

Rabbi Weingarten's Pessach Message 2021

In the end of March we will celebrate Pesach (27.3 in the evening until 3/4.4).

Pesach is the first holiday we celebrated as a nation and is also the first holiday we have in the Jewish calendar, because although our new year is on Rosh Hashana, the month of Nisan is the first month, as is it stated in the Tora (Shemot 12:2) "Let this month be to you the first of months, the first month of the year."

Pesach has many names, the name "Pesach" comes from the Hebrew word from passing over, reminding us how God "passed over" the homes of the Israelites and didn't kill our first born children while killing the Egyptian first born. Another name that we have in the Torah is Chag Hamatzot, the festival of Matzot. In the prayer it's called Zman Cherutenu, the time of our freedom, in modern Hebrew it is therefore often called Chag Hacherut, the holiday of freedom or Chag Ha'aviv, the holiday of spring. The last two days have an extra name, Shvi'i Shel Pesach, the 7th day of Pesach and Achron Shel Pesach, the last day of Pesach.

In Israel and in many liberal communities, the first day and the last day are celebrated as a holiday with no working and the days in between are called Chol Hamoed, which is somewhat in between a full holiday and a working day where most of the works are permitted but not all, but the services on these days are festive, outside of Israel in most orthodox communities and some conservative communities, the first day and the last day are celebrated two days each. Based on the olden days when we did not know the exact day of when the month started.

Pesach is the most important holiday for us as a nation in the sense that we became a nation through this holiday. Before Pesach we were just a group of enslaved people in a foreign country, where we had no freedom what so ever, but once we were rescued, we became a free nation that could start to develop our own identity and religion. The first major thing that we did as a nation was to accept the Tora but we'll talk about that more around Shavuot. According to the Kabbalistic, this miracle happened in the last minute, the nation was already in the 49th gate of impurity, one before the ultimate 50th gate where from that there is no return, if we were to hit that point, we would've stayed stuck in Egypt.

The first step to leaving Egypt was to cross the red sea. We have to imagine the situation, a group of slaves were just released from slavery, they are going through the desert, The Pharaoh changed his mind about the whole releasing part and took his army to go and capture them back. The whole nation is standing in front of the sea, there is desert on the right, desert on the left and the entire Egyptian army coming from behind, they are boxed in and have no where to go.

The verse tells us that the Israelites were full of fear and they were crying out to God. Then they said to Moshe, "are there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the desert?" And then God says to Moshe, "Why are you crying out to me? give the children of Israel the order to go forward."

According to the Talmud, at this point an argument started, which tribe should be the first to enter the sea, that wasn't split yet. The one who jumped in first was Nachshon Ben Aminadav. And only when he was in the water up to his nose, only then the water

split. The concept "to be the Nachshon" is commonly used to describe the one who jumps in first and gets everything started.

But if we keep the image in mind how and when the sea split, this was only in the last minute, when the water came up to his nose, when Nachshon almost couldn't breathe, that the miracle happened, if he would have had his nose a bit higher, then it would have taken a bit longer for the miracle to happen.

This teaches us a very important lesson, the help we so need comes at the point when we are at the edge, and to get there we should be humble and keep our nose low, only then do we get to a state of miracles and receive the ultimate saviour, only then do we see the hidden powers in ourselves to pull us through the sea.

I wish for us all a happy and Kosher Pesach, a holiday full of light and joy, that we should all have the merit to go out of our own Egypt and be truly free.