

Rabbi Marc Levene's Pesach Message 5782

Dearest Friends

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיא דִּי אָכְלוּ אַבְהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם.
כָּל דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וְיִיכַל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח.

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

Anyone who is hungry should come and eat, anyone who needs should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice.

These Aramaic words are taken from the beginning of the Pesach Seder. Nestled in the very fabric of our evening's activities comes a strange sentiment. It's as if we call out to those around us to join us at our meal, and to be with us to partake in the Pesach remembrance activities. It is quite astonishing for a number of reasons, as most of us will methodically plan the seder down to the place settings and quantities of boiled eggs, as well as the fact that isn't it a little late to invite guests when one is already sitting down at home and starting the Seder. Who exactly are we talking to? Furthermore, is it not somewhat distasteful to invite the poor and impoverished to an evening where we speak of suffering and slavery?

Rabbi Sacks of blessed memory answers this last question in his Pesach Hagadah. *"What hospitality is it to offer the hungry the taste of suffering? In fact, though, this is a profound insight into the nature of slavery and freedom. As noted, matzah represents two things: it is the food of slaves, and also the bread eaten by the Israelites as they left Egypt in liberty. What transforms the bread of oppression into the bread of freedom is the willingness to share it with others."*

This means that before we open up the history books and delve into the murky history of our oppression, we must ensure we are thinking about those around us, guaranteeing that all of our brothers and sisters as best we can, are being looked after and are thought of. Rabbi Sacks highlights that it would not be possible to understand our own freedom which we so rightly celebrate on this seder night, without the enthusiasm to include others, to share what we have and to help unify the world.

I would like to suggest that our humble invitation to include others goes a little further. The sentiment is inclusion and unity, but for us in that moment we evoke the precious souls of our entire nation. We call out that ALL PEOPLE should join together and celebrate with us, wherever they might be, whenever they might have lived. I like to imagine that every Jewish Soul joins together in a moment of unity, as if we were all once again standing at Mount Sinai, *am echad b'lev echad*, as one people with one heart. This is a precious moment in time, which we relive year on year! We think about the people we wish that could be with us, as well as loved ones and those that have sacrificed for us.

This year however, one cannot escape the fact there is a war ripping through the heart of Eastern Europe. For many of us, it is a distant war, a fight not on our doorstep and one we do not directly relate to. However, when innocent men, women and children are fleeing their homes, leaving and losing loved ones and face the threat of death on their doorsteps, we cannot sit back. The UK Jewish Community has joined with those around the world to send support, aid and resources to those most affected but we must ask ourselves is this enough?

What did we rely on after the destruction if not decimation of our people post Holocaust? We looked to the support of our neighbours, to those who had the power to help and actually did.

Therefore, at the moment of the seder where we call out to those in need, let us take an extra couple of minutes and give thought to the people of Ukraine who are so very much in need at the moment. Let us all soul search asking ourselves the question, WHAT MORE CAN I DO? And of course, let us continue to pray for freedom for all men women and children so we can live in a world of peace.

Wishing us all a happy, peaceful and beautiful Pesach

Rabbi Marc Levene