

MATZA, REDEMPTION & DARFUR
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The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, ... So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. ...

The Israelites journeyed from Raamses to Succoth, about 600,000 men on foot, aside from children. Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. And they baked unleavened cakes of dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. [*Exodus*, 12:33-39.]

... for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress – for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly – so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live. [*Deuteronomy* 16:3.]

The sparse language of the Torah tells of our dramatic exodus from Egypt. The tension is felt still in the unembellished telling: when finally released by the pharaoh, we left in a hurry, at night, before even our meager bread could rise, before we could collect our belongings. We left, an entire community, 600,000 strong, into the desert. To wander, albeit not alone.

We are told that the *matza* represents three things: One, it represents the bread of poverty that our ancestors ate as slaves in the land of Egypt. Eating the dry, tasteless cracker-like bread reminds us that as humble slaves we were denied all human comforts and pleasures. Two, it reminds us of the hasty flight of the Israelites from Egypt when God redeemed us and took us out of the land of our oppression. And, three, it was the bread of freedom which our ancestors ate when the hour of freedom arrived.¹

We are to eat the *matza*, at once a bread of our humiliation as slaves and our bread of joy at becoming free people. We are to eat it “as if” we – ourselves – had gone forth from slavery to freedom. We are to eat it because the Exodus is a story of then and of now.

But we know that the story of the exodus in Darfur is not a story of redemption. It is

¹Leona S. Green, *The Traditional Egalitarian Passover Haggadah* (South Euclid, Ohio: Norlee Publishing, Ltd., 2002), p. 49, citing Kaplan, Mordechai, Kohn, Eugene, and Einsenstein, Ira (eds.), *The New Haggadah* 2d ed. rev. (New York: Berman House Inc., 1978), pp. 65-66. For similar discussions of matza being a bread that we ate as slaves, not simply as bread that did not have sufficient time to rise at our sudden exodus, see Joseph Elias, *The Haggadah* (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd. [Art Scroll Series] 1977), p. 144-145.

not a glorious story of going from slavery to freedom. It is not an exodus into the desert, protected by a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire in the night. It is a continuing story of humiliation, of deprivation, of a hurried leaving, of a people sent wandering into the desert. But, we can become their protectors. We can hear their cries of affliction, and we can act to help them.

Thirty-six times in the Torah we are told to remember that we were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thus, we are commanded to treat other humans with dignity and respect because we were once slaves and we remember that degradation. Tonight we celebrate our redemption from slavery. As free people, let us act together to end the humiliation of the people of Darfur.