

OLAMI MENTORSHIP



**PESACH
SPECIAL**

PESACH INSPIRATION

On June 15, 1981, an extraordinary gathering took place in Jerusalem. More than six thousand Holocaust survivors arrived from every corner of the globe for the first World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.

They came from North America and South America, from Europe, Israel, Australia, and South Africa. Many had not seen each other since the war years. Some walked slowly with canes. Others arrived in wheelchairs. Many were accompanied by children and grandchildren who had grown up hearing fragments of their stories.

The gathering itself was remarkable for another reason. This was long before the internet, before email, before the convenience of modern communication. Coordinating such an event required enormous effort. Yet the survivors felt an urgency that transcended logistical obstacles.

They understood something that few others grasped as clearly. Time was running out.

The generation that had witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust firsthand was growing older. Soon there would be no one left who could stand before the world and say with certainty, "I was there."

At the same time, disturbing trends were beginning to emerge. There were already academics and writers who claimed the Holocaust had been exaggerated or fabricated. Holocaust denial was slowly finding a voice in certain corners of the world.

Even among those who did not deny the events outright, there was a different danger. A new generation was growing up with little emotional connection to the tragedy that had nearly destroyed the Jewish people. For many young people, the Holocaust was simply another chapter in a history book.



The survivors gathered in Yerushalayim because they shared a single concern. How could they ensure that the memory of the Holocaust would never be forgotten? During the three-day conference, many discussions revolved around education, testimony, and the preservation of historical records. But beneath the scholarly discussions was a deeper question.

How does a nation preserve memory?

How do you ensure that an event remains alive in the hearts and minds of future generations long after the eyewitnesses have passed away?

To address this question, several working groups were formed. Each group was tasked with thinking creatively about how the memory of the Holocaust could be preserved within families and communities.

One group suggested that every home of a Holocaust survivor should contain a visible reminder of the past: a painting, a photograph, a sculpture, something that would immediately communicate the story of survival.

Perhaps it would be the famous photograph of the small boy in the Warsaw Ghetto with his hands raised in surrender, or an image of the barbed wire fences that once surrounded the camps.

The idea was simple. Every time someone entered the home, they would be reminded that this family carried a sacred history.

Another group felt that reminders within the home were not enough. Memory needed to become personal.

They proposed that descendants of survivors might wear something on their bodies as a symbol of their connection to the Holocaust: a necklace, a bracelet, a pin.

Some even suggested the striking idea that descendants might wear replicas of the numbers tattooed on the arms of their parents or grandparents. In this way, the memory of what had happened would never drift far from their consciousness.





A third group suggested something more direct.

There should be a daily moment of acknowledgment. Each day, perhaps privately or as a family, people would pause and declare something simple but powerful.

"I am a descendant of Holocaust survivors. I am part of the miracle of Jewish survival."

Another group suggested a weekly ritual.

Once a week, the family would gather around the table for a meal and speak openly about their history. They would remind each other who they were and where they came from. They would ensure that the next generation understood the story not as distant history but as a living legacy.

A different group proposed a global educational effort.

There should be a universally recognized book that tells the story of the Holocaust in its entirety: the ghettos, the cattle cars, the labor camps, the gas chambers, the forced marches, the crematoria.

A book that every survivor family would use, regardless of language or location.



And finally, another group suggested something experiential.

Once each year, perhaps on the anniversary of the liberation from the camps, families should gather together and recreate aspects of what their ancestors had endured. They might wear simple garments resembling prison uniforms. They might eat the sparse food that prisoners were given. And the oldest members of the family would recount the story firsthand, ensuring that even young children would grow up understanding what had happened.

Some of these ideas were implemented in different ways. Others remained theoretical. But one principle became clear to everyone involved.

If the memory of the Holocaust was to endure, it could not depend on books alone.
Memory must be experienced.
Memory must be lived.
It must be woven into the fabric of daily life.



And when we step back and think about this idea, we discover something remarkable.

More than three thousand years ago, another event occurred that shaped the destiny of the Jewish people.

Yet despite the enormous passage of time, Jews throughout the world remember that event with extraordinary clarity.

We know the leader who guided the Jewish people to freedom.

We know the exact date on which the Exodus occurred.

We know what the Jewish people ate that night.

We know how they dressed, the route they traveled, and the dramatic sequence of events that unfolded.

How is that possible?

How is it that an event that occurred more than three millennia ago is remembered in such vivid detail, when many events from just a few hundred years ago have faded from collective memory?

The answer lies in the remarkable wisdom of the Torah.

The Almighty did not leave the memory of the Exodus from Egypt to chance. Instead, He embedded the story of the Exodus into the rhythm of Jewish life through a network of mitzvos designed specifically to preserve that memory.

Consider the parallels.

One of the proposals at the survivor gathering was to place a reminder at the entrance of every home.

In the Jewish home, that reminder already exists.

The mezuzah affixed to the doorpost reminds of the night of the Exodus and the blood of the Pascal lamb that was placed on the doorposts of each Jewish home. Every time we enter or leave our homes, we encounter a silent witness to that wondrous night.

Another suggestion was to wear something on the body as a constant reminder.

Every weekday morning, Jewish men bind tefillin upon their arm and head. The Torah explicitly describes tefillin as a sign that reminds us that The Almighty took the Jewish people out of Egypt, with a strong hand.

The tefillin are worn near the heart and rest upon the head near the mind, binding the memory of the exodus to both emotion and intellect.

Another proposal suggested that there should be a daily declaration acknowledging our connection to the past.

Twice every day, in the morning and again at night, Jews recite the Shema. At the conclusion of the Shema, we proclaim, "I am the Almighty your God who took you out of the land of Egypt." Remembering the exodus each day is a biblical mandate.

Another group at the conference suggested a weekly gathering where families sit together and reflect upon their history.

Each week, the Jewish family gathers around the Shabbat table.





And how do we begin that elevated experience?

With Kiddush, proclaiming that Shabbat is a remembrance of leaving Egypt.

Finally, there was the suggestion of an annual experiential event with a universally recognized book recounting the story.

Once a year, Jewish families gather for the Pesach Seder.

Before each participant lies the same book that has been used by Jews across the globe for centuries: the Haggadah.

Perhaps no Jewish text in history has been printed in more editions or languages than the Haggadah.

But the Seder does not merely recount the story.

It recreates it.

We eat matzah, the bread our ancestors ate when they left Egypt in haste.

We dip vegetables into salt water to remember the tears of slavery.

We taste charoset, recalling the mortar and bricks of forced labor.

We lean like free people.

We drink four cups of wine, celebrating the stages of geulah.



And the story is told not by rabbis alone but by parents and grandparents sitting around the table, passing the memory directly to the next generation.

The Torah's system for preserving memory is deliberate and profound.

Ramban explains that many mitzvot exist specifically to preserve the memory of Exodus. Through those mitzvot, we constantly remind ourselves that The Almighty did not merely create the world and step away. He continues to guide history and intervene in human affairs.

Similarly, the Sefer HaChinuch emphasizes a fundamental principle about human nature. Ideas that remain abstract are easily forgotten, but when beliefs are reinforced through physical action, they become deeply embedded within a person.

As he famously writes, a person is shaped according to his actions.

The Torah therefore created a system of remembrance that operates on multiple levels:

Daily reminders. Weekly reminders. Annual experiences.

Each layer reinforces the next.

Each mitzvah strengthens the chain.

And together, they ensure that the story of the Jewish people remains alive.

Perhaps this is one of the most astonishing realities of Jewish history.

Ask a child of five or six years old about the story of the Exodus, and they can describe it with surprising clarity.

They know about Moshe confronting Pharaoh. They know about the 10 plagues. They know about the hurried departure from Egypt, and the matzah baked in haste. They know about the splitting of the sea.

And yet these events occurred more than three thousand years ago.

Meanwhile, many people struggle to recall even basic details about events that occurred only a few centuries ago.

The difference lies in the Torah's profound understanding of how memory works.

Historical information preserved in books alone rarely survives intact across millennia.

But when memory becomes mitzvah, when it is embedded in the rhythms of daily life and celebrated in the warmth of the family home, it becomes almost impossible to erase.

And that is precisely what the Torah accomplished with the mitzvot commemorating the exodus from Egypt.

As we prepare to sit down at the Seder table, it is worth pausing to appreciate the magnitude of what we are about to do.

We are not simply reading an ancient text.
We are not merely performing a ceremonial meal.
We are participating in one of the most remarkable chains of memory in human history.

Every generation of Jews has done exactly what we are about to do. Parents have told this story to their children. Grandparents have reenacted the experience with matzah, Mah Nishtanah, and wine. And each generation has passed the story forward intact. Empires have risen and fallen.

Civilizations have appeared and disappeared.





Yet the Jewish people continue to gather every year and relive the night when freedom was born.

In truth, the greatest miracle of the Exodus may not only be the redemption itself.

It may be the fact that the memory of that redemption has survived so vividly for more than three millennia.

Perhaps before beginning the Seder this year, we should take a moment to share this idea with those sitting around our table.

Tonight, we are not merely observers of history. We are its guardians.

The chain that stretches back to the Exodus has reached us, and now it continues through us. When we ask the Mah Nishtanah, when we tell the story through of Egypt, when we eat the matzah and drink the wine, we are doing more than remembering.

We are ensuring that the story will never disappear.

Because more than three thousand years ago, the Almighty designed a system of mitzvot that would safeguard this memory for eternity.

And tonight, as we sit together at the Seder table, we become the living proof that His plan worked.

We celebrate not only the redemption of the past. We celebrate the miracle that the story is still alive. And that we are part of it.

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