

Weekly Teaching

March 23, 2018

In the Passover Haggadah, we read that “in every generation a person must see oneself as if they were the one that went out from Egypt.”

The journey from slavery to freedom was not a one-time event in Jewish history; long forgotten. Rather, it is supposed to be re-experienced by each person, each generation, annually during Pesach.

In 21st century America, it might feel difficult for us to re-live the slave experience and our subsequent redemption. It is difficult because we are free, and we are not slaves longing for our freedom.

But, the reality is that each of us is enslaved to something, and we long for freedom in some area of our lives.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzraim*, which literally translates as meaning a “narrow place.”

Each of us is stuck in a narrow place in some area of our lives.

We may be in a bad or destructive relationship.

We may have allowed our important interpersonal relationships to deteriorate.

We may feel unhappy with the direction our lives are going, and feel stuck and unable to change.

The Rabbis taught that every individual will find himself at some point, literally in that “narrow place,” seeking to go forth from slavery to freedom.

The message of Passover is human beings can change their circumstances.

We are not powerless, and with the help of God, we can go from slavery to freedom.

No matter how bad the situation seems, it is not hopeless.

We Jews went from the darkest days in our history (the Holocaust) to the brightest (the re-creation of the State of Israel).

We did this Zionist miracle inspired by the words of Theodore Herzl: “If you will it, it is no dream.”

In his book “The Gifts of the Jews,” Thomas Cahill wrote that the ancient Israelites, beginning with Abraham, gave the world a new metaphor.

He wrote: “All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world.”

The gift of our Hebrew Scriptures was the vision that we humans can rise above that circle.

When God told Abraham “to go forth from his home,” God was telling him to break out of the circle and to find something new.

And when the ancient Hebrew slaves went out from Egypt, they broke out of a cycle that had lasted centuries.

The message of Passover is that we are not slaves, and we are not stuck.

There is a journey from slavery to freedom, and each of us is on that journey in some area of our lives.

We are each on our way to our own personal Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom,

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