

# Weekly Teaching

## March 30, 2018

Passover is the ultimate family celebration with an emphasis on our children.

Jewish parents are specifically commanded to teach our children the Passover Story.

Two thousand years ago, the head of the rabbinic court, Rabban Gamliel, specifically codified what we are to teach our children:

*Whoever has not referred to these three matters connected to the Passover story hasn't fulfilled their obligation to tell the Passover story.*

- 1) *Why the Pesach (Passover) sacrifice?*
- 2) *Why the eating of the Matzah (unleavened bread)?*
- 3) *Why the eating of the Maror (bitter herbs)?*

Rabban Gamliel goes on to answer:

- 1) *Why the Pesach (Passover) sacrifice?* —Because we are commanded to recall how God “passed over” (Pesach) the houses of our spiritual ancestors in Egypt during the 10th plague, sparing the death of our first born.
- 2) *Why the eating of the Matzah (unleavened bread)?* —Because Matzah is the reminder that we were redeemed from our bondage in Egypt.
- 3) *Why the eating of the Maror (bitter herbs)?* —Because with eating the bitter herbs we recall how the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt during our slavery.

Rabban Gamliel went further with his teaching and explicitly instructs all Jews: “In every generation you are to regard yourself as if you had personally gone forth from Egypt.”

Rabban Gamliel then spells out what every generation of Jews is obligated to do on Passover:

- *Thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol and bless God. Do all of these things because it was God who performed for our ancestors and for us all these miracles. God brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, grieving to festival, darkness to great light, and subjugation to redemption. So, we should say before God, Halleluyah!*

Rabban Gamliel derived our obligation to talk about the Passover sacrifice, unleavened bread and bitter herbs from the Torah itself where God commands us:

- *They shall eat the flesh of the Passover offering that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs. (Ex. 12: 8)*

Whatever the Torah’s original reason for the Passover offering and for eating these three foods together, Rabban Gamliel added three unique and important explanations not found explicitly in the Bible.

Each explanation emphasizes the dual experience of slavery and redemption from slavery, and transforms the Exodus story; commanding us to guarantee our Jewish continuity with the constant religious posture of gratitude no matter what circumstances we might confront at a particular time.

The first obligation, continuity, was being taught by Rabban Gamliel in the aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

Rabban Gamliel directed the Jewish community to continue offering the Passover sacrifice through words; the retelling of the Passover story, and the words recalling the Passover sacrificial ritual through which our ancient ancestors prepared for freedom.

For Rabban Gamliel; Temple or no Temple; Roman occupation or no Roman occupation; freedom or no freedom; all Jews then, now and always were to prepare joyously for the Exodus through the Passover sacrifice.

The second obligation, memory, Rabban Gamliel took one step further.

Not only are we obligated to continue offering the Passover sacrifice, we are also obligated to see ourselves as having personally been slaves who were liberated from Egypt by God and Moses.

Our telling of the Passover story isn't a mere retelling of someone's else's history; it's "MY" history, something that happened to me.

Regardless of time and place, all Jews throughout history—now and in the future—will always taste the bitterness of slavery and the sweetness of freedom.

The third obligation, gratitude, Rabban Gamliel understood that constantly reliving the experience of redemption from slavery should naturally lead to spontaneous and unconstrained expressions of thankfulness to God for transforming us and our situation.

Our gratitude should be a spiritual and moral imperative, and our freedom should never be taken for granted.

Passover is the opportunity to utilize ritual so as to feel and live like slaves, crossing over to freedom, and then internalize that experience and apply it to our everyday lives.

This is the power of Passover, the means by which we "eat our history," and rediscover our purpose as Jews and human beings.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Passover,

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