

PESACH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Pesach is the holiday of memory and of hope. Memory is really the key to Jewish survival and a meaningful Jewish life. All of the rituals and foods of Pesach, the Seder and all of its customs, are intended to be memory aids. Events that are well over three millennia old are remembered and celebrated.

In this the Jewish people remain completely unique in having a national memory that stretches back over such a length of time. We remember that we left Egypt on a Thursday and that the events of our salvation at Yam Suf are indelibly recorded in our minds and daily prayers.

The sweep of Jewish history from Avraham till today is one long continuum of momentous events, special personages and indescribable perseverance and tenacity. Yet somehow the Jewish people in its collective memory recall all of it and keep it alive from one generation till the next.

That is the secret of the vitality of the Pesach Seder, celebrating events that are over thirty three hundred years old. Those Jews who have lost this sense of memory and live only in the ever-changing present are doomed to angst and doubt. Rootless, they will have to sway in the winds that buffet our world from every direction.

Loss of memory is as tragic for a people as it is for an individual human being. Parents and children succumb to this disease of forgetfulness. The story is told about an absent-minded great professor who upon alighting from his bus stop was so confused that he forgot his home address. Seeing a young boy playing with a ball on the sidewalk he approached and asked him: "Do you know where the great professor lives?" The boy looked up to him in wonder and said; "Abba, don't you recognize me?" Without common and important memory the generations will never be able to recognize each other.

That is the reason that the Pesach Seder and holiday is so vital and has always continued to retain its hold on the Jewish people, even amongst sections of the Jewish people who are not necessarily strictly observant. Everyone deep down in their hearts recognizes and treasures the importance of

generational memory and tradition.

And Pesach is probably the strongest memory aid that Judaism possesses. For with every bite of matzo the memories come flooding into our subconscious soul. This is the bread of our forefathers, not only of Egyptian bondage, but of Temple times, of Spanish and French exiles, of Eastern European greatness and Holocaust, of Israel both ancient and current.

The matzo speaks to us of our past and our journey throughout human history. The prophet's words "you are My witnesses" echo in our minds and hearts and in the crackling sound of the matzo being chewed and digested.

Look where we have been and what we have overcome. Remember the generations that enabled us to reach this day. See the faces of our children and grandchildren at the Seder table. What message shall we leave for them? What is our legacy to them if nothing but this great sense of memory and past?

The other side of the coin of Pesach is hope. The view of a better future no matter what our current difficulties are. Judaism is the faith of hope and optimism. For thousands of years Jews proclaimed at the Pesach Seder "Next year in Jerusalem, rebuilt and populated." This unlikely proclamation has come true in front of our very eyes. Those who deny its importance or resist its message are bereft of hope.

The world is full of seemingly self-important naysayers. But the hope of the ages has nevertheless been vindicated in actual and realistic terms. And we still hope for greater things - for the dry bones of the prophet Yechezkel's great vision to be revived once more, for a time of peace and security and true freedom for all.

We have extraordinary hopes for our future and for the future of humankind generally. We have never lost our hope for better times and improved situations. Pesach comes to reinforce our sense of these hopes and expectations. That our situation lacks current perfection is certainly an understatement. But Pesach reminds us not to despair of our future.

Looking at our past challenges one may gain a sense of renewed confidence regarding our future. Building our families, educating our young and old, striving and working for improvement, both

personal and national, is the lesson of Pesach. This tandem of memory and hope assures our eventual survival and triumph.

Shabat shalom
Chag sameach v'kasher

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