

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

Pesach 5782

Pesach - Family

We have often spoken about the fundamental value of family in our tradition. Put simply, a person without family, cannot survive as a member of our great religious community. Of course, when we speak of family, it is not meant to be limited to one's immediate family. It includes relatives and - in a real sense - all of k'lal Yisroel. The principle of KOL YISROEL AREIVIM ZEH BA'ZEH, that "All of Israel are bondsmen for one another" only works for a person when he chooses to identify with kol Yisroel.

But for "family" to happen, for there to be more than a nominal, superficial identification, there must be a committed effort by all parties to make a meaningful connection between 'family' members. This connection can be created in many ways. Here's one.

Over Pesach, we have the wonderful opportunity of spending time with our children and grandchildren. Stories are told; we learn together; we play outside. In short, we connect - graying elders interact with beaming young faces. Through this encounter, we create shared experiences, experiences which surely will be remembered as the youngsters grow older. Adults often

remember the bedtime stories their parents read to them when they were young. Nieces and nephews remember when their uncles and aunts made special time for them. And mostly, the young remember when their lives were transformed by the wisdom they learned from their parents, grandparents, teachers ... - wisdom acquired through shared Torah study, and through the sheer joy of sharing memories and stories.

Such meaningful connectedness doesn't just happen by simply physically being together. It requires a conscious effort on both sides. Elders must become aware of the special role they can play in creating such lasting shared experiences. They must think carefully about how best to interact with the young, and then make the time to do so.

And the young: they must learn to appreciate the invaluable reservoir of knowledge and wisdom their elders possess. And then, they must seek them out: their parents, grandparents, teachers, etc. They must respectfully request of them to share the wisdom of their years. Few things bring greater joy to a grandparent than to hear his grandchild ask to learn some Torah, to listen to some fascinating family stories, to ask for some advice on a pressing matter. But for that to happen, the elders must "be present" when their younger generation is around. And when that special "chemistry" occurs, the magic of a "symposium of generations

comes into existence" (Rav Soloveitchik's memorable phrase). The great dialogue between the old ones of the past and young ones of the future commences, and the future of our People is ensured. Indeed, there be no more glorious rendezvous than this!

Pesach - Hope for the Future

The Mishna (P'sachim 116b) records a disagreement between R' Tarfon and R' Akiva as to the blessing that concludes the Magid section of the Haggada. R' Tarfon is of the view that we are to thank G-d for His miraculous salvation as evidenced by His having redeemed our ancestors as well as ourselves. R' Tarfon's focus is upon our collective past and present. R. Akiva demurs. He feels that R' Tarfon's blessing is missing something crucial. The future. Certainly, include R' Tarfon's blessing, but add to it. Introduce into the blessing our future aspirations and yearnings as well.

R' Akiva was of the powerful conviction that we need to thank HaShem for a future even though it hasn't quite happened yet. He apparently was inspired by the idea that if we believe strongly enough in a noble vision and actually thank G-d for it in advance, then, we can actually increase the likelihood of its future realization. This was the great teaching of R'. Akiva, and the halacha rules in his favor, and such is how the promise of the future can become the new reality with all of its many blessings.

Pesach - Excitement

When Rambam (Hilchot Chametz u'Matza 7:1) discusses the mitzva of telling the Exodus tale at the Seder, he does not quote, as his Biblical source, the obvious verse from Sh'mot (13:8) which requires a parent to "tell his child on that day" about the Pesach narrative. That pasuk is mentioned later. Rather, Rambam first quotes the verse in 13:3 which requires everyone to "...remember this day that you went forth from Egypt ..." What makes this choice rather strange is that its context is not the Passover festival at all.

Rabbi Mayer Lichtenstein, Rav Soloveitchik's grandson, offers the following explanation. It is certainly true that on Pesach night, the Seder leader is obligated to make sure all the participants hear and understand the Pesach story. But for that responsibility to be implemented effectively, something else must come first. The Seder leader must himself be prepared. He must be excited and inspired - "pumped" - by the Exodus drama as well. If his only motivation is to "do it for the kids", the children - no matter their age - will see through the "act" and, while appreciating the attention, will internalize the spiritually injurious impression that the Seder does not and cannot speak to adults as well.

And therefore, so as to remind the Seder leader that he must first tell the story to himself even before reciting the

Haggada for others, the Rambam begins by telling him, "... (first you must) remember this day that you went forth from Egypt..." and if the Seder leader can demonstrate how genuinely enthused he is, that excitement can spiritually charge everyone around the Seder table and make the Pesach experience an unforgettable one.

Pesach - Gevura

Rav Soloveitchik has an important observation to make regarding the Exodus story.

The experience of that first Seder in Egypt carried with it two motifs. The first was CHESED. On that exalted night, the mass of downtrodden slaves transformed into a Nation. The "glue" that enabled such a People to come into being was the display of CHESED shown by each Jew toward one another. It took the form of the communal meal (Seder), the sense of a common fate and destiny, the sharing, etc.

But another part of this freedom experience also occurred. The transition of slavery to freedom is fraught with many dangers. "The masters [Egyptians], who exploited, tortured, and humiliated, find themselves suddenly at the mercy of the slaves [Israelites] for whom they showed no concern, displayed no human emotion. The natural reaction of the slave who is suddenly freed is to get his satisfaction, to avenge himself on the tyrant who murdered his baby, who assaulted and

disgraced his daughter, who mercilessly beat him for any minor infraction ... It is usually a bloody, ruthless and vengeful transition."

Amazingly, nothing of the sort transpired on the night of the Exodus. "Not one person was hurt, no house was destroyed." Instead, the Jewish People demonstrated enormous courage to withdraw and defy the natural "call of the blood". They displayed GEVURA. They behaved with dignity and respect, with incredible restraint and moral greatness. Who would have blamed them if they had acted otherwise? A few acts of murder, some vandalism. But no, they did not surrender to the beast within.

Such incredible restraint would eventually be etched into the ethical character of the Jew and be on proud display in how we treat our adversaries. Our IDF here in Israel understood what our ancestors knew long ago. The horrors of war can test the moral strength of the best of us, and when we demonstrate that notwithstanding an enemy's cruelty, we can act with GEVURA, we sanctify HaShem's Name and bring credit to our People.

Shabbat Shalom & Chag Kasher v'Samei'ach to one and all!