

## *Chag Pesach Sameach*

I would like to share a Pesach blessing with you and your families from the Haggadah. At the Seder you will read a lot of texts, in Hebrew, English, Aramaic or Farsi, and like other sacred texts – the Haggadah is ancient. So, we may feel a gap between reading the Haggadah as a familiar text which directs us in how we tell the story of our exodus from Egypt and the actual content of the Haggadah. Why do we have a long rabbinic account of the verses from Deuteronomy? Why do the rabbis come up with 100's of plagues when the Torah plainly states there were ten? Why do we care about the rabbis who stayed up throughout the night talking exodus in Bnei Brak?

The Haggadah has two aims: The first is to teach, the second is to feel. The first half of the Haggadah communicates the teaching with the injunction that we go through an exegetical process of those verses in Deuteronomy. That text is a classic rabbinic style of parsing the verses of the Torah. The Haggadah models for us how we ought to tell the story: by giving us examples of students and masters who devote themselves to this and providing literature to us which will encourage this kind of thinking.

With this in mind, it makes a great deal of sense to list the four sons. Here are our archetypal students. Our community is made up of sages and heroes and the novices.

The second half of the Haggadah gives us a whole different instruction. Rabban Gamliel tells us if we did not focus on the Pesach, Matzah and Marror elements of the Seder, we will not have fulfilled our obligation to tell the exodus story. We need to move from the mind to the heart and touch. We look at the Matzah and Marror when we arrive at this event and we experience the symbols that were essential for our redemption narrative. Where the first half wanted us to start from the negative story and move to the positive story – 'We were slaves.' In the second half, we show the bitter herbs; the tangible object reminds us of the horrors of slavery.

In this section, it makes sense that we begin the Hallel songs of praise – the very particular songs that describe our redemption event. In an experiential framework, songs belong; in the intellectual, didactic approach – we use our mind – the art and beauty is the thought we construct and the questions we can ask.

This double approach – the mind and the heart – to engaging the Pesach story is very important. For the rabbis, when a student would ask a question then the Seder could commence. What if the student was like the child who does not know what to ask? Then, the story is a flat experience. We put the words in that student's mouth for her. But the dialogue and intellect is not the limit of engagement. The child can sing the praise and feel as if she were released from slavery in Egypt. That requires imagination and a grateful heart.

In either approach, the participants of the Seder and the readers of the Haggadah are shown a path where they must extend themselves. We are told to stretch the limits of the text of Torah. Or, we are told to imagine and experience an event that comes from a different age; some of us may be uncomfortable singing or holding a tune, but on this night we lift our voices and dream. And that is where we will feel the blessings of Pesach this year. If we stretch ourselves wide we will become more.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach and Zissen Pesach to all,  
Rabbi Menashe East