

BACK TO THE FUTURE

by Rabbi Label Lam

And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, Because of this, HASHEM did for me when I went out of Egypt." (Shemos 13:8)

Because of this: In order that I fulfill His commandments, such as these [commandments of] the Passover sacrifice, Matzah, and bitter herbs. — [Passover Haggadah](Rashi)

HASHEM did for me: [Scripture] alluded to a reply to the wicked son, to say, "HASHEM did for me," but not for you. Had you been there, you would not have been worthy of being redeemed. — [from Mechilta] (Rashi)

This is the answer prescribed for the wicked son and his cynical attitude at the Pesach Seder. We tell him "because of this HASHEM did for when I went out of Egypt." Here we sit thousands of years after the Exodus, talking to a non-compliant child and asking him to understand somehow that "I went out of Egypt"! How is he supposed to hear this as a relevant and credible response to his already deep skepticism?

What is "this" referring to as in "because of this"? "This" is usually pointing to something tangible and concrete before our eyes in the present. Rashi comes galloping to the rescue and answers the question about "this". It is talking about the Mitzvos of the evening that we are fulfilling at the Seder such as Matzah, Marror, and the Pesach Offering.

Great! How is this an answer to the wicked son? Does he believe and do I really believe that HASHEM took me out of Egypt? After all it's been a long time since that event.

Again Rashi provides the information for the answer, breathing life into the dialogue. The wicked son is being told that had he been there in Egypt he would not have been one of the redeemed. Those are harsh words! Therefore HASHEM did for me and not him! How does that answer the question of the wicked one?

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!

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. When HASHEM took the Jews out 3300 years ago He had me in mind then that I would be here now carrying out the Mitzvos. The wicked son is being admonished that he is actually scripting himself out of history by choosing a contrarian attitude. If he decides it's not worth being here now, HASHEM did not have in in mind back then. The Seder is really then a journey **back to the future!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.