

SECOND DAY PESACH 1986
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Many times each day we remember the Egyptian experience. Even in the kiddush that we say on Pesach we say "Zecher Yetzias Meetzrayim - We remember the Exodus from Egypt." We do not say that we remember Egypt but remember the Exodus from Egypt. Why don't we say we remember the whole Egyptian experience? Why do we only say we remember the Exodus from Egypt? What's more, when we read the Haggadah, after we have listed all the plagues, we read that Rabbi Yehuda gave them Hebrew initials. He made them into an acronym. Tetzach Adash B'Achav. Why did Rabbi Yehuda do that? If this acronym was a mnemonic device, why wasn't it said before the plagues? After all, a mnemonic device is meant to aid our memory. In the ancient days there was no printing and people had to invent all sorts of strategems in order to memorize things. These devices were very effective, but if this acronym was a mnemonic device, why wasn't it placed before the plagues? Why after the plagues? What's more, why were the plagues divided into three parts? Why not into four parts or five parts or two parts? Also, Rabbi Yehuda's device seems arbitrary. It does not conform with the usual rabbinic division. The rabbis either divided the plagues into nine and one or three, three, three, and one.

The first nine plagues were really natural plagues. They could all be explained by natural means: the rivers got red through some sort of bacterial infestation like they sometimes do in Florida; because of this, the frogs came out; because there were so many frogs, it attracted the vermin; because the beasts did not have water, they invaded the cities; etc. Only the last plague was inexplicable by natural means. After all, we know of no disease which just strikes the firstborn. The rabbis also divide the plagues into three, three, three, and one. All the plagues followed a certain pattern. First

there was a plague against the general community; then there was a plague against personal property; and finally, there was a plague against a person's person. First there was blood, a general plague; then frogs, a plague against property; and then vermin, a plague against a person; then beasts, a general plague; the cattle disease, a disease against property; then boils, a disease against a person, etc.

Why did Rabbi Yehuda divide in three? The answer many rabbis give is because the first three plagues had to do with gratitude. Moshe Rabbeinu was not allowed to use his rod to strike the water to produce the blood of the frogs because the water had shielded and protected him. When his mother put him into a basket he floated down the river to the Egyptian princess who saved him. He was also not allowed to strike the dust in order to bring forth the vermin because the dust had protected him. When he slew the Egyptian, he hid in the dust. Aaron was the one who caused the first three plagues to come. The most important thing that caused the Exodus from Egypt was that the Jewish people learned how to show gratitude to each other, to work with each other. That's why they had a seder at home. They learned not to betray each other as Jews had earlier done to Moshe forcing him to flee.

The second group stands for the separation of the Jewish people from the Egyptians. The Jewish people were not affected by the beasts or cattle disease or boils. Only the Egyptians were. This was to teach the Jewish people that they were chosen for a special mission by G-d that they could not shirk even if they wanted to. They are eternal symbols of G-d's presence in the world. Hitler purposely

singled out the Jews to exterminate because, as he said often, "The Jews give the world a conscience, and we do not need a conscience." To the strong and fit belong the spoils.

The last four letters stand for the fact that there were good Egyptians who disagreed with Pharaoh. During the plague of hail it says that "all those who are G-d-fearing should bring their cattle into barns and they would not be harmed." There were G-d-fearing Egyptians and some did save their cattle. During the plague of locusts the Egyptians actually went to Pharaoh and said, "How long will you keep the Jewish people here and cause Egypt to be destroyed?" They tried to make Pharaoh change his mind. During the plague of darkness they recognized the Jewish people were not acting out of selfish motives but for G-d because, according to the Medrash, during the plague of darkness the Jewish people could see and they went into their neighbor's houses to know what to ask for when they left, but they did not take anything. They could have, but they did not, and the Egyptians recognized then that the Jewish people represented something more than a band of ruffians desiring to pillage them. During the slaying of the firstborn the rabbis say there was actually a revolt by the firstborn against Pharaoh when the plague of the firstborn was announced.

We are always to remember the Exodus of Egypt. The plagues, themselves, are not important, Rabbi Yehuda is telling us. It is what the plagues represent. That's why we read about Rabbi Yehuda after the plagues. The Jewish people, in order to merit freedom, had to show gratitude, had to learn not to be jealous of each other and stab each other in the back. That's why it also says in the Dayenu, "If G-d would

have brought us before Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah it would be enough." How would it have been enough? What good is just standing under a mountain? But the rabbis say that when the Jewish people stood under Mount Sinai they were united. They use a singular, Vayichan, and not the plural, Vayachanu, because when the Jewish people are united it is a great thing. The Jewish people also have to realize that they have been set apart to fulfill G-d's purposes, and, thirdly, they have to realize that there are good people among other nations of the world, and we have to cooperate with them.

We do not say we remember Egypt because slavery many times has the opposite effect on a person. It does not make him more compassionate, it makes him less. Usually during revolutions what happens is that the oppressors and the oppressed just change places. The oppressed now slaughter and maim and harm those who used to oppress them. That's what happened in Russia and many of the third world countries. The Jewish people were to be like that. They were to remember the going out of Egypt so they would always be compassionate people, always wanting to work for the redemption of all mankind. They were to remember their going out, how their going out was caused by them showing gratitude and working one with another and their belief that G-d had singled them out for a particular purpose, and also that we can work with all the good people in the world.

On Pesach we mention Elijah because redemption is not complete. We all need to work together to bring the final redemption. I am reminded of the story they tell about the Russian Jew who was desperate to get out of Russia. He visited a circus and there he found that one of the lions was sick and about to die. He went to the zoo

keeper and said, "I'll pay you. I understand you are going to Europe. I'll put on a lion suit. I'll get out of Russia that way." The zoo keeper agreed. Everything went fine until that night when the door of the cage opens and in comes a big tiger. The man did not know what to do. The tiger started to come forward. All he could think of doing was saying the Shma, and in a loud voice, he said, "Shma Yisroel." All of a sudden the tiger glowered at him and said, "Quiet, do you think you're the only Jew who wants to get out of Russia?"

In order to bring the final redemption we all must work together, realize that G-d wants us to live a special type of life to bring this redemption, and to realize also that there are many among other nations of the world who are good and who want to help us.