

Dear Friends,

It's the week of Pesach. We have arrived. Most of us are knee deep in last minute Pesach cleaning, kashering or Pesach cooking. For some of us this is our first time home. For many, this is being done amidst pain and grief. **But for all of us, Pesach is upon us.**

Pesach counters, Pesach keilim, Pesach recipes...they are all being piled out and held up in wonder. Memories of years past assault us. Memories of our childhood homes flood our very beings. The way Mommy used to do it... Bubby used to make it... are our guiding light. **The sights, the smells, the tastes, the sounds, all merge to form an energy** that imbues us with energy and vigor as we tackle mountain after mountain of potato peels and laundry. It's almost Yom Tov. It's in the air. It's engulfing us in its welcoming embrace. No virus, no matter how virulent, can take it away from us.

Today, I'd like to zero in on a central theme, fundamental to our sense of self—and pivotal to our lives as Yidden: **Zikaron – Memory.** Twice a day, we remember yetzias Mitzrayim. And, when we make Kiddush on Shabbos and Yom tov. In the mezuzah as well, we remember. We're surrounded by mitzvos, zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim. And now we're coming to the high point. We're approaching the crescendo. The night when we were finally redeemed. The night when **not only do we remember, but we also relive the experience.** And in doing so, we again lay down the foundations for the memories, the zichronos, that will accompany us all year long.

Let's take a moment to focus on the idea of zikaron, memory.

The Sefas Emes says something remarkable. He says that remembering is the **innermost point of life**, the pnimiyus hachiyus. It's the place where forgetfulness can't exist, because zikaron, remembering is the essence of life—ikar hachiyus.

Really? Memories are the essence of our life-energy? What does this mean? Memories are definitely essential parts of our working mind. They bring us comfort—and sometimes also pain. True, they form our sense of self. **But why are memories our chiyus?** Why are they the innermost point of our being?

How much do we remember? What do we remember? So many times, we look back and don't remember anything at all. There are whole years of our childhood

that we can't recall. There are busy years of intense happenings, with ups and downs and all that remains is a haze, a blur.

But that doesn't mean that they were wiped away. Everything that we experience forms an imprint on our minds. So our memories are all present, but we often don't recall them. **The act of remembering is like putting a bucket into a deep well, and bringing that water—that story—up to the surface.** Everything has been imprinted on our minds, but it may be difficult to bring it to conscious thought.

That's the deep significance of the idea that while in the womb, a malach teaches us Torah. At birth, the baby is struck on the mouth and forgets everything. So what's the point of all those lessons? Why did we need a nine-month long private tutorial?

The answer is that **while nothing may be recalled, nothing is forgotten.**

The Torah that we learned is deep, deep inside us. It is pushed down into the core of our being and it becomes part of our essence. It means that the deepest memory of all, the most profound level of who I am, is the emes of Torah. And that's why when we hear an idea that relates to emunah, or truth, we aren't surprised by it, even though it may be new. **We may never have heard it before, but it hits us with a feeling of familiarity.** It strikes an intimate chord within us. It feels true. It feels right. That's because it's not entirely new. We learned it before, and before it was driven deep down, it became part of our core. And it's there for the drawing. Ever present and ever ready.

We come into the world, where we grow, learn, live, acquire possession, are struck with worries, and endure tzaros. All of these things can make the truth less accessible. They layer pain and doubt onto our beings. It's part of being human. It's part of our cycle of growth.

But then we have Leil Haeder. An awesome, special night. And on Leil Seder, we have a two-fold job. **We bring back memories and we create memories.** Chayav adam liros es atzmo k'ilu hu yotzei mimitrayim. A person is obligated to see himself as if he is [currently] leaving Mitzrayim. We talk and we imagine and we discuss and we dive into the story so that we experience it with our forefathers, with our nation of yesteryear .

We are there in the choshech. We are there as they cry out. We are there as they bravely take a ram and tie it to the bedpost. We are back with our ancestors, We are back with our grandparents. Back in the war years, back in their experiences, feeling their pain but also drawing on their strength and their resilience. **We are back in the eons of history, and by telling over their stories to ourselves and our children,** we are firmly adhering ourselves to the link in the never-ending chain that is our roots, our ancestry, our core. We bring back those memories, those collective memories of us as a nation—and we lay down memories, for generations to come.

Zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim.

As we engage in all this memory work, as we drink the wine and eat the matzah, we lay down a foundation of emunah, and we simultaneously arouse the memory that is deep within.

The Sefas Emes says that memory is the essence of our chiyus. And this is true of our mitzvah, zecher l'yetzis mitzrayim. Because this is not a matter of nostalgia. This is a matter for now, today. This is the emes and the emunah that lives deep within each and every one of us. **This is a matter of our very nucleus.**

Yetzias Mitzrayim is not just something that we remember, it is something that we are. Something that is deep within us. The knowledge that Hashem is all powerful, that evil is punished. That good is rewarded. That a Yid is distinct from an Egyptian, from any goy. That there is hashgacha pratis. **That there is geulah after galus.**

Zikaron is the essence of our chiyus, because this is who we are. We are Yidden. We were saved. We were reborn. We were loved.

It's all there inside us. Pesach is a time when family memories are recalled—and made. Keilim that we use once a year are embedded with the poignancy of association. Each Seder holds up a mirror, in which we glimpse Sedarim of past years. Minhagim bring to mind past generations. **It's a Yom Tov of memory and it's a Yom Tov for memory.** And even if this year is different than many years preceding it, it's ours. It's from Hashem. It's ours to create. **It's ours to establish unique memories for our future generations. Of withstanding turbulence, and**

pain. Of rising above challenge. Of staying strong and loyal to our Emunah and deep unforgotten faith. It's ours to bind with the links in the chain of remembrances that we are attached to forever - as individuals, as families, as a nation

This year, may we allow the memories of years past, and of millennia gone by, awaken and fill us, one recollection awakening the other, vibrating, resonating, **until the present touches the past and brings us forth to a future of geulah.**

Sincerely,

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