

And on the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzos to Hashem. (23:6)

One year, *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Levin, zl*, had occasion to invite the mayor of Berlin (a gentile, but one that was quite respectful and friendly to the members of the Jewish community) for the first *Seder*. The mayor entered the home to observe the rich finery of the tablecloth and napkins on a table bedecked with the finest china and silver flatware. The mayor had a superficial knowledge of Jewish traditions and customs. He was, thus, taken aback that *Pesach*, when we sit as kings, the young child traditionally asks the Four Questions, which begin, “Why is this night different?” when, in fact, on *Succos*, a festival during which we sit in a flimsy *Succah*, he asks nothing. One would think that a festival which emphasizes the temporal nature of our existence would invoke greater incredulity in the mind of a child than a festival in which we sit as kings.

Rav Levin responded with a practical explanation. “A Jewish child grows up with the notion that everything around him is temporary. One day he can be ensconced in his home and, the next day, the dictator who rules the country where he lives decides that it is time to expel the Jews. Thus, on *Succos*, when he sits in a temporary dwelling which, at best, can be described as flimsy (this was before our modern day structures that are made to withstand a tornado), he is not surprised. He is acutely aware that this is how Jews live.

“On *Pesach*, however, he enters a home wherein the table is bedecked with finery; the chairs have pillows on them, on which the family members recline; fine wine accompanied by a rich meal is served – and the child asks questions: “‘Why is this night different?’ We are living like kings. Jews are supposed to be on the run; instead, we are reclining and relaxing. Is it possible that our exile has ended?” the child wonders.

Let us analyze the difference between the *Pesach Seder*, which is experiential in nature and demands that we relive the Exodus by acting like free men, while never forgetting that we were once slaves; and the meal in the *Succah*, which is to remind us of the temporary nature of everything in life. *Pesach* is to convey the message of freedom from slavery. Thus, we have *marror*, bitter herbs, on the table to serve as a reminder of the bondage. The *Matzah* reminds us of the urgency of our liberation, intimating that Hashem – not us or Pharaoh – was in control of our destiny. “Earlier in the day I was a slave – tonight I am a free man – a king!”: This is the message of the *Pesach Seder*. It is difficult for anyone – especially a child – to absorb such a metamorphosis. Therefore, he asks, “Why is this night different?”

The *Succos* meal is standard fare – no reminders, no messages other than the flimsy walls and leaky roof of the *Succah*. Message: We must trust in Hashem for everything, every movement, all of the time. The *Pesach* message is: You are free, but never forget from whence you came; do not forget that you were once a slave. Thus, keep the *marror* prominently on the table amidst your finery. It belongs there. The *Succos* message: Never forget that whatever you have is temporary; in

the space of a moment, the nice, friendly neighbors whom you felt were your friends can turn on you. It happened in Germany prior to World War II. Who says that it cannot happen again? Trust in Hashem. That is all that we can do.

Which message provokes questioning? Which scene beleaguers the mind of a young child more? I think the bowl of *marror* sitting right in middle of the table is a greater anomaly than sitting in the flimsy *Succah*. Paradox invokes question. *Pesach* is a greater paradox. After all – are we free, or not?

Veritably, *Pesach* and *Succos* both have parallels that end up being different from one another. Indeed, this is because the two Festivals have varied foci. Both *Pesach* and *Succos* address four types of Jews who are different from one another in levels of belief, commitment and knowledge of Judaism. *Pesach* is celebrated with four sons “sitting” at the *Seder* table: the wise and wicked sons together with their brothers, the simple son and the one who knows not what to ask. When the wicked son scoffs at the traditions which we observe, we blunt his teeth, intimating to him that with such an attitude, he has no business at the *Seder* table.

On *Succos*, we celebrate with the Four Species, which symbolize four classes of Jew: the Jew who has “taste” and “fragrance” ie, the Esrog, (this means that they have Torah, *taam*, taste – and *maasim tovim*, good deeds); the *Lulav*, which has taste, but no fragrance; those who have fragrance, but not taste, ie, the *hadass*, myrtle; last, the Jew who has neither taste nor fragrance, no Torah or *maasim tovim*; the *aravah*, willow. Hashem instructs us to bind all of these together as one; thus, as a group, they all achieve atonement.

The question is obvious: Why on *Succos* are we instructed to include all factors, yet, on *Pesach*, we are told to blunt the teeth of the *rasha*, wicked son? *Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl*, distinguishes between *Succos* and *Pesach*, which is a family/home oriented festival/celebration, *seh labayis*, a lamb for a household. The *Korban Pesach*, Pascal offering, is to be eaten together in a group in the house where all are included. In contrast, *Succos* is celebrated outside of the regular house, outdoors, under the sky, without the protection of the home. On *Succos*, we leave our homes and go into exile, while *Pesach* is about *yetzivus*, staying in one place. We are free men with a home. Free men celebrate their freedom in a concrete, stationary edifice. They are not compelled to move around.

When the celebration is homebound, family-oriented, stationary, our attitude concerning including the wicked son is clear: Sorry. We love you and want you to return (on our terms), but this is a (small) family celebration. We require a cohesive family, all of one mind and level of commitment. We are celebrating the Festival of Freedom. You are not free. You are enslaved to your desires, false ideologies, arrogance. When you repent and change, you will be treated with respect.

On *Succos*, we remove our family from the home and take them on the move into exile, protected by flimsy walls/roof and a prayer. Exile implies adversity, *tzaros*, troubles. Along the way, we will

pick up the stragglers who are also suffering. In exile, we are all together as one, bound by our common heritage and (hopefully) destiny. In exile, we turn our back on none. We wait – and wait – for the glorious day on which Hashem will send us Eliyahu *HaNavi*, who will return all of the lost and alienated and bring them “home.”