



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

HAPPY OR SAD ON SEDER NIGHT?

Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg once pointed out that we face a dilemma on Seder night.

Seder is a moment of memory, but which memory are we talking about - happy or sad?

The Haggada tells us to imagine that we are the Hebrews of the Exodus, but what memory is uppermost in our minds - the bondage or the freedom?

There are two possibilities.

We can think back to the hard times when we had no independence, no time to call our own, and had to jump to the command of our taskmasters.

Alternatively, we can think of the liberation, when the metaphorical chains were gone.

Greenberg says that every generation must decide for itself which memory to emphasise.

If we focus on the past we remind ourselves what it was like to be powerless.

If we think of the present and future we are no longer powerless but we

have a new problem, that of learning responsibility.

Neither memory is easy. The thought of the past recalls our victimhood and suggests that we will always feel unsafe because of the resurgent masters of today: as the Haggada says, "In every generation they rise against us to eliminate us."

On the other hand. if we concentrate on the liberation we no longer need to be frightened ... but now we need to make sure that we can be responsible towards others and not make them afraid of us.

Why was the Slavery Necessary?

The Israelites in Egypt cried long and hard because of their pain.

God heard their cry and the people were eventually rescued, crossed the Red Sea, and settled in the Promised Land.

Had there been no bondage there would have been no redemption: had there been no redemption there wouldn't have been a Pesach. Without Pesach, we would have had no Seder, no matza, no four cups of wine.

We realise this, but we still ask: "Why was the bondage necessary? Did God really need us to suffer so much and to cry so long?"

It's the Holocaust question: Why did bad things happen to good people?

The superficial answer is that it tested our character, but shouldn't we say with "Fiddler on the Roof", "God, so we're the Chosen People - but can't You choose someone else for a change?!"

The answer is that we really don't know the answer, or at least not yet. Maybe that's one of the lingering questions that Eliyahu HaNavi will answer for us. In the meantime, as Rav Soloveitchik tells us, though we don't have an answer, we have to have a response.

We don't know why we suffer, but we have to have the courage to keep going, build a future and rise above the pain.

WHY HE IS WICKED

There are many explanations as to what makes the RASHA a "wicked" child.

Most focus on his words, "What does this service mean to you?"

People think he is mocking old-fashioned rituals that have long since lost their point.

What the interpreters often fail to recognise, however, is that the wicked child is not a hundred per cent wicked. When he mocks the traditional ritual,

he is not necessarily saying that it never had a point. His view can be taken as saying, "I can see that it had meaning in the past, but surely we have outgrown such things".

He is also saying, "Some people can't manage without rituals, but aren't we more advanced intellectually these days, perfectly capable of handling ideas without tokens, totems and traditions?"

The Haggada's response is a verse that says the Pesach ritual was ordained by God, not just for the post-Exodus generation, but as a permanent feature of Judaism.

The implication? Not only is the ritual the word of God, but it answers a permanent need in human psychology, to have symbols of abstract concept and not to imagine that man can live on ideas without analogies and active reminders. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH