



Insight in the Hagadah

By Rabbi David Silverberg

Towards the end of the *maggid* section of the *Haggada* we declare, "In each and every generation, one is obligated to see himself as though he himself left Egypt." The obligation – and, indeed, the challenge – of *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, telling the story of the Exodus, is to sense in a profound way how the events of which we speak affect each and every one of us. We are bidden to not merely recall past events, but to feel, to whatever extent possible, that we had ourselves experienced them firsthand.

Maimonides famously codifies a slightly different version of this *halakha*, in his *Hilkhot Chametz U-matza* (7:6): "In each and every generation, one is obligated to show himself as though he himself has now left the Egyptian bondage..." As many later scholars have noted, Maimonides does not present this obligation as requiring an internal, introspective feeling. Rather than write that one must "see himself" as though he had personally experienced the Exodus, Maimonides requires one *le-har'ot et atzmo* – to show himself, to act in a manner befitting a person who has just undergone the process of deliverance.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka, in his work *Torah Therapy* (pp. 147-8), elaborates on the significance of Maimonides' formulation, and of the distinction between "seeing oneself" as having left Egypt and "showing oneself" as though he had left:

It is the difference between passivity and activity. It is the difference between a cardiac identity and one which is contagious. It is the difference between keeping one's feelings to oneself and sharing them with others, so that they can feel them, gain from them, and even be overcome with the same feelings. Maimonides insists that the Pesach experience of release from bondage is not one which should be buried in the recesses of one's subconscious or preconscious; instead it is a feeling which must be evoked verbally, it is a feeling and a radiation of joy which must be shown to others so that they can identify with it.

By requiring one to "show himself" as though he has left Egypt, Maimonides demands that one endeavor to share this experience with others, and contribute towards the collective sense of jubilation that ought to grip *Am Yisrael* each year on Pesach. In essence, Maimonides transfers this *halakha* from the realm of personal experience into the realm of one's responsibility towards the next generation and towards ensuring to do his part in bringing the joy and meaning of Pesach to the rest of the nation.

Sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim thus requires not only the transmission of knowledge and information, but also, and perhaps primarily, the sharing of an experience. Parents are enjoined to not merely teach information, but also demonstrate the elation we should feel as a result of our having obtained freedom and entered the service of the Almighty. The children at the *seder* should absorb both the information as well as the exhilaration of

a newfound sense of freedom, and the privilege of becoming the loyal servants of God and receiving the opportunity to live our lives in fulfillment of the divine will.