

## ENGAGEMENTS (For better or worse)

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### PREFACE

I once told Ethan Stanley that I had a theory that I must get on paper, for me, an engaging theory that should interest all. I don't have the discipline to write a paper unprompted. But I do, if I have a reason, such as a Literary Club paper. He agreed, apparently, and has assigned me the opening paper this year. This is a very nice compliment and favor for which I am extremely grateful.

My theory has to do with meeting others; in history this would be called "engagements", whether as enemies or friends; societies grow both in knowledge and in acculturation when they engage. This idea started following my hearing, reading and contemplating a one-hour lecture by our fellow member, Dusty Anderson, given to an "Institute for Learning in Retirement" class. I began thinking of the significance of the many "engagements" in what was called "the holy land", but today is called "Israel".

### INTRODUCTION

Man is our subject tonight. He certainly is a strange animal, with his loves and hates, his likes and dislikes, his aggressiveness and his passivity, his parsimony and his generosity, his dogmatism and his reconciliation, his curiosity and his dullness, and so much more. I didn't mention aloneness because this is not normal, Man needs others; he goes out of his way to be with others. He has taken over the earth, for sure, and in doing so has ended the existence of some other forms of creatures. Man may have erred some, maybe even a lot, but my interest is in his gregariousness, because it is in Man's relationships with others, his engagements, where he learns.

We all know that Man is a newcomer on this earth, arriving only 50 to 60 thousand years ago. I get mixed up on very large or very small figures, but I think man has been on this earth less than one tenth of one percent of the earth's life. Warm blooded creatures, of which Man is one, have only been on the scene for less than one percent of the earth's existence. Before that there were various creatures, most of which we know very little about, only what we know from a few fragments from which to speculate.

There is something different about Man, different from any other creature alive today or yesterday, different from animals of the same line as Man, such as the Chimpanzee. That difference is man's gift of speech. William Calvin, in his book, "A Brief History of the Mind", says that Homo Sapiens, whose existence started some 100, or more, thousands of years ago, probably "named" objects. But it was about 60 thousand years ago that the magic of the verb arrived, and thus, Calvin calls Man "Homo Sapiens Sapiens" from then to the present.

The syntax of a sentence, or the use of the verb, is the key to speech. This "magic" syntax is already in our brain at the time of our birth and does not need to

be learned; this is the difference between Man and other animals. Other animals have a "voice" of various kinds, they have a memory, they can identify objects and other animals, but without syntax they can't speak of ideas or have "thoughts". It is speech that begets thought. Most of us love to talk, but we wish to talk with someone, we seldom wish to talk in solitude. One to one is an engagement.

Animals also have means of communication; they can convey feelings, we think; they have created a way to live together to procreate and exist. But man has a much richer life than just existing. He forms communities larger than a family, providing fellowships where speculations and feelings are expressed. And he can ask "why".

Anthropologists speak of the first Homo Sapiens as a little girl in Africa. The Bible tells us that the first human was Adam, a man. Who came first, man or woman, is a meaningless question. We can be sure there were two, a pair, so Man could multiply. He must have enjoyed being with others. Beside multiplying, Man wanted to know; he had questions; he enjoyed talking and being in the company of others. He wished to share his skills and ideas with others. How do I know this? I don't, of course, but why else would we be coming here tonight, and every Monday night, unless we liked friendship and wished to hear the thoughts of others?

Our written history starts some 4500 years ago; this means that most of Man's history is unrecorded and, therefore, is speculation. It is important for us to remember that everything we take for granted in how to live, we had to develop. The first man was like the Chimpanzee, man's closest relative in the animal world, but with a much larger brain and eventually his brain had the magic of language. Then he had to learn how to use it, a wonderful abstraction to think about. Talking had to be developed by trial and error.

Man's journey in this development from the first day was helped by encounters. It is these encounters or engagements that I wish to dramatize in this paper.

## ENGAGEMENTS

Engagement is a word that means an encounter plus, between individuals, groups and nations. But my use in this paper is limited to humans, when they mix, having verbal or physical exchanges, such as discussions, combats, immigration, mating, and/or becoming neighbors. Here are some examples. Following World War II, our country left troops, to stay, in foreign countries, such as Germany and Japan. These troops left their mark in many ways, including children, styles, vocabulary and more. I witnessed one of the ways when I was in Germany on business back in the fifties. A German, an associate, picked me up at my hotel before visiting a factory. As we left my hotel on a side street to enter a busy thoroughfare we waited for an entrance into the traffic. As we waited, he said to me, "don't worry, a G.I. will come along and let us in".

The Crusades are a wonderful example of engagement of Europeans with the Middle East. They brought the Europeans exposure, as well as impingement with

the Arab world; some of it was brutal, but there were many personal contacts as well. There were differences in fighting equipment, languages, tastes and ideas. Recently I read a most interesting book, Robert A. Scott's "The Gothic Enterprise", all about a change in Europe from the equivalent of serfdom to the town and farm society following the Crusades, and then to the building of the great Gothic Cathedrals. He wrote that the idea of the Pointed Arch, the earmark of Gothic, was brought back by the crusaders. Perhaps the change of people coming off the fields into towns and cities was accelerated, maybe even started by the returning crusaders?

Alexander the Great's conquests and the subjection of much of the Middle East by his lieutenants was a heritage of "engagements" that changed that portion of the then civilized world. Greek thought, though known before, became a common heritage, after Alexander's death, with peoples living east, west, and south of the eastern Mediterranean.

Likewise, after Mohammed's death, his followers proceeded to carry out one of his wishes, i.e. to make his beliefs known to others. The results were many Engagements. Besides proselytizing, they ruled much of the civilized world of that day. They learned and taught, and they themselves changed as much as did their subjects.

Engagements will occur even when "outsiders" are made slaves. One example is what happened to people as they came north, wishing to migrate out of Central Africa but were made slaves by the Egyptians. Of course, many escaped (Witness the story of Moses leading the Jews into the wilderness) and then had many more "engagements" as they entered what is now Palestine. The American and Caribbean experience with slavery was an engagement/ and an exchange of cultures, although it was seldom a happy experience. It is easy for us to forget that it was the America slaves who brought their music that began America's first indigenous music, the Blues and Jazz

There are tales of tribes visiting other tribes, this occurring almost from the beginning of man, especially in Africa, later in Asia, and later still in the Americas; here exchanges of ideas and genes occurred. With the need to move because of the exhaustion of the land or the lack of game, these exchanges made up much of Man's early history.

The history of the Americas is largely the story of waves of "engagements". Most European countries had a turn at engaging Americans, and now many Asians are coming for an engagement with a new land. Within America, persons have, and are still, leaving the country for the city, again, a kind of engagement for citizens of both.

## OUR JOURNEY

Looking back, as we now can when we read genes; we discover that most of our very early forbearers were great travelers. However, their travel was not for business or pleasure, and their trip might be over two, three or many lifetimes; seldom a vacation trip. We speculate that most animals traveled, as did man, looking for food, but most weren't as gregarious as man. Of course we don't know

for sure. But when the human animal searched there were many engagements, some might settle in where others had already settled, and sometimes they just traveled to "see what is on the other side". It was a relatively short time after man could speak, maybe 3000 years, that some men moved north, then east a ways, and south to Australia. Unbelievable? Yes. Today, because our genetic code can be read, we know much of each person's ancestors, tens of thousands years ago. In his book, "The Journey of Man", Spencer Wells writes, "Our DNA carries, hidden in its string of four single letters, a historical document stretching back to the origin of life and the first self-replicating molecules, through our amoebic ancestors, and down to the present day. We are the end result of over a billion years of evolutionary tinkering, and our genes carry the seams and spot-welds that reveal the story".

Some place in what today we call Ethiopia, a baby was born, who was different in a very important way. This was about 59 thousand years ago. He was born with a brain that was wired with the magic of syntax. Syntax means being able to talk, but it means so much more, too: it means being able to think. It probably took many years of trial and error to create words, other than for things, which may already have been named. The new words would be verbs, the secret of syntax.

Today there is one ancient language, the one employing "clicking", that is believed to be similar to Man's first language. It is used in and around Ethiopia by a people called "San." The language, called "San !Xu" has 141 separate sounds! English, by comparison has only 31, while 2/3 of the worlds languages have between twenty and forty sounds. Thought, requiring "subject, verb and object" was what set early man apart from other animals.

I find it hard to imagine being one of those early persons. Try to think of having a memory consisting of things, others, dangers, food, etc, but, no thoughts. And then think, over night almost, what it would be like to have thoughts, with all history and traditions yet to be made.

Today's San people are small people with tan skin, tightly curled hair and a peculiar fold of skin over their eyes, a feature that has mostly died out. We know that these are direct decedents of the man who started our line of talking animals because they have but the one "Marker", the original that all men have. All DNAs carry in its string of simple letters a historical document. From this we know where ancestors have traveled over these fifty Thousand years. With only the first marker, a marker all men have, we know the San people have not strayed from their first environment.

There are people in Australia who have been there more that 50 thousand years, called the Bushmen with only two "markers: M-168, the original marker and M-130, carried by those who ventured out of Africa early. Besides going to Australia, others that early stayed along the Asian coast, some ventured further east, and a few went north. At the time of these migrations, the earth was in the midst of an ice age, with the ocean levels 100 meters less than they are today. As a result there were connecting land masses that explain how man could go as far as Australia. There were islands everywhere, so that a raft was probably enough

to convey a few persons from island to islands. We must remember that man is gregarious but he needs sustenance, so travels were over many years, even centuries. Think about it for a minute: there were no maps. Geography wasn't taught but man was curious, he was hungry and he traveled.

I mentioned the Ice Age, which was in place when Man first appeared. The Pleistocene Age had four advances and recessions of the North Polar Cap; the last one ended what today we call the "ice age"; it also ended the Pleistocene Age. (about 20,000 years ago) We all knew there was an ice age covering most of Europe, but it lasted for 2/3rds of man's existence! It is hard to believe.

The great migrations of Man came in these past 20,000 years. Man did go east to Southern Asia and southern China before that. He also went west to Pacific Islands and Australia, but he didn't venture north. He seemed to be limited to the eastern rim of the Mediterranean and east and south from there, almost all passing through the Middle East. The DNA "markers" tells us that some of Europe was settled from middle and northern Asia, as well as up from the Middle East; this all happening after the climate became suitable to support humans.

With the "warming" of the planet, northern Africa became a desert, keeping Man from leaving except through Egypt or across water on rafts further east. Later, Egypt developed a kingdom, maybe the first to rule over a large region and became a barrier to Man coming north, enslaving many who came that way. The supposition is that Egypt slowed the traffic out of Africa to a trickle for a thousand years or more.

In all of this movement, these migrations, Man found others as they traveled others who had settled. Those who had settled probably had developed skills, in agriculture, in crafts, or in "how to live" by means other than "hunting". These "engagements," advanced the knowledge and skills of the new arrivals, who in turn, may have brought a few of their own new or different skills.

## BRILLIANCE IN SPAIN

When we think of brilliance, we think of Greece. And Greece was brilliant, a jewel in the history of man. There is another jewel in that history, a jewel I didn't know about until I read Maria Roas Menocal's "The Ornament of the World" with the sub-title, "How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain." My own education in history was limited to Greece, Rome, and Europe after the Norman conquest of England, the United States, and a wonderful course on the Renaissance. However, there was a time in Spain before Isabella that was full of wonderful happenings, so I wish to include its story to illustrate brilliant engagements.

The story of "Encounters" in Spain starts about 800AD and lasted for over 600 years. Persons were drawn to southern Spain from all over the Mediterranean. It wasn't called Spain then; it was called, "al-Andalus," and was most of the Iberian Peninsula. The major cities Lisbon, Badajoz, Toledo, Valencia, Seville, Cordoba, Cadiz, Malaga, Granada and Murcia, were where the magic of discussion and learning occurred. This 500 to 700 year period was unusual in that conflict or war was almost nonexistent. This "happening" was so unique in our world that persons came from all over the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Languages were many; Arabic would have been heard the most, but Latin was the common tongue which enabled discourse among persons, whatever their nationality or religion.

During this period, the Moorish kings ruled, but Christians, Jews and Moors, or Muslims, lived "cheek to cheek", with the Jewish Quarter in the shadow of the Cathedral's tower which was but steps from the Muslim Mosque. Libraries came into being, gathering writings and knowledge from around the Mediterranean: mathematics, architecture, knowledge of medicine and writings of the Greek Philosophers. It is strange to think that some of the Greek plays and writings were translated then for the first time into Latin so that others could enjoy them. Knowledge of Medicine and Anatomy was common, as was thinking and speculation about life's purpose. Much of the writing, poetry and treatises that we think of as coming from North Africa had been brought there from al-Andalus, following the ascendancy of the Christian or Moslem fundamentalists. Some members will remember Victor Reichert, David's Father, who translated poetry written by Jewish Authors of that time. He identified the writers as from Northern Africa, but I'm sure they had come from Iberia and had fled, or the writings had found their way there.

Much of the scientific as well as other Arab thinking, now a part of the mix in this "happening" in the Iberia peninsula became available to many when it was translated into Latin. The Libraries were treasure chests for the likes of Averros and Maimonides, and earlier of Abelard. The many encounters during these centuries of Greek, Roman, Jewish, Arab, and Christian thought, all pursuing the "truth", are today a part of our intellectual heritage.

Each of the religions discovered much, such as: Arabized Jews rediscovered Hebrew, and the Hebrew language was now used for more than just scripture. Christians embraced nearly every aspect of Arabic style. And Arabs discovered the wisdom of the Greeks and Romans.

Today, as I write this our mail included a brochure of a trip to Granada, Seville, Malaga and Cordoba to see architectural wonders. These wonders, such as the Mezquita, Cordoba's eighth century mosque from the at-Andalus, are worth a special trip. I wish the book "The Ornament of the World", had been published earlier so we could have had it with us on our trip to Spain some thirty plus years ago.

It is a shame that religion, which can bring much to life, can so easily thwart life with claims of absolute certainty. In Spain, the Berber people from Northern Africa, the same people who centuries earlier had brought enlightenment to the Iberian Peninsula, now decided the Moslem Law should be enforced, ending much of the freedom. The Christians from Northern Spain, always uneasy with the free exchange of thought further south, convinced Isabella to join them in making Christianity mandatory throughout Iberia. Our history books never mention the demise of the "Ornament". This tragedy was probably caused by the zealotry of "true believers", both Moslem and Christian.

## A SACRED CROSSROADS

We usually identify Lands with a "people". Many times a country is even named with reference to its population, as in France and the Franks, or Greece and the Greeks. Sometimes the Country is named by its geography, such as the Congo. Before countries were named, other than Egypt, perhaps, peoples were named by their language. Many, though, have later been named as a direct result of the 19th century imperialism and 20th century politics, even with tribes or peoples being split-up or put together, with a disregard for language or ethnic group. This was imperialism's legacy. The countries of the Middle East were some of those created artificially by the West after World War I, changed some after World War II. The old crossroads have changed boundaries some since then and may change again. Four Thousand years ago, this area, which I call the "Sacred Crossroads", was the center of the eastern side of the Middle East. Egypt was to its south, Turkey and Syria to the north with the "Fertile Crescent" to its east. Others, also, referred to this area as "The Crossroads" because it was here that different cultures, races and religions mixed and related to one another peacefully.

Historically, the city of Jerusalem was the nexus of the "crossroads". Greeks, Roman, Jews, Arabs, Egyptians, all lived, traded, worshiped, conversed together, or passed through the environs of Jerusalem. Jerusalem also was the reference point for three different religions, and today it still remains a holy place for many people. People come to Jerusalem to worship, even to understand themselves and their religion better, and, perhaps, even to help them identify themselves. In Jerusalem is the Rock from which Mohammed ascended. Near Jerusalem Abraham was buried. The Jews built their great temple in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem was the place where Christ was crucified.

The oldest reference to this "crossroads", aside from mentions in Egyptian and other ancient myths, is the story of Abraham. The bible of the Jews and of the Christians speaks of Abraham as a person who rejected idols and multiple gods for one God. The Koran records this same belief. Abraham is important to knowing and understanding the Middle East, and Jerusalem. In Exodus, chapter 3, The Lord said to Moses, "I am....the God of Abraham.....to bring them out of that land...to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites..." Even then, long before recorded history, in the country containing Jerusalem there was engagement.

"Jerusalem is a touchstone of faith, and has been since time began" says the recent book ABRAHAM by Bruce Feilen. The legends of monotheism are consistent on the following legend. "Before there was time, there was water, and a darkness covered the deep. A piece of land emerged out of that water. That land is the Rock, and the Rock is "here". Adam was born here. Solomon built here. Jesus prayed here. Mohammed ascended here."

Abraham was the patriarch of the Hebrew's Bible. He was the spiritual forefather of the New Testament and he is believed to be the holy architect of the Koran. Yet, other than being the first monotheist, much about Abraham is unknown. He has no mother, that we know. He has no past, of which we have records. He has no personality. He was thought to be born in what is now Iraq, thought to have lived in Turkey, then Canaan, Bethel Sheehan, Beersheba and the

"promised land". Still, the author Albright declared in 1949, "There can be little doubt about the substantial history of the patriarchal narrative".

Even though it is "passed down" history, we think Abram, (an earlier way of saying Abraham) was an astronomer, and probably lived in Chaldea, in lower Mesopotamia, for a portion of his life, because this area was known in antiquity as the home of astronomy. Hebron is thought to be the place of Abram's burial. Spencer Wells in his recent book "THE JOURNEY OF MAN" tells of man's advances from hunter/gatherer communities to farming communities happening here, in the sacred crossroads. Here, too, would have been a place to pass as migrations came out of the south to the east and north.

A quotation by a British historian, Dame Kathleen, is interesting: "We have found evidence for human settlement at Jericho dating from around 10M years BC - hunter-gatherer communities that lived off of game and water resources in much the same way as their Upper Paleolithic ancestors had for 30M years before. Then, immediately above this, we found the remains of an early farming community, dating from the period immediately afterwards." And then a few pages further on, this quote, "In the case of the Middle East, the genomes of today's western Eurasians still retain a signal of those events at Jericho 10M year ago". So we find today's science telling us that the Sacred Crossroads was the location from whence Man left for other lands.

#### A SELECTED HISTORY OF JERUSALEM

I will attempt a short history here. Because it is short I may omit pieces that are important to some and include facts that are important to others, but I hope to illustrate that over the centuries of Middle East history, the major function of its capital, Jerusalem, its natural function, was that of a crossroads, a place where various people mingled, for a brief or an extended time.

We can only guess when the Middle East became an early part of the route going east or going north, probably about 40,000 BC. The "Markers" tell us that many came through here. They were small tribes, probably, settling down here and there as they moved about. They may have stayed a decade or a century or two in different places. The chances are that they left some persons behind, here and there. It could be that one of those small settlements eventually became what we now call Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was/is situated between Egypt to the south, whose civilization and history goes back before 4000 BC, and agricultural and city settlements to the north. There had to be trade routes and settlements in what we now call the Mid-East. The first date we know of for Jerusalem is 1900 BC, a date given to Abraham's arrival in a city already functioning, already with a history in myths and in the tales of some tribes.

The Jewish Bible records pre-Moses persons who must have lived here, since some of them were taken to Egypt as captives. Since we know it was about 1200 BC when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land, and since it was two hundred years later when a kingdom existed in Jerusalem, it was about 1000 BC when Saul, David and Solomon were kings and when the great Jewish

Temple was built. This Kingdom survived a bit more than a century. The Bible says that the country was, in turn, ruled by Assyrians, Egyptians and Babylonians, the last destroying the Temple, the symbol of the Jewish rule.

We should realize that other peoples, perhaps still as tribes, lived in Jerusalem as well. When we read that Jewish, Assyrian, and other kings reigned, we must remember that it was they who maintained order, as did tribal leaders, before them. And it was the trade routes coming through the area, stopping in Jerusalem, that made the city important, made it prosper and allowed it to be the setting for an exchange of ideas, customs, and, languages.

The Bible records the captivity and removal of the Jews from Jerusalem, as well as the destruction of their temple by the Babylonians (587 BC, lasting 73 years). What isn't clear to the casual reader of the Bible is that this captivity was of 4600 Jews, mostly males with power, leaving many Jews behind. Jerusalem was a city of many "peoples", seldom with a majority of any one. The Jews may have been a majority for a short while, when they built the great temple. Religion was never a deciding factor as to who could live in the city.

There were other influences in Jerusalem during these years before Christianity, such as the Greeks, whose influence is shown by the common use of the Greek language. Roman influence was present all over the Mediterranean, including Palestine and Jerusalem, Rome took control of Jerusalem in 63 BC because of unrest and its political climate. Control meant order, not disruption of climate of the cities social intercourse. Then in 135 the Romans ordered the destruction of the second Jewish Temple, when many Jews were killed or fled the city.

In the sixth century CE, with the advent of Mohammedanism, the Arabs took control of Jerusalem, many of them having been citizens for years. With this new religion there came a unity of the Arabs; thus control was a natural occurrence and Jerusalem was the third most important Moslem city. Palestine, including Jerusalem, was "controlled" by various Arab groups until the Ottoman Empire, which had come in 1455CE, lost control at the time of the First World War. There was exception to this "control" when, in the 12th CE century the "European Crusaders" had control for less than a century. The Europeans, again, got into the act following World War I.

In 1897 the first Zionist conference was held in Switzerland, after which Jews started immigrating to the Middle East, mostly from Europe. Following the first World War the area was the subject of much international discussion, resulting in supervision, by the British and French under a mandate worked out at the 1918 "peace conference." The end of the Second World War brought another change; the British and French were to be involved no longer and the present states were established.

As an addendum to this brief history of Jerusalem, let me tell you a little known fact. It was Harry Truman, our president at that time, and a frequent Bible reader, who, when asked what to call the piece of land carved out for a Jewish state, said, "Call it Israel, the home of biblical Jewish tribes."

## QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

This past June The New York Times had a story with the headline "The Oldest Americans May Prove even Older". The author said that the remains of early men, uncovered in South Carolina, were at least 20,000 years old! Those early settlers must have sprinted to get there after the ice left. Or maybe there was another way to get to North America other than going through Alaska.

Immigration was, and is, an engagement. These engagements could be one to one or group to group, or just living now under a different environment. I remember as a youth in Chicago the large Polish district on the near west side. It was well known then but today there is no trace of it left. That population has dispersed, probably through marriages and by moving into parts of the city for better housing, etc. Today few countries are without immigration or emigration, caused by a variety of reasons, with the resulting engagements benefiting all but the country surrendering their citizens, where improvement is probably needed the most.

Besides immigration the most impressive engagements of this sort happening today are through such groups as "Doctors without Borders", the "Peace Corps" and retired business persons helping foreign companies. I wonder about the benefits, if any, of the engagements between Jew and Palestinian living in Israel and Palestine, engagements which have been happening for a century now? And now with the wall, called the "new Wailing Wall" by Thomas Friedman, and the "Apartheid Wall" by the Palestinians, will most engagements cease?

In spite of differences between Muslim peoples and "western" peoples, powerful engagements have happened. It is hard to believe that five Moslem women have been elected "head of state" in the past decade, illustrating that some form of "engagement" occurred in their states. The fact that the majority of Muslims in our world live in democracies is unbelievable, too.

A wonderful story of continuing engagement can be found in Brooklyn, New York. Several years ago a book was published, listing every section of Brooklyn with a page or two for each. On these pages were listed all of the different populations who had lived there, and with dates. And then this past March The New York Times described Brooklyn's "Avenue of Babel, where cultures entwine." "Coney Island Avenue's five miles, from Prospect Park to Brighton Beach". Block by block, the language, the smells, the stores, the funeral homes, all, intermingling, of course; and they are proud of who they are. Easter bunnies are sold next to "Kosher Candy;" a Mosque is next door to a Jewish day care center, and more. Engagement? Yes.

A nice ending for this paper is to relate a comment made by one of our sons after reading this, "engagements we all hope for: "An intermixing of cultures in a spirit of tolerance."

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