

## **Bo: Together**

- Nisson Shulman.

Joining the group of the Pesach Seder has a lesson for Jewish survival, the unity as a family, a group, a people, a synagogue.

Bo: Family

Before they left Egypt, our ancestors were instructed to join a group of one or more families for the Paschal offering and that first Seder. Our sages ruled that he who failed to enrol in a Paschal unit before the offering was made was to be barred from joining a group later (Mishnah Zebahim 5:8).

This regulation is important, because it represents a reversal of the Egyptian attitude to group life. The Torah records that in Egypt "One did not see his brother". Everyone looked out only for himself. That was the major symptom of the plague of darkness which struck Egypt. No man saw his brother! He refused to look to the wants of another or to help in an hour of need. And wherever that characteristic exists in any society, one can say there is truly a plague of moral darkness that engulfs it.

So the way we brought the Paschal offering was a demonstration against such a selfish attitude. The order to join a unit of other Jews taught our people a lesson in community responsibility.

Examine the Siddur, the tear stained and time-honoured prayerbook of Israel, and you will see how it fairly bristles with a sense of community. In the daily Shemone Esreh the prayers are in the plural form only. "Hear us, O Lord.... Listen to our pleas.... May our eyes behold Thy return to Zion with mercy." Everywhere the emphasis is on "We, Our and Ours" - not on "I, Me or Mine".

As a matter of fact, this was the plan of the Creator when He brought the world into being. Everything that lives came in pairs. Only God is one. Even in the inanimate world there is a constant process of fusion. Oxygen and hydrogen are joined to give us water. Sodium and Chlorine, which by themselves are poisons, when joined give us salt. When certain metals are fused they give us steel and other alloys which constitute the sinews of modern industry.

Scientists tell us that at one time in history two types of living creatures inhabited the earth. There were the large, powerful beasts, like the dinosaurs. Many were predators. These animals perished. The ants, the birds, the bees, which joined and formed communities, are thriving to this day.

Human language came into being as a result of man's effort to communicate with his fellows and thus escape oppressive loneliness. Words and gestures were invented to help him plan a better life.

A good home is a place where members of a family have learned harmonious existence by

communicating the best and the finest within them, and where they speak not in terms of "I, me and mine" but "We our and ours". The Tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Arye Levine, took his wife to the doctor with pain in her foot. He said to the Doctor, "Doctor, our foot hurts."

You may have heard the legend about a great mam being conducted on a tour of the other world. On reaching Gehenna he was surprised to find the people seated around colourful banquet tables loaded with appetizing food, appealing to the eye and the palate. But they looked starved. The reason was obvious. Long spoons were tied to their hands and no one could manage to get even a morsel into his mouth. He was then taken to heaven. There he saw exactly the same arrangement. The people were seated at banquet tables and long spoons were tied to their hands, yet they looked well and happy. The man turned to his celestial guide and asked, "Why do people look so good here?" The angel explained, "Here the people have learned to feed one another. That is why it is heavenly here!"

I wish people would become more conscious of the principle that happiness is the result of cooperation; that peace is the product of the true WE spirit in society. Life would then be heavenly for all.

But that is far from all. Because the greatest danger we face as a people is the break-up of the Jewish family. Even if the Gentile world had loose and unsatisfactory family life for generations, nothing in the past compares to the breakdown we are experiencing in the general society. We in our Jewish community had far stronger families, and in fact the family unit has always been the secret of our survival. We are now following the general trend and this vital element in our survival is being lost. It is a jugular threat to our people.

One of the ways to strengthen the family in these times is through the Synagogue. While it is true that the Synagogue depends on the Jewish family for its strength, even more so the Jewish family can find cohesion and strength and values and ideals and common goals through the Synagogue. Immense strength for each member family is available through the activities, and even more through the Synagogue prayers itself, for through them we are linked with the total Jewish people everywhere in the world, and all of us gain strength from each other. The link is stronger yet, because it links all our generations from the first Jewish family of Abraham and Sarah till the ending of time.

One of my favourite stories is a man who lived in the North of England who regularly attended Sabbath services of his congregation. Suddenly he stopped coming. The rabbi inquired and was informed that the man was well. One evening he went to visit the man. He found the synagogue member seated comfortably at the fireplace reading a book. The fire was warm, and the rabbi sat down near his host. He then took a live piece of coal with the tongs and set it in a corner of the fireplace. While the rest of the fire was warm and glowing, the isolated piece of coal grew paler by the minute until it was cold and dead. The rabbi said nothing. He arose, bade his neighbour goodnight and went home. Next Sabbath the man returned to the Services. He had gotten the point. I see in that man, an entire family, whose glow of warmth and the radiation of glory can be kept burning by association with other such families, and the Synagogue is one of the best ways to nurture that association.

May this kind of accusation be one of many ways we shall find to strengthen the bonds of husband and wife, parents and children, ancestors and future generations till the ending of time, amen veamen.