

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

*** Note on special schedule: This Shabbat is Metzora (Hagadol) with Pesach starting April 22. This issue includes Metzora and Pesach. My next issue will be Acharei Mot, May 3-4.**

Hamas recently announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead), including Hersch ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

During a non-leap year, Pesach normally arrives very close to Vayikra and Tzav, where we read about the korbanot and instructions that the kohanim would follow when performing the sacrifices. The juxtaposition of these Torah portions makes sense as we prepare for the rituals that we may still perform for Pesach since the destruction of the Temple. This year, however, we read Metzora on Shabbat HaGadol. How does the purification process for one who recovers from tzaraat relate to Pesach? Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues at alephbeta.org explain that Metzora connects very closely to Pesach.

The Torah discusses tzaraat immediately after the implications of childbirth on tamai and tahara (ritual impurity and purity). The classic case of tzaraat in the Torah is Miriam's condition after she speaks lashon hara about Moshe's wife (Bemidbar ch. 12). Aharon describes Miriam's skin as resembling that of a stillborn baby. Miriam must stay outside the camp and do teshuvah for a week before becoming tahor again.

Rabbi Fohrman observes that the Torah describes tzaraat as a "negah," and the only other use of "negah" is when Hashem tells Moshe that Paro will release the Jews after He brings one more plague, a negah, to the Egyptians. The tenth plague, killing of the first born men and kosher animals of Mitzrayim, is contact with death – a parallel to the near death experience involved with tzaraat. After the tenth plague, the Jews must be waiting by the doors to their homes, with blood covering the doors. The Jews eat the korban Pesach that night, go through the bloody doors, and become reborn as a nation, B'Nai Yisrael, as they set off for the land that Hashem promised to our ancestors.

Rabbi Fohrman observes that the purification process for a metzora is almost identical to the korban Pesach. The ritual involves two birds, one that is killed with its blood mixed with water to turn the water red. The other bird is set free. One bird that is killed reminds us of the first born of Egypt killed, and of the Egyptian army and horses killed in the Sea of

Reeds on the seventh day, turning the sea red. The bird set free represents the Jews set free after eating the korban Pesach. The cedar wood dipped in blood (with a hyssop plant) reminds us of the bloody doors of the Jews, painted with hyssop before the korban Pesach. In both cases, there is a seven day period before the Jews cross the sea safely and the Egyptians die in the sea. The night that Hashem frees the Jews, the Egyptians are stillborn. The purification process for a metzora parallels that for the korban Pesach very closely (ch. 14). Rabbi Fohrman describes the metzora as having encountered a near death experience and a form of social death. The waiting period permits the metzora to perform teshuvah and rid himself of anti-social activities (such as lashon hara), and the purification process initiates his rebirth as a member of the community. This rebirth parallels the birth of the Jews as a distinct nation after leaving Egypt. The connection between the purification process and the korban Pesach illustrates why Metzora is a fitting introduction to Pesach.

Metzora and Pesach have special meaning for all Jews even today, more than 3330 years after the Exodus. Rabbi Label Lam observes that we must still attend Seders and observe the mitzvot, because there is no expiration date for gratitude. Indeed, with each new generation, we have more descendants from those freed from Egypt – and therefore more reason to express our gratitude to Hashem. Rabbi Marc Angel reminds us that we must each feel a part of the story of our slavery and exodus – exactly what the Sephardim do at their Seders. Rabbi Rhine adds that we must view ourselves as if we were just freed from Mitzrayim, so we must feel Hashem's love and protection personally.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings his message to the situation in 5784, a situation that Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, also observed during covid a few years ago. This year there are many empty chairs at Seders, especially in Israel. The Seder's recurring theme is that Jewish history starts with shame and evolves to praise. All the Pesach Seder symbols have the dual themes of shame and praise. Grief and hope/redemption are part of the central meaning of the Seder. Israel and all Jews are both a redeemed people and a nation facing difficult, continuous challenges. As Rabbi Sacks observes, during times of isolation and need, our sense of "we" gets stronger. During covid, and again since October 7, neighbors and congregations have been pulling together as never before. Pesach starts with suffering and ends with hope. All Jews, especially those facing an explosion of anti-Semitism throughout the world, and our fellows in Israel facing danger and attacks, internalize this message.

Metzora introduces Pesach, and the Seder introduces our resolve to work together and both hope and expect a better future, one where we can understand God's hand in bringing miracles to protect us, today as He has since the time of Avraham. God's continued protection with miracles was clear only a week ago, when Iran sent countless missiles and drones toward Israel – yet virtually none of them landed, and there was very little damage anywhere in Israel. Jordan joined the defense in shooting down missiles that flew over Jordan's air space. Egypt joined in condemning Iran, as did the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Several other Arab countries that might have applauded an attack on Israel shouted out silence – implicitly taking Israel's side against Iran. The United States and U.K. both joined Israel in shooting down missiles. Iran's attack, which could have been a great victory for our enemies, backfired on Iran and other enemies of our people. While Israel's ability to withstand Iran's attack was not a surprise, the magnitude of the victory, the reaction of so many other countries, and the absence of any major harm to Israel all demonstrate Hashem's miracle and continued protection.

I have written before that a basic issue of Purim and Hanukkah was whether God would continue to protect B'Nai Yisrael after the end of prophesy. Many of our people had the same question during the Holocaust. Hashem answered loudly last week that He continues to protect our people. Rabbi Rhine adds the story of Gideon (Shoftim ch. 6-8). When Gideon asked an angel when and whether God would bring a miracle, Hashem's response was that Gideon should go forward and He would give him victory. The lesson from Metzora and from Pesach is that we must observe the mitzvot, keep up our personal relationships with Hashem, and ask Him when we need miracles for our people. God continues to protect us and will do so as long as we do our part.

Metzora reminds me of how thrilling my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, could make the legalistic portions of the Torah, sections whose eternal relevance is often difficult to appreciate from reading only the text. Hannah and I also lovingly recall the special Seders we attended with the Cahan family in the days before we had our own growing family.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Pesach kasher v'samaich,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Shabbat HaGadol – The Paradox of the Pesach Symbols: The Jewish Dance for Eternity

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander (5784 / 2024) **

*President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone **

**** Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen: the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers. AM YISRAEL CHAI!**

In just a matter of days, we will all sit at the festive Seder table, in commemoration and celebration of the foundational story of our people. We will read the Haggadah, our guidebook through the evening, as we tell our story with the help of the various symbolic foods that grace the Seder table.

And yet, this year the joy of the holiday is colored with grief, sorrow and anxiety. There are so many empty chairs at so many Seders – some for reservists back on the frontlines, some for the remaining hostages, some for those who remain in hospital for their injuries or in hotels as their displacement continues, and yet more for all whose lives have been taken from us on and since October 7th.

The weight grew even heavier on Saturday night, as Iranian cruise missiles and drones rained down on our cities, striking fear into the hearts of Israelis across the country. This latest escalation in Iran's campaign to destroy our nation threatens our very existence and instills even greater anguish in the minds of our already overburdened children. How are we meant to focus on the festival's messages of freedom, peoplehood and redemption in the face of the overwhelmingly tragic and terrifying events of the last six months? Perhaps the answer lies in the duality of the Seder's narrative and of its symbols themselves.

The Mishna in Masechet Pesachim 10:4(presents the framing through which we are commanded to read the Exodus narrative: *Matchil bignut, umisayem bishevach*, ‘opening with shame and servitude, and ending with praise.’ In order to fulfill the *mitzva* of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim*, of telling the story of our release from bondage in Egypt, we must begin our retelling by recounting the servitude itself, and only then make our way towards redemption.

This framing, making space for both the servitude and the redemption, plays out in the symbolic items on the Seder table as well. The Matza we eat is presented twice in Maggid – first in the *Ha Lachma Anya*, seeing in the Matza the bread of affliction eaten while our ancestors were enslaved in Egypt, and then again at the closing of the Maggid section, where the Matza celebrates redemption, reminding us of the hurried departure from Egypt, which left the Jews with no time to allow their dough to rise. The same goes for the Maror, the bitter herbs. The Mishna Pesachim 10:5(, cited in the Haggadah, attributes the Maror to the bitterness of slavery Shemot 1:14(, yet Rav Chaim ibn Attar, in his masterful commentary *Or Hachayim* Shemot 12:8(, sees Maror as a way to accentuate the taste of the Korban Pesach eaten with it. Even the Maror has a dual purpose, focusing on both dimensions of Pesach: the enslavement and the redemption.

So, too, for the four cups of wine. On the one hand, they are traditionally associated with the four redemptions from Egypt Shemot 6:6-7; Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1(. On the other hand, the Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayim 472:11(notes a preference for red wine for it recalls the blood of the Jewish children spilled by Pharaoh as he had them cast into the Nile. Even the sweet Charoset, according to the Gemara Pesachim 116a(, holds within it a duality of meaning, directing our memory both to the fragrant apple orchards in which Jewish women would secretly birth their children, as well as to the thick mortar the Jewish slaves would prepare and use during their backbreaking labor.

Each one of these symbols has two layers of meaning, one of *Genut*/*Avdut* (denigration and slavery) and one of *Shevach*/*Geula* (praise and redemption). Yet unlike the telling of the story, which follows a clear chronological trajectory, the symbols on our Seder table are denied the luxury of beginning with sadness and journeying into joy. On the contrary, our Matza, Maror, wine, and Charoset are left to hold the whole story together – simultaneously the tragedy and the relief, all the pain and all the healing, all the grief and all the hope – in a single instant.

This intermixing of suffering and redemption speaks to us so clearly this year. We will celebrate our people, our State, and our bright future, without losing sight of all that remains broken, the empty chairs, the unbearable sacrifices, and the ongoing challenges facing our people. We will bring all this grief with us into Pesach this year, as we reminisce about marching out of Egypt and dream ahead to our ultimate redemption.

These feelings are not in opposition to one another, but complementary – the story of our people, throughout history and in this moment, holds within it both of these poles. We are both a redeemed people and a people in a state of challenge, with both Eliyahu the prophet and the angel of destruction simultaneously knocking on our door on Seder night. For this is the Jewish dance towards eternity.

Our challenge for this Passover is not to lose sight of either, making space for both our heartbreak and our hope, praying that it won’t be long before we ‘sing a new song upon our salvation, and upon the redemption of our souls.’ *Haggadah*(.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyn.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Is There an Expiration Date on Gratitude?

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5777 (2017)

Why is this night different than all other nights! (From the 4 Questions in the Pesach Haggadah)

Why are questions such a critical ingredient of the Pesach Seder? Questions create vessels that demand filling. The extent of the depth of the question determines how much wisdom will be accessed. An unnamed philosopher once said,

"There is nothing more irrelevant than the answer to a question that was never asked!" Without questions, knowledge is reduced to mere information, and it finds no resting place. The most compelling bytes of info are rendered useless without a question. Light is the answer to what question? Love is the answer to what question? G-d is the answer to what question? Life is riddled with questions! Quality questions can magnetize and organize treasures houses of knowledge.

Pesach night is such a critical time to become connected, to forge another link between our history and our destiny, that it is best not left to amateur pedagogy. We need for children to ask questions because that opens to the heart to receive.

Einstein said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."

In this spirit, it was hard for me to ignore the sincere question of a third grader in class today. His hand was waving intensely in the back of the room as if there was an emerging emergency. So I called on him and he *asked*, "*Why do we need a Pesach Seder anyway!*" It was stunningly honest and refreshingly real. My mind shifted into hyper speed. How could I explain it to 9 year olds? How could I explain it to myself? With help from Heaven, I managed to zero in on an idea that might prove helpful.

There is a phrase I have plastered on the Yeshiva walls. It shows a picture of Matzah, an expired credit card, and the Western Wall. The words read, "**Because there is no expiration date on gratitude!**" After explaining the concept of an expiration date and how it relates to credit cards and milk, I told with loads of drama the following phantasmal tale.

Imagine you are looking out the open window of a very tall building and somebody walking by clumsily bumps you and suddenly you find yourself hanging by your finger tips to a ledge with your feet dangling over the busy sidewalk 30 floors below.

Your fingers are beginning to give way, and you are about to surrender your life. Suddenly, a giant and powerful hand grabs your arm firmly and pulls you back into the building. The hero is then identified as Big Mo, and you thank him profusely.

Now the question is, "*How long do you need to thank him?*" Next year you send him for Purim M'shloach Manos. Very nice! What about the next year and the year after that!? The kids were feeling the answer now but I wasn't done. So you invite him as a special guest to your Bar Mitzvah and tell all the guests this is the one who saved back then.

At your wedding, you introduce him to your bride and gratefully acknowledge that he is the one without whom you would not be here today. Now you have a child, and he has a Bar Mitzvah, and Big Mo is still a VIP guest showered with the honor he deserves. Now when your child has a child and he has a Bar Mitzvah, is Big Mo still on the short list of invitees? Of course! The value of his having saved you not only does not expire or diminish with time but it actually increases.

Why after 3329]now 3336[years do we still invest all the effort required to make a Seder, munch exuberantly on Matzos, and ask questions? So what do you think? **Is there an expiration date on gratitude?**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5777-pesach/>

Tazria – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Haircuts During Chol HaMoed

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

And it shall be on the seventh day, he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows; all his hair he shall shave off.” (Vayikra 14:9)

QUESTION — Washington, DC

Chag Sameach! Mo'adim LeSimchah! Suppose someone had been working 80-100 hours a weeks as a doctor leading up to Friday night coming into Shabbat and was unable to get a haircut in advance of Yom Tov. His vacation starts Friday night before chag and lasts for the duration of Pesach. Does this level of involvement in one's job meet the Halachic requirements to permit a haircut during Chol HaMoed, when the person is off work for vacation in advance of Yom Tov HaAcharon shel Pesach?

ANSWER

Yes, there is no question that he can. There is no reason to think that the list in the Mishnah and in Shulchan Arukh OC 531:4 regarding who can shave/get a haircut during Chol HaMoed (someone freed from prison, someone who came from a distant location, etc.) should be limited to exactly those cases. Being a formalist here makes no sense. Arukh HaShulchan OC (531:3,5) makes it clear that the rule is what dictates and these cases are just classic examples:

Nevertheless, there are cases that the Sages permitted a person to shave on Chol HaMoed, and those were in situations where everyone knew the reason why the person had not shaven before the Yom Tov. There was thus no concern that permitting such cases would lead other people to act improperly...

Similarly, if a person came from a faraway place on Chol HaMoed, such that it was well-known that he had just returned from a journey, he would be permitted to shave. But when he returned from a nearby location, it would be forbidden for him to shave, since not everyone would know that he had been traveling. Even if he came back from a distant place on erev Yom Tov before nightfall, if he didn't have an opportunity to shave before Yom Tov, he is permitted to shave on Chol HaMoed... Similarly, even those who are permitted to shave on Yom Tov should not shave in the public space, but rather in a private location, for there may be people who don't know the specifics of the case, and they will come to treat lightly the restriction against shaving on Chol HaMoed.

This case obviously satisfies the requirement that he had no chance to do it earlier, and I feel confident that – given that he is a doctor and I assume that people in the community have a sense of his hours, etc., – this is also a case where the situation is well known.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY. [Hebrew text omitted because of issues moving across software products that do not translate easily.]

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/04/ryrshemini/>

Outside the Camp

by Rabbi Ilay Ofran *

[Translated from Hebrew by Elisha Gordan]

Parashat Metzora is famously difficult to unpack. It deals with obscure illnesses that can render a human impure and the convoluted processes of purification that can counteract those effects. These illnesses are mostly unknown today, and the laws detailed in the parasha have fallen out of practice. Nonetheless, if we probe deeply enough, we find that our eternal Torah is teaching a lesson that might well have been written for our generation.

At the end of the previous parasha, Tazria, the Torah proclaims its law of the leper: the leper will *“dwell outside of the camp.”* This law appears again at the start of the book of Numbers, where we are commanded to send *“every leper, זר, (zav, a type of bodily discharge) and tamei l’nefesh, one who has become impure through exposure to a corpse”* from the camp. The reasoning behind this law is fairly easy to grasp. The Torah tells us that impurity is contagious. The impurities mentioned are likely to spread to others, and so the safest course is to remove the affected person from the camp. The underlying concern in this case is preserving the camp’s purity.

One verse, however, that appears in the beginning of our parasha, teaches us a meaningful and deep lesson about our relationship to the person banished from the camp. In order to determine whether a leper can begin the purification process, the Torah commands that *“the priest must go outside the camp,”* meaning that the priest’s responsibilities extend to those who are outside *“our camp.”* The priest must put in the work to travel to those who have been removed. Spiritual and religious leadership cannot be satisfied with erecting boundaries around the camp and distancing anyone who is not *“pure.”* Instead, its obligations extend to those outside the camp as well.

Moreover, the language of the verse emphasizes this point. It does not write that the priest must go *“out of the camp,”* but rather he must go *“to the outside of the camp.”* The superfluous *“to”* creates the impression that the Torah relates to *“outside the camp”* as a specific, bounded location that can be traveled to. From the verse’s language, *“outside of the camp”* is not just any place outside the camp, but rather to a named place where those who have been separated from the camp live. This reading further supports the idea that the Torah widens society’s responsibility to include even those outside of it.

When the Torah describes the leprous house, it assigns responsibility to the priest to return again and again to the house to diagnose the ailment and later to assist in purifying it. From the moment the homeowner asks the priest to visit the house, the priest is called upon time and again to visit the house. Jewish priests cannot just take their leisure in the Temple while members of their community are grappling with difficult afflictions. The religious leadership is obligated to leave its comfort zone and to arrive at the home of the simple person and assist them in the healing process.

The Talmud in Masechet Berachot (28a) tells the story of Rabban Gamaliel who served as Patriarch and came to the house of Rabbi Yehoshua to placate him after he insulted him in the Beit Midrash. When he saw the black walls of Rabbi Yehoshua’s house, Rabban Gamaliel told him that *“from the walls of your house it seems you are a blacksmith”* – he had not previously realized Rabbi Yehoshua’s employment. Rabbi Yehoshua responded in anger and disappointment, *“Woe to the generation that has you as its leader. For you do not know the struggles of your disciples, how they support themselves and how they eat.”* The expectation of the spiritual leader is to frequent the homes of the community, and through this effort to understand their daily challenges and difficulties. The leader who remains in the Beit Midrash and is not familiar with the public’s hardship is disqualified from serving as a leader.

Despite the fact that the laws of nega’im (leprosy-like afflictions) are not practiced today, they carry a lesson that remains as relevant as ever. Parashat Metzora impels us to expand our circle of responsibility to include those who are outside the camp, to hear the calls of those knocking on the doors of *“our”* camp, and open those doors, and our hearts, to them. I will

merely suggest that it is possible that one of the keys that may lead to this change in our time is bound up in the understanding that nowadays we should not relate to someone who finds themselves outside the camp as a zav or leper.

* Rav of Kvutzat Yavneh, and founder and joint head of Mechinat Ruach Hassadeh, a pre-military Jewish academy for boys, located in Kibbutz Beerot Yitzhak. He is a graduate of Yeshivat Kibbutz HaDati in Maaleh Gilboa and of the Beit Midrash in Beit Morasha, and received his Semicha from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/04/metzora5784/>

Thoughts for Shabbat HaGadol

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his book *Crowds and Power*, the Nobel Prize winning Sephardic author Elias Canetti writes of the tremendous diversity among Jews. He theorizes: *“One is driven to ask in what respect these people remain Jews; what makes them into Jews; what is the ultimate nature of the bond they feel when they say “I am a Jew”....This bond...is the Exodus from Egypt.”* Canetti suggests that the Israelites’ formative experience as a vast crowd leaving Egypt is the key to understanding the nature of Jewish peoplehood. As long as Jews — however different they are from each other — share historical memories of the Exodus from Egypt, they continue to identify as members of one people. We are bound together by the shared experience of redemption.

When we imagine the Exodus, we naturally envision a huge crowd of Israelites hastily leaving Egypt. When we recount the story of the Exodus in the Passover Haggada, we are reminded that the redemption was a group experience of great magnitude that has shaped the destiny of our people for all generations.

Yet, the Haggada does not focus only on the “vast crowd” experience, but conscientiously strives to personalize the story to the level of each individual. *“In every generation one must see him/herself as though he/she personally had come forth from Egypt.”* The Haggada tells stories about particular lessons taught by individual rabbis. It teaches that we have not fulfilled our obligation unless each of us speaks of Pessah, Matsah and Maror.

And, famously, the Haggada includes instructions on dealing with children with different aptitudes and interests. The challenge is to feel and transmit the vast group Exodus experience of antiquity on an individual level.

Thus, while the Haggada celebrates national liberation, it also provides a theme of personal liberation. While each participant is taught to identify with the masses of ancient Israelites who were redeemed from bondage, each is also encouraged to relate to our tradition as a unique individual.

Each person brings his/her specific talents, sensitivities and knowledge. Each needs to find his/her own way of relating to and individualizing the Exodus message.

Albert Einstein taught: *“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”* Each person has a specific set of qualities. If allowed to develop in accord with these qualities, a person can live a happy and fulfilling life. But if a person is stifled or misled, he/she may live a frustrating and unsatisfactory life. So many people are diverted from meaningful lives because they live by definitions and standards that others have imposed on them. They strive to meet expectations of others that may, in fact, be inappropriate for them.

In transmitting religious traditions from generation to generation, the elders need to be tuned in to the specific aptitudes and sensibilities of the younger members of the family and community. One formula does not work for everyone. On the contrary, the best teachers are those who can individualize their lessons so that each child/student feels personally engaged.

The Haftara on Shabbat HaGadol is drawn from the book of Malachi. The prophet foresees the day when *“He shall turn the heart of the parents to the children, and the heart of the children to their parents”* (Malachi 3:24). It is profoundly significant that Malachi envisions a messianic time that begins with parents turning their hearts to their children. We might ordinarily have thought that the ideal is for children to listen to parents. Malachi — while surely agreeing that children should heed their parents’ teachings — suggests that it is up to parents to take the initiative in maintaining or restoring inter-generational relationships. The elders must strive to understand the younger members of the family/community on the latter’s terms.

“In every generation one must see him/herself as though he/she had come forth from Egypt.” To internalize the power of this message, we envision the vast crowd of Israelites who experienced the Exodus first hand. We identify with them and feel part of their peoplehood. At the same time, though, we envision the unique talents and aspirations of each member of the family and community. The goal is to raise all of us to a high level of understanding, solidarity and love.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/thoughts-shabbat-hagadol-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

Thoughts for Pessah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[Note: Rabbi Hayyim Angel, National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, teaches Tanakh at Yeshiva University. He is the author of many books and articles. His article, “Our Journey in the Haggadah,” is one of the attachments to the email version of this issue, and it is also available at <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/our-journey-haggadah>. This article appeared in his book, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 218-229.]

Rabbi Marc Angel’s thoughts for Pessah:

The Jewish Press newspaper asked a group of Rabbis, including Rabbi Marc Angel, to comment on the meaning of Pessah during these troubled times. **From that presentation:**

How are we meant to help bring about the ultimate Geulah, especially in light of this very precarious moment for the modern state of Israel?

Response of Rabbi Marc D. Angel, Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals:

At the Seder, we eat the “Hillel Sandwich,” Korekh, which includes both matsa and maror. Rabbi Benzion Uziel, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, pointed out that matsa — eaten as the Israelites left Egypt — symbolizes freedom. Maror

— bitter herb — symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. We combine these two symbols to remind us that freedom and slavery are intertwined. Even when we are enslaved, we have our inner freedom. Even when we are free, we have to worry about falling back into slavery.

Until Mashiah arrives, we simply don't have full redemption. We are always experiencing a mixture of matsa and maror, freedom and suffering. Sometimes things are better and sometimes worse...but we are constantly engaged in personal and national struggle.

We are currently living in very challenging times for Israel and the Jewish People. We all feel the taste of maror, the bitterness of war, death, anti-Semitism, ugly anti-Israel hatred. But we also have the taste of matsa...freedom. The State of Israel is strong, vibrant, and courageous. The Jewish People worldwide are standing up for our rights and for the honor of Israel. We are literally eating "korekh," matsa and maror together, simultaneously.

It has been noted that the redemption from Egypt is attributed entirely to the Almighty. The Israelites themselves were relatively passive in the process of gaining their freedom. But the ultimate redemption will require us to participate actively. While Hashem will be the guarantor of our geulah, we will need to assume personal responsibility.

Along with our prayers, we each must stand with Am Yisrael in every way possible. We need action — communal, political, financial etc. — in support of Medinat Yisrael. We need to stand up against anti-Semites and anti-Zionists with fortitude...and we must prevail.

Rav Nahman of Bratslav wisely taught: *The whole world is a narrow bridge (precarious); but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all.*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3222>

The Pesach Seder: Did You Meet My G-d? -- Mitzvah #71

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Mitzva of the Pesach Seder is different than most other Mitzvos of commemoration. The Pesach Seder is meant to be personal, not merely a commemoration of what happened many years ago.

Most Mitzvos of commemoration remind us of an event of the past. Shabbos commemorates creation of the world; Rosh Hashana commemorates the creation of mankind; Shavuot commemorates the time that Hashem gave us the Torah. Certainly, the energy and blessing of that time recurs each year. But these are commemorations of events that occurred years ago.

The Pesach Seder is different. As we state in the Haggada, we are obligated to view ourselves as if we ourselves were just redeemed from Mitzrayim. The Mitzva of the Pesach Seder is to recreate that experience such that we relive the joy of redemption and feel, in a very personal way, Hashem's love and protection.

The book of Shoftim (6) gives us a glimpse of how a Pesach seder should be. The Novi describes how the Jewish people of the time were deeply oppressed and violated by neighboring tribes. The situation is described as, *"If the Jews would plant and their efforts would start to bear fruit, the neighboring tribes would come and destroy."* The Jews felt helpless; they simply didn't know what they could do about the situation.

Then, one day, an angel appeared to Gideon while he was in the field. Gideon was destined to be the next leader of the Jewish people; he was destined to free the people of the ongoing oppression. The angel greeted Gideon and said, *"Hashem is with you!"*

Gideon responded politely but forcefully, *"Please my master, if Hashem is with us, why are we in this vulnerable predicament? Where are the miracles about which our fathers told us: Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim!"*

Rashi explains that this conversation took place on Pesach, the day after the Pesach seder. Gideon was referencing how his father had made the story of the Exodus so vivid. At the Pesach Seder it was clear that Hashem is all powerful and loves us. Gideon contrasted that with the current plight, and asked, *"Where are the miracles?"*

The Novi describes how, instead of the angel responding to that provocative question, Hashem Himself responded. Hashem said, *"Proceed with the strength of that question and save the Jewish people from their enemies."* And indeed, Gideon proceeded and was victorious.

The goal of the Pesach season and of the Pesach Seder in particular is to realize that we are not simply commemorating the redemption of old. It is our redemption, and we have the right to ask for miracles.

This past week the world witnessed miracles.

*After repeated threats, Iran launched at Israel some 350 missiles, containing collectively over 60 tons of explosives, and they did almost no physical damage. **Experts in the military say that there is no parallel in history.** Each drone, missile, and projectile had a story of its own. Although Iran had its GPS intended tracking, and the militaries of the world had their GPS tracking on the hundreds of missiles as they were airborne, Hashem also had His GPS tracking for each one. Some misfired, others landed harmlessly, and others were shot down by Israel or its allies. Neither the magnitude of what Iran tried to do, nor the magnitude of their failure to inflict damage, has been seen in modern warfare.*

After the attack, Israel naturally wanted to promptly respond. Interestingly, when President Biden discouraged Prime Minister Netanyahu from responding impulsively, he is reported to have said, *"You won; take the win."* I am not one to mix into politics or strategies. Certainly, Israel should and with G-d's help will respond at a time that suits them. But the comment of POTUS needs to be reflected upon. From the war room in the United States, this man knew what kind of damage 60 tons of explosives could have inflicted. This man witnessed, *"Behold the guardian of Israel, neither sleeps nor slumbers."* (Tehillim 121)

The Mitzva of the Pesach season is not just to be inspired by the redemption of old, but to relive it. As the Haggada of Seder night declares, *"In every generation they arise to destroy us, but Hashem saves us."*

It is only natural for Israel to declare its intent to respond decisively. But before doing so, we need to reflect on the fact that **Hashem deflected the attack in a magnificent and gracious way.** An alliance of countries, using advanced technology, with such precision and complexity that it is the dreams of military training, coupled with Divine redirection of so many of the projectiles, all came together to reassure our nation that Hashem is with us.

Let us prepare for and observe the type of Seder that Gideon's father conducted. Let it be one that Hashem's salvation feels real to us and our children. **Let us have the clarity to ask of Hashem, "We too need miracles."** For it is through

the strength and clarity of that question, that we can find Hashem's response, *"Proceed with the strength of that question and save the Jewish people from their enemies."*

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and enjoyable Pesach!

[emphasis added]

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Pesach – The Wisdom To Appreciate

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

The four sons, their questions and the scripted responses, take a place of prominence in the Haggadah. Before we even begin discussing the details of the story, we are instructed that the Seder night is for each and every Jew. We are guided on how to best respond to each Jew according to their individual needs and how best to connect them with the message of the evening.

There are many nuances to their questions and the responses, and many lessons to be learned. One point of much discussion is the inference in the question of the wicked son. He asks *"What is this service to you?"* The author of the Haggadah tells us that since he has worded his question in the second person, he has excluded himself from the service of the Seder. He is clearly stating that the service is *"for you"* and not for him. If we consider the question of the wise son he appears to be guilty of the same error. He asks *"What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?"* He too states clearly that the commandments were directed to you. Why don't we say that he too is excluding himself from the Seder?

The Kli Yakar, in his commentary on the Chumash (Shemos 13:14), offers an answer to this question, which I believe defines for us the essence of the message of the Pesach Seder, and what we can take away from the evening. The Kli Yakar notes that the Torah introduces the wise son's question differently from the wicked son's. The Torah introduces the wise son's question by saying *"And it will be when your son will ask you tomorrow"* (Devarim 6:20). This phrase is absent when discussing the wicked son.

The Kli Yakar explains that herein lies the difference between the two questioners. The wicked son is not wrong in recognizing that his parents understand the meaning of the Seder in a way that he does not. He is correct in asking his parents what meaning they find in the service. However, his timing shows that his intent is evil. He is sitting there at the Seder, while everyone is preparing to engage in the mitzvos of the evening, and he stops. Right then and there he turns to his parents and says, why is this important to you? His wording as he is sitting at the Seder clearly states that despite knowing how important this evening is to his family and to Hashem, it is of no importance to him. He cannot accept to do something because it is important to someone else. The action must be inherently important to him, or he wants no part of it. He cannot act for the sake of the relationship – neither with G-d nor with his parents. For this selfish, short-sighted attitude we tell him that he is on the wrong track in life. So much so, that had he been in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed.

The wise son, however, asks his question tomorrow. At the Seder, he was ready to engage in the experience of the evening because he knows that it is important to Hashem. However, once he has experienced it and still does not understand it, he wisely seeks to understand. With humility and faith, he comes to his parents and asks to understand why this is important to G-d. He wants to better understand his relationship with G-d and how to connect with G-d.

I heard it said in the name of the Dubno Maggid that we see this distinction from the phrasing of their questions, as well. The wicked son asks *"What is this service to you?"* The wise son, however, asks *"What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?"* The wise son understands what the service is to his parents. It is the service that G-d has commanded. His question is a deeper one – he seeks to understand what meaning it has that G-d should command it.

I believe this message is the core of the Pesach Seder. We gather every year, reviewing the story of our slavery and redemption, to understand that we have a relationship with G-d. This is the initial answer we give to the four questions. We respond saying that we were slaves in Egypt, and had G-d not redeemed us, then we BS"D today would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, we are gathering here tonight and doing things differently from other nights. No matter how well we know the story, we need to stop and review every year, to recognize that we ourselves were destined to be slaves, and we ourselves were redeemed with the Exodus.

After the four sons, as we resume the story of our history going back now to the very beginning with Avrohom, we state this message clearly with *"And this is that which stood."* We have been persecuted and challenged in every generation. Yet, this message of the Pesach Seder is what has stood by us and given us strength throughout each and every generation. The purpose of redemption from Egypt was not only that we should leave Egyptian bondage. G-d was displaying his commitment to our physical and spiritual salvation. He ensured that we survived and thrived, becoming a vast and mighty people even while enslaved in Egypt, and then freed us, carried us, raised us and taught us to become His nation. G-d did this for us then, and He does it for us in every generation. *"In every generation they stand upon us to annihilate us, and the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves us from their hands."*

The message is clear. G-d loves us and cares about us. Even before we accepted the Torah, G-d is showing His love, care and concern for us, and committing Himself to a relationship with us. The message of the Seder is to recognize and appreciate that love and commitment. A love and commitment which is not only for our ancestors, but is for us, as well. The importance of our mitzvos is far beyond what they accomplish. The importance of our mitzvos is, as the wise son understands, that they fulfill G-d's purpose in His world. How and why they are important to G-d are details. The accomplishment for me is not what my actions achieve, but that I displayed my love and respect for G-d, as He has done for us.

This idea is further illustrated in the verses we expound upon detailing the story of the Exodus. The verses are from the service of the Bikkurim – the first fruits of the harvest which a farmer brings to the Temple. When the farmer arrives and presents his produce, he is instructed to recite these verses. Each year, after harvesting his crop, he brings the first to the Temple and declares aloud how his ancestors were slaves, G-d redeemed them and now he instead finds himself a landowner working his own field. He concludes his declaration saying *"And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land that You have given me, G-d."* These verses we are reading at the Seder are verses intended to describe an individual's understanding of G-d's involvement in their personal life and that any and all successes are direct gifts from G-d. An understanding stemming from the recognition that we would be slaves, if not for the fact that G-d wants us to be here. We express this again with *"Dayeinu."* We begin with the Exodus and culminate with the Temple, recognizing that each step was a gift which was already enough for us to recognize G-d's love for us and kindness to us. We then reiterate and repeat how much more we need to recognize G-d's kindness and love now that G-d has indeed done all of these for us. After explaining the messages of the mitzvos of the evening, we then conclude the Maggid section of the Haggadah by

stating this principle explicitly. The Seder is not a commemoration of national history. Rather, in each and every generation, no matter how far removed that generation may be from the original event, every Jew is obligated to see themselves as if they left Egypt. Each and every one of us must recognize and appreciate that G-d saved our ancestors from Egyptian slavery in order that we should be free from Egypt today. This is the essence of the Seder – to recognize G-d's relationship with us today.

As the Kli Yakar says of the wise son, our entire understanding of and commitment to Torah and mitzvos is built upon this foundation. We are Jews, committed to G-d and His Torah, because G-d loves us and we love Him and care about what's important to Him - simply because we know it is important to Him. May we all merit to learn the message of the Seder, and thereby merit to bring joy and nachas to our Father in Heaven.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Metzora and Pesach

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Metzora or Pesach. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Metzora -- A Bird's Eye View

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

One day, Rabbi Shimon Ben Elazar was riding his donkey along the coastal road. He was enjoying the beautiful scenery and reviewing in his mind the wonderful study session he had with his Rabbi at Migdal Eder. He encountered a man who was extremely ugly. "How ugly you are" said the startled Rabbi, "are all the people in your city as ugly as you are?" The man responded calmly "what can I say, go to the artisan who crafted me and tell him that his handiwork is ugly." Upon hearing this response, Rabbi Shimon realized that he had gravely sinned. He came down and begged the man to forgive him. The man refused to forgive him until Rabbi Shimon would speak to the Creator.

The Rabbi ran after the man a long way until they came to a town. The people of the town called out: "Welcome, Rabbi." The man asked them whom they were calling Rabbi." They pointed to Rabbi Shimon. "If this is a Rabbi," said the man, "let there be no more Rabbis among the Jews." Eventually, after Rabbi Shimon made a public apology, the man forgave Rabbi Shimon, who learned a humbling lesson from the experience.

I have always understood the man's as acceptance. "This is who I am. This is how God created me. I am not as good looking as you, but you have to accept me." Today, however, I read his words from a totally different point of view. He is not talking with self pity but with pride, and he does not regard Rabbi Shimon as better, wiser or luckier than him. The man whom Rabbi Shimon encountered drew upon the wisdom of Job who said, in reference to the weak and the poor: "Did not He who made me in my mother's belly make him? Did not One form us both in the womb?" What the man was telling Rabbi Shimon was that they were equals, that they were peers and that the same creator who created the Rabbi in his

image created also the “ugly” man.

So who is a truer image of God? The message is a universal one, and it is directed to all mankind. The world be much better if we looked at people and instead of analyzing how are they different from and therefore inferior to us, we would think first of what we have in common. We are Human beings, created in the image of God. We talk and communicate, smile and cry. laugh and get depressed. We feel pity at the sight of a helpless animal and frustration when we can do nothing to help. When we realize how similar we are, the road is open for understanding and for appreciating the unique gifts and talents of every human being.

In this week’s Parasha, we read about the purification process of the “leper.” According to the Rabbis, the sin of the leper is judging the fallacies of others and making them known to all. Most of us, like Rabbi Shimon, are guilty of engaging in this kind of judgment. The leper is rejected and alienated for him to experience, even for a short while, the pain he afflicted upon others by judging and rejecting them. When his teshuvah and process of purification are completed, the Torah commands that:

“the priest shall order two live clean birds... to be brought for him who is to be cleansed, the priest shall order one of the birds slaughtered... and he shall take the live bird... and dip... in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered... and he shall set the live bird free in the open country.”

This ceremony is shocking and powerful. The bird is an analogy to the Neshama, the soul. The slaughtered bird is the person who was offended by the leper, as our sages have taught us that insulting someone in public is tantamount to murder, and the same follows for gossip and calumny. The live bird, representing the leper, is then dipped in the blood to signify that he is stained by that sin. It is sent free in the open country to tell the leper that on one hand he is now cleansed and free to rejoin the community, but he should always remember his past actions and avoid such behavior in the future. He is also told that once he spread lashon hora, it is very difficult to retrieve it and undo the damage, since evil speech is like a bird that can fly freely everywhere. Let then the clean bird of our soul fly free and unstained in the open country, and let it see, from a bird’s eye view only, the good and positive in our fellow human beings. ¨

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Matzah: Humble but Noble

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

The shabbat before Passover is traditionally called “*Shabbat Hagadol*” or “The Great Shabbat” in remembrance of the first Paschal lamb offering the Jews offered in Egypt. There is a special Haftorah, and the rabbi gives a sermon on topics about Passover.

I think Matzah gets a bad rap. Yes it’s not as tasty as challah, but it’s a lot more functional. It serves both as bread and as a cracker and can last for years on a shelf. It takes up very little space and can double as an edible plate for dinner. There’s no question that if I were going on a trip through the desert, I would take a box of Matzah rather than challah.

But the thing I love most about Matzah is its humility. When you spread something on challah or make a challah sandwich, the taste of the challah dominates. But with a Matzah sandwich, the sandwich innards of roast beef or lox and cream cheese are supported by the matzoh but their taste gets the ability to shine through.

This is the magic of the humble Matzah. It supports and nurtures what it contains and then allows the taste of whatever it surrounds to shine forth. Unlike challah, which puffs itself up with yeasts and air bubbles to make it seem larger, Matzah is flat and humble. What you see is what you get. It has a taste but it chooses to play the support character to the world within its crumbly walls.

This exact attitude is what the Haggadah asks the parents to do for their children. We start the telling of the Passover story not with long speeches, but with the Mah Nishtanah. We encourage the children to ask questions and take the lead as much as possible. The children get a chance to shine and take center stage. We become their Matzah and hope that they start shining with their own light as they begin to explore their heritage. Other times throughout the year, we take a more challah based role and dominate the educational process. But on Seder night we encourage our kids as much as we can to lead the exploration.

May we merit to be good supportive Matzas this year for our children and seder guests.

Shabbat Shalom,

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah

Seder: The Special Pesach Offering

The offering brought for the Passover holiday, the korban pesach, has special laws how it is to be cooked and eaten:

"They will eat the meat on that night ... Do not eat it raw, or cooked in water, but only roasted over fire.")Ex. 12:8-9(

Why may the korban pesach only be eaten at the nighttime? And why must it be roasted?

National Holiness in Each Individual

All Temple offerings fall into two categories. Some are korbanot yachid, personal offerings brought by an individual; while others are korbanot tzibur, communal offerings brought in the name of the entire nation. An individual brings a korban yachid for private reasons — to atone for a particular sin or express gratitude for a personal deliverance. The Jewish nation as a whole, on the other hand, is represented by communal offerings which commemorate national events and holidays.

Of all the Temple offerings, the korban Pesach is unique, since it combines characteristics of both types of offerings. It commemorates a national historic event; and yet the obligation to bring this offering is not on the nation but on the individual. Why is it not like other communal offerings?

This unusual offering teaches us an important lesson about the Jewish people. The korban pesach reveals the quality of national holiness that resides in the soul of every Jew. Our ties to Knesset Yisrael are so deep that each individual's pesach offering is like a korban tzibur representing the entire nation. And this special connection of each individual to the nation is reflected in the laws regulating how the korban pesach is to be eaten.

The Unity of Israel

Our daytime activities are characterized by extensive social interaction, while at night we retire to our homes and private lives. By stipulating that the Passover offering be eaten at night, the Torah is emphasizing that our connection to the Jewish people is not based on some form of social contract, a utilitarian agreement to band together due to common interests. Rather, our ties to the Jewish people reflect a unique shared commonality that binds together all of Israel. These national ties persist even at night, a time when each individual retreats to the privacy of his home.

The manner in which the offering is cooked is similarly instructive. Were it boiled in water or cooked together with other foods, the taste of the korban would spread outside of the meat. Roasting, on the other hand, prevents the flavor from dispersing to other foods. This ensures that the offering's qualities of holiness remain concentrated inside the korban pesach. Why should this experience be so intense?

The mitzvah of eating the roasted offering has the power to uplift each individual with an intensity of pure holiness, a powerful quality rooted in the national soul of Israel. This concentrated holiness deepens our awareness of the singular unity of Israel, a result of the communal holiness that resides within each and every individual, in all of his being.

)Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 163-164. Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 178-179. (

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BO63.htm>

Rediscovering the Common Good, Passover in isolation, and Lessons from a Gulag Survivor

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.* (© 5780)

For perhaps the first time in 32 centuries, Jews around the world will be unable to celebrate the festival of Pesach with their extended families.

The coronavirus crisis has brought out the worst and the best in people. We've seen the worst in the panic-buying and hoarding that has left supermarket shelves bare, painkillers unavailable, and the elderly and vulnerable feeling even older and more helpless. Some people are ignoring government guidelines on social distancing, and we are all suffering as a result.

But it has also brought out the best, and a level of community spirit we haven't seen in a long time. Our local synagogue, for instance, has been dazzling in the help it has offered members: doing their shopping, getting their medicines, providing them with company over social media, and giving them multiple opportunities to join communal prayers and study sessions online. I suspect most religious communities throughout the country have been doing much the same thing, as have neighbourhood groups and other associations.

Several streets close to my home have formed WhatsApp groups of all the families living there, so that people can ask each other things like, "I'm going shopping. Is there anything you need?" Our eight-year-old granddaughter, taking care to keep her social distance, knocked on all the doors in her street and said, "We're from number 12. If you need anything, just knock on our door." This was further proof of the joys of being a member of the best club in the world: that of proud grandparents.

Why "we" beats "I"

When you write a book about contemporary society, you never know whether it will still be relevant by the time it's published. That was the concern I had about my new book, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*. It has turned out, though, to be more timely than I could have wished. What we have seen these past few weeks has been a

precise playing out of the key terms of the book: “I” versus “we.”

My argument is that we have become a hyper-individualistic society, and we need to build into our culture a greater concern for the welfare of others. The bad behaviour of recent weeks has been by people who put themselves and their families first without thought for others. The heroic behaviour, by doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers, people filling supermarket shelves, teachers who keep going using Skype or Zoom, and the more than half-a-million volunteers assisting the National Health Service, has all been about service to the common good. Rarely has it been clearer what we lose by focusing on the “I” and gain by caring about the “we.”

When this is all over, society will emerge with a stronger sense of “we.” This experience has included the “we” of humanity, knowing that virtually every country has been exposed to the same risk at the same time; the “we” of nation, each country relying on its own resources to deal with the crisis; and the “we” of community, as neighbourhoods and congregations have pulled together as never before.

Usually it takes war to bring about this degree of social solidarity. The one consolation of the present crisis is that it wasn’t war this time.

Prisoner’s Wisdom

Given the degree and length of the isolation most of us will have to go through, it seemed sensible to turn to one of the great experts in surviving isolation, the former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky. Sharansky was imprisoned in a gulag for nine years between 1977 and 1986, half of it in solitary confinement. He has now released a YouTube video explaining how he stayed sane and cheerful throughout that time.

He had five pieces of advice for us. First, see yourself as part of the war, in this case against an invisible enemy; the struggle depends on you.

Second, don’t depend on things that are not under your control – in this case, how long the pandemic will last. Focus on the things that depend on you – for instance, reading a book you have always wanted to read but could never find the time for.

Third, never lose your sense of humour: Sharansky had great fun telling anti-Soviet jokes to his prison guards.

Fourth: don’t give up on your hobbies. He spent much of his time playing games of chess in his head. It kept his mind active and sharp.

Fifth: feel a sense of connection. We Jews, he said, were scattered around the world yet we felt like one people. You can feel connected even if physically you are separated.

The Road to Freedom

As often happens, Easter coincides with Passover, the Jewish festival of freedom. But this year Elaine and I, along with Jews around the world, feel anything but free. Passover is a moment for the extended family. We, along with guests, re-enact the story of our beginnings in the days of Moses, when our ancestors were slaves in Egypt, and God took us to freedom: a narrative story of how the supreme power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless. It’s the most fundamental of all Jewish festivals, a fact re-emphasised for me when I went to see *Leopoldstadt*, Tom Stoppard’s latest play, about a highly assimilated Jewish family in Vienna. Stoppard has written into the play a verbatim extract from the Seder night service itself, including the famous question asked by the youngest child present: “*Why is this night*

different from all other nights?"

Recently I've been asking myself: why is this year different from all other years? For perhaps the first time in the 32 centuries since the days of Moses, Jews around the world will be unable to celebrate the festival with their extended family. Many, especially the elderly, will be on their own. For a religion focused around the family, this is truly painful. But this at least we know, that the food we eat – the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery – are all too appropriate in a world, like ancient Egypt, smitten by a plague of biblical proportions. And we know this too: the Passover story begins with suffering but ends with hope.

<https://rabbisacks.org/archive/rediscovering-the-common-good-passover-in-isolation-gulag-survivor/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Watch Your Words!

Life Lessons From the Parshah - Metzora

By Yehoshua B. Gordon z"l * © Chabad 2024

The theme of this week's Torah portion, Metzora, revolves around tzaraat – biblical leprosy. It's important to distinguish between biblical leprosy (which no longer occurs) and the modern disease we know as leprosy or Hansen's disease. While relatively rare, contemporary leprosy is a treatable skin infection. Biblical leprosy, on the other hand, is not a condition with a medical cure or treatment.

Maimonides explains that tzaraat is a purely spiritual phenomenon, illustrating his point with an extreme example from our parshah:

And if the tzaraat has spread over the skin, whereby the tzaraat covers all the skin of the [person with the] lesion, from his head to his feet, wherever the eyes of the priest can see it, then the priest shall look [at it] and, behold! The tzaraat has covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce [the person with] the lesion clean. He has turned completely white; he is clean.¹

Essentially, if a person develops a rash that we suspect might be tzaraat, but it covers their entire body, the priest must pronounce the individual ritually pure. While medicine might classify this as a severe case of leprosy, tzaraat is not a medical matter; it does not require the attention of a dermatologist. Maimonides concludes that biblical leprosy is solely based on spirituality.² It is miraculous. It is otherworldly. It is a Divine sign. It is a punishment sent from On High.

What was the Divine message to those afflicted with tzaraat? That their behavior was not as it should be. The primary misdeed that led to tzaraat was "*lashon hara*" – negative talk (lit. "evil tongue"). Tzaraat served as a punishment for gossiping or speaking ill of others, whether or not the gossip was true. Those who incessantly engaged in lashon hara developed leprosy on their bodies. If they learned their lesson and changed their behavior, it ended there. If they persisted, the leprosy could spread to their clothing and, if left unchecked, even to the walls of their houses.

Adrift In the Wind

There's a profound story of a man who approached his rabbi seeking advice on the proper path to repentance after speaking lashon hara.

"Rabbi," the man began, "I must confess. I have engaged in lashon hara, and I'm ashamed to

admit that I've done so extensively. How can I possibly atone for my sins?"

"Please go home," replied the rabbi, "and return with a feather pillow and a knife." Confused but determined to follow the great rabbi's instructions, the man did as he was told.

"Now cut open the pillow," instructed the rabbi. "Walk outside and let the wind carry the feathers wherever they may go." The man followed the instructions and the feathers flew everywhere.

"Now," concluded the rabbi, "go and collect all of the feathers and put them back in the pillow; when you've done that, you will know that G d has forgiven you."

"But rabbi!" cried the man, "the feathers flew here, there, and everywhere! There's no way I can get them all back into the pillow!"

"Exactly," said the rabbi, "and such is the nature of one's language! Unlike an object that can be returned to its owner, a word can never be retrieved once released from one's mouth. The damage it does is impossible to undo."

Unintended Harm

So, what exactly constitutes lashon hara? All forbidden speech, including anything derogatory or damaging spoken against an individual, regardless of one's intentions.

The Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, recounts the following story in Tanya:³

The great Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, redactor of the Mishnah, once examined a bill of divorce, and was displeased with the way it was written. When his son, Rabbi Shimon, defended the document's validity, Rabbi Yehuda looked at him disapprovingly and maintained that such a document should not have been written in that way. In his defense, Rabbi Shimon stated, "I did not write it; Rabbi Yehuda Chaita wrote it." His father responded, "Turn away from uttering this kind of malicious speech, this lashon hara!"⁴

Rabbi Shimon clearly had no intention of speaking negatively about Rabbi Yehuda Chaita; he was merely defending himself. Nonetheless, his father reprimanded him. What he was essentially saying was, "All you needed to say was, 'I didn't do it.' There was no need to disclose who did."

Elevate Yourself

Many people engage in lashon hara due to their own insecurities; when they feel insecure, they seek solace in belittling others. A profound principle that we must uphold and teach our children and our grandchildren is: Don't elevate yourself up by putting others down; elevate yourself by elevating yourself.

When Rabbi Shalom DovBer, the Fifth Rebbe, and his brother Rabbi Zalman Aharon, known as "the Raza" were children, the Raza was shorter than his younger brother, which didn't sit well with him.

One day, the Raza snuck up behind his brother and gently pushed him down, causing him to fall into a small pit. Standing over his brother, the Raza happily remarked that he was now the taller

one. Their father, Rabbi Shmuel, the Fourth Rebbe, known as the Rebbe Maharash, witnessed the incident.

The Rebbe asked for a chair, instructed the Raza to stand on it, and asked him, "Who's taller now?"

"I am!" answered the Raza enthusiastically.

"Indeed!" affirmed the Rebbe Maharash, "but now you understand that there's no need to bring your brother down; you can simply elevate yourself."

When we engage in lashon hara, we are attempting to elevate ourselves at the expense of others.

Packed Suitcases

A wise friend once shared with me that people can be placed into one of three distinct categories based on their topics of conversation.

The lowest category comprises those who talk about other people.

The next category consists of those who talk about "things." Some people love to talk about their material possessions: their new car, new house, or the great vacation they just went on. "Look what I have, look what I bought, look what I got."

Then there's the highest category of people — those who discuss ideas.

We should always keep fresh Torah teachings in our minds, memories, and hearts. This way, even if we encounter a situation where people are engaging in lashon hara, we can redirect the conversation and say, "You know, I recently learned something very interesting," or "I read something fascinating in a Torah book."

The Rebbe once gave this advice to a young rabbinical student who was preparing for a stint as a "roving rabbi" in Chabad's Merkos Shlichus program. The program dispatches hundreds of rabbinical students to small Jewish communities around the globe for Passover, during the summer, and for the High Holidays. Their mission is to meet with Jewish people and plant seeds of spirituality and inspiration wherever they go.

The Rebbe instructed this young man to always have a substantial amount of Torah wisdom on hand, ready to be shared with others. "*Pack many Torah teachings into your suitcase,*" instructed the Rebbe.

As we travel the road of life, what should we pack in our suitcases? Torah teachings. We should always have a Torah thought ready to share with others. It's the best antidote to lashon hara.

A Painful Lesson

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933), a renowned Talmudist, rabbi, and authority on Jewish law, better known as the "Chafetz Chaim" after the title of his book on lashon hara, was once traveling by train to a Jewish community to give a lecture. During the trip, a man sat down next to him and struck up a conversation. When the Chafetz Chaim asked where he was headed, the man replied, "I'm going into town to hear the Chafetz Chaim speak. He's the greatest tzaddik (righteous person) in the Jewish world today."

Embarrassed by the praise, the Chafetz Chaim responded, "People tend to exaggerate his greatness. I know him very well and he's not that great." Enraged by this remark, the man slapped the Chafetz Chaim across the face.

That night at the lecture, the man was shocked to realize that the person he had hit was none other than the Chafetz Chaim himself. As soon as the lecture ended, he pleaded with the Chafetz Chaim for forgiveness.

In response, the Chafetz Chaim simply smiled and said, "There's no need for forgiveness—you were defending me. In fact, you taught me a great lesson: I learned that not only should one not speak lashon hara about others, but one should also not speak badly about oneself."

The parshah of Metzora reminds us of the importance of being extremely sensitive to the feelings of others, which begins by ensuring that we always use the right words.

As we approach the holiday of Passover and gather around the Seder table with the Four Sons — the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, and the son who does not even know how to ask — let us remember the power we hold in our speech. Let us use our words to educate, inspire, and uplift. With our speech, we can build greatness. Let us keep our insecurities in check and be mindful never to hurt others in our attempt to elevate ourselves.

May we all be blessed with a happy and kosher Passover, filled with elevating those around us. And may we merit the Ultimate Redemption from this last and final exile, with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 13:12-13.
2. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Leprosy 16:10.
3. *Tanya* ch. 30.
4. Bava Batra 164b.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6399995/jewish/Watch-Your-Words.htm

Metzora: The Odyssey of Redemption

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

The Odyssey of Redemption

Tazri'a discusses a now-extinct disease known as tzara'at, which appeared on a Jewish man or woman's skin, garment, or home as a reflection of some subtle spiritual imperfection in the person.

This is the law governing a lesion of tzara'at on a woolen or linen garment, warp or woof, or any leather article, to be rid of defilement or to be defiled.)Lev. 13:59(

Spiritually, the condition of tzara'at and its purification allude to exile and redemption, respectively. This means that just as the condition of tzara'at was followed by the process of purification, living our lives according to the Torah's instructions during exile will lead organically into the Redemption. In other words, the Redemption will simply be the full flowering of the Torah and its commandments that we studied and performed during our exile. The Torah of the Messianic future will be the same Torah we now possess, but its innermost dimensions will finally be fully revealed to us. Similarly, we will continue to observe the Torah's commandments in the Messianic future, but we will do so in their fullest scope, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In reading about the odyssey of the individual afflicted with tzara'at and the process of his or her redemption from social isolation – “exiled” from society – we are at the same time reading about both our own personal odysseys of spiritual crisis and redemption as well as our collective odyssey through our exile, as we work toward our final Redemption.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d show more and more great miracles in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos, and a kosher and joyous Pesach.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Pesach Issue Attached!!

Volume 30, Issue 28

Shabbat HaGadol Parashat Metzora

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Power of Shame - On 20 December 2013, a young woman named Justine Sacco was waiting in Heathrow airport before boarding a flight to Africa. To while away the time, she sent a tweet in questionable taste about the hazards of catching AIDS. There was no immediate response, and she boarded the plane unaware of the storm that was about to break. Eleven hours later, upon landing, she discovered that she had become an international cause célèbre. Her tweet, and responses to it, had gone viral. Over the next 11 days she would be googled more than a million times. She was branded a racist and dismissed from her job. Overnight she had become a pariah.[1]

The new social media have brought about a return to an ancient phenomenon, public shaming. Two recent books – Jon Ronson's *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* and Jennifer Jacquet's *Is Shame Necessary?*[2] – have discussed it. Jacquet believes it is a good thing. It can be a way of getting public corporations to behave more responsibly, for example. Ronson highlights the dangers. It is one thing to be shamed by the community of which you are a part, quite another by a global network of strangers who know nothing about you or the context in which your act took place. That is more like a lynch mob than the pursuit of justice.

Either way, this gives us a way of understanding the otherwise bewildering phenomenon of *tsara'at*, the condition dealt with at length in last week's parsha and this one. *Tsara'at* has been variously translated as leprosy, skin disease, and scaly infection. Yet there are formidable problems in identifying it with any known disease. First, its symptoms do not correspond to Hansen's Disease, otherwise known as leprosy. Second, the *tsara'at* described in the Torah affects not only human beings but also the walls of houses, furniture, and clothes. There is no known medical condition that has this property.

Besides, the Torah is a book about holiness and correct conduct. It is not a medical text. Even if it were, as David Zvi Hoffman points out in his commentary,[3] the procedures to be

carried out do not correspond to those that would be done if *tsara'at* were a contagious disease. Finally, *tsara'at* as described in the Torah is a condition that brings not sickness but rather impurity, *tumah*. Health and purity are different things altogether.

The Sages decoded the mystery by relating our parsha to the instances in the Torah in which someone was actually afflicted by *tsara'at*. It happened to Miriam when she spoke against her brother Moses (Num. 12:1-15). Another example referred to was Moses who, at the Burning Bush, said to God that the Israelites would not believe in him. His hand briefly turned "as leprous as snow" (Ex. 4:7). The Sages regarded *tsara'at* as a punishment for *lashon hara*, evil speech, speaking negatively about or denigrating another person.

This helped them explain why the symptoms of *tsara'at* – mould, discolouration – could affect walls, furniture, clothes, and human skin. These were a sequence of warnings or punishments. First God warned the offender by sending a sign of decay to the walls of his house. If the offender repented the condition stopped there. If he failed to do so his furniture was affected, then his clothes, and finally his skin.

How are we to understand this? Why was "evil speech" regarded as so serious an offence that it took these strange phenomena to point to its existence? And why was it punished this way and not another?

It was the anthropologist Ruth Benedict and her book about Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*,[4] that popularised a distinction between two kinds of society: guilt cultures and shame cultures. Ancient Greece, like Japan, was a shame culture. Judaism and the religions influenced by it (most obviously, Calvinism) were guilt cultures. The differences between them are substantial.

In shame cultures, what matters is the judgment of others. Acting morally means conforming to public roles, rules, and expectations. You do what other people expect you to do. You follow society's conventions. If you fail to do so, society punishes you by subjecting you to shame, ridicule, disapproval, humiliation, and ostracism. In guilt cultures what matters is not what other people think but what the voice of conscience tells you.

Living morally means acting in accordance with internalised moral imperatives: "You shall" and "You shall not." What matters is what you know to be right and wrong.

People in shame cultures are other-directed. They care about how they appear in the eyes of others, or as we would say today, they care about their "image." People in guilt cultures are inner-directed. They care about what they know about themselves in moments of absolute honesty. Even if your public image is undamaged, if you know you have done wrong it will make you feel uneasy. You will wake up at night, troubled. "O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!" says Shakespeare's Richard III. "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues / And every tongue brings in a several tale / And every tale condemns me for a villain." Shame is public humiliation. Guilt is inner torment.

The emergence of a guilt culture in Judaism flowed from its understanding of the relationship between God and humankind. In Judaism we are not actors on a stage with society as the audience and the judge. We can fool society; we cannot fool God. All pretence and pride, every mask and persona, the cosmetic cultivation of public image are irrelevant: "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Shame cultures are collective and conformist. By contrast Judaism, the archetypal guilt culture, emphasises the individual and their relationship with God. What matters is not whether we conform to the culture of the age but whether we do what is good, just, and right.

This makes the law of *tsara'at* fascinating, because according to the Sages' interpretation, it constitutes one of the rare instances in the Torah of punishment by shame rather than guilt. The appearance of mould or discolouration on the walls of a house was a public signal of private wrongdoing. It was a way of saying to everyone who lived or visited there, "Bad things have been said in this

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place.” Little by little the signals came ever closer to the culprit, appearing next on their bed or chair, then on their clothes, then on their skin, until eventually their found themselves diagnosed as defiled:

And a blighted person, one bearing the disease – their clothing shall be torn, and the hair of their head disarrayed. And they shall cover their upper lips as they cry out, ‘Impure! Impure!’ They shall be in a state of impurity for as long as they have the disease; they are impure. They shall live apart; outside the camp shall be their dwelling. (Lev. 13:45-46)

These are quintessential expressions of shame. First is the stigma: the public marks of disgrace or dishonour (the torn clothes, unkempt hair). Then comes the ostracism: temporary exclusion from the normal affairs of society. These have nothing to do with illness and everything to do with social disapproval. This is what makes the law of *tsara’at* so hard to understand at first: it is one of the rare appearances of public shaming in a non-shame, guilt-based culture.[5] It happened, though, not because society had expressed its disapproval but because God was signalling that it should do so.

Why specifically in the case of *lashon hara*, “evil speech”? Because speech is what holds society together. Anthropologists have argued that language evolved among humans precisely in order to strengthen the bonds between them so that they could co-operate in larger groupings than any other animal. What sustains co-operation is trust. This allows and encourages me to make sacrifices for the group, knowing that others can be relied on to do likewise. This is precisely why *lashon hara* is so destructive. It undermines trust. It makes people suspicious about one another. It weakens the bonds that hold the group together. If unchecked, *lashon hara* will destroy any group it attacks: a family, a team, a community, even a nation. Hence its uniquely malicious character: It uses the power of language to weaken the very thing language was brought into being to create, namely, the trust that sustains the social bond.

That is why the punishment for *lashon hara* was to be temporarily excluded from society by public exposure (the signs that appear on walls, furniture, clothes, and skin), stigmatisation and shame (the torn clothes, etc.) and ostracism (being forced to live outside the camp). It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to punish the malicious gossipier using the normal conventions of law, courts, and the establishment of guilt. This can be done in the case of *motsi shem ra*, libel or slander, because these are all cases of making a false statement. *Lashon hara* is more subtle. It is done not by falsehood but by insinuation. There are many ways of harming a person’s

reputation without actually telling a lie. Someone accused of *lashon hara* can easily say, “I didn’t say it, I didn’t mean it, and even if I did, I did not say anything that was untrue.” The best way of dealing with people who poison relationships without actually uttering falsehoods is by naming, shaming, and shunning them.

That, according to the Sages, is what *tsara’at* miraculously did in ancient times. It no longer exists in the form described in the Torah. But the use of the Internet and social media as instruments of public shaming illustrates both the power and the danger of a culture of shame. Only rarely does the Torah invoke it, and in the case of the *metzora* only by an act of God, not society. Yet the moral of the *metzora* remains. Malicious gossip, *lashon hara*, undermines relationships, erodes the social bond, and damages trust. It deserves to be exposed and shamed.

Never speak ill of others, and stay far from those who do.

[1] Jon Ronson, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed*, London: Picador, 2015, pp. 63-86.

[2] Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary? New Uses for an Old Tool*, London: Allen Lane, 2015.

[3] Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, *Commentary to Sefer Vayikra [Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 253–255.

[4] Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.

[5] Another example of shame, according to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was the ceremony in which a slave who did not wish to go free after the completion of six years of service, had his ear pierced against a doorpost (Ex. 20:6). See Rashi ad loc., and Kiddushin 22b.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

While we are looking forward to the Passover Seder, allow me to suggest an important lesson that we are likely to overlook. Fascinatingly, alongside Moshe who is not really mentioned by the Haggadah, there is another great Biblical personality who plays a major role in the Haggadah, but who is likewise overlooked. This personality is Joseph, firstborn of Rachel, favored son of Jacob-Israel and Grand Vizier of Egypt.

Let us start at the very beginning of the Seder. After we raise the first cup of wine and recite Kiddush, we wash our hands without a blessing before eating a vegetable, usually parsley, and we make the blessing to God, “Creator of the fruit of the earth”. The usual explanation for this is that *karpas* is the Greek word for vegetation, and Greco-Roman meals would generally begin with the vegetable *hors-d’oeuvre* together with a ‘dip’. The Seder is a reclining meal reminiscent of a Graeco-Roman

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feast and so we begin the Seder evening with this vegetable *hors-d’oeuvre*/dip.

For us, the vegetable is also a symbol of spring, Passover is called the Festival of the Spring – and the dip is generally salt-water, reminiscent of the tears of the Hebrew slaves.

There is, however, an entirely different interpretation of the *karpas* suggested by Rashi in his commentary on the verse, which mentions the coat of many colors (*k’tonet passim* Genesis 37:3). Rashi links this source to the verse in the Scroll of Esther which describes the rich embroidery of the palace of King Achashverosh: “There were hangings of white fine linen (*karpas*, Esther 1:6), thereby identifying with the Persian word *karpas* which describes an expensive material or garment; the second syllable *pas* means stripe in Hebrew and evidently refers to an expensive material with stripes of many colors. The *karpas* would therefore refer to Joseph’s coat of many colors, the gift he received from his father elevating him over his siblings and singling him out as the *bechor* (firstborn).

Interestingly enough, there is a custom in many Yemenite communities to dip the *karpas* vegetable into the *charoset*, a mixture of wine, nuts and sometimes dates, which the Jerusalem Talmud says is reminiscent of blood. Hence, just as the brothers dipped Joseph’s cloak of many colors into the blood of the goat claiming to their father that Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast; we dip our *karpas* into the *charoset*.

What does this have to do with Passover? The Babylonian Talmud (B.T. Shabbat 10b) teaches in the name of Rav: “One should never favor one child over the other children in a family. It was because of an expensive garment bought for two *sela’im* that Jacob gave to Joseph – more expensive than anything he had given to any of his other children – he was envied by his brothers, and the issue ‘snowballed’ until our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt.” Hence, the Seder begins by warning every leader of the family to learn from the Joseph story the importance of showing equal affection and treatment to all of one’s children so as not to engender causeless hatred and strife.

The Seder’s theme of the Joseph story continues with the cups of wine. Although the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 99b) links the four cups with the four (or five) expressions of redemption in the Book of Exodus (6:6-7), the Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim 10:1) connects the cups of wine to the four or five times the word *kos* – cup – appears in the butler’s dream in the book of Genesis (40:9-13, 21). And of course Joseph’s interpretation of the butler’s dream is that he would be freed from his

prison enslavement and would be able to once again serve his master. Since this source deals with freedom from slavery in Egypt and actually uses the word *kos*, it is certainly legitimate to see it as a source for the cups of wine that we drink in remembrance of our exodus from Egypt.

Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, (known as the Vilna Gaon, 1720-1797) identifies a reference to Joseph at the very end of the Seder as well, with the Had Gadya song. He masterfully interprets the little goat bought for two zuzim as the goat whose blood was used to soil Joseph's coat of many colors: Jacob 'acquired' the shock that he received upon seeing the bloodied cloak by virtue of the two sela'im he had spent on the expensive cloak, which engendered the causeless hatred of the other brothers – a hatred unto death.

In a fascinating and parallel symbolic manner, the Jewish people are also the blameless goat whom our Father in Heaven bought unto Himself with the Two Tablets of Stone, the Decalogue He gave them at Sinai. Because of that gift, and the status of the Jewish people as the chosen people, we have been hated throughout the generations and persecuted unto death by cruel tyrant after cruel tyrant. And despite the causeless hatred against us, each of our attackers will be destroyed in turn until eventually even the angel of death will be destroyed by our Father in Heaven. At that time, Israel and the world will be redeemed and death will be destroyed forever.

May it be speedily and in our days!

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Miserly Marner

I no longer remember the name of my ninth-grade teacher of English literature. But I do remember well one of his important lessons. He taught us that there are many great works of literature that are misunderstood. These are books which are commonly thought to be concerned with one specific theme but are really about something else entirely.

To illustrate his point, he included George Eliot's famous novel, *Silas Marner*, in our list of assigned readings. He pointed out to us that even well-educated individuals assume that this work is all about a pathological miser and is essentially a psychological study of miserly behavior. He thus demonstrated to us that one of the common clues in the highbrow New York Times crossword puzzle is "miserly Marner," for which the correct response is "Silas." The creator of the crossword puzzle is confident that he can safely assume that even his sophisticated audience will readily associate "miserly" with the hero of Eliot's novel.

Yet, after the class had completed the assignment and read the great novel, we all knew well that miserliness was only a secondary, and quite incidental, theme in this work. On the contrary, the book was a study of several significant issues, ranging from religion to industrialization to community.

Many years later, it occurred to me that my freshman teacher of English literature was on to something that applied not only to classic English literature, but that also could be applied to the weekly Torah portions. Many, even ardent students of the weekly parsha fail to identify important themes, and very substantial lessons, in the Torah portion.

This week's parsha is a case in point. We will be reading *Metzora* (Leviticus 14:1-15:33). Most of us assume that the content of this Torah reading is limited to its title, *Metzora*, usually translated as a "leper." On the surface, this assumption is true. It is all about symptoms of a once common and fairly widespread disease, usually identified with leprosy. As such, this Torah portion heads the list of those passages in the Torah which seem irrelevant to contemporary life and which have little to teach us about human conduct.

But the rabbis thought otherwise. Famously, they saw the connection between the Hebrew word *metzora*, leper, and the Hebrew phrase *motzi ra*, "he who expresses malice." They go further and maintain that the disease is a punishment for the egregious sin of spreading malicious gossip, and countless rabbinic sermons have used this week's Torah portion as a springboard for a lecture about the evils of maligning others and of the abuse of the gift of speech.

But there is another, lesser-known, hidden theme in this week's Torah portion which the rabbis of the Talmud have identified. For *metzora*, besides being a contraction of the two words *motzi ra*, can also be decoded as a contraction of the two words *tzar ayin*, "narrow eyes," a Hebrew euphemism for miserly behavior. A stingy person is referred to in Hebrew as a *tzar ayin*, a narrow-eyed individual, one who selfishly sees only himself and does not see the needs of another.

The source of this approach is to be found in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Arachin* 16a, which includes *tzarut ayin*, stinginess, as one of the sins for which "leprosy" is a punishment. The Talmud finds a basis for this contention in the phrase to be found in chapter 14 verse 35, which describes the procedure to be followed when an Miserly Marner individual discovers a "leprous blemish" in "his" house. The school of Rabbi Ishmael taught that such bizarre blemishes were the consequences of the sinful attitude of one who thinks that his "house" is his and his alone, and who selfishly does not share his possessions with others.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Representatives of the nineteenth-century Mussar movement, which emphasized the central importance of ethical behavior in Jewish religious practice, used this week's Torah portion to severely criticize miserliness and undue emphasis upon the retention of one's possessions. Thus, one of the leaders of this movement, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, known as "the 'Alter (Old Man)' of Kelm" writes at length about the "shameful behavior of *kamtzanut* (stinginess)."

Rabbi Ziv, whom I'll refer to from hereon as "the Alter," delves into medieval rabbinic literature and finds a treasure trove of quotations condemning miserliness, and which find miserly behavior widespread in the communities in which they lived.

One example is this quotation from the work known as *Sefer HaYashar*, "The Book of the Upright," which is attributed to one of the outstanding leaders of French Jewry in the twelfth century, Rabbenu Tam: "An individual's miserliness is not limited to just one aspect of his overall behavior. Rather, the stingy person will fail to perform even basic mitzvot, good deeds, because he sees no benefit to be gained from performing them. If performing such good deeds will cost him even a minute monetary loss, he will find all sorts of excuses to avoid performing those good deeds. His stinginess will make it impossible for him to be a truly pious person."

Interestingly, and almost paradoxically, the Alter finds that the character trait of miserliness is not always a negative one. It is sometimes praiseworthy, particularly when it is utilized as an antidote to a very different negative trait, namely undue extravagance. The Alter recognizes that whereas many individuals in the communities with which he was familiar were overly stingy, there were many who were given to excessive spending, often falling into irreversible debt in the process. He has no difficulty in finding earlier rabbinic authorities who condemn excessive spending as well as miserly selfishness.

In a collection of the Alter's personal correspondence, we have an example of just how careful he encouraged his students to be in order to avoid profligate spending. In a letter to three of his young students, he urges them to conserve the stationery at their disposal and join together in writing letters to him on just one sheet of paper. He concludes his letter thus: "Remember that spending even one penny for naught is a violation of the prohibition against waste."

The Alter's insistence that one strike a balance between selfish stinginess and wasteful spending is a useful teaching for those of us who live in today's affluent society. Often, we adopt distorted priorities and practice thrift with regard to important societal causes, and spend excessively on frivolous ones.

As always, Maimonides said it best when he advocated what has come to be called the “golden mean,” and advised us to carefully contemplate the downsides of extreme behaviors and adopt moderation in all of our endeavors.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Why Was the Metzora Put Into Solitary Confinement?

Tzora'as – which is one of the primary topics of this week's parsha – is a consequence of a variety of sins, such as Lashon HaRah (gossip), Tzarus Ayin (miserliness), and Gayvah (arrogance). But for whatever reason, when a person has become a Metzora “–his clothes must be torn, he must let the hair of his head grow long, he shall cloak himself up to his lips; and he is to call out: ‘Contaminated, contaminated!’” (Vayikra 13:45). There are many parallels here to the halacha of mourning. A person who is a Metzora goes into a form of Aveilus, similar to an Avel.

The next pasuk continues: “All the days that the affliction is upon him, he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” (Vayikra 13:46). Beyond everything else, the Metzora is placed into solitary confinement—outside the camp—until his Tzora'as is cured.

Rav Yaakov Kaminitzky, in his sefer Emes L'Yaakov, wonders why isolation is an appropriate punishment for a Metzora. Rav Yaakov suggests that perhaps solitary confinement does not seem appropriate for a Metzora. The halacha is (even though this is Biblically prohibited to do) that if a Metzora rips off his signs of Tzora'as, he is no longer Tameh. This means that if a Kohen will examine him again and there is no more Tzora'as, he will be proclaimed Tahor. So perhaps if we put this fellow in confinement, we should maintain some kind of surveillance such as a video camera to ensure that he does not surreptitiously peel off his Tzora'as and try to be m'Taher himself! Why do we leave him out there in the middle of nowhere where he can do anything he wants?

Rav Yaakov rejects the possibility that he is placed in confinement because he has a contagious condition that we are concerned might spread to others. He insists that Tzora'as is not contagious. It is a spiritual disease, not a physical disease that we might consider as contagious.

Ironically, I found that the Meshech Chochma in Parshas Tazria in fact says that Tzora'as is a communicable disease. He brings several proofs from the Talmud and the Medrash that this is the case. The Meshech Chochma points out that this is why it was the Kohanim who had to deal with the Metzora—because the

Kohanim were on a higher spiritual level and had elevated merit, which would hopefully grant them added protection from such contamination.

Be that as it may, Rav Yaakov says that Tzora'as is not a communicable disease, which leads him to the problem: Why was the Metzora put into solitary confinement? Rav Yaakov explains that the purpose of this confinement is that we want to send the Metzora a message from Heaven that based on his behavior, he should be incommunicado. The Ribono shel Olam is not happy with him. He is in a form of excommunication—the Ribono shel Olam does not want him around. By putting him in solitary confinement in this world, we are actualizing what is happening in Heaven. The hope and intent are that his isolation and confinement should bring him to Teshuva. Sitting in solitary confinement should help him recognize why he is in this type of situation.

I was thinking that perhaps there is another approach which might explain why the Metzora must be placed in confinement “outside the camp.” A person who is a Metzora, who has engaged in Lashon HoRah is a menace to society. His presence harms the community. We always think of a “danger to society” as someone who attacks or harms other people. But a Metzora is just as much a menace to society. He destroys society because when people speak ill of one another and spread rumor—whether true or not true—about other people, it destroys the fabric of interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, his punishment is “You cannot be in society.” I heard an interesting chiddush in the name of Rav Yaakov Galinsky. If we consider the Ten Plagues, we may ask ourselves, “Which was the worst of the Makos?” A case could be made that Makas Bechoros was the worst of the plagues. But what was the most difficult plague to withstand—not in terms of the numbers who were killed or the damage, but simply the most difficult maka to endure?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky says the most difficult maka was the Plague of Darkness. The reason for that, he maintains, is that it says by Makas Choshech that “One man could not see his brother” (Shemos 10:23). This means that it was impossible to commiserate with someone else. By all the other makos, everyone suffered together. Everyone experienced Blood. Everyone experienced Lice. Everybody experienced Wild Animals.

Everyone complains about their problems. There was a city-wide blackout a couple of years ago due to a major storm. Everyone complained how tough they had it. I lost my freezer, I lost this, I lost that. Everyone commiserates with each other. When there is a

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blizzard... “Oy! It was gefairlich! I had so much snow on my drive way, I could not move my car for two weeks!” But at least you could talk to people about it, and everyone could share their personal problems. “You think that was bad? You should have seen what happened by me!”

Misery loves company. By every other plague, as bad as it was, at least there was company. However, during the plague of Darkness, people sat alone for three days and could not talk to anyone! It was impossible to tell anyone how bad it was! Nobody could tell you that he had it worse than you! “One man did not see his brother.” They all had to sit alone by themselves! To deal with a maka and not be able to share it with anyone is the most difficult maka to take.

This is what we do to the Metzora. We tell the person “You are a menace to society. You do not belong among people. You cannot have the comfort of being with other people to console you and commiserate with and comfort you. That is your punishment.” We deny the Metzora, who is a menace to society, the benefit of society—which is to have someone else there to comfort him.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How can any one shabbat be greater than all the others? This coming shabbat will have the title ‘Shabbat HaGadol’ – The Great Sabbath. Many reasons are given as to why the shabbat preceding Pesach has this name. The great 14th century Jewish scholar, the Tur, explains, “Lefi shena'aseh bo neis gadol.” – “It's because on that shabbat, a great miracle happened.”

An Open Display of Faith - This was the shabbat preceding Pesach when the Jewish People in Egypt took a lamb, which was deified by the Egyptians, and sacrificed it to Hashem. In this way they showed confidence in their faith: despite so many years of bondage, they were able to openly display the features of their faith.

Although this was a special miracle, it took place at a time when there were numerous great miracles; all the plagues, the parting of the waters of the sea and so on – so why is this called the neis gadol, the great miracle? Greatness

The term ‘neis gadol’ – great miracle – mentioned by the Tur – can also be translated as ‘the miracle of greatness’.

Our people at the time showed greatness, and what was their greatness? It was the fact that they were proud of themselves and championed what they believed in without denigrating the Egyptians.

Rebbe Yisrael Salanter the 19th century scholar would tell a story about two identical twins who were constantly taunting each other. Once he came across them arguing about who was taller than the other. One of the brothers pushed the other on the ground and said, Ahah! Can you see? I'm now taller than you are!"

Rebbe Yisroel Salanter advised him, "If you want to appear to be higher than your brother, why don't you stand on a chair?"

Championing our Values - The point here is that in life, to promote ourselves, we should try to raise the level of our achievement through championing what we value rather than through pushing others down. If we all did this, and if nations would do this, this world would indeed be a better place.

So therefore on this great shabbat, let's all recognise the importance of true greatness.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Significance of Purity and Impurity in The Relationship Between Humankind and God - Rabbanit Rivky Yisraeli

The Book of Vayikra – or Torat Kohanim as it is also known – deals primarily with the Mishkan/Mikdash; the sacred service performed therein and the eating of the holy sacrifices. All of these can only be performed when one is in a state of purity.

The weekly portions we have recently read deal with the laws pertaining to men and women who are in a state of impurity (with the exception of those who are impure because they have come into contact with a dead person; these laws are mentioned in another portion). Let us attempt to understand the concepts of tum'ah and tahara [ritual purity and impurity] and how these are relevant to our own times.

The list of "those who are impure" begins in the portion of Tazri'a and continues until the end of parshat Metzora. The list comprises six states of human impurity in the following order:

The impurity of a birthing woman: "If a woman be delivered, and bear a male child, then she shall be impure seven days... But if she should bear a female child, then she shall be impure two weeks..." (Vayikra 12: 2, 5)

The impurity of one afflicted with leprosy – a metzora: "When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, or a scab, or a bright spot, and in the skin of his flesh it turns into the plague of leprosy.... and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him impure..." (ibid. 13: 2, 3)

The impurity of a man who has a urethral discharge (zav): "When any man has a discharge out of his flesh, his discharge is impure..." (ibid. 15, 2)

The impurity of a man who has discharged semen: "And if the flow of seed should go out from a man... he will be impure until the evening..." (ibid. 15, 16)

The impurity of a menstruating woman: "And if a woman has a discharge, and her discharge in her flesh be blood, she shall be in her impurity seven days; and whosoever touches her shall be impure until the evening..." (ibid. 15, 19)

The impurity of a woman who bleeds beyond her menstrual cycle (zava): "And if a woman should have a blood discharge of many days not in the time of her menstrual cycle, or if she should have a discharge beyond the time of her menstrual impurity; all the days of the discharge of her impurity she shall be as in the days of her impurity: she is impure." (ibid. 15, 25)

A closer examination of this list brings to light a few interesting characteristics: Some forms of impurity, like that of the birthing woman, a man who has discharged semen or a woman's menstrual blood, are natural phenomena, reflecting good health. (It must be noted that a woman is termed a nida, a woman who becomes impure due to the discharge of menstrual blood, so long as her bleeding is regular and doesn't continue beyond the normal number of bleeding days. In other words – as long as her body functions normally and her cycle is orderly. However, the minute the balance is broken and the bleeding goes on for longer than it should, this is looked upon as a disorder and the woman is then defined as a zava.

Other types of impurities are manifestations of illnesses: the impurity of the leper; the impurity of one who has abnormal urethral discharge and a woman with irregular or very long uterine bleeding.

It follows then that impurity does not necessarily denote a disorder. Often, impurity is simply a reflection of good health; occasionally, it is a sign of illness. (In fact, in the instance of an impurity resulting from the body's natural course, one can immerse oneself as soon as the "symptoms" are over, and thus become pure again. However, when the symptoms causing the impurity are the result of a disorder or illness, one has to wait an interim period until one is able to immerse and be purified.)

Impurity, at large, is not gender-specific. That said, there are types of impurity that are characteristic of males only (for example,

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semen or urethral discharge); while other forms of impurity are typically female (birth, menstruation, abnormal uterine bleeding over a long period of time.). Some states of impurity are not gender-specific and can manifest themselves in both men and women (for example, leprosy). No matter what kind of impurity we are dealing with, impurity may be transmitted from a woman to a man and vice versa through physical touch or intercourse.

With the exception of kohanim – who are prohibited from becoming impure and, as such, are not allowed to be in contact with the dead – there is actually no prohibition to be impure. (In fact, it would be impossible to obligate one to maintain a state of purity since, in most cases, impurity is the result of circumstance, and not normally a state people choose to be in).

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations that are imposed on one who is impure: s/he may not enter the Mikdash, nor may s/he eat of the flesh of the sacrifices.

Any person, irrespective of status or personality, can be in a state of purity or impurity. No person can remain pure for eternity; on the other hand, one always has the possibility to emerge from a state of impurity and become pure.

If so, what is the significance of these two states? An impure person is one who is physically distant from God due to the fact that he is unable to fulfill such commandments that signify physical closeness to God (entering the Mikdash, bringing sacrifices, eating from the sacred flesh of the offerings). Is this bad in itself? Not necessarily. Our portion teaches us about the natural states that are part and parcel of human life, and the dynamics of our relationship with our Maker – movements comprised of closeness and distance, a concept called 'ratzo vashov' ["going and returning"] – describing the eternal human state of coming closer to God and then feeling distant from Him, intermittently. When one feels far away from his Maker, he longs for the moment when he can finally become pure again and reunite with God. However, when one is in a state of purity, one also knows that it is for a limited time only, and that impurity cannot be evaded forever. Closeness to God, if so, is built on dynamics of closeness and distance, and the constant longing for renewed closeness.

It follows then that purity and impurity are a natural part of man's relationship with God; a dynamic relationship based on constant back-and-forth movements which make the bond as significant and as deep as it is. One must know that when it comes to our special relationship with God (and all our relationships for that matter – be they our spouses, our friends etc.), there is also a great significance

to distance and separation. There is no need to fear this temporary alienation, but to simply be aware of the fact that distance plays a part in the relationship, and can be used to better understand the connection and ultimately enhance the bond.

We truly hope that we will soon merit to engage in the true and pure worship of God – “Purify our hearts that we may truly worship You”, as we say in our prayers, “vetaher libeinu le’ovdecha be’emet”. May it come to be soon!

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg Great Expectations

In Parshas Metzora, the Torah describes the korbanos that a metzora brings on the eighth day after he is purified. The typical metzora offers three sheep: one as a korban asham, one as a chatas and one as an olah (14:10). But a metzora who is poor and cannot afford to bring three animals instead offers one sheep as a korban asham as well as two birds, one as a chatas and the other as an olah (14:21-22). Chazal (Yoma 41b) derive from the extra word “zos – this shall be” that a wealthy metzora who offers a poor man’s korban does not fulfill his obligation. Only a poor metzora may bring the lesser korban.

There are two important lessons that this halacha highlights. First, the atonement of the metzora is not dependent on the size of the korban he brings. Rather, the Torah accords equal value to the larger korban of the wealthy metzora and the smaller korban of the poor metzora. In a similar vein, Chazal point out (Menachos 110a) that the Torah uses the phrase *rai’ach nicho’ach* (a pleasant smell) to describe both an animal offering and a bird offering to indicate that whether a person offers a large korban or a smaller one is immaterial; the key is that his intention should be *l’sheim shamayim* – his heart should be directed toward heaven (see Rashi, Vayikra 1:17).

The Ramchal comments (Mesilas Yesharim, chapter 26) that every person is capable of achieving the middah of chassidus, that is, to act in a way that is pleasing to the Creator – *la’asos mah sheyaish nachas ruach l’yotzro bo*. But since people and their life circumstances vary, their expression of chassidus will be different. Nevertheless, a simple person can achieve the same level of chassidus as the greatest talmid chacham as long as he serves Hashem to the best of his ability. For this reason, the smaller korban of the poor metzora has the same value as the larger korban of the wealthy metzora since each korban fulfills the obligation of its owner.

Despite the fact that the smaller korban of the poor metzora is acceptable for him, the wealthy metzora may not use it to fulfill his obligation. He must bring the larger korban. Why is that? The Chofetz Chaim explains that since the wealthy man can afford to give more, he is expected to do so, and he may not discharge his obligation with less. This idea is relevant not just in the realm of korbanos, but in all of one’s avodas Hashem. The more intelligence, talent and resources a person has, the more that is expected of him.

At the end of Parshas Ki Savo (29:3-8), when Moshe Rabbeinu takes leave of Klal Yisrael after forty years in the desert, he tells them, “Hashem did not give you a heart to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear until this day...And you shall safeguard the words of this covenant and fulfill them.” What is the connection between Moshe’s two statements? Rashi explains that Moshe was saying that a person does not fully understand his teacher’s way of thinking until forty years. Therefore, Hashem was not particular with you until this day. But now that you have gained a more complete understanding of Hashem’s will after forty years, He will be stricter with you. Be careful to keep all of the mitzvos properly because from this point on, you will be held fully responsible for them. The greater a person’s understanding, the more that is expected of him.

This is one of the messages that Hashem shares with Klal Yisrael at the time of yetzias Mitzrayim. The posuk says, “This month (of Nisan) shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (Shemos, 12:2). Why does Hashem emphasize that Nisan will be “for you” the first of the months of the year? The Sforno explains that Hashem was saying that from now on, after your redemption, the months will be yours to do with them as you choose. As long as you were enslaved, you were beholden to others. But now you start your “existence of free choice” – *metzius’chem ha’bechiri*.

Freedom is certainly a privilege. But it comes with a sense of responsibility. A slave cannot set goals for himself; he cannot aspire to greatness or accomplishment. He is controlled by his master’s will. But a free man can chart his own destiny. He has the power to choose whether to pursue his material desires or to live an elevated existence, whether to be satisfied with doing the minimum or to try to accomplish the most he possibly can. It is up to him to make something of himself.

At the time of yetzias Mitzrayim, Hashem exhorted Klal Yisrael to use their newfound freedom properly. And every year, as we approach the yom tov of Pesach and zman

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cheiruseinu, we are called upon to re-evaluate whether we are truly living up to that mission.

Rabbi Yakov Haber^{SEF} On Earthquakes, Eclipses, and Tzara’as

Much “buzz” has abounded in recently concerning two natural phenomena, a non-lethal earthquake hitting the tri-state area and a solar eclipse, total in many areas of the United States, but seen, to some extent, practically across all of that country. Much has been written and said about various Torah perspectives on these two events, for, as believing Jews, we do not attribute anything to mere happenstance. Here, I humbly submit some viewpoints culled from Torah sources with a modest attempt to connect these two natural events to broader current events and to the weekly Torah reading.

A famous passage in Maseches Brachos (59a) states: AND OVER ZEVA’OT [a blessing is recited]. What are ZEVA’OT? R. Kattina said: A rumbling of the earth. R. Kattina was once going along the road, and when he came to the door of the house of a certain necromancer, there was a rumbling of the earth. He said: Does the necromancer know what this rumbling is? He called after him, Kattina, Kattina, why should I not know? When the Holy One, blessed be He, calls to mind His children, who are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, He lets fall two tears into the ocean, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and that is the rumbling. Said R. Kattina: The necromancer is a liar and his words are false. If it was as he says, there should be one rumbling after another! He did not really mean this, however. There really was one rumbling after another, and the reason why he did not admit it was so that people should not go astray after him. R. Kattina, for his own part, said: [G-d] clasps His hands, as it says: “I will also smite my hands together, and I will satisfy my fury.” R. Nathan said: [G-d] emits a sigh, as it is said: “I will satisfy my fury upon them and I will be eased.” And the Rabbis said: He treads upon the firmament, as it says: “He giveth a noise as they that tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth.” R. Aha b. Jacob says: He presses his feet together beneath the throne of glory, as it says: “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.”[1]

Although earthquakes are unpredictable events,[2] in the above passage, Chazal present various approaches as to the cause of their happening. At first glance, all of these statements - attributing earthquakes to various Divine actions - seem directly at odds with the contemporary scientific theory of tectonic plates which attributes earthquakes to the shifting of tectonic plates beneath the earth’s surface. These plates, resting on liquid magma, are the foundation of all of the land above.[3]

A fundamental statement of Maharal (Be'er Hagola 6:1) illuminates our understanding of this and similar statements of Chazal. Our Sages in their aggadic statements are rarely concerned about the siba or direct, natural cause of natural or historical phenomena. They do not deny that this is present, but since natural phenomena are created and controlled by Hashem, they are more focused on the "sibas hasiba - the cause of the cause." In other words, they seek the fundamental, spiritual, heavenly reason why either erratic natural phenomena (e.g. earthquakes and rainbows) happen at a specific time or why cyclical ones (e.g. eclipses and comets) were programmed into the fabric of the natural order of creation by their Creator.[4]

In light of this, our Torah luminaries have presented various central lessons inherent in the above-mentioned teaching of Chazal. Here, we present one of them. Maharal (Be'er Hagola 4:7) explains that Klal Yisrael being in exile represents a fundamental change of the proper state of the world.[5] Such a change causes, by means of Divine providence, another massive change in the world order, an earthquake. In the language of Maharal, "shinui goreres shinui." Perhaps we can elaborate based on another teaching of Maharal (Nesiv Ha'avodah 5) that the word for place, "makom," is related to the word "mekayeim" or causing existence. Without a place to rest on, nothing could exist; the bricks of a building are not its true source of existence, but rather the piece of land it rests on is. Hashem is called "Hamakom" since He is the true Source of existence for everything. Hence, when the world order is massively conceptually "shaken to its core" by the exile of the Jewish people, its very source of existence, the makom, is quite literally shaken by its core. According to Maharal, the various anthropomorphic expressions used by the various Amoraim[6] refer to different parts of the body representing various aspects of G-d's closeness to mankind - eyes, hands, heart (the source of sighs), the lower leg (the source of kicks) and the foot, each one focusing on a different level of Divine providence evidenced by the earthquake.[7]

Commenting on eclipses, Chazal (Sukka 29a) state (among other comments there) that when a "solar defect" occurs, this is a bad omen for the nations of the world. By contrast, when a "lunar defect" happens, this is an inauspicious sign for the Jewish people. Here too, Maharal (Be'er Hagolah 6:2), in answering the problem that these "defects" are predictable natural events, explains, as mentioned briefly above, that the world was created in an imperfect manner in light of the imperfections that different segments of mankind would later manifest. Perhaps we can also explain that just as there are times in the day which are more conducive to prayers being answered and seasons in the year where certain spiritual

resources are more readily accessible, eclipse phenomena may represent such times.[8] In addition, many have noted that a solar eclipse caused by the moon, smaller than the sun by orders of magnitude, indicates the important teaching of "רבים ביד מעטים", that when one is allied with the Creator of the World and the Master of its History, the ability to overcome mighty nations can be granted even to the few and the weak.[9] Rav Aryeh Lebowitz quotes the Rishpei Eish that indeed a solar eclipse represents the victory of Klal Yisrael, represented by the moon, over the persecuting nations of the world, represented by the sun. The subsequent light of the sun represents the light of redemption over the entire world to follow that.

The bulk of our parasha deals with the physical phenomenon of tzara'as. As is quite evident, this is not to be equated with the medical condition known as leprosy. Neither its initial appearance nor the halachos mandating its declaration as tamei or tahor corresponds to medical science. Nonetheless, tzara'as is a physical phenomenon on the body, clothing or home. This serves as an example of the Maharal's principle of sibas hasiba on an individual basis. True, there is a physical phenomenon governed perhaps by the rules of nature, but it clearly represents a Divinely machinated physical manifestation of some spiritual malaise as highlighted by Chazal in Midrashim listing the various sins which can cause tzara'as. Not just concerning tzara'as but concerning all travails in life, Chazal (Berachos 5a) adjure us: הַרְוֵא שִׁיטוּרִין בְּאֵין - one who sees that suffering befalls him, should examine his deeds and return to G-d. In other words, one should constantly strive to see "the cause of the cause" and not suffice with a surface level focus on just the physical reason for the stress.

Klal Yisrael the world over, and, more manifestly, the yishuv in the Holy Land remain threatened by formidable enemy nations. The IDF remains locked in a multi-front war against Arab terrorists in Gaza, Yehuda and Shomron, Lebanon and Syria in a precarious struggle for survival. Iran, the modern-day kingdom of Persia, has threatened and, in light of recent events, presently threatens severe reprisal attacks against Israel and its interests abroad. Any other nation would go insane from fear under the current situation. But, the Jewish people, strengthened by the words of the haggada: "In every generation they rise up to destroy us, and the Holy One blessed be He saves us from their hand!" have confidence that they will survive against all odds.[10] The natural phenomena just occurring should both inspire us to be worthy of Hashem's protection by strengthening our avodas Hashem and by improving our interpersonal relationships and serve as an impetus to constantly realize that the Sibas Hasibos and Ilas Ha'ilos Above is the

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One truly running the show. May the aforementioned words of the Rishpei Aish be fulfilled in our days with a speedy victory over our enemies and may the illumination of the final redemption speedily shine in this month of the ge'ulah! אור חדש על ציון תאיר ונזכה כלנו! ממהרה לאורו!

[1] Translation courtesy of the online version of the Soncino Talmud.

[2] A quote from the United States Geological Survey: "Can you predict earthquakes? No. Neither the USGS nor any other scientists have ever predicted a major earthquake. We do not know how, and we do not expect to know how any time in the foreseeable future. USGS scientists can only calculate the probability that a significant earthquake will occur...in a specific area within a certain number of years." Available at

<https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/can-you-predict-earthquakes>.

[3] A fascinating passage in Chazal perhaps references this by comparing the earth to a ship floating on the ocean (Midrash Tehillim 93) as explained by Rav Dovid Brown, Mysteries of Creation.

[4] A similar approach explains the difference between human history and Divinely recorded history as written in Tanach. The former concerns itself only with natural, historical cause and effect; the latter presents the inner Divine dimension. See the Daas Mikra introduction to the book of Shmuel.

[5] See also Netzach Yisrael 1.

[6] And the necromancer who, in the Gemara's conclusion, actually spoke truth. R. Katina dismissed his words in order to avoid people following his other falsehoods and forbidden behaviors.

[7] The existence of earthquakes before the Jewish people were exiled represented the imperfect state of the world which would allow for such an exile. These words of Maharal perhaps imply that in the perfect Messianic era, earthquakes will cease to exist. He writes this explicitly concerning eclipses (see below) ceasing in the Messianic era (Be'er Hagolah 6:2).

[8] I was delighted that Rav Aryeh Lebowitz expressed a similar thought in his recently published remarks on the eclipse.

[9] A fascinating insight by Professor Nathan Aviezer in his book, "In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science" suggests that, on a psat level, the seeming contradiction between the passages describing the creation of the sun and the moon as, on the one hand, "שני מאורות הגדולים," but, on the other hand, also as "המאור הקטן" and "המאור הגדול" can be resolved by noting that although in actual size, the sun dwarfs the moon being approximately 400 times larger than it, but in relative size - due to the sun's extreme distance from the earth and the moon's relative nearness being 400 times closer - they are practically equal. This is of course is what allows for a total solar eclipse of the gigantic sun by the small moon.

[10] Even CNN, notoriously anti-Israel in its news coverage, put out a series of videos entitled Against All Odds documenting the miraculous survival of the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah: Rabbi Label Lam

Team Meeting - What is different about this night from all other nights? What is the meaning of this question that is meant to drive the Pesach Seder into high gear? After all, one anonymous philosopher once said, "There is

nothing more irrelevant than the answer to a question that was never asked." A question opens the mind and creates a vessel to receive. To the extent the depth of the question is perceived so will be the depth of the cognitive receptacle. I'm afraid, however, that this question is woefully underappreciated and underutilized. It is all too often employed as a recital and an invitation for the children to express their objective cuteness. So what does it mean and how can it be best used?

Here is my thesis. Pesach Night at the Seder, such a supremely holy gathering of the entirety of the Jewish People. Rav Hirsch points out that when we went down to Egypt it was "Es Yaakov Ish u'Beiso" – "Yaakov, each man and his household". When the time of the redemption came 210 years later we were by design configured again as households, families, eating our Korbon Pesach and readying to exit Egypt. Here we are 3,335 years later around the hearth of the family table in the same position again on the spiritual launching pad. Pesach night is a team meeting of ALL Klal Yisrael. Every family is a franchise of that original home of Avraham and Sara and of all the other homes that have preceded us. We are miraculously coordinated to clear away this time for a live meeting, separate and together all over the world as we have been gathering now generation after generation.

When I would have a meeting with my staff, I would not leave the event open to conversations that could run away anywhere. They needed to know that they were called to together for a purpose and I understood their time was valuable and that they might get hungry or tired along the way. Therefore I made sure to show some goodies at the beginning and for later too, and that we had a script, a guide, an agenda. After a team building exercise, we would review the agenda. It was usually a major question of concern to all teachers and administrators and the future of the institution and our employment, our mission, our collective reason for being. That's all! This meeting is no different!

The Question: The Agenda: "What is different about this night from all other nights?" Night is classically exile. We have passed through many different types of challenges and opponents over the gauntlet of this historical journey. Each one required a different strategy. We have faced forces of annihilation and assimilation.

None were able to defeat us entirely but many, too many, have fallen along the way. We are the survivors of survivors. What is the secret of our survival? The asking and the answering of this simple question: "What is different about this night from all other nights?"

Woe to the general who fights that last battle and sorry is the baseball batter who is still swinging at the last pitch. What are we being served now? What are we currently up against? In which way is this exile different from previous exiles? How are we being threatened presently as a continuous family culture?

Nishtana means to change or learn. What can we learn from all the experiences of the past and how can we adapt ourselves to survive those forces presently poised to separate us from our national and familial mission? If we can come up with just a few ideas and examples of ways to strengthen ourselves and our families then we will stand a greater chance of navigating the storm around us.

Now this is all very heavy so the night needs to feel light, and it's possible to do both. I find myself around this time of the year printing out lyrics of more current songs to add to the Lam Haggadah and distribute at the Seder. In recent years we have enjoyed singing together Shwekey's "We Are a Miracle". It's a great summary of our collective history and a profound definition of our existence. Then just recently my youngest son introduced me to a song from 8th Day entitled, "Avraham". One refrain there knocked me out. The first time I heard it I started to cry. I don't know why. The words are, "Avraham, are we the children that you dreamed of? Are we that shining star that you saw at night?" What a beautiful way to reflect upon our own historical reflection, in the eyes of Avraham Avinu. It's an awesome question! I love it! We sing it.

This year I am thinking of adding the words to Joey Newcomb's version of the Berdichever Niggun, "You Fall Down but You Get Back Up... Ki Yipul Tzadik Shiva Paamim V'Kam... The Tzadik fall seven times but rises..." I am hoping that one of the kids or grandkids will ask, "Abba – Zeidy, what does this have to do with the Seder?" The answer is, "Everything".

I had a real Irish poetry teacher in university and I remember well one thing he said, "Poetry gives the rowers a vision of the shore!" With a clarity of vision of where we are coming from and where we're going to and a strategy of how we are to navigate the current, with a few good strong theme songs to give us a vision of the shore, we are certain to bridge history and destiny in our mini team meeting.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l Studying the Laws of Leprosy

The Midrash on our parasha (Vayikra Rabba 19:3) addresses two seemingly contradictory verses in Shir Hashirim: the "Dod" (male lover) is described as "black as a raven" (5:11) and "[white as] the Lebanon" (5:15). One explanation cited by the Midrash is that of Rabbi Shemuel Bar

Likutei Divrei Torah

Yitzchak, who viewed these verses as references to certain areas of the Torah: "Even when they seem inappropriate and 'black' to teach in public, such as the laws of emissions, leprosy, menstruation, and childbirth, the Almighty says, 'Behold they are pleasant before Me,' as the verse states, 'The mincha [meal offering] of Yehuda and Jerusalem will be pleasant to God...' Know that this is so, for, after all, the parshiyot of the 'zav' [male who experiences emissions] and 'zava' [female who experiences emissions] are not included together [in a single parasha, despite their similarity]; rather, each one stands independently [this testifying to their importance]."

At first glance, it would appear that the Midrash refers to these parshiyot as seemingly "inappropriate and 'black' to teach in public" because they deal with private matters involving male and female bodies, regarding which modesty ought be applied. If this were true, however, then the laws of "nega'im" - leprosy skin infections - should not have been included in the list, for these laws deal with exposed parts of the body as well. It seems, then, that these areas of study are "black" because of the widespread aversion to involvement in these disciplines. These topics are dry and unappealing. In fact, the expression "Nega'im ve-Ohalot" (Maskehet Nega'im deals with the laws of leprosy, and Maskehet Ohalot covers methods of transmitting ritual impurity) appears in several contexts as a code-word for dry, technical areas of halakha. For example, it was once said to Rabbi Akiva, "What are you doing studying aggada - go deal with Nega'im and Ohalot!" (Sanhedrin 38b). The Gemara in Maskehet Chagiga (11a) comments, "Nega'im and Ohalot have little mention in the Scripture but many halakhot." The general popularity of aggada over halakha emerges in a story related in Maseket Sota (40a) of two amoraim who came to a city, whereupon one began teaching halakha and the other aggada. Almost the entire city went to hear the lectures on aggada!

The Almighty therefore declares that although these areas do not generally arouse interest, he considers them pleasant, as the verse states, "The 'mincha' of Yehuda and Jerusalem will be pleasant to God..." But how does this verse relate to our issue?

The Mishna at the end of Maskehet Menachot observes that the Torah applies the expression "of pleasant fragrance to God" to all sacrifices - animal sacrifices, bird sacrifices, and meal offerings, despite the vast difference in expense incurred between them. The Gemara adds, "[This comes] to teach you that whether one does much or little [is irrelevant] so long as he directs his heart to Heaven." The "mincha" (meal offering) is the cheapest sacrifice (as evidenced from the laws of "korban oleh ve-yored" - Vayikra 5), brought specifically by the poor. The mincha thus symbolizes an offering generally looked upon with disdain, but accepted by the Almighty as wholeheartedly, as it were, as any other korban. Therefore, the pleasantness with which God accepts the mincha, as spelled out in the aforementioned verse, accurately represents His

positive outlook on the generally unpopular parshiyot of zav, nida, tzara'at, etc.

It is not clear from the Midrash whether the "impropriety" of these areas of halakha is purely subjective, determined by popular conception, or if the Almighty Himself affords greater importance to certain areas of study and looks at others as more peripheral. It would seem, however, that the Midrash refers to a subjective description, as suggested by its wording, "Even when they seem inappropriate and 'black'..."

We find support for this position in a striking gemara in (Eruvin 64a): "What does it mean, 'He who keeps company with harlots will lose his wealth'? Whoever says, this topic is pleasing and this one isn't pleasing, loses the wealth of Torah." A person must relate to all areas of Torah study with the same level of fondness, and may never view certain areas as unappealing.

One may, however, wish to question this comment in the Gemara in light of a seemingly contradictory passage (Avoda Zara 19a): "A person can study Torah only in the place where his heart desires." Apparently, this comment bids one to choose the area of study that arouses his interest.

The answer is that one may never relate to a topic as "ugly," or claim that it is boring or pointless. He is entitled only to claim that a certain area does not appeal to him personally or doesn't speak to him, specifically. Although one may be permitted to avoid studying topics that do not appeal to him, this in no way legitimizes a perspective that sees these areas as of a lesser quality or lesser importance. The basis of one's relationship to Torah study must rest upon the awareness that within every part of Torah scholarship lies immense value. One must strive to master the entire gamut of Torah knowledge, despite the fact that due to time limitations he focuses only on those areas that interest him the most. The yeshivot selected several masekhtot for their curriculum not because they saw these masekhtot as more important, but because of the limited time generally spent by students in yeshiva. They therefore decided to focus on the more basic masekhtot that provide the young student with the foundations upon which he will be able to continue and progress in the world of Gemara and halakha after his years in yeshiva. One must study not only that which appeals to him, but must strive to reach a level where all subjects of Torah appeal to him. *(Summarized by Matan Glidai; Translated by David Silverberg)*

So, how can we develop a strategy never to speak negatively about anyone? Never think badly about anyone. If you always judge people favorably, always think and re-contextualize everything someone else does and think of them in a positive way, you won't say anything negatively about them. That's why our Sages emphasize the concept of judging people favorably. If we can see the world through a positive prism, you simply cannot say anything bad about others because you only think good of them.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: We Are What We Think

There is a foolproof solution how to never say lashon hara, how never to say a bad word about anyone, one of the most difficult things to do.

The parshiot we are reading, Tazria and this week's parasha Metzora, are about someone suffering from tzara'at, a disease which affects the body, clothes and houses – a metaphysical plague. The Sages say this stems from some kind of spiritual source, above all else from defamation and negative speech. That is why the perpetrator is sent out of the community? He or she spoke negatively and caused a division in society, so is removed from society.

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Chag Kasher V'Sameach!

Volume 30

Pesach Issue

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Short Thoughts for Pesach

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Pesach is the oldest and most transformative story of hope ever told. It tells of how an otherwise undistinguished group of slaves found their way to freedom from the greatest and longest-lived empire of their time, indeed of any time. It tells the revolutionary story of how the supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless. It is a story of the defeat of probability by the force of possibility. It defines what it is to be a Jew: a living symbol of hope.

For many years I was puzzled by the first words we say on Pesach: 'This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat it with us. 'What kind of hospitality is it to offer the hungry the bread of affliction? Finally, though, I think I understood. The unleavened bread represents two things. It was the food eaten by slaves. But it was also the food eaten by the Israelites as they left Egypt in too much of a hurry to let the dough rise. It is the bread of affliction, but it is also the bread of freedom.

Once a year, every year, every Jew is commanded to relive the experience of Egypt as a constant reminder of the bread of oppression and the bitter herbs of slavery – to know that the battle for freedom is never finally won but must be fought in every generation.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"You must surely instruct your colleague, so that you not bear the brunt of his sin" (Leviticus 19:7).

Judaism teaches us that "every Israelite is responsible for the other." Except for the State of Israel, where the Jewish population continues to grow, Jews in the rest of the world suffer from internal "hemorrhaging."

How do we "inspire" our Jewish siblings so that they remain within – or return to – our Jewish peoplehood? We recently celebrated the festival of Passover, and we are now "counting" each day towards the festival of Shavuot. The Hebrew term for the counting is

sefira, a word pregnant with meaning. Its root noun is the Hebrew sappir, which is the dazzling blue—as the Bible records immediately following the Revelation at Sinai: "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel then went up. And they saw the God of Israel, beneath whose 'feet' was something akin to the creation of a sapphire stone, like the essence of the heavens as to its purity" (Ex. 24: 9-10).

From this perspective, the days of our counting are a period of spiritual growth and development, of a connection between Passover and Shavuot. But when and how does this spiritual journey begin?

It begins with Passover, God's encounter with His nation Israel at its conception. And the Hebrew sefira (counting/ sapphire) is also based on the Hebrew noun sippur, a tale, a story, a recounting – the very essence of the Passover Seder evening experience: "And you shall tell (haggada, telling a story) your child on that day saying..." (Ex. 13:8)

The Israelites came into Egypt as a family, the 70 descendants of Jacob. Hence the recounting of the story of our enslavement and eventual redemption is the recounting of family history. A nation is a family writ large: in a family, there are familial memories of origins; in a family there is a sense of commonality and community togetherness; in a family there are special foods and customs, special holidays and celebrations; in a family there are mandated values and ideals, that which is acceptable and that which is unacceptable "in our family"; and in a family there is a heightened sense of a shared fate and shared destiny.

Eda is the biblical word for community (literally "witness"), and every community attempts to recreate a familial collegiality. The relationship within the family is largely horizontal (towards each other) rather than vertical (connected to a transcendent God). And familial rites of togetherness are largely governed by family customs rather than by a Divinely ordained legal code.

Most importantly in families – as well as communities – every individual counts (once again, sefira).

Passover is our family-centered, communal festival, at the beginning of our calendar, at the very outset of our history, at the early steps towards our sefira march. On that first Passover we had not yet received our Torah from God, and we had not yet entered our Promised Land.

The Passover Sacrifice (Exodus 12) emphasizes our willingness to sacrifice for our freedom from slavery—our sacrifice of the lamb which was a defiant act of rebellion against the idolatrous Egyptian slave-society – and it attests to our uncompromising belief in human freedom and redemption even before we became a faith ordained at Mount Sinai. In order for every person/community to really count, large communities must be subdivided into smaller – and more manageable – familial and extra-familial units, "a lamb for each household" or several households together.

Special foods, special stories and special songs define and punctuate the close-knit nature of the event.

The ticket of admission is that you consider yourself a member of the family and wish to be counted as such; this entitles you to an unconditional embrace of love and acceptance, to inclusion in the family of Israel.

The rasha (wicked child) of the Haggadah is the one who seems to exclude himself from the family – and even s/he is to be invited and included! How do we engage our unaffiliated Jews so that they do not defect and fall away from us? We must embrace them as part of our family, love them because we are part of them and they are part of us, regale them with the stories, songs and special foods which are expressed in our biblical and national literature that emerged from our challenging fate and our unique destiny, share with them our vision and dreams of human freedom and peace, and accept them wholeheartedly no matter what.

From the Writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac

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Who is Free?

The major theme of the Passover holiday is, undoubtedly, freedom. But we must understand what this freedom is all about. Does it refer simply to the end of Egyptian slavery? Is it only political independence - a gift which has eluded the Jewish people for most of their 4,000-year existence?

The difference between a slave and a free person is not merely a matter of social position. We may find an enlightened slave whose spirit is free, and a free man with the mindset of a slave.

True freedom is that proud and indomitable spirit by which the individual - as well as the nation as a whole - is determined to remain faithful to his inner essence, to the spiritual dimension of the Divine image within. It is this quality that gives meaning and purpose to life.

Individuals with slave mentality live their lives and expresses views that are based, not on their own essential spiritual nature, but on that which is attractive and good in the eyes of others. In this way they are ruled by others, whether physically or by social convention, in body or in spirit.

Vanquished and exiled, the Jewish people were oppressed over the centuries by cruel masters. But our inner soul always remained imbued with the spirit of freedom. Were it not for the wondrous gift of the Torah, bestowed upon us when we left Egypt for eternal freedom, the long and bitter exile would have crushed our spirits and reduced us to a slave mentality. But on Passover, the festival of freedom, we openly demonstrate that we are free in our very essence, and our yearnings for that which is good and holy are a genuine reflection of our inner nature.

Aiming for Greatness

Ware charged to sing out in joy – God answered our prayers and rescued us from the bondage of Egyptian slavery:

I am the Eternal your God Who raises you up from the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. (Psalm 81:11)

What is the connection between our redemption from Egypt and opening our mouths wide "to receive God's blessings?"

A careful reading of this verse will note two peculiarities about the word *ha-maalcha*, "Who raises you up." First of all, it does not say that God "took you out" of Egypt, but that He "raises you up." It was not merely the act of leaving Egypt that made its eternal impact on the destiny of the Jewish nation and through it, all of humanity. The Exodus was an act of elevation, lifting up the souls of Israel.

Additionally, the verse is not in the past tense but in the present - "Who raises you up." Is it not referring to a historical event? We may understand this in light of the Midrash (Tanchuma Mikeitz 10) concerning the creation of the universe. The Midrash states that when God commanded the formation of the *rakiya*, the expanse between the upper and lower waters (Gen. 1:6), the divide between the heavens and the earth began to expand. This expansion would have continued indefinitely had the Creator not halted it by commanding, "Enough!" In other words, unless they are meant only for a specific hour, Divine acts are eternal, continuing forever. So too, the spiritual ascent of "raising you up from Egypt" is a perpetual act of God, influencing and uplifting the Jewish people throughout the generations.

There is no limit to this elevation, no end to our spiritual aspirations. The only limitations come from us, if we choose to restrict our wishes and dreams. But once we know the secret of *ba-maalcha* and internalize the message of a Divine process that began in Egypt and continues to elevate us, we can aim for ever-higher spiritual goals.

It is instructive to note the contrast between the Hebrew word for "Egypt" - *Mitzrayim*, literally, "limitations" - and the expression, "open up wide." God continually frees us from the conining restraints of *Mitzrayim*, enabling us to strive for the highest, most expansive aspirations.

Now we may understand why the verse concludes with the charge, "Open your mouth wide." We should not restrict ourselves. We need to above all self imposed limitations and transcend all mundane goals and petty objectives. If we can "open our mouths wide" and recognize our true potential for spiritual greatness, then "I will fill it - God will help us attain ever-higher levels of holiness.

Destroy Chametz, Gain Freedom

By the first day (of Passover) you must clear out your homes of all leaven. (Ex. 12:15)

WHY CLEAR OUT CHAMETZ? - Why does the Torah command us to destroy all *chametz* (leaven) found in our homes during Passover? It is logical to eat *matzah*; this fast-baked food has a historical connection to the Exodus, recalling our hurried escape from Egyptian slavery. But how does clearing out leaven from our homes relate to the Passover theme of freedom and independence?

FREEDOM OF SPIRIT - There are two aspects to attaining true freedom. First, one needs to be physically independent of all foreign subjugation. But complete freedom also requires freedom of the spirit. The soul is not free if it is subjected to external demands

that prevent it from following the path of its inner truth.

The difference between a slave and a free person is not just a matter of social standing. One may find an educated slave whose spirit is free, and a free person with the mindset of a slave. What makes us truly free? When we are able to be faithful to our inner self, to the truth of our Divine goals. One whose spirit is servile, on the other hand, will never experience this sense of self-fulfillment. His happiness will always depend upon the approval of others who dominate over him, whether this control is *de iure* or *de facto*.

THE FOREIGN INFLUENCE OF LEAVEN -

What is *chametz*? Leaven is a foreign substance added to the dough. The leavening agent makes the dough rise; it changes its natural shape and characteristics. Destruction of all leaven in the house symbolizes the removal of all foreign influences and constraints that prevent us from realizing our spiritual aspirations.

These two levels of independence, physical and spiritual, exist on both the individual and the national level. An independent people must be free not only from external rule, but also from foreign domination in the cultural and spiritual spheres.

For the Israelites in Egypt, it was precisely at the hour of imminent redemption that the dangers of these foreign "leavening" forces were the greatest. At that time of great upheaval, true permanent emancipation was not a given. Would the Israelites succeed in freeing themselves, not only from Egyptian bondage, but also from the idolatrous culture in which they had lived for hundreds of years? To commemorate their complete liberation from Egypt, the Passover holiday of freedom requires the removal of all foreign leavening agents.

CLEANSING OURSELVES OF FOREIGN INFLUENCES - In our days too, an analogous era of imminent redemption, we need to purge the impure influences of alien cultures and attitudes that have entered our national spirit during our long exile among the nations. Freedom is the fulfillment of our inner essence. We need to aspire to the lofty freedom of those who left Egypt. To the Israelites of that generation, God revealed Himself and brought them into His service. This is truly the highest form of freedom, as the Sages taught in *Avot* (6:2): Instead of "engraved (*charut*) on the tablets" (Ex. 32:16), read it as "freedom" (*cheirut*). Only one who studies Torah is truly free.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Do we have the right blessing? At our seder

tables, we will be taking maror and we will dip it in charoset. However, the blessing that we will be reciting will be 'al achilat maror' – on the eating of maror, with no reference to charoset.

Similarly during Succot, the Torah commands us to take the Arbah Minim, the Four Kinds, the lulav, the etrog, the hadass and the aravah, but what is the blessing that we recite? 'Al netilat lulav' – on the taking of the lulav. We don't mention the other three.

The reason behind this is that in our halachot, our laws, relating to brachot, we differentiate between 'ikar' and 'tafel' – that which is important and that which is only of secondary significance – and the blessing is always over the most important part of that which we are blessing.

This, I believe, conveys to us a message of general importance within our lives. We should never lose the capacity to identify the ikar, what's really important in our lives, and as a result, we shouldn't waste our time with the tafeel, that which is of only trivial significance.

Sometimes, however, it is challenging to identify what's ikar and what's tafeel, for example:

A hardware superstore was once suffering from employee theft. The owners decided that they would position security personnel at the entrance to the store at the end of every working day. On the first day of this procedure one of the workers arrived with a wheelbarrow full of boxes. It took five or six minutes for the security workers to go through all the boxes, but eventually they discovered that they were empty, and they waved the fellow through.

On the second day, the same thing happened again, and on the third day, again. People had to wait in a queue so that this fellow could take his boxes home! After two weeks the owner came to this worker, and he said, "I know you're up to something. Please tell me what it is and I'll let you off." The worker said, "You promise you'll let me off?" and the owner promised. "Well," said the worker, "I'm stealing wheelbarrows."

You see sometimes the ikar, what really matters, is right there under our noses but all we notice is the tafeel. It's the empty boxes of life.

Now that the pandemic, thank God, is behind us, I have noticed that it has become common, as is human nature, for people to prefer to try to forget our traumatic experiences during Covid. I think that's not a bad thing, but there's one thing which we should never forget and that's the lessons of Covid. And it was during Covid that all of us gained that capacity to

differentiate between ikar and tafeel – from the pandemic we learned that what's important in life is home, it's family, it's community, it's faith, it's our spirituality,

At the seder table during the festival of Passover, we will dip maror – bitter herbs – into charoset. The blessing we'll recite will be al achilat maror, we only mention the maror because that's what counts, not the charoset. Therefore this year at our seder tables, let's dip and while doing so remember not just about maror but about everything in life which is really important. And let's not waste our lives, our precious time, with empty boxes.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel **Making Seder of the Seder***

הוא ענין לחמא דהא This is the Bread of Affliction
There are a number of glaring questions both about the form and content of this paragraph, as well as its purpose in the Haggadah.

1) This is the only paragraph in the entire Haggadah that is written in the Aramaic language. If this was the vernacular at the time the Haggadah was written, then why isn't the entire Haggadah in Aramaic instead of Hebrew? And, if not, then what is unique to this particular paragraph that the Rabbis chose to write only it in Aramaic and not Hebrew like the rest of the Haggadah?

2) After raising the "Matzah of Poverty," We invite anyone and everyone who needs a Seder to join us at our table. But this seems like a very hollow invitation and a gesture devoid of meaning and sincerity. Who hears this invitation? Only the people already gathered at the table! If this invitation is indeed sincere, it would be made directly to people in need, days before the Seder. Alternatively, the Rabbis should have instituted this invitation publicly in the Synagogue after the Maariv-Evening service on Pesach night, in case anyone in attendance has no place to celebrate the Seder (if this were a yearly public custom, then people without a Seder would intentionally gather in the Synagogue waiting for such an invitation, and the offer would certainly have some actual takers). Even if this invitation is only supposed to be a symbolic gesture, then the Rabbis still should have placed it at the very beginning of the Seder before the Kiddush. Why is it placed specifically here, in the middle of the proceedings, when an invitation seems to make no sense?

3) The words כל דצריך יתי ויפסח "He who is in need, let him let him come and partake of the Pesach." Why is the Paschal sacrifice referred to in this particular paragraph, when today we do not offer this sacrifice after the destruction of the Holy Temple?

Likutei Divrei Torah

4) After we invite the people to join us, we state in this paragraph that this year we are in the Diaspora, but next year we hope to be in the Land of Israel (implying after the Coming of the Messiah, rebuilding of the Third Temple and offering the Paschal Sacrifice by the Holy Temple). While this is a noble aspiration and (should be) the desire of all Jews every day of their lives, why is it mentioned specifically here? What is the connection to inviting people to the Seder? We can understand this expression and sentiment AFTER the Seder is complete, and it is then that we traditionally do say "Next Year in Jerusalem." But why now? Why here?

5) We end this strange paragraph by saying that this year we are slaves, but we hope that by next year we will be free. Isn't the entire point of the Seder to feel free tonight, and NOT next year (see Introductory discussion of Seder-order)? And are we really slaves now, today, in the 21st century? And what is the connection between the slave-freedom statement and the previous sentiments and statements in this paragraph?

All five of these strong questions can be answered by understanding this **הוא ענין לחמא דהא** paragraph according to the NETZI"V (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, 1817-1893). According to his approach, this particular paragraph of **הוא ענין לחמא דהא** was added after the text of the Haggadah had been established many years before. While the original Haggadah text was in Hebrew, this later addition was placed in the Haggadah after the Destruction of the Temple, and was intentionally written in the vernacular Aramaic, precisely to show that it was a later addition. But why was it specifically added at all? And why added here?

The breaking of the Middle Matzah is the first introduction of Matzah at the Seder. Before the Temple's destruction Matzah represented only Matzah, and was eaten along with the Paschal Sacrifice and the Maror- Bitter Herbs. But AFTER the Temple was destroyed, the Matzah now ALSO symbolized and represented the Paschal sacrifice itself, which is forbidden to be brought subsequent to the Temple's destruction. That is why many have a custom not to eat any roasted meat at all on Seder night, so that no one may wrongly think that our meat in any way represents the Paschal sacrifice which had to be roasted. Therefore, it is the Matzah of the Afikoman that takes the place of the Paschal sacrifice, which also had to be eaten at the end of the meal for dessert, after the entire meal was served, and also had to be completed before midnight (Pesachim 119b). The reason this Matzah is now called "Poor Man's Bread" is because now, without the Temple, we are reduced to having this Matzah represent the Paschal Sacrifice.

But any symbol of something connected to the Holy Temple had to, by definition, be different from the original item or action in the Temple. Therefore, today's synagogue (Mikdash Me-at-Miniature Temple) may not at all resemble the structure of the Holy Temple at all. The Menorah inside the synagogue may not be of 7 branches like the original Menorah in the Holy Temple. In a similar manner, this Matzah that symbolizes the Paschal sacrifice, may not take on all of the Halachot-Jewish laws of the original Paschal Sacrifice. One example of this involves who may eat the Paschal Sacrifice. If the real sacrifice had been brought tonight, then the invitation for an outsider to be included in the eating of the roasted meat would have had to come much earlier. Every person who could eat from this sacrifice had to be designated or "invited" before it was brought or sacrificed, much earlier in the day. Inviting someone now, at the Seder, to eat from the meat of the Paschal sacrifice, would violate Jewish law and render it invalid. Thus, in order to clearly differentiate this Matzah before us from the Paschal sacrifice it represents, we specifically invite people now, at the first introduction of Matzah at the Seder, in order to demonstrate that this Matzah is indeed different from the Holy Temple's Paschal sacrifice, where such an invitation would be forbidden.

Now we can readily understand the context and connection of the כל rest of the words in this paragraph. We intentionally say the words He who is in need, let him let him come and partake of the - ייתי ויפסחPesach." We DO invite the person to partake of the Paschal sacrifice – in the symbolic sense – as we introduce its symbolic substitute, the Matzah. Today we are indeed situated "here" in the Diaspora (or at best in an Israel devoid of the Temple). Hence, as we recall the Paschal Sacrifice that once was, we long for next year in a Jerusalem where we can sacrifice the real animal and not substitute the Matzah. Thus, these words are indeed appropriate here. Similarly, we are indeed still psychological slaves in some sense, as long as there is no Temple. The ultimate freedom will be felt "next year" when we will, please G-d, be in the Temple in Jerusalem and offer the original Paschal Sacrifice.

Therefore, we highlight our lack of a Temple by pronouncing these words in Aramaic, the post-destruction vernacular, and realize that while we have to be satisfied now with the Matzah that only symbolizes the Paschal sacrifice, next year we hope to be in Jerusalem and offer up the actual sacrifice in the Holy Temple, where we will truly feel spiritually free in all senses of the word.

*** This article is based on an excerpt of the Haggadah "Making Seder of the Seder" by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

"Who am I?" Humility vs. Evasion

Rabbi Eliyahu Gateno

At the heart of the Exodus from Egypt, which we commemorate on the festival of Pesach, lies the shlichut of Moshe Rabeinu. Moshe was sent on a mission by God Himself to save the People of Israel after the cry of their great agony – induced by the heavy bondage – had reached Heaven. This notion has led many to ask why the name of Moshe is not mentioned at all in the Haggadah, and many a reason has been offered. However, we sometimes forget the fact that at the outset of the story, Moshe Rabeinu stands before God and refuses to take on this mission.

A closer examination of the verses will reveal that Moshe refuses to accept God's unique and historical request/instruction no less than five times, offering a variety of excuses and reasons. In fact, according to our Sages, these "negotiations" between God and Moshe lasted seven whole days.

The first time God reveals Himself to Moshe in the Burning Bush, He says: "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Shemot 3:10).

Moshe then responds: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (ibid. verse 11). According to Rashi, Moshe puts forth two claims: (a) Who am I that I can speak to kings?[1] (b) Why have the People of Israel merited that such a great miracle be done unto them and that I should take them out of Egypt?[2]

Moshe not only doubts his own worthiness to carry out this mission, but also has doubts about the mission's success. According to Rashi, God responds to Moshe's two claim thus: "Certainly I shall be with thee" (Shemot 3:12), which ultimately means: "As to your claiming that you are not worthy to come before Pharaoh, it is from me and not from you, and I shall be with you." And when God says: "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (ibid) this comes to say: "When you asked which merits the People of Israel have to be deserving to be taken out of Egypt, there is great merit for this exodus, for they will get the Torah upon this mountain."

Later on, Moshe Rabeinu tries to evade the mission by claiming: "What is His name?" [Who is this God that is sending me?] (Shemot 3:13), and when God answers, Moshe goes on to argue: "But they shall not believe me" (Shemot 4:1), to which God answers in kind and gives Moshe numerous signs to show the People.

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This is how the Ramban puts it: "At this time Moshe did not utter worthy words... Immediately God responded and gave him the signs as answer to all his [Moshe's] words."

Moshe's fourth attempt to reject the mission is expressed through his fifth argument: "I am not a man of words (Shemot 4:10), to which God replies: "I shall be with your mouth." But then comes Moshe's fifth rejection: "Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send" (Shemot 4:13), followed by "and the anger of God was kindled against Moshe."

According to Rashi, Moshe's words comprise two separate arguments: (a) He did not wish to accept a position of leadership which would make him greater than his brother Aharon, who was older than he, and for this reason he said to God "–send in the hands of the one You are used to sending" namely – Aharon, and (b) Send somebody else, for I will not merit to bring them into the Land nor be their savior in the future.

Let us not err to think that this point of the dialogue marks the end of the negotiations. Rather, it is our obligation to try and understand why God's anger bursts forth following this particular point, and not in reaction to the other arguments presented by Moshe earlier.

Furthermore, the verses do not seem to present an answer to Moshe's second argument. As to Moshe's first argument, although there seems to be an answer in the verses "–Is there not Aharon thy brother the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart" (Shemot 4:14) – this hardly suffices as an answer, since Moshe did not refuse because he was afraid of Aharon's reaction, but because he did not want take on a role that would make him greater than his brother. If so, this latter argument still goes unanswered.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Likutei Sichot, Vol. 31, Parshat Shemot, Discourse III) explains that the answer to Moshe's claims can be found a few verses later, in the description of Moshe's going down to Egypt (Shemot 4:20): "And Moshe took his wife and his sons, and set them upon a donkey". Our Sages, in their reference to the translation of the seventy scholars who translated the Torah [into Greek] for King Talmi, discuss the translation of the said "donkey" in the verse above. Instead of using the word "donkey", the Septuagint chose to use "carrier of people" lest King Talmi question Moshe's usage of a lowly animal rather than a more worthy one (tractate of Megillah 9:1). Still and all, we do not find in the words of our Sages a sufficient

clarification as to why Moshe should choose to ride a donkey in particular.

Rashi alludes to a fascinating Midrash that refers to this donkey (Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer, Chapter 31): "This donkey was a designated one. It was the same donkey that Avraham saddled on his way to the Akeida, the Binding of Yitzhak, and it is one and the same upon which will ride the Messiah when he should reveal himself." A deeper reading of the words of our Sages will reveal that they incorporate an answer to Moshe's last two arguments.

Moshe's first argument, whether we interpret it as a complete evasion like the Ramban – "Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send, for there is no one in the whole world who is less worthy than I am for this mission" – or whether we interpret it like Rashi who says that Moshe did not wish to take upon himself more greatness than Aharon his brother, ultimately Moshe still expresses doubt in God's instruction, as if saying to Him that He had not considered the matter thoroughly enough before turning to Moshe. Until this point, Moshe's arguments were reasonable: Who am I? Why are Israel deserving of salvation? Which name of God do I give them? How will they believe me? But at this point, Moshe seems to suggest that God did not put enough thought into His request – either because all others are more worthy than he is, or else because such a request of Moshe is inappropriate seeing that he is the youngest brother, unfit to have greatness beyond that of his elder brother. To this God responds by instructing Moshe to take the donkey that had belonged to Avraham Avinu. What is the significance of this? God wishes Moshe to put before his eyes, as it were, Avraham's devotion when the latter was commanded to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham had not hesitated for a moment and went to fulfill God's commandment without delay and without putting forth a single argument.

As to the second argument, God wishes to hint to Moshe that the exodus from Egypt is the beginning of a long process, which begins with Moshe and culminates in the coming of the Messiah, and that Moshe cannot evade the mission by claiming that he will not be the one who brings the mission to its completion.

The above story of Moshe and his shlichut must serve as an important example to us, as shlichim, and the message it conveys must be constantly reiterated. Although we have not merited Divine revelation, nor has God conveyed to us directly what precise shlichut we must fulfill, one who looks wisely upon his/her own life reality and circumstances will not fail to notice that there is always a crucial calling that must be undertaken. However,

sometimes the people most worthy of undertaking the mission try evading it by making arguments similar to those presented by Moshe. When that happens, we must stand firm and respond to their arguments by giving them God's answers to Moshe.

If one does not wish to undertake a shlichut by saying "Who am I?" we must answer such a one that the mission is not a personal matter, as God said to Moshe – "It is from me and not from you, and I shall be with you." And if one rejects a mission by saying that another is more worthy than he, we must put before his eyes the image of Avraham Avinu saddling his donkey and setting out swiftly to sacrifice his son without any hesitation on his part, only complete joy. And if one claims not to have the ability or competence to complete the task at hand, for it is too great, then let us say to him: "It is not upon you to finish the work" (Pirkei Avot 2, 15), but you must begin it nonetheless, even if another completes it. And remember that this does not detract from your part in it, just like Moshe's role in the Exodus is no less great even though the ultimate redemption will only come to pass when the Messiah completes it.

[1] As is phrased by the Ramban: "I am the lowliest of men, a mere shepherd, while he is a great king." And in the words of the Ibn Ezra: "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh? Even if it is only to present him with an offering and a gift, I am still not worthy of entering the court of the king for I am a stranger."

[2] According to Rashi, Moshe seems to be doubtful of the People of Israel's right to salvation. However, the Ramban renders a different explanation: "Who am I that I should take the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt – for You told me to take them to the Land of Canaan, and since they are a wise and clever People, surely they will not want to follow me to a land filled with nations greater and mightier than them." The Ibn Ezra, too, takes a different approach and explains thus: "Even if I were worthy of presenting myself before Pharaoh... is Pharaoh such a fool to listen to me and send away a multitude of slaves from his country and set them free?"

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

"Yehi libi tamim be-chukecha": Korban Pesach as Chukim - Pillars of Commitment

The midrash (Shemot Rabbah, parshat Bo) exemplifies purity of faith, belief, and commitment in halachic life ("yehi libi tamim be-hukecha") by invoking two core mitzvot - korban Pesach and parah adumah. This unanticipated pairing is predicated on the fact that each of these halachic pillars embodies the category of chok. The parallel between "zot chukat ha-Torah" (Bamidbar 19:2) and "zot chukat ha-Pesach" (Shemot 12:43) is noted to reinforce the link. [It is interesting to note that while the term "chok" is usually translated by Unkelas as "keyam", these two are rendered "gezeirat", signifying the formal category of "chok".] While parah adumah's credentials as the ultimate and

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personification of chok is self-evident, as it is defined by the paradox that effecting ritual purity triggers defilement of the purifying agent (metamei tehorim, metaher temeim), an enigma that even the wisest of all men was unable to decipher (see also Ramban Bamidbar 19:2), the characterization of korban Pesach as a chok, even as an archetypal chok, is more mystifying. The Torah does ubiquitously use the term chok in connection with the Pesach (see Shemot 12:14, 24, 43; 13:10, Bamidbar 9:3,12, 14). However, it also repeatedly provides a ready rationale - "u-pasahti aleichem" (Shemot 12:12, 13, 23, 27) for this unusual korban. This etymological explanation is frequently emphasized and is halachically consequential, as it forms the explication-recitation mandated by R. Gamliel (Pesachim 116b) in conjunction with the mitzvah of Pesach (See Rambam, Hilchos Hametz U'Matzah 8:4, Ramban, Milhamot, Berachot ch1, and his comments on hashmatat ha-esin no. 15) and the imperative of sipur yetziat Mitzrayim (Rambam, Hilchos Hametz U'Matzah 7:5), deepening the mystery of this uber-chok designation. Certainly, many of the specifics of this korban are singular, even relative to other korbanot, but these novel dimensions cohere compellingly with the evident motifs that underpin this mitzvah, reinforcing the impression of an accessible and rational mishpat, rather than inexplicable, impenetrable chok. Sefer ha-Chinuch (13,14,17 etc.) and Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:53) supply additional perspectives that explore and accentuate singular facets of this challenging korban, reinforcing the enigma: in what sense is korban Pesach truly a chok, never mind one whose stature compares with or even equates to the uber-chok, parah adumah?

Numerous mefarshim engage the question of korban Pesach's chok status, even without the pressure of justifying this grandiose comparison to parah adumah. The Griz (also cited in Haggadah shel Pesach mi-Beit Levi) posits that korban Pesach is a chok to the extent that it belongs to the world of korbanot that generally attains that status. This approach is intriguing when one considers korban Pesach's extraordinarily distinctiveness within that world. While korban Pesach certainly retains the status of a korban (Rambam treats this topic in Sefer Korbanot, not in Avodah. See also Rambam Hil. Korban Pesach 1:3), it is offered outside of the "aleha hashleim" time frame of other korbanot (see Pesachim 59a and Rambam Hil. Temidim 1:4 and Lechem Mishneh), is developed in sefer Shemot rather than Vayikra, is designated as "Pesach la-Hashem", requiring lishmah in a manner that may exclude any obvious generic fallback status typical of most korbanot (see Zevachim 2a, Pesachim 61a and especially Rambam's view on Pesach le-sheim chulin - Pesulei ha-mukdashin 15:11), and it redefines, refines, or

adapts many other korbonot conventions to project its singular message.

The Beit ha-Levi (parshat Bo) perceives the depiction of korban Pesach as a chok, despite the fact that the Torah provides a very compelling explanation, as exemplifying the perspective that all mitzvot and halachot are essentially Chukim, both regarding their ultimate Divine (and thus, unfathomable or impenetrable) purpose and with respect to the motivation of their execution. In a celebrated halachocentric passage, he argues that even halachic institutions apparently tied to historical events, like yetziat Mitzrayim, constitute transcendent themes that have independent value that may also be prior to or disconnected from the events that introduced them. [This halachocentric perspective coheres with, although it is a particularly striking manifestation of Brisker ideology.]

The Sheim Mishmuel (parshat Tzav - inyanei Pesach), specifically addressing the difficulty of this very midrash, emphasizes that it was vital that Benei Yisrael respond to this Divine imperative as if it was an unfathomable chok, or at least with no regard for its eminently evident objective. Consciously cultivating this submissive orientation was a critical step in the necessary transition from Egyptian servitude to enthusiastic immersion in Divine service and the exclusivity of Hashem's sovereignty. This process- the forceful substitution of Divine jurisdiction in place of dehumanizing human slavery- was a precondition to extricating the nation from the brink of spiritual extinction. Thus, the mentality of chok applied to the rational korban Pesach- "zot chukat ha-Pesach", constituted an important breakthrough in bringing about "halelu avdei Hashem- velo avdei Paroh" [This view is rooted in the insights of his father, the Avnei Nezer that are also developed in his halachic work (YD 554:12).]

Perhaps a brief reevaluation and expansion of the chok concept may further clarify the equation in the midrash between Pesach and parah adumah, the references to purity of faith ("tamim"), as well as the ubiquitous usage of "chok" in the korban Pesach context. While the paradoxical or unfathomable, exemplified by parah adumah, is the most ubiquitous and familiar chok, the concept is yet broader. The Talmud (Yoma 67b, see mefarshim Bamidbar 19:2 and beginning of parshat Behukotai) defines chok as something that is permanently etched in stone, and that should not be second-guessed ("chok chakti lecha ve-ein reshut le-harher acharei"). Unkelos typically renders "chok"- "keyama", an enduring law (though as noted, in these two contexts he opts for "gezerat"). The Torah often uses this term to express the enduring or permanent application of a law or laws, notwithstanding otherwise relevant changing circumstances. The laws are

not only enduring, they are the core foundations for an unshakeable bond that itself cannot be intellectually rendered or even accurately articulated, but that is the sole anchor of a purposive life. Rambam, rightfully regarded as a colossal champion of religious intellectualism, unequivocally asserts (conclusion of Hil. Meilah) the axiological primacy of chukim over that of mishpatim, the more accessible rational mitzvot. This preference certainly reflects a profound awe and appreciation for the transcendent dimensions and the inner logic of halachic institutions and details. But it also spotlights the idealism and purity of motive and purpose that is entailed in and mandated by halachic commitment. chukim both test and further facilitate and manifest the permanent relationship with Hashem, which transcends pragmatic considerations as well as human understanding. Indeed, the midrash accentuates not subservience for its own sake, or even to initiate or reinforce submission, but pure and idealistic faith in Hashem- "yehi libi tamim bechukecha"- that extends to his mitzvot, and any Divine fiat. Parah adumah quintessentially embodies the most common application of chok - unqualified embrace of the intellectually impenetrable. Korban Pesach, though thoroughly comprehensible, constituted an act of faith in the most inhospitable of circumstances that absolutely defied personal self-interest and any pragmatic calculation. As such, it reflected the apex of chok-surrender, religious commitment, and faith that indelibly transformed Kelal Yisrael by cementing a permanent and unqualified bond with Hashem.

This bond was significantly formalized and advanced at keriya Yam Suf, when faith and unqualified commitment was extended also to the role of Moshe Rabbeinu, the linchpin of the oral tradition and the embodiment of the halachic partnership between Hashem and Kelal Yisrael (Sheim mi-Shemuel, in his Haggadah, also develops this theme). It was then that "yehi libi tamim bechukecha" was converted into "vayaminu ba-Hashem u-be-Moshe avdo", triggering a spontaneous shirah that is an enduring expression of our spiritual aspirations.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

The Value of History

One of the remarkable books about the Jewish contribution to the course of humanity was written by an American-Irish historian Thomas Cahill in his book "The Gifts of the Jews." In this book he recalls so many remarkable contributions that the Jewish people have made to the destiny and course of human history.

First and foremost, he says, is the understanding of the idea and concept of history. Before the Jews, no one looked back at

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the past with any moral or spiritual value. After all, the past has passed!

Cahill says the Jewish people taught the world that the past has infinite value. Both in terms of learning from the past, and in terms of our identity and destiny. After all, as Santayana famously said, those who do not learn from history will be condemned to repeat it. Not looking back at the past means you don't look at your own actions, and if you don't learn from them, you will repeat them, teaching us about how to behave.

But it is deeper than that. Rabbi Benjamin Blech in his Haggadah develops this idea – that for the Jewish people it is far deeper – our past is part of our identity. More than any other part of Judaism, the mitzvah of the Haggadah is looking back and re-learning and re-teaching what it means to be a part of the Jewish story. That the past has so much to tell us about the future.

As Rabbi Berel Wein says, if you don't look in the rear-view mirror, it is very hard to know where you are going if you don't see where you came from, because where you came from informs who you are and where you ought to be going.

May we all, as we come together with our families at the Seder and recount and reexamine what it means to be part of the Jewish story, may our glorious past and the gift of history inform us of who we are and where we come from, so that we know better where we are heading.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Pesach – Last Day

"...God made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert..." [Ex. 13:18]. Having observed the Passover Seder just one week ago, we would do well to reflect back on that experience now in order to glean new insights for everyday life. For example, why did we recline while eating matzah? In what I believe is a teaching that captures the essence of Passover, our Sages state that on Passover Eve, "...even a pauper should not eat until he reclines, and he should be given not less than four glasses of wine, even if he is so poor that he eats by means of the community charitable fund" [Mishna, Pesachim 10:1].

One night a year, even the destitute throw off the shackles of their misery and feel as if they, too, have been freed from Egypt. They, too, celebrate this festival, which speaks of a nation of slaves transformed into a free people. And all of us on the communal 'tzedaka committee' must make sure that every last Jew, no matter how poor he or she may be, shall be given the opportunity to recline like the most free of people.

Fascinatingly, our Mishna's concern that even the poorest recline is based on a Midrashic comment to a verse in Exodus, where we read that when Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go, "...God made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert..." [Ex. 13:18].

The Hebrew word for 'being made to take a roundabout path', 'vayasev', 'has, curiously enough, the same root of the Hebrew word 'reclining' (yesev). The Torah explains that God takes the Israelites on a roundabout path because taking the most direct route would have caused the Hebrews to pass through land of the Philistines. This act could have provoked an aggressive nation who might very well have attacked and frightened the Israelites into retreat.

Despite having witnessed the fall of the Egyptian empire, the miracles of the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea, the Israelites are still frightened to wage war. God knows that they are still slaves at heart. One of the manifold tragedies of slavery is the psychological impact on the victim whereby he believes himself to be worthless and incapable of fighting for his rights.

Indeed, Moses learns this lesson after he slays an Egyptian taskmaster for beating an Israelite, an act he had probably hoped would incite and inspire the Hebrew slaves to rise up against their captors and demand their freedom. The very next day, when he tries to break up a fight between two Hebrews, they taunt him for having killed the Egyptian. Instead of hailing Moses as a hero who risked his own life to save a fellow Jew, they deride him. Slavery corrupts captor and captive alike.

If power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, then powerlessness corrupts most of all. A magnificent post-Holocaust Australian play, "The Edge of Night," has a former Kapo declare: "There were no heroes in Auschwitz; there were only those who were murdered and those who survived."

A slave feels helpless: uncertain of his ability to obtain food, he becomes almost obsessed with the desire for a piece of bread – almost at any cost. From this perspective, the desert possesses not only a stark landscape, but also a stark moral message concerning the transformation of an enslaved Hebrew into a freed Hebrew.

The manna, which descended daily from heaven, was intended to change the labor camp mentality of greedy individuals in Egypt into a nation in which "...the one who had taken more did not have any extra, and the one who had taken less did not have too little. They gathered exactly enough for each one to eat..." [ibid., 16:17-18].

The Haggadah begins, "This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the Land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and join celebrating the Passover offering." This is more than just generous hospitality; it is

fundamental to Jewish freedom; the transition from a frightened, selfish and egocentric mentality of keeping the food for oneself into a free and giving mode of sharing with those less fortunate.

Now we understand clearly why the Midrash connects 'reclining' with a 'roundabout' path. Far beyond use of the same root, the very purpose of this path is intended to purge the state of mind that still thinks like a slave, frightened not only of Philistines, but of another mouth who one fears is always waiting to take away the little bit that one has. Therefore, it is when we give so that others, too, may have and thus feel free, that we demonstrate in a most profound way that we are no longer slaves, but are truly free.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

In a Manner Expressive of Freedom: Ma'aseh (Action) and Kiyyum (Fulfillment) in the Mitzvot of Pesach - Rav Ezra Bick

Introduction - This *shiur* will deal primarily with the *mitzvot* of the *seder* night, but first I wish to clarify two points.

First, generally speaking, a distinction must be made between a *halakha* and its reasons: The reasons for a *mitzva* may be important and worthy (and many Jewish thinkers have dealt with them), but they are not necessary for the performance of the *mitzva*. One need not experience or remember the reasons for the *mitzva* in order to fulfill one's obligation.

As an illustration of this point, Rav Hai Gaon explains that the inner meaning of the *mitzva* of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashana relates to the story of the *Akeida*, but it is clear that a person fulfills the obligation even without contemplating the connection between the shofar and the ram that was sacrificed in place of Yitzchak. Why? Because the reasons for a *mitzva*, as important as they may be, are irrelevant on the "pure" halakhic plane.^[1]

Second, a distinction must be made between the "act [*ma'aseh*] of the *mitzva*" and the "fulfillment [*kiyyum*] of the *mitzva*" – that is to say, between the action performed in the framework of the *mitzva* and the content or goal of the *mitzva* itself.

A good example of this distinction can be seen in the *mitzva* of circumcision: the *mitzva* act is the cutting of the foreskin (over which one recites the blessing, "who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about circumcision"), but there is an additional "fulfillment" of entering into the covenant of Avraham Avinu (over which one recites the blessing "to bring him into the covenant of the patriarch Avraham"). Admittedly, this distinction does not usually find practical expression; regarding most *mitzvot*, the act of the *mitzva* and its fulfillment are identical. However, there are cases where this distinction has an effect, as we will see regarding the *mitzvot* of Pesach.

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The Reason for the Mitzva - "In a Manner Expressive of Freedom": The Four Cups of Wine at the Seder

The night of the *seder* is unique with regard to the distinction between a *halakha* and its reasons, as the halakhic requirements of the *seder* include conceptual aspects. While the tendency in most instances is to remove such matters from the definition of the *mitzva* and leave them exclusively on the conceptual level, on the night of the *seder*, we instead draw them in to the realm of halakhic obligation.

One of these conceptual elements is the goal of acting "in a manner expressive of freedom." This idea arises in several *mitzvot* of the night, including the eating of *matza* and the drinking of the four cups of wine. For example: In the time of *Chazal*, a distinction was made between "raw" wine, which had a strong taste, and "diluted" wine, which had water added in order to temper the flavor. The Gemara in *Pesachim* addresses whether raw wine may be used for the four cups that must be drunk at the *seder*:

If he drank them raw [undiluted], he has discharged [his duty]. Rava said: He has discharged [his duty] of wine, but he has not discharged [his duty] of [expressing his] freedom. (*Pesachim* 108b)

Raw wine is also wine, but it is not the wine of cultured people (in the time of *Chazal*).^[2] Thus, Rava argues that drinking such wine does not fulfill one's obligation of drinking the four cups. Why? The Rambam^[3] emphasizes that there are two separate aspects of the *mitzva*: "four cups" and "a manner expressive of freedom"; with raw wine, one fulfills only the first aspect:

A person who drank these four cups from wine which was not mixed [with water] has fulfilled the obligation to drink four cups of wine, but has not fulfilled the obligation to do so in a manner expressive of freedom. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:9)

Following on the distinction between "four cups" and "freedom," the Griz, Rav Yitzchak Soloveitchik (in his novellae on the Rambam, *Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:7), explains that there are two different laws relating to the four cups: First, that the blessings recited on the night of the *seder* (*Kiddush*, the blessing of redemption, Grace after meals, and *Hallel*) must be recited over wine – just as *Kiddush* and *Havdala* are recited over wine every Shabbat. On the night of the *seder*, there are four blessings, and it therefore turns out that we drink four cups, one cup for each blessing. Second, that one drink "in a manner expressive of freedom" – i.e., a large amount of wine. This second aspect is unique to Pesach and does not necessitate specifically four cups; the main point is that one should drink a large amount of wine.

We see here a good application of the distinction between the "act of a *mitzva*" and the "fulfillment of a *mitzva*": Regarding the first aspect of the law of the "four cups," the

act and the fulfillment are identical; both involve the drinking of wine. In contrast, regarding the second obligation – "in a manner expressive of freedom" – the act of the mitzva is the drinking, whereas the "fulfillment" is not the drinking itself, but the expression of freedom through *liberal* drinking. Since raw wine was not favored by free men in the time of *Chazal*, one who drinks raw wine discharges his duty of wine – with respect to the obligation to drink wine with each blessing – but does not discharge his duty of expressing his freedom.^[lv]

The Reasons for Matza and Maror

The idea that our obligations on the night of the *seder* go "beyond" the ordinary acts of a mitzva also arises in relation to the *mitzvot* of eating *matza* and *maror*: they must be not only imbibed but tasted. Once again, it is Rava who presents this idea:

Rava said: If one swallows *matza*, he discharges his duty; if he swallows *maror*, he does not discharge his duty. (*Pesachim* 115b)

Rashi and the Rashbam (ad loc, both s.v. *bala matza* and *bala maror*) disagree about the case of one who swallows *maror*, whether the text should read that he does *not* discharge his duty (as in our printed editions) or that he *does* discharge his duty. Thus, they disagree whether "it is impossible that he did not taste the taste of *maror*" (Rashi – and thus, he *has* discharged his duty) or whether "we need the taste of *maror*, and there is none" (Rashbam – and thus, he has *not* discharged his duty). Either way, they agree on the basic principle: In contrast to other *mitzvot* that involve eating, the mitzva of *maror* requires not only that one eat it, but also that he sense its bitter taste.

The Rashbam proposes a similar idea regarding the "taste of *matza*":

"If one swallows *matza*" – without chewing it, he discharges his duty, for he fulfilled "in the evening you shall eat unleavened bread," for it is eating. *Nevertheless, ideally we require the taste of matza.* (Rashbam, *Pesachim* 115b)

The Rashbam's source is in the Gemara in *Berachot* (38b, in connection with the blessing recited over cooked vegetables), where it is stated that "we require the taste of *matza*" (and thus the *matza* may not be boiled); he proves from this statement that there is significance not only in eating the *matza*, but also in tasting it. Nevertheless, the Rashbam explicitly writes that tasting the *matza* is the optimal way of fulfilling the mitzva, but it is not indispensable.^[lv]

The requirement of "the taste of *matza*" also arises in the context of the law that "one does not conclude after the Paschal [lamb] with an *afikoman*" (Mishna *Pesachim* 10:8). The Gemara there (120a) explains after a short discussion that the same law applies in our time: one may not eat any other food after eating the *matza* of "*afikoman*," which serves as a remembrance of the Paschal offering. Though there are others who adopted a

different explanation, the *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* (*Pesachim* 26b in the pages of the Rif) argues^[lv] that this law stems from the fact that there is a requirement of "the taste of *matza*" even with respect to the *matza* of *afikoman*.^[lvii]

To summarize: As with the four cups, so too with *matza* and *maror*, we find an extra requirement that goes beyond the "ordinary." Regarding the four cups, the requirement is to drink the wine "in a manner expressive of freedom," while regarding *matza* and *maror*, there is a special requirement that one sense the taste – in contrast to all other *mitzvot* that involve eating.

Mentioning Pesach, Matza and Maror

Thus far, we have seen two instances on the *seder* night of a blurring between a mitzva and its reasons. We now turn to the clearest example of this phenomenon, namely, the mention of "*pesach*, *matza*, and *maror*."

Rabban Gamliel used to say: Anyone who does not make mention of these three things on Passover does not discharge his duty. And these are they: The Paschal offering, *matza*, and *maror*. (Mishna *Pesachim* 10:5)

This law in itself is quite surprising. In a modern formulation, we might say as follows: If you did not offer a midrashic exposition, you have not discharged your duty.

Indeed, because of the exceptional nature of this duty, some *Rishonim* did not codify it. The Rambam did codify it, however, in the context of the obligation to retell the story of the exodus from Egypt:

Anyone who does not mention these three matters on the night of the fifteenth has not fulfilled his obligation. They are: the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*. (*Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:5)

The meaning of the phrase "does not discharge his duty" is unclear. The Ramban (*Milchamot Hashem, Berachot* 2b) writes, on the one hand, that "he has not fulfilled his obligation in proper manner," but also emphasizes that this does not mean he has not fulfilled his obligation at all. As he puts it: "This does not mean that he must go back and eat again the Paschal offering, *matza*, and *maror*." In any case, it is clear that mentioning the Paschal offering, *matza*, and *maror* is part of the mitzva; even if we say this mention is not indispensable, it certainly involves a mitzva.

The Mitzva of Relating the Story of the Exodus - Sharpening the Difficulty

In all these examples, we see that on the night of the *seder*, the experiential aspects are part of the fulfillment of the mitzva: Regarding the wine, in addition to the requirement to drink it, the drinking must be done "in a manner expressive of freedom." Regarding the *maror* and *matza*, there is significance in their tastes – which are reminiscent, respectively, of the hard labor in Egypt and the redemption from it. And most of all, Rabban Gamliel rules that in order to fulfill one's obligation, one

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must also make a special statement of "the Paschal offering, *matza*, and *maror*."

The central point that ties all of these examples together is that without internalizing the content, without the experience, one does not fulfill his obligation on the night of the *seder*: With the wine and the *maror*, internalizing the content (by drinking the wine "in a manner expressive of freedom" and by sensing the bitter taste of the *maror*) is indispensable for fulfilling one's obligation, whereas with the *matza* and the recitation of the words of Rabban Gamliel, that internalization is required at least for the optimal fulfillment of the mitzva (even if it is not necessarily indispensable). Why?

"A Man Must Present Himself"

If we return to the Rambam in *Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza*, we see that the explanation for this is quite simple: the special requirement of internalizing the content, beyond the ordinary requirement of performing the "act of the mitzva," stems from the mitzva of relating the story of the exodus from Egypt.

Anyone who does not mention these three matters on the night of the fifteenth has not fulfilled his obligation. They are: the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*... These statements are all referred to as the Haggada. (*Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:5)

The mitzva of relating the story of the exodus does not only include speech; it also has a practical expression – acting "in a manner expressive of freedom" while drinking the four cups of wine and while reclining:

Therefore, when a person feasts on this night, he must eat and drink while he is reclining in the manner of free men... (*Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:7).

That is to say, drinking wine and reclining express the same "manner of freedom" that is obligated by the mitzva of relating the story of the exodus – the Haggada. It also stands to reason that this is why special importance is attached to the experiences of the night, as expressed by "the taste of the *maror*" and "the taste of the *matza*" that we saw above.

The Rambam mentions another requirement in the framework of the mitzva of relating the story of the exodus:

In each and every generation, a person must present himself as if he, himself, has now left the slavery of Egypt.... (Rambam, *Hilkhot Chametz u-Matza* 7:6)

The question, of course, is: What does this requirement entail? The answer seems to be simple: The Rambam's ruling that "a person must present [*le-har'ot*] himself" indicates that the mitzva is not only to remember the exodus, but to live it. On this night, each person goes out from slavery to freedom.

In contrast to the Rambam's halakhic ruling that one must mention "the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*," the text of the Rambam's Haggada includes an addition at the beginning of this statement, following the Mishna in *Pesachim* (10:5):

Rabban Gamliel said: Anyone who does not mention these three matters on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation: the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*. (Rambam, *Hilkhos Chametz u-Matza*, text of the Haggada)

In the Haggada, we cite not only the *halakha* that one must mention "the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*," but also the introduction to it, namely, the words: "Rabban Gamliel used to say." Why?

The reason is that the mitzva is to live the exodus from Egypt. On this night, the Jew goes out from slavery to freedom. The mitzva to relate the story of the exodus goes beyond knowledge of the dry history, and includes a renewed experience of the exodus. This experience is not created through the reading of history books, but by way of a story: "Ask your father, and he will declare to you; your elders, and they will tell you" (*Devarim* 32:7). A person must know from where he comes and to where he is going. It is therefore important to emphasize that Rabban Gamliel said this: We act by virtue of the earlier generations and continue them. This is the central idea of the night of the *seder*.

The Renewed Experience on the Night of the Seder "A Remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt"

Now we can understand the difference between the telling of the story of the exodus from Egypt on Pesach, on the one hand, and on the other hand – the mitzva of remembering the exodus from Egypt every day, and in general, the rest of the *mitzvot* that serve as "a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. Unlike the latter category, the night of the *seder* is not exclusively about remembrance.

Throughout the year, there is an obligation to remember our history – as on the festival of Sukkot, which mentions the exodus from Egypt: "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (*Vayikra* 23:43).^[viii] But regarding the mitzva of the Haggada and relating the story, we are not only remembering history; we are also engaged in a renewed experience of the exodus from the slavery of Egypt, as the Rambam rules: "In each and every generation, a person must *present himself* as if he, himself, has *now* left the slavery of Egypt" (Rambam, *Hilkhos Chametz u-Matza* 7:6). That is to say, we are dealing with an internalization of the exodus from Egypt – *now*.

This is the "fulfillment" of all the various reasons for *mitzvot* that we saw: the four cups, the taste of *maror*, the taste of *matza*, the Haggada – these are all "fulfillments" of the obligation to retell the story of the exodus from Egypt. The speech and the actions are meant to cause us to internalize the idea that the exodus is not something that happened a long time ago, but something that is happening right now: *We* were there, and therefore *our* lives were embittered, *we* were redeemed, and thus *we* went out to freedom.

Therefore, the various acts of eating are accompanied by taste: One should really feel that "they embittered their lives" (*Shemot* 1:14), which in essence are our lives. This is true also of the experience of redemption that occurs when we eat the *matza* and taste it. Of course, for the same reason, there is a special requirement of mentioning "the Paschal sacrifice, *matza*, and *maror*" – as part of the retelling of the story of the Haggada.^[ix]

The Redemption that Takes Place Every Year

Understanding what happened in the exodus from Egypt is only the beginning, because slavery and freedom are experiences that everyone has all the time. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that "man is born free but everywhere is in chains" (*The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter One), and thus he ignited the modern freedom movement that assumes that man is fundamentally born free and yet is shackled. Judaism, however, says the opposite: We were created enslaved, and only with a mighty hand and outstretched arm did God break the iron rods and redeem us from Egypt. In other words, a Jew's natural condition is slavery; were it not for God, the Torah, and miracles, he would not be free – and therefore, he needs to be newly liberated every year.

This is the uniqueness of Pesach as compared to the other festivals: Every year before Pesach, each and every one of us is a slave, just as our ancestors were slaves, and on the festival he is liberated anew, just as they were liberated. One must strongly internalize that we really came out of Egypt, and thus re-experience the redemption every year.

The renewed liberation begins with the statement that had we not been redeemed, we would still be slaves in Egypt; it intensifies with the eating of the *maror*, which has the taste of the bitterness of Egypt, and with the eating of the *matza*, which has the taste of God's redemption. A Jew eats both the bitterness of Egypt and the redemption so that the experience should be real, so that he will be truly free. The requirement that "the taste of the *matza* and the Paschal sacrifice be in his mouth" (*Tosafot, Pesachim* 120a, s.v. *maftirin*) stems from the fact that the desired fulfillment is not merely eating and chewing, but being free. This is achieved through the taste and through leaving it in one's mouth even after the meal.

Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik used to say that the Haggada includes a retelling of the story of the exodus from Egypt by way of speech, and here, in the words of Rabban Gamliel, begins the retelling of the story of the exodus by way of actions. This is the additional and deeper level that we experience on the night of the *seder*, and this is the special nature of the experience of the Haggada of Pesach – to be redeemed every year anew. (*Translated by David Strauss*)

^[xi] In the same way, even in the (exceptional) cases where the Rambam brings a reason for a mitzva, he

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emphasizes the distinction between the mitzva itself and the reason, which he calls an "allusion": "Even though the sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana is a decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep..." (*Hilkhos Teshuva* 3:4).

^[xii] The reality today is different, and it is not clear that this detail of the *halakha* applies in our time.

^[xiii] The Rashbam (*Pesachim* 108b, s.v. *yedei cheirut*) similarly wrote that "this is not a complete mitzva," but he did not explain what he meant.

^[xiv] Thus we can understand the next line of the Gemara there: "If he drank them [all] at once, Rav said: He has discharged [his duty of drinking] wine, but he has not discharged [his duty of] four cups."

^[xv] To explain this using the terminology of Brisk, it may be argued that the Rashbam maintains there must be a taste of *matza* in the object [*cheftza*], but there is no obligation falling upon the person [*gavra*] that he actually taste it (though it is preferable).

^[xvi] The Gemara states that the prohibition to eat something else after eating the *matza* is self-evident, and therefore it is not mentioned in the Mishna. It explains there that one may not eat after the *matza* of *afikoman* because "its taste is not strong." This argument, which is formulated in the negative, was adopted by the *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* in the positive.

^[xvii] There is a great controversy among the *Acharonim* regarding this *halakha*: In order to allow people to continue the meal even after midnight and still fulfill their obligation according to all opinions (regarding the latest time one can eat the *afikoman*), the *Avnei Nezer* proposed eating the *afikoman* before midnight, continuing the meal after midnight, and then eating an additional *afikoman* – with the stipulation that if the end of the time for eating the *afikoman* ends at midnight, he will fulfill his obligation with the first *afikoman*, and if it ends at dawn, he will fulfill it with the second *afikoman*. Rav Chayyim of Brisk maintained that this does not help, because in his opinion the taste of the *matza* must stay in his mouth until the morning, while according to this proposal, the taste of the first *afikoman* will certainly stay in his mouth only until midnight.

^[xviii] Admittedly, the *Bach* (OC 625:1) maintains that regarding the mitzva of *sukka* as well, remembering the reason for the mitzva is part of its fulfillment – but his opinion has not been accepted.

^[xix] For example, according to the Maharah, the Paschal offering expresses the selection of Israel.



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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's parsha is truly one of the most difficult subjects for people in our time to contemplate, understand or from which to gain knowledge and inspiration. The entire subject of these mysterious diseases, which manifested themselves on the human body, in clothing and even in houses and buildings is technically discussed in the Mishna and also in various places in the Talmud itself. However, the fact that the subject is discussed does not really reveal the underlying pathology of these diseases nor does it help explain it to us in a purely rational fashion.

We are all aware that the Talmud connects the disease to the sin of slandering others and improper speech. Nevertheless, the mystery of the cause, diagnosis and cure for the condition remains a troubling and hidden matter. It is beyond my ability to add any new insights into this age old discussion by the great scholars of Israel. I think, though, that we simply have to accept that there are physical diseases that manifest themselves because of spiritual failings, whatever those failings may be and however they are interpreted.

We are all aware that there are psychosomatic diseases that can and often do become actually physical. Medical science has not yet been able to determine why such phenomena occur. Well, just as there are, so to speak, mentally caused diseases, the Torah informs us that there are also spiritually caused diseases that actually effect one's body, clothing and even one's home. There are many events and occurrences in life, both personal and national, that defy logic or any form of human understanding.

The Torah does indicate to us the areas of our lives where our human vulnerabilities exist and are apparent. Certainly our bodies, our health, our appearance and our general physical well-being rank as some of the most vulnerable of all human conditions. Our bodies are so delicately formed and

perfectly balanced that even the slightest malfunction of any of its parts immediately causes pain and requires our attention.

The Torah expands this idea to include spiritual imbalances and shortcomings. We are usually never conscious of these matters and if, in fact, they are pointed out to us by others, the usual reaction is one of resentment. So, through the mechanism of physical symptoms as described in this week's parsha, the Torah reminds us that we need to examine and purify ourselves spiritually and not merely physically.

Our bodies, our clothing, even our dwelling places require inspection and sanctification. Even though the physical manifestations of these shortcomings are no longer apparent in our time, the underlying lesson is still present in all of our actions and attitudes.

The realization that we can be woefully deficient in behavior, unless we are constantly monitoring our relationship to our unique value system, is essential for living a truly Jewish and observant life. We are responsible for discerning those weaknesses within us even if they are not physically apparent. Perhaps this is the message to us from this week's parsha.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation
COVENANT & CONVERSATION
Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Is there such a thing as Lashon Tov?

METZORA

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

lashon tov positive words of affirmation constellation relationships
communication talking supporting helping friends

The Sages understood tsara'at, the theme of this week's parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, He empowered us to create, and destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, "good speech". The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages (where it refers to praising God). But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishnah Avot we read the following:

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach.

He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin.

Elazar ben Arach: an ever-flowing spring.

Ethics of the Fathers 2:10-11

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism.

Arachin 16a

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [yoter midai], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults in response to the praise.

For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: “Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [avak lashon hara], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him” (Hilchot Deot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions, or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding:

Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai’s disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don’t tell a lie. “Do you call that a lie?” the Hillel’s disciples respond. “In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful.”

What’s really at stake here is not just temperament – puritanical Shammites versus good-natured Hillelites – but two views about the nature of language. The Shammites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate, and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise, and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin’s famous account, can be performative as well as informative.[1]

The discourse between the disciples of Hillel and Shammai is similar to the argument between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84b).

Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty “to speak in his praise” (Hilchot Deot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one’s neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai’s disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: “Raise up many disciples.” But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the “well that never loses a drop”, was not creative but he had a remarkable memory – not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arach, the “ever-flowing spring,” was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and it is said that he forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of “Love your neighbour as yourself.” According to Avot it is one way of “raising up many disciples.” It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive.

Seeing the good in people and telling them so is a way of helping it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too.

[1] See J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press, 1962.

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Potomac Torah Study Center

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Hamas recently announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead), including Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. With the help of Hashem, Israel and a few friendly countries prevented an attack by Iran from causing more than minimal damage. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the continued help of Hashem.

During a non-leap year, Pesach normally arrives very close to Vayikra and Tzav, where we read about the korbanot and instructions that the kohanim would follow when performing the sacrifices. The juxtaposition of these Torah portions makes sense as we prepare for the rituals that we may still perform for Pesach since the destruction of the Temple. This year, however, we read Metzora on Shabbat HaGadol. How does the purification process for one who recovers from tzaraat relate to Pesach? Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues at alephbeta.org explain that Metzora connects very closely to Pesach.

The Torah discusses tzaraat immediately after the implications of childbirth on tamai and tahara (ritual impurity and purity). The classic case of tzaraat in the Torah is Miriam’s condition after she speaks lashon hara about Moshe’s wife (Bemidbar ch. 12). Aharon describes Miriam’s skin as resembling that of a stillborn baby. Miriam must stay outside the camp and do teshuvah for a week before becoming tahor again. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the Torah describes tzaraat as a “negah,” and the only other use of “negah” is when Hashem tells Moshe that Paro will release the Jews after He brings one more plague, a negah, to the Egyptians. The tenth plague, killing of the first born men and kosher animals of Mitzrayim, is contact with death – a parallel to the near death experience involved with tzaraat. After the tenth plague, the Jews must be waiting by the doors to their homes, with blood covering the doors. The Jews eat the korban Pesach that night, go through the bloody doors, and become reborn as a nation, B’Nai Yisrael, as they set off for the land that Hashem promised to our ancestors.

Rabbi Fohrman observes that the purification process for a metzora is almost identical to the korban Pesach. The ritual involves two birds, one that is killed with its blood mixed with water to turn the water red. The other bird

is set free. One bird that is killed reminds us of the first born of Egypt killed, and of the Egyptian army and horses killed in the Sea of Reeds on the seventh day, turning the sea red. The bird set free represents the Jews set free after eating the korban Pesach. The cedar wood dipped in blood (with a hyssop plant) reminds us of the bloody doors of the Jews, painted with hyssop before the korban Pesach. In both cases, there is a seven day period before the Jews cross the sea safely and the Egyptians die in the sea. The night that Hashem frees the Jews, the Egyptians are stillborn. The purification process for a metzora parallels that for the korban Pesach very closely (ch. 14). Rabbi Fohrman describes the metzora as having encountered a near death experience and a form of social death. The waiting period permits the metzora to perform teshuvah and rid himself of anti-social activities (such as lashon hara), and the purification process initiates his rebirth as a member of the community. This rebirth parallels the birth of the Jews as a distinct nation after leaving Egypt. The connection between the purification process and the korban Pesach illustrates why Metzora is a fitting introduction to Pesach.

Metzora and Pesach have special meaning for all Jews even today, more than 3330 years after the Exodus. Rabbi Label Lam observes that we must still attend Seders and observe the mitzvot, because there is no expiration date for gratitude. Indeed, with each new generation, we have more descendants from those freed from Egypt – and therefore more reason to express our gratitude to Hashem. Rabbi Marc Angel reminds us that we must each feel a part of the story of our slavery and exodus – exactly what the Sephardim do at their Seders. Rabbi Rhine adds that we must view ourselves as if we were just freed from Mitzrayim, so we must feel Hashem's love and protection personally.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings his message to the situation in 5784, a situation that Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, also observed during covid a few years ago. This year there are many empty chairs at Seders, especially in Israel. The Seder's recurring theme is that Jewish history starts with shame and evolves to praise. All the Pesach Seder symbols have the dual themes of shame and praise. Grief and hope/redemption are part of the central meaning of the Seder. Israel and all Jews are both a redeemed people and a nation facing difficult, continuous challenges. As Rabbi Sacks observes, during times of isolation and need, our sense of "we" gets stronger. During covid, and again since October 7, neighbors and congregations have been pulling together as never before. Pesach starts with suffering and ends with hope. All Jews, especially those facing an explosion of anti-Semitism throughout the world, and our fellows in Israel facing danger and attacks, internalize this message.

Metzora introduces Pesach, and the Seder introduces our resolve to work together and both hope and expect a better future, one where we can understand God's hand in bringing miracles to protect us, today as He has since the time of Avraham. God's continued protection with miracles was clear only a week ago, when Iran sent countless missiles and drones toward Israel – yet virtually none of them landed, and there was very little damage anywhere in Israel. Jordan joined the defense in shooting down missiles that flew over Jordan's air space. Egypt joined in condemning Iran, as did the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Several other Arab countries that might have applauded an attack on Israel shouted out silence – implicitly taking Israel's side against Iran. The United States and U.K. both joined Israel in shooting down missiles. Iran's attack, which could have been a great victory for our enemies, backfired on Iran and other enemies of our people. While Israel's ability to withstand Iran's attack was not a surprise, the magnitude of the victory, the reaction of so many other countries, and the absence of any major harm to Israel all demonstrate Hashem's miracle and continued protection.

I have written before that a basic issue of Purim and Hanukkah was whether God would continue to protect B'Nai Yisrael after the end of prophesy. Many of our people had the same question during the Holocaust. Hashem

answered loudly last week that He continues to protect our people. Rabbi Rhine adds the story of Gideon (Shoftim ch. 6-8). When Gideon asked an angel when and whether God would bring a miracle, Hashem's response was that Gideon should go forward and He would give him victory. The lesson from Metzora and from Pesach is that we must observe the mitzvot, keep up our personal relationships with Hashem, and ask Him when we need miracles for our people. God contin

From: **TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org>

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Subject: Rabbi Hershel Schachter - Our Beloved Hears, Even in Our Silence

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Our Beloved Hears, Even in Our Silence

The Mishna (Pesachim 116a) records that the Chachomim established that the mitzvah of sippur yetzi'as Mitzrayim which we observe on the night of the seder should be fulfilled in a specific form of talmud Torah: we should recite the pesukim of "Arami oveid avi" (Devarim 26:5-9) and give the commentary of the Torah Sheb'al Peh on each phrase of the pesukim. We combine Torah Sheb'al Peh with the Torah Sheb'ksav. On many occasions in his public shiurim, Rav Soloveitchik repeated the comments of the Ma'aseh Nissim[1] to explain this combination. Each time we give an interpretation of the Torah Sheb'al Peh on each phrase of "Arami oveid avi", we are exposing an addition level of interpretation over and above the simple translation of the words by quoting a different passuk which teaches some additional point. For example, the simple translation of the passuk, "va'nitz'ak el Hashem elohei avoseinu" etc. (ibid 25:7) is that on the occasion of yetzi'as Mitzrayim our ancestors prayed to Hashem, He listened to their prayers and brought them out of Mitzrayim. The Rabbis who authored the Haggadah interpreted that passuk to mean that our ancestors never really prayed; they did not know how to pray! Rather, Pharoh died, the masters in Egypt then made the Jews work harder than ever resulting in the Jews crying out in anguish over this burden of slavery, and Hashem in His kindness and love for the Jewish people considered it as if we had prayed and He redeemed us. Many of the Jews in Eretz Yisroel who suffered in the last half year are secular people who are not in the practice of davening. Because so many strange things were happening this year, they obviously must have felt in their hearts that there is an all-powerful Boreh Olam who is running this world and Hakodosh Boruch Hu certainly has considered their expressions of pain and anguish as if they had offered tefillos.

The Gemara tells us that Chizkiyahu Hamelech acted improperly by not expressing Hallel v'hodoah over the miraculous redemption that the Jewish people experienced from the armies of Sancherev, and he was therefore punished. After such a long and drawn-out war in which so many Jewish soldiers have lost their lives, and after long drawn-out negotiations with Hamas over release of the hostages which led to nothing, the Jewish people experienced a fantastic miracle last motzaei Shabbos. Several hundred missiles and drones were sent by Iran to attack Israel. These weapons of war must have cost Iran billions of dollars, and yet hardly any damage was caused to Israel. The entire Jewish people, all over the world, really ought to sing Hallel v'hodoah over this neis. However, the Jewish nation is so numb and emotionally drained by the atrocities of the pogrom which occurred on Simchas Torah and the losses that we have suffered in the ongoing war that most of us did not even think of offering Hallel v'hoda'ah. Hakodosh Boruch Hu, out of his love and kindness towards his chosen nation, will certainly consider it as if we davened to Him in the most proper fashion and as if we offered the proper hoda'ah al ha'neis, as he did at the time of yetzias Mitzrayim.

Just as the Torah Sheb'al Peh reads in between the lines of the Chumash and exposes additional levels of interpretation, so too Hakodosh Boruch Hu reads in between the lines of what we say and how we act and considers it as if we

have davened properly and offered the proper hoda'ah. May He redeem us today just as he redeemed us at the time of yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

[1] The commentary on the Haggadah by the author of Nesivos HaMishpat, Rabbi Yaakov (Lorberbaum) of Lissa.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Schachter

More divrei Torah on Pesach

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The Seder Night: Exalted Evening

Excerpted from **'The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening' A Passover Haggadah with a commentary based on the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**; Edited by Rabbi Menachem D. Genack
Exalted Evening Haggadah

Seder Hakearah The Talmud (Pesachim 114b) discusses the requirement to place shenei tavshilin, two cooked items, on the Seder plate, commemorating the korban Pesach and the chagigah offering that were eaten when sacrifices were brought in the Temple. Rav Huna says that this requirement may be fulfilled by using beets and rice. According to Rav Yosef, one must use two different types of meat. Rambam (Hilchot Chametz u-Matzah 8:1) follows the opinion of Rav Yosef, while the popular custom is to place one item of meat and an egg on the Seder plate (see Kesef Mishneh, loc cit.).

The presence of the egg at the Seder also has another source. The first day of Passover always occurs on the same day of the week as Tishah be-Av, the day that marks the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews (Orach Chayyim 428:3). Accordingly, the custom is to eat an egg, a symbol of mourning, on the first night of Pesach (see Rama, Orach Chayyim 476:2). The egg, therefore, symbolizes both joy, the chagigah, and mourning, Tish'ah be-Av.

The Beit ha-Levi explains the correlation between the first day of Passover and Tish'ah be-Av as follows. Several midrashic sources indicate that the Exodus from Egypt was premature. The Jews were supposed to have been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years but were redeemed after only 210 years. After 210 years of exile, the Jews were in danger of completely losing their Jewish identity. Had they remained in Egypt any longer, they would have been hopelessly assimilated. The urgent need to redeem them without further delay explains why the Exodus occurred "be-chipazon, in haste" (Deut. 16:3). God, therefore, redeemed them prematurely, and the balance of their term of exile would have to be completed in future exiles. Thus, the redemption from Egypt was not a complete redemption, since it was the cause of the later exiles. It is, therefore, appropriate to eat an egg, an open expression of mourning, on the very night of redemption.

It is interesting to note that the terminology of shenei tavshilin occurs with respect to the laws both of Passover, when one is required to place shenei tavshilin on the plate, and of Tish'ah be-Av, when one may not eat shenei tavshilin in the meal preceding the Tish'ah be-Av fast. The similar terminology further points to the correlation between Passover and Tish'ah be-Av.

(Reshimot)

Seder Leil Pesach There is a logic and a structure not only to the Maggid section of the Haggadah, but also to the entire Seder. The Gemara emphasizes in several places the necessity of preserving the proper order of performance on Pesach night. For example, the Gemara (Pesachim 114b–115a) asks what blessing should be made if one must eat maror before the Maggid section because there is no other vegetable for karpas. It is evident from the discussion that the fulfillment of the mitzvah of maror would not have occurred the first time it was eaten when it was eaten as karpas, but

rather the second. If one could fulfill the mitzvah of maror at the first dipping, the whole discussion of the Gemara would be superfluous.

Apparently, one may not eat maror before matzah. According to Rashbam (Pesachim 114a), the sequential order of eating matzah first and then maror is biblically mandated. This is based on the verse "al matzot u-merorim yo'kheluhu, they shall eat it (the korban Pesach) with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Num. 9:11), implying that the matzot are eaten first, and then the maror. The requirement to maintain a sequence, however, is also applicable to the entire Seder.

In order to explain this, we must understand that each of the mitzvot of Pesach night has two aspects, two kiyumim, two fulfillments. The mitzvah of sipur Yetzi'at Mitzrayim is discharged in a twofold way – through the medium of speech and through symbolic actions. A person who eats the matzah and the maror before saying Maggid fulfills the mitzvah of eating matzah, but does not fulfill the mitzvah of sipur Yetzi'at Mitzrayim by means of eating matzah. That is what the Gemara (Pesachim 115b) means by referring to matzah, lechem oni (Deut. 16:3), as "lechem she-onin alav devarim harbeh, the bread over which we recite many things." Since eating matzah is also part of sipur, we understand the need for Seder, for a particular order of performance.

(Kol ha-Rav)

The language utilized by Rambam in his introduction to the order of the Pesach Seder is reminiscent of his introduction to the Temple service of Yom Kippur. In Hilchot Chametz u-Matzah (8:1), Rambam begins "Seder, the order, for the performance of the mitzvot on the night of the fifteenth is as follows." In Hilchot Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim (4:1), Rambam begins, "Seder, the order, for the performances of the day is as follows." Just as following the order of the Yom Kippur service is essential for the proper performance of the mitzvah, so, too, following the order of the Seder is essential for the proper fulfillment of the mitzvot of this night of the fifteenth of Nisan. By following an order we demonstrate that all the parts of the Seder are interconnected and only collectively do they properly retell the story of Yetzi'at Mitzrayim. If, for instance, one were to consume the matzah before reciting Maggid, the narrative would be deficient in that one would not have satisfied the facet of lechem oni, bread over which we are to recount the Exodus. Similarly, the karpas is intended to elicit the questions that will enable the Maggid discussion to proceed, and the failure to eat the karpas in its proper sequence would impair or forestall the Maggid section. Only through adherence to the prescribed order can we express the overarching principles and ideas that are intended to emerge from, and which are coordinated with, our actions on the Seder night. (Reshimot)

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Metzora

Does Mussar Help?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1288 An Aliyah After Your Wife Gives Birth Revisited. Good Shabbos & Chag Kosher V'somayach!

Towards the end of Parshas Metzora, the pasuk says: "You shall separate the Children of Israel from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination if they contaminate My Mishkan that is among them." (Vayikra 15:31). The simple reading of this pasuk is that when Bnei Yisrael are tameh (impure), they should not, in a state of impurity, go into the holy places where they are forbidden to enter, lest they die from that impurity. However, homiletically, the sefer Yismach Yehudah cites the following interesting vort from a drasha of Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer (a

great grandson of the Chasam Sofer, who was the Chief Rabbi of Cracow, Poland, in the early part of the 20th century):

Sometimes we talk to our children or to our students or to our congregants until we are blue in the face. We wonder, does it make an impression? Are our words taken seriously? Do people change? Perhaps this is most relevant for professionals who do this for a living. Do all the things that we say, year after year, really help? Do speeches help? Do drashos help? Does mussar (chastisement) help? Does lecturing to our children really help?

Rav Kornitzer suggests that we need to bear in mind that it may not help now, and it may not help six months from now or a year from now. But, at some point, at some time in the future, maybe the lesson will hit home. I don't know how Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer explained the mashal that he gave, but today it is easy for us to imagine what this is like. Namely, the "mussar" is in the "cloud." Where is all this data? It is in the "cloud." Where is the "cloud?" There is not a cloud in the sky! But we know this concept that something can be not in front of us, yet when we need to access it, it is somehow there for us to access. It is the same with mussar and with lecturing our children. It is there. It hasn't penetrated yet, but it can penetrate.

He references the pasuk "And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart (al levavecha)." (Devarim 5:6). It does not say b'soch levavecha (within your heart) because sometimes it has not yet penetrated the heart. However, at least it remains al levavecha – upon your heart. One day, maybe, just perhaps, it will penetrate the heart and will be b'soch levavecha.

This is why the pasuk says "...v'lo yamusu m'tumosam" (Vayikra 15:31), which means you talk to people and you tell them what is right. Even though it might not help now or even ten years from now, they will not die from their impurity. How many people do we know that return at the end of their days? They don't die in their state of impurity because at the end of their days, they in fact realize that what they were told so many years earlier was correct, and they in fact do come back.

Ironically, I was recently speaking with someone in Eretz Yisrael who told me the following interesting incident that happened only a few days ago. (This was April 2016.) I believe this story brings home the point that I am trying to make:

A fellow in Eretz Yisrael has a distant relative who was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. The relative's father was a rav and a shochet, who tried his best to educate his son in the proper Torah path, including sending him to a yeshiva. The boy only lasted in the yeshiva for two weeks. He hated it. He left the yeshiva and eventually left Yiddishkeit. He never got married. He does not have a wife or children. He is a man alone in the world. From what I gather, he must be in his late sixties or early seventies.

For whatever reason, this relative got an inspiration: I want to go to Israel. I want to daven at the Kosel HaMaaravi. He takes his Bar Mitzvah tefillin, which he has not put on in a half century, and has plans to visit the kosel, put on his tefillin, and daven there. He hooks up with some Federation tour and goes with this tour and their tour guide on the Federation tour to Eretz Yisrael.

The person who is relating the story finds out that his long-lost cousin is coming to Israel and he decides that he will get in touch with him, take him around, and give him a real tour of Eretz Yisrael. They meet in a certain place. The Israeli says to his American relative, "Have you been to the Kosel yet?" His cousin responds, "No, I have not been to the Kosel yet." The Israeli said, "Great. So let's go now!" The American says "No, not now. Maybe later."

"What's the problem?" his Israeli cousin presses him. "This is why you came. You want to put your tefillin on and daven at the kosel." The cousin is hesitant. Finally he says "I can't go!"

"Why can't you go?" The long-lost cousin finally explains "I can't go to the Kosel with a cross."

The Israeli cousin is incredulous: "What are you doing with a cross?" The American explains that while he was on the Federation tour they went through the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. "I have a very good Christian friend back home in America. I wanted to buy him a cross from Israel as a present. I asked the rabbi who is leading the Federation tour if it was okay to buy a cross for my Christian friend in America. He told me it was."

He bought the tselem (cross) and put it in his bag, and is now walking around Jerusalem with a tselem in his bag. He tells his relative "I cannot go to the Kosel with a cross in my bag."

This Israeli cousin told my friend this story and his friend told it to me. He then commented: This fellow has not had any connection to Yiddishkeit in maybe sixty years. He is putting on tefillin now for probably the first time in more than fifty years, or even more! But he still has a sensitivity, a feeling, that a person does not go to the Kosel HaMaaravi with a tselem in his bag. This is an example of "...You shall not die in your state of impurity." The person left Yiddishkeit, he had a bad experience in yeshiva, he did not want to have anything to do with Judaism, and he has not kept who knows what for all these years, but there is something in the Jewish heart that remains "al levavecha" – upon your heart. It was ON the heart. It was "in the cloud." After all these years, it finally penetrated that you do not go to the Kosel with a tselem in your bag.

This is a lesson to all of us, whether you are a rav, a rabbi, a rebbi, a teacher, or even a parent. If you preach and preach and preach and it does not seem to make a difference, yes, it does! "You shall warn... and they shall not die in their state of impurity."

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Tazria

Gold in them Thar Walls

This week, in reading both Tazria and Metzorah, we combine portions that deal with the physio-spiritual plague of tzora'as. Tzora'as is a discoloration that appears in varying forms on human skin, on hair, clothing, and even on the walls of one's home. The afflicted individual must endure a complicated process of purification in order to rejoin the community. The Talmud explains that tzoraas is a divine punishment for the sins of slander and gossip. In fact, the Talmud in Arachin 16b comments that the reason that the afflicted is sent out of the camp was because "he separated friends and families through his words, and deserves to be separated from his community."

Rashi and the Ramban explain that the first form of tzora'as does not begin on the person. Hashem in His mercy first strikes at inanimate objects — one's possessions. The discoloration first appears on the walls of a home, forcing the affected stones to be removed and destroyed. If that event does not succeed as a wake-up-call, and the person continues his malevolent activities, then his clothing is affected. If that fails, eventually the flesh is transformed and white lesions appear, forcing the afflicted to leave the Jewish camp until the plague subsides and the Kohen declares him acceptable to return.

Rashi tells us that the first stage of tzora'as — the home — is actually a blessing in disguise. Tzora'as on a home can indeed bring fortune to the affected. As the Israelites were approaching the Land of Canaan, the inhabitants, figuring that one day they would re-conquer the land, hid all their gold and silver inside the walls of their homes. When one dislodged the afflicted stones of his home he would find the hidden treasures that were left by the fleeing Canaanites.

It is troubling. Why should the first warning of tzora'as reek of triumph?

What message is Hashem sending to the first offender by rewarding his misdeeds with a cache of gold? What spiritual import is gained from the materialistic discovery?

After the end of World War II, the brilliant and flamboyant Torah sage, Rabbi Eliezer Silver visited and aided thousands of survivors in displaced persons camps in Germany and Poland who were waiting to find permanent homes. One day, as he was handing out Siddurim (prayerbooks) and other Torah paraphernalia, a Jewish man flatly refused to accept any.

“After the way I saw Jews act in the camp, I don’t want to have any connection with religion!”

Rabbi Silver asked him to explain what exactly had turned him off from Jewish practice.

“I saw a Jew who had a Siddur, yet he only allowed it to be used by the inmates in exchange for their daily bread ration. Imagine,” he sneered, “a Jew selling the right to daven for bread!”

“And how many customers did this man get?” inquired Rabbi Silver.

“Far too many!” snapped the man.

Rabbi Silver put his hand around the gentlemen and gently explained. “Why are you looking at the bad Jew who sold the right to pray? Why don’t you look at the many good Jews who were willing to forego their rations and starve, just in order to pray? Isn’t that the lesson you should take with you?” Perhaps Hashem in His compassion is sending much more to the gossipier than a get-rich-quick scheme. He shows the first-time slanderer to look a little deeper at life. On the outside he may see a dirty wall of a former Canaanite home. Dig a little deeper and you will find gold in them thar walls. Next time you look at a person only superficially — think. Dig deeper. There is definitely gold beneath the surface. Sometimes you have to break down your walls to find the gold you never thought it existed.

Rabbi Eliezer Silver (1881-1968) was a prominent figure in the emerging American Torah Community. A powerful, witty and brilliant leader, he came to America as a Rabbi in Harrisburg, PA and ended his career as Rabbi of Cincinnati, OH. He was a founder of the Vaad Hatzalah during World War II. Good Shabbos!

The Bread of Affliction

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

YU to Go NISSAN 5768

Each Pesach we begin our Seder with the familiar words: השתא הכא לשנה השתא עבדי לשנה הבאה בני חורין. This year we are here, next year in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year, free men.

The formula is ancient, preserved in its original Aramaic from a time when Aramaic was the vernacular. How many centuries has it been since Jews spoke Aramaic? And yet we continue to say the same words, the same prayer.

Actually, it doesn’t sound like a prayer. A prayer would begin יי רצון, or the Aramaic equivalent:

רעיא יהא, let it be Your will – to bring us by next year to Jerusalem, to make us free men.

That is not what we say. We don’t begin the Seder with a prayer. We begin with a confident statement of fact: This year we are here; but next year we will be in Jerusalem. This year we are slaves, but next year we will be free men.

And the years roll by, and the decades, and the centuries, and each year we are disappointed, each year our confident expectation fails to materialize.

Last year we were here, and here we are still; last year we were slaves, and slaves we remain.

How is it then that we continue to make this confident prediction, year after year? Shouldn’t we at least tone it down, allow for a little uncertainty? This year we are here, perhaps next year we will be in Eretz Yisroel; this year we are slaves, let us hope that next year we will be free men.

Why do we go on year after year, setting ourselves up for disappointment? Another strange feature of this declaration is its opening: עניא לחמא, this is the bread of affliction. After all, the Torah describes the matzoh as the bread of redemption, the bread that the Jews baked on their way out of Egypt

because they were hurried out of Egypt so quickly that there was no time for their bread to leaven. And later on in the Seder, too, we say: שאנו זו מצה מה שום על אוכלים עד להחמין; what does this matzoh signify? And we answer: בציקם הספיק שלא על המלכים מלכי מלך עליהם שנגלה there was no time for their bread to leaven, until the King of Kings revealed Himself to them.

Why do we begin the Seder by describing the matzo, that symbol of our redemption, as עניא לחמא?

A commonly given answer is that the matzo had two historical roles. It was, as the Torah says, and as we say later in the Haggadah, the bread of redemption that we baked on our way out of Egypt. But it was also, for centuries, the bread of affliction, the bread that we were fed as slaves in Egypt when we were not allowed the luxury even of waiting for our bread to leaven before being hurried back to our labors. And so the matzo is both the bread of geulah and the bread of affliction.

But this answer, at first glance, seems unsatisfactory. Even if it is true, as a matter of historical fact, that the Jews ate matzo as slaves in Egypt, that is not the reason that we eat matzo at the Seder! The Torah makes clear that the reason we are commanded to eat matzo this first night of Pesach is to commemorate the bread that we ate when we were redeemed. So why do we begin the Seder by emphasizing matzo’s other, more melancholy and less important, aspect?

Matzo is, indeed, the bread of geulah. That is how the Torah characterizes it, that is the reason we eat it at the Seder, that is its essential nature. And therefore when the Jews in Egypt during their long years of slavery, under the lash, ate matzo, they were eating the bread of geulah. With every bite of matzo that they ate, they were celebrating their geulah. Every meal that they ate in Egypt, where they were fed nothing but matzo, was a Seder.

Only they didn’t know it yet.

Because the beginning of the process of geulah from Egypt was not the moment when Moshe arrived back from Midian. Nor did it begin when he smote the Egyptian overseer. It did not begin, even, when Moshe was born. The process of geulah began the minute the Jews arrived in Egypt.

We see this in the beautiful Midrash which relates that Yocheved, Moshe’s mother, was born החומות בין, between the gates of the walls of the city when Yaakov and his children first arrived in Egypt. At that moment – the very moment of our entry into Egypt – the geulah began to unfold.

That geulah was a long, drawn out process, and for two centuries it was invisible to human eyes. No one realized the significance of Yocheved’s birth. No one knew, for that matter, the significance of Moshe’s birth and adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter. The beginning of the slavery, its intensification, Pharaoh’s decrees, were public knowledge that filled our hearts with dismay. But beneath the surface – far beneath – the geulah had already begun.

The great R’ Yaakov of Lisa, the author of the Nesivos haMishpat, in his commentary on the Haggadah, records a beautiful insight. The Haggadah says: Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel; for the Holy One, blessed be He, calculated the end, in order to do what He had promised to Avraham

This is a difficult passage. What does the Haggadah mean by saying that He “calculated the end”? Why does He need to calculate?

R’ Yaakov explains that all those years in Egypt the עולם של רבונו was busy bringing the geulah about. All those years, when all we saw was misery, He was directing the strands of history towards that end. And the slavery itself, with all its horrors, was a necessary part of that geulah, even if we could not – even if we cannot – understand it. All those year when we were calculating how long we had been slaves, He was calculating how long until we would be free, how much longer the process of redemption would require.

And therefore every bite of עוני לחם, the bitter bread of slavery, was a bite of גאולים, the bread of redemption. The same matzo that we experienced as

the bread of affliction, was really the bread of freedom – but only He knew it.

And that is the lesson that the matzo teaches us, and the lesson with which we begin the Seder. As we sit down to the Seder we take the matzo, that symbol of our freedom which is the centerpiece of our Seder table, over which we will soon recount the story of our miraculous deliverance, and we say: עניא לחמא הא; this matzo was for many years the bread of our affliction. We ate it in abject despair, not knowing what it was. And all that time – it was really the symbol of our redemption. All that time – we were being redeemed. The mills of geulah ground slowly but relentlessly on and on. Only the process was hidden, until that final moment when – המלכים מלכי מלך – עליהם שנגלה עד He revealed Himself to us. Until that time when He showed us that He had been there all the time – being הקץ את מחשב, calculating and counting down and bringing the redemption into being. The גאולה was there all the time, what we waited for was its revelation.

הא, today, too, we eat the bread of affliction. When we read of bombs and mortars, of the shattered lives and bloodthirsty threats that have become our daily fare – then we eat לחם, the bread of affliction. וליה יומם, our tears are our bread, by day and night. לחם דמעתי לי היתה, this year we are here, still eating the bread of affliction – and there is so much affliction for our people today.

And yet we know that ה"הקב is here too with us, being הקץ את מחשב, bringing the redemption closer and closer, and this bread, this matzo, is for us today, too – not only לחם but also גאולה, the bread of our redemption, which advances inexorably. And sometimes we are even vouchsafed a glimpse of that advance.

And so with that same faith that our ancestors showed when they first made this declaration, with the same words that they used then, with the same undiminished confidence, we declare: דישראל בארעא הבאה לשנה, next year in the land of Israel; חורין בני הבאה לשנה, next year indeed we will be free.

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Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Tzipora bas Tzvi.

A Deconstructive Criticism

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I will give you as a possession, and I will place an affliction of tzora'as upon the house [...] (14:33-34).

This week's parsha continues the theme of divine retribution in the form of the punishment tzora'as and the process of purification and recovery from it. Chazal teach us that this affliction came in progressive waves; first tzora'as appeared on one's home and when the person continued to ignore the message it appeared on the person's vessels and finally on the person's skin. The Talmud (Arachin 16a) says that tzora'as was a heaven sent punishment for seven types of sins, but chief among them loshon hora. In fact, the word מצורע (the name given to a person afflicted with this ailment) is a contraction of the words מוציא רע – one who brings out evil." As discussed in prior editions of INSIGHTS, the sin of loshon hora is quite serious and thus the punishment quite severe.

Yet Rashi comments on this possuk regarding tzora'as afflicting one's home: "This was good news, because the Amorites hid treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years that Bnei Yisroel were in the desert and as a result of the tzora'as (in the process of the purification) a person would dismantle the home and find (these treasure hoards)."

One must wonder as to the logic of this punishment. The divine retribution for a heinous sin actually leads to a person finding a treasure of gold? What is the message that Hashem is trying to convey?

Punishment is a message of criticism from Hashem that one is not behaving properly and that one must change his ways. But criticism is very difficult for a person to accept. The knee-jerk reaction upon hearing criticism from someone is to get defensive because the person feels that he is being personally attacked.

In most situations, this analysis of being attacked is actually true. Consider the person who "shushes" someone in shul for speaking loudly or talking during davening; 99% of the time the person who gives the criticism is merely annoyed at being bothered or distracted during davening. Criticizing another person's behavior because you are annoyed by it is almost never effective.

Proper criticism is only to be delivered if a person has a genuine concern for the person he is criticizing – because that is the only way the criticized person could possibly feel that he is not being personally attacked. At that point, the person being criticized can try to dispassionately look at his own behavior and see if corrective measures are in order.

A person who receives tzora'as on his home is getting a very public rebuke from Hashem. After all, it's hard to hide having to dismantle one's home.

This is obviously very embarrassing and debilitating to one's psyche.

The reason that a person who gets the first level of rebuke (tzora'as on one's home) receives an almost instantaneous reward is because Hashem is sending him a message: "I love you and care about you; I am rebuking you for your own good, so please change your ways."

In this way, a person is likely to receive the criticism from Hashem in the most positive manner and consider what changes to make in his life in order to correct his errant behavior. The reward showing Hashem's love allows a person to honestly reflect on the message and react in a positive manner to the criticism.

Follow the Leader

And Bnei Yisroel went and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did (Shemos 12:28). This week is known as Shabbos Hagadol. According to Chazal, this was the Shabbos that Bnei Yisroel set aside a lamb to be brought as a Korban Pesach.

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the possuk. The beginning of the verse clearly states that Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, therefore why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words "so they did"? Rashi goes on to explain that the words "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon; they too did the mitzvah of Korban Pesach.

Maharal in the Gur Aryeh (Shemos 12:28) wonders; why is it assumed that Moshe and Aharon would not have had to bring a Korban Pesach and thus the Torah had to tell us otherwise?

Additionally, if the Torah meant to tell us that "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon, why doesn't it expressly state such, leaving no room for confusion?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to studying Torah an hour a night), they silently wonder (and sometimes not so silently) why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior?

Of course they don't realize all the obligations that we are under (work, business meetings, school board meetings, home repairs, etc.), so how can they possibly understand why we aren't able to make that very same commitment to Torah study?

In fact, our kids are actually right. Of course, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don't do what we are asking our kids to do, but that's exactly what they are – excuses. Of course, when one has many responsibilities there are conflicts that cannot be avoided. But our children aren't fooled, they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to an ideal. Our kids also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives by how we choose to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about – taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above following certain laws that everyone else must adhere to. They forget that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moshe and Aharon were. On the night that Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, undoubtedly, there were a multitude of things to do and Moshe and Aharon could easily have been forgiven for not fulfilling the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. But that's not the type of leaders they were – they did exactly what everyone else did. That's what the Torah is telling us by not mentioning their names: They fulfilled the Korban Pesach like everyone else – as ordinary members of Bnei Yisroel about to leave Egypt.

Essays for Pessach

Laws Regarding 'Rich Matzah' and Medicines on Passover

Revivim Rav Eliezer Melamed

'Rich matzah' (matzah ashira), meaning dough that was mixed with fruit juices, is forbidden to eat on Passover according to Ashkenazi custom. For Sephardic Jews as well, it is best to avoid eating it, unless one's rabbi permits it * Additionally, one who comes from a family that abstained from eating soaked matzah is allowed to eat it today, but if they knew it was a stringency and observed it for several years, it is good for them to receive a formal annulment in front of three people * Medications without taste do not require kosher certification for Passover, and even medications with taste can be used if one cannot verify whether they are permitted on Passover

Q: Is it permissible to eat cookies on Passover that are made with fruit juices, which are called "rich matzah" (matzah ashira)?

A: The chametz (leavened bread) prohibited by the Torah is created from flour and water, but if the flour is kneaded with fruit juices, even if it sat for a full day until the dough rose, it is not considered chametz, because this rise is different from the rise of chametz prohibited by the Torah. The liquids considered fruit juices are wine, honey, milk, oil, and egg yolk water, as well as all juices squeezed from fruits like apple and strawberry juice. Since fruit juices cannot become ferment, according to the basic law, it is permissible on Passover to knead dough with fruit juices, bake it, and eat it. However, according to Rashi, even though this dough cannot become fully leavened chametz, it is considered chametz nuksheh "hardened chametz," meaning chametz by rabbinic decree, and therefore it is prohibited to eat it.

All of this applies when the flour was kneaded with fruit juices alone, but if they also mixed in water, the dough can become chametz. And according to many poskim (decisors), water mixed with fruit juices causes faster leavening, and in order not to enter the concern of leavening, our Sages prohibited kneading dough on Passover with fruit juices and water (Shulchan Aruch 458:1-3).

Ashkenazic Custom

According to Ashkenazic custom, it is forbidden to eat on Passover anything kneaded with flour and fruit juices, because they are concerned that water may have become mixed into the fruit juices, and then the dough will leaven quickly and perhaps they will not supervise it properly. Additionally, they are concerned about Rashi's view that fruit juices alone can cause rabbinically-prohibited leavening. And although according to the basic law one could be lenient like the clear majority of poskim, the Ashkenazic custom is to be stringent, and this should not be changed.

Sephardic Custom

According to Sephardic custom, it is permitted to prepare Passover cookies from flour and fruit juices, but it is forbidden to mix in water, since that can cause faster leavening. Retroactively, if water was mixed in, one should bake them immediately (Shulchan Aruch 458:2).

In practice, the cookies that receive Passover certification according to Sephardic customs are usually made on a base of fruit juices, taking care that

no water is mixed in, but various other ingredients are added. Those who permit them maintain that these other ingredients are not considered like water. This was also the ruling of Rav Ovadia Yosef. In contrast, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu was very stringent about this, due to the concern that the status of the additional ingredients is like water, and it is even possible that the leavening agents are worse than water, so that even if they are produced under special supervision, it would be considered chametz even retroactively (like the law of chametz that became leavened due to another factor, Pesachim 28b). Therefore, in practice, even according to Sephardic customs, it is correct to equate the Ashkenazic and Sephardic customs, and refrain from eating them. However, one who has a rabbi who permits it, may act in accordance with his ruling (Peninei Halakha: Pesach 8:1).

Soaked Matzah

Q: Is there room to be stringent and not eat "soaked" matzah, (matzah sheruya, or gebrochts), meaning matzah, or matzah crumbs, that have been soaked in water?

A: After the matzah has been fully baked, the leavening power in the flour is nullified, and even if the matzah is soaked in water for a long time, it will not become chametz. A sign that the matzah has been fully baked is that its surface has become crusted, and if one breaks it, no dough threads will be drawn from it. Since matzah that has been properly baked cannot become chametz, it is permissible to soak it in soup. And an elderly person or sick person who cannot eat dry matzah at the Seder night is permitted to soak the matzah in water and eat it soft (Shulchan Aruch 461:4). Similarly, if the matzah has been ground into flour, it is permissible to knead the matzah flour with water, and there is no concern that it will become chametz, since after being thoroughly baked it can no longer become chametz (Shulchan Aruch 463:3). And this way one can bake Passover cakes from the five grains or cook various types of patties that contain matzah flour (kneidelach and gefilte fish).

Stringency of the Chassidim

However, some have the custom to be stringent and not soak the matzahs, lest some of the flour in the dough was not kneaded properly and remained within the matzah without being baked, and when soaked in water, that remaining flour will become chametz. And they were also concerned that some flour may have stuck to the matzah after baking, and when soaked in water it will become chametz. Regarding matzah flour, there is an additional reason for stringency, lest there be ignorant people who will confuse matzah flour with regular flour, and come to the prohibition of chametz on Passover. This was the custom of the Hasidic disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, to be stringent and not eat soaked matzah.

The Practical Halakha

However, the opinion of the vast majority of poskim is that there is no need to be stringent about this, because usually the kneading was done properly and no flour remained unblended and unbaked. And this is the custom of Sephardic and non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jews. The Chassidic Ashkenazim have the custom to be stringent.

The Custom in Chassidic Families

Even among those of Hasidic descent, some are lenient today, because the custom of prohibition was founded at a time when thick matzahs were commonly baked by the multitude of Jews by hand, and there was reason to fear that a particle may have remained un-kneaded and not baked properly. But today, when the kneading is done by machine or by hand with great precision, and the matzahs are thinner, and great care is taken to separate the flour area from the area where the matzahs are removed from the oven, all the concerns have been eliminated.

Therefore, even one whose parents refrained from eating soaked matzah is permitted to eat it today, provided that it does not involve disrespecting his father. And if he knew that this was a stringency and practiced it for some years, it is good for him to receive a formal annulment (hatarah) in front of three people for not having said bli neder ("without a vow") regarding his

stringency. And if he thought it was an obligation and now has learned that there is no such obligation, he is permitted to stop without an annulment (Peninei Halakha: Passover 8:2).

Medicines on Passover

The question of medicines on Passover is very common. When it comes to a medicine that has no taste, it does not require kosher certification, because even if chametz was mixed into it in the past when it was edible, since now it is no longer fit even for a dog's consumption, there is no longer a prohibition of chametz. Although there are those who are stringent about this due to a concern of a rabbinical prohibition. However, the halakha follows the opinion of the majority of poskim who permit swallowing a medication that is unfit for eating (Peninei Halakha: Pesach 8:7).

Therefore, the thick booklets published before Passover are unnecessary, and it would have been sufficient to focus on flavorful medicines. The principle of "you grasped too much, you did not grasp" applies here. Due to the extensive focus on tasteless medicines, efforts are not invested in verifying the composition of the flavorful medicines, which is where the verification is truly important, and in which there is often negligence.

Can a Flavorful Medicine Be Taken Without Kosher Certification?

However, when the medicine is flavorful, such as a syrup or lozenge, it clearly requires Passover certification, lest chametz be mixed into it. Only one who is dangerously ill, and has no good substitute for the medicine, is permitted to consume it, since the imperative of saving a life overrides the prohibition of eating chametz.

However, I previously wrote (in Peninei Halakha 8, end of footnote 9) that in a time of pressing need, when it is impossible to verify if the flavorful medicine is kosher, even not for a life-threatening situation, it is permitted to take it on Passover, since the majority of medicines do not contain chametz, one can be lenient based on the majority, as explained in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 110:3).

But now my esteemed friend, Rabbi Shaul David Botchko, has sent me a responsum in which he clarified that there is no concern of chametz even in flavorful medications. Firstly, because only an infinitesimal percentage of them contain starch or alcohol derived from the five grains. And even in those that contain grain-derived starch, there is no concern of chametz, because this starch has been separated from the rest of the wheat components, and alone it cannot become chametz, as Rabbi Shar Yashuv Cohen clarified regarding citric acid (see Peninei Halakha: Passover 8:8). And even if a medication contains alcohol derived from the five grains, it is different from drinking alcohol, since it is intended for a medicinal purpose of dissolution. The alcohol concentration in it is between 95-99%, and such a liquid is unfit for drinking, and therefore even if derived from the five grains, it was disqualified from being edible by a dog before Passover, and thus there is no prohibition of chametz in it.

How Long Should Kaddish Be Said in the Year of Mourning?

Q: How should children properly conduct themselves in saying Kaddish during the year of mourning for their parents? Should they say Kaddish for the entire year, and in a leap year for 13 months, or 12 months, or only 11 months? Are there differences in the customs of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews?

A: It is a mitzvah for one who is mourning a parent to say Kaddish in the first year for the elevation of the deceased's soul. And this has great benefit for the deceased, for through the son saying Kaddish and sanctifying God's name, the deceased's merits are increased, and if they were sentenced to Gehenna (hell), their punishment is lightened.

However, if they were to say Kaddish for the full twelve months, it would appear as if they are considering the deceased a wicked person who was sentenced to Gehenna. Therefore, only when it is known that the deceased was wicked is Kaddish said for the full twelve months. But when it is not known that they were wicked, in order not to appear as if they are

considering the deceased a wicked person, Kaddish is not said for the full twelve months.

There are two customs regarding this:

The first is the custom of most Sephardic Jews. In order to show that they do not consider the parent a wicked person, they do not say Kaddish in the first week of the twelfth month, and then continue saying Kaddish until the end of the twelve months (Rav Pe'alim 3, Yoreh Deah 32). This was the custom in Babylon, Turkey, Persia, Syria, and Egypt.

The second custom is to say Kaddish for eleven months after the passing, and in the twelfth month they do not say it. This is the custom of all Ashkenazic Jews (Rema, Yoreh Deah 376:4), most North African Jews (Otzar HaMichtavim 3:1:2599; Shemesh U'Magen 3:60), and most Yemenite immigrants.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

THE HAGGADAH OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

Hakheh Es Shinav - Proper grammar

There is a humorous anecdote about the **Beis Halevi** that helps to shed light on some of the difficulties that are discussed by the commentators concerning the response to the wicked son.

Once a maskil (a proponent of the "Enlightenment" movement, which was known for its antagonism towards the traditional, orthodox establishment) came to the Beis Halevi to request an approbation for a book he was about to have published. The Rabbi began to peruse the manuscript, and after a few minutes notified the maskil of his decision not to provide a written recommendation for the book, on the grounds that the Hebrew in it was full of grammatical errors.

The maskil was nonplused by the Beis Halevi's response. "Didn't you provide Rabbi So-and-So with an enthusiastic approbation for his book of Torah discussions, which is also written with poor grammar?" he protested. The Rabbi explained his reaction by referring to the Haggadah. The wicked son asks, "Of what purpose is this service to you?" The Haggadah considers his use of the word you to indicate a negative attitude (implying "you," but not "me") and subjects him to considerably harsh rebuke because of it. But if we consider the words of the wise son we find the exact same expression: "What are the testimonies, decrees, and laws which Hashem, our God, has commanded you?" Why is the same word considered reprehensible when it is spoken by the wicked son, but not when it comes from the mouth of the wise son? Nearly all the Haggadah commentators are puzzled by this seemingly inequitable treatment for the two sons.

The **Beis Halevi** explained the discrepancy as follows. The wise son spends all of his time and efforts in the pursuit of Torah and wisdom; we can therefore overlook his occasional improper syntax. The wicked son, however, who considers himself to be such an intellectual that he finds religion to be a superfluous waste of time ("Of what purpose is this service to you?"), must at least be held responsible for the technical exactness of his words, for he prides himself with his knowledge of proper grammar. Hence, when it comes to a book dealing with Torah subjects, one may overlook relatively insignificant matters such as grammatical perfection, but in a book which deals specifically with scientific, technical analysis of various non-Torah points, grammatical deficiency is a crucial shortcoming. The maskil, annoyed by the Beis Halevi's comments and its implications, left the house in anger, rather unceremoniously. A short while later the Rabbi summoned him, requesting him to return to his house. The maskil was under the impression that the Rabbi had had a change of heart, and eagerly responded to his request. But to his chagrin, he found that the Beis Halevi had not changed his mind at all. On the contrary, he had summoned him to tell him that he had something to add to his explanation of the Haggadah's treatment of the wicked son.

The Rabbi noted a difficulty in the wording of the response that the Haggadah supplies for the wicked son: "It is because of this that Hashem did

so for me when I went out of Egypt — for me but not for him — had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." Why, asked the Beis Halevi, do we refer to the wicked son as "him" and "he"? When responding in person to an individual's question, we should use the word "you," not "him"! "Now, after many years of wondering, I understand the answer to this question!" the Beis Halevi exclaimed. "Such is the nature of the wicked son. As soon as one begins to react to the criticisms and objections that he levels against the Torah and to put him in his place, he runs away and disappears. By the time the answer is fully formulated, one must already speak of him in the third person!"

בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים

"It is because of this that Hashem did so for me when I went out of Egypt"

Making mitzvos meaningful

After this verse the Torah writes: "You shall observe this decree at its designated season for all time (Shemos 13:10). Why does the Torah refer to the laws of the pesach sacrifice by the word nim (decree), a word which is usually used to describe ritual laws which have no apparent logical rationale? As the Haggadah makes a point of noting later, the pesach sacrifice, as well as the eating of matzah and maror, are all mitzvos based on clear logical reasons. The pesach ("Passover") sacrifice recalls the fact that God "passed over" our houses while punishing the Egyptians. Furthermore, the midrashim explain that the choice of animal for the sacrifice — a lamb or goat — was designed to demonstrate that the Jews were repudiating the idolatrous notions of the Egyptians, who deified these animals. The bones were not to be broken so that the whole bones left over from the sacrifice would lie conspicuously in the streets of Egypt in order to publicize the "outrage" committed to their gods.

Thus we see that the laws of the pesach sacrifice are replete with symbolic significance and rational themes. Why, then, does the Torah refer to this mitzvah as a decree?

Another question is: What in fact is the answer that we are to give to the wicked "My river (the Nile) is my own, and I have made myself" (Yechezkel 29:3), a country infamous for its idolatry and immorality. There Yaakov and his sons would proclaim the existence and Unity of the Supreme God, fulfilling a mission of spreading the message of the true religion where it was needed most. Throughout the ages, the Jews were charged with this special responsibility of acting as a "light unto the nations." Wherever they went they have always exerted an influence upon men's souls to an extent that was remarkably disproportionate to their small numbers. Even where they and their religion were rejected and scorned, their influence was present, its impression often being made without the conscious recognition of their hostile neighbors. Almost half the world today embraces some sort of religion which was spawned from Judaic principles, although they might passionately deny this association.

But the Jews have never sought to impose their beliefs upon those who come into contact with them. The Talmud tells us: "God exiled the Jewish people so that proselytes from other nations might become added to their number" (Pesachim 87b). This corroborates what we have said above, that Israel's frequent and extensive contact with other nations is deliberate and beneficial. But it is interesting to note that the statement is phrased in the passive — "so that proselytes might become added," not "so that they might add proselytes to their number." The Jews never engaged in crusades or jihads to coerce others to adopt their philosophies, nor did they ever seek to persuade others through evangelism and missionary activity; their "light" was to shine out in much more subtle ways, and anyone who wishes to benefit from it does so.

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Insights into Halacha

Seder Insights: Understanding Urchatz, Comprehending Karpas by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Have you ever wondered why, during the annual Pesach Seder, when we dip the Karpas vegetables in saltwater to symbolize our ancestor's tears while enslaved at the hands of the cruel Egyptians, we precede it by washing our hands (Urchatz)? Isn't handwashing exclusively reserved for prior to 'breaking bread'? And furthermore, why is this only performed at the Seder? Is there a specific message this action is meant to portray?

All About the Children

The answer to these questions might depend on a difference of understanding. The Gemara in Pesachim (114b) asks why at the Pesach Seder we perform two dippings, i.e. Karpas into saltwater and later the Maror into Charose s. The Gemara succinctly answers 'Ki Heichi D'lehavai Hekeira L'Tinokos, in order that there should a distinction for children.' Both Rashi and his grandson, the Rashbam, as well as the Rokeach, explain the Gemara's intent,[1] that this act is performed in order so that the children should ask why we are performing this unusual and uncommon action on Leil Haseder, as this action serves as a 'hekeira tova', an excellent distinction. This is one of the ways we ensure that the Seder Night's Mitzvah of 'Vehigadta Le'vincha,' retelling the story of our ancestors' exile, enslavement, and ultimate redemption and exodus from Egypt, is properly performed.[2]

But a question remains. Which exact action is the one that is meant to evoke the children's questions? The answer may surprise you. The Bartenura and Tur specify that it is not the seemingly odd act of handwashing for vegetables that is peculiar,[3] but rather the timing of the dipping. They assert that it is unusual to dip food items at the beginning of a seudah. Most other days we also dip, but in the middle of the meal. In other words, the only change we do to evoke children's questions is to perform the dipping right then.

What then of the seemingly atypical handwashing just for vegetables? Isn't that an uncharacteristic change from the ordinary? 'No,' they would respond, 'one certainly would have to wash his hands before dipping his vegetables.' Drip and Dip

But in order to properly understand this, we must first digress to a different Gemara in Pesachim (115a). Rabbi Elazer teaches in the name of Rav Oshia "any food item that is dipped in a liquid (davar hateebulo b'mashkeh) requires handwashing before eating." On this statement, Rashi and Tosafos (among others) differ as to the correct understanding of his intent.

Rashi and the Rashbam maintain that this ruling is still applicable nowadays, as it is similar to the requirement to wash before eating bread, while Tosafos is of the opinion that this law is only relevant during the times of the Beis Hamikdash, as it is conditional to Taharos, Ritual Purity, which in this day and age, is unfortunately non-applicable.[4] Although the Maharam M'Rottenberg, and several later poskim are of the opinion that one may indeed rely on the lenient view,[5] it should be noted that the majority of halachic authorities including the Rambam, Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Rema, Vilna Gaon, Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Ben Ish Chai, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Mishnah Berurah, Kaf Hachaim and Chazon Ish,[6] hold that even nowadays one should do his utmost to be vigilant with this and wash hands before eating a food item dipped in liquid.[7]

The lenient opinion is taken into account, however, and that is the reason why according to the majority of poskim, this washing is performed without the prerequisite blessing, as opposed to the washing before eating bread.[8] This is due to the halachic dictum of "Safek Brachos Lehakel", meaning that in a case of doubt regarding the topic of brachos, we follow the lenient approach and do not make the blessing, to avoid the possibility of making a blessing in vain.

This all ties in to our Seder. In fact this, explains the Tur and Abudraham, and echoed by later authorities, is the reason why we wash Urchatz prior to dipping the Karpas into saltwater.[9] As this action is classified as a davar

hateebulo b'mashkeh, it requires handwashing before eating. Although the Rambam, Tur and Abudraham, as well as the Levush and Vilna Gaon, aver that Urchatz actually necessitates a brachah of Netillas Yadayim,[10] conversely, the vast majority of poskim conclude that we do not make the Netillas Yadayim brachah at this Seder handwashing,[11] but rather exclusively at Rachtzah immediately prior to Motzi-Matzah. This is indeed the common custom.[12]

The Chida's Chiddush

The Chida, in his Simchas HaRegel commentary on the Haggada,[13] explains that this is the background, as well as the reason for the added 'vav' by Urchatz at the Pesach Seder, as it is the only one of the Seder Simanim that starts with that conjunction. We find a parallel by the brachah that our patriarch Yitzchok Avinu bestowed on his son Yaakov (Bereishis, Parshas Toldos Ch. 27: verse 28), 'V'Yitein L'cha' – 'And Hashem should give you'. According to Chazal and cited by Rashi,[14] the extra conjunctive 'vav' means 'yitein yachzor v'yitein' – that Hashem should continually and constantly give.

Likewise, the Chida explains the extra 'vav' in Urchatz. The Baal Haggada is transmitting a message to us. Just as during the Seder we all wash before dipping a vegetable in salt water, that extra 'vav' is telling us - 'rachatz yachzor v'rachatz' – that we should continue to wash our hands, anytime we want to eat a food dipped in liquid, year round.

The Chasam Sofer and his son-in-law, the Chasan Sofer, write in a similar vein in their Haggada, that Urchatz is meant to serve as a tochacha (rebuke) and yearly reminder to those who are lackadaisical with the observance of this halacha, in order to remind everyone that this applies year round as well. Indeed, the Taz actually writes similarly, and concludes that at least during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva one should be stringent. The Ben Ish Chai remarks comparably when discussing Urchatz, that praiseworthy is one who is careful with this handwashing year round.[15]

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l adds that the 'Vav' is connecting 'Urchatz' to 'Kadesh' – meaning 'Kadesh Urchatz' – (as a command) that we should be mekadeish ourselves and continue to wash for food items dipped in liquid – even if we were previously generally not stringent with this all year round.[16]

The Medium is the Message

Yet, it is important to note that other poskim take an alternate view. Rav Yaakov Reisher in his Chok Yaakov argues[17] that since the great Maharam M'Rottenberg, as well as the Lechem Chamudos and Magen Avraham among other poskim, ruled leniently with washing before eating a food item dipped in liquid following Tosafos' precedent, and most people do not follow the opinion mandating it nowadays, this simply cannot be the reason why we perform Urchatz at the Seder.

Rather, he explains that the Gemara's intent with stating that Urchatz is performed in order that there should be a distinction for children to ask, is that the handwashing itself for eating dipped vegetables is what is out of the ordinary, not the timing of the washing. According to this understanding, it is the Urchatz itself that is essentially the "hekker," highlighting that something different than the norm is occurring, to enable children to ask what is different on Seder night. Meaning, although most do not wash before eating a dipped item year round, at the Seder we do; and that is the atypical action we do to arouse the interest of the children.

Not a Daas Yachid (lone dissenting opinion), this understanding of Urchatz is also given by the Abarbanel, both the Chayei Adam and Aruch Hashulchan seem to favor this explanation, and it is cited by the Mishnah Berurah in his Shaar Hatziyun as well.[18]

Alternate Views

On the other hand, the Levush understands Urchatz somewhat differently. He explains that the dipping of Karpas at the Pesach Seder is due to 'Chovas (or in some editions 'Chibas') HaRegel, extra obligation or devotion for the Yom Tov.' Ergo, the handwashing is specifically performed at the Seder, as due to

its inherent holiness, 'we go the extra mile' to strive for an increase in purity, as opposed to year round, when in his opinion, it would not be mandated.[19] Vayaged Moshe, the renowned classic sefer on the Haggada, after citing several authorities who discuss the extra intrinsic Kedusha of Leil HaSeder, writes that perhaps this can be seen by the 'Vav' in 'Urchatz.' He explains (in the exact opposite approach of the Chida's) that the 'Vav' is connecting 'Urchatz' to 'Kadesh' – meaning 'Kadesh Urchatz' – (as a command) that specifically at the Seder, due to the added inherent Kedusha of Leil HaSeder, we should be mekadeish ourselves by washing before dipping our vegetables – even though we would not need to the rest of the year.[20] [21]

An alternate, yet somewhat similar, interpretation is offered by the Netziv, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin zt"l, venerated Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin.[22] The Seder reminds us of the eating of the Korban Pesach that took place when the Beis Hamikdash stood. Therefore, we follow the same halachic requirements at the Seder that were in place during the Temple era. Everyone agrees that at the time of the Beis Hamikdash there was an obligation to wash hands for dipped food items, and therefore, at the Pesach Seder we do so as well, regardless of whether or not we actually fulfill this year round.

Rav Yishmael Hakohen maintains an analogous distinction.[23] He explains that earlier generations were indeed stringent with Ritual Purity and hence certainly washed their hands before dipping vegetables. Since "Minhag Avoseinu B'Yadeinu" we follow in our ancestors' footsteps by performing the Seder as accurately as possible as they did. Hence, our mandated washing Urchatz at the Seder irrespective of our actions the rest of the year.

A slightly similar, yet novel explanation is given in the Zichron Nifla'os Haggada.[24] He explains that generally speaking, people are lenient year-round with this pre-dipping handwashing following Tosafos' understanding, that this washing is intrinsically only relevant during the times of the Beis Hamikdash, as it is conditional to Taharos, Ritual Purity. Yet, he explains, when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt, we will also be required to offer and eat the Korban Pesach on Seder Night, in addition to our obligation of eating a davar hateebulo b'mashkeh. As such, if we would not be makpid on washing beforehand at the Seder, people may not realize the import of the new situation and not wash before dipping the Karpas. However, at that point, with the Beis Hamikdash standing, the intricacies of Ritual Purity will once again be 'back in play.' As such, if one would eat his dipped Karpas without the Urchatz pre-wash, he will have made himself 'pasul' (invalidated) from being able to eat Kodshim, including the Korban Pesach. Hence, explains the Zichron Nifla'os, although year-round such washing may be currently deemed unnecessary, it is nonetheless mandated on Leil HaSeder.

Another idea, cited by the Rema in his Darchei Moshe,[25] is that the Haggada is akin to a Tefillah, that we relating thanks and praise to Hashem for everything he has done for our ancestors and us. Therefore, immediately prior to the recital of the Haggada we wash our hands in preparation without a brachah similar to the requirement before davening.

One more interesting explanation, suggested by Rav Reuven Margoliyus,[26] is that this washing is performed at the very beginning of the Seder night 'derech cheirus', to show that we are doing so as free people and nobility, who are accustomed to washing their hands prior to eating even a small amount. This is opposed to slaves, who do not have the rights or ability for such extravagance, but rather 'eat their bread with sweat.' This 'nobility' reasoning would seem to fit well with the minhag many perform of 'serving' the Baal Habayis for Urchatz, by bringing him a wash basin and washing his hands.[27]

Divergences of Dipping

Interestingly, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l, the former Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, opines that the dispute among Rishonim whether only the head of the household is supposed to wash Urchatz or if everyone at the Seder does as well (the most common custom) might be dependent on this

debate of why the handwashing at the Seder was instituted.[28] According to the majority opinion that Urchatz was enacted due to the halacha of davar hateebulo b'mashkeh, then everyone would be mandated to wash.

However, according to the opinions that this handwashing is only performed on Pesach at the Seder, it is possible that only the head of the household need wash Urchatz, as that should be deemed sufficient enough to arouse the interest and subsequent questions of the children.

Practically, as mentioned previously, the most common custom is that everyone washes Urchatz.[29] Yet, a notable minority minhag, performed mainly by many of Germanic / Dutch origin, as well as Sanz, Lelov, and Satmar Chassidim, is that only the head of the household wash.[30] So it is remarkable that this modern divergence of minhagim might actually depend on how Poskim understood the brief statement of the Gemara regarding children's questions.[31]

Finger Food?

Another interesting machlokes that might depend on which hekker the Gemara intended is how to dip the Karpas into the saltwater. If the reason Urchatz was mandated is due to the halacha of davar hateebulo b'mashkeh, then it stands to reason that if one used a fork or other utensil to dip and not actually getting 'ones's hands dirty' then many poskim would hold that handwashing is technically not required.[32] On the other hand, if the washing prior to dipping is considered the unusual action of Seder night, then we should perform Urchatz regardless of utensil.

Practically, although there are contemporary authorities, including Rav Moshe Sternbuch and Rav Nissim Karelitz,[33] who maintain preference for dipping the Karpas by hand in order that it should satisfy all opinions, nonetheless, due to the other understandings of Urchatz's role, many poskim rule that even if one used a fork for the dipping, we should still perform the handwashing prior.[34] Just another insight into the seemingly simple and straightforward, yet remarkable Urchatz.

How Do You Karpas?

Now that we explained the "Why" and "How" of Karpas, this leaves the "What," as in which vegetable should be used. It is interesting that the Mishnah in Pesachim did not tell us a specific vegetable, with the Gemara explaining that if stuck, we may even use the Maror for Karpas as well.[35] Although Rashi, the Rambam, and Tur tell us that any vegetable may be used for Karpas,[36] and conversely the Maharil, Arizal, and seemingly the Shulchan Aruch, understanding "Karpas" to be referring to a specific vegetable with that name,[37] yet, many sefarim cite "Petrozil" or "Petreshka" (presumably parsley, as "Petrozilia" is called in modern Hebrew) as the vegetable of choice, with the Aruch Hashulchan commenting that "we don't know what it is." [38]

Other popular options used over the generations include onions, radishes, scallions, and even cucumbers.[39] The main point is that its proper brachah be a "Borei Pri Ha'adama" so that it should exempt repeating this brachah again when it is time for Maror.[40]

Strictly Celery

However, it seems that the two most prevalent vegetables, at least nowadays, are celery and potatoes. Celery is considered an excellent choice, as the Chasam Sofer relates, his rebbi, Rav Nosson Adler did much research in tracking down the Maharil's elusive "Karpas" vegetable, and his findings were that it is none other than celery. The Chasam Sofer writes that therefore that is what he used as well for Karpas. The Machatzis Hashekel writes similarly, that he was told by a "Great Man" (presumably Rav Adler) that after much research in Medical books, "Karpas" is truly none other than celery. The word he uses to identify it – "ipiya" or "ipuch," is also cited as such in earlier sefarim, including the Bartenura in classifying "Karpas." [41] Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, in his annual Luach Eretz Yisrael, writes that in Eretz Yisrael the "Mehadrin" use "Karpas" that is known by its Arabic name. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach fills us in that he was referring to celery. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch cites a preference for celery as well,

and this is the minhag of many, including the Mareh Yechezkel, and later, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer.[42]

Pontificating a Perchance for Potatoes

The other common "Karpas", perhaps the most common, is potatoes. Cited by the Aruch Hashulchan and Misgeres Hashulchan, it is the minhag in Belz, Skver, and Spinka, and many Gedolim, including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and Rav Moshe Sternbuch, were known to use potatoes as Karpas.[43]

Yet, there are those, including chassidim of Sanz, Bobov, and Kamarna who will not use potatoes for Karpas. This can be traced back to the famed Yismach Moshe, Rav Moshe Teitelbaum, rebbi of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz. In his Tehillah L'Moshe, the Yismach Moshe writes that he used to use potatoes for Karpas, but then heard that the great Rav Naftali of Ropschitz made a Shehakol brachah on it (and hence would not be fitting for Karpas). He writes that he found that the Aruch, Rav Nosson M'Romi (literally, of Rome; d. 1106), when referring to the proper brachah of mushrooms and other food items that do not actually get their nourishment from the earth and consequently their brachah being Shehakol, translates them as "Tartuffel." Not familiar with the archaic word, the Yismach Moshe maintained that the Aruch must have been referring to "Kartuffel," colloquially known as the potato.[44]

Although there are different rationales for this,[45] this idea is also found in several other sefarim, and there are prominent authorities who therefore made a Shehakol brachah on potatoes.[46] On the other hand, the facts do not seem to corroborate that potatoes should be classified in the same category of mushrooms, as potatoes not only grow and root in the ground, but they also get their nourishment from the ground, as opposed to mushrooms and their ilk. Several contemporary authorities point out that it is highly unlikely, if not outright impossible, for the Aruch, who lived in Europe in the eleventh century, to have been referring to "Kartuffel" (potatoes) as the proper translation for mushrooms, as tubers were unknown on that continent until almost five hundred years later! [47]

In fact, according to the Tiferes Yisrael, this act of Sir Francis Drake's, of introducing potatoes to the European continent, merited him to be classified as one of the Chassidei Umos Ha'Olam, as over the centuries potatoes have saved countless lives from starvation.[48]

Moreover, in modern Italian, "tartufo" still translates as "truffle," the prized underground fungus,[49] and not a potato. Therefore, the vast majority of authorities rule that the proper blessing on the potato is indeed "Borei Pri Ha'adama," and hence, it is still the preference for many as "Karpas." Urchatz Everyday!

Back to Urchatz, the Chida, in his Simchas HaRegel Haggada, continues that although many are aware of the halacha of davar hateebulo b'mashkeh, they do not realize that it even applies to something as ubiquitous as dipping cake into coffee! [50] One might contend that the connection between vegetables in saltwater to tea biscuits in coffee seems tenuous, but actually, according to the majority of authorities, from a halachic perspective they are remarkably similar.

So the next time you get that dunkin' urge, it might be prudent to be conscientious by following the Haggada's hidden exhortation, and head to the sink before diving in to your cup-of-joe.

Thanks are due to my 12th-grade Rebbi in Yeshiva Gedolah Ateres Mordechai of Greater Detroit, Rav Yitzchok Kahan, for first enlightening me to this passage of the Chida's.

This article is dedicated L'iluy Nishmas Maran Sar HaTorah Harav Shmaryahu Yosef Chaim ben Harav Yaakov Yisrael zt"l (Kanievsky), this author's beloved grandmother, Chana Rus (Spitz) bas Rav Yissachar Dov a"h and uncle Yeruchem ben Rav Yisroel Mendel (Kaplan) zt"l, and l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

Rabbi Spitz's recent English halacha sefer, “Insights Into Halacha - Food: A Halachic Analysis,” (Mosaica/Feldheim) has more than 500 pages and features over 30 comprehensive chapters, discussing a myriad of halachic issues relating to food. It is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.

[1] Rashi and Rashbam (Pesachim ad loc. s.v. dilma). Rokeach (483).

[2] Meaning, the children will ask “Why is this night different than all other nights?” – a.k.a. ‘The Mah Nishtana’ – and we respond with “Avodim Hayim” and the retelling of our nation’s origins. This is in line with the Torah’s referring to the Seder as “Ki Yishaleh Bincha” – when your children will ask, “v’ehigda Le’vincha,” – you will tell your child, meaning, recite the Haggada. Interestingly, the Mishnah’s version of the Mah Nishtana regarding dipping (Pesachim 116a) is slightly different than ours, as it asks that we generally dip once and not twice, as in the Mishnaic period it was common to dip during a meal. However, by the Gemara’s time this was no longer prevalent so it amends the Mishnah’s version of Mah Nishtana to “afilu paam echas,” that we generally do not dip at all during a Seudah. Either way, we can ask, well, if this is the question that children ask, then what is the actual answer that dipping shows? The Bach (O.C. 473: 8 s.v. v’loke’ach; and later cited by the Pri Megadim ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 7) cites three diverse solutions: 1) That we are showing Derech Chai, that free men dip before a Seudah to whet the appetite. 2) It serves as a small taste, as the Seder’s Seudah is much later, after Haggada and Hallel, so we should not sit so long without eating anything. 3) Citing the Maharal M’Prague (Gevuros Hashem Ch. 50), that the first dipping before the Seudah shows that the second dipping by Maror, is performed exclusively for the Seder Night’s special Mitzvah of eating Maror; otherwise, as many people dip during their meals, it would not appear out of the ordinary. The Taz (ad loc. end 7 s.v. u’me’od) offers an alternate approach, that the fact that the first dipping is performed prior to the Seudah shows that it is not actually performed as part of the Seudah, so too, it proves that the second one, Maror is also not performed as part of the Seudah but rather for its unique Mitzvah. On the other hand, the Pri Chodosh (ad loc. 6 s.v. Rashbam) raises the point that everyone knows that there is a different Mitzvah of dipping and eating Maror that is performed much later on in the Seder, well after the ‘answer’ of ‘Avadim Hayim.’ He therefore suggests that perhaps the main purpose of Karpas is for the children to ask questions, irrelevant of the answer or whether it actually answers that exact question. Once the children realize early on in the Seder that there are actions out of the ordinary being performed on Leil HaSeder, they will notice and ask the purpose of all of them, and thus enable the Mitzvah of ‘v’ehigda Le’vincha’ to be performed in the optimal manner.

[3] Bartenura (Pesachim Ch. 10, Mishnah 5) and Tur (O.C. 473: 6). Many later authorities, including the Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 14) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 105) understand the Gemara this way as well.

[4] Rashi (ad loc. s.v. tzarich), Rashbam and Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. kol). See Maharsha (ad loc.) for explanation.

[5] Including the Maharam M’Rotenberg (cited in Tashbatz Katon 99 and Tur ibid.), Rashbot (cited by the Mordechai on Pesachim 34a), Baal Hatur (Aseres HaDibros Matzah U’Maror pg. 134b, third column), Maharil (Hilchos Hagagada, pg. 14a s.v. darash Maharash; explaining that this handwashing on Pesach is essentially a ‘chumra b’alma meshum srach Terumah, u’didan ha’idna an shayach’; thanks are due to R’ Yisroel Strauss for pointing out this essential source), Maharsha (Yam Shel Shlomo on Chullin, Ch. 8: 18), Lechem Chamudim (Divrei Chamudim on the Rosh, Chullin Ch. 8: 41), Levush (O.C. 473: 6), Magen Avraham (O.C. 158: end 8), Ateres Zekeinim (O.C. 158: 4, end s.v. oh hapri), Chok Yaakov (O.C. 473: 28), and Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 158: 4 and 5). The Yaavetz (Mor U’Ketziar 158 end s.v. v’ha) is also melamed zecheus for those who are lenient with this. On a more contemporary note, Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Hilchos HaGr’a U’minhagav 135; pg. 149-150) adds a compelling reason for the common custom of not washing. He cites that the Brisker Rav zt”l explained that the handwashing necessitated for a davar hatebeul b’mashkeh is not for the same reason as the washing for bread. Whereas for bread we wash due to the need for Kedushah, on the other hand, for a davar hatebeul b’mashkeh all that is necessary is to have ‘yadayim tahoros’, but not necessarily is an actual maaseh to make them tahor required. Hence, since nowadays we generally make sure that our hands are not ‘halachically dirty’ (as we make sure to wash our hands in many situations throughout the day – see Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 18), it is sufficient for these halachos and handwashing is technically not actually mandated. The Kozoglover Gaon, Rav Aryeh Leib Frommer HY”D (Shu”t Eretz Tzvi vol. 1: 32) and Rav Shalom Messas (Meshash) zt”l (Shu”t Shemesh U’Maginei vol. 2: 45) also defended the common practice not to wash before eating dipped food items. See also footnote 7.

[6] Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6: 1), Tur (O.C. 158: 2 and 473: 6), Shulchan Aruch and Rema (O.C. 158: 4), Biur HaGr’a (O.C. 158: 4 s.v. b’lo brachah and Maaseh Rav 81), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 4), Shulchan Aruch Harav (O.C. 158: end 3), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Tazria 19), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (40: 17), Mishnah Berurah (O.C. 158: 20), Kaf Hachaim (O.C. 158: 13 and 25), and Chazon Ish (O.C. 25: 14 & 15 s.v. kasav b’M”B). The Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon were known to be very stringent with this – see Orchos Rabbeinu (5775 edition; vol. 1, pp. 153-154, Netilas Yadayim V’Sedud 6 and 7). See also next footnote.

[7] Other authorities who hold this way include Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos 41a s.v. kol), the Rosh (Chullin Ch. 8: 10), the Knesses HaGedolah (Shiurei Knesses Hagedolah, O.C. 158 Hagahos on Beis Yosef 3:3), Matteh Yosef (Shu”t vol. 2, 18: 19 – who uses extremely strong terms against those who are lackadaisical with this), Taz (O.C. 473: 6); who concludes that at the very least one should be makpid during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva), Chida (Birkei Yosef, O.C. 158: 5), Shlah (Shaar Ha’Osiyos 81b, hagahah), and Ba’er Heitiv (O.C. 158: 11). See also Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Ch. 9, pg. 253, footnote 184) which quotes Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l as maintaining that even though in previous generations many were lenient with this issue, adding that the Chayei Adam, in his hesped for his son (titled ‘Matzevos Moshe’) stressed that the nifar was a tzaadik and illustrated this by stating that he was makpid to always wash his hands before dipping food items into liquid, implying that even in his time and place it was an uncommon procedure, nevertheless, nowadays we should definitely do our utmost to fulfill this halacha. Likewise, Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner zt”l is quoted (Koveitz M’Beis Levi vol. 17, pg. 17, 3: 3) as sharing a similar assessment, that although the common custom seems not to be makpid, nonetheless, it is indeed preferable to strive to do so. Rav Ovadiah Yosef zt”l (Chazon Ovadia vol. 1 - Pesach, Hilchos Leil HaSeder pg. 32, Urchatz 1) likewise stresses that since the majority of poskim, including the Shulchan Aruch, hold that one need be makpid year-round, b’vaday hachi naktanim.” For more on this topic, as well as which Gedolim over the ages were or were not makpid, see Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Brodt’s Bein Kesesh L’Eser (Ch. 9, pg. 148 - 153).

[8] Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch, and Rema (O.C. 158: 4), Taz (ad loc. 6), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 4), Shulchan Aruch Harav (158: 3), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (40: 17), Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 158: 5), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Tazria 17), Mishnah Berurah (158: 20), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 13; citing ‘the Acharonim’). However, the Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGr’a ad loc. 11 and Maaseh Rav 81) and several others actually do mandate a brachah on the washing for a davar hatebeul b’mashkeh. See next footnotes.

[9] Tur (ibid.), Abudraham (Seder HaHaggada s.v. u’le’achar).

[10] Tur and Abudraham (ibid.), with the Tur adding that although the Maharam M’Rotenberg and Baal HaTur (ibid.) are of the opinion that nowadays it is not necessary, nevertheless, as the Gaonim, as well as Rashi, as quoted by Rav Shmayah, mandate it, the ikar is to make Netillas Yadayim by Urchatz. The Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah Ch. 8: 1) rules this way as well. The Levush (O.C. 473: 6) and Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGr’a ad loc. 30 and Maaseh Rav beg. 191; also cited in Shaar Hatziyun ad loc. 70) also rule this way by Urchatz. Interestingly, in the famous 1526 Illuminated Prague Haggada, it cites that Urchatz should be recited with a brachah. Thanks are due to Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Brodt for pointing out this. See his article titled ‘The 1526 Prague Haggadah and its Illustrations’ (Ami Magazine, Issue 313; April 5, 2017 / 9 Nissan 5777; Double Issue pg. 143). Yet, it is important to note that there is a practical difference between the shittos of the Levush and Gr’a. The Gr’a maintains that Urchatz shares the same status as any davar hatebeul b’mashkeh, which in his opinion is obligated in handwashing with a brachah. However, and quite conversely, the Levush maintains that generally we rule that nowadays a davar hatebeul b’mashkeh does not require handwashing. It is only at the Seder, due to Chovas HaRegel (some editions have ‘Chibbas HaRegel’) that we do so by Urchatz. Accordingly, since we are performing this handwashing especially for the Seder, it requires the full status of the Gemara’s ruling and therefore, in his opinion, does require Netillas Yadayim as well. See also footnote 19. On the other hand, the Taz (ad loc. end 7 s.v. u’me’od) questions the Tur’s (and Levush’s) ruling, as by Pesach he mandates Urchatz with a brachah, whereas year-round rules one does not make the brachah for such handwashing at all. The Taz states that it is inconceivable that the same action for the same purpose can require a brachah parts of the year, whereas other times not. Interestingly, in his Darchei Halacha glosses to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119: 8), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu writes that those who generally follow the rulings of the Rambam should wash with a brachah for Urchatz, and not like the common halachic consensus. Interestingly, Rav Yitzchak Isaac Tirna (Tyrnan) in his Sefer HaMinhagim (Minhag HaPesach) cites both sides of this machlokes regarding Urchatz with a brachah or not, with no clear ruling. Even more interesting, is that the Hagahos ad loc. (89) succinctly adds that this very same machlokes applies year round regardingeder hatebeul b’mashkeh.

[11] Maharil (Seder HaHaggada), Beis Yosef (O.C. 173: 6 s.v. u’mashkasav Rabbeinu) and Darchei Moshe (ad loc. 12), and conclusively ruled in Shulchan Aruch (ad loc.), and followed authoritatively by the Bach (ad loc. s.v. ul’inyan halacha), Taz (ad loc. 7), Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 23), Hagahos Mohar”a Azulai (on the Levush ad loc. 6), Malbushei Yom Tov (ad loc. 3), Pri Chodosh (ad loc.), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 19), Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav ad loc. 6), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 130, HaSeder B’Ketzara 4, s.v. Urchatz), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119: 3), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Tzav 31), Mishnah Berurah (473: 52), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 18), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 106). This is also cited lemaaseh in most Haggados. There is also some discussion as to if one eats less than a kezayis of dipped Karpas if he may be lenient with washing with a brachah according to the opinions who mandate it. One can posit that this idea is logical, as the Rambam, Abudraham, Levush, and Vilna Gaon (ibid.), who all mandate Urchatz with a brachah, also hold that one should eat a kezayis of Karpas (as less than a kezayis is not true ‘achilah’ – eating). Therefore, it would stand to reason that if one eats less than that amount, washing with a brachah is not necessitated. In his Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 70) the Mishnah Berurah adds that although the Vilna Gaon maintains to eat more than kezayis as well as make the brachah of Netillas Yadayim at Urchatz, nonetheless, he would agree that if one would eat less than a kezayis, then he should not make the Netillas Yadayim brachah. On the other hand, the Taz also mandates washing with a brachah but writes that eating a kezayis is not necessary. Most Rishonim, including the Maggid Mishneh, Hagahos Maimoniyos, and Rosh (ad loc.), as well as the Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 15), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 18), maintain that a kezayis is not necessary, as even eating a small amount would arouse the interest of the children. Indeed, the Shulchan

Aruch (ad loc. 6) rules this way lemaaseh, to specifically eat less than a kezayis. The Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 53), echoing the Maharil (Minhagin; Seder HaHaggada ibid.) and his talmid, the Matteh Moshe (625), and ruling like the Magen Avraham (ad loc. 18) and Taz (ad loc. 8), concludes that it is preferable not to eat a kezayis of Karpas not to enter a question of whether a brachah acharonah would be mandated. However, although the Magen Avraham and Taz agree that one should not eat a kezayis of Karpas, they differ as to the proper halacha if one would actually do so, whether a brachah acharonah would be mandated. Although a Machlokes Rishonim between the Ri (Tosafos ad loc. 115a s.v. v’hadar) and Rosh (Pesachim ad loc. Ch. 10: 26) against Rashbam (Pesachim 114b s.v. peshita; see Tur O.C. 473 and 475 on this machlokes), the Taz seemingly holds that one would be required to in such an eventuality (and not as the Ba’er Heitiv ad loc. 18 quotes him as agreeing with the Magen Avraham), whereas the Magen Avraham maintains that it is a safe, and therefore even if done, we would not recite a brachah acharonah. Ultimately, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 56) sides with the Magen Avraham, that if one would eat more than a kezayis of Karpas, he would not make a brachah acharonah. Although the Bach (ad loc.) cites a possible solution to fulfill both sides of this debate, the Chok Yaakov (ad loc. 29) questions its applicability. To further complicate matters, the Vilna Gaon, in his Biur HaGr’a (ad loc. v’aينو mevarich) writes that according to the Rema, it should come out that we should make a brachah acharonah after Karpas (and not as most Poskim understood). However, in Maaseh Rav (191) it is recorded that the Gr’a would not make a brachah acharonah, even after eating a kezayis of Karpas. This is also cited as the Vilna Gaon’s own personal hanhaga in the Chavas Daas’ Maaseh Nissim Hagagadah with Hanhagos of the Vilna Gaon (Vilna; 1864 / 5624 edition; while stating that the Chavas Daas held to wash without a brachah and eat less than a kezayis, like most poskim). The Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu, 5775 edition; vol. 2, pg. 95, Hanhagos Pesach M’Maran HaChazon Ish, 20) would also eat a kezayis of Karpas without a brachah acharonah. There is also some debate as to the Ben Ish Chai’s final opinion if one ate a kezayis of Karpas whether he should make a brachah acharonah – see Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parashas Tzav 32), Od Yosef Chai (Parashas Tzav 7), and Rav Yaakov Hillel’s Luach Dinim U’Minhagin Ahavat Shalom (Leil Pesach, footnote 569). For more on this topic, see Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 70), Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. pachos m’kezayis), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 19), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. end 106 and 158: 20), and the Mekoros U’Biurim to the recent Weizel edition of Maaseh Rav (191: footnote 58, pg. 210; who concludes “tzarich iyun”).

[12] Another interesting question is whether ‘heseshah – reclining.’ is required by Karpas. Also a machlokes, with the Abudraham (ibid.) requiring it and the Rambam (Hilchos Chometz U’Matza, Ch. 8: 2) implying it, whereas the Shibolei Haleket (218) and Matteh Moshe (625) writing that it is not performed. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (119: 3) writes to do so, but the Chida (Birkei Yosef O.C. 473: 14) and Ben Ish Chai (Year 1 Parashas Tzav 32) argue that it is not necessary. The Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 114) concludes that either way is acceptable – “Nahara Nahara U’Pashte!” Practically, it is recorded that Rav Yisroel Yaakov Fischer (Halichos Even Yisrael, Moadim vol. 1, pg. 164: 3) did not decline when eating Karpas, whereas Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Hanhagos Rabbeinu pg. 214: 97) was not makpid to do so – some years he did and others he did not.

[13] The Chida’s Simchas HaRegel Hagagada - in the end of his passage explaining Urchatz.

[14] Midrash Rabba (Parshas Toldos, Ch. 66: 3), cited by Rashi (ad loc. s.v. v’yetein l’cha).

[15] Haggada of the Chasam Sofer and Chasan Sofer (Urchatz), Taz (O.C. 473: 6), and Ben Ish Chai (Year 1 Parshas Tzav 31).

[16] Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Seder Leil Pesach, pg. 253, Orchos Halacha 184).

[17] Chok Yaakov (473: 28). See also footnote 5.

[18] In the Abarbanell’s Zevach Pesach (end; Dinei HaSeder), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 130, HaSeder B’Ketzara 4, s.v. Urchatz), Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 473: 18), and Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 69), Interestingly, in his Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 51), the Chofetz Chaim implies conversely, like the basic understanding of the Tur and most commentaries, that the Urchatz handwashing is due to the halacha of ofdavar hatebeul b’mashkeh.

[19] The Levush (O.C. 473: 6) understands Urchatz differently than the other two main opinions. He explains that since the dipping of Karpas at the Pesach Seder is due to “Chovas HaRegel” and is considered a “Teivillah shel Mitzvah” we should therefore strive for an increase in purity and that is why the handwashing is performed, even though the rest of the year it is deemed non-mandatory; quite the opposite of the Chida’s and Chasam Sofer’s understanding. Rav Shmuel Avigdor zt”l (Haggada shel Pesach in Pirush Maharsha; cited in Bein Kesesh L’Eser, Ch. 9, pg. 152-153), the Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 6), although he implies that it should thus apply equally to every Yom Tov, due to the dictum of ‘Chayav L’Taher Atzman L’Regel’ and Shlah (Shaar Ha’Osiyos ibid.) understand Urchatz akin to the Levush. The Taz (ibid.) also mentions the idea of being more stringent at the Seder due to Chovas Haregel [however, as mentioned previously, he ultimately concludes that it is preferable to be makpid year-round, and at least during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva]. This understanding is also cited by the Kozoglover Gaon (Shu”t Eretz Tzvi vol. 1: 32 s.v. amman), and later by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l (Halichos Shlomo ibid.). For more on this topic, as to Urchatz being mandated due to the inherent extra-Kedusha of the Chag, see Bein Kesesh L’Eser (Ch. 9, pg. 152-153). In a sort of similar vein, the Maharil (Seder HaHaggada) writes succinctly that a ‘Rechitzah Gemurah’ (without a brachah) is necessitated to ensure that our hands remain pure when dipping the vegetables, as liquid makes an item huchshar l’Tumah (enabled to become Tamei).

[20] Vayaged Moshe (16: 1). This sefer, an incredible compilation of Dinei V’Minhagei Leil HaSeder, was originally written by Rav Moshe Yehuda Katz HY”D, who was murdered in Auschwitz. The manuscript was later edited by his nephew Rav Chaim Yehuda Katz, and published by his brother Rav Yehoshua Katz. Since first being printed over 50 years ago, Vayaged Moshe, a perennially popular, yet, hard-to-find sefer, a new updated (eighth) edition was just published last month.

[21] This author feels it is important to note that not every Poskef or commentary ties the unique conjunctive ‘Vav’ in Urchatz with the halachos of ‘davar hatebeul b’mashkeh.’ For example, in the Shem M’Shmuel’s Haggada (pg. 17a s.v. Kadeish Urchatz), he cites an explanation from his father, Rav Avraham Bornstein, the illustrious Avnei Nezer. He asks why the order at the Seder is ‘Kadeish Urchatz’ and not the other way around. Generally speaking, we ‘wash’ in order to properly prepare ourselves for ‘Kadeish’ – sanctifying ourselves. To borrow the phrase “Why is this night different than all other nights?” The Avnei Nezer explains that during Yetziat Mitzrayim our ancestors were redeemed even though they were technically not worthy of Geulah at the time. Similarly, at the Seder we are able to tap into the inherent spirituality of the day and ‘jump’ and reach higher levels of Kedusha than we ordinarily could, even without proper preparation. [A similar elucidation is given in the Zichron Nifla’s Haggada (pg. 96b s.v. v’achar)]. An entirely different, yet halachic explanation for this interesting turn of phrase is given by Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt”l (Machzor L’Chag HaPesach Siach Sifoseinu pg. 683, footnote; thanks are due to my talmid Rabbi Rafi Wolfe for pointing this out). Rav Chaim explains that the conjunctive ‘Vav’ in Urchatz is connected to Kadeish to teach us that washing for Karpas must take place soon after Kiddush, in order to ensure that the Kiddush is considered Kiddush B’Makom Seudah, as Karpas is the beginning of the actual Seudah. The halachic issues of the obligation of Kiddush B’Makom Seudah were detailed at length in a previous article titled “More Common Kiddush Questions” Kiddush B’Makom Seudah.”

[22] In the introduction to the Netziv’s Imrei Shefer commentary on the Haggada. Thanks are due to Rabbi Yaakov Luban for providing me with this important source. In his words: “This thought of the Netziv takes on even greater significance if we accept the position of the Rosh (Pesachim Ch. 10: 34), that the Afikoman matzah is eaten in place of the Korban Pesach. Accordingly, one can suggest that at the Pesach Seder we not only remember the Korban Pesach as a historical event last practiced 2,000 years ago. Rather, when we eat the Afikoman, we replicate the experience and feel the excitement of eating the Korban Pesach in Yerushalayim in the close proximity of the Beis Hamikdash. As we relive this experience we feel compelled to wash Urchatz, just as we did in the days of old.”

[23] In his sefer Shevach Pesach (cited by Vayaged Moshe 16:2 s.v. v’hinei). The Vayaged Moshe refers to Rav Yishmael as “HaGaon HaSefardi Rishi Yeshiamael Hakohen z”l.”

[24] Zichron Nifla’s Haggada (pg. 11a-b s.v. Kadeish Urchatz and ulefi aniyus daati). The Zichron Nifla’s Haggada was written by Rav Elazar ben Rav Ze’v Wolf Hakohen, Av Beis Din of Sokatchov, and son-in-law of Rav Yaakov of Lissa, renowned author of Chavas Daas, Nesivos Hamishpat, Derech Hachaim, and other essential works.

[25] Darchei Moshe (O.C. 473: beg. 12). Washing before Teifillah (and without a brachah) is based on Gemara Brachos (15a) and ruled accordingly in Shulchan Aruch and Rema and main commentaries (O.C. 92: 4 and 5).

[26] In his Haggada (as cited in sefer Haggada V’Aggadta pg. 81).

[27] This was the minhag of the Chasam Sofer (cited in his Haggada pg. 43) in order to show “Derech Cheirus” and aristocracy. Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited in his Haggada pg. 100) was noheg this way as well. For more on this minhag, see Vayaged Moshe (16: 5), Rav Asher Weiss’s Haggada shel Pesach Minchas Asher (pg. 30, Urchatz 3), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 10), and Rabbi Yaakov Skoczylas’s Ohel Yaakov (on Hilchos U’Minhagei Leil HaSeder, pg. 51: 2 and footnote 5).

[28] Mikraei Kedosh (Pesach vol. 2: 39, pg. 142). This logic is also later cited in Minhag Yisrael Torah (vol. 3, pg. 133-134: 14), and Ohel Yaakov (on Hilchos U’Minhagei Leil HaSeder, pg. 51, footnote 4). Although there does not seem to be a direct dispute regarding whether everyone at the Seder or just the head of the household wash by Urchatz, it is implied by their specific writings. For example, the Rambam (ibid.) when discussing the customs of the Seder, uses plural tense (lashon rabbim) for almost all of the minhagin, except Urchatz, which he uses the singular tense (lashon yachid), implying that in his opinion only the one leading the Seder need to wash. Similarly, the Shibolei Haleket (218) writes “natel habaki,” the expert takes (the Karpas). On the other hand, from the way the Rivta (Pesachim, Seder HaHaggada), Maharil (Seder HaHaggada), Abudraham (Seder HaHaggada s.v. u’le’achar), and Mordechai (Pesachim 37b; cited by the Beis Yosef ibid. s.v. u’mashkasav v’lo) discuss the topic, it is clear that they are of the opinion that everyone should be washing by Urchatz.

[29] As aside for the aforementioned Rishonim, is also explicitly cited by the Seder HaYom (Seder Teifillas Arvis V’Kiddush [shel Pesach] s.v. achar), Misgeres Hashulchan (on the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 119: 3), and Chakal Yitzchak Haggada (pg. 59). See also Vayaged Moshe (16:2), Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, pg. 163, Urchatz 1 and footnote 6), Haggada shel Pesach (on Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l pg. 109), Haggada shel Pesach Chazon Ovadiah (‘Urchatz’; at the end of Sefer Chazon Ovadiah vol. 1 - Pesach), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 11), and Ohel Yaakov (ibid.; citing Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt”l and others).

[30] This is cited as the proper minhag in Sefer Minhagei Amsterdam (new edition, Ch. 3: 6, 4; pg. 52), as well as the minhag of Rav Shalom M’Neustadt (Minhagei Maharash, 302: 3; also cited by his talmid, the Maharil, Seder HaHaggada ibid.; although the Maharil himself seems to side with his other Rabbi whom he mandated everyone washing Urchatz – the Maharil Weil and Maharil Segal; see also Leket Yosher vol. 1, pg. 88, and Shu”t V’Drashos Maharil Weil 193). Thanks are due to R’ Avraham Schwejtschuerder for pointing out several of these important sources. This is also cited as the proper minhag in Moreshes Machon Ashkenaz’s Madrich L’Minhag Ashkenaz Hamuvhak (pg. 33, Urchatz), stating that although in Ashkenaz the general minhag is not to be makpid on washing for a ‘davar hatebeul b’mashkeh’ year round, nonetheless at the Seder, only the Baal HaBayis does this, “derech serara” (meaning in a royal manner). In Rav Asher Weiss’s Haggada shel Pesach Minchas Asher (pg. 30, Urchatz 5) he cites this as Minhag Sanz, following the precedent of the Divrei Chaim and Kedushas Yom Tov. See also Vayaged Moshe (16: 2), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 11, and footnote 20 and 21), Minhag Yisrael Torah (ibid.), and Ohel Yaakov (ibid.) who cite different minhagin on this. Sanz, Satmar, Lelov, and Ziditchov, as well as Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner zt”l, maintain that only the Baal Habayis needs to wash, and that this was also the personal hanhaga of

the Chasam Sofer, while Belz, Gur, Ropshitz, Spinka, Skver, Boyan, and Chabad hold everyone washes. Vizhnitz minhag is that only once one is married does he wash for Urchatz.

[31] An additional possible rationale for leniency that not everyone wash even though all are dipping and eating the vegetable (cited by the Vayaged Moshe ad loc. s.v. v'daas), is that it is unclear in halacha if handwashing is indeed mandated for eating less than a kezayis of a vegetable. Although, as mentioned previously, the Shulchan Aruch's conclusion is to wash Urchatz and eat less than a kezayis of Karpas, nonetheless the earlier Tashbeitz (Yavin Shemuah, Maamar Chometz, 35a end s.v. tanya; cited by the Chida in his Birkei Yosef, O.C. 158:7, and later the Kaf Hachaim ad loc. 20) maintains that 'davar hatebulu b'mashkeh pachos m'kezayis lo bae'i netillah,' handwashing is unnecessary when eating less than a kezayis. Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah (Biur Halacha 473: 6 s.v. pachos) cites both sides of this debate, ultimately concluding "tzarich iyun l'dina."

[32] Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l (Mikraei Kodesh ibid.) makes this distinction as well. Rav Yaakov Emden (Mor U'Ketziach 158 end s.v. v'ha) writes leshittaso regarding a 'davar hatebulu b'mashkeh' that those who dipped with a fork or spoon are not required to wash their hands. Many other authorities rule similarly regarding a 'davar hatebulu b'mashkeh' that is always eaten with a spoon (or fork etc.), including the Taz (O.C. 158: 9), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 3), Derech Hachaim (Din Netillas Yadayim L'Seudah 5), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 36: 8), Magen Giborim (Shiltei Hagiborim 7), Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 158: 12), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 26). However, see Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 23) who cites several authorities who differ and rules that even though there is what to rely upon, nevertheless one should be stringent and wash his hands. This machlokes of understanding between the Yaavetz and Kaf Hachaim (citing Mekubalim) is extant in many issues of handwashing, including the one mandated in-between milk and meat and also regarding Mayim Acharonim. An alternate approach, given by several Poskim including the Pri Megadim (Y"V D 89 S.D. 20), is that even if not required me'ikar hadin, nonetheless, optimally one should still wash his hands after eating a dairy product with a fork, as handwashing does not usually entail too much effort. This topic is discussed at length in this author's recent English halacha sefer "Food: A Halachic Analysis" (pg. 9-11, 25-26, 312-313). Interestingly, this machlokes seems to be originally based on different understandings of a debate amongst Tannaim (Nedarim 49b; thanks are due to R' Baruch Ritholtz for pointing this out) regarding whether it is more proper to eat *die sah* (porridge) with one's fingers or a 'hutza,' a sliver of wood. The Yaavetz understood that this topic was only relevant in their time, as they apparently did not have proper eating utensils. Accordingly, nowadays, when everyone uses cutlery, this debate would seem somewhat irrelevant. Others, however [see Maharsha and Ben Yehoyada (ad loc.), and Bnei Tzion (vol. 3, O.C. 181: 9; from Rav Ben Tzion Lichtman, Chief Rabbi of Beirut, Lebanon approximately seventy-five years ago)], seem to understand that the Tannaim did generally have spoons, but in that instance did not have them readily available. Thus, the Gemara's discussion was only regarding when spoons were not available, debating whether it was preferable to use fingers or a wood chip in such an instance. Following the latter approach would seemingly substantiate the Yaavetz's proof from this Gemara. Remarkably, the earliest use of forks as cutlery in Rabbinic literature seems to be from Rabbeinu Chananel (990-1053) in his commentary on Bava Metzia (25b s.v. pi' homnick), which was first published as part of the famous Vilna Shas by the Brothers Romm, in the 1870s and 1880s. To describe the Gemara's 'homnick' (or 'hemnick'), he explains that it is a two-pronged fork, similar to a 'mazleig,' which he elucidates is a three-pronged fork that 'Bnei Yavan' use to hold pieces of meat and help cut them with a knife, as an aid for eating without touching the food with one's hands. As implied from Rabbeinu Chananel's terminology that using a fork was a novelty even in his days, it seems that his phraseology can be used as proof to Rav Yaakov Emden's understanding of the Tannaic debate in the Gemara Nedarim, some 700 years later. Thanks are due to Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, author of 'Lashon Hakodesh: History, Holiness, and Hebrew,' and 'God versus gods' for pointing out the location of this comment of Rabbeinu Chananel's. [33] Haggada shel Pesach Moadim Uzmanim (pg. 58; see also Shu"t Teshuvos V'hanhagos vol. 2: 116 and Hilchos HaGr"a U'Minhangav 135; pg. 150 s.v. umvakom acher) and Chut Shani on Hilchos Pesach (Ch. 17: 16); cited in Ohel Yaakov (ibid. pg. 52: 3 and footnote 6). [34] See Mikraei Kodesh (ibid.), Haggada shel Pesach Minchas Asher (pg. 30, Urchatz 7), Netei Gavriel (Hilchos Pesach vol. 2, Ch. 81: 5), and Ohel Yaakov (ibid.). Also, the fact that this issue is not even raised by the majority of poskim proves that they were of the opinion that it should not factor lemaaseh regarding Urchatz.

[35] Mishnah Pesachim (114a), Gemara (114b-115a). For what to do practically if only Maror is available for both Karpas and Maror, see Rambam (Hilchos Chometz U'Matza, Ch. 8: 12), Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 475: 2), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 28), and Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach, Ch. 9: 27).

[36] Rashi (Pesachim 114a on the Mishnah), Rambam (Peirush HaMishnayos, Pesachim Ch. 10, Mishnah 3 and Hilchos Chometz U'Matza, Ch. 8: 2), and Tur (beg. O.C. 473).

[37] See Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4) and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 19) famously citing the Maharil (Minhagim, Seder HaHaggada), to use "Karpas," which stands for "60 Parech," the 600,000 Jews who suffered Avodas Parech – backbreaking labor in Mitzrayim. The Shulchan Aruch (ad loc. 4) writes similarly to the Rozeach (ibid.), to take "Karpas or Yerek Acheir," implying that "Karpas" itself is the name of a vegetable. In his earlier Beis Yosef (ad loc.) he cites the Agur quoting the Mahari Mulin, who specifically used "Karpas." He writes this more explicitly in his Maggid Meirsharim (Parashas Tzav, Ohr L'Gimmel shel Karpas; bottom right corner of pg. 41b) that it is more of a Mitzva to use "Karpas" than other vegetables. The Arizal is quoted as stating similarly (Shaar Hakavannos, Drush 6; cited in Vayaged Moshe ibid. 20), that one should specifically search for and use 'Karpas' and not any other vegetable.

[38] See for example, Maharil (ibid.), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4; although he questions this choice), Chok Yaakov (ad loc. 12), Elyah Rabba (ad loc. end 27), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 130, HaSeder B'Ketzara 3), the Chavas Daas' Maaseh Nissim Haggadah with Hanhagos of the Vilna Gaon (Karpas), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (118: 2), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 10). Rav Akiva Eiger (ad loc. s.v. v'ani) points to the Yerushalmi in Sheviis (beg. Ch. 9), cited by the Tosafos Yom Tov in Shabbos (Ch. 9, Mishnah 5), that states that "Karpas Shebneharos" is "Petroselin." The Aruch (erech 'Karpas') cites this as well in his definition of 'Karpas.' Interestingly, the Taamei HaMinhagim (Inyaney Pesach, hagahah 517) writes that in Arabic, "Petrosilin" are called "Karpas."

[39] All of these vegetables are cited by various Poskim through the ages, including the Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.). For a full listing and their various customs, as well as potential issues raised by others for using each specific vegetable [for example, is it generally eaten raw or cooked, or is it perhaps 'sharp' so rather used for Maror (see Chochmas Shlomo ad loc. 5), etc.], see Vayaged Moshe (ibid.) at length. Regarding the different vegetables for Karpas, see also Shu"t Tirosch V'Yitzhar (117), Shu"t Kinyan Torah B'Halacha (vol. 4: 53), and Shu"t Lehoros Nosson (vol. 3: 24). The idea of using cucumbers for Karpas seems to be more recent, as Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is quoted as sometimes using cucumbers (Halichos Shlomo, Moadim vol. 2, Pesach, Ch. 9: 28), and the Strasbourger Rav (Shu"t Kinyan Torah B'Halacha ibid. s.v. ulifi aniyus daati) maintaining a preference for it; yet, if my memory serves me correctly, Rav David Feinstein is quoted in the ArtScroll Kol Dodi Haggada as maintaining a preference for green vegetables for Karpas, and hence specifically "not using cucumbers."

[40] Hence one should also have kavanna when making the Ha'adama brachah on Karpas, that it should cover Maror as well. Although many commentaries discuss this, see Mishnah Berurah (473: 20 and 54) for a succinct explanation. If one did not have this specific kavanna by Karpas, he still would not repeat Ha'adama when eating Maror (see Kaf Hachaim ad loc. 113). [41] Shu"t Chasam Sofer (O.C. 132, end s.v. edos), Machatzis Hashkefel (O.C. 473: 4), Bartenuza (Sheviis Ch. 9, Mishnah 1). See also Shu"t Lehoros Nosson (vol. 3: 24, end 2) as to the distance the Chasam Sofer would go to procure celery for his rebbi for Karpas. The Chasam Sofer adds that the "ipiya" or "ipuch" as the Maharil writes perhaps stands for "Keil Peol Yeshuos Attah." [42] Luach Eretz Yisrael (Nissan, Aleph D'Pesach), Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach, Ch. 9, footnote 197), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (118: 2), Mareh Yechezkel Haggada (end; cited in Vayaged Moshe ibid. 4; that in Eretz Yisrael celery is truly called "Karpas" in Arabic like the Chasam Sofer), Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, Pesach, pg. 164: 1).

[43] Aruch Hashulchan (ibid. 10), Misgeres Hashulchan (118:1), Chakal Yitzchak Haggada, Vayaged Moshe (ibid. 7), Shu"t Lehoros Nosson (ibid. 6), Halichos Shlomo (ibid.), Hanhagos Rabbeinu (ibid.), and Haggada Moadim U'Zmanim (ibid.). [44] Aruch (Erech Petter), cited in Tehillat LeMoshe (hakdama to Yismach Moshe al Tanach, vol. 3pg. 12a). See She'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha (118: end 4). Thanks are due to Rabbi Nosson Wimer of Kiryat Sanz, Netanya for pointing this out.

[45] This topic is discussed at length in this author's recent English halacha sefer "Food: A Halachic Analysis," in a chapter titled 'The Halachic Adventures of the Potato.'

[46] Likutei Maharich (vol. 1, Seder Birkas Hanehenin pg. 182b), Maharam Ash(Zichron Yehuda pg. 23b s.v. al esrog), Shulchan HaTahor (204:3 and Zer Zehav 2), Otzar Hachaim (Parashas Vayeilech, Mitzvas Birkas Hanehenin), Pische Zuta (Birkas HaPesach 12:3), Minhagei Kamarna (pg. 25:97). See also Shu"t Divrei Yatziv (O.C. vol. 1:82), Shu"t Migdalos Merkachim (O.C. 18), and Shu"t Shraga HaMeir (vol. 6:119).

[47] Shu"t B'tzeil Hachochma (vol. 4:83), Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 6:39 and 40), and many of the Poskim whose teshuvos on topic are printed in the recent Teshuvos HaPoskim (11; pg. 143-170). See also Shu"t Igros Moshe (O.C. vol. 3:63), who also defines the potato as such. Interestingly, although another famous Ashkenazic Rishon, the Maharil (Hilchos Erev Yom Kippur, Seudah Hamafsek, 8; cited by the Elyah Rabba, O.C. 608:9, and Kaf Hachaim, ad loc. 41), quoting his Rebbeim, mentions that a good way to cool off and get nutrition before a fast day is by soaking a so-called "erd-apple," another common colloquialism used for the potato, in water and eating it, he could not possibly have been referring to our potatoes which were not extant in Europe for another several hundred years. Additionally, he refers to it as a "pri," and not a vegetable. As an aside, soaked raw potatoes also does not seem to be one of the usual manners which potatoes are nowadays enjoyed.

[48] Tiferes Yisrael (Avos Ch. 3: Mishnah 14, Boaz Beg. 1). Thanks are due to Rabbi Elchannan Shoff for pointing out this fascinating source.

[49] Thanks are due to my uncle, Rabbi Avrom Baker, for pointing this out.

[50] See also Orchos Rabbeinu (5775 edition; vol. 1, pg. 153, 154, and 159 Dinei Netillas Yadayim V'Seudah 6, 7, and 27) which records that the Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon were known to be very stringent with this halacha, and always washing before dipping cake into tea, eating washed fruit, and even fruit taken from the fridge that is slightly damp.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda.

Essays Rabbi YY Jacobson

Powerful Gems for Your Seder

Seven Meditations to Transform Passover 2020

1. Invite Yourself to the Seder

“Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and conduct the Seder of Passover.”

Since when do you invite people to an event, once the event started? And if you want to invite new guests, go outside and invite people. Why are you inviting those that are already here?

And how can we justify these words during the Seder of Passover 2020 when we are not allowed to invite guests?!

Here is one possible perspective.

What happens to you when you are on a plane, before take-off and they play the safety video? While your eyes may be watching it, you aren’t. You have seen it 300 times, and it doesn’t seem relevant. What are the chances of you needing to inflate your life jacket?

This statement in the beginning of the Seder isn’t an invitation to your physical body, it is an invitation to your mind. Invite your entire being to take part in this vulnerable journey, from enslavement, through your personal and collective pain and suffering, all the way out of Egypt, to seeing yourselves differently than the way you entered.

We read the story every year. We already know the story. We know the information. So that’s not the reason we are here. It’s like the life jacket speech on the airplane. Been there, done that. I know the salt water; I know the mah nishtanah; I know the Avadim Hayuni, the Dayanu, and the ten plagues.

The seder is about revisiting our personal narrative through the lens of our historic Jewish narrative. It is turning your history into your personal biography. We tell our personal story through telling the story of our people. It’s about the evolution of Jewish consciousness. It’s about personal evolution. Where were we last year? Where are we today? Where was I last year? Where am I today? And where do I want to be in a year from now? What is the “Jerusalem” I would like to be in next year, and how do I plan on getting there?

So every year, we begin with an invitation. It is a time to reflect on the transformations you have experienced: what experience have you gone through that transformed your life? What awareness has Coved-19 created for you? It is a time to reflect on the areas we are currently stuck in—what feelings and emotions “own” you? What happens to you when you are attacked by a feeling of insecurity? Of not belonging? Of trauma? Of depression? Of anger? Of apathy?

We all go through our ups and downs. We all get stuck, and we are all capable of experience emotional and psychological freedom. Tonight we ask: where am I in my relationship with G-d, and do I see how He is walking me through life? (If you would like others to share, begin by sharing something personal. This will take the seder from a nice seder to a life-experience your family may never forget).

Perhaps the seder was the first invention of group therapy.

This is the space we are inviting each other to. This is a safe space. We aren’t just going to read the words. This isn’t an intellectual journey. It’s a soulful experience. We are going to live through the exodus. We recline, we will eat the bitter herbs, matzah and drink the wine. We'll laugh, we'll cry and we will sing.

Let us pray that we have the courage to show up for this wonderful opportunity.

2. Tonight We Search for Incompletion

Yachatz:

Why do we break the matzah? And the say the entire haggadah on that broken matzah?

The Jewish community looks for and celebrates what’s whole. We want the Shofar with no cracks, the Esrog with no blemishes, and the beautiful menorah that has pure oil. Yet tonight we have the courage to “break out matzah,” to discuss and search for the broken pieces.

Because to be free we must profess the courage to stop pretending that all is perfect and we can figure it all out on our own. We must be willing to admit that we are deeply imperfect and need each other to grow and heal. And just like it doesn't humble me to admit that I need oxygen outside of me to survive, and I need those little plants and fruits to nurture me, I should not feel ashamed to accept how much I need.

I can't handle all of life on my own. I need a spiritual nutrient in my life. I need to learn how to pray. I need to learn how to pass my stress to G-d – to rely on something greater than me.

I need to cultivate faith like my ancestors did, and not have to fret if I don't know exactly what I will be doing the rest of my life. It is alright to be broken.

I have to be willing, like my forefathers, to go out of my comfort zone – perhaps all the way out – to a desert, to gain the wisdom of my people and not stay smug with what I know or think I know.

The Flawed Circle

Shel Silverstein, who died in 1999, was a Jewish American poet, singer-songwriter, cartoonist, screenwriter, and author of children's books.

Translated into more than 30 languages, his books have sold over 20 million copies. One of his moving tales is about a circle that was missing a piece. A large triangular wedge has been cut out of it. The circle wanted to be whole, with nothing missing, so it went around the world looking for its missing piece.

But because it was incomplete, it could only roll very slowly as it rolled through the world. And as it rolled slowly, it admired the flowers along the way.

It chatted with the butterflies who landed on his back. He chatted with the worms he met along the way and he was warmed by the sunshine.

The circle found lots of pieces, but none of them fit. Some were too big and some were too small. Some too square, some too pointy. So it left them all by the side of the road and kept on searching.

Then one day it found a piece that fit perfectly. It was so happy. Now it could become complete with nothing missing.

The circle incorporated the missing piece into itself and began to roll again. But now that it was a perfect circle, it could roll very fast, too fast to notice the flowers and to talk with the worms. Too fast for the butterflies to land on his back.

When the circle realized how different the world seemed when it rolled through it so quickly, it stopped and left the missing piece by the side of the road.

It decides that it was happier when searching for the missing piece than actually having it. So it gently puts the piece down, and continues searching happily.

In some strange way, we are more whole when we are incomplete. That we can achieve so much more when we realize that we are still far from perfect. Because a person who thinks to himself that he is perfect, without any loose ends and internal conflicts, becomes too smooth to even attempt to change and grow and realize how much more there is to accomplish. Such a person shuts themselves down from others, from themselves and from G-d.

Why is this night different? While every night we search for perfection, tonight we go out and search for the amazing gift of incompleteness, or openness.

3. 3333 Years Later, We Still Remember.

"Now we are slaves; next year in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year we will be free."

It was in 1937 when the handwriting was already on the wall regarding the future of European Jewry that David Ben-Gurion, later to become the first Prime Minister of Israel, appeared before the Peel Commission to allow the Jews of Europe to immigrate to Palestine.

The Peel Commission was created during the British Mandate over Palestine. After a series of heinous Arab attacks against the Jews, the British attempted

to extricate themselves from this nutcracker of Arab violence and Jewish pressure by establishing a commission to study the problem, appointing the British Lord Peel as its chairman. Under the shadow of Hitler's rise in Germany, England floated a trial balloon in the form of a partition plan. The proposed Jewish section would have consisted of tiny, barely visible slivers of land and could never become a viable national entity. But while the Jews were displeased by the Peel Commission Report, the Arabs were even more outraged and violence again spread throughout the country. Ben Gurion's speech was given in the midst of the commission.

This is what he said:

"300 years ago, there came to the New World a boat, and its name was the Mayflower. The Mayflower's landing on Plymouth Rock was one of the great historical events in the history of England and in the history of America. But I would like to ask any Englishman sitting here on the commission, what day did the Mayflower leave port? What date was it? I'd like to ask the Americans: do they know what date the Mayflower left port in England? How many people were on the boat? Who were their leaders? What kind of food did they eat on the boat?"

"More than 3300 years ago, long before the Mayflower, our people left Egypt, and every Jew in the world, wherever he is, knows what day they left. And he knows what food they ate. And we still eat that food every anniversary. And we know who our leader was. And we know exactly how many Jews left the land! And we sit down and tell the story to our children and grandchildren in order to guarantee that it will never be forgotten. And we say our two slogans: 'Now we may be enslaved, but next year, we'll be a free people.'"

"Now we are behind the Soviet Union and their prison. Now, we're in Germany where Hitler is destroying us. Now we're scattered throughout the world, but next year, we'll be in Jerusalem. There'll come a day that we'll come home to Zion, to the Land of Israel. That is the nature of the Jewish people."

David Ben Gurion was an ardent secularist, but there were certain basics he understood well.

It is always deeply moving for observing a seder. After all the jokes about the boredom, the uncle who gets on our nerves, the horrible horseradish, and the endless dragging on of the afikoman search—here we are, 3328 years later, coming together on the very same night, retelling the story of our people.

Think about it, it is mind blowing.

We have been through everything—every conceivable challenge and blessing life has to offer. We have touched the heavens and we have been to hell and back. Yet every single year, without interruption, Jews came together around a table, sharing the same story, eating the same food, singing the same songs, and arguing about the same ideas. Ben Gurion was right. There is a reason we are still here, going strong. For each of our children knows the food they ate and the day they left.

4. Our Innate Potential for Transformation

"Avadim Hayenu..."

For centuries the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt in bondage of body and spirit. They were crushed and beaten, physically and mentally. Spiritually too, they have lost their sense of identity and purpose. When Moses brought them the message of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, they did not listen to him, the Torah states, "because of short breath and crushing labor." They were lost. However, after their liberation from enslavement they attained, in a comparatively short time, the highest spiritual level a man can reach. Every man, woman, and child of Israel experienced Divine Revelation at Mount Sinai, absorbing the highest knowledge and inexhaustible source of wisdom and faith for all generations to come—the only time such a thing ever happened in history.

We often think that if we struggle with a bad habit, a painful emotion, an addiction, a bad relationship, or a difficult childhood, or if we struggle with

our Jewish identity, that it has to take a lot of time—perhaps many years—to heal or to change. It might. We don't know how long it will take. But the story of the Exodus is essentially about the possibility of transformation. When we can look inside and see that who we truly are is beautiful, perfect, capable, full of love; how we are literally part of the Divine. Then in one moment we can transcend, let go of our old identity, and start living who we truly are.

Yet sometimes we are so filled with toxicity that we cannot even understand or feel how free we really are. That is what I want to ask you to do tonight: Start believing in your genuine potential for personal liberation in the profoundest way. Tonight, share with yourself this thought: "I'm not a body with a soul, I'm a soul that has a visible part called the body."

The Kohen from Pinsk

Yankel from Pinsk arrives in the New Country. In the old shtetl, in the small Lithuanian town of Pinsk, he was a simpleton, a poor schleper; but now he decides he will open a new chapter in his life. He showed up for the first time on Pesach in shul and he was dressed to kill—a fancy new suit, an elegant tie, a classy hat, and designer shoes.

He sits down in the front row, establishing his reputation as an honorable man.

The rabbi, Rabbi Goldberg, takes a glimpse at the guest. The rabbi, himself a native from Pinsk, recognizes him immediately. He is impressed with Yankel's new look.

Then comes the reading of the Torah. The Gabai asks if there is a Kohen in the synagogue. Yankel thinks to himself: Being a Kohen will give me an opportunity to become a popular member of the shul. After all, a shul always needs a Kohen, and I'd always be getting an Aliya.

Yankel raises his hand. "I am a Kohen," he declares.

They call him up to the Torah, and then he blesses the community.

After the services, the rabbi approaches him, and welcomes him warmly: "Yankel! Yankel from Pinsk! Wow, what a pleasure to have you.

But let me ask you a question: I remember you from Pinsk, I knew your father, I knew your grandfather, and I still remember your great grandfather. None of them were kohanim. How did you suddenly become a kohen?"

To which Yankel from Pinsk responds:

"Hey, this is a new country. This is AMERICA. If you can come here and become a rabbi, I can come here and become a Kohen!"

5. Matzah—the Food of freedom

By the age of fifteen we think we have it all figured out. There is nothing new to learn. The rest of life is simply reaffirming what we already know to be true. "I always knew that we can't trust that guy." "This family is good, and from that family stay away." We have a certain way of seeing the world and we lock into it. As we get older it becomes the "truth."

We are stuck in our perception. We are arrogant. We believe that what we think of life and what we think of ourselves, and others, is true.

The staple food of Passover is Matzah. It represents the food of freedom. Why?

Matzah—as opposed to bread—is a humble food. Lots of care was taken that the dough should not rise. Matzah is the process of humbling ourselves. Not breaking ourselves, rather breaking our misinformed ego. It's the realization that I don't know. What I think, is simply that—what I think. It's not the truth. We never know the full truth.

Matzah is the gateway to freedom. The message of matzah is that instead of living in our self-fulfilling prophecy of reality, we let go and become open to a new way of seeing things. There is always another way to see almost everything.

Who am I beyond what I think of myself? This is food (for thought) of hope. This is food (for thought) of healing.

Dare to let go of the shackles of your intellect. Dare to question what was solid and "true" for you yesterday. This is where you will meet the G-d of

Abraham. This is the G-d that took us—and takes us out of our perpetual state—of Egypt.

Dare to let go and you will fall into the all-embracing hands of G-d.

The Impressionist artist Pierre-August Renoir (1841–1919) once said: "I am beginning to know how to paint. It has taken me over fifty years to work to achieve this result, which is still far from complete."

Renoir said this in 1913, at the age of seventy-two. By this time, the artist was a master at his craft. He was well established, and considered by many to be the greatest living painter in France.

He knew the secret of not knowing. The secret of freedom.

Trapped In Marriage

You're trapped in your marriage. You've said certain things, she's said things, both quite unforgivable, so now you're imprisoned in this cube of tense silence you used to call "home" and the only place to go from here is down. Yes, there is a way out -- just yesterday there was a moment, a fleeting opportunity for reconciliation. But you were too big to squeeze through. Sometimes, the weather clears enough for you to see the escape hatch set high up in the wall -- the way out to freedom. But it's so small. Actually, it's not so much that it's small as that you need to make yourself small -- veritably flatten yourself -- to fit through. You need to deflate your false ego. Chametz -- grain that has fermented and bloated -- represents that swelling of ego that enslaves the soul more than any external prison. The flat, unpretentious matzah represents the humility that is the ultimate liberator of the human spirit.

The liberating quality of matzah is also shown in the forms of the Hebrew letters that spell the words "chametz" and "matzah". The spelling of these two words are very similar (just as a piece of bread and a piece of matzah are made of the same basic ingredients) --chametz is spelled chet, mem, tzadi; matzah is spelled mem, tzadi, hei. So the only difference is the difference between the chet and the hei -- which is also slight. Both the chet and the hei have the form of a three sided enclosure, open at the bottom; the difference being that the hei has a small "escape hatch" near the top of its left side. Which is all the difference in the world.

6. No Dialogue, Just Endless Love

"What does the rebellious child say? What is this service you are doing?...

You too Blunt/hit his teeth."

Really? Are you kidding me? A call for violence at the Seder table? And toward whom? Toward your own child?

There is, in truth, a deeper message here. It is the source of the expression: "Answer the person, do not answer the question."

Real listening occurs when we are not distracted or diverted by our own thinking. We know that when we quiet down sufficiently, when we are present in the moment, we can reach beyond the content of the spoken word and hear the underlying intent of the other. There is what we see and hear—the behavior of the other person and their words—and there is what we don't see—the inner feeling of the other person.

Now, think about it: When is the last time you were living in the most wonderful feeling, and you mistreated your spouse? It doesn't happen. This isn't an excuse to behave inappropriately; we are always responsible for our behavior. But it does allow us to look beyond the behavior and see what is really going on. When we see someone acting in a destructive manner, we know that they are hurting inside.

Your child may be yelling, throwing things or hitting his sister, he is completely reckless and lacks any form of decency and obedience. He should be disciplined. But what is going on beneath the surface? Is he anxious about something? The more we can go beneath the surface the closer we are to dealing with the root of the problem. In Hebrew, the word used for a bully is the same word used for a mute—אָלם. Why? Because bullying is often a result of the child being muted and he has no way of expressing himself.

The bully must always be stopped. Yet it behooves us to look one step deeper so we can mend the inner heart of the bully and cause him to truly stop bullying forever.

When we hear the voice of a rebellious child, we often get carried away in what he says instead of looking beyond the word to what he is truly feeling. What are his words? “What is this service of yours?” It sounds as if this son is excluding himself, but if you listen beyond his words you will hear the cry of a lonely soul. We all know the feeling of not belonging, of being an outsider. Our troubled and “rebellious” child is doing his or her best to convey that to the ones around him or her: I feel like I don’t belong. I have no place, I am an outsider. I am hurting.

How are we to respond? Says the Haggadah: “Break his teeth”—don’t enter into a dialogue. Let this not be about teeth vs. teeth—and he who screams louder wins. Forget the words, forget the teeth. Shower him or her with unconditional love. Simply overwhelm him or her with enormous affection and acceptance, until they see that there is no such thing as an outsider; we all already inherently belong.

This is also the way to approach our own feelings of loneliness. Don’t engage. Rather look for a feeling of unconditional acceptance. This will always guide you to a place of clarity and perspective.

The Vilna Gaon once said: The Hebrew word שני, his teeth, is numerically equivalent to 366. Now the Hebrew word for Rasha (רשע) is 570. So when we “blunt” his teeth and subtract 366 from 570 what are we left with? 206, which equals the word Tzaddik (צדיק). In other words, when you remove the “teeth,” the sharp words, you will see that inside this child is a Tzaddik.

7. Nirtzah—I’m Never Good Enough

We conclude the seder with the final and very strange step of “Nirtzah.” We acknowledge that G-d has accepted and is deeply moved and pleased by our service.

This is enigmatic. All the other 14 steps of the seder connote an action of some sort: Kiddish, washing hands, dipping, etc. What is the significance of this 15th step where we do nothing, but believe that G-d was pleased with our seder?

In truth, this is the climax of the seder.

One of our ego’s favorite lines is: “Not good enough.” You commit to learning Torah twenty minutes a day, your ego comes and says: only twenty minutes? What can you learn already in twenty minutes?

You spend fifteen dollars and buy your wife flowers, your ego says that’s all you spend on your wife?!

You gave someone collecting money for charity ten dollars, afterwards your ego says: you are not good enough, why didn’t you give him twenty dollars? You start doing Kiddush Friday night, and your ego says: That’s not called keeping Shabbat!

Any project we do, there is that little voice inside that comes and says: “Not good enough.”

Remember this rule: This is the voice of the yetzer hara, of our ego.

You see, it is true that we should always improve, and there is always room for improvement. But this isn’t the intention of our ego. It has one intention--to deject us and take the life out of life. For how does it make you feel when you think “not enough”? It makes you a smaller person, it makes you think less of yourself, it makes you think that your actions are worthless. It drains you from your vitality and zest. It makes you feel sad and depressed. And it ultimately causes you to do less, not more.

It has nothing to do with the truth or with G-d; it is a creation of ego.

Once something was done, we surrender and say I have done the best I could have done in the moment. And we trust that our sincerity will be seen, by our spouse, the beggar, G-d and ourselves.

Nirtzah. G-d accepts your offering. Do YOU accept your offering?

(My thanks to Rabbi Yanki Raskin for his assistance in preparing these insights. My thanks to Rabbi Nir Gurevitch (Serfers Paradise, Australia) and Rabbi Zalman Bluming (Duke University) for sharing their insights).

OUR JOURNEY IN THE HAGGADAH: HOW ITS NARRATIVES AND OBSERVANCES ENABLE US TO EXPERIENCE THE EXODUS*

by Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

INTRODUCTION

The Haggadah is a compilation of biblical, talmudic and midrashic texts, with several other passages that were added over the centuries.¹ Despite its composite nature, the Haggadah in its current form may be understood as containing a fairly coherent structure. It creates a collective effect that enables us to experience the journey of our ancestors. As the Haggadah exhorts us, we must consider ourselves as though we left Egypt, actively identifying with our forebears rather than merely recounting ancient history. The exodus lies at the root of our eternal covenantal relationship with God.

The Haggadah merges laws with narrative. Its text and symbols take us on a journey that begins with freedom, then a descent into slavery, to the exodus, and on into the messianic era. Although we may feel free today, we are in exile as long as the Temple is not rebuilt. Many of our Seder observances remind us of the Temple and we pray for its rebuilding.

The Haggadah also presents an educational agenda. Although most traditions are passed from the older generation to the younger, the older generation must be open to learning from the younger. Often it is their questions that remind us of how much we still must learn and explore.

This essay will use these axioms to outline the journey of the Haggadah, using the text and translation of Rabbi Marc D. Angel's *A Sephardic Passover Haggadah* (Ktav, 1988). This study is not an attempt to uncover the original historical meaning of the Passover symbols or to explain why certain passages were incorporated into the Haggadah. However, perhaps we will approach the inner logic of our current version of the Haggadah and its symbols as they came to be traditionally understood.

THE FIRST FOUR STAGES: FROM FREEDOM INTO SLAVERY

Kaddesh: Wine symbolizes festivity and happiness. Kiddush represents our sanctification of time, another sign of freedom. We recline as we drink the wine, a sign of freedom dating back to Greco-Roman times, when the core observances of the Seder were codified by the rabbis of the Mishnah. Some also have the custom of having others pour the wine for them, which serves as another symbol of luxury and freedom. The Haggadah begins by making us feel free and noble.

Rehatz (or Urhatz): We ritually wash our hands before dipping the *karpas* vegetable into salt water or vinegar. As with the pouring of the wine, some have the custom for others to wash their hands, symbolizing luxury and freedom. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, 1817–1893, Lithuania) observes that many Jews no longer follow this talmudic practice of washing hands before dipping any food into a liquid. Doing so at the Seder serves as a reminder of the practice in Temple times. We remain in freedom mode for *rehatz*, but we begin to think about the absence of the Temple.

* This article appeared in *Pesah Reader* (New York: Tebah, 2010), pp. 17-29; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 218-229.

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Karpas: Dipping an appetizer is another sign of freedom and nobility that dates back to Greco-Roman times. However, we dip the vegetable into either salt water or vinegar, which came to be interpreted as symbolic of the tears of slavery. In addition, the technical ritual reason behind eating *karpas* resolves a halakhic debate over whether we are required to make a blessing of *Borei peri ha-adamah* over the maror later. On the one hand, we eat maror after matzah and therefore have already washed and recited the blessing of *ha-motzi*. On the other hand, it is unclear whether the maror should be subsumed under the meal covered by the matzah, since it is its own independent mitzvah. Consequently, the *ha-adamah* we recite over the *karpas* absolves us of this doubt, and we are required to keep the maror in mind for this blessing.² Interpreting this halakhic discussion into symbolic terms: while we are dipping an appetizer as a sign of freedom and luxury, we experience the tears of slavery, and we think about the maror, which the Haggadah explains as a symbol of the bitterness of slavery.³ We are beginning our descent into slavery.

Yahatz: The Haggadah identifies two reasons for eating matzah. One is explicit in the Torah, that our ancestors had to rush out of Egypt during the exodus (Exodus 12:39). However, the Haggadah introduces another element: The Israelites ate matzah while they were yet slaves in Egypt. The Torah's expression *lehem oni*, bread of affliction (Deuteronomy 16:3) lends itself to this midrashic interpretation.

Yahatz focuses exclusively on this slavery aspect of matzah—poor people break their bread and save some for later, not knowing when they will next receive more food (*Berakhot* 39b). By this point, then, we have descended into slavery. At the same time, the other half of this matzah is saved for the *tzafun-afikoman*, which represents the Passover offering and is part of the freedom section of the Seder. Even as we descend into slavery with our ancestors, then, the Haggadah provides a glimpse of the redemption.

To summarize, *kaddesh* begins with our experiencing freedom and luxury. *Rehatz* also is a sign of freedom but raises the specter of there no longer being a Temple. *Karpas* continues the trend of freedom but more overtly gives us a taste of slavery by reminding us of tears and bitterness. *Yahatz* completes the descent into slavery. Even before we begin the *maggid*, then, the Haggadah has enabled us to experience the freedom and nobility of the Patriarchs, the descent to Egypt with Joseph and his brothers, and the enslavement of their descendants.

MAGGID: FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

A. EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

At this point in our journey, we are slaves. We begin the primary component of the Haggadah—*maggid*—from this state of slavery.

Ha Lahma Anya: We employ the “bread of affliction” imagery of the matzah, since we are slaves now. This opening passage of *maggid* also connects us to our ancestors: “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt....Now we are here enslaved.” The passage begins our experience by identifying with the slavery of our ancestors, then moves into our own exile and desire for redemption.

Mah Nishtanah–The Four Children: Before continuing our journey, we shift our focus to education. The Haggadah prizes the spirit of questioning. The wisdom of the wise child is found in questioning, not in knowledge: “What are the testimonies, statutes, and laws which the Lord our God has commanded you?” To create a society of wise children, the Haggadah challenges us to explore and live our traditions.

Avadim Hayinu: We are not simply recounting ancient history. We are a living part of that memory and connect to our ancestors through an acknowledgement that all later generations are indebted to God for the original exodus: “If the Holy One blessed be He had not brought out our ancestors from Egypt, we and our children and grandchildren would yet be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

Ma’aseh Be-Ribbi Eliezer: The five rabbis who stayed up all night in B’nei B’rak teach that the more knowledgeable one is, the more exciting this learning becomes. These rabbis allowed their conversation to take flight, losing track of time as they experienced the exodus and actively connected to our texts and traditions.⁴ This passage venerates our teachers.

Amar Ribbi Elazar: As a complement to the previous paragraph, the lesser scholar Ben Zoma had something valuable to teach the greatest Sages of his generation. Learning moves in both directions, and everyone has something important to contribute to the conversation.

Yakhol Me-Rosh Hodesh: The Haggadah stresses the value of combining education and experience. “The commandment [to discuss the exodus from Egypt] applies specifically to the time when matzah and maror are set before you.”

B. THE JOURNEY RESUMES

Now that we have established a proper educational framework, we return to our journey. At the last checkpoint, we were slaves pointing to our bread of affliction, longing for redemption. Each passage in the next section of the Haggadah moves us further ahead in the journey.

Mi-Tehillah Ovedei Avodah Zarah: We quote from the Book of Joshua:

In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession, while Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. (Joshua 24:2–4)

To experience the full redemption, halakhah requires us to begin the narrative with negative elements and then move to the redemption (see *Pesahim* 116a). However, the Haggadah surprisingly cuts the story line of this narrative in the middle of the Passover story. The very next verses read:

Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with [the wonders] that I wrought in their midst, after which I freed you—I freed your fathers—from Egypt, and you came to the Sea. But the Egyptians pursued your fathers to the Sea of Reeds with chariots and horsemen. They cried out to the Lord, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians; then He brought the Sea upon them, and it covered them. Your own eyes saw what I did to the Egyptians. (Joshua 24:5–7)

Given the direct relevance of these verses to the Passover story, why are they not included in the Haggadah? It appears that the Haggadah does not cite these verses because we are not yet up to that stage in our journey. The Haggadah thus far has brought us only to Egypt.

Hi She-Amedah: The Haggadah again affirms the connection between our ancestors and our contemporary lives. “This promise has held true for our ancestors and for us. Not only one enemy has risen against us; but in every generation enemies rise against us to destroy us. And the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand.” The slavery and exodus are a paradigm for all later history.

Tzei Ve-Lammed: The midrashic expansion is based on Deuteronomy 26, the confession that a farmer would make upon bringing his first fruits:

My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. (Deuteronomy 26:5–8)

We continue our journey from our arrival in Egypt, where the passage in Joshua had left off. Through a midrashic discussion of the biblical verses, we move from Jacob's descent into Egypt, to the growth of the family into a nation, to the slavery, and then on through the plagues and exodus. By the end of this passage we have been redeemed from Egypt.

Like the passage from Joshua 24, the Haggadah once again cuts off this biblical passage before the end of its story. The next verse reads:

He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 26:9)

In Temple times, Jews evidently did read that next verse (see Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:4).⁵ However, the conceptual value of stopping the story is consistent with our experience in the Haggadah. This biblical passage as employed by the Haggadah takes us through our ancestors' exodus from Egypt, so we have not yet arrived in the land of Israel.

Ribbi Yosei Ha-Gelili Omer—Dayyenu: After enumerating the plagues, the Haggadah quotes from *Midrash Psalms* 78, where Sages successively suggest that there were 50, 200, or even 250 plagues at the Red Sea. Psalm 78 is concerned primarily with God's benevolent acts toward Israel, coupled with Israel's ingratitude. Psalm 78 attempts to inspire later generations not to emulate their ancestors with this ingratitude:

He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children, that a future generation might know—children yet to be born—and in turn tell their children that they might put their confidence in God, and not forget God's great deeds, but observe His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a wayward and defiant generation, a generation whose heart was inconstant, whose spirit was not true to God. (Psalm 78:5–8)

Several midrashim on this Psalm magnify God's miracles even more than in the accounts in Tanakh, including the passage incorporated in the Haggadah that multiplies the plagues at the Red Sea. From this vantage point, our ancestors were even more ungrateful to God. The Haggadah then follows this excerpt with *Dayyenu* to express gratitude over every step of the exodus process. The juxtaposition of these passages conveys the lesson that the psalmist and the midrashic expansions wanted us to learn.

In addition to expressing proper gratitude for God's goodness, *Dayyenu* carries our journey forward. It picks up with the plagues and exodus—precisely where the passage we read from Deuteronomy 26 had left off. It then takes us ahead to the reception of the Torah at Sinai, to the land of Israel, and finally to the Temple: “He gave us the Torah, He led us into the land of Israel, and He built for us the chosen Temple to atone for our sins.”

Rabban Gamliel Hayah Omer: Now that we are in the land of Israel and standing at the Temple, we can observe the laws of Passover! We describe the Passover offering during Temple times, matzah and maror, and their significance. It also is noteworthy that the reason given for eating matzah is freedom—unlike the slavery section earlier that focused on bread of affliction (*yahatz-ha lahma anya*). “This matzah which we eat is...because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to leaven before the Holy One blessed be He...redeemed them suddenly.”

Be-Khol Dor Va-Dor—Hallel: The primary purpose of the Haggadah is completely spelled out by now. “In each generation a person is obligated to see himself as though he went out of Egypt....For not only did the

Holy One blessed be He redeem our ancestors, but He also redeemed us along with them....” Since we have been redeemed along with our ancestors, we recite the first two chapters of the *Hallel* (Psalms 113–114). These Psalms likewise take us from the exodus to entry into Israel. R. Judah Loew of Prague (Maharal, c. 1520–1609) explains that we save the other half of *Hallel* (Psalms 115–118) for after the Grace after Meals, when we pray for our own redemption. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik adds that Psalms 113–114 consist of pure praise, befitting an account of the exodus from Egypt which already has occurred. Psalms 115–118 contain both praise and petition, relevant to our future redemption, for which we long.⁶

Asher Ge’alanu: Now that we have completed our journey and have chanted the *Hallel* thanking God for redeeming us, we conclude *maggid* with a blessing: “You are blessed, Lord our God...Who has redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt and has brought us to this night to eat matzah and maror.” For the first time in the Haggadah, we place ourselves before our ancestors, since our experience has become primary. As we express gratitude to God for bringing us to this point and for giving us the commandments, we also petition for the rebuilding of the Temple and ultimate redemption.

THE REMAINDER OF THE SEDER: CELEBRATORY OBSERVANCE IN FREEDOM AND YEARNING FOR THE MESSIANIC REDEMPTION

At this point we observe the laws of Passover. Although there is no Passover offering, we eat the matzah and maror and then the festive meal (*shulhan orekh*). Our eating of the *korekh*, Hillel’s wrap of matzah, maror, and haroset together, reenacts a Temple observance (*Pesahim* 115a). Similarly, we use the final piece of matzah (*tzafun*) to symbolize the Passover offering, the last taste we should have in our mouths (*Pesahim* 119b).⁷ By consuming the second half of the matzah from *yahatz*, we take from the slavery matzah and transform its other half into a symbol of freedom.

After the Grace after Meals (*barekh*), we pray for salvation from our enemies and for the messianic era. By reading the verses “*shefokh hamatekha*, pour out Your wrath” (Psalm 79:6–7), we express the truism that we cannot fully praise God in *Hallel* until we sigh from enemy oppression and recognize contemporary suffering.⁸ Many communities customarily open the door at this point for Elijah the Prophet, also expressing hope for redemption. We then recite the remainder of the *Hallel* which focuses on our redemption, as discussed above. Some of the later songs added to *nirtzah* likewise express these themes of festive singing and redemption.

CONCLUSION

The Haggadah is a composite text that expanded and evolved over the centuries. The symbols, along with traditional explanations for their meanings, similarly developed over time. Our Haggadah—with its core over 1,000 years old—takes us on a remarkable journey that combines narrative and observance into an intellectual and experiential event for people of all ages and backgrounds. In this manner, we travel alongside our ancestors from freedom to slavery to redemption. We are left with a conscious recognition that although we are free and we bless God for that fact, we long for the Temple in Jerusalem. *La-shanah ha-ba’ah be-Yerushalayim, Amen.*

NOTES

¹ Shemuel and Ze’ev Safrai write that most of the core of our Haggadah, including the *Kiddush*, the Four Questions, the Four Children, the midrashic readings, Rabban Gamliel, and the blessing at the end of *maggid* originated in the time of the Mishnah and were set by the ninth century. “This is the bread of affliction” (*ha lahma anya*) and “In each generation” (*be-khol dor va-dor*) hail from the ninth to tenth centuries. Components such as

the story of the five rabbis at B'nei B'rak and Rabbi Elazar; the Midrash about the number of plagues at the Red Sea; *Hallel HaGadol* and *Nishmat*; all existed as earlier texts before their incorporation into the Haggadah. "Pour out Your wrath" (*shefokh hamatekha*) and the custom of hiding the *afikoman* are later additions. All of the above was set by the eleventh century. The only significant additions after the eleventh century are the songs at the end (*Haggadat Hazal* [Jerusalem: Karta, 1998], pp. 70–71).

² See *Pesahim* 114b; *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 473:6; 475:2.

³ The symbol of the maror underwent an evolution. Joseph Tabory notes that during the Roman meal, the dipping of lettuce as a first course was the most common appetizer. By the fourth century, the Talmud ruled that the appetizer must be a different vegetable (*karpas*) so that the maror could be eaten for the first time as a mitzvah with a blessing (*The JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008], pp. 23–24).

In *Pesahim* 39a, one Sage explains that we use *hasa* (romaine lettuce, the talmudically preferred maror, even though five different vegetables are suitable) since God pitied (*has*) our ancestors. Another Sage derives additional meaning from the fact that romaine lettuce begins by tasting sweet but then leaves a bitter aftertaste. This sensory process parallels our ancestors' coming to Egypt as nobles and their subsequent enslavement.

⁴ Unlike most other rabbinic passages in the Haggadah which are excerpted from the Talmud and midrashic collections, this paragraph is unattested in rabbinic literature outside the Haggadah. See Joseph Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, p. 38, for discussion of a parallel in the Tosefta.

⁵ Cf. Joseph Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, p. 33.

⁶ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom: Essays on Passover and the Haggadah*, ed. Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2006), p. 105.

⁷ The word *afikoman* derives from the Greek, referring to anything done at the end of a meal, such as eating dessert or playing music or revelry. This was a common after-dinner feature at Greco-Roman meals (cf. J. T. *Pesahim* 37d). The Sages of the Talmud understood that people needed to retain the taste of the Passover offering in their mouths. It was only in the thirteenth century that the matzah we eat at the end of the meal was called the *afikoman* (Joseph Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, p. 15).

⁸ Shemuel and Ze'ev Safrai enumerate longer lists of related verses that some medieval communities added (*Haggadat Hazal*, pp. 174–175).

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

UNDERSTANDING MAGGID - A biblical Perspective

[revised 5768]

Expression of Gratitude

or

Recogniton of Destiny

Should Passover be understood as our 'holiday of freedom' - a special time set aside to thank God for taking us out of slavery?

Certainly, the popular song of "avadim hayinu... ata benei chorin" ['We were once slaves, but now we are free'] - seems to state exactly that point.

However, if you *read* your Haggada carefully, you'll notice that those words never appear (in that combination). And if you *study* the Haggada, you'll notice that it states quite the opposite, i.e. that we remain 'servants', but we simply have a new 'boss'!

In the following 'Guide for Maggid', we attempt to arrive at a better understanding of how and why we tell the story of the Exodus - and how that story explains why Passover is such an important holiday. Hopefully, it will ask help make your Seder evening a little more interesting (and life - a bit more meaningful).

THE SOURCE FOR MAGGID in Parshat Bo

Even though we are all familiar with the pasuk "ve-higadta le-bincha..." (Shmot13:8) - the Biblical source for our obligation to recite MAGID - when one reads that pasuk in Chumash, it's not very easy to translate.

[Try it yourself, and you'll immediately notice the difficulty.]

So let's begin our study by taking a careful look at this 'source pasuk' within its context - as it will be very insightful towards understanding what MAGID is all about.

Towards the end of Parshat Bo, Bnei Yisrael have already left Egypt and set up camp in Succot. For food, they have just baked "matzot" from the dough that they had taken with them (in their rush to leave Egypt - see Shmot 12:37-39). After the Torah concludes this narrative, Moshe commands Bnei Yisrael to remember these events in the following manner:

"And Moshe told the people - Remember this day that you left Egypt, from the House of Slavery, for God has taken you out with a strong hand..."

[Then, when you come to the land of Israel...]

Eat matza for seven days... and don't see any chametz..."
 (see Shmot 13:3-7)

With this context in mind, note how Moshe concludes these instructions with the following commandment:

"ve-HIGGADETA le-bincha ba-yom ha-hu leimor" -

And you must TELL your son on that day, saying:

BA'AVUR ZEH -

for the sake of this -

ASA Hashem li BE-TZEITI mi-MITZRAYIM -

God did for me [?] when he took me out of Egypt"
 (see Shmot 13:8).

Even though we all know this last pasuk by heart, it is not so easy to translate. In our above transliteration, we have highlighted the difficult words - which we will now discuss:

Let's begin with the meaning of the word 'zeh' [this]. Based on its context (see 13:6-7), 'zeh' most probably refers to the matzot that we eat, for the previous psukim describe the mitzva to eat matza for seven days. Hence, this pasuk implies that we must tell our children: 'for the sake of this matza - God did for me [these miracles ?] - when I left Egypt'.

Indeed, this commandment instructs us to 'remember' this day by telling something to our children; however, it is not very

clear what the Torah wants us to explain.

There are two possible directions of interpretation. Either we must explain to our children:

- **Why God took us out of Egypt** - i.e. to eat matza! -

Or,

- **Why we eat matza** - because God took us out of Egypt!

Even though we are most familiar with the latter reason, the first interpretation seems to be the simple meaning of the pasuk. As you'd expect, the classical commentators argue in this regard.

Ramban (on 13:8) explains (as most of us understand this pasuk), that we eat matza to remember HOW God took us out of Egypt. However Rashi (and Ibn Ezra) disagree!

In his commentary, Ibn Ezra explains (as 'simple pshat' implies) - that we are commanded to explain to our children that God took us out of Egypt IN ORDER that we can eat matza; implying that God intentionally placed Bnei Yisrael in slavery in order to redeem them - so that we would keep His mitzvot!

Rashi provides a very similar explanation, but widens its scope by stating that God took us out of Egypt in order that we would keep ALL of His mitzvot, such as pesach matza & maror.

[Chizkuni offers a similar explanation, with a slightly different twist - i.e. in the ZCHUT (in merit) for our readiness to perform the mitzvot of pesach matza & maror for all generations - God redeemed us from Egypt.]

According to Rashi and Ibn Ezra's understanding of this pasuk, the primary mitzvah at the Seder should be not only to explain to our children **what** happened, but also **why** it happened.

In our study of Maggid, we will show how this specific point emerges as a primary theme - but first must consider where that story - that we are commanded to tell over - should begin.

WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN?

Let's contemplate for a moment where would be the best (or most logical) point to start the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim from. One could entertain several possibilities.

The simplest and most obvious approach would be to begin with Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Egypt. In fact, this is precisely where Sefer Shmot begins!

On the other hand, one could start a bit earlier with the story of Yosef and his brothers, for that would explain how Bnei Yisrael first came to settle down in Egypt. However, if we continue with that logic, we could go back another generation to the story of Yaakov, or even back to story of Avraham Avinu. [Or maybe even back to the story of Creation!]

This dilemma appears to be the underlying reason behind the Talmudic dispute between Rav and Shmuel. Let's explain:

THE MISHNA in Mesechet PESACHIM

The Mishna in the tenth chapter of Mesechet Pesachim sets some guidelines concerning how to fulfill this obligation 'to tell the story', including one that deals with its format:

"machilim bi-gnut u-mesaymim be-shevach" -

- We begin our story with a derogatory comment, and conclude it with praise.

In the Gemara's subsequent discussion (see Pesachim 116a), we find two opinions concerning what this opening comment should be:

- **Rav** - "Mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara..." - At first, our ancestors were idol worshipers..."
- **Shmuel** - "Avadim hayinu..." - We were once slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt..."

At the simplest level, it seems that Rav & Shmuel argue concerning what is considered a more derogatory statement- i.e. the fact that we were once slaves, or the fact that we once idol worshipers. However, this dispute may also relate to a more fundamental question - concerning **where** the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim actually begins - from our slavery in Egypt (Shmuel), or from the time of our forefathers (Rav).

In our study of Maggid, we will show how we actually quote both of these opinions, but not as the starting point of the story, but rather as important statements of purpose.

So where does the story begin?

We will now begin our detailed study MAGGID not only to answer that question, but also in an attempt to better understand HOW we fulfill this mitzva of "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim" when we read the Haggada.

HOW WE [DON'T] TELL THE STORY IN MAGGID

Even though the primary obligation of the Seder evening is to 'tell the story' of Yetziat Mitzrayim, when we read Maggid at the Seder, it is not very clear where that story actually begins (or ends). To determine when, where, and how we actually fulfill this mitzva, we will examine Maggid - one paragraph at a time.

As we study each paragraph, we will ask ourselves: is this part of the story?

If it is, then we can determine how we tell the story.

If it's not, then we must explain why this paragraph is included in Maggid nonetheless.

'HA LACHMA ANYA'

The opening paragraph of MAGGID - 'ha lachma anya..' is definitely not the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, but rather a quick explanation to the guests about the MATZA on the table. Let's explain why:

In the opening sentence, the leader of the Seder explains how this 'special bread' on the table is what our forefathers ate in Egypt; then he quotes what our forefathers said to one another in Egypt as they prepared to partake in the first Korban Pesach.

"kol dichfin..." - reflects how they invited one another to join a common group to eat the korban Pesach (see Shmot 12:3-6);

"hashta hacha..." reflects their expression of hope that by next year they would no longer be slaves in Egypt, but rather a free people living in the land of Israel.

As we will explain later on, this quote of what our forefathers said to one another in preparation for the very first 'seder' in Jewish History is thematically very important, for at the end of Maggid, we will express our need to feel as though 'we were there' ("bchor dor v'dor...")!

Nonetheless, this section is not the story itself - however, it forms a very meaningful introduction.

[See Further Iyun Section for a discussion of the meaning of "lechem oni". Re: how the matza eaten with the 'korban Pesach' had nothing to do with being in a rush, but rather reflected a 'poor man's bread' ["lechem oni"], see TSC shiur on Parshat Bo regarding 'two reasons for matza'.]

MAH NISHTANA

Similarly, the 'ma nishtana' is not part of the story. Rather, we want the children to ask questions to ensure that they will take interest in the story that we are about to tell.

As our obligation to tell this story is based on the pasuk "ve-higgadeta le-BINCHA" - and you must tell your children... (see Shmot 13:8), it makes sense that we try to capture their attention before we tell the story. However, as you have surely noticed, this section contains only questions, but no answers.

It should also be noted that these 'four questions' are really one question; i.e. - the **one** question is: 'Why is this night different?' Afterward, the child brings four examples/questions to support his claim that tonight is indeed different.

It is for this reason that we never answer these 'four questions'; Rather, Maggid continues with the answer to the 'one question' - of why this night is special.

'AVADIM HAYINU'

At first glance, the next paragraph: 'avadim hayinu...' seems to begin the story. [In fact, it appears that we have followed Shmuel's opinion (in Pesachim 116a) that we should begin the story with 'avadim hayinu'.]

However, if you take a minute to carefully read this entire

paragraph, you'll immediately notice that this paragraph does NOT begin the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Instead, the 'avadim hayinu' section makes two very important statements, which provide the answer to the 'one question' of WHY this night is so special. Hence we explain:

- **WHY** we are obligated to tell this story - for had it not been for this story of how God saved us from Egypt, we would still be slaves till this day;

And, then we explain:

- **WHO** is obligated to tell this story - i.e. 've-afilu kulanu chachamim..' - and even if we [who gather] are all very wise and learned and know the entire Torah, it remains incumbent upon us to tell that story; and the more we elaborate upon it, the better!

From this paragraph, it appears that before we actually tell the story, the Haggada prefers to first discuss some fundamentals relating to the nature of our obligation!

The first statement deals with a fundamental question regarding **why** this story is meaningful to all future generations, even though we will be discussing an event that took place thousands of years earlier.

The second statement comes to counter a possible misunderstanding, based on the source-text of "ve-higgadeta le-bincha..." - that this mitzva applies **only** to teaching **children** [i.e. those who never heard this story]. Therefore, before we tell the story, the Haggada must remind us that **everyone** is obligated to discuss the story - even 'know it alls'.

[See Further Iyun section for a more detailed discussion of how to understand this section in light of Devarim 6:20-25.]

MA'ASEH BE-R. ELIEZER...

To prove this second point of the 'avadim hayinu' paragraph (that even 'know it alls' are obligated to tell the story), the next paragraph in MAGGID quotes a story of five great Torah scholars (in fact Tannaim) who gathered for the Seder in Bnei Brak. Even though they certainly knew the story; nonetheless they spent the entire evening (until dawn the next morning) discussing it.

[This reflects a classic format for a Rabbinic statement. First the Rabbis state the obligation [in our case, that everyone is obligated to tell the story - even 'know it alls'] - afterward they support that ruling by quoting a story [in our case, the story of the five scholars who spent the entire evening discussing the story of the Exodus, even though they surely knew it.]

Even though the Haggada does not quote their entire conversation of that evening, the next paragraph does quote one specific discussion. Let's explain why:

AMAR RABBI ELIEZER BEN AZARYA...

The specific discussion that we quote concerns the Biblical source for our **daily** obligation to **'mention'** the story of the Exodus (see Devarim 16:3). In Hebrew, this obligation is commonly referred to as "**zechira**" [to passively remember], in contrast to our 'once a year' obligation at the Seder of "**sippur**" - to actively **tell** the story of the Exodus.

Most likely, the Haggada chose to quote this specific discussion as it relates to the obvious connection between these two mitzvot ("zechira" & "sippur").

One could suggest that the story we tell at the Seder ("sippur") serves as the reference point for our daily mention ("zechira") of the Exodus - when we recite the third 'parshia' of keriya shema (see Bamidbar 15:41), every morning and evening. To mention this story on a daily basis only becomes meaningful if we first 'tell the story' in full (at least once a year).

We should note as well that the very pasuk: "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt **to be for you a God**" (Bamidbar 15:41) supports the opinion of Rashi & Ibn Ezra (quoted above) that God took us out of Egypt **in order** that we keep His commandments.

Notice however, that we are still discussing the nature of our obligation - but the story itself has not yet begun!

THE FOUR SONS

The next section of MAGGID - beginning with 'baruch ha-Makom', discusses the Four Sons. Here again, we do not find the actual story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, rather another aspect of 'defining our obligation', as this section discusses **HOW** we should tell the story.

This section reflects the statement in the Mishna: "'Ifi da'ato shel ha-ben, aviv melamdo" - based on the level of the child, the parent should teach [the story]. [See Pesachim 116a.]

Based on this dictum, the Haggada quotes a Mechilta, which offers **four** examples of **how** to tell the story to different types of children - each example based on a pasuk in Chumash (where the father answers his son).

The opening statement of this section: 'baruch ha-Makom...' serves as a 'mini' "birkat ha-Torah" [a blessing recited before Torah study], as we are about to engage in the study of a Mechilta - the Midrash on Sefer Shmot. The quote itself begins with "keneged arba banim dibra Torah..."

[For a deeper understanding of this Mechilta, see the TSC shiur on 'The Four Sons' - tanach.org/special/4sons.doc]

This section certainly teaches us **HOW** to be a 'dynamic' teacher as we tell this story, and adapt it to the level of our audience. However, note once again that the story has yet to begun!

"YACHOL ME-ROSH CHODESH"

In the next section, beginning with: 'yachol me-rosh chodesh...' we discuss yet another aspect of our 'obligation to tell the story' - this time concerning **WHEN** we are obligated. Here, the Haggada quotes an analytical discourse which arrives at the conclusion that the story must be told on evening of the Seder.

Once again, we find another definition relating to our obligation to tell the story, but we haven't told the story yet!

[In case you'd like to follow the logic behind this discourse: Because the Torah's first command to **remember this day** is recorded in Shmot 12:14, as part of a set of commands given to Moshe on Rosh Chodesh Nisan (see 12:1-2), one might think that the phrase "v'haya ha'yom ha'zeh l'zikaron" (in 12:14) refers to Rosh Chodesh [that's the "hava amina"].

However, when Moshe relays these laws to Bnei Yisrael in chapter 13, he informs that they must remember this day that they left Egypt, not eat chametz & eat matza for seven days (see 13:3-7), and then they must tell the story to their children **on that day** "ba'yom ha'hu" (see 13:8) - which may refer to the **day time**, i.e. when they first offer the Korban on the 14th in the afternoon [based on Shmot 12:6 and hence "yachol m'b'od yom..."].

The drasha rejects that possible understanding based on the next phrase in 13:8 - "ba'avur zeh" - where "zeh" in its context must be referring to the matza - hence the story must be told at the same time that we eat matza and the korban Pesach, i.e. on the **evening** of the 15th.]

Once again, we find another definition relating to our obligation to tell the story, but we haven't told the story yet!

[At most Seders, probably at least an hour has gone by, but we haven't even begun to tell the story!]

"MI-TCHILA OVDEI AVODA ZARA..."

After defining the various aspects of our obligation, it appears that MAGGID finally begins telling the story with the paragraph that begins with "mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara..." (apparently following Rav's opinion in Pesachim 116a).

If so, it would seem that we actually begin the story with the story of our forefathers [the Avot] and how Avraham grew up within a family of idol worshipers.

However, if you read this paragraph carefully, you'll notice it isn't a story at all. Instead, the Haggada is making a very important **statement**, and then proves that statement with a text-

proof from Yehoshua chapter 24.

To appreciate what's going on, let's take a closer look at this statement and its proof.

The Statement:

"Mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara.hayu.avoteinu, ve-achshav kirvanu ha-Makom le-**avodato**"

At first, our forefathers were servants to strange gods - but now, God has brought us closer to Him - **[in order] to serve Him!**

The Proof:

"And Yehoshua said to the people: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt in the past - beyond the River, even Terach - the father of Avraham, and the father of Nachor - and they **served** other gods.

And I took your father Avraham from beyond the River, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Yitzchak.

And I gave unto Yitchak Yaakov and Esav; and I gave Esav mount Seir, to possess it; and Yaakov and his children went down into Egypt" (Yehoshua 24:2-4).

This statement should not surprise us, for once again we find the Haggada emphasizing the point (discussed above) that God chose the people of Israel for a purpose - i.e. to **serve** Him!

However, if you study the quoted text-proof, you'll notice that it only proves the first half of our statement, i.e. that we were once idol worshipers, but it doesn't prove the second half - that God brought us close in order to serve Him.

RE-AFFIRMING BRIT SINAI in Sefer Yehoshua

The solution to this problem is very simple. To show how this quote from Yehoshua proves the second point as well, we simply need to read the continuation of Yehoshua chapter 24. In that chapter, after teaching a short 'history lesson' (see 24:2-13), Yehoshua challenges the people saying:

"Now - fear the LORD, and **serve Him** in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt; and **serve ye the LORD**.

And if it seem evil unto you to **serve the LORD**, choose you this day **whom you will serve**; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, **we will serve the LORD**" (Yehoshua 24:14-15).

The entire reason why Yehoshua gathered the people in Shchem and reviewed their history was in order to challenge them with this goal - i.e. their willingness to truly serve God. After all, as Yehoshua explains, it was for this very reason that God chose Avraham Avinu. Thus the proof on the second half of the opening statement comes from the continuation of that chapter!

Note as well how the chapter continues, emphasizing over and over again this same theme:

"And the people answered: 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; for the LORD our God, He it is that brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and that did those great signs in our sight...

therefore we also will **serve the LORD**; for He is our God.'

And Yehoshua said unto the people: '**You cannot serve the LORD**; for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression nor your sins....

And the people said: 'Nay; but **we will serve the LORD**.'

And Joshua said unto the people: 'You are witnesses that **you have chosen God to serve Him**. - And they said: 'We are witnesses.'--

And the people said unto Yehoshua: '**The LORD our God will we serve**, and unto His voice will we hearken.'

So Yehoshua made a **covenant** with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem."

[See Yehoshua 24:16-25!]

Hence, the proof for the entire statement of 'mi-tchila...' is found in the continuation of Yehoshua chapter 24. Most probably, when this section was first composed, the Haggada assumed that its readers were well versed in Tanach, and knew the continuation of that chapter.

[Note as well how psukim that we do quote from Yehoshua (see 24:2-4) form a beautiful summary of Sefer Breishit, as they focus on the key stages of the 'bechira' process.

Should you be looking for something novel to do at your Seder, you could have the participants read from this section. Note as well that Yehoshua 24:5-7 is an excellent (albeit short) review of the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim.]

This background can help us appreciate how this statement of 'mi-tchila' sets the stage for the story that we are about to tell - for it explains why God originally chose Avraham - i.e. to become the forefather of a nation that will serve Him. The next paragraph of MAGGID will explain its connection to the story that we are about to begin.

"BARUCH SHOMER HAVTACHATO"

In the next paragraph we find yet another 'statement' (and not a story) followed by a proof-text, that relates once again to God's original choice of our forefathers. We will now show how this section explains why the story must begin with Avraham.

Statement:

"Baruch shomer havtachato... - Blessed is He who keeps His promise [of redemption] to Am Yisrael, for God had calculated the end [time for redemption] as He had promised Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha-btarim. As God stated:

Proof:

'Know very well that your offspring will be **strangers in a foreign land** which will **oppress and enslave them** for four hundred years. But that nation who will oppress them I will judge, and afterward they will go out with great wealth"
[See Breishit 15:13-18].

In this statement, we thank God for keeping His promise to Avraham Avinu, at "brit bein ha-btarim", to ultimately redeem Bnei Yisrael from their affliction, after some four hundred years.

At first glance, this statement sounds like yet another expression of gratitude. However, when considering its position in Maggid, one could suggest a very different reason for its mention specifically at this point.

Recall how the previous paragraph explained that God had chosen our forefathers to establish a nation to **serve** Him. In order to become that nation, God entered into a covenant with Avraham Avinu - i.e. "brit bein ha-btarim" - which forecasted the need for Avraham's offspring to first undergo suffrage in 'a land not theirs' in order to become that nation.

In other words, this historical process of slavery, followed by a miraculous redemption, was to serve as a 'training experience' that would facilitate the formation of that nation. [See concept of "kur ha'barzel" and its context in Devarim 4:20.]

Hence, this paragraph explains why the story of the Exodus must begin with "brit bein ha-btarim" - for our slavery in Egypt was not accidental, rather it was part of God's master plan. In a certain sense, God put us into Egypt - in order to take us out!

[This does not imply that every event that happened to Am Yisrael was already predetermined since the time of Avraham Avinu. Rather, this overall framework of becoming a nation in someone else's land - followed by oppression and servitude - then followed by redemption - was forecasted. How exactly it would play out, who would be the oppressor, and how intense that oppression would be - was yet to be determined. See Rambam Hilchot Teshuva chapters 5 & 6; see also Seforno's introduction to Sefer Shmot as his commentary on the first chapter.]

As we thank God for fulfilling His promise to Avraham, we are in essence thanking God for His covenant **and its very purpose**, not just for taking us out of Egypt.

Therefore in this section of Maggid, before we tell the story of WHAT happened - we must first explain WHY it happened.

This point is proven in the next paragraph:

"VE-HEE SHE-AMDA"

As we lift our cups and recite the "v'hee sh'amda" - we declare yet another important statement, connecting that covenant and the events of the past with today:

"ve-HEE she-amda la-avoteinu **ve-LANU**"

- And it is THIS [Promise that was part of the COVENANT, i.e. brit bein ha-btarim] which stood for our fathers, AND for us as well. For not only once [in our history] did our enemies try to destroy us; but in EVERY generation we are endangered, but God comes to save us [for the sake of His covenant]."

The word "hee" in this statement obviously refers to the promise ['havtacha'] of brit bein ha-btarim (mentioned in the previous paragraph). This statement is so important that our custom is to raise the cup of wine before reciting this proclamation!

Here we explain that "brit bein ha-btarim" was not merely a 'one-time coupon' promising one major redemption, but rather it defined an eternal relationship between God and His people. The events of Yetziat Mitzrayim are only the initial stage of this everlasting relationship. Therefore, anytime in our history, whenever we are in distress - God will ultimately come to redeem us. However, the reason why God redeems us is in order that we can return to serve Him (that's why He chose us).

This provides us with a deeper understanding of why every generation must tell-over the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. At the Seder, we are not simply thanking God for the 'event' but rather for the entire 'process'. Yetziat Mitzrayim was not simply a 'one-time' act of redemption. Rather, it was a critical stage in an on-going historical process in which God desires that Am Yisrael become His special nation.

As this purpose is eternal, so too the need to remind ourselves on a yearly basis of the key events through which that process began.

This understanding explains why redemption requires spiritual readiness, for in every generation Bnei Yisrael must show their willingness to be faithful to that covenant.

[In our TSC shiur on Parshat Bo, we explained how this concept explains the symbolism of why we must rid ourselves of chametz, prior to and during the time when we thank God for Yetziat Mitzrayim.

This may also explain why we invite Eliyahu ha-navi, when we begin the final section of the Haggada, where we express our hope for our future redemption. According to the final psukim of Sefer Mal'achi (the Haftara for Shabbat ha-Gadol!), Eliyahu will come to help the nation perform proper 'teshuva' - to become worthy for redemption.]

At most Seder's - surely, over an hour has passed; yet we still haven't told the story!]

"TZEY U-LMAD" / "ARAMI OVED AVI"

With this thematic background complete, the Haggada is finally ready to tell the story (for those who are still awake). However, as you may have noticed, we do not tell the story in a straightforward manner.

Take a careful look at the next section of MAGGID, noting how the Haggada takes four psukim from Devarim 26:5-8, and quotes them one word (or phrase) at a time. Each quote is followed by a proof of that phrase, usually from either the story of the Exodus in Sefer Shmot or from a pasuk in Sefer Tehillim.

[To verify this, be sure to first review Devarim 26:1-9 before you continue.]

This section begins with "tzey u-lmad: ma bikesh Lavan...." which is simply a drasha of the opening phrase 'arami oved avi', and then continues all the way until the 'makkot' -the Ten Plagues. In a nutshell, this section constitutes a rather elaborate Midrash on four psukim from 'mikra bikkurim' (Devarim 26:5-8).

The reason why MAGGID chooses this format to tell the story is based once again on a statement in the Mishna in the tenth chapter of Masechet Pesachim: "ve-dorshin me-arami oved avi ad sof ha-parasha" - and then we elaborate on the psukim from 'arami oved avi' until the end of that unit - and that is exactly what the Haggada does!

In other words, the Haggada uses Devarim 26:5-8 - beginning with 'arami oved avi' - as the 'framework' for telling over the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Even though 'technically' it would suffice to simply quote these psukim, we elaborate upon them instead, in an effort to make the story more interesting and meaningful. [In fact, we are quoting a Sifrei - the Midrash on Sefer Devarim, which most probably was composed for this very purpose.]

From a 'practical' halachic perspective, this is critical to understand - for in this section we finally fulfill our obligation to TELL THE STORY - and hence this section should be treated as the most important part of MAGGID!

[Unfortunately, this section is usually one of the most neglected parts of the Haggada, since we are usually 'out of steam' by the time we reach it. Also, if one is not aware of the elaborate nature of these quotes, it is quite difficult to understand what's going on. Therefore, it's important that we not only pay attention to this section, but we should also be sure at this point to explain the details of the story to those who don't understand these psukim.]

WHY MIKRA BIKKURIM?

It is not by chance that Chazal chose to incorporate a Midrash of "mikra bikkurim" - even though it is rather cryptic - as the method through which we fulfill our obligation of sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Let's explain why.

Recall from our shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo, that "mikra bikkurim" (see Devarim 26:1-10) serves as a yearly proclamation whereby every individual thanks God for His fulfillment of the final stage of brit bein ha-btarim.

[This is supported by numerous textual and thematic parallels between the psukim of mikra bikkurim (Devarim 26:1-9), and brit bein ha-btarim (see Breishit 15:7-18). Note as well the use of the word 'yerusha' in 26:1 and in 15:1-8!]

This proclamation constitutes much more than simply thanking God for our 'first fruits'. Rather, it thanks God for the Land (see Devarim 26:3) that He had promised our forefathers (in brit bein ha-btarim / see Breishit 15:18). The 'first fruits' are presented as a 'token of our appreciation' for the fact that God has fulfilled His side of the covenant - as each individual must now declare that he will be faithful to his side of the covenant.

As mikra bikkurim constitutes a biblical 'nusach' ['formula'] through which one thanks God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim, one could suggest that it was for this reason that the Mishna chose these same psukim as its framework for telling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

[It very well may be that this custom to tell the story at the Sefer with "mikra bikurim" began after the destruction of the Temple (note that the Tosefta of Masechet Pesachim does not include this custom, while the Mishna (compiled later) does include it! Without the Temple, the individual could no longer recite "mikra bikkurim". However, we can at least remind ourselves of this yearly need to proclaim our allegiance to God's covenant - by quoting from "mikra bikurim" at the Seder!]

This may explain why the Haggada only quotes the first four psukim of mikra bikkurim (where it talks about Yetziat Mizraim) but not the pasuk that describes how He bought us

into the Promised Land.

Finally, note also the word 'higgadeti' in Devarim 26:3 and compare it with the word 've-higgadeta' in Shmot 13:8!

See also Rambam Hilchot Chametz u-Matza chapter 7, especially halacha 4.]

THE MULTIPLICATION TABLES

When you study the "drashot" of these four psukim, note how the drasha of the final pasuk leads us directly into the Ten Plagues. At this point, the Haggada quotes an additional drasha - by R. Yossi ha-Glili - that there must have been 5 times as many plagues at the Red Sea than were in Egypt [based on the ratio - 'etzba' of the Makkot to 'yad' at Kriyat Yam Suf, i.e. hand/finger = 5/1].

Then R. Eliezer and R. Akiva add multiples of 4x and 5x for each plague - based on Tehillim 88:49.

[Note in the Rambam's nusach of MAGGID, he skips this entire section. This suggests that this Midrash is an additional 'elaboration', but not a necessary part of the story that we must tell. In other words, if you need to skip something, this section is a 'good candidate'.]

DAYENU

Now that the story is finished, it's time for 'praise' -following the format of the Mishna "matchilin bi-gnut u-mesaymim be-shevach" - and we will now explain how DAYENU serves as a special form of HALLEL (praise).

You are probably familiar with all the questions regarding what we say in Dayenu, for example, how could a Jew say, let alone sing, that -'it would have been enough'- even had God not given us the Torah?

And how could a 'zionist' say, let alone sing, that -'it would have been enough'- even if God had not given us the Land of Israel?

However, the answer to all those questions is rather simple, once one understands that each time we say the word "dayenu" - it really implies that 'it would have been enough - **to say Hallel**'.

In other words, we say as follows:

- Had God only taken us out of Egypt and not punished the Egyptians, **it would have been reason enough** to say Hallel
- Had He split the sea, but not given us the 'manna', that alone **would have been reason enough** to say Hallel...

... And so on.

With this background, the next paragraph of that poem makes perfect sense:

"al achat kama vekhama..."

- How much more so is it proper **to thank God** for He has performed **ALL** these acts of kindness ..

He took us out of Egypt, **and** punished them, **and** split the sea, **and** gave us the manna etc.

In essence, this beautiful poem poetically summarizes each significant stage of redemption, from the time of the Exodus until Am Yisrael's conquest of the Land - stating how each single act of God's kindness in that process would be reason enough to say Hallel, now even more so we must say Hallel, for God did all of these things for us.

From this perspective, "dayenu" serves a double purpose. First and foremost, it concludes the story with "shevach" [praise], and qualifies the Hallel that we are about to sing. However, it could also be understood as a continuation of the story of the Exodus. Let's explain why and how:

Recall that the last "drasha" [elaboration] on the psukim of "arami oved avi" led into a lengthy discussion of the Ten Plagues. To fulfill our obligation at the Seder to tell the story, we could (and do) finish right here. But the poem of "dayenu" actually continues that story, picking up from the Ten Plagues ["asa bahem shfatim" refers to the Plagues], and continuing through all the significant events in the desert until our arrival in the Land of Israel and building the Temple.

This takes on additional significance, as it concludes in the same manner as the final pasuk of "arami oved avi" - which for

some reason we do not include in our Seder (even though according to the Mishna it appears that we really should)! Recall that according to Devarim 26:9, the proclamation should conclude with: "va'yvi'einu el ha'Makom ha'zeh"

According to Chazal - he brought us to the Bet ha'Mikdash!
"va'yiten lanu et ha'aretz ha'zot" he gave us the land of Israel

Even though we don't elaborate upon this pasuk in our version of Maggid, "dayenu" enables us to include it!

In this manner, the song of "dayenu" serves as both "shevach" [praise] and "sippur" [story] - at the same time!

It is also interesting to note that we find 15 levels of praise in the Dayenu, that most probably correspond to the 15 steps leading to the Bet ha-Mikdash, better known as the 'shir ha-ma'a lot', i.e. the 15 psalms in Tehillim (120-134) / composed for each step.

Finally, note how Dayenu discusses fifteen 'stages' in the redemption process. This beautifully reflects the theme that we have discussed thus far - that we are thanking God for the entire **process** of redemption, and not just for a specific event!

[For a full shiur on the topic of Dayenu, see:
www.tanach.org/special/dayenu.txt]

"RABBAN GAMLIEL"

Even though we have completed our story, before continuing with the Hallel, the Haggada wants to make sure that we also fulfill Rabban Gamliel's opinion (in Masechet Pesachim chapter 10) that we have not fulfilled our obligation of "v'higadta l'bincha" unless we have explained the connection between that story and the commandment to eat PESACH, MATZA & MAROR.

[It appears that Ramban Gamliel understands the word "zeh" (in Shmot 13:8) refers to the 'korban Pesach' - probably based on his understanding that the phrase "ha'avoda ha'zot" in 13:5 also relates to 'korban Pesach'. Hence, Raban Gamliel requires that we explain to our children (and whoever is gathered) why we are eating not only matza, but also pesach and maror.]

Rabban Gamliel's statement could also imply that our obligation of eating matza and maror is not complete unless we explain how they connect to the story that we just told. This would explain why it is added at the conclusion of the "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim" section, as we are about to fulfill our obligation to eat matza, and maror.

[In our times, this section may also be considered a 'fill in' for the KORBAN PESACH itself. During the time of the Bet ha-Mikdash, MAGGID was said while eating the korban pesach. Nowadays, since the korban cannot be offered, we mention pesach, matza, and maror instead of eating the korban. Thus, this section forms an excellent introduction to the Hallel, which in ancient times was recited as the Korban Pesach was offered, and later when it was eaten.]

This section forms the conclusion of "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim", and sets the stage for our reciting of Hallel - to praise God for our salvation. [See Rambam Hilchot chametz u'matza 7:5, where his concluding remark implies that "haggada" ends here.]

"BE-CHOL DOR VA-DOR"

Considering the integral connection between the events of the Exodus and "brit avot" (discussed above) the statement of: "be-chol dor va-dor chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo ke-ilu hu yatza mi-Mitzrayim..." takes on additional significance.

Before we say HALLEL, we conclude our story by stating that in every generation - each individual must feel as though HE himself was redeemed from Egypt. As the purpose of this entire historical process of redemption was to prepare Am Yisrael for their national destiny - it becomes imperative that every member of Am Yisrael feels as though they experienced that same 'training mission'.

One could suggest that this closing statement complements

the opening statement of MAGGID (in the avadim hayinu paragraph) that had God had not taken us out of Egypt we would still enslaved until this very day. Now that we have told the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, we are supposed to feel as though we ourselves were redeemed.

As stated in Devarim 6:20-25, the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim obligate Am Yisrael to keep not only the mitzvot of Pesach but ALL of the mitzvot of the Torah! [See Sefer Kuzari section 1.]

[Note how the phrase "ve-otanu hotzi mi-sham" that we recite in this section of MAGGID is quoted from Devarim 6:23!]

Note as well how Chazal most probably arrived at this conclusion based on Moshe Rabeinu's statement in Devarim 5:2-3 (at the very beginning of his main speech) that God's covenant at Har Sinai was made with the new generation, even though they themselves were not born yet!]

LEFICHACH / HALLEL

As an introduction to the first two chapters of HALLEL, we recite 'lefichach...'. Note how this section contrasts 'suffering' with 'redemption' (note the numerous examples). This too may reflect our theme that we thank God for the process, and not just for the event.

The two chapters of Hallel that we recite at this time are also quite meaningful. The reason for 'be-tzeit Yisrael mi-Mitzrayim' is rather obvious. But note the opening words of the first chapter:

"hallelu AVDEI Hashem, hallelu et SHEM Hashem..."

In other words, as we are now God's servants [avdei Hashem] - and no longer slaves to Pharaoh, it is incumbent upon us to praise our new master.

THE 'SECOND CUP'

We conclude Maggid with the blessing of "ge'ula" [redemption] on the 2nd cup of wine.

As we recite this blessing, note how most fittingly we express our hope that we will become worthy of God's redemption speedily in our own time

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Even though much of our above discussion may seem 'technical', our analysis alludes to a deeper concept, that the Seder is not only about 'gratitude' - i.e. thanking God for what happened; but more so - it's about 'destiny' - i.e. recognizing why it happened!

Let's explain.

Many of us are familiar with a concept called 'hakarot ha-tov' - recognition of gratitude. Simply translated, this means that people should express their gratitude for help (or assistance) provided by others. In relation to the Seder, by telling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim [the Exodus] and reciting afterward the Hallel [praise], we express our gratitude to God for our redemption from slavery in Egypt.

However, if "hakarot ha-tov" is the sole purpose of Maggid, then a very serious question arises when we pay attention to the details of the story that we have just told. Recall (from the paragraph "baruch shomer havtachato...") how we thank God in the Haggada for the fulfillment of His covenant with Avraham - that he would ultimately save Am Yisrael from their bondage. Yet in that very same covenant, God promised not only our redemption, but also our enslavement! [See Breishit 15:13-15.]

If there was a real teenager [or 'chutzpedik'] son at the table, he could ask a very good [but 'cynical'] question:

Why should we thank God for taking us out of Egypt, after all - it was He who put us there in the first place!

To answer this question, I'd like to introduce the concept of 'hakarot ha-ye'ud' [shoresh yod.ayin.daled] - the recognition of destiny [and/or purpose]; in contrast to "hakarot ha-tov".

As we explained above, our obligation to 'tell the story of the Exodus' stems not only from our need to remember **what** happened, but more so - from our need to remember **why** it happened. In other words, we are actually thanking God for both

putting us into slavery **and** for taking us out; or in essence - we thank God for our very relationship with Him, and its purpose - as we must recognize the goal of that process and the purpose of that relationship.

In our shiur, we have both discussed the biblical background that supported this approach, and shown how this understanding helped us appreciate both the content of structure of Maggid.

This point of "hakarat ha-ye'ud" is exactly that we emphasized in our introduction. As our 'ye'ud' - our destiny - is to become a nation that will serve Him, God found it necessary to send us down to Egypt in order that He could redeem us.

This could be the deeper meaning of Rashi's interpretation of the pasuk "ve-higgadeta le-bincha ... ba'avur zeh" - that we must explain to our children that God took us of Egypt **in order** that we keep His mitzvot. [See Rashi & Ibn Ezra 13:8.] Rashi understands that the primary purpose of "magid" is not simply to explain why we are eating matza, but rather to explain to our children why God took us out of Egypt - or in essence, why He has chosen us to become His nation and hence keep His mitzvot.

To complement this thought, we will show how this same theme may relate as well to the very purpose of God's first covenant with Avraham Avinu - "brit bein ha'tarim".

ETHICS & the EXODUS -

Recall that when God first chose Avraham Avinu in Parshat Lech Lecha (see Breishit 12:1-7), He informed him that he would become a great nation and that his offspring would inherit the land. However, only a short time later (in chapter 15), God qualifies that promise by informing Avraham Avinu (at brit bein ha'tarim) that there would be a need for his offspring to become enslaved by another nation **BEFORE** becoming (and possibly in order to become) God's special nation (see Breishit 15:1-18).

Even though some commentators understand this 'bondage' as a punishment for something that Avraham may have done wrong (see Maharal - Gevurot Hashem); nonetheless, the simple pshat of Breishit chapter 15 is that this covenant was part of God's original plan. This begs for an explanation concerning why this framework of 'slavery' was a necessary part of this process.

[We should note that according to Seforno (based on Yechezkel 20:1-10), even though God forecasted our slavery, it didn't have to be so severe. Its severity, he explains, was in punishment for Bnei Yisrael's poor behavior in Egypt. (See Seforno's intro to Sefer Shmot and his commentary on Shmot 1:13.)]

One could suggest that the answer lies in what we find in the mitzvot given to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, immediately after they leave Egypt.

Recall the numerous commandments that include the special 'reminder' of "v'zacharta ki eved hayita b'erezt Mitzraim" - to Remember that you were once a SLAVE [or STRANGER] in Egypt. Just about every time we find this phrase, it is not a 'stand alone' mitzvah, but rather as an additional comment following a law concerning the proper treatment of the 'less-fortunate' - i.e. it serves as an extra incentive to keep some of the most very basic ethical laws of the Torah.

To prove this, simply review the following list of sources in your Chumash, paying careful attention to when and how this phrase is presented, noting both its topic and context:

- Shmot 22:20 & 23:9 (note the type of mitzvot found in numerous laws recorded between these two psukim). Note especially "v'atem y'datem et nefesh ha'ger" in 23:9, that phrase highlights our above assertion.
- Vayikra 19:33-36 (concluding "Kdoshim tihiyu!")
- Vayikra 20:26! and 25:55! (note the context of Vayikra 25:35-55, noting especially 25:38.)
- Devarim 5:12-15 (shabbos is to allow our servants a chance to rest as well - v'zacharta ki eved hayita...")
- Devarim 16:11-12, in regard to "simchat yom tov"
- Devarim 24:17-18, noting context from 23:16 thru 24:18
- Devarim 24:19-22, continuing same point as above
- Note as well concluding psukim in Devarim 25:13-16

REMEMBER WHAT THEY DID TO YOU

In light of these sources (a 'must read' for those not familiar with these psukim), it becomes clear that part of God's master plan (in the need for our enslavement to Egypt before becoming a nation) was to 'sensitize' us, both as individuals and as a nation, to care for the needs of the oppressed and downtrodden.

God is angered when any nation takes advantage of its vulnerable population (see story of Sedom in Breishit chapters 18-19, noting especially 18:17-21!). In our shiurim on Sefer Breishit, we suggested that this may have been one of the underlying reasons for God's choice of a special nation, a nation that will 'make a Name for God', by setting an example in the eyes of these nations, of ideal manner of how a nation should treat its lower classes, and be sensitive to the needs of its strangers and downtrodden. [Note also Yeshayahu 42:5-6!]

Hence, after Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they must receive a special set of laws are Har Sinai that will facilitate their becoming that nation. As they are chosen to become God's model nation (see Devarim 4:5-8), these laws must set reflect a higher standard, to serve as a shining example for other nations to learn from. Note as well how the opening laws of Parshat Mishpatim (which immediately followed the Ten Commandments), begin with special laws for how to treat our own slaves, whether they be Jewish (see Shmot 21:1-11) on non Jewish (see 21:20 & 21:26-27). [Not to mention the laws that follow in 22:20 thru 23:9.]

With this background, one could suggest that the suffering of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, i.e. their being taken advantage of by a tyrant etc., would help teach Bnei Yisrael what 'not to do' when they form their own nation, after leaving Egypt.

As anyone who is familiar with the prophecies of Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu (and just about all of the Neviim Acharonim) knows, it was this lack of this sensitivity to the poor and needy that becomes the primary reason behind God's decision to exile Israel from their land, and destroy the Bet Ha'Mikdash.

A YEARLY 'RE-SENSITIZER'

Let's return to the very pasuk from which we learn our obligation to tell the story at MAGID - "v'higadta l'bincha... ba'avur zeh asa Hashem li b'tzeiti m'Mitzraim". If we follow the interpretation of Rashi & Ibn Ezra, then this pasuk is commanding us that we explain to our children that God took us out of Egypt in order that we can fulfill His commandments. Or in essence, God orchestrated all the events forecasted in "brit bein ha'tarim" to help us become that nation. Certainly, this approach fits nicely with our explanation thus far.

Finally, the very pasuk that Chazal chose that we must recite twice a day to 'remember' the Exodus on a daily basis (see Bamidbar 15:41) may allude as well to this very same point: "I am the God who took you out of Egypt **IN ORDER** to be your God...". In other words, God took us out of an Egypt **in order** that He become our God. Our deeper understanding of the purpose of the events (of the Exodus) can serve as a guide and a reminder to assure that we act in the manner that we assure that we will indeed become God's model nation.

In summary, when we thank God for taking us out of Egypt, we must also remember that one of the reasons for why He put us there - was to sensitize us towards the needs of the oppressed. Should we not internalize that message, the numerous "tochachot" of the Bible warn that God may find it necessary to 'teach us the hard way' once again (see Devarim 28:58-68 and Yirmiyahu 34:8-22).

In this manner, the message of the Seder is not only particular - in relation to the obligations of the Jewish people; but also universal - in relation to their purpose - the betterment of all mankind. Or in the words of Chazal - "ein l'cha ben choriin ele mi sh'osek b'Torah" - 'Who is considered free - one who can dedicate his life to keeping God's laws

Freedom - to dedicate one's life to the service of God, both as an individual and a member of God's special nation - to internalize and eternalize God's message to mankind - that's what the Seder is all about!

chag sameiach, menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. V'ACHSHAV KIRVANU HA'MAKOM L'AVADATO

This key statement of the MAGID section (as discussed in our shiur on MAGID), that God chose the Jewish people in order that they could serve Him (by acting as His model nation) - is proven not only from our quote of Yehoshua 24:1-3, but more so from the remainder of that chapter - a 'must read' for anyone not familiar with that chapter!

For those of you familiar with Sefer Yehoshua, here's an observation that you may appreciate. One could suggest that the gathering, as described in Yehoshua 24:1-27, may have taken place at an earlier time, even though it is recorded in the final chapter of the book. Based on the content of this speech (and challenge) by Yehoshua for the entire nation to serve God - it would have made more sense for this gathering to have taken place soon after the original wave of conquest, and not at the end of his life.

In my opinion, the most logical time for this gathering to have taken place would have been at the same time when Bnei Yisrael first gathered at Har Eival to re-convene their covenant with God, in fulfillment the God's command in Devarim 27:1-8! This covenantal gathering, similar to the original covenantal gathering at Har Sinai (compare w/Shmot 24:3-11) is described in detail in Yehoshua 8:30-35. Note that the city of Shechem - where the events in chapter 24 take place, is located at the foot of Har Eival (where the events in chapter 8:30-35 take place!)

Even though the events in chapter 24 should have been recorded after the events in 8:30-35, Sefer Yehoshua preferred to 'save' that speech for its concluding section, because of its thematic and everlasting significance.

If so, then Yehoshua chapter 23 would have been the last gathering of the people with Yehoshua prior to his death (as seems to be simple pshat of the opening psukim of that chapter), while the events described in chapter 24 were 'saved' for the conclusion of the book (even though they took place much earlier). [Note how the story of Yehoshua's death in 24:28-33 is not an integral part of the story in 24:1-27]

Hence, it may not be by chance that the Haggada quotes from this chapter to present its key point - that God chose us, and gave us the special Land, for the purpose that we would be able serve Him. Its thematic importance results in its special placement at the conclusion of Sefer Yehoshua, and similarly, at a key position in MAGID.

B. MAGID & SEFER DEVARIM

For those of you familiar with our Intro shiur to Sefer Devarim (i.e. in regard to the structure of the main speech), it will be easier to appreciate why the Haggada begins its answer to the "ma nishtana" with "avadim hayinu...". [Or basically, Shmuel's opinion for "matchilim b'gnut" in the tenth perek of Mesechet Psachim"/ see 116a.]

Recall how that speech began in chapter 5, where Moshe Rabeinu introduces the laws [the "chukim upmishpatim"] by explaining how they part of the covenant that God had made with Am Yisrael at Har Sinai; while the laws themselves began with the famous psukim of Shema Yisrael that begin in 6:4.

In that context, the question in 6:20 concerns the inevitable question of children relating to the very purpose for keeping all of these laws, while the phrase "avadim hayinu" (see 6:21) is only the first line of a four line answer to our children, that explains why God chose us, and why we are obligated to keep all of His laws (see 6:20-25).

Hence, it is not by chance that the Haggada uses specifically this pasuk to explain why we are obligated to 'tell the story of the Exodus' every year, as that very pasuk begins the Torah's explanation for why we are obligated to keep all of God's laws.

Note as well how the pasuk of "v'otanu hotzi m'sham **Imaan.** [for the purpose of]..." (see 6:22-23) is quoted at the end of

MAGID in the "bchol dor v'dor" section - and not by chance!

Recall as well how the final mitzvot of this lengthy speech are found in chapter 26, namely "mikra bikkurim" and "viddui maasrot".

In light of our study of Sefer Devarim and the sources in Sefer Shmot for Maggid (relating to how the experience in Egypt served to sensitize the nation - to act properly once they become sovereign in their own land), one can suggest an additional reason for why Chazal chose Mikra Bikurim - from Devarim chapter 26 - as the official 'formula' by which we tell the story. Note not only how the declaration in 26:5-9 constitutes a thanksgiving to God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha'b'tarim, but notice also the closing line in 26:11, where once again we are called upon to be sure that the stranger and Levite share in our happiness (for they have no Land of their own, and hence not able to bring their own first fruits).

It should also not surprise us that the next law, "viddui maasrot" at the end of every three years, emphasizes this very same theme. Simply read its opening statement in 26:12-13, focusing on the need of the farmer to give the necessary tithes to the poor and needy, the orphans, widows, and strangers. Only afterwards does he have the ethical 'right' to pray to God that He should continue to bless the land and its produce - see 26:15! This law forms a beautiful conclusion for many of the earlier laws in the main speech of Sefer Devarim, again a set of laws originally given to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (see Devarim 5:28).

One could even suggest that reciting these psukim as well may be what the statement in the Mishna in Pesachim refers to when instructing us to read from Arami oved Avi (from Devarim 26:5) until we finish the ENTIRE Parsha. If we read the entire Parsha, the should certainly should include 26:11, and may even allude to 26:12-15 ("viddui maaser"), (and in my humble opinion even to the concluding psukim of the entire speech in 26:16-19!). ["v'akmal"]

AVADIM HAYINU & SEFER DEVARIM

To appreciate why MAGGID quotes specifically this pasuk of 'avadim hayinu' to begin its discussion of our obligation to tell the story of the Exodus, we must study its source (and context) in Sefer Devarim.

Recall from our study of Sefer Devarim how Moshe Rabeinu delivers a lengthy speech (chapters 5 thru 26), in which he reviews the numerous laws that Bnei Yisrael must observe once they enter the land (see Devarim 5:1, 5:28, 6:1 etc.). As part of his introductory remarks concerning those mitzvot - Moshe states as follows:

"Should [or when] your child will ask - What [obligates us] to keep these laws and statutes and commandments that God our Lord has commanded? -

And you shall tell him - AVADIM HAYINU le-Pharaoh be-Mitzrayim... - We were once slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God brought us out with a mighty hand..."

(See Devarim 6:20-21, and its context.)

In other words, Sefer Devarim used the phrase 'avadim hayinu' to introduce its explanation for why Bnei Yisrael are obligated to keep ALL of the mitzvot.

But when we continue to read that explanation in Sefer Devarim, we find the reason **WHY** God took them out:

"ve-otanu hotzi mi-sham, lema'an havi otanu el ha-aretz..."

And God took us out **in order** to bring us to the Land that He swore unto our fathers [=brit avot].

And the LORD commanded us to do all these laws, to fear the LORD our God, for our good...

And it shall be the just thing to do, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He hath commanded us." [See Devarim 6:22-25.]

Here again, we find that the Torah states explicitly that God took us out of Egypt for a purpose - i.e. **in order** to inherit the

Land and to serve God by keeping His laws.

This statement supports Rashi & Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the pasuk 'ba'avur zeh...' (as we discussed earlier in this shiur), that we are to explain to our children that God took us out of (and put us into) Egypt, in order that we keep His mitzvot.

Therefore, it is very meaningful that the Haggada chose specifically this pasuk of 'avadim hayinu' to introduce its discussion of WHY we are obligated to tell the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim on this special evening.

In fact, one could suggest that this may have been the underlying reasoning behind Shmuel's opinion (in Pesachim 116a). By stating that we begin the story with the pasuk of 'avadim hayinu', Shmuel is simply stating that before we tell the story, we must explain the reason for this obligation - just as we do in MAGGID!

C. BCHOL DOR V'DOR & SEFER DEVARIM

Note as well how the pasuk of 'v'otanu hotzi m'sham Imaan. [for the purpose of]...' (see 6:22-23) is quoted at the end of MAGID in the "bchol dor v'dor" section - and not by chance!

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This law forms a beautiful conclusion for many of the earlier laws in the main speech of Sefer Devarim, again a set of laws originally given to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (see Devarim 5:28).

D. "HA LACHMA ANYA"

This opening paragraph of MAGID is difficult to understand not only due to the Aramaic, but also due to its context and content. Let's begin by explaining the problems.

After breaking the middle matza for YACHATZ - we begin MAGGID with the following statement:

"ha lachman anya..." - 'This [matza that we are now looking at] resembles the poor man's bread that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt.'

First of all, it would make more sense to understand this statement as the completion of YACHATZ (since it refers to the matza that we just broke), and not necessarily the beginning of MAGGID (for it doesn't tell the story). However, even if this section is not an integral part of Maggid, it will form a significant transition between 'yachatz & maggid' - as we shall soon explain.

Secondly, this opening statement leaves us with the impression that we are eating matza at the Seder to remember how Bnei Yisrael ate matza during their slavery. However, Sefer Shmot leaves us with the impression that we eat matza in order to remember the hurried nature in which Bnei Yisrael left Egypt (see Shmot 12:33-40 and subsequently 13:3 & 13:8). In other words, should we be explaining at this time that matza on our table is to remind us of our slavery, or to remind us of our redemption?

The simplest answer would be to explain that 'this is the matza that our forefathers ate in Egypt - **when they brought the very first korban Pesach**!'. In other words, we are not stating that this poor man's bread was the 'staple' of the daily diet of our forefathers in Egypt - rather, it is the special bread that God commanded us to eat

with the original Korban Pesach (see Shmot 12:8).

Furthermore, the reason for calling this bread "lechem oni" [lit. either bread of affliction or bread of poverty] is obviously based on Devarim 16:3 ["shivat yamim tochal alav matzot lechem oni - ki b'chipazon..."]. However, when studying the context of those psukim (see Devarim 16:1-4), the phrase "lechem oni" can be understood as a description of what matza is, and not necessarily as the reason for the commandment to eat it. [The question is whether 'lechem oni' defines for us WHAT matza is, or explains WHY we eat matza.]

This returns us to our discussion of the two reasons for matza (see TSC shiur on Parshat Bo) - where we explained that the reason for eating matza with the original Korban Pesach in Egypt had nothing to do with the fact that we later rushed out on the next day. Rather, there had to be some intrinsic reason for eating matza (and not chametz) with that korban; either to remind us of our slavery, or to symbolize our need to reject Egyptian culture to be worthy of redemption.

If we continue with our understanding that this is the 'matza' that our forefathers ate together with the first Korban Pesach, then the next statement of "kol dichfin" - which otherwise is very difficult to understand - begins to make sense. Let's explain why.

The next statement (right after explaining that this matza used to be eaten by our forefathers) - at first sounds like an invitation:

"Anyone who is hungry, let him come and eat, anyone who is in need, let him come and join in the Pesach, this year 'here', next year in the Land of Israel; this year - slaves, next year - free men"

It can be understood in one of two ways, either:

- an open invitation for others to join us. - or
- a quote of what our forefathers once said.

These two possibilities are a result of how one understands the word "v'yifsach" in the phrase "kol ditzrich yete v'yifsach" [anyone who needs, let him come and join our Pesach].

If we take the word "va'yifsach" literally, then this must be an invitation to join in the korban Pesach - and hence, it must be a quote from an earlier time period.

If "va'yifsach" is not translated literally, and hence it refers to the Seder, then this section was composed to be recited as an invitation (to the Seder). But this wouldn't make much sense at this time, since everyone is already sitting down, and considering that we've already made Kiddush and eaten "karpas" - isn't it a bit late to be inviting people!

Let's return therefore to the possibility that "va'yifsach" refers to the actual 'korban Pesach' (which seems to be the simple meaning of this word). If so, then we can easily pinpoint exactly who we are quoting - as it must be from a time when the korban Pesach was offered, but also when we were not yet living in Israel, and still in slavery! The answer is simple - this must be a quote of what our forefathers said to one another (translated into Aramaic) in preparation for the very first korban Pesach (i.e. the one in Egypt, as described in Shmot 12:1-23).

It can only refer to that very first korban Pesach, for that was the only time in Jewish history when the korban Pesach was offered when we were both (1) in slavery (hoping next year to be free) - and (2) living outside the Land of Israel (hoping next year in the Land of Israel)! If this interpretation is correct, then the flow of topic makes perfect sense. We break the matza, and explain that this was the same type of bread that our forefathers ate with the first korban Pesach in Egypt, and then we quote what they said to one another in preparation for that special evening - fulfilling what God instructed them in Parshat ha'Chodesh (see Shmot 12:3-8!).

This quote of our forefathers, from the very first Seder in Jewish History, is quite meaningful - for we begin MAGGID by emphasizing the connection between our own Seder and the very first Seder that Am Yisrael kept thousands of years ago (and its purpose). By quoting from the special atmosphere of that very first korban Pesach family gathering, we highlight the continuity of our tradition and our hope for the fulfillment of its goals.

[Note how this would conform to Shmot 12:14, in its context!]

"DA'YENU" - shiur for Pesach & for Yom Atzmaut

How could an observant Jew say, let alone sing, that -it

would have been enough'- even had God not given us the Torah?

And how could a Zionist say, let alone sing, that 'it would have been enough'- even if God had not given us the Land of Israel?

Nevertheless, every year at the Seder, we all sing the popular song of "dayenu", which seems to convey precisely that message!

In the following shiur, we attempt to answer this question.

INTRODUCTION

"Dayenu" is a very simple, yet beautiful poem - containing fifteen stanzas describing acts of God's kindness - each stanza stating that it would have been 'enough' had God only helped us in one way.

For example, we begin by saying it would have been enough had He only taken us out of Egypt, and not punished the Egyptians. The poem continues stage by stage through the process of redemption from Egypt (until we arrive in the Land of Israel and build the Temple), saying how each stage would have been 'enough', even had God not helped us with the next stage.

However, some of those statements appear very strange, for they include that it 'would have been enough had we not received the Torah', which simply doesn't make sense!

To understand what we are 'really saying' in "dayenu", we must consider its context, as well as its content.

A PREP FOR HALLEL

In the Haggadah, "dayenu" does not 'stand alone'. Rather, we recite (or sing) "dayenu" towards the conclusion of Maggid; after we tell the story of the Exodus, but before we sing the Hallel.

Following the guidelines of the Mishna (in the tenth chapter of Mesechet Pesachim), in Maggid - we tell the story of the Exodus by quoting (and then elaborating upon) the psukim of "arami oved avi" (see Devarim 26:5-8). But that very same Mishna also instructs us to begin the story with a derogatory comment, and conclude it with praise ["matchilin b'gnut - u'msaayim v'shevach"/ see Pesachim 10:4].

Taking this Mishna into consideration, we find that "dayenu" is recited in Maggid - precisely when we finish telling the story of the Exodus (with the discussion of the Plagues) - and right at the spot where we are supposed to begin our "shevach" [praise].

Therefore, "dayenu" should be understood as a poem that was written as a form of praise, to conform with the guidelines set by the Mishna. This consideration will allow us to explain its full meaning - in a very simple manner:

Within this context, the refrain of "dayenu" has an implicit suffix. In other words, - "dayenu" should not be translated simply as 'it would have been enough'; rather, "dayenu" means **'it would have been enough - to PRAISE God**, i.e. to say Hallel - even if God had only taken us out of Egypt, or only if He had split the Sea, etc.

In this manner, the poem poetically summarizes each significant stage of redemption, from the time of the Exodus until Am Yisrael's conquest of the Land - stating that each single act of God's kindness in that process obligates us to praise Him: e.g.

- Had He only taken us out of Egypt and not punished the Egyptians, **it would have been reason enough** to say Hallel
- Had He split the sea, but not given us the 'manna', that alone **would have been reason enough** to say Hallel...

... And so on.

With this background, the next paragraph of that poem makes perfect sense:

"al achat kama vekhama," - How much more so is it proper to thank God for performing ALL these acts of kindness, as He took us out of Egypt, and punished them, and split the sea, and gave us the manna etc.

"Dayenu" relates a total of fifteen acts of divine kindness, each act alone worthy of praise - even more so we must praise God, for He had performed all of them!

From this perspective, "dayenu" serves a double purpose. First and foremost, it concludes the story with "shevach" [praise].

and qualifies the Hallel that we are about to sing. However, it could also be understood as a continuation of the story of the Exodus. Let's explain why and how:

SIPPUR & SHEVACH

Recall that the last "drasha" [elaboration] on the psukim of "arami oved avi" led into a lengthy discussion of the Ten Plagues. To fulfill our obligation at the Seder 'to tell the story', we could (and do) finish right here. But the poem of "dayenu" actually continues that story, picking up from the Ten Plagues ["asa bahem shfatim" refers to the Plagues], and continuing through all the significant events in the desert until our arrival in the Land of Israel. This is also congruent with the last pasuk of "arami oved avi", that includes arriving in Israel (see Devarim 26:9! - "va'yvi'einu el ha'Makom ha'zeh, va'yiten lanu et ha'aretz ha'zot"), which we don't elaborate upon in our version of Maggid, even though according to the Mishna it appears that we really should!

In this manner, "dayenu" is both "shevach" [praise] and "sippur" [story] - at the same time!

The 'HASHKAFa' of DAYENU

According to our explanation thus far, "dayenu" sets the stage for Hallel, as we will now praise God [by singing Hallel] not only in gratitude for taking us out of Egypt, but also in appreciation for each significant stage of the redemptive process. We thank God not only for the Exodus, but also for the 'manna', for shabbat, for coming close to Har Sinai, for the Torah, for the Land of Israel..., and finally for the building of the Bet HaMikdash.

From a certain perspective, this poem may allude to a very profound 'hashkafa' [outlook on life], and a message that is very applicable to our own generation.

Today, there are those who focus at the Seder only on the first stanza of "dayenu," viewing 'freedom from slavery' as the final goal, and hence the ultimate goal of redemption. For them, this first stanza of "dayenu" is 'enough' - and to them, that is the entire meaning of Passover - a holiday of Freedom.

Others focus only upon the last stanza, that without the entire land of Israel in our possession, and without the re-building of the bet-ha'Mikdash, the entire redemptive process is meaningless. In their eyes, Hallel should only be sung when the entire redemption process is complete, and Am Yisrael reaches its final goal.

The beautiful poem of "dayenu" seems to disagree with both approaches. Instead, each significant stage in the process of redemption deserves our recognition and for requires that we praise God for it, even though it is 'not enough'!

It is this hashkafic message, i.e., the understanding and appreciation of each step of the redemptive process, which "dayenu" can teach us. "Ge'ulat Yisra'el" - the redemption of Israel - even in our time, is a process which is comprised of many stages. Every significant step in this process, be it simply sovereignty, or partial borders, or victory in battle; or freedom to study Torah, even without complete redemption, requires our gratitude and praise to Hashem.

For each stage in that process, it is incumbent upon Am Yisrael to recognize that stage and thank Hashem accordingly, while at the same time recognizing that many more stages remain yet unfulfilled - and reminding ourselves of how we need act -to be deserving of that next stage.

"Dayenu" challenges us to find the proper balance.

chag samayach,
menachem

[P.S. - Save this shiur! You can 're-use' it for Yom Atzmaut.

Pesach – The Wisdom To Appreciate

The four sons, their questions and the scripted responses take a place of prominence in the Haggadah. Before we even begin discussing the details of the story, we are instructed that the Seder night is for each and every Jew. We are guided on how to best respond to each Jew according to their individual needs and how best to connect them with the message of the evening.

There are many nuances to their questions and the responses, and many lessons to be learned. One point of much discussion is the inference in the question of the wicked son. He asks “What is this service to you?” The author of the Haggadah tells us that since he has worded his question in the second person, he has excluded himself from the service of the Seder. He is clearly stating that the service is “for you” and not for him. If we consider the question of the wise son he appears to be guilty of the same error. He asks “What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?” He too states clearly that the commandments were directed to you. Why don’t we say that he too is excluding himself from the Seder?

The Kli Yakar, in his commentary on the Chumash (Shemos 13:14), offers an answer to this question, which I believe defines for us the essence of the message of the Pesach Seder, and what we can take away from the evening. The Kli Yakar notes that the Torah introduces the wise son’s question differently from the wicked son’s. The Torah introduces the wise son’s question by saying “And it will be when your son will ask you tomorrow” (Devarim 6:20). This phrase is absent when discussing the wicked son.

The Kli Yakar explains that herein lies the difference between the two questioners. The wicked son is not wrong in recognizing that his parents understand the meaning of the Seder in a way that he does not. He is correct in asking his parents what meaning they find in the service. However, his timing shows that his intent is evil. He is sitting there at the Seder, while everyone is preparing to engage in the mitzvos of the evening, and he stops. Right then and there he turns to his parents and says, why is this important to you? His wording as he is sitting at the Seder clearly states that despite knowing how important this evening is to his family and to Hashem, it is of no importance to him. He cannot accept to do something because it is important to someone else. The action must be inherently important to him, or he wants no part of it. He cannot act for the sake of the relationship – neither with G-d nor with his parents. For this selfish, short-sighted attitude we tell him that he is on the wrong track in life. So much so, that had he been in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed.

The wise son, however, asks his question tomorrow. At the Seder, he was ready to engage in the experience of the evening because he knows that it is important to Hashem. However, once he has experienced it and still does not understand it, he wisely seeks to understand. With humility and faith, he comes to his parents and asks to understand why this is important to G-d. He wants to better understand his relationship with G-d and how to connect with G-d.

I heard said in the name of the Dubno Maggid that we see this distinction from the phrasing of their questions, as well. The wicked son asks “What is this service to you?” The wise son, however, asks “What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?” The wise son understands what the service is to his parents. It is the service that G- has commanded. His question is a deeper one – he seeks to understand what meaning it has that G-d should command it.

I believe this message is the core of the Pesach Seder. We gather every year, reviewing the story of our slavery and redemption, to understand that we have a relationship with G-d. This is the initial answer we give to the four questions. We respond saying that we were slaves in Egypt, and had G-d not redeemed us, then we

today would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, we are gathering here tonight and doing things differently from other nights. No matter how well we know the story, we need to stop and review every year, to recognize that we ourselves were destined to be slaves, and we ourselves were redeemed with the Exodus.

After the four sons, as we resume the story of our history going back now to the very beginning with Avrohom, we state this message clearly with “והיא שעמדה” - “And this is that which stood”. We have been persecuted and challenged in every generation. Yet, this message of the Pesach Seder is what has stood by us and given us strength throughout each and every generation. The purpose of redemption from Egypt was not only that we should leave Egyptian bondage. G-d was displaying his commitment to our physical and spiritual salvation. He ensured that we survived and thrived, becoming a vast and mighty people even while enslaved in Egypt, and then freed us, carried us, raised us and taught us to become His nation. G-d did this for us then, and He does it for us in every generation. “In every generation they stand upon us to annihilate us, and the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves us from their hands.”

The message is clear. G-d loves us and cares about us. Even before we accepted the Torah, G-d is showing His love, care and concern for us, and committing Himself to a relationship with us. The message of the Seder is to recognize and appreciate that love and commitment. A love and commitment which is not only for our ancestors, but is for us, as well. The importance of our mitzvos is far beyond what they accomplish. The importance of our mitzvos is, as the wise son understands, that they fulfill G-d's purpose in His world. How and why they are important to G-d are details. The accomplishment for me is not what my actions achieve, but that I displayed my love and respect for G-d, as He has done for us.

This idea is further illustrated in the verses we expound upon detailing the story of the Exodus. The verses are from the service of the Bikkurim – the first fruits of the harvest which a farmer brings to the Temple. When the farmer arrives and presents his produce, he is instructed to recite these verses. Each year, after harvesting his crop, he brings the first to the Temple and declares aloud how his ancestors were slaves, G-d redeemed them and now he instead finds himself a landowner working his own field. He concludes his declaration saying “And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land that You have given me, G-d.” These verses we are reading at the Seder are verses intended to describe an individual's understanding of G-d's involvement in their personal life and that any and all successes are direct gifts from G-d. An understanding stemming from the recognition that we would be slaves, if not for the fact that G-d wants us to be here.

We express this again with “Dayeinu”. We begin with the Exodus and culminate with the Temple, recognizing that each step was a gift which was already enough for us to recognize G-d's love for us and kindness to us. We then reiterate and repeat how much more we need to recognize G-d's kindness and love now that G-d has indeed done all of these for us.

After explaining the messages of the mitzvos of the evening we then conclude the Maggid section of the Haggadah by stating this principle explicitly. The Seder is not a commemoration of national history. Rather, in each and every generation, no matter how far removed that generation may be from the original event, every Jew is obligated to see themselves as if they left Egypt. Each and every one of us must recognize and appreciate that G-d saved our ancestors from Egyptian slavery in order that we should be free from Egypt today. This is the essence of the Seder -to recognize G-d's relationship with us today.

As the Kli Yakar says of the wise son, our entire understanding of and commitment to Torah and mitzvos is built upon this foundation. We are Jews, committed to G-d and His Torah, because G-d loves us and we love Him and care about what's important to Him - simply because we know it is important to Him. May we all merit to learn the message of the Seder, and thereby merit to bring joy and *nachas* to our Father in Heaven.