

מאמרי תורה - Torah Talk



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Bo
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פרשת בא
ו" בשבט, תשע"ט

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 10:1-13:16

This week's *parasha*, Bo, continues the story that we know so well from the Pesach *seder*. The Israelites are slaves in Egypt, and Moses is sent to free them. Last week, in *Parashat Vaera*, we saw the first 7 of the 10 plagues. This week we read about the final three plagues, including *makkat b'chorot* – the death of the firstborn. After the plagues, the Israelites escape and become free. They begin their journey to the Land of Israel, where they will create a new life, a civilization, and many more generations of Israelites.

The Torah acknowledges that with the generations to come, there will be Israelites who did not experience the Exodus, and who might not know the reasons for the *mitzvot*, the holidays, or even why they should care about God. Therefore, God instructs the Israelites to tell this story of *yetziyat Mitzrayim* (the Exodus from Egypt) to future generations, to those who did not experience these happenings first hand.

This is why we have a Pesach *seder* in the first place, to tell the story of our escape from slavery to the next generation, and to allow children the opportunity to ask questions, to learn through curiosity. We read:

וְהָיָה כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם: וְאָמַרְתֶּם
זָבַח-פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בֵּיתִי בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם
בְּנֹגְפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-בֵּיתִינוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקַּד הָעַם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:

And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' You shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice HaShem, because God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.' The people then bowed low in homage.

The Torah tells us that when a child asks about the rituals of Pesach, it is normal, and expected. It is good for them to ask these questions, and it is even good for them to initially not know what happened to their ancestors. We don't ignore this question, we don't turn away the child who is asking it. The Torah even instructs the reader about the answer we should offer. Questioning, in Judaism, is a wonderful thing to be celebrated. We are always meant to be curious about our tradition, to be learning throughout our lives. But learning, this Torah portion tells us, is not enough. We must also teach.

It is the responsibility of every Jewish adult (and knowledgeable child) to continue the stories of our people, to keep up the rituals and traditions, so that they can be passed down to the next generation. We have been taught the stories of our people, and the traditions of our religion. In receiving that tradition, we also carry a great responsibility – to pass it on, to teach it, to make sure that Judaism does not end with our generation. We never stop questioning and learning with curiosity, but we can't stop there. We also need to pass on this knowledge, and ensure the future of our people and our religion.

Shabbat Shalom

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What is something about Judaism that you are able to teach someone who does not have the same knowledge or understanding as you?
- 2) Who are the people in your life who regularly answer your questions and are eager to teach you?
- 3) What aspects of Jewish history or the Jewish story do you think are most important to pass on?