

Shabbos
HaGadol
Tzav

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This Shabbos is Shabbos *HaGadol* and the tenth of Nisan, as it was the first time back in Egypt. That's gotta mean something especially given what is going on today and so close to the end of history. It's like a wormhole opening up to the very first Pesach.

Once upon a time, the whole world knew about the Jewish God. Nebuchadneztar may have destroyed His house and exiled His people, but He believed in the reality of the Jewish God. So did those who came before him and after him, like Achashveros, for example.

Much later on, the Roman historian Josephus wrote that people still knew in his time that God had once miraculously redeemed the Jewish People from Egyptian slavery. Christianity, which began in Rome and spread across the empire was based upon the Jewish People having at least once been God's people. The Queen of Sheba purportedly sent gifts to the Jewish God to be offered up in His Temple.

It's not quite clear when the world stopped knowing and then believing in the Jewish God. Certainly the end of prophecy

was part of that, you know, “out of sight, out of mind.” It made it harder for generations of Jews to read the Haggadah as more than just a history book about events long over and far from everyday Jewish experience.

It also didn't seem to be so true anymore that God took care of our enemies that arose in every generation to destroy us. Yes, miraculously and therefore, thank God, we're still here. But we've developed a bad limp over time, having suffering countless pogroms, Crusades, and even a Holocaust. To an outsider and even more tragically, many an insider, it has looked as if God did give up on the Jewish People and walked away.

All of it is understandable from a kabbalistic perspective, but how many people learn Kabbalah? All of it, even the countless spiritual and physical casualties, can be justified, or at least rationalized, from a “big picture” perspective. But at the end of the day, how many people even try to do that before jumping ship and capitulating to a secular way of life? Current statistics of assimilation and intermarriage speak for themselves.

It seems as if the longer Jewish history continues the more it travels downward without brakes. There was a brief period of excitement from a short era of teshuvah, but it passed and has been dwarfed by the amount of previously religious Jews going the other direction. And they're not just turning against Torah Judaism, but against the Jewish People themselves, even siding with mortal enemies.

Dear God, where in Heaven are You?

It's a good question, if asked with the right intention. The wrong intention is if the person asking it intends to use it as an excuse to abandon Torah and the Jewish People. But to ask it

out of a hunger for redemption so that the true God can once again be recognized and acknowledged by the world is to have the best intention of all. This is what it means to be a zealot for God.

Maybe that is one the lesser-known goals of the Haggadah. We approach it with joy over what once happened when even Pharaoh and his spiritually corrupt nation were compelled to pay homage to the real God, the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. And we do it as if we're enjoying the same level of revealed *Hashgochah Pratis* as they did, as if we still talk to God and see Him immediately in all that happens...which is clearly not the case.

Instead, perhaps, what the Haggadah wants us to say is, "Look at how it once was with God and the Jewish People...Feel how spiritually lonely we are today compared what we once lived with at the beginning of our history." How else can we draw ourselves out from the depths of a non-Torah reality and fulfill our soul's desire to "go home"?

Let's not kid ourselves. Exile has been kind to us, which means distracting. All the brochah is from God via the host nations, but for many it has been a big distraction away from Torah priorities that supersede current history. God blesses us in order to participate the completion of Creation, but In some cases it has backfired lured Jews away from their three millennia heritage and responsibility. The casualties are mounting as we approach the finish line.

Then comes the Pesach Seder. It's not that Chazal thought the good tidings of the Haggadah would apply equally to every generation, because they already hadn't in their time. They compiled the different elements of the Haggadah as a way to stay in touch with how things once were, and how things are

destined to be once Moshiach finally arrives. It's a spiritual flotation device to keep us from drowning in the turbulent waters of a hester panim history.

But after thousands of years of Seders all over the world, Jewish history is now reaching its end for this stage of the world. The Haggadah, in a sense, has promised that God will return once again to the world stage, and no one will be able to deny His reality anymore. He'll do it the same way He did back at the beginning when He used ten plagues to increasingly reveal Himself to the Jewish People and the world.

Unquestionably, we're watching the same thing happen again. It may not be the Ten Plagues, but the miracles saving the Jewish People have increased continuously in recent times. At some point, His hand in life will become so obvious we'll wonder how we didn't see it so well until that time. And using the Haggadah to this end makes it even easier to see God in life even more clearly.

Have a great Shabbos HaGadol and Chag Pesach Kasher
v'Samayach,
Pinchas Winston