

TELLING THE STORY OF THE EXODUS: ONCE UPON A TIME...

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah:

There is a mitzvah for a father to relate to his children on the Seder night all the wondrous miracles that transpired at the Exodus; how G-d struck the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues and split the Reed Sea to liberate the Children of Israel from their oppression as they dramatically experienced salvation (Exodus 13:8).

Faith in the exodus from Egypt is a cornerstone of Judaism.

Reference to yetzias Mitzrayim, the departure from Egypt, is found no less than 50 occasions in the Torah. Nor is one hard pressed to find one of a plethora of commandments related to recalling the miraculous redemption from slavery. Take tefillin and tzitzis as two examples.

All this points to how this is more than just "another" historic event in the annals of Jewish history. That it is to be recalled and replayed out, again and again, for time immemorial throughout Jewish history illuminates how it takes on a pivotal role in answering the question "who" and "what" is a Jew?

But what is the significance of this event? And just why is it such an integral part of the Seder night tradition and the transmission down the generations on the- such that "one who expands relating about the Exodus, that person is praiseworthy"?

Pesach "the festival of our freedom" commemorates the liberation from slavery, their release from harsh oppression and from the depravity influence of Egyptian culture.

It is on this monumental date that the Jewish people came into being.

However the Jewish people's formation was not the end goal. True, salvation from Pharaoh after 210 years was most welcome. But the achievement of nationhood was not to be taken and evaluated in isolation.

Instead, the significance of the Exodus and its indelible imprint upon the Jewish psyche is "because of what this historic event set into motion". The holiday of Pesach - and its dazzling miracles - is to be seen in a wider context - in conjunction with the festival of Shavous 50 days afterwards.

The creation of this people was to attain their special status as "chosen nation" by accepting the Torah. Only upon freeing the Jewish people, granting them liberty from their oppressors and Egyptian masters, were they then on track to accept the Divine Law at Sinai from the Master of the

Universe.

On the Seder night, in particular, the detail of our salvation and the supernatural interference by G-d in the history of the world, is related and colorfully conveyed from one generation to the next. A pillar of our faith, Pesach celebrates the miraculous redemption that set the scene for the eventual acceptance of Torah and mitzvos into the world.

The endpoint to the redemption of Pesach was Shavuos. What makes us into the Jewish nation is our Torah observance. Torah is what defines and vitalizes the Jewish people (Rav Saadiah Gaon). Hence the first of the Ten Commandments is directly attributed to the Exodus: "I am Hashem Your G-d Who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). And no doubt the 50 citing of the Exodus allude to the 50 days from their salvation through seven weeks until their acceptance of Torah on Shavuos.

Pesach was when we became the "Jewish nation". And on Shavuos we sealed our status as the "chosen nation". Accordingly, just as there is a mitzvah to study and transmit Torah to one's children (Deuteronomy 6:7) there is a corresponding commandment to convey the story of our liberation onto our children.

It is this faith that has and continues to be lovingly related by father to son, from generation to generation, at the Seder night. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.