

# No Place for Hate

When I walk into the Sid Jacobson JCC, I notice the sign “Hate Has No Place Here.” I was part of an advertisement along with other Long Island rabbis against hate speech and disturbing rhetoric and action that occurred at Charlottesville. I had also gone along with a number of congregants to the Mid Island JCC to be part of a Break the Hate event co-sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League.

In this week’s parsha, Israel is being freed from Egypt ( היום יצאתם )  
ממצרים.<sup>1</sup> This is great cause for the Israelites to rejoice and to wreck  
vengeance on their Egyptian brethren. The Egyptians are eager for Israel  
to leave, proclaiming ותחזק מצרים את העם למהר לשלחם מן כי אמרו כלנו מתים  
הארץ “The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country,  
‘for otherwise,’ they said, ‘we will all die!’”<sup>2</sup> We learn in Beshellach  
that Israel leaves armed and in Bo we learn that Egypt gave Israel כלי-

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 13:3

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12:33

כסף וכלי זהב ושמלות, “silver, gold and clothing.”<sup>3</sup> Israel made out like a bandit in plundering Egypt upon their escape from slavery.

With all that had happened, one could surmise that Israelites would hate the Egyptians. After all, they enslaved us for 212 years (or, according to G-d’s prophecy to Abraham, for 400 years). However, at the end of his life, Moses implores Israel “Do not hate an Egyptian because you were a stranger in his land.”<sup>4</sup> What led Moses to say this?

Sir Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, “This is remarkable. The Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians. They owed them no debt of gratitude. On the contrary, they were entitled to feel a lingering resentment.” He concludes that “a people driven by hate are not-cannot be-free. Had the people carried with them a burden of hatred and a desire for revenge, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt, but he would not have taken Egypt out of the Israelites. They would still

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 12:35

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 23:7

be there, bound by chains of anger as restricting as any metal. To be free you have to let go of hate.”<sup>5</sup>

Mitzrayim means the place of constriction/narrowness. When we feel hatred (or negative emotions in general), our chest constricts, our shoulders rise and become tense, our fists clench. We close ourselves off, as opposed to the openness our body feels when we have joy and happiness.

How many of us are still bound by hatreds and resentments that we have held onto for years, unwilling to let go of? There’s a great reading in Siddur Hadash “Let us rid ourselves of hatreds and resentments which rob us of the peace we crave.”<sup>6</sup> By holding onto the past events, even when we were wronged, we are the ones who suffer. We cannot become whole until we let go of the past, becoming fully immersed in the present: moment-by-moment, breath-by-breath.

There’s a great video I saw at a Hebrew High staff meeting in Tucson about a father and son. The son complains about an acquaintance

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: Exodus* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2010), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Siddur Hadash Moreshet Edition, “Peace Means More than Quiet,” p. 61.

he had recently come across again who had wronged him a decade ago. His dad looked at him and said, “How much rent is he paying you?” The son was perplexed: “Rent, but he doesn’t live with me.” His father said, “He should be; he’s been living in your head all this time.”

When we hold onto events from the past, we hold ourselves back. When we hate someone for what they did to us in our hearts rather than forgiving them in our hearts, we hold ourselves back. When we cannot get over our hate and resentment that we feel towards another, even if we feel it is completely justified, we hold ourselves back.

The lesson that Moses is imparting is not to forget past wrongs but rather not to hate today because of them. We need to focus on what we can do in the present to make situations better for ourselves and for those we love rather than living in the past. What’s done is done and Moses recognizes that no amount of anger, vindication, upheaval or frustration will change it. He imparts on his people to not let the past in Egypt guide them but rather the future in the Promised Land. That is a lesson for us to take in as well: what can we do in the present to let go of hate,

resentment and aggravation from the past, embracing a present with only love and kindness so that we will be better off today, היום, as a result.