

Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt, from the house of bondage, for with a strong hand Hashem removed you from here and, therefore, chametz may not be eaten. (13:3)

Zachor, remember, is written in the infinitive form which implies that *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt, should be remembered constantly. Thus, we recite the remembrance with the recitation of the third paragraph of the *Shema*. Interestingly, the Exodus is the only such miraculous episode which the Torah commands us to remember daily. It is certainly not the only miracle that we, as a nation, experienced. Our history is replete with miracles. Why does *yetzias Mitzrayim* take center stage, such that we must constantly reiterate it. Furthermore, the Torah is addressing the miracle of the Exodus. Why is the prohibition against eating *chametz* included? Indeed, earlier (in 12:15), the Torah states that the punishment of *kares*, Heavenly excision, is meted out to one who eats *chametz* during *Pesach*. Why repeat the prohibition and juxtapose it upon the obligation to constantly remember the Exodus? Last, shortly before the end of the *parsha* (13:14), the Torah cites the impending question, “What is this?” presented by our children. They want to know what we are doing and why. While they are certainly entitled to question, why do they query only concerning the Exodus? What about the *manna*, Pillars of Cloud and Fire, the Well of Miriam, the miraculous descent of the quail and the daily life in the wilderness? We have so much to question. Why do we single out *yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, suggests that herein lies a profound principle. *Klal Yisrael* spent 210 of their formative years in Egypt, a period of time amid a prevailing culture that wreaked havoc on their collective and individual spiritual persona. These were generations of enslavement – not only in a physical sense, but even more so in a spiritual sense. Hashem liberated them and brought them from slavery to freedom, so they were now free from their backbreaking labor. It was much more difficult, however, to extricate themselves from the nadir of depravity to which they had plummeted in the spiritual dimension. Nonetheless, *Chazal* teach that the simple maidservant was privy to and perceived a greater revelation of the Divine when she stood at the banks of the Red Sea than did *Yechezkel HaNavi* who prophesied about the Heavenly spheres. How was their complete spiritual metamorphosis effected so quickly and definitively?

We must assert that all this is true; a spiritual transformation does not just happen. One must go through trial and error, much questioning and doubt, before his decision to change catalyzes a successful transition. The secret to success is hidden in plain sight within our *parsha*'s narrative: perform *mitzvos*; live a committed Jewish life.

The Jewish people in Egypt were instructed to smear the mingled blood of circumcision and the *Pesach* offering on the two doorposts and lintels of their houses: “The blood shall be a sign of you upon their houses where you are; I shall see the blood and I shall pass over you” (ibid 12:13).

Rashi comments, “The Jewish firstborn were saved from the plague because the blood on the outside signified that those inside had confirmed and involved themselves in doing G-d’s will. It was their devotion and commitment to the *mitzvah* that saved them.” It is all about being grounded and engaged in *mitzvah* performance. Veritably, one may participate in discussions – both philosophic and *halachic*; artificial inspiration, such as singing and dancing. These all work as a great support system, but, in order to effect lasting change, one must be involved in *mitzvah* performance. Otherwise, one brings along his baggage from the past to his new home – which will impede his spiritual initiation and further growth.

This is what troubles the children: how did you make the transition from the spiritual filth of Egypt to the unparalleled purity reflected in Jewish life? How did you cleanse your minds of a spiritually bankrupt culture and profligate lifestyle to that of a religious Jew, wholly committed to spiritual advancement? Explain to them that the secret lies in observance, performance, involvement in *mitzvos*. This is why we remember, reiterate and perpetuate the memory of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. It protects us from falling back into the abyss. We realize and acknowledge that the only means of protection is *mitzvah* performance.

Last, we now understand why the Torah chose to include the prohibition against eating *chametz* in the same *pasuk* that invokes us to remember the Exodus. *Chametz* is the symbol of *se’or she’bisah*, yeast that causes the dough to rise. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, has that effect on us, catalyzing our arrogance and consequent refusal to accept Divine authority. When we perform *mitzvos* – which is the lesson we realize by remembering how we went from being slaves to Pharaoh to becoming servants to Hashem – we distance ourselves from any interaction whatsoever with the *yetzer hora*.

The *Bostoner Rebbe*, *Horav Levi Yitzchak Horowitz, zl*, devoted his life to drawing people in and bringing them closer to Hashem. As Rabbi Hillel Goldberg recalls, “The *Rebbe* was not a *kiruv* professional who sought out alienated, assimilated Jews for the sole purpose of returning them to Hashem’s embrace. He did not attempt to persuade people to become observant, unless they sought a discussion with him and asked his advice. He did not pressure them. His way was through one *mitzvah*, one unique experience: *Shabbos*. He would invite a prospective *baal teshuvah*, penitent, for *Shabbos*, to expose him to the warmth and beauty of *Shabbos Kodesh*. Thus, the person would decide on his own that this was the way to live. By opening his home to young people, inviting them to join him in experiencing and celebrating *Shabbos*, he changed their lives forever.

I think that another key to the *Rebbe*’s success plays a pivotal role in all *kiruv*, outreach, relationships. One of the *Rebbe*’s most distinguished students is today a well-known *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, and a senior lecturer in a *yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael*. He was not always like this. Brilliant and inquisitive, he was prepared to follow through his secular upbringing in an ivy-league college. While he was interested in Judaism and he met with the *Rebbe* to discuss a number of issues that troubled him, he decided, at first, that he had so much about *Yiddishkeit* to

learn, and, at the time, he was too far along in his academic career. It just was not worth it. He shared his frustration with the *Rebbe*. The *Rebbe's* response not only manifested his humble character and sensitivity, but it also characterized his ascent to the pinnacle of the *kiruv* movement: "There is much about Judaism that I, too, have to learn. So, if you will return to the Torah center, we will together study and discover the Truth." He neither lorded over his students, nor manipulated their lives to suit his needs. It was always together – *Rebbe* and *talmid* – as one.