

REJEWVINATION AT THE SOURCE

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

As we draw closer to Pesach we are increasingly caught up in the excitement of the upcoming festival and the feverish preparations that herald its imminent arrival. Scrubbing, cleaning (spring cleaning?) cooking and baking are all the order of the day. As strenuous as these activities are, we recognize that they enhance the essential mission of the chag. That mission is encapsulated in the words of our sages: "B'chol dor v'dor chayov odom liros es aztomo keilu hu yotzah mimitzrayim". In each and every generation we are obligated to see ourselves as if we ourselves are going out of Egypt.

The nature of this mission seems to be rather elusive. After all, we have been re-enacting the same scenario for some 3,328 years. What does it mean that we are to see ourselves as if we actually went out of Egypt? How do we transform the Pesach Seder from a commemorative celebration to a transformative experience, in which we leave behind the negative character traits and materialistic drives that represent the 'little Egypt' that hold us hostage?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in an important message in this week's Torah portion. In biblical times, a person who had strayed from his Divine mission was afflicted with the plague of tzoraas, and became a "metzora."

The metzora's skin discoloration was a natural outgrowth of the person's transgression and his disconnection from his Divine source. His loshon horah had distanced and separated him from his fellow Jews, at the same time driving a wedge between himself and his Creator. As part of his healing process, the metzora had to undergo a process of purification and teshuva. When this was successfully completed, the affliction mysteriously disappeared from his skin and he was restored to his full health, spiritually and physically.

Our bodies have a miraculous Divine property—they naturally heal. Given the right conditions, our bodies will regenerate and cure by themselves. Wounds heal, scars mend and sicknesses run their course, allowing the patient to be nursed back to health. So it is with our spiritual existence. Even if we err and commit grievous sins we can be confident in the knowledge that after addressing the source of our errant behavior, making amends and renewing our commitment to G-d, our neshamas can miraculously heal.

Rav Shimon Schwab develops this concept further. It is well known, he says, that our bodies are constantly in a state of transformation. Over the course of every few years, each cell in our bodies is

cycled out; each molecule and fiber of body mass completes a regeneration process and each blood platelet is replaced. There are trillions of cooperative cells in each human adult; every second millions of blood cells die, to be instantly replaced with fresh substitutes.

Externally we continue function and look to one another exactly the same. But our physical beings are constantly being replenished and every few years we have shed the "old" person and become almost entirely a new one!

It is this amazing phenomenon, explains Rabbi Schwab, that allows us to appreciate the message of Chazal instructing us to personally experience the Exodus on Seder night in the same way our forefathers assumed a new identity upon leaving Egypt. They were not merely liberated from physical bondage; they were unshackled from the chains of materialism and paganism that constituted the true source of slavery.

Don't accept yourself as the same person as yesterday, the Torah tells us. You can change, you can grow.

Perhaps this is the underlying mitzvah of Pesach. We have to see ourselves as if we are actually experiencing an exodus from one dimension into a new one. Although our negative habits and mindset are deeply ingrained in our psyche, we can reconfigure and assume a new spiritual identity. We can grow and mature.

Just as our physical being changes, so can our spirit. The Pesach seder is not simply an exercise in education or a celebration of our past. We are not simply jogging our ancient memories. The purpose is rather to use all one's imaginative powers and spiritual hunger to produce a profound and lasting inner experience—an ennobling re'jew'vination.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos.

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