

**TALES OF THE EXODUS
ANCIENT AND MODERN**

D'VAR TORAH

By

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On Seder night, the entire nation of Israel remembers the past. Our sages always believed this to be very important because memory is identity. We are what we remember. The past will enable us to know ourselves better. We appreciate where we came from so that we can contemplate where we are going to.

Rabbi Chaim Potok, an American novelist and scholar, had the following to say on this subject:

“I do not think that you can be fully a member of the Jewish people and, creatively, a member of humanity, without knowing who you yourself are. The only way you achieve a deep sense of self is to know your own beginnings.”

Mark Twain used to say: “A self-made man is as likely as a self-laid egg”.

This, of course, is impossible. A nation as well as an individual has an origin and on Seder night we remember our origin – we recall the past, and eat the bread of affliction that our ancestors consumed as slaves in ancient Egypt.

But having remembered the past, we immediately look to the future, saying: “This year we are slaves here, next year we will be free men in the Land of Israel.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains this shift as follows:

“What is distinctive about Jewish time is that we experience the present not as an isolated moment, but as a link in a chain connecting past and future. The very fact that they had been liberated in the days of Moses gave our ancestors the confidence that they would be liberated again. Those who remember the past have faith in the future. We can face it without fear, because we have been there before.”

Memory, as he correctly claims, is not only an identity but it is also the guardian of hope, and it is this enduring optimism which kept our vision alive and ensured our survival to this very day.

Because of its supreme importance, in the year 1966 Ezer Weizman, Israel’s president and founder of its Air Force, summed up the impact of **memory** on the fate our nation in his address to the German Bundestag, saying:

“It was fate that delivered me and my contemporaries into this great era, when the Jews returned to and re-established their homeland. I am no longer a wandering Jew who migrates from country to country, from exile to exile. But all Jews, in every generation must regard themselves as if they had been there, in previous generations, places, and events. Therefore, I am still a wandering Jew, but not along the far-flung paths of the world. Now I migrate through the expanses of time, from generation to generation, down the paths of memory.

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I was a slave in Egypt. I received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Together with Joshua and Elijah, I crossed the Jordan River. I entered Jerusalem with David (circa 1000 BCE), was exiled from it with King Zedekiah (586 BCE), and did not forget it by the rivers of Babylon. And when the Lord returned the captives of Zion (538 BCE), I dreamed among the builders of its ramparts. I fought the Romans (66-70 CE) and was banished from Spain (1492). I was bound to the stake in Mainz. I studied Torah in Yemen and lost my family in Kishinev (Russia, 1903). I was incinerated in Treblinka (1942), rebelled in Warsaw (1943), and emigrated to the Land of Israel, the country from which I had been exiled and where I had been born, from which I come and to which I return.

I am a wandering Jew who follows in the footsteps of his forbearers, and just as I escorted them there and then, so do my forbearers accompany me and stand here with me today. And just as memory forces us to participate in each day and every event of our past, so does the virtue of hope force us to prepare for each day of our future.”

Faithful to the tradition of our forefathers, we keep the memory alive by celebrating the Seder in all places, circumstances and conditions. Ample examples exist to illustrate this, for instance the account of **observing the Seder inside a Syrian prison**.

It happened that on Thursday, April 2nd, 1970, an Israeli phantom jet was shot down over a Damascus suburb. At that time the president of Syria was Nur Al-deen Atassi, who promised that the Israeli pilots would never be released but would grow old in a Syrian prison. Accordingly the pilot, Pini Nahmani, was imprisoned in the notorious Al-Mazza Prison in Damascus. But in spite of this, in his secret diary he described how he celebrated the Seder in captivity. He wrote:

“It’s hard to imagine the holiday atmosphere in here: in the morning, we gave the cell a thorough scrubbing, something the concrete floor had never had. We drew a Seder plate on a piece of cardboard, with a Magen David in the middle, and a different item at each of the star’s points. In the afternoon, we managed to give ourselves baths in ice-cold water, and then we put on our cleanest clothes.

These were difficult hours of soul searching. When you are a prisoner of war, the memories rise up and choke you. You think about home, trying to sense the smells and the holiday feeling at twilight. You know that your family and children, that the entire Jewish people, are waiting and hoping, while you’re still here, tossing and turning, helpless on your stinking mattress. Time crawls by at its own pace.

Two Haggadahs and some Matzah crumbs sent by the Chief Rabbi of Zurich gave us the feeling of a real Passover. When Boaz, the youngest among us – almost a kid – sang the four questions, tears welled up in my throat. But then came the singing! It was such a strange scene. In the most heavily-guarded prison of an enemy state, three Israeli prisoners are singing songs of the ancient holiday of liberty.

While we were still celebrating and reading the Haggadah, the guards appeared and demanded that we stop. It seemed that our singing had disturbed the ousted Syrian

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president in the next cell, Nur al-din Atassi. He had thrown us in jail and declared that “the Israeli pilots would grow old in a Syrian prison!” Now (after Hafez al-Assad, father of the present leader of Syria, seized power in a military coup) Atassi was in the same boat we were. At any rate, **we** refused to stop, even when they threatened to throw us into solitary confinement as a punishment for making noise, for even that awful threat could not silence the sound of freedom.

We finished the Haggadah with *Had Gadya*, and went on singing other Israeli songs – Naomi Shemer’s “Jerusalem of Gold” – just to continue the celebration long into the night and to avenge ourselves a little bit... I had never taken part in such a long Seder. We had to be taken prisoners in order to fulfil the Haggadah’s description of the five rabbis in Bnei Barak: “*The whole night long they spent retelling the story of the Exodus.*”

Another poignant example is that of the inmates of the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen Belsen, who in 1944 were determined to perform the Seder there. Lacking Matzah they, sadly, conducted the Seder using the terrible camp bread – hametz - in place of matzah.

Another special Seder was that of Jewish Union soldiers in the US Civil War, themselves fighting a battle against slavery. They prepared their Seder in the wilderness of West Virginia. Lacking charoset, which symbolises mortar, they placed a brick on their Seder plate.

Another remarkable example involves a group of Jews in the Soviet Union who wished to observe the Seder but had no Haggadot, as it was forbidden both to participate in the festival and to purchase the Passover texts. Resolute that they should celebrate, they endangered themselves by entering a church disguised as Russian Orthodox priests. There they went to the library and picked up a Haggadah, then secretly made copies in the basement of an apartment building. After that they carried out a secret Seder down there in that very basement.

The Soviet Union provided more poignant examples, like that of **Natan Sharansky**. Imprisoned in **Siberia**, Sharansky, a Soviet refusenik and later Israeli cabinet minister, had to observe the Seder without a Haggadah, charoset or anything for dipping. He recalled his experience as follows:

“Some years later, I led my own Seder for the first time. In truth, my memory of the text of the Haggadah was by then rather sketchy, and the Seder itself had none of the traditional trappings. There was [no celery to dip in salt water] and no unleavened bread to eat, no bitter herbs to taste, no Haggadah to read and I was the only Jew present. In fact, I was the only person in the room. But my outside “guests” didn’t seem to mind. I retold the story of Pesach through the small window of my punishment cell to two fellow inmates and they too could immediately identify with its universal message.

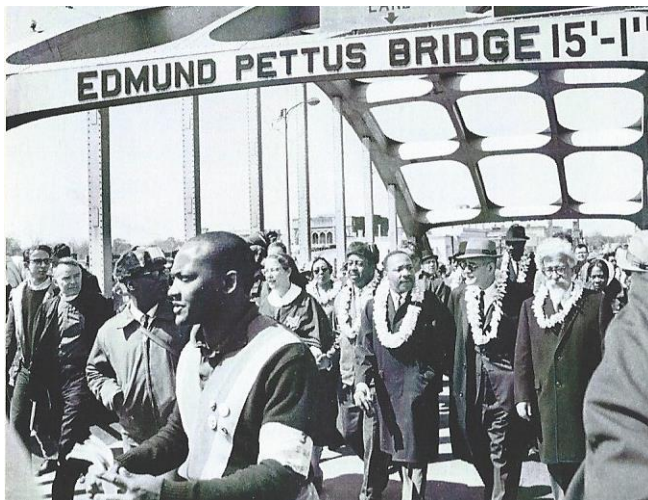
The reason was simple. This isolated group of dissidents in the Soviet Union had already experienced the power of freedom to transform an individual, and understood its power to transform a society. They needed no reminders. The idea that a nation of slaves could

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win its freedom and defeat the most powerful empire in the world was to us not an ancient legend, but an eternal truth..."

Sharansky was absolutely right. The universal message of the Exodus is an infinite truth which has dominated every freedom movement in the Western World. As I mentioned once before, the Jewish poet Henrich Heine summarised this fact brilliantly, saying: "Since the Exodus, freedom has always spoken in a Hebrew accent."

And indeed the Exodus influenced Cromwell during the English Civil War, and George Washington during the American War of Independence. It greatly inspired Abraham Lincoln in his bid to abolish slavery in America. Moreover, in our time and age, it deeply stirred the Civil Rights Movement of black Americans led by Martin Luther King.



His utterances during the course of this struggle echo the prophets of Israel. In many instances, he quoted directly from Amos and Isaiah. Later on he compared himself to Moses, the leader of the Exodus. It is well known that towards the end of his life Moses climbed up the mountain of Nevo. From the summit he looked upon the Promised Land, but he was not allowed to enter it with the rest of Israel. He therefore died and was buried in a strange land: in the land of Moav.

Like Moses, Martin Luther King claimed that he had been to the mountaintop, peered over and viewed the Promised Land. In one of his speeches he clearly attested to this, remarking:

"We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountain top. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land.

I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I do not fear any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

This was in fact his last speech. He was shot the following day. As did Moses, King died without reaching the "Promised Land". Earlier though, he had accepted an invitation to celebrate the Seder with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, but passed away in Memphis in 1968 just a few weeks before Passover. Yet his fight was not in vain. As he had envisaged, his people "got to the Promised Land" and attained their civil rights. More astounding still, a black man has in our day and age been elected to rule those who were

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once the oppressors. This is clearly a great modern miracle, a wonder roused by the prophets of Israel and the universal message of the Exodus.

Yet the yearning for freedom never ceases. It continues unabated everywhere. Lately it seized North Africa and the Middle East. Most astoundingly, it reached our next door neighbour, Syria, 3300 years after Moses. Sadly, though, the blood libel that began in Norwich, England, in 1144, and plagued Europe for centuries, finally infected the Arab countries, but much earlier than the arrival of the 'Arab Spring' and continued to this very day.

I would like to make mention of two incidents which demonstrate the depths of depravity reached among the Arab elite in relation to this issue.

The first concerns the Saudi King Faisal. In the early 1970s, the King told a Cairo newsman about his experiences in Paris, saying:

"Two years ago when I was in Paris, police discovered the bodies of five children... Afterwards, it turned out that Jews had killed the children in order to mix their blood into their bread."

The second episode involves a Syrian personality, Nabila Shaalan, who served as a delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. There she tried very hard to pass a motion that defines Zionism as racism. To augment her case, she recommended to the Commission (in her words) "a very important work that demonstrates unequivocally the historical reality of Zionist racism - the work of Mustafa Tlass named 'The Matzah of Zion'." This was the "best suggestion" that she could have made.

Who was Mustafa Tlass, and what was his work about? Tlass was one of the worst anti-semites in Syria. He acted as Defence Minister of Syria during the Yom Kippur War. At that time, the Syrian army captured Israeli soldiers on Mount Hermon and hacked them to death using axes. Tlass decorated these murderers as Syrian heroes, and promised before the media to highly honour any soldier who similarly slashed "Jews" to death with an axe. In 1985, still as Defence Minister, he produced his work 'The Matzah of Zion' which justifies the infamous Damascus blood libel. This horrendous episode began with the disappearance in Damascus, on February 5th 1840, of a Capuchin father called Tomaso. A confession was extracted from a Jewish barber by torture. This led to pogroms against the Jewish community of Syria, and the abduction of sixty-three Jewish children.

To recommend to the UN Human Rights Commission the work of a war criminal which justified pogroms against Jews and the kidnapping of their children as historical proof of racism, not of the brutal perpetrators but as racism of the victims i.e. "Jewish racism" is indicative of the ghastly extent of wickedness that Nabila Shaalan and her masters in Damascus had arrived at. For her infamous services to the Assad regime, she was promoted to the post of Deputy Foreign Minister of Syria. Consequently, she ended up serving a genocidal regime, one that has already effected the slaughter of over 80,000 of its own citizens; a regime which shells innocent civilians with tanks and artillery; and which wipes out entire villages using bombs and missiles. Mrs Shaalan should take a close

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look at herself now. She will find that there is blood not only in her bread but also on her hands – in fact, she is neck-deep and fast sinking in the blood of her own brethren. History has verified that he who validates the massacre of innocent Jews will by law justify the destruction of his own people. Syria is the latest proof of this.

But whichever libels we have been charged with, and whatever suffering and persecution we have endured over time, we have stayed faithful to the ethical teachings of Judaism stemming from our Exodus experience. The message of the Exodus has always had a profound effect on the collective memory and the conscience of our people. It has always provided a motive force behind our moral conduct. It has made us sensitive to the plights of others and eager to help the oppressed and the under trodden in our midst. This is most evident in the handful of examples which follow:

1ST: How a Synagogue Became a Hotel

In the very cold winters of Toronto, numerous homeless people search for refuge. In 1995, a synagogue by the name of ‘Holy Blossom Temple’ opened its doors as a shelter for the homeless. Over 500 people aged 6 to 95 sign up annually as volunteers.

From early November until a week before Passover, the homeless arrive for Thursday dinners and Friday breakfasts. School children collect clothing for them. The families of Bar Mitzvah boys decorate their tables with baskets of socks and toiletries, which are then distributed amongst the attending homeless. Teams charged with organising social activities provide books and magazines, and arrange art shows on alternate weeks.

The homeless have tried to pay the synagogue back in their own way. In one instance, on an extremely cold night, an exhausted individual entered the synagogue from the streets, and, speaking with great difficulty, requested food. After eating he shuffled over to the piano, and before anyone was able to prevent him from touching the instrument, he sat down and played the most beautiful pieces by Bach and Vivaldi. The whole room fell silent. After playing continuously for about thirty minutes, the man got up and without uttering a word went back out into the bitter darkness.

2nd: How Jewish Schoolchildren Became Abolitionists of Slavery

Leah Kroll, a teacher from high school ‘Stephen S. Wise Temple’ in Los Angeles told the following remarkable story about her students, writing:

“It all began as a program to make the holiday of Passover more meaningful for the students at our school. The entire school, students and teachers, read Sonia Levitin’s book *Dream Freedom* which chronicles the modern problem of slavery in Sudan, where Muslim gangs with army support take over Christian villages and sell men, women and children as slaves. Two weeks before Passover, the school convened to meet Francis Bok, a Sudanese slave who escaped to America. One student wrote: *“Before meeting Frances Bok, slavery seemed like a horrific nightmare, but I never imagined that the nightmare would stand right in front of me. To witness a slave was an enlightening experience and I thank God every day that I am free. The whole concept of selling people like property and*

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treating them like animals is the most horrendous and disturbing problem that faces our world today. I learned that 27,000,000 people are enslaved today. Now all my problems seem so miniscule. Today I am helping to free several in bondage.”

It costs only \$36 to free a slave, to buy their freedom from the Sudanese captors. Many students made bracelets engraved with the name of a slave who had been recently captured. Others wrote a prayer for their Seder tables to remind us that we who were once slaves need to work for the freedom of others. In two weeks, the middle school students collected a whopping \$14,700 – enough to free 411 slaves! As Jews, we know that we cannot remain silent while others have been abandoned into bondage.”

How wonderful and touching this account is! But equally moving is the 3rd example: an incident that occurred about 150 years ago in Newport, Rhode Island, USA, just by the Canadian border. Before recounting the story however I would like to mention that in ancient times harbouring a runaway slave was forbidden in most parts of the globe. It was required that the slave be promptly returned to his owner. Sheltering an escapee usually carried a sentence of capital punishment. The only exception to this was the Law of Israel. The Bible commands us to do just the opposite – to give refuge to the fugitive slave. In Deuteronomy 23; 15-16 it says: “You should not deliver to his master the slave who escaped to you. He shall dwell with you, among you, in the place which he shall choose. Do not oppress him.” The tale to follow wholly fulfils this biblical mitzvah, as you will see.

It took place in the oldest standing synagogue in North America, which was built in 1763 in Newport, Rhode Island, by Spanish-Portuguese immigrants, descendants of persecuted Marrano Jews. They had come to America so they could, for the first time in generations, openly practise their Judaism in their new home. In the centre of the synagogue, under the Bima, they built a special hiding place, as a lesson learned from their many years of persecution and their undercover Jewish activities. For 100 years the congregants retold their story and passed on the secret of the underground shelter.

Thankfully, Jews have never had to use this sanctuary. But there were other people who came to the synagogue in search of a hiding place on their way to freedom from oppression: In the years preceding the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves in the United States (1863), many slaves were smuggled from the South to the North, on their way to safety in Canada. The Jewish community put their synagogue and its underground hiding place at the disposal of the refugee slaves, fugitives from injustice, proceeding to freedom. In this way, they gave a renewed interpretation to the mitzvah of Deuteronomy, whereby descendants of slaves are required to help other slaves to freedom.

David Ben-Gurion and the Matzah

Besides its impact upon our national conscience, the Exodus has been a source of motivation for the Zionist movement and the revival of Jewish life in the Holy Land. There are of course some interesting stories on this subject, but with time being short I shall recount just a brief anecdote about David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel.

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Ben-Gurion strived his whole life to establish a Jewish state in the Holy Land. Legend has it that he had a flash of inspiration one Seder Night from the matzah. It is believed that when he performed Yahatz, and broke the middle matzah into two halves, he was suddenly struck with the idea of dividing Palestine into two states – a Palestinian and a Jewish state. This thought gave rise to the birth of the State of Israel. This way the bread of affliction turned to be the bread of freedom.

The Exodus from Russia and Ethiopia

The establishment of the State of Israel triggered the ‘modern Exodus’ from all corners of the globe. Every community has its own unique story of deliverance. The most recent are the aliyah from communist Russia and that from Marxist Ethiopia.

The exodus from Russia was on a far greater scale than the biblical departure from Egypt. One million Jews left Russia when the mighty communist empire was verging on collapse, proceeding hurriedly just like our ancestors. Here is **the testimony of one Russian immigrant, Yigael Asnis:**

“In Haste We Left Communist Russia: The story of my liberation is the story of my teeth and the ballet ‘Swan Lake’. In August 1991 I prepared to make aliyah from the Soviet Union: we sold the apartment, I left my job, I was issued a visa for Israel, and I had bought tickets for November. And then, suddenly... I was about to leave the house one morning for a final root canal appointment at the dentist. But when I turned on the television and saw that all channels were broadcasting the same performance of ‘Swan Lake’, I realised right away that dramatic political events must be happening. The Soviet Union always broadcast ‘Swan Lake’ to cover up when important things were happening. It quickly became clear that a coup was taking place, and that the Communist regime was about to end.

But I was worried – all the borders would probably be closed and I was afraid I’d be stuck in the Soviet Union. I went to the Jewish Agency representatives and they told me that they had chartered a second plane to Israel that very day! I called home and said, “We’re leaving for the airport in two hours, start packing!” We managed to take documents and clothing, but I was forced to leave most of my books behind.

The root canal I should have finished that day left me with a gaping hole in my tooth that caused me great pain, but there wasn’t time. I knew what I didn’t finish in the crumbling Soviet Union, I would take care of in my own home, in the State of Israel.”

And so it was. One million Russian Jews arrived in Israel, integrated themselves into society and greatly contributed to the cultural, scientific, technological and political life of the country.

Like the Russian aliyah, the Ethiopian exodus took place against the clock while the Marxist regime there was on the brink of disintegration. **Micha Odenheimer, a journalist and programme director for Ethiopian immigrants,** was an eyewitness and wrote the following testimony:

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“Operation Solomon – From Ethiopia on Eagle Wings: On Friday night, May 24, 1991, fourteen thousand four hundred Jews from Beita Yisrael crowded into the Israeli Embassy compound in Addis Ababa, the capital. They were caught between a nightmare and a dream, the danger of slaughter by the rebel army that encircled the capital and the opportunity to make aliyah to Israel at the last possible moment before the invasion by the rebels.



Months earlier the Jews of Ethiopia who had lived for centuries as farmers in the Gondar region abandoned their homes, sold their property and migrated – often by foot – 700km south to the slums of the capital of the Marxist regime, hoping to leave from there to Israel.

Eight weeks earlier the priests (called *kesim*) celebrated at the Israeli Embassy their last Passover in Ethiopia. After purifying themselves in water they laid their hands on ten one-year-old sheep, blessed them, and then ritually slaughtered and roasted them. When the *kesim* honoured me by offering me – an Ashkenazi Orthodox Jew – a piece of the lamb, I hesitated for a moment

because their kashrut is different than my own. Yet I knew that eating the Pesach lamb has always been the symbol of inclusion in the Jewish community, so I expressed my solidarity with their Exodus and ate my first Paschal sacrifice.

Now, only weeks after Pesach, the final Exodus was to begin under the title ‘Operation Solomon’. The Marxists who ruled the capital had made a deal with Israel for a \$35m bribe (paid by American Jewish philanthropists) to release the Jews in a massive airlift just days before the government fell.

At the Israeli embassy, 14,400 Jews spent all night long in darkness and exceptional calm and discipline. They experienced a mixture of fear and hope (reminiscent of the children of Israel in Egypt on the first Seder night).

That night the Ethiopian Jews passed from one station to another at the embassy grounds. First the head of the household’s identity card was checked and his children counted off and given a sticker with the number of their bus to wear on their forehead. Then all their local money had to be thrown into a box, as demanded by the Ethiopian government. Afterwards all their possessions were relinquished, for lack of space in the planes. Only what they wore – their nicest clothes and gold jewellery – came with them, along with bread which was wrapped in their flowing garments.

I remembered the Biblical verses describing a similar ‘Night of Vigil’ in which no one slept, on Passover evening in Egypt: *“The people took their dough before it was leavened.... wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders (Exodus 12:34). That was.... a Night of Vigil”* (Exodus 12:42). Even the numbered stickers on their foreheads reminded me of the command, *“This shall serve you as a sign upon your hand and as a reminder on your forehead.... that the Lord freed you from Egypt with a mighty hand”* (Exodus 13:9).”

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Photographs of the Ethiopian exodus correspond strikingly strongly with Biblical descriptions of the departure from ancient Egypt. They could almost have been taken when the children of Israel left the land with Moses. Their departure was swift, as it is said in the Bible (Exodus 19:4) as if “on eagles’ wings”:

In under twenty-four hours, El-Al passenger planes and Hercules aircraft evacuated 14,400 people in the largest, longest and fastest airlift of refugees in world history. Forty journeys were made, covering over 1,560 miles and back in less than a day.

This was truly a miraculous exodus.

In Conclusion

Passover is about memory, and memory has a significant impact on our conscience and destiny. In fact, **extensive memory** has become one of **the distinctive characteristics of the Jewish people**. David Ben-Gurion described it as follows in 1947, before one of the UN committees:

“Three hundred years ago a ship called the Mayflower set sail to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England. Yet I wonder if there is one Englishman who knows at what time the ship set sail? Do the English know how many people embarked on this voyage? What quality of bread did they eat?

Yet more than three thousand years ago, before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt. Every Jew in the world, even in America or Soviet Russia knows on exactly what date they left – the fifteenth of the month of Nisan; everyone knows what kind of bread the Jews ate – Matzah. Even today the Jews worldwide eat Matzah on the 15th of Nisan. They retell the story of the Exodus and all the troubles Jews have endured since being exiled, saying: *“This year, slaves. Next year free! This year here. Next year in Jerusalem, in Zion, in Eretz Yisrael!”* That is the nature of the Jews.”

This is truly notable. But to my mind, there is more to say about the qualities of the Jewish people. To illustrate this, I would like to share a story about **turtles**. But, I hear you say, what have **turtles** to do with the Exodus? Well, listen to this:

Every year, hundreds of giant green sea turtles swim hundreds of miles from their natural habitat on the Brazilian coast to tiny Ascension Island in the Atlantic Ocean in order to mate. For years, researcher and pioneer conservation biologist Archie Carr tried to understand how the turtles found their way to the island from so great a distance, when even airplanes had trouble locating it. Carr’s conclusions were fascinating: he claimed that the turtles navigate using **genetic memory**. Millions of years ago, when a strip of land bisected the Atlantic, the journey from Brazil to the closest stretch of the eastern shore was only a short swim. That land was submerged millions of years ago. But the turtles, driven by their **genetic memory**, still search and find the last remaining remnant of the world that disappeared into the ocean – Ascension Island. Every year they return to perpetuate the species and the memory.

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It is claimed that the human race is not as historic as these turtles. As a result, the phenomenon of **genetic memory** is not known amongst our kind. The experience of the Exodus, old and new, could dispel this theory. The turtles are described by scientists as **“creatures who exhibit strong site-fidelity as they return to nest on the beaches where their ancestors were born.”** This is exactly what we Jews do. It seems to me that the Jewish people are the only race who has developed this amazing capability. For two thousand years we were drawn, as if by a magnet, from all over the world to the shores of the Holy Land. Throughout history, whenever the population of Jerusalem was counted, Jews were found to comprise the majority of its inhabitants. Nowadays, since the establishment of the State of Israel, we visit the Holy Land continuously and much more often than at any other time. We even set up second homes there and our children immigrate, get married and ‘nest’ there permanently. Even from within our small community, quite a few young members did just this – Dan Kosky, David and Sarah Preston, my son Avy and a score of their childhood friends. **This is, to my mind, the human equivalent of the genetic memory displayed by the giant turtles.** There is only one hope – that our children will multiply there as profusely as the turtles, and fill the shores of the land as they do the island beaches. This is so important for the survival of the Jewish people and for the eternity of Israel.

It seems most fitting, therefore, to end this D’var Torah by greeting you all with the traditional salutation of Seder Night – may we be **next year in Jerusalem. Amen!**