

SHABBOS HAGADOL

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This Shabbos is called "Shabbos HaGadol," "The Great Shabbos." There is a custom to read part of the Hagada, or liturgy for the Passover Seder on this Shabbos. In that spirit, we will turn our discussion to a thought on the Hagada.

As we may know, Passover is the holiday in which we celebrate our freedom from bondage in Egypt. It's important to note that that is half of the story. The other half of the story is that Passover begins our countdown toward the holiday of "Shavuos" which takes place seven weeks later. Shavuos is the celebration of our receiving the Torah, and accepting the responsibility of learning and observing it.

The reason we count up to Shavuos is because the goal of freedom from bondage from Egypt was receiving the Torah. G-d did not free us so that we would live our lives completely according to our own limited judgement. G-d's purpose was that we should be granted the highest privilege of all - to be close to Him - The Creator - through His holy service and direction.

The more one contemplates this - that we merited the favor of The Creator - as insignificant as we are in the scheme of the entire universe...To think that The One Who is bigger than all that we can imagine and explore; be it in the depths of the ocean or at the furthest edges of outer-space, cares about what we do! It gives us a great value, importance, and responsibility. Considering all that we have from G-d, it is a labor of love.

About this point the Hagada states "anyone who speaks at length about the miraculous event of leaving Egypt is praiseworthy." The following analogy found in the "Yainah Shel Torah Hagada" illustrates this point.

A poor and ignorant man once struck it rich. He decided it was time to put an end to his ignorance, and he hired a personal teacher to educate him with a well-rounded, comprehensive education. He climbed the ladder of intellectual accomplishment, and became a notable scholar. Alas, his wealth did not endure, and he rejoined the ranks of the impoverished. Nevertheless, to the astonishment of his peers, he continued to observe the day he had attained his riches as a day of celebration. "I can understand making a party if you were still rich," they commented, "but why do you now continue to celebrate this day?" "I'll explain it to you. Before I became rich, I was an ignorant boor. Now I possess great intellectual wisdom which enlightens every moment of my life. My wisdom is something which remains with me even if my wealth did not. For that reason I continue to celebrate."

We find ourselves deep in the diaspora. We now lack the great "riches" which the generation liberated from Egypt possessed - G-d's manifest presence, prophets, and supernatural divine aid in all situations. Yet that experience yielded us something we still have. We still have the Torah and its commandments. That is our reason for celebrating.

One who speaks at length about leaving Egypt manifests his appreciation for what he gained as a result of that great experience, even if we are not as "wealthy and influential" as we once were, so to speak. Still he is showing that he attributes value to the experience of leaving Egypt on a deeper level. He doesn't view his physical freedom and lack of limitations as an end in itself, because he can still celebrate after losing it. He focuses on what he gained through his physical freedom - his release from spiritual bondage and blindness. This person is truly praiseworthy.

Good Shabbos!

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