



THE PEOPLE MISSING FROM OUR SEDER

Pesach night, in general, is a time when so many different people gather people together: family, friends, neighbors — the *chacham, tam, she'eino yodea lishol* — even the *rasha* has a place at the table. *Kol dichfin yetei v'yeichol* — everyone is invited. But while everyone is invited, and many are present, inevitably there are those who are missing. These “missing” people are represented in the Seder as well. Who are these people?

The first person is Eliyahu. By opening the door and pouring him wine, and play acting his participation, we in a sense both invoke his presence but also call attention to the fact that he is absent. He is there but he is not there at the same time. The second person is Moshe. Read through Shemot and one can hardly begin any part of the story of the exodus without his name being mentioned. Yet we go through the whole Seder night, barely mentioning his name. But everyone knows he played a much more crucial role to the story.

I would suggest that these two people, Eliyahu and Moshe, represent two categories of people who are physically not at our Seder but nevertheless are very much thought about during the Seder.

Who does Eliyahu represent? Eliyahu is the figure who heralds in the time of the Messiah. In this sense, he represents the future. The people who are missing from our personal Seder table who we wish were here with us and we hope to be with us in the future. Every year we open the door anew, for each year we anticipate and hope that they will be present. And this could be anyone. It could be close friends or family that are presently a far distance away. Loved ones who used to spend Pesach together with us and are now spending it elsewhere. Or perhaps a different situation, members of our family from whom we are estranged: brothers or sisters, children or grandchildren that for whatever reason are distant from us. In fact, it could be people we have not yet met. The intended we have not yet

found, or the newborn we have not yet delivered. Any person who we hope and pray will join us at our Seder, if not this year, then the next. We think of them, even if they are not here; we think of them, even if we have not yet met them. These are the people we hope will join us, if not now then tomorrow. The people we want to be part of our lives.

Moshe, however, represents a different category of people who we miss. Not people who could potentially be with us, but people who meant so much to us in our lives and who are sadly lost to us. If Eliyahu represents the people of our future, Moshe represents the people from our past. And like Moshe who is so essential to the story of the Exodus, these people, even in their absence, are still present. They are always there in the background. Even after they move on from this world, they still serve as inspiration for us. We still turn to them for guidance and advice; we can still hear their voices; still feel the warmth of their embrace. Where

is Moshe at the Seder? He is nowhere but he is everywhere. He is not directly mentioned, but his presence is felt throughout the evening, for without him we would not be here to celebrate.

I remember the first time my wife and I made a Seder for our family and guests. We were accustomed to being the children at the table, assuming the set roles in which we were familiar. But it was another feeling entirely to be the ones who made the Seder — to prepare the Seder plate, to set the table, to lead the Maggid. When we recited the story and sang the tunes of the Haggadah, I thought of my grandparents' home; I thought of the previous generations who taught me this tune — their voices echoed in my head, their faces pictured in my mind's eye. Were they gone? Were they missing from the Seder? Or in some way, are they still present, as we sing their tunes, pass down their traditions, tell over their stories and remember their impact on our lives. It is very appropriate that we recite Yizkor

and invoke the names of our loved ones at the end of Pesach, because they have been with us all throughout this week, sometimes consciously other times subconsciously, but nevertheless always present.

The Seder is a multilayered and complex experience. It weaves together both the conscious and subconscious, the text and the subtext. When we open the Seder inviting all to join, *Kol dichfin yetei v'yeichol*, we invite those who are physically with us, *et asher yeshno po*, and those who are not physically with us, *ve-et asher einenu po*. It is not just our current family and friends who are sitting with us at the Seder but also all of the Moshes and Eliyahus of our lives. The past, present and future all come together to create a multi-layered multi-generational experience.

There are two endings to the Seder. The first is *Nirtzah* — when we sing *leshanah habah beyerushalayim habenuyah* — when our grand future will be realized, when differences can

be forgiven and friends and family are reunited, when Jews from all distances will come together in brotherhood and unity. But that is only the first ending. The second ending is when we finish the *Chad Gadya: V'ata Hakadosh baruch Hu v'shachat l'malach hamavet*. When G-d slaughters the angel of death, when death will be no more, the time of *tehiyat ha-meitim* — when past generations return and when we are reunited with our fathers and mothers, grandparents and grandparents, lost siblings and children.

Together, both of these endings herald in a time when those missing from the Seder are present at our Seder.

This Pesach, we should take a moment to appreciate those who are around our table, the special people in our lives, the ones who make us feel blessed, but at the same time, let us not forget those who are missing. For we are promised that in the end, we will all be home together. May we be *zocheh* to see that time come soon.

The graphic consists of five vertical bars of different colors, each with a Hebrew word and its English translation. From left to right: 1. Orange bar: 'SEEK TRUTH' (EMET) with the Hebrew word 'EMET' below. 2. Purple bar: 'DISCOVER YOUR POTENTIAL' (ADAM) with the Hebrew word 'ADAM' below. 3. Pink bar: 'LIVE YOUR VALUES' (CHAIM) with the Hebrew word 'CHAIM' below. 4. Green bar: 'ACT WITH COMPASSION' (CHESED) with the Hebrew word 'CHESED' below. 5. Blue bar: 'BRING REDEMPTION' (TZION) with the Hebrew word 'TZION' below. Each bar also features a small logo of the seminary at the bottom left.