

CHABAD
DED
 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Thursday evening 12 April 2012 - 20 Nisan 5772
 Final Days of Pesach

LEAVING EGYPT AND LEAVING EXILE

DO PEOPLE SOMETIMES FORGET THE BEAUTY OF THE LAST TWO days of Pesach? The inspiring atmosphere of the Seder nights has passed. The family has eaten Matza for a full week. Then come two more festive days, falling this year from Thursday night till Saturday night. What is the meaning of these final days of Pesach?

The seventh day of Pesach, Thursday night and Friday, commemorates the splitting of the sea. This was more than the final destruction of the power of Egypt. It was a tremendous revelation of divine power. The Sages tell us that the simplest servant girl who witnessed the miracle at the sea experienced a greater revelation of G-d than did the prophet Ezekiel in his remarkable visions recorded in the Bible. In certain ways the splitting of the sea was a preparation for an even greater revelation of G-d which was yet to come: the hearing of the Ten Commandments from G-d at Mount Sinai.

Because of the special nature of this occasion, some people have a custom to stay up late this Thursday night, meeting together in the synagogue or at home and studying Torah.

LOOKING AHEAD

Leaving Egypt was a single event, crucial in our history, but in a sense just a beginning. Becoming the Jewish people, and then continuously coming closer to G-d is an ongoing process. The splitting of the sea was a step which brought us closer to G-d. Seven weeks later, the divine revelation at Mount Sinai brought us even closer, granting us the teachings of the Torah which can bring holiness into every detail of our lives. This event finalised our identity as the Jewish people. Then, eventually, we entered the Land of Israel, built the Temple, and so on... The culmination of this process will be with the coming of the Messiah. This is the theme of the eighth day of Pesach, which is only celebrated outside Israel.

The Haftara reading (read on Saturday morning) is the famous passage in Isaiah which speaks of the Messiah as a wise ruler, a descendent of David, son of Yishai (Jesse). He will govern the world with righteousness and faith in G-d, bringing an epoch of peace, in which “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb... there will be no evil or harm on My holy mountain, for the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11: 6,9).

At the beginning of Pesach we remember how G-d liberated us from our first exile, the slavery in Egypt; at the end of Pesach we look forward to the time when we will be liberated from the present exile, through the coming of the Messiah.

CONCLUDING FESTIVITY

Some people have a custom, instituted by the Baal Shem Tov, to have a meal together on the afternoon of the last day of Pesach, eating Matza and drinking four glasses of wine: a kind of repeat of the Seder. But this time one is not looking back to events in the past, but forwards towards the ultimate redemption.

Scripture and the Sages compare the coming of the Messiah with the going out of Egypt: “like the days of your going out of Egypt I will show you wonders” (Micah 7:15). The last days of Pesach are an opportunity not just to remember the way we left Egypt, but to enjoy a taste of leaving exile altogether, when we will all experience true closeness to G-d and ultimate liberation.

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FINAL DAYS OF PESACH

SAVED

Little Simon was very frightened. It had been a *very* exciting week and now he was very, very tired. Was it really only seven days ago that he and his family had left Egypt, together with all their friends and other relatives?

Simon remembered how Pharaoh himself had been seen running through the streets of the Jewish district in a blind panic, begging every Jew to leave. "Please go! Please GO!". The words still rang in Simon's ears. It was amazing! After all, everyone knew that Pharaoh had refused to let them go, even after seeing the most fantastic miracles!

The Jews had made for the desert, led by Moses and Aaron. Simon had overheard his parents talking about it. It seemed rather dangerous to go into a desert without proper provisions. However, Moses said they should do so - and the people had said "let's trust him! Everything he has said so far has come true!"

But now - things seemed to be going **WRONG!** Facing them was the Reed (Red) Sea. It looked so blue and deep! And behind them were the Egyptians! If you climbed up a little way on a sand dune you could see a great cloud of dust in the distance - that was them! It was the dust raised by their chariots!

"There is nowhere to run", thought Simon. "What can we DO!?"

Simon wandered around the camp despondently. He heard people talking in worried groups. "Let's surrender and go back to Egypt", some were saying. "No, let's fight!" replied others. "We brought weapons with us, didn't we?"

Further on there was another group of people. "I'd rather jump in the sea than face the Egyptians again", a worried voice whispered. Behind him, Simon heard the sound of praying. A knot of people stood with arms outstretched to G-d. "G-d of Abraham! Please save us! We are lost! Save us!". It made shivers run down Simon's spine.

Suddenly Simon heard Moses' voice. Everyone fell absolutely silent. You could hear a pin drop. Moses' clear voice carried through the desert air. "Children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Do not be afraid! G-d is going to save you and you will never see the Egyptians again! Do not fear - just GO FORWARD!"

"Go forward?" thought Simon. "That means - towards the Sea! How is that possible?" Suddenly the cloud of dust from the advancing Egyptians seemed ominously close. "The end!" thought Simon...

But it wasn't. Something remarkable was happening.

"The Sea has split! The Sea has split! Dry land!"

The joyous cry of the people could be heard, and they surged forward.. Simon caught a glimpse he would never forget, of Moses standing with his staff stretched out over the Sea... SAVED!

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