

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parsha Bo

In this week's parsha, the Jews finally gain their freedom. After 210 years of oppression, torment and slavery in Egypt, G-d takes them out with an astonishing display of unforgettable miracles. Three millennia later, the memory of that night is still fresh in the mind of the Jewish People.

We cannot underestimate the value of this memory. The Torah gives us a mitzvah to remember the Exodus, but apparently that just isn't good enough. The Torah goes on to ensure that we remain forever conscious of the Exodus by dedicating many more mitzvot to its commemoration. The stated objective of such basic mitzvot as Shabbat (Devarim 5:15), Tefillin (Shemot 13:16), and Sukkah (Vayikra 23:43) is to remind us of our miraculous redemption from Egypt, and this is in addition to the numerous mitzvot of Pesach. Clearly then, the Torah considers this memory to be absolutely fundamental to Jewish belief.

Why is this memory so important, and why do we need so many reminders? Isn't the Seder night sufficient? What is the Torah so worried about? How could anybody forget such a great story?

The truth is, we need every reminder we can get. Our understanding of G-d, our appreciation of His love for us, and our identity as Jews all depend on our memory of the Exodus. The Exodus established our relationship with G-d and our indebtedness to Him. It is for this reason that when G-d first introduces Himself to us at Sinai, He describes Himself not as our Creator, but as the one who took us out of Egypt (Shemot 20:2). The Torah is not satisfied with mere knowledge of the story; the Torah wants us to be conscious of the Exodus all of the time.

But there is more to it. Exodus-consciousness is vital for the spiritual health of a Jew for another reason. It's not just about religious and national identity. It's about how we view the daily events of our personal lives.

The immortal words of the Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) in his commentary to our parsha explain the relevance of the Exodus to our lives today: "It is through [the recognition of] the great and famous miracles that man comes to recognize the hidden miracles. [Faith in divine providence] is the foundation of Judaism.



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Man has no connection with the Torah of Moshe until he recognizes that every event and happening is miraculous, free of “forces of nature” or “coincidences.” [This is true] both on a communal and an individual level... Things happen only by divine decree.”

There is no such thing as a coincidence. Nothing happens without G-d’s say so. Unfortunately, the natural world masks G-d’s presence, and we quickly forget the One who is taking care of us. The existence of terror and evil make it even more difficult to recognize G-d’s control over events. But there is a way to rise above it all and maintain our faith.

Remember the Exodus!

The supernatural events of the Exodus remind us that G-d is master of all that transpires here on Earth. And that awareness opens our eyes to divine providence. Exodus-consciousness enables us to detect the Hand of G-d in our own lives, and that is why so many mitzvot commemorate the miracles of the Exodus. Reviewing the story just once a year at the Seder is most definitely not sufficient.

The story of the Exodus will never be forgotten. It is faithfully told and retold, passed on generation after generation. But the Exodus has so much more to offer than just a good story. If we listen closely and internalize the message, if we realize that ultimately there is no difference between shock and awe miracles and day-to-day miracles, if we recognize that the one G-d that took us out of Egypt three millennia ago still cares for every single Jew, even if we don’t always understand His ways, then we will truly fulfill the essential mitzvah of remembering and reliving the Exodus.

It’s more than just a mitzvah; it’s the only way to get to Sinai.

Shabbat Shalom!

