

Shabbat HaGadol, 5779, 2019:

Pesach and Social Justice

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our natural inclination at this time of the year is to focus upon the phrase, *zacher l'yetziat mitzraim* — a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. After all, one of the major *mitzvot* of *Pesach* evening is none other than *l'saper b'yetziat mitzraim* — to tell the story of the departure from Egypt. While this is surely a key element of our thoughts during the course of the *Seder*, the Torah also reminds us, no less than five times, “And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt...” (*Sefer Devarim* 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18 and 24:22, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In sum, while we are certainly obligated to focus upon our joyous march to freedom on the night of *Pesach*, we are equally mandated to remember our 210-year ordeal of backbreaking servitude and abject misery at the hands of our heartless Egyptian taskmasters.

Two of the five instances wherein the Torah enjoins us to “remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt...” explicitly discuss our responsibility to treat the stranger, orphan and widow in an equitable and righteous manner:

You shall not pervert the judgment of a stranger or an orphan, and you shall not take a widow's garment as security [for a loan]. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the L-rd, your G-d, redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this thing. (*Sefer Devarim* 24:17-18)

When you beat your olive tree, you shall not pick all its fruit after you; it shall be [left] for the stranger, the orphan and the widow. When you pick the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean after you: it shall be [left] for the stranger, the orphan and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt: therefore, I command you to do this thing. (24:20-22 with my emendations)

These verses urge us to guard the rights and privileges of the most vulnerable members of Jewish society by reminding us, in no uncertain terms, that our entire nation was once completely vulnerable, subject to the diabolical control of Pharaoh and his vicious henchmen. As such, as a people and as individuals, we must build upon the historical consciousness of our Egyptian servitude and be acutely sensitive to the needs of those who require our assistance to live dignified and meaningful lives. In other words, the Torah is commanding us to practice the highest standards of social justice.

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) codifies our moral and halachic imperative to actively provide for the needs of those most at risk. In the context of a famous *halacha* regarding the *mitzvah* of *simchat Yom Tov* (rejoicing during the *Yom Tov* meal), he states:

When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is [not indulging in] rejoicing associated with a *mitzvah*, but rather the rejoicing of his belly. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov* 6:18, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger with my emendations)

The Rambam is teaching us a profound life lesson that goes far beyond the purview of a specific *Yom Tov*-based halacha, namely, *kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* — every Jew is personally responsible for the welfare of every other Jew, and no one should ever be left behind. Little wonder, then, that in the opening words of the *haggadah* we declare as one:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All those who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate the Passover. Now we are here. Next year in the land of Israel. This year we are enslaved. Next year may we be free. (<http://www.mazoncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-Passover-Resource.pdf>)

B'shanah haba b'yerushalayim habanuyah! — may we all join as one united people in the rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash* soon, and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [**http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd**](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd)

*** I have posted 164 of [**Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio**](#) *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.