

In the Passover Seder we read that “even if all of us were wise, all of us discerning, all of us veteran scholars, and all of us knowledgeable in Torah, it would still be a mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus.” But in our modern world we tend to see study and learning as we do most other things – as means to an end. We learn what we need to do to get the job done and no more. When we have concluded the task or learned enough to carry it out, we stop learning and move on to something else.

In Judaism however, learning is a lifelong task. Thus, no matter how learned we are, no matter how much of Judaism we know, we are still commanded to continue learning and teaching about our tradition. Indeed, in the case of the seder and the weekly Torah portion, we are commanded to learn about the same selection of laws and stories again and again every year, year after year. This may seem strange to us. After all, we may think, there is only so much to learn in any body of knowledge, and once we know it, why retread the same path again and again to simply learn what we already know. The seder itself provides an answer to the question. After the words quoted above, the seder continues to tell of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria who admits that despite being a man of seventy he never understood a particular aspect of the seder until another rabbi explained it to him. There is always more to learn, whether we are 7 or 70 and our tradition ingrains this in our thinking by commanding us to return to the same texts year after year.

And beyond that our tradition reminds us that learning is not just about facts and figures. There is a difference between having information and knowing what to do with it; there is a difference between knowing something and understanding its meaning; and there is a difference between having the facts and knowing how to apply them responsibly and morally in our lives. That is the difference between knowledge and wisdom and an important part of our Jewish tradition. On Passover we not only learn what our tradition tells us about the Exodus from Egypt but we contemplate what that means for us today and how to live according to the lessons of the Exodus.

In learning about our slavery we are reminded to be humble. In learning about our rescue from slavery we are reminded to be grateful for what we have. And in learning that we should consider ourselves as if we were slaves in Egypt we are reminded that we should always be compassionate to those who are oppressed and downtrodden.

No matter our age our tradition tells us that learning is always valued and ongoing. As we look forward to our seders this year, be aware of what can be learned this year that we did not learn

last year. Even if we have done the same seder for many years there is always more to learn, both about the rituals and details of our tradition and about the deep and abiding wisdom that can be gleaned from that tradition if we are open to learning.

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