak from my faith perspective with amazing results. I cannot remember how long it has been since I have been cornered into an argument about religion – oh yes, and it was with another believer.

The insight I got is one I want to share with you and that I want you to seriously think about: "intrusive proselytization (sharing your faith by being pushy and trying to inject Yeshua into every conversation) is to true evangelism, what rape is to real sex." We want to draw people into an encounter with G-d through faith, not to hit them over the head with our faith and turn them off and make them hostile.

Well these are four very simple ways to soar and which can turn sparrows into eagles and give blind red necks a chance to "see" more of the elephant of G-d . Let me share my last picture, and we'll do Kiddush. It is an insight I use when I do my pre-marriage counselling and it has to do with life cycles and learned behaviour. When I get together with my couples I amaze them by discovering how much of the difficulty they are having building one new family out of two, has to do with trying to recreate or escape from their family of origin in the relationship they are building with their intended.

It usually takes a while to sink in, but painfully and slowly, we build new strategies for a mature intimacy, which is what marriage is supposed to be. But change doesn't come easily, nor does it come all at once. Each of us has about a four or five month inner cycle, where the newness wears off and where whatever changes we are trying to make can become part of the inner workings of our heart. It takes us at least that long to get used to things and to re-arrange our inner lives, or to do the opposite and this is where most relationships come to grief – to choke out any change and to return to the same old learned negative behaviour patterns, kind of like the fool returning to his folly.

Why do we do this? Most of us want to be happy and most of us want to make our spouses and children happy, but not all of us succeed in doing so. The problem lies in the

deep inner programming of our hearts, where we hang on to pain, and guilt and replay the same old broken record again and again. Here I'm talking about life themes, about people who are always trying to change, but who never seem able to break out of old negative patterns, no matter what they try and no matter what they do.

It's the old "cow running back into the burning barn" syndrome. Life, with all of its contradictions and nonsense has got us brainwashed, and not even the parting of the sea of Reeds and the smoking mountain are enough for us to really want to change. Sometimes we have to wander in the wilderness until we are finally ready to change.

Not changing into someone else, like developing a new costume for Halloween, where the old man is just wearing a disguise to try and fool G-d and other believers into giving us some candy. But the slow pace of real inner change means looking at why we do things and why we react to things and learning to react to things from our heart and from G-d's Word, instead of flittering about like the red necked sparrow, pecking away at the same old portion of the elephant, instead of letting go and soaring into the bigger picture.

Now this is a pretty powerful picture and not one I want to develop it here any further. Over the next two months I want to help us build that bigger picture, and get a personal and a community vision of G-d's personal agenda for us, which we build from the bigger picture and not the other way around. The cycles have turned slowly for two years now at B'nai Chayim and some things are changing slowly, and others are still waiting their turn to change. Change is what it is all about, if we want to wait on G-d and learn to walk with Him in deed and in truth.

How about you? Red necked sparrows lead a loud, fast paced, boring life twittering and flittering from the same branches to the same branches. Eagles cover a larger territory and are able to rise above the noise of life and be renewed to walk with out fainting and to run without growing weary. Blinded believers never learn to see the whole elephant and nothing really changes in their lives, no matter where they go and what they do. They are chained to negative habits and twisted perspectives and just keep wearing new costumes – stuck in the same old heart, repeating the same old mistakes.

And they may flutter from congregation to congregation, from marriage to marriage, from job to job, from house to house, mistakenly trying to change everything about their lives, except themselves. May the L-rd deliver us from such a prison, which is really what He is working on in our lives, if we would stop twittering and flittering long enough to get a grip on a different part of the elephant. Are you a red necked sparrow in need of a life this morning? Are you a blind red neck trying to get the whole picture by increasing your grip on your part of the elephant? Are you tired of trying out new costumes and watching your life unfold like a broken record, revolving around the same old boring problems? Then learn to soar, not just flutter and gradually as your cycles turn, let go of your portion of the elephant and let G-d show you things from a different perspective.

Let's pray. Red necked sparrows, blind men and eagles, there's more of the elephant waiting for us to explore.