

EVERYONE IS INVITED!

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

One of the most wondrous features that surfaces during our pre Pesach preparations is the manner in which we assume responsibility for one another, ensuring that everybody's needs are met before the Pesach festival. The first Mishna in Pesachim instructs us not to lean at the Seder table until everybody has been provided with their Seder necessities.

Earlier this week, a scene unfolded here in Monsey at the Tomche Shabbos headquarters, replicated in Jewish communities across the globe, that put the magnificent solidarity of the Jewish people on display in faithful adherence to this teaching.

Scores of volunteers assembled to pack the Pesach food that was donated to hundreds of families in our community. Over ten trucks lined up in front of the Tomche Shabbos warehouse and eager volunteers from every religious stream gathered in unity, sorting, loading and delivering what seemed like an endless stream of boxes onto the waiting trucks. Grape juice, potatoes, chickens, groceries, staples and the like were piled high in the warehouse. It was truly an inspirational and heart warming scene to see Jews so joyously fulfilling the mitzvah of providing Kimcha d'Pischa to those in need.

Why do we emphasize this particular mitzvah before Pesach? Why do we feel such an urgent sense of responsibility to one another leading up to this particular festival? True, the needs associated with Pesach are greater than at any other time of the year. The festival provisions tally up to an enormous expense and for many, securing the bare necessities for the family is daunting. Yet the awesome sense of responsibility we see displayed for fellow Jews in our midst goes above and beyond what one would expect. What brings to the surface at this particular time the tremendous compassion and desire to reach out to our brothers and sisters?

Perhaps the answer is that over three thousand years ago, when we accepted the Torah, we Jews accepted upon ourselves the bond and covenant of areivus, responsibility to one another. We recognize that all six hundred thousand of us are one unit, one organic entity; we are inseparably intertwined. This remarkable unity, undeterred by barriers of time and geography, is unique to the Jewish people.

Consider the human body's amazing capacity to address its needs. If a germ invades a particular area of the body, the entire human organism springs into action. Nutrients and blood cells stream to the affected area from all over the body to repel any substance that endangers its health. The hand,

the toe, the head, any organ-it makes no difference. Every cell is interconnected and stands ready at any given moment to assist the body and restore it to health. This the unique trait characteristic of the Jewish people!

It is well known that during the Mendel Beilis trial that was held in Moscow at the turn of the century, the prosecutor accused Jews of harboring contempt for non-Jews. He quoted a piece from the Talmud to demonstrate how superior Jews feel to Gentiles and how they loathe those who are not of their faith. "Atem keruim Adam, you [the Jewish people] are called a man, which is not true of the Gentiles," says the Talmud. The legal defense team of Mendel Bailis was in a quandary as to how to respond to this devastating attack on the Jewish faith. They consulted with the Rav of Moscow who sent a telegram to Rabbi Meir Shapiro for advice. He instructed them to tell the judge that this segment of the Talmud reflects the essential character trait of the Jewish people and is not intended as an insult to the other peoples of the world.

"This essential Jewish characteristic is on display during this very trial in a courtroom in Moscow," he said. "The entire Jewish world is up in arms. Jews across the globe are using all the resources at their disposal to intercede on the behalf of the accused, Mendel Beilis. We are one Adam, one man, one organic whole. We feel the pain of one another and are willing to sacrifice for each other in a way that no other people has ever demonstrated."

This profound trait surfaced at the moment of our formation as a people and is the force that renders us distinct and unique. On Pesach, at the moment of our annual rebirth, we sit at the Seder to celebrate our exodus from Egypt and our creation as a nation. Our joy at this momentous occasion and our cohesion as a nation is expressed in a heartfelt reaching out to our Jewish brothers and sisters: "Let all who are hungry come and partake, let all who need come and join us!"

Next Year In Jerusalem!

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos and a Kosher and Happy Pesach!

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