

THE PAST IS OUR FUTURE

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Appropriately, the one time of the year that we place particular emphasis on the involvement of the children is Seder night. This is accomplished by the obligation to tell over the story of the Exodus. The importance of relating the story to the younger generation is obvious, but there is also great significance in the telling by the older generation. "And in order that you shall speak it into the ears of your son and your grandson... that you will know that I am God" (Exodus 10:2).

Rav Shalom of Belz explains that from the verse it sounds like the intention of the telling is purely to make the children wiser. However, the end of the verse informs us that "you will know that I am God." The Torah is teaching us that by relating the story to the children, the adults will increase their own level of faith and love of God. This idea is also proven from the fact that Jewish law states that if one is alone with no one else to relate the story to, he has to relate it over to himself...

Pyramids and Pentium

What is the significance of the emphasis on relationships between the generations, as well as on past events such as the Exodus?

In a zoo, one of the most popular exhibits is always that of the monkeys. Perhaps this is because the nations of the world believe they came from monkeys. They look at these animals and think about how clever they act while at the same time are still so primitive. They comfort themselves by saying that humans are the more advanced, refined beings. Their philosophy is that every generation is an improvement on the previous one. "Look at our technology," they think to themselves. "We have 2000 MHz computers, while only a few years ago we ran on 1 MHz. (I'm sure that by the time this goes to press this will also be out of date.) Look at how we can travel into outer space, and look at our weapons of mass destruction."

The Torah view is somewhat different from this. We look at previous generations as having been on a higher level than we are. When the Jews received the Torah at Sinai, they were on the highest level ever, having experienced Divine revelation. Moses received the Torah directly from God, with the full complexity of the oral law. This was handed down from one generation to the next. This means that previous generations are closer to the original source; the Torah they learned was purer,

less diluted.

On the other hand, the wisdom of the nations is different. No one can say that one particular theory is correct, because inevitably a new theory will take its place. The mathematical proofs of years gone by were refuted by later mathematicians. Economic models are out of date even before they have been publicized. However, with our Torah, we look to earlier generations. We examine how they unraveled the complexities in the Talmud, precisely because each older generation is closer to the source...

Coining the Future

[In Exodus 10:8-11, the Torah describes how Pharaoh was willing to let the adult males go serve God in the desert, but Moses insisted that -- whether male or female -- "with our youngsters and with our elders shall we go."]

Now we can understand Pharaoh's problem. Although he was wicked, he understood the key to Jewish survival. Apparently, Pharaoh was willing to let those between the ages of 20 and 60 leave, but he could not allow those above or below that age to go. Pharaoh knew of the concept of the tradition that we receive from our fathers and grandfathers. He also knew that without someone to give it over to, there is no future.

The Midrash says that Abraham was one of four people who minted coins. On one side was a picture of an elderly man and woman. This represents that the Jewish people need an older generation for guidance and to transmit important teachings to us. On the other side of the coin was a young boy and girl, representing that there must also be a future. This is what Pharaoh wanted to take away, but Moses insisted that "with our youngsters and with our elders shall we go."

Coming Out of Retirement

Once there was a Palestinian terrorist called Salah Tamari who was incarcerated in an Israeli prison. He related that while there, he underwent a great transformation. He had given up hope that his movement would ever reach its goals. Israel was simply too strong, and he was ready to give up the struggle.

One Passover, he saw his jailer eating a pita sandwich. He was shocked at how a Jew could do such a thing and asked the jailer why he was doing it. The jailer replied, "I feel no connection with events that took place over 2,000 years ago; they have nothing to do with me."

That night, Tamari couldn't sleep. He thought to himself, "A nation with no connection to its past, openly transgressing its most important laws, has cut off its roots to the land." He concluded that his people could indeed achieve their goals and should not give up on any of their aspirations, for if the opposition was a nation without connection to its roots, it could be defeated.

The importance of the Exodus is that it is central to our beings as Jews. It was what led to the giving

of the Torah, and we are commanded to remember it daily. The Torah gives as the reason for many of the mitzvot that they are a remembrance of the Exodus. We are remembering that we are a nation with a past, and a destiny for the future.

In fact, there are many connections between the Exodus from Egypt and the future redemption. While the text of the part of the Haggadah that is read before the meal commemorates the past Exodus, a close examination of the part of the text read after the meal shows that it is referring to the future redemption. By understanding the significance of our past, and knowing how strong our attachment to these events must be and what they represent, we should merit the redemption speedily in our days.

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