

PESACH PREPARATIONS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

As the month of Nissan begins this Shabat the forthcoming joyous holiday of Pesach is already much anticipated. Whether one is going to celebrate it at home or travel to family or participate in a Pesach resort hotel program, it is obvious that Pesach requires preliminary preparations. One just does not come into Pesach stone cold.

Shopping, cleaning, cooking and packing are all part of the necessary Pesach preparations. But physical preparations, important and necessary as they certainly are, do not constitute the whole of the preparations required for the proper commemoration of Pesach. One must prepare one's self emotionally and mentally as well.

In every family there are memories of past Seders and Pesachs, of chairs at the table that are now empty and of bygone opportunities and choices. All joy in Jewish life is always tinged with a bittersweet quality. The ability to emphasize the sweet and sublimate the bitter is itself one of the great challenges that life presents before each and every one of us.

Egypt was a horrible place for Jews and it contained many bitter and depressing memories. Yet the task of Moshe and the Jewish people was to shake off those memories and proceed onwards in good spirit and high hopes and firm belief. All later commemorations of that first Pesach are charged with maintaining that remarkable ability and positive viewpoint of life. Pesach therefore requires a particular mindset, mental strength and fortitude. The ability to be optimistic about our future is the real secret ingredient that our matzot contain.

Another lesson of preparation for Pesach is how exact life is. A small amount of chametz - even only a particle - is enough to render our food inedible on Pesach. We see how in nature, in the human body, in medical research, in computer science, in almost every facet of life, the smallest deviation from the norm creates major consequences.

Pesach reinforces the basic Jewish concept that there really are no small things in life and in

relationships. One foolish word, one misspoken statement can destroy a lifelong relationship. A small act of kindness can change a person's entire life - both for the giver and the receiver. And the same is true for an act that lacks kindness, compassion and sensitivity.

The daughter of the Pharaoh's small act of kindness in rescuing a Jewish infant from the crocodile infested waters of the Nile changed all of human civilization and world history. The pettiness and spitefulness of those who informed on Moshe almost derailed the whole process of Jewish redemption from Egyptian slavery.

The realization that there are really no small things in life is certainly one of the major preparatory mindsets that ready us for the Pesach holiday. Most, if not all, of the laws regarding Pesach, and in Temple times regarding the Pesach sacrifice, center on seemingly minute issues. On the road to Jewish redemption there are no small things - everything is important and crucial.

Another mindset in preparation for Pesach is the reinforcement of the importance of family in our lives and actions. All Jewish holidays are family oriented, as is all Jewish life - but Pesach is especially so. The Torah emphasizes this point in stating that the Pesach sacrifice was to be "a lamb for every house." In our time the family structure of many Jews has disintegrated, leading to great personal and national problems.

People are afraid to commit to creating a family of their own - witness how many singles now populate the Jewish world. People realize that committing to marriage and to a particular spouse is an act of faith, and bringing Jewish children into our dangerous world is an equal, if not greater, act of faith. And faith is unfortunately a commodity that is in very short supply in today's Jewish society.

Pesach reminds us of the fact that we, the Jewish people, are in essence a family with all of the glory, problems and peculiarities that this entails. And, part of the task is to ensure that the family will continue to exist - and the realization that selfish betrayal of family always brings with it elimination from the greater eternal book of the Jewish people.

So, part of our Pesach preparations is the renewed commitment to family continuity and growth. If these Pesach ideas permeate our minds and hearts, as we engage in all of the necessary physical work that leads up to Pesach, we can be assured that this Pesach, like all others past and future, will be special, meaningful and joyous for all concerned.

Shabat shalom,

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