

Thoughts and Actions

Parashat Bo - Rabbi Jay Weinstein

Several years ago, my family had the opportunity to host Yemenite Jews at our Pesach Seder. We all came wearing dressed up in our typical Yom Tov gear while our guests were dressed quite differently. They were "dressed down," wore sandals and carried canes with them. Not wanting to embarrass them, we didn't ask any questions and kept our curiosity to ourselves. Towards, the middle of the Seder, as we read the part of the Haggada which says that each person has an obligation to feel as if he or she left Egypt, we were enlightened.

The Torah teaches us, (Shmot 12, 11) that the night before the Jews left Egypt, they had to eat the Korban Pesach (Pascal Sacrifice) with "their loins girded, shoes on their feet and staff in their hand." In other words, they had to eat it with one foot out the door. In fact, if they were missing this slight detail, they wouldn't have fulfilled the Mitzvah and perhaps wouldn't have been able to leave Egypt.

Why was this so important? Why thousands of years later, are there Jews who are still reenacting this part of the story?

Perhaps, the wearing of the belts, sandals and holding the staff were more than simple preparations for leaving Egypt. These actions represented to the Jewish people the commitment to leave Egyptian society and culture and become a nation with a new identity. In the midst of eating the "sheep" or Egyptian god, they were making a statement that this isn't a onetime deal but rather they are leaving Egypt for a new type of home and society. It was a change of value system and commitment to being a new nation.

If we are instructed to relive the exodus of Egypt, as our Yemenite guests taught us, this is a key element of the story. We too, have to go through the thought process that our ancestors went through while leaving Egypt. We have to be ready to leave behind a familiar and comfortable culture and accept the ideals of what it means to be a Jewish nation.



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