

PESACH**SHABBOS HAGADOL**

2015 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The Saturday before Passover is known as “Shabbos Hagadol –The Great Sabbath.” One of the reasons for this special designation is that a great miracle took place on the 10th of Nissan, 5 days before the Exodus from Egypt.

One of the Mitzvahs of the Seder is the Korban Pesach, the Passover Sacrifice. A lamb is supposed to be designated several days before Passover, slaughtered on the Eve of Passover, and then roasted and eaten Passover Night. On the 10th of the month of Nissan, which that year came out on Shabbos, the Egyptians saw that thousands of lambs were being designated for slaughter.

The lamb was an animal that was considered by the Egyptians to be sacred. What the Israelites were planning was an abomination! What greater sacrilege could there be in the eyes of the Egyptians than the mass ritual slaughter of their deity? (To get a little idea of how “politically incorrect” this was, imagine what the reaction would be today if Jews went around town collecting Christmas trees for a bonfire!) What an outrage! There should have been a riot! And yet, the Egyptians quietly accepted the fact that the Children of Israel were planning to barbeque an Egyptian god and eat it for dessert!!!!

And yet, there was silence.

This silent acquiescence of Jewish independence and religious freedom is considered to be a miraculous beginning of our Redemption from Egypt. Hence, “Shabbos Hagadol–the Great Sabbath.”

In the Haggadah at the Seder, we read a quote from the Talmud: “In every generation, a person is obligated to view himself as if he himself left Egypt.”

We are required to recognize that if not for G-d’s Divine Protection, we would still be living under the strong arm of the Pharaoh’s regime. We have to feel as if we ourselves are enjoying the sweet taste of freedom for the very first time.

We American Jews have been spoiled. We live in a country where our right not to work on Shabbos is protected by federal law. We are entitled to practice our religion, although our beliefs contradict the religious tenets of the majority of Americans. An orthodox, Sabbath observant Jew can be respected by millions, and come within a few hundred chads of the Vice-Presidency.

We are naive enough to believe that religious tolerance is normal. We sometimes forget that the norm is actually to live in country where we are persecuted and despised. The norm of Jewish history is to be surrounded by people who consider us to be big-nosed god-killers who use Christian blood to bake Matzahs. Christopher Columbus and his fellow Jews of that time could tell us about Spain under the Inquisition; a land of “religious tolerance” where a Jew who is caught wearing a white shirt on Saturday or with Tefillin hidden in his home ends up on top of a pile of firewood!

The Founding Fathers of this country articulated a strange new concept to the world; that you don’t have to persecute Jews just because their beliefs are different. To be sure, anti-Semitism is alive and well in America. But by and large, we have the good fortune to live in an unusual and wonderful country.

We continue to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. G-d bless America, where every day is Shabbos Hagadol!

Have a great Shabbos.

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