

Dvar Torah for Pesach

Based on *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #39*

The Israelites groaned because of their subjugation. They cried out and their lament rose to God. God heard their cries. As a result, God remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak and with Yaakov (*Exodus 2:23-24*).

After one of the recent terrorist suicide-homicides I let some friends know that my family had, thank God, been spared again. They all wrote back thanking me for letting them know. One very dear friend (whom I've known for a long time, and who is really a sensitive person) added that he and his family were going to a hotel for Passover. "I could use some serious downtime." I was flabbergasted by the seeming lack of empathy. I thought of what Rebbe Nachman said:

You should be able to feel another's troubles in your own heart. This is especially true when many are suffering.

It is possible to clearly realize another's anguish, and still not feel it in your heart.

When an entire community is in distress, you should surely feel their agony in your heart. If you do not feel it, you should strike your head against the wall.

You should strike your head against the walls of your heart. This is the meaning of the verse, "Know this day and realize it in your heart" (*Deuteronomy 4:39*). You must bring the realization from your mind to your heart. Understand this well.

We later heard that the Rebbe once said that this is the meaning of the passage, "And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall" (*Isaiah 38:2*). The face that he turned was his awareness, bringing it inside the walls of his heart. For one's true face is his mind, which illuminates it from within.

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #39

In the course of the Seder, a great deal of time is spent working on our mind. We speak at length about the slavery and Exodus from Egypt. The wine of Kiddush is augmented by a second cup of wine following the telling of the tale. Then we eat the matzah. We are not merely consuming ceremonial foods; we are ingesting *Chakhmah* and *Binah* (wisdom and understanding). We understand better the joy and God's praises the wine accompanies, as well as the humiliation and physical suffering the bread of affliction embodies.

Have we taken it to heart, though? How deeply do we feel the pain, our own and that of our fellow Jew? At this point of the Seder we eat *maror*, the bitter herb.

In Egypt we suffered horribly, for hundreds of years. In addition, at that point in our history God's "track record" was unproven (see Rashi, *Exodus 7:3-4*). There was only some vague promise that a redeemer would come to take us out of our misery, the disgrace of physical and ideological slavery. When the subjugation situation got to be too bad "the Israelites groaned." We should take our cue from our ancestors, because this year there's *maror* aplenty.

CRY OUT! MOAN! SCREAM IN PAIN! COMPLAIN OUT LOUD!

We have to believe that our pained and painful cries will rise straight to God now, just as they did then (Ohr Hachaim, *Exodus* 2:23-24).

Yet we must not dwell on the suffering and distress. We must integrate our mind's awareness with our heartfelt pain. This integration of matzah and *maror* commemorates the Holy Temple, where we all gathered and united in common purpose, to celebrate our national birth and re-dedicate ourselves to our mission of serving God. Our awareness and our sensitivity are gifts that have to be used in helping one another.

The Seder is a process. Experiencing bitter pain is a necessary part of the process. A Seder without *maror* is not a Seder. A Seder that does not progress beyond *maror* is also not a Seder. We must not be like the German in Rebbe Nachman's parable.

Two tramps, one Jewish, one German, were travelling together. Pesach was approaching. The Jew knew that his fellow Jews would invite poor Jewish wanderers for the Seder, so he taught his companion the ins-and-outs of the Seder. He mentioned Kiddush, the telling of the story, everything. However, he forgot to tell him about *maror*.

On the first night of Pesach the Jew and the German were invited to different homes. The hungry German could hardly wait for the meal. Yet, those Jews kept talking and talking! Finally, when the matzah was served, he was happy. Then they gave him horseradish for the *maror*. It was bitter to taste. He thought this was the entire meal. The German ran from the house, bitter and hungry, cursing the Jews. He returned to the synagogue where he had made up with the Jew to meet.

After a while, the Jew arrived, happy and full from a good meal. "How was your Seder?" he asked. The other told him what had happened.

"Stupid German!" replied the Jew. "If you would have waited just a little longer, you would have had a fine meal, as I had."

Hopefully, we have finished our portion of *maror*, once and for all. May God give us the faith and the patience to wait to celebrate with Him and with each other, the ultimate redemption, speedily in our lifetime. Amen.

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