

Weekly Teaching

January 18, 2019

In the Book of Exodus, we read:

At midnight, the Lord killed the first-born son of every Egyptian family, from the son of the king to the son of every prisoner in jail. He also killed the first-born male of every animal that belonged to the Egyptians. That night, the king, his officials and everyone else in Egypt got up and started crying bitterly. In every Egyptian home someone was dead.

During the night the king sent for Moses and Aaron and told them, "Get your people out of my country and leave us alone! Go and worship the Lord, as you have asked. Take your sheep, goats and cattle, and get out. But ask your God to be kind to me."

*The Egyptians did everything they could to get the Israelites to leave their country as quickly as possible. **They said, "Please hurry and leave. If you don't, we will all be dead."***

So the Israelites quickly made some bread dough and put it in pans. But they did not mix any yeast in the dough to make it rise. They wrapped cloth around the pans and carried them on their shoulders.

This is the reason for eating Matzah on Passover; for we left so quickly, we "didn't even have time for the bread to rise."

After the 10th and final plague; the "Death of the First Born;" the Egyptians were terrified of what might happen next so they urged our spiritual ancestors to hasten their departure from the land. **They said, "Please hurry and leave. If you don't, we will all be dead."**

The 10th plague, however, isn't the last great miraculous sign that led to our final redemption from Egyptian bondage.

God has one last great miracle to perform: the "Parting of the Sea."

It's this great miracle that forever establishes God as the One who has the Ultimate Power, the One who has the power over tyranny.

Within our Friday Night liturgy, I often ask us to participate in an adapted English reading composed by Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan Z'L.

We acknowledge that there is but one universal God, and that to God's service Israel stands eternally committed.

We recognize in God the Power that has enabled us to triumph over defeat, persecution and oppression.

It was God who redeemed us from Egyptian bondage and delivered us from the despotism of the Pharaohs;

For God wills that we be free to use our powers for worthy ends, unfettered by arbitrary rule of any mortal.

Whenever human tyrants usurp Divine authority, oppressing or exploiting others,

The hardening of their hearts proves their undoing; their unrelenting arrogance writes their doom.

Therefore we will not be discouraged or dismayed when unrighteous powers rise up against us.

Though enemy hosts pursue us, we shall remember how our ancestors were saved at the Sea.

We shall recall, in every age, the words of triumph with which they gave thanks for their deliverance from peril.

Mi Chamocha—Who is like You, O Lord, among the mighty?

I find this reading to be especially poignant, and historically accurate.

It is the reality of the Jewish People that our faith in God, and living by God's teachings, has always given us the strength not only to survive, but to thrive.

The miracle of the Parting of the Sea is our story; the story that makes us who we are, and who we continue to be as Jews.

The Parting of the Sea truly is the staging place for the birth of the Jewish People; like the mother whose "water breaks", we emerge from the "narrowness of Egypt" and are re-born into the freedom of God's expanse.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, which literally means narrowness.

The lamb's blood on the doorposts of the Israelites that instructed the Angel of Death not to strike was the "birth-blood" of the soon to be born Jewish People.

In *Mitzrayim*—the Egyptian land of narrowness and tyranny—we left for the open space of sacred freedom and values; the place where God ultimately rules.

There have historically been many Pharaohs and/or Pharaoh wannabes; people who want to act without concern for any moral curbs on their behaviors.

People who wish to utilize power so as to oppress others.

The Jew has faced many such oppressors, yet our faith and our commitment to leading Jewish moral lives assures that we outlast all of our oppressors.

As Mark Twain observed:

The Egyptian, the Babylonian and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then... passed away. The Greek and the Roman followed. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts...All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

The secret to our immortality was our knowing that the story of Passover, the story that made us who we are, is our historic reality if we continue to make it true each and every day.

We live our Jewish lives continued to be tethered to God's laws; living up to our sacred responsibilities both as Jews and as human beings.

God delivered us from bondage.

God has always been our hope and strength even in our times of despair.

And, with each new day, we Jewishly re-dedicate ourselves to leading a sacred life by which we recall our past, live responsibly in the present and help assure our future.

In doing this we forever hear the echoes of the Parting Sea.

Shabbat Shalom,

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