

THE GREAT SHABBOS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Shabbos Hagadol

This Shabat bears the great title of being Shabat Hagadol - the Great Shabat. There are many reasons that have been advanced as to why the Shabat that precedes the great holiday of Pesach is called Shabat Hagadol. The Shabat reminds us of the first Pesach in Egypt when the tenth of Nissan, the day of taking the Paschal lamb, fell on the Sabbath as it does this year. There is also the great Haftorah from the prophet Malachi that speaks of the "great day" and the great zayin that appears in that Haftorah. But the truth is that the title is granted to this Shabat simply because of its association with the holiday of Pesach. Greatness is an emotion that comes from self-confidence and self worth. Great people have always felt within themselves the beat of greatness. Greatness presupposes a feeling of being special, of importance and purpose. The entire message of Pesach is therefore one of greatness. For it is the story of our salvation from Egyptian bondage that is the basis of all Jewish pride and existence. All of our holidays are "in remembrance of our exodus from Egypt." Our entire national existence is built upon the remembrance of that event that began our history as a nation.

Only a people with memory and pride can strive for greatness. The Shabat of greatness comes to introduce us to the holiday that is the basis of our greatness. And it points out to us that Shabat itself is an expression of our greatness. The holy day of Shabat is the ultimate of Jewish greatness. Greatness means to rise above the world and its mundane frustrations. It is the ability to have vision where others are blinded by the fog of circumstances. That is the message of Shabat, the day of vision and rest, of hope and holiness. It is the day that we are lifted above all of the tawdry things that bind us all week long. It allows us to be great and not just ordinary.

We cannot enter the holiday of Pesach and truly reap the spiritual benefits of this exalted holiday if we are not prepared for greatness. The challenge of greatness is what has accompanied us in our long history from Egyptian exodus until today. Greatness requires steadfast principles, high moral values and a commitment to heroism. These are the hallmarks of Shabat. For to truly honor and observe Shabat one must place the principles and values of holy commitment above the temporary gains of everyday life and achievement. That is why Pesach is preceded by Shabat Hagadol. It is to attune and train us for the role of greatness in life that Pesach commemorates and demands from us. Greatness is required of each of us in every generation.

Chag Kasher v'Sameach.

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