

Pesach Article (continued)

of open miracles.

The climax of all of our preparation is the first night of Pesach. It is a time when we sit around the *seder* table with our children around us. We encourage their questions and we respond with loving and understandable answers, each on his or her personal level. Teaching our children about the miracles *H-shem* has done for us and the forming of the Jewish Nation is a focus of the evening.

I find it fascinating that the *Hagaddah* clearly states that the obligation of teaching the story of *yitzias mitzrayim* must take place at the *seder* table when *matzah* and *maror* are placed before you. Why not in shul or in any other place or time? Perhaps a nice walk in the park would be a beneficial place to communicate with our children.

There is a very significant message that we must learn from this *Chazal*. This lesson is the concept of family meals. Although there is much professional, secular literature written on the subject, it was first introduced by *Chazal*.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at an Ivy League university in New York conducted a study a few years ago on the significance of family dinners. "Kids who live in families that eat together regularly are less likely to be involved in anti-social behaviors". They reported that "these children are 61% more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs".

The report lists additional benefits of a family eating together, including

1. Bonding time
2. Time for family updates
3. Opportunity to resolve family conflicts
4. Time to model good manners
5. Healthier diets

So, the argument and need for family dinners is quite clear. However, I can also understand the argument that a *bais medresh* or a library might be much more conducive to concentrating and learning new subject material. Why is the quiet, more private setting not recommended? Let's explore and better understand why this is the case.

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, zt"l, in his remarkable way, explains the significance of communicating and teaching at mealtime. He explains that when a person is hungry and sits

down to eat, he feels G-d in his life in the most profound way. Before he eats, he is weak and hungry and feels a lack of energy. Then, in an instant, as he starts to eat, he feels himself getting stronger and energized. At this point, his feelings of gratitude to *H-shem* are at its peak. It is a time that he can see that G-d is the provider of all food and he can more easily feel *H-shem* in his life.

In the same vein, on the night of the *seder*, while we are already at a meal and in the mindset of gratitude, we are taught to tell the story of our ancestors leaving Egypt to become a nation. As a result, we feel gratitude to the Creator of the world. The gratitude flows from our stomachs to our hearts and to the rest of the body. We can actually feel the difference in our bodies in a matter of seconds.

This message is appropriate for people of all ages. It is possible to teach gratitude to even very young children. Yes, to communicate to them the need to be grateful is important. But to really drive home this message of gratitude, the most effective way is to teach by example. When our children observe us in this light it makes a deep and lasting impression on them. We must strive to constantly share and imbue this important attribute in our children.

Unfortunately, however, I often observe that our children have come to expect everything they are given without understanding the hardships that had to be overcome in acquiring these things. Instead of entitlement, parents should strive to teach humility and appreciation.

Recognizing that everything in our life comes from H-shem is a feeling that brings much stability and emotional health. If we would focus on this lesson, perhaps we would see less hardship and pain within our community.

I bless our community to have much nachas from their children. We should be successful in raising good, healthy, and grateful children.

*Good Yom Tov*