

Make It Real

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Now, I don't know how it is at your Seder. Maybe the highlight is eating the matzah or the meal; maybe it's negotiating the return of the *afikoman* or singing all those fun songs at the end of the Haggadah. I do know that for many of us, it's the actual telling of the story. As I began to prepare for the Seder, I reviewed its 15 *simanim* (signs/signposts/ steps) and had a question: Why is the telling-of-the-story *siman* called *maggid*? What does *maggid* even mean?! Why not *sipur* (tell, recount), which is how the mitzvah is described and named? Yeah, sure, the mitzvah is couched using a *maggid*-word (Exodus 13:8), but so is a more common *emor* (say) word. In fact, a *maggid*-word is used only once in relationship to this mitzvah, while *emor* and *sipur*-words are used many times. So I started to do some (Breslov) research.

I discovered that the holy Ohr HaChaim also wondered why the *maggid*-word is used instead of an *emor*-word. I also discovered that in defining *maggid*, Rav S. R. Hirsch contrasts it to other "speaking" words. He writes that to be *maggid* something is to bring it home, to make it real and present, to demonstrate its truth.*

Think about our first exile and exodus—from Avraham Avinu coming to Eretz Yisrael and being told that his descendants would be enslaved, redeemed and brought to Eretz Yisrael; the

actual enslavement of millions of people for hundreds of years to harsh and cruel taskmasters; the plagues; the liberation and the leaving. To call it crucial or seminal is a vast understatement. It is defining, if not more. One would think that a process and an event such as the liberation of a nation from centuries of slavery would never, could never, be forgotten. Apparently, one would be wrong. After all, we find time and again the injunction to remember that God took us out of Egypt, sometimes attendant to a mitzvah and sometimes on its own.

How could this be? From the very first, we celebrated our emancipation and exit from Egypt on two planes, as families and as a nation. As family events go, this ranks as unforgettable. This wasn't Grandma getting her first job as an immigrant teenager. As a

national event, this is not some boring political convention nominating a vice-president. This is literally the birth of a nation. How could someone forget it, God forbid?

There's a place inside us where memory and forgetting live. In Rebbe Nachman's teachings it's called *medameh* (imagination). You know who else lives in *medameh*? *Emunah* (faith). The most critical and difficult aspect of *emunah* is to believe that God created the world out of nothing. As stupendous as it is that a seed becomes a fruit-bearing tree or that a seed becomes an intelligent human being, it's easy to believe that God created trees and people because we see them being born all the time. It's also easy to believe that He created the sun because we see it rise and set every day. But since it is so hard to imagine something coming from nothing, it's a challenge to believe that God created existence out of nothing.

This is also the challenge of remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Had the Exodus been a revolution or a migration, events we have seen, we could believe it without any great to-do. The Exodus parallels Creation. The Midrash (*Mekhilta*) tells us

that the Israelites in Egypt were indistinguishable from their hosts. To separate them and create them as a new, distinct and chosen nation so defied rationality that the angels questioned God's actions. Precisely because it is so unbelievable, the Exodus is easily forgettable.

Therefore, telling the story is not enough. You have to bring it home and make it real—*maggid*. Back up your words with action: wash your hands, drink the Four Cups, and eat matzah and maror. May your Seder be unforgettably good, and your *emunah* unbelievably strong. Amen.

* Avudraham cites *Targum Yerushalmi* (see Deuteronomy 26:3) that *maggid* also means to thank and praise.

A kosher and freilekhen Pesach!

Chag kasher v'sameach!

(Based on *LH, Birkhot HaRei'ach* 4:9-15)