

## **Behold! Seven years are coming, a great abundance throughout the land of Egypt. And seven years of famine will arise after them; all of the plenty in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. (41:29, 30)**

Yosef *HaTzaddik* was describing to Pharaoh the seven years of famine which were to follow on the heels of the seven years of plenty. He said that the famine would be so fierce and grim that no one would even remember that they had enjoyed seven years of plenty. This idea begs elucidation. Hunger is hunger. Is it necessary to underscore that people would forget the years of plenty? While it is true that the people would no longer have any remaining food, why should that prevent them from remembering that they had once had food?

*Horav Levi Dicker, zl*, infers that the word, *v'nishkach*, "and they will be forgotten," does not apply to memory. Indeed, the Egyptian people would not forget that they had had seven years of plenty. Rather, they would have no remnant, no vestige left of those wonderful years. An action or an occurrence leaves its stamp, an imprint, which in some manner impacts the lives of those involved. In this case, the bounty of the first set of years would be so eradicated and expunged from their minds by the ensuing hunger that nothing would remain to intimate that they had ever occurred.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that this is the only instance in the Torah in which the terms *z'chirah* and *shikechah*, ordinarily defined as remembering and forgetting, are used instead as reference to imprinting or not imprinting. He cites the fact that the words of a *tzaddik* are his *zikaron*, *Divreihem hein zichronam* (*Shekalim* 7:1). This does not mean that the words of a *tzaddik* are his memory; rather, it means that a *tzaddik's* words (his words of Torah) are the imprint which he leaves on this world. Even after he is gone, his influence continues to inspire and guide.

*Z'chor*, remember, is a religious imperative, enjoining us to remember and not to forget the things that we have seen and experienced, from the liberation from Egypt to the Revelation at *Har Sinai* and other occurrences that should impact our lives. We go forward with the lessons gleaned from the past, because we remember. By its very nature, memory is selective. Some might conveniently forget that with which they are not comfortable. This is especially true when it comes to acknowledging the Hashem factor as the events play out. Every event in our past must serve to recognize Hashem's intervention and our response – whether positive or negative. Memory must recognize the truth, whether it is positive or negative.

Perhaps more so than any other moment in our lives, the rituals of *Pesach* are devoted, not only to memory, but also to how an event should be remembered and its impact incorporated into our lives. Sadly, some view *Pesach* as a study of Jewish nostalgia, when, in essence, it invokes us to remember the Exodus by reliving it. Thus, our faith is fortified and our hopes energized.

Notably, Hebrew has no word for “history.” Modern Hebrew concocted the word *historia* which is not derived from *lashon kodesh*. Instead, we use the term *zikaron*, remembrance, or *zichronos*. Memory is personal; it is my story. History is abstract, an encapsulation of events that occurred which, for all intents and purposes, do not relate to me. When we study our past, it is about us, and its purpose is to teach, to appreciate, to acknowledge, to be grateful, so that we will live better. Every occurrence in Jewish life does not just happen. It happens by Divine decree for the purpose of conveying a message. Unfortunately, some of us do not bother checking our messages.

Remembering fosters a strong sense of identity and continuity among Jews. This is especially true concerning those who have been brought up in families that have no connection to the past. It literally means nothing to them, because to them it is “history,” not “memory.” If they could be made to understand that this “history” is their personal history from whom they descend, it would be that much easier for them to relate to Judaism as a religion. One cannot have pride in something to which he does not connect. By explaining to him that this is about him, he might be emboldened to follow up and eventually be inspired by his new-found identity.