

And I, too, have heard the wail of Bnei Yisrael whom Egypt enslaves, and I have remembered My covenant. (6:5)

What is the meaning of the added “I, too,” as if Hashem is also listening, when, in fact, Who else but Hashem listens? Hashem heard the cries emanating from the Jewish slaves. Why is this referred to as “also”? The *Chasam Sofer* explains that, “I, too,” teaches us that, indeed, Hashem is not the only one listening. In Egypt, each and every *Yid* listened to the painful cries of his neighbor and, as a result, they commiserated with one another. They did not think only of their pain, but also of the pain of other *Yidden* who were suffering. When Hashem saw how *Yidden* cared for one another, how they felt each other’s pain, He listened and “remembered His covenant.” The key to liberation is in the caring for one another. Hashem redeems the nation collectively. When we isolate from our fellow, we are undermining the very foundation of *Am Yisrael*: we are one people under one G-d.

In the *Gerer Dynasty Haggadah*, Rabbi Yisrael Besser relates that the saintly *Pnei Menachem*, *Gerer Rebbe*, would see *tzadikim* who had left this world. (Obviously, this concept is beyond our level of understanding. The *Pnei Menachem* was an other-worldly person who happened to be in this world.) One night, during the few hours that he slept, he encountered his uncle, *Horav Menachem Mendel, zl, m’Pabnetz*, who had been brutally murdered by the Nazis. He asked his uncle, “Fetter, uncle, can you explain to me why our People are suffering so much?” The *Pabnetzer* replied (this is all in a dream), “There was once a time when a personal tragedy was felt communally. When one *Yid* had a *tzarah*, experienced a challenge, the entire *shteibel* carried the burden with him. No one was alone. When one Jew was suffering, all were suffering.”

When a bitter edict was decreed against an individual, they were spared, even if they deserved the blow, because the others who empathized with him did not deserve the pain that he would suffer. Today (What should we say?), it has changed; everyone is concerned for himself. No longer do we care about the *tzaros* our fellow is experiencing. Therefore, the merit has been revoked, and people now have to confront their challenges alone.

The Jews in Egypt cared for one another and cried for one another. Another *Yid*’s pain was his pain. Thus, Hashem redeemed them.

We begin the *Pesach Seder* with a resounding, *Kol dichfin yeisei v’yeichol*, “All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who are in need, may they come in and partake with us of the *Korban Pesach*.” The *Seder* is not a private, solitary affair, but one in which we expand our table to include those who have and those who sadly are not as fortunate. The *Korban Pesach* is to be eaten with friends and family. *Pesach* is an experience that we should share with others. Why? Because redemption, which is the theme of *Pesach*, is a communal experience. *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt, not as individuals, but as a nation (in-waiting for the Torah, after which Hashem accepted us as His nation). In order to be redeemed, one must care for others, to feel the pain and perceive the needs

of others. *Freedom is not about “me,” but about “us.”*

The theme of *Succos* is also *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Why is it that the demands of community do not play as prominent a role in the *Succos* experience? We eat in a *succah* with our family or, if necessary, alone. We have no mention of *kol dichfin* with regard to *Succos*.

I think the answer lies in the name, *z'man simchaseinu*, the time of our joy, as opposed to *Pesach* which is *z'man cheiruseinu*, the time of our redemption. Redemption requires togetherness. Joy requires inwardness. A person who is not intrinsically happy will not become happier if he sits in a *succah* with one hundred people. He must first work on himself, deal with his internal issues and demons, and then, when they have all been resolved, he can experience joy. True *simchah* depends neither on a crowd, nor on external celebration. When a person cultivates within himself the awareness that he is not alone, but with Hashem, he will be able to develop the inner joy that will overflow to others. Only after he is happy can he include family and friends into his circle of joy.

Pesach teaches us that redemption is incomplete unless it is shared. *Succos* teaches us that joy is incomplete unless it is first genuine and personal. *Succos* bespeaks personal authenticity. Once that hurdle has been climbed, he is ready to share in and benefit from the communal joy.

A wealthy man once made a lavish wedding for his only son. He spared no expense: beautiful flowers; the finest food; a large orchestra. Guests came from all over. Yet, as the evening wore on, people noticed something strange: the father of the *chosson* was standing off to the side, expressionless, barely speaking. Despite all the grandeur, no real joy was radiating from him.

Later, someone asked him, “Why were you so quiet at your own son’s wedding?” He replied, “It is true that I spent much money to create a joyful atmosphere, but joy cannot be purchased or staged. If it is not in one’s heart, all the noise and dancing will not catalyze it.”