

# WHAT TIME IT REALLY IS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*And I will take you to Me for a nation and I will be for you a G-d, and you will know I am HASHEM your G-d who took you out from the burdens of Egypt! (Shemos 6:7)*

The Maharal from Prague asks a question that seems so obvious when explicitly stated. Why do we celebrate yearly and mention daily having left Egypt if afterwards we find ourselves back in the hot soup of subsequent exiles? Egypt was not the exile to end all exiles! Why, then, do we continue to hearken back to that event?

The answer he offers is based upon a subtle yet profound distinction between two different states of being - "essential" versus "incidental" What does that mean?

The apocryphal story is told about Pavorati the famous opera singer, that he entered a bank in New York and tried to cash a check for 100 dollars. The cashier asked for some form of identification. Pavorati insisted he was who he is and happened to have left his wallet in the hotel. The clerk insisted that he produce ID or she could not cash the check. He pointed to a giant bill board outside with his larger than life picture on display. "That's me Pavorati. See I'm singing at the MET!" She said, "It sure looks a lot like you but if that's really you, then sing a little and then I'll cash you're check!" With that Pavorati snatched back the \$100 check and before turning to walk out he told the cashier, "Pavorati doesn't sing for \$100!" Sometimes a rich person finds himself in, for whatever reason, a situation where he has no money handy. He happens not to be able to prove his financials but at least he knows his worth.

Our Rebbe once asked the class, "What can we learn from a clock that has stopped still? I remember feeling very good at the time that the Rebbe liked my answer very much.

I said that if you happen to see a person who is getting drunk on Purim and eating with great appetite on the eve of Yom Kippur that does not mean that you can learn from him at other times throughout the year."

It also happens on occasion that a poor individual can put on a display of wealth that extends far beyond his actual means. The fact that he is able to create such a play of opulence does not necessarily make him a rich man. Anyone with a credit card can do the same but when the end of the month arrives, reality lands with a thunderous thud.

So the Jewish People are essentially free people after the exodus. Yes there are situations when we

find ourselves at the mercy of others but this is a contradiction to our essence and we therefore long for better times. Something inside us quakes as mounting pressures demand we cheapen our essential worth. There's too much we wouldn't do for any price because "self-esteem is the reputation we have with ourselves!"

On the other side there are, what seem like long moments in history when bad minded movements and individuals are getting away with murder and profiting from lies. It's hard not to want to join them at those times. Nice guys seem to be destined to finish last. The Mishne in Avos cautions therefore, "Distant yourself from a bad neighbor, don't join the wicked, and don't give up hope for retribution."

Life is not a snap shot. It's a moving picture. Those forces may appear successful on occasion but not often enough to earn our allegiance or respect. Winston Churchill said, "The wheels of history grind slowly but thoroughly!" The Exodus from Egypt therefore reminds us of who we really are and what time it really is! Text Copyright &copy 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.