In Each and Every Generation

The expression “in each and every generation” is recited twice each year as we read the Haggadah at the Pesach Seder. Once in Vehi SheAmda: “but in each and every generation, they rise up to destroy us. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivers us from their hands” and once: “In each and every generation, it is the duty of man to consider himself as if he had come out of Egypt.”

The Pesach Haggadah exposes us to three elements of Judaism, in reference to its past, present and future. The first: “And if G-d had not taken our ancestors from Egypt...” The second is a deeper look at the past from the perspective of the present: “In each and every generation, it is the duty of man...” and the third is an acknowledgment that present and past are precursors of the future: “Bring us to other appointed times and holidays...”

We must remember and contemplate the past to relive it in the present while looking to the future.

The two passages of “each and every generation...” are eternal. They have accompanied us as a nation since the Exodus, and have been a beacon of light during times of suffering and anguish.

The nation has remembered and celebrated the Exodus in freedom and with praise, not as a once-in-a-lifetime event in history’s archives, but as the secret to our constantly standing up to our enemies with steadfast resolve.

According to Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch, we say these passages in the Haggadah because “Everything that occurred to our ancestors has happened to us too. We do not celebrate an event from thousands of years ago, but rather the premise of our present, our future. We celebrate our salvation and fulfill the precepts associated with it, so as to bequeath our children with the tradition of salvation for the sake of celebrating the same freshness and sacredness of the Exodus.”

Rav Kook wrote: “In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we left Egypt.’ How do we actualize this outlook? This is not a passive perspective, but an active one. The redemption only started when we left Egypt. It continues and advances in each generation, until the final Redemption.”

“We all must contribute our part, according to our ability and our generation’s needs. The Jewish people was born in Egypt with all of its unique traits. But these traits are latent and are only realized over time. Each of us has a special portion in the Torah – as we say in the daily prayers, ‘Grant us our portion in Your Torah.’ So, too, each of us has a special part to play in the nation’s redemption.”

In our days, we have merited the ingathering of the exiles and impressive national achievements that have led to political independence. But it is not yet complete. In tandem with these achievements, we must play our part in the redemption of the nation. We need spirit and a vision of a continuous and sanctifying lifestyle, and only then can we be perfectly free people. We will continue to deepen the story of the Exodus, and draw encouragement and courage from the Haggadah’s recounting of G-d’s salvation for His people. May we sing a song of thanks for the final Redemption speedily in our days.

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