



## Lesson 6, Series 2

### **Passover:** *Remembering the Exodus*

It is a biblical commandment to remember the Exodus every day, daytime and nighttime, as it is written, **“You shall remember the day when you went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life”** Shulchan Aruch Harav.”

In reciting the **Shema prayer** twice daily as required we are mentioning the Exodus which is stated in the third paragraph. In addition, we pay tribute to the Exodus in various other ways each day as follows:

**Tfillin** are “a sign on your arms and between your eyes” reminding us that “G-d took you out of Egypt with a strong hand”, **Shabbat** is a day of rest when we abstain from work also to remember that time when we were slaves in Egypt until G-d freed us, **Sukkah** reminds us that G-d, “placed the Jewish people in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt.”

**On the Seder Night we have a mega-commemoration of the Exodus. What is the basis for this?**

**You shall tell your son** on that day, saying, **“Because of this, G-d did this for me when I went out of Egypt”** Shemot 13:8.” The question still remains, why is this night different from all others? The answer is in the words **“tell your son”**. This means that it is not sufficient to remember the Exodus on Passover, it’s about telling it, relating it to our sons/daughters, to each other and to ourselves. To assume that thought alone is insufficient or that a brief mention is insufficient is not the point. Rather, it is much more than not forgetting the tumultuous events in the annals of history.

**Rabbi JB Soloveitchik** explains, it is about reliving the Exodus, by making the story of the Exodus our personal story, and bringing the past to the present, into our life. This dimension is made clear in the declaration by our sages, **“In each generation, one must see himself as having personally left Egypt.”** This dramatic re-enactment takes place in the magic of the Seder night. Throughout the Seder we look to the liberation of our ancestors and realize that we too are free, and we too left Egypt and emerged into an air of true freedom. We don’t only remember, but we relive the glorious love that Hashem showed us.

**Maimonides** states that one must proactively show himself as having personally left. Reading through the Haggadah is not a spectator sport. You’ve got to get into it! You’ve got to feel the heat of the Egyptian sun baking upon you, hear the taskmaster’s whip and the ecstasy of 600,000 leaving Egypt, with Moses at their head.

In the Yemenite tradition, each person heaves a sack of matzah over his shoulder, like the Jews did upon leaving Egypt. Then there is a responsive dialogue of where one is coming from and where one is heading.

It is clear to us that the most powerful affirmation of the Exodus as the top of Jewish experiences came from Hashem, revealing Himself on Mount Sinai 3300 years ago. **“I am the Lord your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves”** Shemot 20:2.” Why is the Exodus His claim to fame?

In the **Haggadah of Passover** we read: “In every generation a person is obligated to regard himself/herself as if he/she had come out of Egypt, as it is said: ‘You shall tell your child on that day, it is because of this that the L-rd did for me when I left Egypt.’” **How then can we translate the story of the Exodus into our contemporary lives?**

**Rabbi Yehuda Loew of Prague (The Maharal)** writes: There are some people who ask, “What difference does the Exodus make? Aren’t we now enslaved by other regimes?”

Society and circumstances may have placed barriers in our way, and we are surely stifled by self-imposed stagnation and mediocrity of our own making, how then do we have the power to control our own destiny?

But on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the night of Pesach, we sit around and relive the Exodus until it is ours, we realize that the future does belong to us and that we do control it. The Maharal: When G-d liberated the Jewish people from Egypt, He gifted them with eternal, intrinsic freedom. No future exile or persecution of the Jewish people could undo this gift of freedom.

What the Maharal is telling us is that at our core we are free, no matter how deeply we are entrenched in our (superficial) “issues” and our “attachments”. The permanent freedom granted to us during the Exodus is the ability to be true to ourselves and exact the control over own destiny.

No story demonstrates this point better than that of Reish Lakish, documented in the Talmud Baba Metzia 84a: Rabbi Yochanan was swimming in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish [who was then cheiftan of a gang of bandits] saw him and jumped into the Jordan after him. Rabbi Yochanan said to him, “Your prowess should be used for Torah study!” Reish Lakish retorted, “Your good looks should be for women!” Rabbi Yochanan said to him, “If you will repent, I will give you my sister who is more beautiful than me [as a wife].” Reish Lakish agreed. Rabbi Yochanan taught him Bible and Mishnah and made him into a great man.” Indeed, the Talmud tells us that ultimately for each piece of information that rabbi Yochanan taught, Reish Lakish was able to mount 24 challenges.

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe:** True freedom for a Jew is to allow the expression of his or her most essential character, the [Jewish] soul, through Torah and mitzvot, and strengthening [the soul’s] bond with G-d. Judaism is our identity. When Moses went to Pharaoh and demanded to free the Jews He said: Exodus 8:16 **“Let my people go, so that they may serve me”**. The only way to true freedom is by tapping into the soul’s infinite potential by transcending our finite limitations and freeing us to the higher calling of the divine through Torah and Mitzvot.

A Lesson in a Box is culled from Torah Studies and Rosh Chodesh Society classes taught throughout the year at Aleph Learning Institute.

Dear Friend:

The main staple on Passover is ‘Matzah’, bread of poverty. Matzah is also the bread of freedom, “for in haste you left Egypt”. The Maharal explains that matzah represents poverty in a symbolic sense-in a word- simplicity. Just as matzah contains the bare minimum ingredients of bread; “poverty” represents stripping one’s identity to its core, essential state. And this, in effect, is freedom. During the week of Passover, our “matzah diet” establishes the foundation of our interactions with the world, during the rest of the year.

*Best wishes for a Kosher & Happy Pesach!*

Sincerely,  
  
Rochelle Kaplan

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