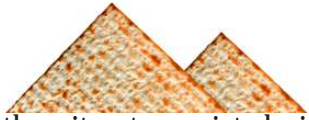




Zecher L'Yitzi'at Mitzrayim



The first mitzvah given collectively to the Children of Israel was the sacrifice of the Pascal lamb and the observance of the Feast of Passover. Amongst all the mitzvot associated with Passover (the pascal sacrifice, eating matzah, not eating leavening, eating bitter herbs), the telling of the Exodus story to each succeeding generation is central among the practises of almost all Jews. The Seder, a ritualized meal on the first and second night of the festival, became the primary forum for the fulfillment of this important and popular mitzvah.

Blessing for the Study of Torah:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו
במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher
kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe,
Who makes us holy through mitzvot, and commands
us to engage in the study of Torah.

פרשנות Commentary

From the Haggadah: The Haggadah is the book containing the story of the Exodus and the rituals read at the Passover Seder. (The seder, as we know it, began as a rabbinic version of the 1st-century Greco-Roman meals called 'Symposia'.) The word "Haggadah" comes from the Torah command "And you shall tell (vHigadeta) your children on that day..." (Exodus 13). The earliest known written form of the Haggadah comes from the 8th or 9th-century. Over time, the Haggadah came to include more and more rabbinic material, including midrashim, questions and songs. The Haggadah does not tell the story of the Exodus in a linear fashion, but ideally serves as a jumping off point to tell the story to the participants, especially to the younger generation. The midrash on the four children especially underscores the importance of telling the story to each person in the language they best understand.

Nechama Leibowitz on the Telling of the Story: Nechama Leibowitz (1905-1997) was recognized as one of the leading teachers of the Torah of the twentieth century. Her approach to text was always an active one and through her thought-provoking use of questions, she challenged her students to adopt a similar active role towards the text.

מקורות From our Sources

The Book of Exodus:

You shall the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an institution for all time. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, you shall eat matzah until the twenty-first day of the month in the evening. (Exodus 12:17-18)

And you shall explain it to your children on that day, "it is because of what the Eternal One did for me when I went free from Egypt." (Exodus 13:8)

The Book of Deuteronomy:

You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress, for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly, so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live." (Deuteronomy 16:3)

The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:4) states with regard to the telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt: "Begin with the denigration and end with Praise." The Seder is to commence with the negative part of the history of the Bnai Yisrael which preceded the redemption from Egypt. In the Gemara (Pesachim 116a), Rav and Shmuel disagree as to what constitutes "the disgrace". One says that it is "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," and the other claims that it is "In the beginning our fathers were idol worshippers." Both opinions are reflected in the Haggadah....

From Studies on the Haggadah from the Teachings of Nechama Leibowitz (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2002) p.44.

שיחה For Discussion

The story of the Exodus told in the Haggadah is markedly different from the version of the same story told in the Torah in the Book of Exodus. In the Torah, the story is told with all the details, while in the Haggadah a briefer version is presented, but with midrash and other commentaries to help us understanding the meaning of the story on many different levels. In the Torah, Moses is the star of the story, while in the Haggadah, Moses is usually not mentioned at all, highlighting the fact that it was God who saved Israel from slavery. In the Torah, the story is told in a straight narrative form. The Haggadah is much more interactive, using questions, songs, symbolic foods and glasses of wine, commentaries and ritual acts. The Haggadah helps present the story of the Exodus in a form so that all learners, of all ages, backgrounds and learning styles, can draw some new meaning out of the story, each and every time it is told.

- 1) Why is it so important that we tell the same story year after year, generation after generation?
- 2) What parts of the story or the Seder experience holds the greatest meaning for you? How do you relate to this ancient story in your own life and times?
- 3) How do you tell your own story? When you tell your own story, do you begin or end with praise?

