

## **"You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem your G-d redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing." (24:18)**

The admonition to remember our status as slaves in Egypt is repeated four times in the *Torah*. It is mentioned here in regard to taking advantage of the widow and orphan. It is repeated when the *Torah* details the laws involving giving to the poor and needy. It is again recounted in reference to the laws prohibiting labor on *Shabbos*. Finally it is mentioned concerning the *mitzvah* of *ha'annakah*, sending off the *eved Ivri*, Jewish servant, with gifts that will raise his self-esteem. Considering the references to these *mitzvos*, why does the *Torah* emphasize the liberation from Egypt as the primary rationale for observing these *mitzvos* ?

*Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l.*, opines that the obligation to "remember" the slavery, which was our way of life in Egypt, is more than a recounting of our *tzaros*, afflictions. It should be a source of optimism for us, a well-spring of encouragement and hope. Our past history as slaves reassures us of our Divinely inspired ability to rise above all trial and travail, while maintaining our belief and conviction in the Almighty.

Even when we suffered, our spiritual heroism was the symbol of our fortitude. While the Egyptians beat us and shed our blood, we still observed *Shabbos*. Their terrible decrees against our children did not halt our *mitzvah* of propagating *Am Yisrael* in the physical sense. Similar to every anti-Semitic enemy we have endured to this day, the Egyptians were not able to break the spiritual backbone of our People. As Pharaoh failed, so, too, did the descendants of Amalek fade into extinction, while *Klal Yisrael* stands strong in their observance of *Torah* and *mitzvos*.

Consequently, when we recount the Egyptian bondage, we acknowledge and affirm our G-d given inner strength to adapt and maintain our conviction under the most trying circumstances. We must, therefore, sustain the poor and afflicted, observe the *Shabbos* by relaxing from labor and affording our servants a day of rest, and shower the Jewish servant with gifts when he goes free. By doing such, we confirm the fact that we were able to sweeten the bitter exile through our faith in Hashem. Through our remembrance, we proclaim that we view what others have labeled as cruel and harsh as a vehicle to stimulate our sense of dedication to Hashem. Thus, the true Jewish spirit is free to shine.