

GOOD 'TILL THE LAST DROP

by Rabbi Label Lam

In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he went out of Egypt, as it says, "And you should tell your child on that day, 'Because of this HASHEM did for me when I went out of Egypt!' Not our ancestors alone did the Holy One blessed is He redeem but even us he redeemed with them!" (The Haggada)

There's an open contradiction in this statement. I'm not the first one to notice it. On the one hand each individual in every generation has an obligation to see themselves as if they had gone out of Egypt and then immediately the Haggada tells us that we too actually were redeemed when our ancestors exited Egypt 3321 years ago. Which is it? Is it "as if" like some imaginary morality play we perform or is it real and true? The Maharal from Prague offers the answer but it needs a little explaining. The "as if" goes on the individual while the "actual" refers to the group.

I once asked a group of high school students that had just finished a unit in history, "Who's the most important person in human history?" and "What is the most important moment of human history?" After guessing Avraham, Moshe, and Dovid, I finally let them know...it is...Label Lam! They were shocked. Most of them had never heard of me. I told them I would prove it.

There can be no more reliable proof than an open statement from the Sages of the Talmud. When a witness is about to give testimony in a life and death trial he is strongly reminded about the hazardous consequences of his words. They ask him, "Why was "man" created singular?" He could have been created as a couple, or a gaggle, or a corporation. The answer the witness is told is: "A person has an obligation to say, 'the whole world was created for me!'".

When Adam opened his eyes he beheld a universe of trees and breezes and rays of golden light, constructed with precision for his for his benefit. That's not only true of Adam the first man but every individual subsequently has the same obligation to see himself as the centerpiece of human history.

I told those students that if you ask your parents, "Who's the most important person in Jewish history?" and then you tell'm, "Label Lam" then you didn't understand the message. Everyone has to say himself! I am only an actor in your morality play. So what is the most important moment in Jewish history? You guessed it! THIS moment!

This is all included in a statement by Hillel, "If I am not for me who will be for me, and if I am only for myself then what am I and if not now, then when?!" Hillel says that nobody else can play my unique

part in history but me and nobody can make me want to realize that role but me. However, if my part is only about me or for my sake then I am no longer suffering an identity crisis, (WHO am I?) but rather, a humanity crisis (WHAT am I?). The reason I'm obligated to develop my SELF is for the good of the aggregate. We need the help of and we have to act on behalf of the entirety of humanity over many the millennium.

How does "if not now, when?!" fit in here? Is it simply a nice rhetorical device? "Seize the day! No time like the present!" Actually, the first two parts tell us that there are no extra actors in the play of history and everyone fits perfectly into the plot, adding color and texture to the living fabric of life. The third part tells us that there are also no extra or repeat moments. Twice daily we say in our prayers, "He renews with His kindness all day the act of creation." Each moment the world is being recreated and affirmed by The Almighty no less than the first moment of creation.

So too when we are seated around the Pesach Seder, we are obligated to imagine that the entire exodus from Egypt was all because of me. "Because of this HASHEM did all this for me..." He had me in mind at that time that I would be seated here in the 21st century munching Matzos. By imagining it so we weave our way into the fabric of Jewish history and destiny. Ultimately it's about being an important part of the entirety of Israel, from its very beginning and Maxwell House Haggada in hand, good 'till the last drop. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).