

SEARING FIRE OR REACHING HIGHER

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

The wonderful festival of Pesach, celebrated in the warm circle of family and friends, provided an opportunity with each festive meal to share, sing, and delight in a uniquely spiritual atmosphere. Although the moments flew by all too quickly, let us hope, as we re-engage our daily responsibilities, that the spiritual enlightenment we gained over this inspirational Chag will remain with us.

Perhaps the following thought culled from the commentaries on the Hagadah, can help us preserve a little of the spiritual essence and flavor of Pesach.

Our sages tell us that each of the plagues that Hashem wrought upon the Egyptians provided a measure of enlightenment and clarity to the Jewish people. This clarity reached its zenith during the ninth plague, with the blatant delineation between the treatment meted out to the Egyptians and that accorded by Hashem to the Jewish people. The Torah expresses it this way: "No man could see his brother nor could anyone rise from his place..., and to all the Jewish people there was light in their residences." While a thick darkness blanketed the Egyptians, the Jewish people realized a heightened awareness of Hashem's presence, and light and clarity infused their homes.

Although each plague lasted an entire week, the Torah makes a point of telling us that the plague of darkness continued for only six days. The seventh day of the plague was reserved for a later time. The beginning of the grand finale of this plague occurred on during the night of the crossing of the sea. "And there were cloud and darkness (for the Egyptians), and the night was illuminated (for the Jewish camp)" (Exodus Ch 14 V.20).

The Midrash tells us that the final (seventh) day of the plague of darkness will also be one in which light and darkness will be flip sides of the same coin. That will occur in Messianic era where the nations that oppress the Jewish people will be smitten with darkness, while the Jewish people will experience the intense light that will accompany the full revelation of Hashem's presence to the entire world.

The commentaries explain that this supernatural light and darkness will be antithetical forces emanating simultaneously from one Source. The spiritual light that will be delightful to the Jewish people will be a source of pain, misery and darkness to the nations who have defied Him. In our world we often see a glimpse of an internal paradox of this sort: one man's triumph can be another man's defeat; one man's bliss is another's despair; one man's freedom is another man's chains ,and

one man's pleasure can be another man's toil.

We have an example of this phenomenon in the Torah when we read of how the lowest elements of the Jewish people complained bitterly about the Manna's bland taste in the wilderness, while the righteous savored the taste of all foods that were embedded in the Manna. Mitzvos and Divine service can be onerous, rigid and painful to those who crave unbridled material freedom. Others will experience the Divine commandments as a source of intense joy and delight.

As we travel through the year we are not immune to strains of the Egyptian darkness as we engage our daily halachic obligations. At times our responsibilities can be challenging, testing us to the limit. We can lose sight of the spiritual pleasure inherent in the performance of mitzvos and the rewards of overcoming the obstacles to observance. Pesach has given us a potent taste and reminder on that sublime delight that is to be experienced in dutifully fulfilling our Creator's will. We need to draw on that uplifting experience in the days ahead, enabling us to perceive the Divine radiance and closeness that emanates from being devoted children of Hashem.

As we read our daily Shmoneh Esrei and lay forth the many requests that we have to Hashem, we come to the last and final request that encapsulates everything that precedes it. In this moving plea, we beseech Hashem to "Bless us, our Father, with the radiance that emanates from your face, for it is with that light that you imparted to us Your Torah and commandments."

As we strive to stay close to Hashem holding on to those days of light when we felt like children at His heavenly table, basking in His loving gaze and embrace, we can endeavor to maintain some of that special Pesach spirit by performing our duties with an extra spring in our step. We can thus ensure that the taste of the afikomen accompanies us for the duration of our journey, enabling us to appreciate and enjoy the spiritual bliss that will be ours in the Messianic era.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos,

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