

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Va'eira

God instructs *Moshe* to deliver a message to the children of Israel:

Therefore, say to the children of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will take you out (וְהוֹצֵאתִי) from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you (וְהִצַּלְתִּי) from their labor, and I will redeem (וְגִאֲלְתִּי) you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you (וְלָקַחְתִּי) to Me as a people, and I will be a God to you, and you will know that I am the Lord your God, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Ex. 6:6-7)

The Sages (JT *Pesachim* 10:1) ritualized this poetry of comfort by commanding us to drink four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, one for each of the descriptions of redemption used by God. According to the Rabbis, these words are not merely synonyms, and the repetition of phrases is not simply Divine poetic license.

Just as each of the four cups of wine has an increasing effect on us, so too does God's promise(s) of redemption build to a final crescendo. First, we will be freed from the burdens. *Dayeinu*. Next, we will be relieved from the back-breaking work. *Dayeinu*. Afterwards, God will remove us from Egypt (*dayeinu*) and finally, using a Biblical word intentionally calculated to evoke the relationship of a husband and wife, God will 'take us' as a people. *Dayeinu*.

But if the story ended there, we would still be living in *Sukkot*, wandering in the Sinai Desert, schlepping the Tabernacle and the Tablets. That is why God presented Moshe and the Children of Israel with a fifth and final promise, one that would transform us from a newly freed people into a distinct nation:

I will bring you (וְהִבְאֵתִי) to the land, concerning which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage.
 (Ex. 6:8)

That last promise of the Land of Israel is also ritualized at the Seder with a cup of wine, but we do not imbibe it. Rather, we pour it and then we set it aside for *Eliyahu HaNavi*. Why this strange custom?

Perhaps the answer can be gleaned by considering that Rabbi Tarfon established that the Fifth Cup of Wine is recited after the meal, over the second part of Hallel. Hallel is split

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at the Seder, like the Red Sea, which is fascinating; part of it is chanted before dinner and the balance afterwards.

Reading the Psalms that comprise Hallel, it is easy to see that first part (Psalms 113-114) is dedicated to the historical past, to the celebration of the redemption from Egypt, while the second part of Hallel looks outward into the future. After dinner, the Seder has subtly transformed from an historical reenactment of past glory to a joyful contemplation of an as-yet-unrealized future. The Seder is no longer about Egyptian slavery; it is about a coming enlightenment.

Perchance now we can understand why the Fifth Cup is poured but left untouched, and why we invite *Eliyahu HaNavi* to the Seder to drink it. It is, after all, the Prophet *Eliyahu* who will help usher in the era of peace that is contemplated by the as-yet-unfulfilled promises of Hallel and the Messianic era.

So we pour the cup, and in doing so we tease ourselves about a future worth singing about, and we remind God that there are promises that still need fulfilling. We even go so far as to give God a (melodious) time limit: "Next year in (the rebuilt) Jerusalem!"

Sadly, God's message fell on deaf ears:

Moshe spoke [these words] to the *B'nei Yisrael*, but they would not listen to *Moshe* because of *kotzer ruach* (distress) and *avodah kasha* (hard labor).
(Ex. 6:9)

We have no such excuse to tune out God's message of hope, redemption, and peace!

Shabbat Shalom!

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