

## Parents and Children

This Shabbat we read the Torah portion *Tzav* and this Shabbat is also the Shabbat before Pesach, which is known as the Great Shabbat, *Shabbat Hagadol*. What makes this particular Shabbat great? Why is it any greater than any other Shabbat on our calendar?

One interpretation of the miraculous nature of this Shabbat was based on a pseudo-historic event. Following God's instruction, each Israelite family tied a lamb to be used for the Paschal offering, in view of the Egyptians. When the Egyptians came before the Israelites wondering why they had tied up the lambs, the Israelites replied: We are using them to initiate God's final plague upon the Egyptian first born sons. When the first born sons heard this, they went to their parents, pleading: Everything Moshe promised to do, he has done. Now, we will die if you do not let the Israelites go free. The parents, however, were unmoved. The children petitioned before the Pharaoh and he, too, was unmoved. They rose up in rebellion – sons striking down fathers – and yet it was too late. (See Midrash Tanchumah, Bo, 18) Egyptians were paralyzed to defend their children's lives, opting for obstinacy over their family.

The words of the Prophet Micha serve as an important corrective and guidance for all parents and all families. Micha looks to a Messianic future, when God will send Elijah as the harbinger of the Great day of God. On that day, in that time, 'He will restore the hearts of fathers to children and the hearts of children to fathers.' (Micha 3:24) The great Shabbat, the great day, is a vision of a future when we will turn our hearts to God and when families will turn their hearts to each other.

The timing of this message makes an important statement about our communal values. On Pesach, in particular, we are enjoined 'and you shall tell your child on that day.' Pesach is the time to talk with and to our children. Why is that so crucial? Passover celebrates the Israelite redemption from slavery in Egypt. We were saved from suffering so we could become a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' The people would not cohere into a holy nation magically. Israel needed to devote its communal energy and resources to teaching its children. That is why in every age study and learning are the cornerstones of the growing and living community. The redemption story is not particularly important and it would not be all that interesting without a living covenantal community upholding God's dream. For the Jewish community, living out our ancestral destiny is embodiment of a great life. This Shabbat is the great Shabbat because it prepares us to reach for something great; for the greatest, most important feature of Jewish communal life – we reach for our children and we pray, that our children will reach back

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach  
Rabbi Menashe East