

Bo – 5782

The commentary in Eitz Chaim for this week's parsha begins with the statement that these chapters in the Torah document the transition of the Jewish people from a collection of tribes based upon the descendants of the sons of Jacob to the nation. This nation is to be based upon a covenant between HaShem and the Children of Israel. We read in these chapters of the last of the ten plagues and the commandment to mark the doorposts of this nation of slaves with the blood of the pascal lamb so that the angel of death will pass over them while they ready themselves for the exodus from Egypt. It is also in these columns of the text that we read of the commandment to retell their children, our children, from generation to generation, of this singular event in our collective history. We all of us listening to my Davar Torah today take for granted why we are commanded to remember our exodus from slavery because we were slaves unto Pharoah and now we are free men. We all understand, and can tell our children why we eat matza, and I am pretty sure most of us understand and know the intricacies of the story and have learned it from the feet of our elders and from the mouths of our teachers. We know to focus on the concept of slavery and its reverse and struggle to find ways to explain just what freedom really means to the youngest among us to make the seder and the holiday relevant. But how often do we reflect on this idea of the birth of our nationhood, and how often do we speak of this at our seder tables?

It seems to me that this is an important question to ponder today, specifically because it intersects with the events occurring to our south on the first-year anniversary of the assault on Washington. Hardly anyone who is aware of the news of the day also knows that, at its core lies the foundation

of democracy in the United States. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory draws attention to the differences in the nature of memorials in Washington as opposed to those in London. The latter all focus attention on the nature of the individual and his or her historic contributions to the national identity. Think Trafalgar Square and the statue in front of Buckingham Palace. These are compared to Lincoln and freeing of the slaves and Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. London is a city of history and the remarkable achievements of the British people. Washington is a city of great ideas about the struggle for human rights and equality. However, as we all know, south of the border that struggle seems to be losing its way.

And this brings me to something that we overlook when we reflect on our preparations for Pesach and what we say and do at our seders. Our peoplehood, our existence as a nation, has been reinforced through the teachings of our sages and our rabbis. In all the history of the Jewish people, over and over again, we have been reminded and in turn have attempted to remind those that come after us, that we have survived as a people because of our commitment to that covenant with HaShem. The Torah is not just a book of laws and commandments and how they came to be, but the story of a people that became a nation. We begin with Bereshit, and the creation of man and we end with Zot Ha Beracha, the reminder that all of this is blessing from HaShem meant to create a nation dedicated to the betterment of mankind and the world we live in.

It is that which we all need to remember and remind not just ourselves but our decision makers in government. Our sense of peoplehood has been maintained for 2500 years or more through the constant retelling of its birth and why it exists in the first place. Speaking as an educator, the concept of democracy is not nurtured as it should be. Sure, as a teacher, I talked all

the time about decision making and the majority rules or so it should be. But we don't every year, over and over, review how democracy came to be and why it is important to choose democracy over autocracy. It is important to note that, originally, it was not HaShem's intention that Israel have a king or a civil government. Courts, yes, judgements yes, but not by a king but by a counsel of wise and holy men. Until the modern era, everything was all about our subservience to HaShem and the principle of justice, for each of us and within society. No man was better than the next. However, in our civil society, we have substituted the concept of no man is better than the next by so much else.

We are meant to be a light unto the nations of the world, and we could do a lot worse than by reminding those who will listen and trying to make change based upon the fact that democracy has to be worked at. It will disappear unless we fight for it, just the same way our traditions and our faith will disappear as soon as we stop teaching about the covenant and struggling day in and day out to listen to the still, small voice urging us to choose Yetzer HaTov, over Yetzer HaRah, and to pursue Justice for each and every man and woman and animal on the planet. Sadly, we cannot be passive observers of what is happening around us. WE have to be active participants in intervening so that we carry the message not just of freedom but of justice to the rest of the nations.