

Acharai – Shabbat HaGadol 5771

BS"D Parashat Acharai and Shabbat Hagadol 5771

Every year at the seder, while advancing from stage to stage in our conscious reenactment of our ancestor's unspeakable slavery experience and subsequent miraculous delivery, I am filled anew with amazement over how we were able to preserve these experiences after 3000 plus years.

The major theme of the seder is for each person to arouse a certain deju vu, as if he was a slave, and try to feel the metal tipped tongs of the whip lashing into his naked back. And then the ecstasy of freedom and the rapture when seeing the Egyptians punished.

On this night, we recite the Hallel praises to HaShem twice – once in the bet kneset during Ma'ariv (evening prayers) and again during the seder; because on this night we are aware of the fact that never before had a slave been freed from Egypt, yet HaShem freed millions of our ancestors. We recall in great detail the stories of our subjugation and subsequent freedom passed down in the written word as well as by word of mouth.

Now, picture for a moment a Japanese person in a day in March 2011, sitting atop of what was left of his city in northeast Japan, while as far as the eye can see there is absolute, total devastation. As we draw closer, we hear the man wailing over a devastating earthquake that occurred 100 years previously. Something is obviously very amiss with the man. Doesn't he see what is apparent at that moment right in front of his eyes? He is obviously in shock and in need of psychiatric help.

How about a religious leader sitting at his seder, celebrating God's miracles of over 3000 years ago; when He brought 20% of

the Jews out of Egypt after 80% had died just a week before the liberation, but refuses to acknowledge the huge miracles occurring in the present. He too is in shock and in need of help.

The presence of close to six million Jews in Eretz Yisrael, which was a wasteland for 2000 years, and our sovereignty over Yerushalayim and the Temple Mount cannot produce in that person even one Hallel, but he often utters words of ridicule and derision at the day we became free from foreign rule.

The Hagada introduces us to a seemingly dysfunctional family where only one out of four sons is a source of nachat for the parents.

But despite the parental disappointment, only one is found to be utterly negative – the rasha, regarding whom the Hagada states emphatically that had he lived at that time he would not have been freed from Egypt.

Why not? We know that HaShem is merciful to all His creations; even evil men have some good in them!

The answer, I believe, is because this particular rasha does not identify with the laws and customs of the seder night. By his negative attitude, he is displaying his inner feelings that he would not have wanted to be freed from Egypt. He is like the prisoner whose time has come to be free but refuses to leave his cell. He is so accustomed to his straw mattress and hard cot, his little toilet in the corner and the rust colored water coming out of the faucet, and his soft job of sorting the clothing in the prison laundry, that freedom for him holds no blessings.

When in 1948, HaShem miraculously opened the gates of His holy land for Am Yisrael and keeps them open despite many nations who seek to shut these gates, any Jew who refuses to leave the galut probably also would have refused to leave Egypt had he been there.

Something to also think about when saying tachanun on Yom
Ha'atzmaut!!!

Shabbat Shalom

Pessach Kasher v'samayach

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Nachman Kahana

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