

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Tzav

Tosafot (12th century) says the Shabbat before Pesach is called the great Shabbat because a miracle happened on it, signifying the beginning of the redemption. The Jews were commanded to set aside lambs for the Pesach sacrifice on the tenth of Nissan, which fell out on Shabbat that year. The Egyptians, who worshipped the lamb as a deity, were outraged when they saw the Jews preparing to sacrifice it. Yet, they did not do anything to harm them. This special miracle, which showed G-d's protection over the Jewish people, serves as the starting point of the redemption from Egypt.

Interestingly, the special haftarah read on Shabbat Hagadol does not mention anything about the Pesach lamb or about the redemption from Egypt. The passage from Malachi chapter 3, the last chapter of the prophets (Malachi 3), discusses the final redemption. The opening verse depicts the image of a rebuilt temple, in which the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Hashem like in former years (3: 4). Whenever we say the standing prayer, we end with this verse, hoping for the day Hashem will lovingly accept our temple offerings.

The haftarah concludes with the promise that Hashem will send Elijah the prophet prior to the final redemption. It says, "He shall restore the heart of fathers to children and the heart of children to their fathers (3: 24)." Why do we read about the final redemption on this special Shabbat prior to Pesach?

On the surface, we read about redemption because on this Shabbat, the redemption from Egypt began when the Jews successfully planned for their Pesach sacrifices and the Egyptians did not stop them. Furthermore, tradition says that just as G-d redeemed the Jews from Egypt in the month of Nissan, so too He will redeem them again in the month of Nissan with the final redemption. So in a general sense, we read about redemption because during this time of year, we dream of another redemption.

However, the final verse describing Elijah's influence and depicting it as a precursor to the coming of Messiah, relates to the holiday of Pesach in a deeper way. The prophet Malachi does not simply say that the Jewish people will do teshuva (repent) before Messiah comes. He says Elijah will return the heart of the fathers to their sons and the heart of the sons to their fathers. Fathers will effectively communicate the lessons of the Torah to their sons, and sons will appreciate the traditions of their fathers. In a similar vein, every Pesach we celebrate the teachings we have received from our fathers and grandfathers, generation after generation.

The whole framework of the Haggadah is a dialogue between parents and children. The mishna (Pesachim 116a) says that a son asks his father the four questions. If a child is not present at the seder, one adult asks another these same questions, but the essential core of mitzvah involves parents relating the story and its lessons to their children.

Indeed, the name Haggadah derives from the verse (13: 8), "You shall tell your son...for the sake of this, G-d did for me when he took me out of Egypt." The seder narrative starts with the four questions a child asks his parents, and then the Haggadah describes four different types of questions



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posed by four different types of children. On Pesach night, the new generation connects to previous generations and children learn from their parents and grandparents.

We even see this idea in the story of the Exodus as related in the Torah. When instructing Moshe to warn Pharaoh of the seventh plague, G-d says that the Jews will also benefit from seeing the miracles. He says “you will relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I made a mockery of Egypt...and you will know I am G-d (Exodus 10: 2).” The miracles of the Exodus were not only meant to show Pharaoh that G-d exists, but also for the Jewish people themselves to strengthen their belief in Hashem. The miracles of the Exodus serve as an important tool to help us communicate our belief in G-d to the future generations.

In a broader sense, the daily mitzvah of studying and teaching Torah takes the identical form of the mitzvah of educating children and grandchildren on the night of Pesach. When the Torah tells us the mitzvah to study Torah, it immediately tells us to teach it to our children. In both of the first two paragraphs of Shema, the Torah instructs us to study Torah and to teach whatever we know to our children. At its core, the mitzvah of talmud torah involves the older generation teaching the younger generation the lessons and laws he learned from previous generations.

The Talmud (Sotah 49b) says in the final era before Messiah comes, “the footsteps of the Messiah,” there will be an increase of chutzpah in the world which will express itself in the breakdown of respect for elders. “Young boys will embarrass elders, elders will stand up in front of young children...and a son will not be embarrassed of his father.” But this will also result in the corrosion of proper education, because if the young people do not respect the wisdom of the elders, they will not be interested in learning from them.

But before Messiah comes, there will be a movement of people returning to G-d, specifically punctuated with new respect young people will find for elders and their wisdom. The hearts of the sons will be reunited with their fathers and teachers, and they will be interested in the ancient traditions of the Torah. The fathers and grandfathers will be able to communicate the Torah they received from their own teachers and ancestors to the younger generations.

We drink four cups at the seder, representing four stages in the redemption from Egypt. The fifth cup, referred to as “the cup of Elijah,” is poured but not drunk. This cup represents the future redemption, and although we cannot drink it because we have not experienced it, we still present it at the seder. On the night of educating children and grandchildren, we honor Elijah, the man who will “return the heart of fathers to sons and the heart of sons to their fathers.” We pray for success in transmitting the teachings of the night to our children and grandchildren and for the coming of the Messiah, just as the prophet Malachi describes it in the haftarah of Shabbat Hagadol.

Shabbat Shalom!

