



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Pesach
תשפ"ג

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Partners In Torah

Mission Statement:

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Welcome.

Thank you for coming.

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.

The Jews are finally out of Egypt. Hashem has delivered the knockout punch to Pharaoh by killing every first born, and Pharaoh threw the Jews out of Egypt. This chapter in Jewish history, viz, the slavery and the process of freedom from 210 years of Egyptian servitude, is the source of many of the Torah's 613 commandments, and provides the theme of most of our festivals.

We are also commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt twice daily, morning and evening, which we fulfill when reciting the third paragraph of the *Shema* in the morning and evening services. That chapter of the Torah (Numbers 15:41) contains the verse:

(מא) אֲנִי יְדֹדְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים
אֲנִי יְדֹדְךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ :

41. I am Hashem, your G-d, *Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem your G-d.*"

In the Friday night *Kiddush*, we say that the Sabbath is a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. So, too, in many of our prayers "*a remembrance to the Exodus from Egypt*" is said.

Indeed, many of the mitzvot that we perform are also intended to remind us of the Exodus. Tefillin, for example, which contain the Exodus written on the parchments inside of them, and the mitzvah of mezuzah, which reminds us that Hashem passed over the doorposts of the Jews during the plague of killing the first born. Eighteen of the nineteen commandments in this week's portion deal with the Exodus. (Most of them concern the laws of the Pascal offering, which cannot be performed today.)

The most famous of the commandments relating to the Exodus is the one which commands us to relate the story of the Exodus to our children, one which we fulfill at the Seder that we conduct on the first two nights of Passover. Families all over the world join together to hear the elder of the family or someone knowledgeable recite the Haggadah, which tells the story of the slavery and redemption from Egypt. This is different from, and is in addition to, the daily mitzvah to remember it. Here, at the Seder, we are instructed to elaborate on the story and to add as much detail as we can, to paint the most vivid picture of the Exodus as possible for our children. Thus, from their earliest childhood memories, our children grow up with this seminal event in our history deeply etched deeply in their minds.

What is it about the Exodus that is so important to our people? Why must we mention it twice every day, and why are there *so many* commandments to commemorate it? And, when we remember it each day, as instructed, exactly what are we supposed to think about?

When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and instructed him to tell the Jewish people that He had appeared to him, Moshe responded, "They won't believe me!" His comment was not a criticism of the Jewish people, but, rather, a compliment. Why should they believe him? The Jewish people are skeptical by nature and will not commit to something unless they can verify it. Each of the world's other religions started when one person claimed that God appeared to him and taught him His religion! What proof did this person have? Not a shred! He made up a religion and attributed it to God. Similarly, Moshe felt, when he would return from the burning bush claiming that G-d appeared to him, who would believe him?

The real G-d would want the reality of His existence to be clear and obvious to each of His adherents, beyond the shadow of a doubt. This would not be a mere whisper into the ear of one person with the hope that he would be successful in spreading the religion.

This is the one time in world history that Hashem parted the curtain of nature and revealed Himself and His awesome power for all to see, Jew and gentile alike. He demonstrated once and for all, by changing the laws of nature, that He created nature with its laws, the world and everything and everyone in it. He changed water into blood and made hailstones of fire and ice together in one hailstone. He split the sea allowing his nation to pass through on dry land, and then He drowned the pursuing Egyptian army in the same sea. The entire civilized world was shaken and trembled from Hashem's display of might and awesome power. They all knew very well that Hashem miraculously took the Jewish people out of Egypt to be His nation.

Even the Christians and Moslems, the world's other major religions with over three billion adherents combined, agree that the Jewish people were first chosen to be Hashem's nation. The events of Egypt were undeniable and acknowledged by all religions. Their only claim is that the situation has since changed. The Christians claim that G-d became angry with us, discarded us, and chose them instead; the Moslems claim that their prophet Mohamad was the final prophet and supersedes all previous prophets (Moshe) and their teachings.

In the year 740 CE, according the *Sefer HaKuzari* by Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, the king of Kazar called together a priest, an imam, and a rabbi to learn about their religions. He was very devout in the Kazar religion, to the point where he alone was the high priest who did all the sacrifices and service. In spite of all his efforts to be perfect in his service to his god, he had a recurring dream of an angel telling

him that his heart and intentions were beloved by G-d but that his actions were not. To determine what the desirable service to G-d was, he invited a leader from each major religion to find out what they believed so that he could choose the correct one for himself.

Initially, he was inclined to follow the Christian religion because they had the largest number of followers, figuring that they were probably correct.

The rabbi, however, objected and said, "Your highness, the Jews are the majority in this matter!"

"How so?" asked the king. "The Jews are but a miniscule number compared to the others!"

"It's very simple," said the rabbi. "The Christians and the Jews both agree that it is not the Moslems, and the Moslems and the Jews both agree that it is not the Christians. They are thus each in the minority, outnumbered 2 to 1. But all three religions unanimously agree that the Jewish people were chosen by G-d to be His nation, claiming only that something has changed. The burden of proof lies upon the *them* to prove that something *has* indeed changed. We say nothing has changed and can prove it. Upon hearing the rabbi's argument, the king had to agree. He chose to learn about Judaism from the rabbi and, eventually, converted to Judaism along with many subjects in his kingdom.

This is what is so important about the events of the Exodus, and what Hashem wants us to be constantly aware of. Our belief in Hashem is not based on hearsay, but, rather, is based on events that each individual present personally experienced. Every single Jew who left Egypt witnessed the Egyptians suffering from the plagues and how they themselves were unaffected. Each of them walked through a sea with walls of water miraculously standing up on both sides of

them, and then watched the Egyptians killed as the waters came crashing down on them when they resumed their natural state.

How many people followed Moshe out of Egypt?

The Torah tells us in Exodus 12:37:

(לז) וַיֵּסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעְמֵסֶס סִפְתָּהּ כְּשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי הַגְּבָרִים לְבַד
מִטָּף

37. The Children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children:

Statistically, there are about as many women as there are men, so the number of adults was about 1.2 million people. If they had just 3 kids apiece, we are talking another 1.8 million children (600,000 X 3). This is a conservative estimate of about three million people, which does not include the mixed multitude whom the Torah tells us left with them and who could have been just as numerous.

A rabbi sat in the dentist's chair. The dentist, a devout Christian, was pestering the rabbi about why he doesn't believe in Jesus. After numerous attempts to evade the question, the dentist finally said to the rabbi, "Rabbi, stop beating around the bush. Tell me once and for all why you don't believe in Jesus?"

"If you really want to know, I will tell you," said the rabbi. "You are a medical man, right? What would you say if a young woman came into your office visibly pregnant and told you, 'I was never with a man; this child is from god'? What would you say?"

"I would say that she was nuts!" replied the dentist.

"So why are you asking me why I don't believe in Jesus; isn't *that* what you are telling me!"

“OK,” said the dentist, “so, let me ask you a question. If someone came into your office one day and said, ‘Rabbi, you are not going to believe what just happened! I was fishing on the Detroit River, and, all of a sudden, the water split and the riverbed could be seen!’ What would you say?”

“I would say he was nuts!” replied the rabbi.

“But don’t you believe in the splitting of the Reed Sea?”

“Of course, I do!” said the rabbi.

“But didn’t you just say the guy was nuts?”

“Let me explain the difference,” said the rabbi. “If one person came and said it, I would say he was nuts. If two people came, I would say it was a hoax. Ten people, it’s probably also a hoax. But, what if a thousand people came, all telling the same story: they were sitting by the river and saw it split. You would not be able to dismiss their claim out of hand. Maybe a large boat passed through and, in its wake, you could see the bottom of the river; but they must have all seen something or they would not all be telling the same story with the same details. Here we have *three million people*, all saying that they, together, shared the very same experiences! This is something that cannot be falsified.”

It was the 14th day of ניסן-Nissan, and the Jewish people in Egypt were busy preparing for the very first Seder ever, which would take place that night. There was much to be done. The Pascal offering needed to be slaughtered and roasted, and its blood needed to be placed on the doorposts and the lintel. The matzahs needed to be baked, and they also needed to get some bitter herbs because they would be eating those three things together at the Seder.

The verse states (Exodus 12:8):

(ח) וְאָכְלוּ אֶת הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מַרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ :

8. They shall **eat the flesh** (of the Pascal offering) on that night - - roasted over the fire -- and **matzos; with bitter herbs** shall they eat it.

These three foods symbolize what was happening to the Jews. The bitter herbs represented the bitter slavery in Egypt. The Matzoh represented that they left so quickly that their dough didn't even have time to rise, and the Pascal offering represented Hashem's passing over the houses with blood on the doorposts, sparing the first born inside.

When the children, bewildered by all the sudden activity, asked their parents: "What's going on?" Their parents told them of the exciting events that were going to transpire that evening and that they would be leaving Egypt the next morning for good.

That Seder was in the year 2448, 3,308 years ago (we are now in 5783). From that Seder and until today, on the 15th of Nissan, Jewish families all over the world, have joined to celebrate the day on which the Jewish people left Egypt. They all eat the same symbolic foods and tell the same story: our ancestors were slaves in Egypt, and Hashem performed many miracles and took them out to make them free. Throughout the ages, many Jews risked their lives to have a Passover Seder, and today, almost anyone who calls himself a Jew, celebrates the Passover holiday in some way. Statistically, it is the most celebrated holiday in the Jewish calendar.

This is but one of a myriad of practices that have been passed down from father to son in an unbroken chain from the time the Jewish people became a nation and started doing them in the year 2448.

Had these people not actually experienced these events, how could the “lie” have started?

It has been only about 80 years since the Holocaust and, yet, there are fervent Holocaust deniers. Despite the many survivors who relate, from personal experience, the story of the Holocaust, many people have the gall to publicly claim it never happened. Can you imagine what people will say two hundred years from now? “You believe in the holocaust? It could never have happened! The Germans were the most polite and cultured people in the world at that time. They could never have done something like that to human beings!”

What is the antidote to this possible, future? All of the documentation and testimony that is being assembled and archived, so that when one would want to know the truth, the evidence would be clear and readily available to be seen.

The festivals of Passover and Sukkot, and all the mitzvot that we still do to remember the Exodus, are Hashem’s way of documenting the events for the future. The very fact that we still keep the traditions that we received from our fathers, who received them from their fathers all the way back to our ancestors in Egypt, is the greatest testimony to the veracity of the events.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (d. 1883) returned to the inn where he would usually stay, and noticed that the innkeeper had changed his attitude to Torah and mitzvot and was no longer respectful of them. When asked what caused the change, the innkeeper related the following story that had recently happened.

“A Jewish guest at the inn denied completely that there is reward and punishment for one’s deeds in this world. To prove his point, he ordered a ham sandwich and said, ‘If there is G-d, let me choke and die on this ham sandwich!’ I watched him eat the whole sandwich and nothing happened to him. To be honest, my faith was shaken.” Rabbi Salanter did not respond and went to his room.

A while later, the innkeeper’s daughter came home from school announcing excitedly that she received 2 A’s on her report card, one in math and one in singing. Rabbi Salanter intercepted her and asked her to prove to him that she could really sing. The girl refused, so Rabbi Salanter called over her father and told him that his daughter wasn’t being respectful. When the innkeeper asked his daughter as to the meaning of her behavior, she said. “I don’t think I should have to prove my abilities to anyone who comes along to question them. Does it make sense that any time someone questions me I should have to sing to prove my talent? That is why I have the report card! I proved my abilities to my teachers and that should be sufficient.”

When the innkeeper agreed with his daughter, and after sending her off, Rabbi Salanter said to him:

“This is the answer to your question also. Hashem proved His control of the world and His involvement in it through the miracles that He did in Egypt. The document (report card, if you will) that proves it is the Torah that He gave us. Hashem will not change the laws of nature for every Tom, Dick, and Harry that comes along and questions His abilities. ‘If there’s a G-d, let this table do a summersault! You see! The table didn’t even move! No G-d.’ Hashem proved His existence once and for all, and we know it from then.”

In mentioning the Torah, Rabbi Salanter adds another layer of proof that is unshakeable. Just 50 days after the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. At that event, the entire Jewish nation heard the first two of the ten commandments directly from Hashem. This means that they all became prophets and heard the voice of Hashem speak to them. This was conclusive proof of Hashem in and of itself. But it goes farther.

After the event of Sinai, Hashem gave each tribe a Sefer Torah exactly like the ones we read from every Shabbat in Shul. In the Sefer Torah, we read the story of the Jewish people in Egypt, and the events of the Exodus, and the subsequent episodes which transpired throughout the 40 years in the desert. Those events were written into the Torah by Moshe as they occurred. They received the entire document at the end of Moshe's life, just before they entered the land of Israel with Joshua. They read the very same narrative that we read; however, they were reading about the events that happened to them! They had been a part of everything that happened during the forty years in the desert. They collected the manna every morning for forty years! They drank water from the well that traveled with them for forty years! They followed the cloud that led them during the day, and the pillar of fire that led them during the night. They were witness to Korach being swallowed up by the earth, as well as many, many other miracles that they were part of during that time. And, after reading the entire book, they accepted it. Not only did they accept it, they vowed to give their lives for it. Now, if there was one mistake or one exaggeration in that book, would they have accepted it?

Imagine that a business acquaintance told you that he had a private meeting with President Biden in the oval office. After giving you elaborate details about the meeting, you were convinced that he was telling the truth.

But, how would you react if he told you that you were there with him? “Don’t you remember? You were wearing your pinstripe suit with a blue tie!” No sane person who would believe something about himself that he knows is not true, no matter how charismatic and convincing the other person was.

In the Torah there are many verses that talk directly to the Jewish people. (Exodus 19:4)

(ד) אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם

4. *'You have seen what I did to Egypt,*

(Deuteronomy 29:1)

(א) וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְדֹוֹד לְעֵינֵיכֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכָל עַבְדָּיו וּלְכָל אֶרֶצוֹ :

1. *Moses summoned all of Israel and said to them, "You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land:*

If even one word was not true, why would they accept the Torah? They would insist that it be changed, or reject it out of hand.

The Torah is brutally honest. The Jewish people were criticized, reprimanded, warned, and punished numerous times. Very unbecoming for them, and yet they gave it to their children?

They accepted it with a full heart, for this was the truth. This very Torah resides in thousands of synagogues around the world. It has been copied, read from, and studied faithfully for 3,308 years without interruption. How fortunate we are to know and to be able to prove that the Torah that we have and everything in it is true.

This is the eighth Principle of the 13 Principles of Faith listed by Maimonides:

ח - אָנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאַמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה. שְׂכָל הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצוּיָה עִתָּהּ בְּיַדֵּינוּ הִיא הַנִּתְּנָה לְמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלְיוּ הַשָּׁלוֹם :

I believe with complete faith that the Torah that we have today in our hands is the same one that was given to Moshe on Sinai.

This simple and clear truth is what we want to remember and review numerous times a day when remembering the Exodus from Egypt, for it was there that Hashem revealed Himself to the world. The Shema always precedes the *Shmoneh Esreh* – the silent devotion - and before standing before Hashem to request our needs, we remind ourselves that Hashem is a reality because He was seen by all in Egypt. We pray to Him because He is the address for all of our needs, and only He can supply them.

The Pesach Seders provide us the medium to transmit this essential truth to our children and grandchildren. I wish you all great success in this most important endeavor!