

Pessach

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Pesach is the holiday of belief in G-d.

Sometimes we forget that. After all, isn't Pesach called zeman cheiruteinu "the time of our freedom"? Yes, but Succoth is called zeman simchateinu, and no one claims that the essence of Succoth is simply our joy.

Instead, the three pilgrimage festivals represent different aspects of our relationship with G-d. Succoth marks G-d's ongoing providence; Shavuot reaffirms the truth of the Torah; while Pesach is the holiday of belief in G-d Himself.

G-d's existence was proven by the miracles of the Exodus.[1] This is explicit in Devarim: "Or has a god attempted to come and take a nation to him from the midst of another nation, by trials, signs and wonders...all of which haShem, your G-d, did for you in Egypt before your eyes. You were shown, in order to know that haShem is G-d; there is none besides Him" (4:34-35).

Other verses make the same point. When the Egyptians drowned in the sea, Israel "believed in haShem and his servant, Moshe" (Shemot 14:31). And the Ten Commandments begin, "I am haShem, your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the abode of slaves" (20:2). In twenty places in the Torah, G-d is identified as having taken Israel out of Egypt; nowhere, by contrast, does the Torah say, "I am haShem, your G-d, who gave you the Torah on Mount Sinai."

We say at the Passover seder, "Even if we're all learned, all wise, all elders and all knowledgeable in the Torah, it is incumbent on us to recount the Exodus, and the more one recounts the Exodus the more praiseworthy it is." If one already knows the story, why retell it over and over? The answer is that the Exodus is not simply history, but the source of belief in G-d. Retelling it is not a matter of increasing knowledge, but of strengthening our faith.

Moreover, sippur yetziat Mitzrayim encompasses, not only the Exodus from Egypt, but subsequent redemptions and salvations wrought by G-d throughout history. We read this in the Haggadah. Referring to G-d's promise to Abraham in Bereishit chapter 15, "Vehi she'amdah..., [the promise] has stood by our ancestors and ourselves. Not merely one adversary has loomed over us to [attempt to] destroy us. Rather, in every generation they loom over us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us from their hands." The promise ostensibly refers to the Exodus, but the Sages saw Egypt and the Exodus as paradigms for all persecutions and deliverances. [2]

On this basis we can understand the remarkable statement in Jeremiah: "No longer will it be said, 'Chai haShem who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt,' but rather 'Chai haShem who brought Israel up from the northern land and from all the lands where He had driven them'" (16:14-15). "Chai haShem" means "G-d lives." G-d exists! The indisputable proof of this will no longer be the historical Exodus, but our direct

experience of redemption from exile.³

Around the seder table, we can recount persecution and deliverance, and confirm our belief in G-d from the witness of our own eyes. "We will sing a new song before Him, praise the L-rd!"

Notes

1. Tur, Orach Chayim 725. This is a witnessed proof of G-d's existence, as opposed to Creation which must be proven inductively or taken on faith; see R. Yehudah Halevi, Book of the Kuzari, part 1, chap. 25.
2. The promise to Abraham does not mention Egypt or the Egyptians by name. See Bereishit 15:13-16.
3. For an expansion on this theme, see Equality Lost, chap. 13, pp. 135-9.