

Shabbat HaGadol, 5784, 2024:

And You Shall Remember You Were A Slave in Egypt

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Our natural inclination at this time of the year is to focus upon the phrase, *zacher l'yetziat mitzraim*—a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. This is the case, since one of the major *mitzvot* of *Pesach* evening is none other than *l'saper b'yetziat mitzraim*—to tell the story of the departure from Egypt. While this is a key element of our thoughts during the course of the *Seder*, the Torah also reminds us, no less than five times, “And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt...” (*Sefer Devarim* 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18 and 24:22, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach* with my emendations) As such, while we are obligated to focus upon our joyous march to freedom on the night of *Pesach*, we are equally mandated to remember our 210-year ordeal of backbreaking servitude and abject misery at the hands of our heartless Egyptian taskmasters.

Two of the five instances wherein the Torah enjoins us to “remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt...” explicitly discuss our responsibility to treat the stranger, orphan, and widow in an equitable and righteous manner:

You shall not pervert the judgment of a stranger or an orphan, and you shall not take a widow's garment as security [for a loan]. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this thing. (*Sefer Devarim* 24:17-18)

When you beat your olive tree, you shall not pick all its fruit after you; it shall be [left] for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. When you pick the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean after you: it shall be [left] for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt: therefore, I command you to do this thing. (24:20-22)

These verses urge us to guard the rights and privileges of the most powerless members of Jewish society by reminding us that our entire nation was once completely vulnerable and subject to the diabolical control of Pharaoh and his henchmen. Therefore, as a people and as individuals, we should ever remember our Egyptian servitude and become acutely sensitive to the needs of those who need our help to live dignified and meaningful lives. In other words, the Torah is commanding us to practice the highest standards of social justice.

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) codifies our moral and halachic imperative to actively provide for the needs of those most at risk in a well-known *halacha* regarding the *mitzvah* of *simchat Yom Tov* (rejoicing during the *Yom Tov* meal):

When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is [not indulging in] rejoicing associated with a *mitzvah*, but rather the rejoicing of his belly. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov* 6:18, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger with my emendations)

The Rambam is teaching us a profound life lesson that goes far beyond a specific *Yom Tov*-based halacha, namely, *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*—every Jew is personally responsible for the welfare of every other Jew, and no one should be left behind. Little wonder, then, that in the opening words of the *Haggadah* we declare as one:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All those who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate the Passover. Now we are here. Next year in the land of Israel. This year we are enslaved. Next year may we be free. (<http://www.mazoncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-Passover-Resource.pdf>)

B'shanah haba b'yerushalayim habanuyah!—may we join as one united people in the rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash* soon, and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)