

## **Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt. (13:3)**

Memory and the joy of remembering seminal moments in our history are among the cornerstones of Jewish life. As such, we are a nation who, although we live in the present, we neither forget nor take for granted the lessons of the past. As *Klal Yisrael* is about to prepare for its liberation from the Egyptian exile, they were repeatedly exhorted to remember that they were once slaves, and Hashem in His infinite kindness redeemed them from bondage. In the *Haggadah*, we underscore this obligation with, *B'chol dor vador chayiv adam liros es atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mi'Mitzrayim*, “In every generation, one is obligated to see himself as if he personally left Egypt.”

How can one remember what he did not experience? *Yetzias Mitzrayim* occurred three thousand years ago. How can we be expected/obligated to remember an event that took place so distant in time from the present?

Somewhat of an explanation dawned on me this past *Shemini Atzeres* – during the *Yizkor* service. This service is a solemn moment dedicated to praying for our loved ones who have passed on to a better world. It is about remembering them, their deeds and our relationship with them. During the service, I was seated next to an elderly gentleman. He was bent and feeble, and had difficulty standing for the duration of the service. I noticed him reaching into a worn, leather bag and remove a small packet that was wrapped with rubber bands. Carefully, he removed the bands, revealing a set of 3x5 prints, photographs of gravestones. At first, I thought this man was unhinged. Then the man noticed my apparent curiosity and offered an explanation. “I no longer drive,” he began, “so I am unable to visit the cemetery on my own as in days past. Before *Yizkor*, I take these pictures out: my parents, my wife, my siblings and I look at each one during *Yizkor* as I say their names. I picture myself standing at their graves, whispering a prayer on each stone. I stop for a moment to remember something about their life. When I do that, I feel as if I might be there with them.”

That simple act carried a profound truth. Memory is not confined to time or place. True remembrance is an act of imagination of the heart, which leads to a connection with the past. When we remember, we visualize; we transport ourselves in time. That man need not be at the cemetery, because he brought the cemetery to him using vision, imagination and love as the vehicles for this journey.

This applies likewise to our collective memory. None of us left Egypt, yet every year we celebrate and even relive the exodus as if we were there. How? We close our eyes and view ourselves among those who were. We stood there with them celebrating the redemption, crying tears of joy, visualizing the trembling sea, and singing the famous *Shirah*, Song of praise. When we visualize, when we allow our imagination to roam, to internalize the experience, the story becomes ours.

This is our key to Jewish continuity: to remember what, in fact, we did not ourselves experience. Thus, when a Jew in South Africa sits with his family at the *Seder* table, he is connected to the Jew in America, Europe, *Eretz Yisrael* – the entire world. Our shared memory is made possible by our

shared destiny. We are all reliving history, by affirming our *emunah*, faith, in the Almighty. That faith is the precursor for gratitude. When we remember, we realize that we have a debt of gratitude to repay. Just as that elderly Jew uses memory to feel close to his departed loved ones, so too, we apply our memory to traverse generations and connect with our spiritual ancestors.

In conclusion, true memory is not about looking back, but about bringing the past into the present. Thus, we bridge generations, strengthening our faith by reminding ourselves that we too were there. The same Hashem Who redeemed us from slavery in Egypt continues to do so today.