A few years ago, the Dalai Lama invited a group of rabbis to meet with him. He wanted to learn from them the secret of Jewish survival. The Dalai Lama leads a people living in exile from their homeland, Tibet, and he is worried about his people losing their unique traditions through assimilation. He wanted to learn from the assembled Jewish religious leaders how Jews endured thousands of years of exile from their land and yet managed to survive as a unique people.

What do you think was the answer the rabbis gave, what is the secret to Jewish survival?

The Seder – the telling and retelling of the story of our slavery and redemption from the hand of Pharaoh.

It is the Master Story of the Jewish people

a. Not Noah
b. Not Adam & Eve
c. Not Abraham and Isaac
d. Not Joseph and his amazing Technicolor dream coat – good musical though

The Exodus – but not only the exodus – what does the seder focus on? On what happened to us BEFORE we got out, the plagues, the killing of the first born, the evil task masters, the inhumanity and degradation.

What is the most important line in the seder meal? – not pass the brisket – but the answer to the Wicked Son, the one who belittles the meaning of the long ago events and this long meal and all its ritual and traditions. By asking what does this seder mean to YOU? To him we answer , "In each generation the individual is obligated to see himself (lir'ot et atzmo) as though he [himself] left Egypt, as it is written: 'And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, For this God did for ME, when I left Egypt'" (Mishna Pesachim 9:5).

It is the Jewish Moral imperative of Empathy – that each generation must see itself as having endured and been redeemed from the cruelties of slavery.

Empathy, as I shared on the Rosh Hashanah is the essence of what it means to be a Jew and in relationship with other human beings.

Hillel said it best, “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow”. Every religious tradition has its version of what is known as the golden rule. But why is Judaism phrased as it is, to start with the memory of the negative. Because that is where the Jewish expression begins – we start from memory and let that inform our actions.

How do you insure that people will be good?

a. command it
b. expect it
c. incentive-fy it
d. – The Jewish response you are good because you have experienced bad from the other side and you would never do to another that which was so hateful to you, as

long as the memory of that pain is fresh and present in every generation. Hence the seder, the maror, the salt water, the hagadah. Its brilliant, its what the Dalia Lama came to admire so much about our people's survival.

More than a dozen times in the Torah we read – do this because I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

You could argue that without the experience of the slavery and Egypt Judaism would have no compass, no relevant meaning, - to reference Star Trek – no Prime Directive

How incredible is that? That had we not been enslaved, had we not be beaten upon by taskmasters, had we not been redeemed – Judaism would have no meaning. Our past experiences give our present lives meaning and context.

ISRAEL?

The answer will come from this generation just as it did from the generation of Joshua the first to celebrate a seder without any personal recollection of their own enslavement. There was no wicked son until the generation that had experienced the slavery had died off.

So too as we tell the story of what happened to our people in another narrow place and time – it will be the context that put it in, that will define us?

The Jewish response to slavery was empathy for slaves, not what you might have thought which would have been to do the same to others – to seek retribution but to rise above because we had been down low.

How will we tell the story what will the lesson we learn, when the wicked child of our generation asks about the gas chambers what do they mean to you? Will we say – this is what they mean to ME?