

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I noticed that you were a signatory on a letter from a number of Rabbis, in today's TJP, proclaiming their objection to any legitimization of intermarriage. The letter ends with blessings of continuing the unbroken chain with began with the first Passover, leaving Egypt until today. But surely, as slaves to the Egyptians, there must have been much intermarriage and relations with their Egyptian taskmasters, leading to much Judeo-Egyptian blood mingled in those leaving Egypt. This doesn't seem to be an appropriate blessing to delegitimize intermarriage, or to usher in the Passover holiday.

Gloria T.

Dear Gloria,

*Rashi*, the classical commentary on the Torah (France, d 1105), addresses your question. The Torah, when enumerating the leading Jewish families which left Egypt, seems to do a strange thing. It surrounds each name, front and back, with the letters *yud* and *hey*. These two letters spell one of the names of G-d. Why would the Torah do that?

Rashi explains the following: "Since the nations of the world were belittling the Israelites, saying 'how can these people trace their lineage back to the Tribes of Jacob? Isn't it obvious that, while in servitude, the taskmasters controlled their (Israelite) maidservants? If they controlled the men, certainly they controlled the women!' Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, connected His Name with theirs, attaching the letter *hey* on one side of their names and a *yud* on the other side. This is G-d's own testimony that they are truly the offspring of their patriarchs and matriarchs. This is the meaning of the words of King David 'The tribes of *yud* and *hey*, a testimonial to Israel', (Psalms ch. 122); This Name of G-d testifies upon them and their tribes (that they are pure), hence each tribal name carries the *yud* and *hey*, such as Chanoch the family of *Hachanochi*, Palu the family of *Hapalui*. (Starting with the *hey* and ending with the *yud*)..." (Rashi to Bamidbar/Numbers 26:5).

The Jews, despite their many years of servitude, succeeded in staying physically separate from their taskmasters and Egyptian society at large. In fact, the Talmud tells us that it was in the merit of three accomplishments that the Jews were redeemed from Egypt: They did not change their names, language or mode of dress. Those three items are what identify a people as a nation apart. This was despite tremendous pressure to "modernize" and assimilate into the popular and prestigious Egyptian culture. In fact, Rashi on a different verse points out that there were many Jews who did, in fact, assimilate. Those Jews perished and were buried during the plague of darkness, since they lost the merit to join the intact Jewish nation in their miraculous redemption from Egypt. They forfeited, by their assimilation, their place in the annals of Jewish history, and being the subject of discussion of generations of Jews at the Passover Seder.

In the same way that the Al-mighty attached His Name to the Tribes of old, the miracle of our survival endures today. Despite all the nations that have controlled and ruled over us, we have, often at the cost of our lives, ensured the integrity of our lineage as Jews. This is a large part of our celebration of Pesach.

May we be worthy to pass on the torch to the next generation, which will illuminate the world with the final redemption, the arrival of Moshiach speedily in our days.

With wishes for a joyous, meaningful Pesach to you and all the readers.