

Bo: Let My People Know

- Rabbi David Gutterman.

Last week R' Gutterman discussed Moshe's message, "Let My People Go". This week he gives Moshe's current message, that teaches how our people are to survive: "When your son asks you...." Education is the secret of our survival. Moshe's message, is "Let My People Know".

The State of the Jewish Union

Last week we heard the concise content of Moses' speech to Pharaoh - and it was a sort of shot heard 'round the world: "Let my people go that they may serve Me." But were I to ask, what will become the essential and defining tag line for the strength and vitality of this union of Jews - we need to hear Moses' speech this week.

Let's put this in context. Moses, the reluctant but great leader of the Jews, is now addressing a people who had been humiliated, enslaved and subjugated for 210 years. They had just now lived through the ten plagues -and, contrary to our popular understanding, the rabbis suggest that 80% of the Jewish people of that day did not survive. As cacophonous as it sounds - Egypt was the first holocaust of our people. The survivors, as it were, had now witnessed the discomfiture of their oppressors and they were now preparing to embark on a journey. A journey which would entail the acceptance of a sacred charge - to become the union for G-d and holy values. Jews will journey to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

So on the eve of this liberation, what would you say to this nascent and fledgling people? What would be your state of the union message?

Listen to Moses' speech because it is potent. His wasn't a call to revenge or a call to power. He speaks to the people of the more essential and fundamental things; yes - of memory and of concretizing and institutionalizing memory - but more pointedly, Moses speaks of the future, children, and learning. "When your child will ask you tomorrow," "When your children will inquire of you, you will be able to say and instruct them," "And you will dialogue with your children."

In a word, Moses delivers a most powerful and eloquent response - how will this state of the Jewish union survive and thrive? In a word - education. A people can only be free and a society can only flourish where education is the passion. This is the hallmark of dignity, this is the essence of power, and this is the Jewish message.

Interestingly enough, universal education was not instituted in England until 1870 and even later in the United States. The Talmud tells us that universal Jewish education was already instituted by the end of the Second Temple period. "Remember for good the man Yehoshua ben Gamla...he instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and in every city. (Bava Batra 21a)

Is it any wonder that Time Magazine determined that the most seminal and significant event of the millennium was the advent of Gutenberg's printing press - sometime in the late 15th century.

Why? Because now knowledge and an exchange of ideas can be writ large and more widely disseminated. Now, people can become "educated." How interesting and how enlightened - but isn't this what Moses was teaching the Jewish people a mere few thousand years before?

So, were I to ask: What will become the essential and pivotal tag line that will define the state of the Jewish union? All we need do is take our cue from Moshe Rabeinu - he was, after all, our greatest rabbi.

"Let my people go" was the speech he delivered to Pharaoh; but the speech that he delivered to the Jewish people was, 'Let my people...Know.' Dare I say, powerful then and powerful now.

Shabbat Shalom,
David