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The Nine Aspects Of The Haggada HaRav Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Reprinted with permission from The Yeshiva University Haggada, 1984. The Haggada is based upon and revolves around the section in the Torah known as the "Arami Oved Avi" portion, which appears at the beginning of Sidrat Ki Tavo (Devarim 26). This is the passage that each Jew recited upon bringing the first fruits, the Bikkurim, to the Temple in Jerusalem. It is clear from the Talmud in Pesachim 116a, and the Rambam's codification in Hilkhos Hametz u'Matza 7:1, 7:4, that the recitation of this passage is essential to the fulfillment of the mitzva of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Why in fact do our sages choose this passage as the focal point of the Haggada? We must conclude that each Jew, in addition to offering the first fruits, was commanded to fulfill the mitzva of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Thus there are two times during the year that the Jew must relate the Story of the Exodus from Egypt; at the Havaat Bikkurim and on the night of the Seder. The Torah presented us with the text for the Havaat Bikkurim. However, with regards to the Seder night all that we find in the Torah is the general commandment: "You shall tell your son on that day, saying, this is done (the Pesach observance) because of what the Eternal did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Shemot 13:8). A specific text is not mandated. ChaZa"L, however, concluded that the "Arami Oved Avi" text which fulfilled the requirement of Sippur at the bringing of the Bikkurim, would also be appropriate at the Seder.

The use of a common text indicates that the seemingly distinct rituals, in fact, have a common theme or purpose. That purpose is to give thanks and express gratitude to the Almighty. Both

recitations are acts of Hakkarat haTov to the Eternal. The essence of the Seder, and hence that of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim, is the expression of gratitude to the Almighty on the great liberation and miracles that he wrought for us in Egypt. As the Rambam states in Sefer haMitzvot: "We are commanded to tell the story at the beginning of the fifteenth of Nissan... and we are to thank Him for all the goodness He has bestowed upon us" (Mitzva 157). On the Seder night at the climax of Maggid we say: "Therefore we are obligated to thank and praise... exalt and revere Him who performed all those miracles and for us."

Similarly, the act of Havaat Bikkurim is an expression of thanksgiving and gratitude to the Almighty for granting the farmer and the people this holy land and its abundance after a history of wandering and suffering. The Jew recognizes that this land has come to him and his nation through a chain of miraculous and divinely ordained episodes throughout history. Therefore, the Arami Oved Avi passage contains a short synopsis of early history, with an emphasis on the enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus and the entry into the Land of Israel. The Jew, when bringing the Bikkurim states (Devarim 26:3): "I say today before the Lord, your God...". However, the Targum of Yonatan Ben Uziel translates: "I will give gratitude and praise this day to the Lord...". The passage was understood by ChaZa"L as a statement of thanksgiving and gratitude to the Almighty. (In fact, from this comment of the Targum it is possible to suggest that the word Haggada does not only imply the idea of "telling," but also the notion of thanksgiving and gratitude.)

1) Let us now analyze some of the various aspects of the Haggada. It will help us to begin with a comparison of the Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim that the Jew engages in at the Havaat haBikkurim and that of the Seder night. The common feature and first aspect of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim on both these occasions is the Sippur. We read and tell a story. This recitation must consist of the biblical text of the Arami Oved Avi passage. In a word, we engage in Mikra. In this respect the Havaat Bikkurim and the Seder night are identical.

2) At this stage, however, the two rituals part company. In the act of Havaat Bikkurim, the Torah only required that a text be recited. There is no requirement that it be translated or elaborated upon. In contrast, on the Seder night there are additional demands. The Mitzva of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim at the Seder is basically an act of Talmud Torah. Talmud Torah involves within it elaboration and exegesis. The Mishna in Pesachim (10:4) mandates: "And he explains and elaborates from Arami Oved Avi until he concludes the whole portion." The Mishna speaks of "Limud," which involves translation, asking of questions and conceptualization. In fact, the core of Maggid is a systematic exegesis and discussion of every word of the Arami Oved Avi passage. We engage in a Torah sheBaal Peh analysis, of a Torah sheBikhtav text.

This analysis utilizes all the elements that comprise Torah sheBaal Peh. For our purposes these elements may be subdivided into three different areas. The first is Midrash. This refers to the exegesis of biblical verses in accordance with the hermeneutical rules set down by our sages (e.g. the Thirteen Middot of Rabbi Yishmael, the Thirty-two Middot of Rabbi Eliezer).

The second category is Mishna. This refers to the set laws and statements cited in the Mishnayot and Memrot.

Finally, we have Gemara, which refers to halakhic analysis and conceptualization. Rashi in various places in the Talmud translates Gemara as — the Sevarot — the logical basis for the laws of the Mishna. However, the most full and eloquent definition is given by Rambam in Hilkhos Talmud Torah (1:11): "And one is obligated to

apportion his time of study, so that he spends one third of his time studying Torah sheBikhtav, another third, Torah sheBaal Peh, and one third in understanding and trying to see the development from one step to another from beginning to end, and he should compare cases and derive one idea from another; these elements are called Gemara." In the Haggada we find that all three areas of the oral law are used and applied. Firstly, we have Midrash. As was quoted above, the Arami Oved Avi passage is interpreted and explained through the different devices of Midrash. Secondly, the Haggada includes a number of passages of Mishna, of set halakhot and statements. Examples include the passage taken from the Mishna in Pesachim (10:5) "Rabban Gamliel used to say, anyone who has not said these three things at Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, etc.," and the response to the wise son "And you shall even tell him, (all the halakhot including) "We do not eat any food after the eating of the Afikoman," which is a law found in the Mishna in Pesachim (10:8). Finally, the Haggada contains elements of "Gemara," of logical deductions and inferences. An example of this is the passage "Therefore, it is our duty to thank, praise..." which is a logical conclusion based upon the reading of the immediately preceding Halakhot (i.e. Pesach, Matza and Marror). Thus the Haggada not only involves Mikra, but also Limud. In fact the word Haggada and its root "Haged" imply not only telling, but also an act of study and Talmud Torah, as we find prior to Matan Torah when the Almighty commands Moshe, "Thus shall you say to the House of Yaakov and tell (vetaggid) to the Children of Israel" (Shemot 19:3).

3) It is not enough, however, for the Jew to be a student the night of the Seder; he must also become a teacher. This reflects the third aspect of the Haggada—Masora. The Jew must teach his children and others about the glorious event that occurred in Egypt long ago. The Haggada, before the passage about the four sons, included the portion "Blessed be the Omnipotent. Blessed be He who hath given the Torah to his people Israel. Blessed be He, etc." What, in fact, is this passage? In a word, it is a short version of Birkat haTorah—the blessing made on the Torah. If we carefully examine the Torah blessings, in general, we see that they, too, stress the aspect of Masora, the passing on of tradition. We state "And the house of Israel. And we and our children and our children's children should all be privileged to know your name, and be students of your Torah for its own sake." Moreover, at the close of the blessing we say, "Blessed by the Lord, who teaches Torah to His people, Israel." It is as if the Almighty himself becomes part of that Masora community. After this blessing, appears the passage about the four sons, which concretizes the notion of teaching one's children each at his respective level.

4) The fourth aspect is the "question and answer" style dialogue that is found in parts of the Haggada. Why is it so crucial that the child ask questions; why do we prompt him? Simply put, Judaism insists that God reveals himself to the man who seeks after and thirsts for God. The verse in Devarim (4:29) reads: "But if you search there for the Lord your God, you will find him if only you will seek him with all your heart and soul." We want to initiate the child into the Masora community that seeks out the Almighty and yearns for his presence and illumination. We want the child to become a "Mevakesh Hashem"— "a seeker of God." 5) The fifth aspect of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim is the central role that the meal and food play at the Seder. The drama of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim begins with Kiddush and closes with Nishmat and Yishtabach after the meal. In fact, this is the reason that the Shulkhan Arukh, O.C. 472:1, is so careful in specifying that the Kiddush on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan should be recited after astronomical nightfall. (On other festivals, one may usher in the festival and

recite Kiddush earlier when it is still daytime.) Kiddush is part of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim, and therefore, must take place on the night of the fifteenth proper. Kiddush the night of Pesach plays two roles. One is the normal role of Kiddush as the introduction of the festive meal as on every festival. Secondly, it is part of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Kiddush contains within it the statement "who has chosen us from all nations," which is identical to the third language of Geulat Mitzrayim found in Sidrat Va'era (6:7) "Velakachti": — "and shall take you unto me for a nation."

Moreover, there is another more basic reason for Kiddush playing a role in Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim contains within it two elements. One is the recitation of certain passages. Second, is the element of performing certain actions, eating of certain foods, etc. When one eats Matza, Marror, and Korban Pesach on the Seder night one fulfills these specific mitzvot. However, in addition, through the eating of these foods one is able to teach and convey the messages of Geulat Mitzrayim. They function as audio-visual aids in our educational scheme, namely, the Seder. This is what Rabban Gamliel was trying to convey. (in the Mishna "Whoever has not said these three things has not fulfilled his obligation" 10:5, etc.) He wanted the Jew, before he partakes of the foods, to explain their significance and message, to all who are at this table. Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim is a careful blend, then, of narrative, teaching and actions to get across a unified message.

Kiddush also opens the Seuda every Shabbat and festival. Kiddush puts the meal in a context of holiness, uplifting it from a mundane effort to satisfy biological needs to the realm of the sacred. The idea of "a meal before God" is a fundamental one in Judaism.

It is along these lines that our sages (Berakhot 55a) spoke of "an individual's table is an atonement for his sins" and "a dining table is similar to an altar."

6) As was previously stated, the Mikra Bikkurim involves praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty. However, this is an awareness that comes about indirectly. The farmer recites the Arami Oved Avi passage which in itself, when understood, expresses gratitude. It is almost a notion of "Kriyata zu Hilula (Megillah 14a)." The praise is implicit in the narration.

In contrast, on the night of the Seder we are enjoined not only to praise and give gratitude, but rather to break forth into spontaneous song — "Let us, therefore, sing a new song in his presence, Halleluya." The Jew's heart is overflowing with feelings of joy and thanksgiving. It is the night of the great romance between the Almighty and Knesset Yisrael—"I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me." It is these feelings that are expressed in the custom of reading the book of Shir haShirim the night of the Seder.

Philosophically, one can ask, who is lowly man that he should have the audacity to praise God? Is not man "dust and ashes"? How then does he have the right to praise the infinite being, the Almighty? The Halakha responds true, philosophically, there may be problems, however the Jew cannot contain himself. The Jew, on the night of the Seder, is overflowing with thanksgiving and song to God, and he cannot repress this authentic need to express his gratitude to the Holy one, Blessed be He.

7) As the Jew approaches the Story of the Exodus, there may be a tendency to look at the event as remote and distant from the here and now. Therefore, the Haggada contains within it three passages that help us deal with this problem. First of all, before the recitation of the Arami Oved Avi passage, we say: "And if God had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would still be enslaved in Egypt." We make a

declaration of relevance. Why, in fact, are we discussing these events of history; what is their relevance to our present situation? And to this we respond that were it not for the redemption in Egypt, there would be no Jewish People today.

Secondly, before Hallel we recite that "in every generation a person should look upon himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt. Not our ancestors alone did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but us also He redeemed with them." The events of Yetziat Mitzrayim are not only relevant to us, rather, we are actually re-experiencing history on the night of the Seder. It is a current as well as a historical event. This recognition enables us to recite Hallel and break forth into spontaneous song, because it is we who left Egypt as well. Finally, we recite the "Vehi sheAmda" passage: "For not only one tyrant has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation tyrants have sought to destroy us and the Holy One, Blessed be He, delivered us from their hands." Not only do we relive the experience of Egypt, but also we realize that danger and annihilation threaten the Jewish people in every generation and locale. We move from the historical events to a better understanding of our current situation. The custom is that at this point in the Seder, one lifts up his cup of wine. Why is this done? The cup is the symbol of Jewish destiny and eternity - Netzach Yisrael, as the verse (Tehillim 116:13) "A cup of salvation I shall uplift, and call on the Almighty's name" indicates. At the Seder we speak of the relevance of historical events, the reliving of those events and the cycle of danger and redemption that is characteristic of Jewish history. 8) The Mishna in Pesachim (10:5) dictates "and he explains the Arami Oved Avi passage until he completes it." However, in our Haggada we do not complete the passage in its totality. We do not recite and discuss the last verse and a half, which read: "He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing (with) milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruits of the land which Thou hast given to me, O Lord..." (Devarim 26:9- 10). The farmer bringing the Bikkurim would include these verses and then set down the fruits "before the Lord your God." It is understandable why the Haggada did not include the last verse that discusses the actual bringing of fruits, as that is out of place on the Seder night. However, why was the verse discussing the entry into the Land of Israel not included in our version of Haggada? A number of approaches exist to resolve this problem. First of all, if we included this reference to the Land of Israel, we would convey the impression that there are five languages or references of Geula and not four (as we maintain). We would include "veheveti" as one of the references of Geula, and ChaZa"L felt that this would not be appropriate on the Seder night. Why is this the case? Firstly, the four references of Geula that were stated by the Almighty to Moshe in Sidrat Vaera, were new ideas that had not been expressed to the Patriarchs. However, "veheveti", "and I shall bring you into the land..." was already promised to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov in their respective Brit Avot. They were already promised that their descendants would inherit the Land of Israel. Secondly, although the Jewish people did enter into the Land of Israel subsequent to the Exodus from Egypt this was not the primary goal of Yetziat Mitzrayim. It was their destination but not their destiny. The direct goal of Yetziat Mitzrayim was the revelation at Sinai. The goal was the transformation of a subjugated people into "a nation of priests and a holy nation." It was not just to grant them political and economic freedom, but also to create a sacred people. Moshe, at the episode of the burning bush, asked the Almighty: "Who (am) I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the Children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Shemot 3:11). And the Almighty gives an answer that seems at first to be

a bit difficult: "Certainly I will be with you and this shall be unto you the sign that I have sent you: When thou has brought forth the people out of Egypt they shall serve God upon this mountain." What was the Almighty saying to Moshe; how did this answer his query? The Almighty was stating,— know, Moshe, that the purpose of Geulat Mitzrayim is not political and social freedom. For that task, I would not have picked you. I did not pick you to be a diplomat or a king or political leader. Rather, the purpose of the Exodus is to create a holy nation, to make them a Torah nation. For this purpose, God says, I need a Rebbe, a teacher and mentor who will lead and guide this people. And for this role, you are the best candidate. Pesach is the holiday of Yetziat Mitzrayim and leads into Shavuot and Matan Torah. These two festivals do not focus on the Land of Israel as a central theme. According to Rambam in Moreh Nevukhim (3:43), it is Succot, rather, that is the holiday which celebrates the Land of Israel.

Thirdly, it is possible to suggest that during the time the Temple still stood, the text of the Haggada did include the last verses relating to the entry into the Land of Israel. Upon the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile, ChaZa"L amended the text in order to conform to the new reality in which Am Yisrael found itself. 9) Finally, on the night of the Seder, the Jew mentions all the wonderful things that the Almighty has done and is doing for him and his people. This, in fact, is the thrust of Birkat haMazon and, therefore, it also functions as part of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim (in addition to its role as Grace after the meal.) After discussing God's special relationship with the Jewish People we move to the Hallel haGadol, which contains a recognition of God's benevolence to the whole world. We recognize and express gratitude for this, as we state, "Who giveth food unto all flesh, for His kindness endures forever." This leads us to the climax of the Seder, "Nishmat", when we speak of the future, the Acharit haYamim, when all living beings shall give praise to the Almighty — Nishmat kol chai tevarekh..." These portions add a glorious eschatological dimension to the Shevach and Hoda'a sections that are so essential to the Haggada.

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Acharei Mot - Kedoshim 5770
On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16: 30).
On the holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement, the holiest of people, the High Priest, entered the holiest of places, the Holy of Holies, and made atonement for all Israel. It was a moment on which the fate of Israel depended. For their destiny depended on G-d; and

G-d in turn sought their obedience. Yet a sinless nation is inconceivable. That would be a nation of angels, not women and men. So a people needs rituals of collective repentance and remorse, times at which it asks G-d for forgiveness. That is what the Day of Atonement was when the Temple stood.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to understand the crisis represented by the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70CE. It was, to be sure, a military and political disaster. That, we have no difficulty in imagining. But it was also a spiritual catastrophe. Judaism and the Jewish people survived. We would not be here otherwise. But that survival was by no means assured at the time. How does a nation defined in terms of a religion centred on the Temple and its sacrifices live on after the loss of its most basic institutions? That is the question of questions.

The destruction of the First Temple was no less tragic. But in those days, Israel had prophets – men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel – who gave the people hope. There were no such prophets in the first century CE. To the contrary, from the time of the Maccabees onwards, prophecy gave way to apocalypse: visions of the end of days far removed from the normal course of history. The prophets, despite the grandeur of their visions, were for the most part political realists. The apocalyptic visionaries were not. They envisaged a metaphysical transformation. The cosmos would be convulsed by violent confrontation. There would be a massive final battle between the forces of good and evil. As one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran put it: “the heavenly host will give forth in great voice, the foundations of the world will be shaken, and a war of the mighty ones of the heavens will spread throughout the world”.

People foresaw disaster. Josephus tells us about one of them. Four years before the war against Rome, “at a time of exceptional peace and prosperity”, a certain Jeshua son of Ananias, “a very ordinary yokel”, began to cry “Woe to Jerusalem” wherever he went. People beat him; the authorities had him sentenced to corporal punishment; yet he continued his lament undaunted: “All the time till the war broke out he never approached another citizen or was seen in conversation, but daily as if he had learned a prayer by heart he recited his lament: ‘Woe to Jerusalem’ . . . For seven years and five months he went on ceaselessly, his voice as strong as ever and his vigour unabated”, until he was killed by a rock flung by a Roman engine during the siege.

What does a nation do in the wake of “sacrificial crisis”, the loss of its rituals of atonement? We are in a position to trace this precisely, because of the exceptionally candid confession of one who chose another way, Paul of Tarsus, the first and greatest theologian of Christianity.

Paul tells us that he was obsessed by guilt. He said of himself that he was “sold as a slave to sin”. The good he sought to do, he failed to do. The sin he sought to avoid, he committed. The very fact that he was commanded to do something, provoked in him the opposite reaction, an overwhelming desire to do it. So powerful was this antinomian streak within him that it led him to conceive of a religion without commands at all – quite unlike the sermon on the mount, in which the founder of Christianity said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called

least in the kingdom of heaven . . .”

Paul famously attributed the sinful nature of humanity to the first sin of the first human being, Adam. This sin was lifted by the death of the Messiah. Heaven itself had sacrificed the son of G-d to atone for the sin of man. G-d became the High Priest, and His son the sacrifice.

Paul lived and taught shortly before the destruction of the Second Temple, but his teaching – like that of the members of the Qumran sect and Josephus’ visionary Jeshua – fully anticipates that catastrophe and constitutes a pre-emptive response to it. What would happen when there were no more physical sacrifices to atone for the guilt of the nation? In their place, for Paul, would come the metaphysical sacrifice of the son-of-G-d. In Paul, sacrifice is transcendentalized, turned from an event in time and space to one beyond time and space, operative always.

Judaism could not take this route, for many reasons. First, because the message of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is that G-d does not allow us (let alone Him) to sacrifice sons. Second, because not one, but all, members of the people of the covenant are sons or daughters of G-d: “My child, My firstborn, Israel” (Exodus 4: 22). Third, because despite the many messianic movements to which it has given rise, the Jewish answer to the question, “Has the Messiah come?” is always, “Not Yet”. While there is still violence and injustice in the world, we cannot accept the consolation of believing that we live in a post-messianic age.

Only against this background can we appreciate the astonishing leap implicit in the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva:

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel. Who is it before whom you are purified and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven. As it is said: And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. And it further says: You hope of Israel, the Lord. Just as a fountain purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, purify Israel.

According to Rabbi Akiva specifically, and rabbinic thought generally, in the absence of a Temple, a High Priest and sacrifices, all we need to do is repent, to do teshuvah, to acknowledge our sins, to commit ourselves not to repeat them in the future, and to ask G-d to forgive us. Nothing else is required: not a Temple, not a priest, and not a sacrifice. G-d Himself purifies us. There is no need for an intermediary. What Christianity transcendentalized, Judaism democratized. As the Yiddish dramatist S. Ansky put it: Where there is true turning to G-d, every person becomes a priest, every prayer a sacrifice, every day a Day of Atonement and every place a Holy of Holies.

This really was the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. At stake were two quite different ways of understanding the human person, the nature of sin, the concept of guilt and its atonement, and the mediated or unmediated relationship between us and G-d. Judaism could not accept the concept of “original sin” since Jeremiah and Ezekiel had taught, six centuries before the birth of Christianity, that sin is not transferred across the generations. Nor did it need a metaphysical substitute for sacrifice, believing as it did in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 51: 17): “The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O G-d, you will not despise”. We are all sons or daughters of G-d, who is close to all who call Him in truth. That is how one of the greatest tragedies to hit the Jewish people led to an unprecedented closeness between G-d and us, unmediated by a High Priest, unaccompanied by any sacrifice,

achieved by nothing more or less than turning to G-d with all our heart, asking for forgiveness and trusting in His love.

Excerpt from Yom Ha'atzmaut Address 5765 – Kinloss, London May 2005

Why is Israel blamed for almost every problem affecting the 21st century? Why is Israel held up as the explanation for the underachievement, inequality, and lack of human rights in other countries? This afternoon I attended the service of remembrance for the victims of the Tsunami. with its devastating loss of life throughout the Indian Ocean. The Tsunami. A tidal wave. I thought, here was a disaster for which Israel could not be blamed. I was wrong. Within days a religious teacher, in another part of the world, let it be known that the Tsunami was caused by Israel's programme of nuclear testing. When it comes to hate, the capacity for self-delusion knows no bounds.

Why, when the whole history of the 20th century tells us what happens when hate is unchecked, when lies are told in the media as truth - as they were in the case of Jenin -when universities discriminate against this or that one, we know what happens at the end of that path that begins that way. Why do these things still happen?

Do we still - after 60 years of Holocaust education, 60 years of anti-racist legislation, 60 years of inter-faith activity - have to defend the right of the Jewish people to be?

All too often, in defence of Israel against defamation, we, the Jewish people have had to stand alone. No people should be left to face hate alone. As Martin Luther King said, "In the end we will remember, not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends."

Ki sarita im elokim ve'im anashim vetuchal

You shall be called Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with men.

Consider the five overriding problems that will face all humanity in the 21st century:

First, the environment: Israel was the first country in the modern world to plant trees, not cut them down, to reforest not deforest. Long before ecology had entered the moral imagination, the Jewish people were turning a land that for centuries lay desolate into a fertile landscape of farms and forests and fields.

Problem Two: Asylum seekers: Israel is the only country other than the United States built out of asylum seekers. They came from 103 different countries, speaking 82 different languages, and out of that global mixture of refugees a great nation was born.

Terror: Israel's security fence, so often described as a wall, is the only effective non-violent protection against terror yet devised in this age of global terror.

Fourth, economic divisions: according to Harvard University's Professor of Economic History, David Landes, only one country in the world has moved in 50 years from being a third world economy to a first world economy: and that is Israel.

And fifthly and lastly, democratic freedom: Not only is Israel the only genuine democracy in the Middle East, but it has sustained its

democratic freedoms under strains and stresses that would have broken the back of weaker cultures.

If there were justice in the world, Israel, a tiny country of indomitable courage, would be seen as the role model among the nations, not the pariah among the nations.

Ki sarita im elokim ve'im anashim vetuchal - The struggle continues and is part of what it means to be a Jew.

Yet today, this evening is a religious moment, and of all the words in the religious vocabulary of Am Yisrael and Torat Yisrael the key one is the word emunah. Emunah it is normally translated as faith, but it does not mean faith. What it means is faithfulness, loyalty, not walking away when times are tough. It means being steadfast in our loyalty to our people and our land, the home of all our hopes, the place where long ago the Jewish people was born on, and where, within living memory, it has been reborn.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Seeing Clearly

I

The story of Pesach is inextricably linked to the heroic life of Moshe Rabbeinu. Ultimately, the Torah teaches, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face" (Devarim 34:10). As such, we cannot strive to be as great as Moshe. Nonetheless, every Jew can be as righteous as Moshe (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 7:2). What does this mean?

"Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and gave it to Yehoshua" (Avos 1:1). Only Moshe received all of Torah; all others were given it but something was lost in transmission. Only Moshe saw clearly; all others saw reflections or dreams (Bamidbar 12:6,8). Moshe was the humblest person (3). Since he had absolutely no personal agenda, he saw clearly.

Moshe's humility was greater than Avraham's (Chulin 89a). Hashem called "Moshe Moshe" (Shemos 3:4) without the line that usually exists between the two repetitions of a name, such as exists in (Braishis Shemos Rabba 2:6). The separating line represents the gap between the person's potential, represented by the first name, and the actual person, represented by the second name. Only Moshe, who was exceedingly humble, reached his full potential (Rav Chaim of Volozhin, Avos 1:1). No prophet will ever be like Moshe, but for everyone has there is the possibility of being righteous like Moshe, reaching his/her full potential through great humility. 22:11) "Avraham Avraham" (

Moshe's name is omitted from the Hagada. Klal Yisroel feels bad, and poignantly searches for their hero to thank and credit him (see Shira Hashirim Rabba 3:2). But Moshe, in his humility, prefers anonymity.

II

"Hashem saw that Moshe went to see, and He called out to him from the bush and said 'Moshe Moshe'" (Shemos 3:4). Moshe left his palatial setting and went out to his brothers to see their burdens (2:11). He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over their suffering (Rashi). "Hashem said, 'You left your affairs and went to see the pain of Yisroel and help them. I will, in kind, leave the angels and speak with you'" (Shemos Rabba 1:27). Moshe saw Hashem

because he went to see the pains of his brothers. His love and active concern for them resulted from his humility, which led him to ignore his comfort and focus on the problems of Klal Yisroel. Rashi explains "Hashem saw Bnai Yisroel" (2:35) to mean He focused on them and did not hide His eyes. Moshe's focus on the burdens of Am Yisroel was a reflection of Hashem's focus.

"At the image of (vitmunas) Hashem does he (Moshe) gaze" (Bamidbar 12:8). The Netziv understands this phrase to equate Moshe's manner of looking with that of Hashem, i.e. Moshe's look of empathy and clarity resembled Hashem's. Moshe saw Torah clearly because of his humility and lack of any personal agenda, and similarly saw all of the world, and its people, clearly for the same reason.

III

"One with a good eye will be blessed, for he has given of his best to the poor" (Mishlei 22:9). This refers to Moshe. Hashem gave the pilpul (in-depth analysis) of Torah to Moshe, but he had a good eye and shared it with all of Klal Yisroel (Nedarim 38a).

The same good eye that sees the Torah clearly and sees the best in people gladly shares the most precious commodity, Torah, with others. Moshe, the great prophet, was happy to share the great gift of prophecy as well. "Would that the entire people of Israel be prophets" (Bamidbar 11:29). By sharing pilpul with, and wishing prophecy upon, Klal Yisroel, Moshe's uniqueness may be diminished but his humility, and the love of Am Yisroel that it engendered, motivated his ultimate spiritual altruism.

As an advocate for Am Yisroel, Moshe demanded that Hashem exercise the same "good eye" when dealing with His wayward people. Even if a slave doesn't obey his master, a magnanimous master gazes upon him with a pleasant face. So too, You should not look at their stubbornness, as it says (Devarim 9:27), "do not turn to the stubbornness of these people" (Bamidbar Rabba 16:28).

Only one who possesses a good eye should be given a *kos shel bracha* (read "yevorach" as "yevarech", Sotah 38b). One who sees the good side of others can bless for them and can bless them, as Moshe did. On the Seder night, the *ba'al habayis*, who has demonstrated his good eye by inviting the poor, leads the *zimun* (Orach Chaim 479:1).

IV

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him (Shemos 13:19). Chassidic masters interpret that Moshe took the essence (*atzmius*) of Yosef with him (Iturei Torah). Yosef had an *ayin tov* (good eye) to the extent that the *ayin hara* (evil eye) had no power over his descendants (Rashi Breishis 49:22). He fed the entire world (42:6) and had mercy on the very brothers who mistreated him (Rashi 42:8). When Yosef brought evil reports to his father about his brothers, his sole intention was *l'shem shomayim*, for Hashem's sake, so that Yaakov could help his brothers improve.

Yosef's brothers viewed him as a threat to Am Yisroel, akin to their uncles Esav and Yishmael, and sold him *l'shem shomayim*. And yet, despite their ostensibly pure motivation, this sale is the paradigmatic interpersonal sin (Meshech Chochma Vayikra 16:30). How did their *l'shem shomayim* intentions lead to a grave sin? The brothers were jealous of Yosef (37:11) and their jealousy did not allow them to see clearly. Without jealousy they would have seen that Yosef was a *tzaddik* (Rashi Shemos 1:5) and would have either forgiven his evil reports to their father, or brought their complaints to their father for his resolution. Yosef did not anticipate his brothers' jealousy because he lacked it completely. He forgave and assisted those who harmed him. It is this *ayin tov* essence that Moshe took with him.

On Pesach we must learn from the generosity of spirit of the great leaders who saved us, both in Egypt and when leaving Egypt. This includes avoiding jealousy that clouds our wisdom and leads to

serious interpersonal failings, fostering a sense of humility which allows us to reach our potential, and seeing and feeling the pain of our brothers, especially in Eretz Yisroel, and endeavoring to assist them.

We should try to emulate Moshe and see Am Yisroel, even its wayward members, as Hashem does, in a positive light, even as we entreat Him to focus on our tribulations and not our sins (Selichos, Day2). Hopefully, if Klal Yisroel learns and internalizes these lessons, Hashem will quickly fulfill, "in Nissan they will be redeemed" (Rosh Hashana 11b).

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A Passover Sermon Nissan 5762

By Rabbi Dr. Zalman Kossowsky

Zurich, Switzerland

I am sitting and writing this draft exactly 9 days before Pesach, but I have been mulling over these ideas for a while. Obviously the situation around us, especially in Israel, is fraught with danger. No one seems to have a good solution that will truly solve the problems that face us. The hatred seems implacable and the threat of destructions seems very real. Yet the refrain that keeps running through my mind comes from the *Haggadah*:

V'hi she'amda la'avoteynu v'lanu . . . ela sheb'chol dor vador omdim aleinu l'chaloteynu -- v'Hakadosh Baruch Hu matzi'leynu mi'yadam

This promise made to our fathers holds true also for us . . . In every generation oppressors have attempted to destroy us. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, rescues us from their hands.

And these are not just words in an ancient printed text. They are also facts in our personal lives. In recent times I have often wondered what thoughts passed through my late Father's *k"z* mind on that day in September 1939 when he had to jump on a bicycle and flee the *Shtetl of Zelva*, where he was Rabbi, because the Communists were planning to take him that night into the forest and kill him. Or did my mother *k"z* ever dream as she as she, her husband and daughter miraculously left Kaunas (Kovno) 13 months later, that she would need more than two sets of fingers and toes in order to count her descendents (not that she would ever do such a thing as 'count' her great-grandchildren). And yes, there was a horrible price that was paid, on both the national as well as the individual level. But 63 and one half years later, *v"C* I am still here, talking to you, while Hitler and his Final Solution lie in the dust. Yes, they are selling huge quantities of the Arabic version of '*Mein Kampf*' but they too will pass into the dust, and our great-grandchildren will still be coming together to celebrate *Pesach*. Hopefully in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, but if not, then in Synagogues wherever they may be.

Notwithstanding the above, we are all deeply troubled. What shall we do? What can we do? A significant segment of the believing Jewish world came together on *erev Rosh Chodesh*, two weeks ago, in a day of fasting and prayer. We pounded on the Gates of Heaven. While I am convinced that the Almighty heard our prayers, as of now the dangers and threats are all still there. And so I turned to the *Chumash*, because I have been taught, and I truly believe that it is so

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ma'asei avot -- siman la'banim literally translated -- *the acts of the Fathers are signposts for the children*. Or put into modern terminology -- there are macrocosmic and microcosmic cycles in life, and the acts of our ancestors form pathways down which we can travel. And in this sense I went back to the story of that first Exodus because there is a phrase that keeps haunting me.

Ma titz'ak e'lai? G-d says: *Why do you cry out to me? Dabeyr el B'nai Yisrael v'yisa'u* speak to the children of Israel and let them move!

I cannot escape the conviction that there is a key here. There is a *siman* -- a signpost for us the children of Israel of today. So I try to understand the context and search the *mefarshim* the commentators because how can it be wrong to call out in our pain and fear to our Father in Heaven? I read the whole chapter, I recommend it to you, it is Chapter 14 in *Sefer Shemot* the Book of Exodus at the beginning of *Parshat Beshalach*.

Moshe has triumphantly led the People out of the Land of Egypt and they have marched three days into the desert. G'd appears to Moshe and tells him to stop and turn back towards Egypt so that the Egyptians will become convinced that the Israelites are confused and terrified of the desert and will chase after them. 'Why?' 'Because there is still a reckoning outstanding that needs to be settled!' The Israelites listen and turn back and camp along the seashore where the Egyptian horde overtakes them. The *Bnai Yisrael* look up and see the overpowering armored might of Egypt thundering down at them - *va'yir'u me'od* -- and they become very frightened and they cry out to Hashem and they say to Moshe -- 'why did you take us out of Egypt? . . . are there not enough graves in Egypt that you have brought us out here to die?' And Moshe tries to calm them and tells them not to lose heart, but to stand up and be ready to see the salvation that Hashem will bring.

That, briefly, is the context till the end of Verse 14.

I believe that it is not difficult to see the pattern of our moment in history as a reflection of that first event. The pogroms of Europe culminating in the horror of Hitler's attempted Final Solution being followed immediately by the miracle of the renaissance of the establishment of the State of Israel, the *reishit tzmichat ge'ulatenu* - the dawn of the Deliverance are also reflections of the horrors of Egypt followed by the miracle of the Exodus. But then too, the path to Promised Land is tortuous. There are all sorts of reckonings that are still open and need to be settled and in this process there are many moments of terror and indecision to be experienced by the *Bnai Yisrael*. So it is also for our People today. We may be physically within the borders of the Promised Land, but neither our neighbors nor even the nations of the world are ready to accept that we have the right to be there. (In this context there is a wondrous *Midrash* that tells of the 4 different schools of thought that developed amongst the Israelites regarding the optimal response to the Egyptian threat -- but that would make this sermon even longer than it is).

Then comes Verse 15 which I quoted earlier - *Ma titz'ak e'lai?*

Most of the commentators grapple with this verse. However, in my moment of need now, I resonate especially to the comments of the *Or Ha'Chayim* by R. Chaim ibn Atar (1696 -- 1743) who was the leader the Moroccan Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael* at the beginning of the 18th century.

'Why not call to G'd in a time of trouble? To whom else shall we call? And why shall we stop calling before we are saved? And where shall we travel to if the sea had not yet split?'

Therefore he suggests the following reading of Hashem's statement::

Ma titz'ak e'lai? Moshe, do not call out to me. I wish to help you and the Bnai Yisrael. But they need to make the opening for the blessing to come to them. They need to strengthen the forces of chesed and rachamim. THEY NEED TO BEGIN TO MOVE !!!

'How much?' we ask. 'To where?' we ask.

'*me'at me'at*' says the Ibn Ezra, 'small steps, but move in the right direction -- towards the sea.'

'But what is the right direction for us, today?' I ask myself. 'What is our *yam suf* -- our Sea of Reeds today?'

And then the answer came back, echoing from the last verse of the prophetic vision of the Isaiah who foresaw this moment and whose message we read on the Shabbat before *Tisha b'Av*.

Zion b'mishpat ti'pa'deh -- v'sha'veha bi'tzedaka

Zion -- the State -- shall be redeemed through Justice, and those who return to her -- with *Tzedaka*!

We tend to think of *Tzedaka* as charity, as money. Let us not forget that the first time the term appears in the Torah it is in another context entirely.

In Chap. 15 of *Sefer Bereishit* -- of Genesis -- Hashem appears to Avraham in a vision and tells him: 'Fear not, Avram, for I am with you. I am your shield. Great will be your reward.' To which Avram responds: 'L'rd what can you give me. I have no children!'

To which Hashem reacts by taking him outside and showing him the stars and promising that 'his descendants, too, would be as numerous.' (Verse 6):

v'he'e'min ba'shem -- vayach'she'veha lo tzedaka
And he believed in Hashem -- who considered this to him a 'tzedaka'.

Therefore, my friends, for us who wish to return to Zion today, our target to which Hashem is saying today - *Dabeyr el B'nai B'israel v'yisa'u* begins with believing firmly in the Promise and its fulfillment **EVEN IN THE ABSENCE** of evidence as to how it shall occur!

But that is **ONLY THE BEGINNING**. There is still the *chesed* and the *rachamim* that is commonly associated with the term. It has to do with how we relate to our fellow man. How we share in his or her needs and *tzorres*. How we respond. We are not being called upon, I believe, to perform major acts -- '*me'at me'at*' says the Ibn Ezra, 'small steps' to which I would add -- '**but each and every day!!!!**'

We know that the second Temple was destroyed because of *sin'at chinam* - senseless hatred. The antidote, therefore, is acts of 'senseless kindness'. Be kind to the next person -- not because of something that you want from them or have the need to give to them, but simply because they are there. Because they too, like you, are created *b'tzelem elokim* -- in the image of G'd.

There is one final element in this movement towards our personal *yam suf* our Sea or Reeds -- that may be hard for some of us today, after 353 murdered and 3,244 even more brutally and cold-bloodedly wounded and mutilated brothers and sisters in Israel, and that is to accept and understand that at the Seder, when we recount the Ten Plagues that Hashem visited upon Egypt, even the most 'right wing' among us will take off a drop of wine from the Cup of Blessing for each Plague. Nor will any of us dare to say the '*Halel Ha'Shalem*' the 'Full Hallel' during the second half of Pesach.

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From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

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PESACH THOUGHTS :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Pesach has three divisions of time to it. There is the beginning of Pesach that is highlighted by the story of our exodus from Egypt - the Pesach Seder. In its unique fashion it outlines for us the path of the Jewish people throughout the ages. The Seder symbolizes the tenacity of Jewish faith – faith in our God and in our future, in our history and in our ancestors.

The Seder in effect reinforces within us the core Jewish belief that our grandfathers were not liars and that the tradition of the ages from Egypt and Sinai is true, valid, relevant and vital in all places and times. The timelessness of the words and rituals of the Seder further strengthen our inner beliefs. It provides us with optimism and hope for our future in spite of all of the dangers and problems that currently confront us.

We have the innate belief that the young ones who sit today at our Seder table will, in their good time, conduct their own Seder table and thereby guarantee the survival and continuity of the Jewish people. Merely bringing Jewish children into this world at birth is already a declaration of faith in our future and confidence in the eternity of the Jewish people.

And, the living memory of an event that occurred to our people 3323 years ago strengthens that confidence and deepens our determination to continue and succeed no matter the difficulties that constantly face us. This above all else is the gift that the Seder table and Pesach night grants us.

The intermediate days of Pesach – chol hamoed – represent the ability of Jews and of the Torah to treat the mundane activities of life and the world with holiness and a special reverence. I remember that one of my daughters once worked as an actuary in the offices of a large American insurance company. The company graciously allowed her to be absent on the Jewish holidays. However she was never able to satisfactorily explain to them why on chol hamoed she was able to appear at the office and accomplish the work that was necessary to be done that day.

The world understands that there can be holy days and that there are days that are not holy. It finds it difficult to comprehend how a day can be holy and somehow less than completely holy at one and the

same time. Pesach teaches us that we are to sanctify the mundane and the unholy regular activities of everyday life.

The trips, tours, meals and outings that we embark on during the days of chol hamoed are different in kind and spirit than those that we enjoy during the other days of the year. The fact that we are still eating matzo on those occasions only reinforces for us this uniqueness of the time of chol hamoed. It reminds us of the reason for our exodus from Egypt and the purpose of our state of freedom – to be a special people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

The final day of Pesach commemorates for us our miraculous deliverance from the army of the Pharaoh at Yam Suf. The times that the Jewish people have been seemingly on the brink of annihilation over our long history are too numerous to be counted accurately. We have suffered partial annihilation, grievous losses but never total defeat and destruction.

From Pharaoh through Amalek, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Latin Christians, Moslems, Germans, Soviets, Arabs, some present day NGO's and others many have tried to destroy the Jewish people. We are resented for our particularism and when we assimilate we are resented even more. And yet every time that it appears that history's curtain is ready to fall on us something unforeseen occurs and Jewish resilience drives us to survival and renewal.

The drama of Jewish survival at Yam Suf repeats itself in different forms over and over again in the history of civilization. Though many have wondered about this strange and exceptional phenomenon, no logical or completely rational answer to this matter has ever been advanced. The Lord has split many seas for us over the past three millennia of our existence.

Pesach reminds us of this inexplicable historical truism. Somehow merely knowing this fact of history is alone sufficient to enable us to continue to build and achieve no matter what our enemies say and do. The verse "Plot your plots, they will be foiled; speak your words of promise but they will not be fulfilled; for the Lord is with us." Pesach reminds us of all this.

Shabat shalom.

Pesach kasher v'sameach

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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Subject Torah Weekly

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For the week ending 16 April 2011 / 11 Nisan 5771

Parshat Acharei Mot

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Dedicated Followers of Fashion

"And he (Aaron) will place the incense on the fire in front of G-d". (16:13)

A famous writer once quipped, "Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months."

The width of trouser bottoms and their distance from the wearer's navel fluctuates on a yearly basis, and the shape of the human foot seems to metamorphose inexorably. Fashion, however, doesn't just begin and end with clothes.

"And he (Aaron) will place the incense on the fire in front of G-d".

In the first part of the service of Yom Kippur in the Beit Hamikdash, the kohen gadol would burn incense in the Holy of Holies. The Tzadukim (Sadducees), who denied the authority of the Oral Torah, claimed that the incense first should be placed on the fire in a fire-pan outside the Holy of Holies and only then the kohen gadol should carry it inside. The Talmud (Yoma 53) cites the above Torah verse as

a proof to the contrary — that the incense should only be placed on the fire “in front of G-d”.

In every generation, the Jewish People has its ‘Tzadukim’ — those dedicated followers of fashion who want to copy what they have seen ‘outside’ — to introduce ‘improvements’, ‘adjustments’ and ‘modernizations’ into our holy faith.

The Torah Sages of each generation fight a constant and bitter battle against these ‘improvements’. Which is not to say that the Torah is stuck in a bygone age. On the contrary, the Torah speaks to each generation on every aspect of life, sometimes involving itself in the finest minutiae of science to express the Halachic view of all that pertains to the modern world.

That view, however, is always extrapolated from the inward essence of the Torah outward, not grafted on from the outside. The Torah addresses the modern world not in terms of compromise or appeasement, not through pandering to the ideology of the hour; rather it views the world through intrinsic principles enshrined in immutable criteria.

Sources: Based on Hadrash V’Ha’Iyun

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network

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To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>

Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Achrei Mos

After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem and they died. (16:1)

The dichotomy between Aharon HaKohen's reaction to the deaths of his sons and the collective grief of the Jewish People is glaring. Earlier, in Parashas Shemini (10:6), when the actual tragedy is recorded, the Torah writes, "And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited."

Concerning Aharon, however (10:3), it is stated, "And Aharon was silent." If tears are the correct and appropriate expression of grief, where were Aharon's tears? If weeping for these great tzaddikim, righteous persons, is a realistic expectation, as we see concerning the nation's expression of grief, why was Aharon silent?

Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, explains this pragmatically, distinguishing between personal and national tragedy. For Aharon, this was a personal blow. He had just lost two diamonds, two sons whose stars of spirituality and holiness shone brilliantly. Yet, they died in a most horrible manner, on a most auspicious day. The blow was overwhelming, the tragedy unspeakable, but it was personal. The time for weeping would come later, in seclusion, with no one around. It was a personal loss; it would be a personal grief.

Concerning the Jewish nation, the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu was a lesson in spirituality. A great void was left in the spiritual dimension of the nation with the deaths of these two great men. The natural arousal and inspiration that the people manifested in response to this experience were spiritual in nature. It was not a mourning for these two men as people, as friends, but as towering Torah leaders whose passing under such circumstances had to evoke feelings of introspection. Such circumstances impart a compelling lesson and catalyze atonement for the nation. The people must delve into "who" it was that perished and "when," "where," and "how" it occurred, so that the underlying message of this tragedy would have its greatest impact on the living.

To Aharon, however, it was personal. He lost two very special sons under clearly tragic circumstances. It had been destined to be his and

their greatest moment. His grief was unlike that sustained by the nation. He was their father. They were his precious sons. Aharon could not permit his personal grief to becloud his mission as Kohen Gadol. He would deal with his personal feelings later, in solitude. Now was the nation's time. He must remain "silent," continuing his service as commanded by Hashem.

Shortly after the conflagration that destroyed most of European Jewry during World War II, the Belzer Rebbe, zl, one of the few surviving Admorim, reached Eretz Yisrael. His first Shabbos was spent in the port city of Haifa. Accompanying him were a few survivors, themselves broken shards of humanity, whose tenacious clinging to their faith preserved their sanity. Spiritually whole, yet physically challenged, they were joined by other survivors who had arrived somewhat earlier. Their common bond was the holy tzaddik, the Belzer Rebbe, whose survival from Europe was miraculous. The emotions ran high that first Shabbos in freedom. Their lives had been shattered by the Holocaust. What words of comfort could the Rebbe give them? The Rebbe began his homily by quoting the pasuk in 13:18, relating the Jewish nation's liberation from Egypt: Va'chamushim alu Bnei Yisrael mei'erezt Mitzrayim. "Bnei Yisrael were armed when they went up from Egypt." According to the Midrash, the word chamushim is derived from chamesh, five/fifth. This implies that only one fifth of the original Jewish population in Egypt had left. The rest had not been prepared to leave Egypt. It was their home - for better or worse. To adopt a new life in the wilderness, under the aegis of G-d's nation, was too much for them to handle. They perished during the plague of darkness, so that the Egyptians would not see that Jews, as well as Egyptians, were dying. There is a dispute if the actual number of liberated Jews was one-fifth, one-fifteenth, or even one-five hundredth. In any event, the six hundred thousand Jews who left Egypt represented a small percent of the total number of Jews who had been there. Bearing this in mind, the group of Jews who stood at the Red Sea must have been emotionally drained and heartbroken. With so many Jews left in Egypt, no home was immune from grief. How could these remnants of a once large multitude of people stand at the banks of the Red Sea and sing Shirah? From where did they gather the strength to sing praise amidst grief and devastation?

This was the Rebbe's question. How did Klal Yisrael do it? His reply was powerful, its message profound: "Klal Yisrael was not adversely influenced by the tragedy. A Jew understands that when Hashem strikes, one bends his head down and - with humility and faith - continues to trudge on. He trusts in the Almighty. The survivors move on and sing Shirah as if nothing had ever happened. That is the Jew."

Yetzias Mitzrayim taught us the meaning of Jewish resolution and fortitude. The Jew's inherent ability to continue, despite overcoming the most difficult challenges, is ingrained within our DNA. It is part of our eternal heritage and will serve in the future as our enduring legacy.

The Jewish People were instructed to weep and mourn over the deaths of Aharon's sons, because this incident had impacted the entire nation. Aharon, however, remained silent, continuing his service as Kohen Gadol to Hashem and the People.

When Hashem instructed Klal Yisrael to weep over the conflagration, He was being very specific. They were to focus on the suffering of Aharon and his sons. They had undergone a terrible tragedy. Rashi explains that it was important that the Jewish People be acutely aware of Aharon's pain in order to empathize with him. This is a powerful statement. Weeping during a sad, heartrending occasion is not uncommon. Many people become emotional during a funeral, especially if the person has passed away under tragic circumstances, but do we ever wonder why we cry? Are we crying for the close

friends and relatives who have been left bereft of a parent, sibling, child, friend, or are we crying for ourselves? Do we envision this tragedy occurring in our lives and our ensuing reaction? If we think about it, the expressions of emotion are usually for oneself. The Torah is telling us to weep for Aharon and his sons - exclusively. Understand their loss, feel their pain; acknowledge that it was Hashem who sent this fire and think about why He did it. What lesson can you derive from this tragedy? In other words: stay focused; know why you are weeping and for what purpose. Tears are a powerful emotional expression. They represent true emotion and, when sincere, can be very effective. This is exhibited by the following story. One day, a group of students of the famous Chevron Yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael were sitting on the porch enjoying their lunch break. A young fellow walked up to them and asked to see the Mashgiach, Horav Meir Chodosh, zl. The young man looked "different." He clearly was not dressed yeshivish. He wore a cap and slightly torn shirt and shorts. Something about this young man bespoke sincerity. He was directed to the Mashgiach's apartment. After several minutes, the young man emerged with the Mashgiach, who introduced him as a new student in the Yeshivah. He was given a seat in the bais medrash, to which he promptly proceeded with great excitement. With his Gemorah in his hand, albeit upside down, he seemed to have acquired new life.

The students were sort of taken aback by the new student, but, as we all know, everyone has a story. This young man had an extremely sad story. When the students heard his story, their opinion of him changed radically. He had emerged from the European inferno all alone, having lost his entire family to Hitler's hordes. Family was not all that he had lost. He also had lost his youth. At a time when young boys were studying Talmud in cheder, this young fellow was undergoing the trauma of survival. He ran from one place to another, only to be caught and incarcerated until, finally the war was over, and he realized that he had been spared. He was one of the lucky ones. Whatever patchy education he had received prior to the war, however, was only a memory. He had arrived in Eretz Yisrael in search of a life, but - even more - an education. He was starved for Torah. He hungered to learn.

He wanted the best yeshivah. He wanted to start at the "top" and work his way up. It was easier said than done. Here he was in Chevron, and he could barely read a line of the Gemorah. To make things even more challenging, he was in a room with some of the most accomplished young scholars in the country. The dichotomy between where he was situated on the ladder of Torah knowledge and the level of the other students, was beyond comparison. Yet, the other students were very kind, bending over to be sympathetic, to lend an ear, explain, teach, help. They wished him well, but, deep down, they knew that he had so far to go.

Davening was different. It was his moment with Hashem, when he could pour out his heart - and pour out he did. He would stand at his seat and cry. His davening was an entreaty of pain - pain in not understanding the Gemorah, not being able to read properly. He would stand there with the tears rolling down his cheeks, right onto his siddur. When he finished davening, his siddur was drenched with tears. When a person prays in such a manner to acquire Torah knowledge; if he is in pain because he does not understand, then Hashem intervenes, and the supplicant receives His blessing.

The young man started late, but his goals were clear. He knew where he was going, how far it was to the top, and how to reach it. He succeeded. Horav Shaul Barzam, zl, scaled the mountain and reached its summit. In fact, he caught the eye of the Steipler Rav, zl, whose daughter he married. All this was catalyzed by his tears.

And place them (the "sins") upon the head of the he-goat, and send it with a designated man to the desert. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land. (16:21,22)

The idea of a he-goat carrying away all of the sins of the Jewish People does seem a bit fantastic. The commentators, each in his own manner, offer rationales to explain this anomaly. The Zohar views this as a lesson that we must recognize, so that we are able to repulse the evil forces that surround us. We cannot ignore them, because they are there to encourage our downfall. Various energies work to repel these forces. Yaakov Avinu sent a gift to Eisav. Esther Hamalkah used guile, as she invited the evil Haman to her table. Satan is constantly on the lookout to ensure our collapse. We must contend with him, as well.

The Kli Yakar cites Chazal, who break the word avonosam, their sins, into two words: avonos tam, referring to the sins of he who was called a tam, wholesome person, Yaakov Avinu. He explains that, in reality, whoever is a machati es ha'rabim causes the multitude to sin, chet ha'rabim talui bo, the sins of the multitude are blamed on him. Therefore, Satan, is constantly on guard, looking, searching, conniving, doing everything within his power to bring us to sin, to expel us from our spiritual perch. By placing the sins on the he-goat, we are making a silent declaration. Klal Yisrael's sins are the result of Eisav's machinations. He caused us to sin. Satan and Eisav's archangel are one and the same. Thus, let the seir, he-goat, which represents seir, Eisav, take away the sins of Yaakov, the tam, wholesome person.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, explains this further. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, when we are divested of all materialism, when we begin to acknowledge the futility of this world and the everlasting nature of Olam Habba, the World to Come, we start inspecting our lives and activities of the past year - and it does not look very promising. We wonder how we could have descended to such infamy. How could we have been so foolish as to sin against the Almighty?

It is at that moment that we realize that it had not purely been our own doing. We had "help." The root of our iniquity lies in Eisav's influence, in the way he presents this world to us, leading us to believe that the greatest pleasures are all available to us in this world. So, why not indulge? We, regrettably, fall for the ruse and abdicate our beliefs.

On Yom Kippur, it all becomes clear. We are not really the ones who have rebelled against Hashem; rather, we have been misled by Eisav. This is why we send away our sins on the he-goat, who represents Seir / Eisav, to the desolate wilderness. There, amidst the desolation, we imply that all of this world is nothing but empty devastation. This world is nothing. Eisav, who leads us to believe that this world represents Paradise, has returned with the message: we now understand the truth. We erred as a result of being misled. Will You, Hashem, please forgive us?

The Mashgiach explains why the one who leads the seir l'azazel is referred to as ish itee, the designated man. The Chezkuni cites Chazal, who explain that this person is someone whom Bais Din has determined will die during the course of the coming year. It is quoted in the name of Horav Y. Weintraub, zl, of Pinsk that, psychologically, the individual who is aware that his death is imminent despairs from this world and thinks only of Olam Habba. Such an individual is especially suited to represent Klal Yisrael on Yom Kippur and to serve as their advocate. He is the perfect representative to push the he-goat off the cliff, to atone for Klal Yisrael.

Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

Jewish life is sacrosanct. Its value is reiterated numerous times in the Torah and all ensuing Jewish literature. Chazal teach us that nothing

- absolutely nothing - stands in the way of saving a Jewish life. Hashem gives us a gift which we are to cherish, respect and use to the utmost. Three cardinal sins supersede this rule. If an individual's life is threatened unless he either murders, serves an idol, or commits adultery, he must accept death, rather than transgress any of these sins. In contrast, one is to desecrate the Shabbos if another's life is in danger, even if he might be able to save him, even if it will only push off the inevitable for a short while; life takes precedence. While we are all aware of this reality, the following poignant episode underscores the idea, hopefully teaching us all the value of every moment of life that Hashem grants us.

One of the distinguished families in Eretz Yisrael, whose teenage son was stricken with a terminal illness, turned to Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita, for solace. Apparently, the end was very near, and the family was coming to terms with what was naturally inevitable. They had one request of Rav Tauber: Their son had shut everyone out of what was left of his life. He lay there with his eyes open, staring at the ceiling, in deep despair. He knew and understood what was occurring. The doctors were concealing nothing from him. He had given up hope and lay there waiting to die. All that his parents wanted was a simple conversation, to talk to him, to say goodbye. He was their child, and they loved him. Why should his last moments be spent alone? The parents wanted to reach out to him with the hope that he would reciprocate and reach out to them. They were certain that the multi-talented Rav Tauber would succeed in infusing their son with "life," albeit it temporarily. Rav Tauber thought about the request; at first he replied in the negative. What could he do? What could he say that would dramatically alter the boy's spirits? How could he make him responsive to his mother, who wanted nothing more than to have her son talk to her? He could not ignore the mother's tears, and he agreed to go to talk to the youth. Perhaps he would be successful.

Arriving at the hospital room, Rav Tauber was not prepared for what he saw. As much as he had attempted to envision the boy, he was ill-prepared for the image which confronted him. The boy was a mass of skin and bones, his face contorted in agony, his eyes staring out into space. Next to his bed sat his mother, whose tear-stained face told the entire story. Amidst her weeping, she would whisper to her son, "Please talk to me. Please say something" There was no response - just staring.

Rav Tauber turned to the boy and quietly said, "Shalom Aleichem." No response - only continued staring. Again, Rav Tauber said, "Shalom Aleichem." Same response, nothing. This continued two more times until, finally, Rav Tauber said, "I came quite a distance to see you. It was not easy. The least you could do is answer me." Suddenly, he saw a glimmer of movement from the boy's eyes. It was not much of a response, but it was certainly much more than he had been receiving earlier. "Let me ask you a question," Rav Tauber began. "You are a yeshiva student, and I am sure that you have studied halachah. Perhaps you can clarify some halachos for me." If a gentile approaches a Jew and demands that he hand over all of his money, unless he transgresses a prohibition of the Torah, what should he do?"

Slowly the boy's lips began to move, as he forced himself to speak. "He gives up his money, but no mitzvah of the Torah may be transgressed." This was incredible! The boy had, up until now, not uttered a word. Now, he was speaking! Rav Tauber continued, "Perhaps this applies only to one who either does not have much to lose or who lives alone and has no one other than himself to support. Let us look at the example of a wealthy man who supports a multitude of organizations and people. In fact, hundreds of families rely on him for sustenance. Will this ruling still apply? Should he be forced to relinquish all of his funds, thereby jeopardizing the

livelihood of many people, rather than transgress a prohibition of the Torah?"

"Yes," the boy replied emphatically. "The ruling is in place regardless of the consequences. A Torah law may not be transgressed under any circumstances."

"What would be the law if, rather than having one's wealth threatened, it was his life that hung in the balance?" continued Rav Tauber with his questioning.

"In such a case, human life takes precedence. Under no circumstances may one's life be put in danger (except for the three cardinal sins). Hashem wants us to live - not die," was the boy's response.

"Let us say that in this instance, it does not involve merely one person's chillul Shabbos, desecration of Shabbos, but that of many Jews --in fact, an entire town or country. Will the halachah of safeguarding human life still prevail?" asked Rav Tauber.

The boy was really getting into it, and he responded, "It holds true under all conditions. Human life is sacrosanct. It takes precedence over all prohibitions."

"For instance, if the Shabbos desecration was a surety, but the chance of sustaining life was, at best, doubtful, will life prevail?" asked Rav Tauber

"Yes," said the boy. "Even the slightest doubt that affects human life renders it more important than any prohibition," he replied.

Rav Tauber was evidently leading up to his coupe de grace, the searing question and answer that would change the playing field. He had a point that he was bent on driving home to this boy, a point that would hopefully change his attitude toward his remaining mortal days.

"Tell me, my young scholar," Rav Tauber began, "What is the halachah in a situation where someone lies deathly ill; indeed, there is no hope for him to live more than a very short time? Can his life be extended, even for a few hours by desecrating Shabbos?"

The boy was no fool. When he heard the question, he understood the answer, its ramifications and personal message. He did not have to reply to Rav Tauber, because Jewish life is G-d's greatest gift, and every moment is holy. One must desecrate Shabbos to keep the patient alive - even for a short time. Man does not fathom the Heavenly significance given to life. The entire Torah is pushed aside to save a moment of Jewish life. The boy had perceived the message. Rav Tauber bent down and kissed the boy on his forehead. As he parted from him, he said, "It is no secret that you are undergoing indescribable pain. Do not give up. The life that still courses through your veins is something of infinite value. Hashem is willing to have His holy Shabbos desecrated even for the slightest chance, albeit doubtful, of sustaining a life. As long as you are alive, embrace that gift."

The boy gave a weak smile, as if to say, "I know what you are intimating. I understand the message. I will make the most of whatever time I have left."

A few days later, the boy passed from this world. When Rav Tauber visited the family during the shivah, seven-day mourning period, the mother told him, "From the time that you spoke with my son, until the bitter end, he was a different person. He was no longer just lying there waiting for the Malach HaMaves, Angel of Death, to come and take him. He spoke; we spoke; we said good-bye. Thank you for what you have done."

Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)

The Talmud Yoma 85a derives from here that pikuach nefesh, saving of human life, overrides the prohibition of Shabbos. Nonetheless, we note that, throughout the generations, Shabbos has been one staple which Torah Jews have refused to abrogate - even when it has clashed with personal preservation. Life is important, but Shabbos takes precedence. What is it about Shabbos that has incurred such

tenacious reactions to its observance? Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that, halachic ramifications notwithstanding, Shabbos maintains a uniformity with the three cardinal sins which do prevail over human life.

A Jew who is confronted with the decision of "his life" or worshipping an idol, murdering a fellow Jew or committing adultery, the V'chai bahem does not apply, and one should give up his life, rather than transgress. The singularity of these prohibitions stand out because they represent the neshamah of a Jew, and one cannot save a life by destroying a "life." The Jewish soul is bound up with these mitzvos. The sanctity of Hashem, human life and morality are the pillars upon which society cannot be maintained, without an unequivocal commitment to these tenets of our faith. This may be compared to someone who falls into a pot which had been cooking on the flame. He certainly does not jump out of the pot into the fire! Likewise, a Jew does not preserve his life at the expense of his neshamah.

This, suggests Rav Pincus, is what went through the minds of those for whom Shabbos took precedence - even over their own lives.

While halachah does not demand self-sacrifice under such circumstances, their inner voice clamored forth: "How can I desecrate Shabbos? Better I should die than abrogate Shabbos!" This thesis clearly does not advocate adding another prohibition to the original three cardinal sins. Its purpose is to emphasize the overriding significance of Shabbos to the select few. Perhaps the next time one is tempted to be lax in his Shabbos observance, he should remind himself of those who have sacrificed themselves rather than desecrate the holy Shabbos.

In loving memory of Mrs. Fanny Brunner Feldman by her family

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Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Acharei Mos

The Desecration of Molech: We Will Be Held Accountable For Our Priorities

The end of Acharei Mos contains the prohibition of giving one's children over to the pagan worship of Molech. This tragic form of Avodah Zarah [idolatry] involved transferring one's child to the priest of Molech, who would then pass the child through fire as an act of worship to the pagan god. In some forms of this worship the child would in fact be burnt to death. The Torah pasuk that prohibits this act says, "...that you will not thereby profane the Name of your G-d, I am HaShem." [Vayikra 18:21]. In other words, beyond the intrinsic prohibition of the idolatry involved, there is another prohibition, that of Desecrating the Name of G-d (Chillul HaShem).

The Ramba"n elaborates on the unique desecration of G-d's name that accompanies worship of Molech. The Ramba"n explains that it will be a Chill ul HaShem when the nations will hear that Jews honor their G-d by offering animal sacrifices, but that they honor Molech by offering their children.

Rav Dovid Kviat (in his Sefer Succas Dovid) observes that this concept -- that a person can cause a Chillul HaShem by showing greater homage and honor to some other area in life than to the Master of the World, is a phenomenon which is far less foreign to us than the cult of Molech.

In the book of Shmuel we learn of the capture of the Aron HaBris [Ark of the Covenant] by the Plishtim [Philistines]. The Aron remained with the Plishtim for a certain period of time and caused havoc to them, such that they sent it back to Israel. Initially, upon its return to Israel, a plague occurred in Israel as well, smiting the residents of Beis Shemesh [Samuel I Chapters 4-6]. The Medrash asks why the residents of Beis Shemesh were punished. The Medrash answers that they had been more worried when their hens were lost than when the Aron was captured. This is a terrible criticism and a terrible Chillul HaShem.

This is the same type of Chillul HaShem that the Ramba"n identifies with Molech worship. It is the same type of Chillul HaShem in which we all unfortunately engage, to a greater or lesser extent, when we do not demonstrate the proper priorities in terms of manifesting our care and concern.

The transmission of our car breaks. This upsets us. We come back from a vacation and find that the refrigerator stopped working and all the food is ruined. The house stinks. Everyone gets upset! Little things like this upset us.

The difficult situation in Eretz Yisroel should upset us far more than life's trivialities, about which we get so worked up. Every day's curse is worse than the previous day's curse. The situation there is terrible. But does it bother us more or less than if our refrigerator breaks? Does it bother us more than a transmission?

What bothers us? What makes us upset? What makes us lose sleep at night? G-d was upset at the people of Israel for being more concerned about a hen than about the Aron. We read the Medrash with disdain for the people of Beis Shemesh. We think, how could they be more concerned about a chicken than about the Aron! But we need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves -- are we more worried about our own businesses and our own refrigerators and transmissions and all the other trivialities of life, than we are with what is going on with Klal Yisroel?

To be more worried about the former than the latter is in effect the admonition mentioned in this week's parsha: "And you shall not desecrate the Name of your G-d, I am HaShem". G-d holds us accountable for our priorities - how we treat Him and how we treat other things.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Eliyahu_Safran
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Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb's Torah Column Parshat Acharei Mot (Shabbat HaGadol) The Great, But Not Yet Holy, Sabbath

There are many steps that we ascend on our journey towards the holiday of Passover. It is as if it is impossible to just plunge into the holiday without proper preparation. These steps include the many special Sabbaths that precede the holiday. They include the Parshiyot of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and HaChodesh, and they culminate this week with Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Sabbath, the final Sabbath before Passover.

I fondly remember the wise old rabbi whose little shul I frequented before I became a shul rabbi myself, back in Baltimore. His name was Rav Yitzchok Sternhell, may he rest in peace. He had many astute observations, only a few of which I recall.

In one of these insights, he pointed out that when one has a question about some aspect of Torah study and finds a single answer, then, essentially, there is no longer a question. It is answered, plainly and simply, once and for all.

But when one has a question and there are many answers, then the question remains as strong as when it was posed. There is no need for many answers when there is one correct answer. The multitude of answers indicates that not one of them was sufficient enough to completely resolve the question posed.

One question that has received many answers over the centuries is, "Why is this Sabbath called the Great Sabbath, Shabbat HaGadol?"

One answer points to the closing phrase of this week's selection from the Prophets, the Haftarah, which reads:

"Behold, I will send you

Elijah the Prophet

Before the coming

Of the great and awesome day of the Lord." (Malachi 3:24)

Since we read of the "the great day," we call it "the Great Sabbath."

Another approach emphasizes that on the Sabbath preceding the Exodus, the Jews were finally able to prepare lambs and goats for the paschal offering. They did so in the face of their Egyptian slave masters, for whom those animals were considered divine. To be able to fearlessly defy their former slave masters was a "great miracle." Hence the term "the Great Sabbath."

The list of answers goes on, and space does not allow even a small sample of the others. But I would like to share with you, dear reader, a very creative approach to the term "the Great Sabbath." This approach is creative because, contrary to all the other interpretations with which I am familiar, this approach sees this week's Sabbath not as greater than all the others of the year, but as lesser.

The creative commentator to whom I refer is the Chassidic Rebbe, Rabbi Shaul of Modzitz, may he rest in peace. He was known for his prodigious repertoire of musical compositions. The musical creativity of Rabbi Shaul was expressed in his ability to surprise the ear of the listener. His homiletic creativity also contains the element of surprise, of divergent thinking. Using this same divergent thinking, he held a very unique and thought-provoking approach to the Passover Haggadah.

Most of the reasons that are given for the fact that this week's Sabbath is called the Great Sabbath insist upon the superiority of this particular Sabbath over all the others of the year. Rabbi Shaul diverges from all these other explanations and provocatively suggests that this week's Sabbath is inferior to all the others.

Therein he asks the question, "Why do we praise this Sabbath as 'great?' Is every Sabbath not 'great?' In the special blessing that we incorporate in the Grace After Meals, the Birkat HaMazon, every Sabbath, we refer to 'this great and holy Sabbath... this day which is great and holy before Thee...'"

His surprising answer is that every Sabbath of the year is both "great and holy," but this final Sabbath before Passover is, in a certain sense, merely "great" and not "holy."

For every Sabbath, argues Rabbi Shaul, has two components. We might refer to them as the physical component and the spiritual component. The former is built in to the cosmos and can be traced back to the verses in Genesis 2:3. There, God blesses and hallows the Sabbath as part of the process of creation. That is the Sabbath of the physical rest and gives recognition to God's creative powers and omnipotence. It is "holy," but only potentially so.

The second aspect of the Sabbath is a spiritual one; "zecher l'yetziat Mizrayim," a memorial day celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. This has to do with the experience of freedom, of becoming a nation, of undertaking an historical mission.

On this last Sabbath before Passover, the Exodus had not yet taken place. And so, the Sabbath was merely "gadol," "great." On that Sabbath, the Jew could only celebrate his freedom from utter bondage and his ability to defy his former slave master. That was "great," but not yet "holy." He did not yet have a sense of spiritual freedom and religious destiny.

Only after the first day of Passover, with the actual departure from Egypt, and the march into the desert and towards Mount Sinai, could the Jews begin to sense that something "holy" was in store for them. Only then could they begin to anticipate not just "great" freedom, but "holy" freedom, in order to sense that something spiritual and "holy" was in store.

After that first Passover day, and with every ensuing Sabbath since, the Jewish people experienced not just "a great Sabbath," but a "great and holy Sabbath."

Sabbath prior to Passover is "great," but not yet fully "holy." After Passover, every Sabbath is transformed and is not only "great," but "great and holy." Passover and all that it symbolizes adds a new dimension to every Sabbath that follows it.

This week, then, we remember a Sabbath long ago that was the last of the merely "great" Sabbaths: A Sabbath only of respite from slavish toil, of relief from physical slavery. Next week, after we told the full narrative of the Exodus and experience all of the Seder night's rich symbolism and profound lessons, we will be able to celebrate a complete Sabbath, a Sabbath of spiritual freedom and full religious significance. Not just "Shabbat HaGadol," but "Shabbat HaGadol VeHaKadosh."

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A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman

A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman Parshat Kedoshim - Egyptian Business

Why were we taken out of Egypt ?

Concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, and the recognition of Divine Providence are the themes of the exodus, ideas that the Jewish people are mandated to live by and demonstrate to the world around us. Parshat Acharei Mot (18:3) teaches that a sexual ethic based on holiness was one of the ways to differentiate Jewish and Egyptian society. In fact, Rashi identifies the opening call of our parsha , Kedoshim tehiyu , as relating to sexual morality.

While I do not doubt that the above is true, the Torah's most direct reason for our removal from Egypt appears at the end of chapter 19. There, the Torah tells us to love strangers, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt . We are then told, "Do not falsify measurements, whether in length weight or volume. You must have an honest balance, honest weights, and honest dry measure and an honest liquid measure. I am the Lord who took you out of Egypt " (19:35-36). Rashi, with three simple but profound words, spells out the clear implication of the Torah's words: al m'nat ken , for this purpose. The reason G-d took us out of Egypt was to enable us to have honest balances, honest weights, honest dry measures and honest liquid measures. Matza, the seder , and getting rid of chametz are not the key ways to commemorate the exodus. After all, they last only seven (or eight) days, and are apparently of secondary importance. Rather, we celebrate the exodus in a much more significant manner; we rid ourselves and our homes of unfair and shady business practices. Thus, the first of the Ten Commandments--"I am the Lord your G-d, who took you from the Land of Egypt "-means, first and foremost, that as free people we are not to economically oppress others.

The exodus from Egypt is the defining moment of Jewish history, in many ways even more so than Divine Revelation at Sinai. We are commanded to remember it each and every day (and night), and it forms the basis of so many of our mitzvot, from Shabbat and the holidays to Shema, tefillin and mezuzah. Unfortunately, in commemorating the exodus, it is often the ritual side of Judaism on which we tend to focus. Somehow, modern man and many a Jew view money and economics as separate from the religious experience. Working, making a living; surely these are not also religious duties, we tell ourselves. These mundane aspects of life can even be antithetical to religion, G-dliness and spiritual growth; a necessary component of life, but completely divorced from religious observance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Judaism sees work as religiously meaningful and Divinely mandated. Perhaps no less important than "resting" on the seventh day is the imperative "six days you shall work". Not only does the Torah have over 120 mitzvot dealing with the economic sphere, it is specifically in this area that we have the most opportunities to create a Kiddush Hashem, as we interact with people from all walks of life. The way we talk to our co-workers or competitors, the way we advertise, how we hire and fire, how much we charge, our compliance with government regulations, when we pay our bills, are all potential ways to grow closer to G-d as we put Judaism into practice where it really counts. It is the ultimate remembrance of the exodus.

The enslavement in Egypt began with unfair taxes, hard labour and backbreaking work; practices that Jewish law forbids. The right that halacha grants to an employee to quit at almost any time is rooted in the notion that we are not to be enslaved to anybody--even, or perhaps especially, to those upon whom we are dependent for our livelihood. The clarion call of the Torah to a life of holiness demands that our monetary practices be the manifestation of freedom, justice, equality and above all, honesty. After all, it is for this reason that we were taken out of Egypt. Rabbi Kelman, in addition to his founder and leadership roles in Torah in Motion, teaches Ethics, Talmud and Rabbinics at the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto.

http://www.aish.com/h/pes/t/f/Freedom_Without_Limits.html

Freedom Without Limits?
by Rabbi Benjamin Blech (www.aish.com)
"Let my people go" is only half the story.

I hate it when people try to put words into my mouth. That's exactly what happened when I was invited, in the role of rabbinic expert, to address a class of public high school seniors on "The Most Important Message of the Jewish Holiday of Passover." Before I could say anything, the person in charge carried on effusively, telling the students how she was certain I would explain that Jews celebrate Passover as the biblical festival which glorifies freedom as the greatest of all human rights. It is this concept, she enthusiastically went on, that guides us today as we live in a country that permits no limitations on our personal freedoms. We are free to do as we please, she suggested – all thanks to a Jewish holiday. Then she finally introduced me and gave me the opportunity to disabuse her and the audience of an all too common misconception. Of course, on one level, Passover deals with freedom. It is a holiday that commemorates the end of Jewish slavery and suffering. It reminds us from year-to-year that God hears the cries of the downtrodden, sensitive to the pain of the abused who seek relief from their cruel masters. Human beings are meant to be free from

oppression by the wicked, from mistreatment by the callous, from subjugation by the stronger. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and that kind of restriction is something the Almighty cannot countenance. "Let my people go," were the words God put into the mouth of Moses as the first part of his plea for liberty for the children of Israel. But there was more to that petition which we conveniently forget. And it is the last part of the biblical call for justice that forces us to rethink the parameters of freedom and the way in which our contemporary society has distorted its message.

Free Country
It sounds great, at first blush, to say that everyone should be free to do whatever they like. The first time our children give voice to obscenities or speak to us disrespectfully with the argument that "it's a free country," we begin to recognize that freedom without limits is anarchy, and freedom without conscience is cruelty. Free speech is curtailed when it presents a clear and present danger. Societies quickly learn that no one can be totally free at the expense of other people's rights. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right of American democracy. Nonetheless the Supreme Court has ruled that a few other public interests – national security, justice or personal safety – override freedom of speech. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, speaking for the unanimous Supreme Court, stated, "The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent."

The notion that "it's a free country" is what caused a Rutgers University freshman to kill himself after two classmates used a hidden dorm room camera to splash his sex life across the Internet. Tyler Clementi, a renowned high school violinist, left his wallet on the George Washington Bridge before plunging to his death in the Hudson River after a Twitter post revealed sensitive details about his private life. "It's a free country," so Megan Taylor Meier, an American teenager from Missouri, committed suicide by hanging three weeks before her 14th birthday; she was distraught after the e-mails she was receiving from a boy turned from love to hate. In fact they were a fraudulent prank orchestrated by a neighbor, the mother of one Megan's friends with whom she had had a falling out.

The Law of Sinai
Freedom misused may have tragic consequences. That is why Passover, known as the festival of freedom, is actually only half a holiday. From the very moment we celebrate liberation we count the days to the holiday of Shavuot, when the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. The two festivals are inextricably linked. The first speaks of freedom from; the second freedom to. We were freed from physical servitude in order to voluntarily place ourselves under the restrictions of moral rectitude. Freedom without any restraints may very well be just as destructive as slavery. "No one can ever tell me what to do" – an idea not limited by ethical constraints – is potentially just as much a threat to the social order as slave masters. Freedom without restraints may be as destructive as slavery. The Midrash has a fascinating commentary on the location of the first meeting between God and Moses. It was at the burning bush that Moses was delegated to deliver the Jews from the slavery of Egypt. The bush in Hebrew was called sneh. That, say the commentators, is why that very spot would eventually be called Sinai. The place where the mission began defined its purpose. The goal was not simply to get

the Jews out of Egypt, but rather to bring them to the mountain where they would receive the law. Freedom without law is inconceivable. That is why Moses subsequently told Pharaoh not only to "let my people go," but added the all-important phrase "so that they may serve Me." This is the freedom of Passover, wedded to the moral covenant of the Torah.

From a Jewish perspective, to speak only of the ideal of freedom – while ignoring its necessary partner of responsibility – is to pervert its true meaning.

This is what Abraham Lincoln understood so well in his famous words, "Freedom is not the right to do what we want, but what we ought."

And this is the real message of Passover: God granted us the gift of physical freedom, so that we might become truly free to be guided by our spiritual selves.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Passover: Aiming for Greatness

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

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

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

Ongoing Elevation

A careful reading of this verse will note two peculiarities about the word ha-ma'alcha, '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 ha-ma'alcha 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 confining 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 rise 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.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 149-150. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 219-220.)

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Ohr Somayach :: Pesach

For the week ending 16 April 2011 / 11 Nisan 5771

The Greatest Miracle by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Another perspective of the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea

What was the greatest of the miracles which we read about in the Torah's account of the Exodus from Egypt?

Was it the plethora of supernatural plagues – anywhere from 10 to 250 according to the Sages quoted in the Haggadah – visited upon the Egyptians?

Was it the fact that millions of former slaves marched out, in broad daylight, from a land from which no single slave had ever escaped?

Was it the splitting of the sea which allowed a pursued people to cross on dry land while their pursuers drowned?

All of these were indeed great miracles, but if we wish to identify the greatest miracle of all we must turn to the passage in which G-d informs Moshe "I shall strengthen the heart of Pharaoh and he will pursue them." (Shmot 14:4)

In his commentary on this passage Ramban points out that there was a need to harden the heart of the Egyptian ruler because he had been so intimidated by the plagues that he was glad to see Moshe take the people out of the land and had no interest in pursuing them. In the Divine plan that "I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army" it was necessary to virtually coerce this wicked ruler to race to his own destruction. In a later passage (14:17) that describes the scene at the sea, there is a repetition of this "strengthening of the heart of Egypt and they will come after them."

This Heavenly intervention in the decision of Pharaoh and his army was necessary because they saw the sea split and the Israelites crossing on dry land in its midst. How could they then have had the courage to pursue them in order to harm them? None of the miracles that occurred could compare to this, for theirs was an act of insanity brought about by G-d's hardening their hearts to enter the sea.

What makes this miracle of Heavenly intervention stand out from the rest?

It is our fundamental belief that "everything is determined by Heaven except fear of Heaven." The Creator of man endowed him with free will and it is therefore his freedom to choose good or evil which makes him susceptible to retribution.

There is, however, one exception!

"The heart of the king," says King Shlomo, the wisest of men, "is in the hand of G-d; He can direct it to wherever He wishes." (Mishlei 21:1)

In his personal affairs the ruler may also have free will, but if his decision affects a nation or the world he becomes a mere puppet in the Divine plan.

History is filled with examples ranging from the sudden change of heart of Esav who threatened to destroy the Jewish people by murdering his brother Yaakov, to the insanity of the Nazis opening a second front in Russia which brought an end to the Third Reich. In between these world-shaking turnabouts is the madness of Pharaoh rushing into the sea.

Of course water turning into blood and the rest of the ten plagues are miracles, but they are really nothing more than a dramatic demonstration of the Creator's control over His creation. But when the Creator shows that even in that sphere of life in which man is given control, that power can be taken from him and he is orchestrated for self-destruction, Pharaoh's self-destruction becomes the greatest miracle of all!

This is why Pharaoh's self-destruction is the greatest miracle of all. An important lesson can be learned from the above-mentioned observation of King Shlomo and the historical vindications of his wisdom. Everyone is wondering what the new people coming to power in Arab lands will be like in regard to Israel and how their decisions will affect the entire world. This is the time to remember that their hearts, like those of the ones they removed from power, are in the hands of G-d. We can only pray that G-d will direct those hearts to seek peace for the benefit of Israel and the entire world.
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Give Me a Troika
Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

When fulfilling the commandments that G-d has given us, I often think of dedicated high school athletes who, when their coaches say, "Jump!" do not seek an excuse to do less but rather focus on doing what the coach said, and then some. How much more should we seek to fulfill G-d's commandments! So it was for our great sages and so it is why, in remembrance of the Temple, we do as Hillel did in combining Pesach, matzah and maror in a sandwich and eat them together. He did this in literal fulfillment of the commandment given in Bamidbar 9:11 – "They shall eat it with matzot and bitter herbs." During the Seder, once we have fulfilled our obligation to eat first the matzah and then the maror we are confronted with Hillel's view that "the Pesach offering, matzah and maror" must be eaten together. Since the destruction of the Temple, we no longer are able to bring the Pesach offering. How then to "combine Pesach, matzah and maror in a sandwich and eat them together"?

If we were less dedicated than a high school athlete, we might satisfy ourselves with the sad fact that we cannot do all that we are commanded to do. But even in a world in which the Temple does not stand, that is not enough.

We must enthusiastically preserve Hillel's practice by doing whatever remains of his approach. With no Temple and no Temple sacrifice, we cannot eat the Pesach meat, matzah and maror together, but we can still combine matzah and maror.

Why combine the Pesach meat, which signifies the redemptive act, together with matzah, which also represents the miraculous geulah, with the maror, which is a reminder of the bitter state of galut and slavery? Hillel's sandwich combines such odd bedfellows! A blending of apples and oranges. Galut and geulah. How and why bring these opposites together in one sandwich?

Hillel, in his wisdom, understood that to fully appreciate the sublime taste of freedom (the Pesach sacrifice) one must first fully digest the

bitter ingredients of slavery (matzah and maror). Every aspect of the Hillel sandwich has power and meaning. Two matzot – one symbolizing the bitterness of galut and the other the sweetness of geulah.

Maror is inseparable from the redemption experience. No joy exists without bitterness.

But it is not enough to remember, or even understand, the two distinct phases of the Mitzrayim experience. If that were Hillel's goal, he would simply have followed the chronology of our slavery, listing maror first followed by Pesach and then matzah. After all, maror and pain and suffering of galut preceded the redemptive acts of Pesach and matzah.

But it was not Hillel's goal to simply remember; not enough to simply "jump." His intent is to do more. Hillel meant to teach that maror is part and parcel of the geulah/redemption troika. Pesach and matzah do not stand alone as geulah reminders. Maror does not stand in a separate category of the galut/enslavement.

They are three parts of the same whole.

Like Hillel, Rabban Gamliel also insisted on the geulah troika.

"Whoever has not explained the following three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his duty, namely: Pesach, matzot, maror." Rabban Gamliel, like Hillel before him, understood that to fully comprehend and appreciate the magnificent grace of redemption, and be able to fulfill the obligation of recalling the wonders and miracles of our exodus from Egypt, one must view all the elements of geulah as equal and vital components of the process.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein teaches that the Pesach offering symbolizes that God is the absolute Ruler of this world; that man is not his own master. This truth was not fully recognized even by the generation of the Exodus until G-d saved them so quickly as when "the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened." Matzah too is an integral part of the redemptive process. Even in the most unbearable and seemingly hopeless of times, when hope seems lost, God's redemption is at hand.

God needs no warm-up or preparation time to perform miracles or bring salvation.

However, when we relax our spiritual zeal and take God's protection and providence for granted, particularly in times of peace, prosperity and tranquility, then maror rears its ugly head yet again. Maror periodically issues a stern warning to Jews and forewarns of our ever-present vulnerability. The commandment to eat maror together with the Pesach and the matzah not only symbolizes the correct approach to life but represents a danger flare should we stray from it.

Redemption, once attained, is not guaranteed. It must be safeguarded and protected.

As miraculously and suddenly as geulah appears, it may disappear. Like sand between our fingers, it could quickly escape our grasp...

unless. Unless we vigilantly guard our borders from maror. We need to remember that the Egyptians were initially kind to our ancestors and only later embittered their lives with persecution.

Hillel's sandwich teaches us this very lesson. The Pesach meat, matzah and maror are all parts of the same redemptive process. Should one of the ingredients be missing, we lose the ability to fully appreciate what it means to become truly free.

The maror sandwiched between two matzot conveys a similar message. The Torah gives us two reasons why matzah is eaten on Pesach. Matzah is lechem oni, the bread of affliction. It reminds us the hardship of our slavery. Even as it recalls our slavery, it reminds us of the swift and hasty manner of our redemption. Matzah represents the rush to freedom as well as the bread of affliction.

Both reasons create the basis for the mitzvah to be observed at all times, and the rationale for continuing Hillel's practice even when

the Pesach meat can no longer be consumed. When the nation of Israel finds itself safe and secure in its own land, freed from foreign rule and dominion, matzah is to be eaten as lechem oni, lest the nation suffer the illusion that its present state is natural and sure to continue. Remembering the past prompts us to “keep our guard up” and to maintain a vigil against external, as well as internal, intrusions. When we are not safe and galut and maror overwhelm our existence; when the nation of Israel is once again under foreign rule, the matzah we eat will remind us that, “You came forth out of the land of Egypt in haste.” There is always hope in the Eternal! Our fate can change in an instant!

The lechem oni of the past need not be reinforced in the present state of affairs, when oni is yet again relived in our contemporary galut. What needs reinforcement then is the chipazon element of our faith, remembering that even when one sees no glimmer of hope and is apt to despair, God can change it all in a moment.

In galut conditions matzah saves the nation from despair. At the same time, when the nation is in geulah, the matzah is like the watchman, keeping the nation from being seduced by the illusion of security.

This is the reason that the Torah tells us “to remember the days you left Egypt all the days of your life.” That is, during the days of geulah as well as the days of galut.

The forever dynamic of galut and geulah is the essence of the Jewish experience. They make up a single sandwich; a single experience. Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran is OU Kosher’s Vice President – Communications and Marketing. He is the author of *Kos Eliyahu – Insights on the Haggadah and Pesach*.

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

How Do We Sell our Chometz? By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This is the last article I am sending out until after Pesach. Wishing everyone a chag kosher vesamayach

As we all know, a Jew may not own chometz on Pesach, which is included in the Torah’s double prohibition, bal yira’eh and bal yimatzei. Furthermore, the Torah commanded us with a mitzvah, a positive mitzvah, to destroy any chometz left in our possession after midday on Erev Pesach.

According to most poskim, these prohibitions apply both to chometz gamur (pure chometz) and to ta’aroves chometz (chometz mixed into another product). Furthermore, the Torah prohibited benefiting from chometz from midday on Erev Pesach regardless whether a Jew or a gentile owns it. Chazal prohibited benefiting from chometz an hour earlier. In addition, Chazal instituted a penalty whereby chometz owned by a Jew during Pesach may never be used. They also required us to search our homes and property the night before Pesach for chometz that we may have forgotten.

Although a Jew may not own chometz on Pesach, there is nothing wrong with his selling his chometz to a gentile before it becomes prohibited. The Mishnah (21a) states explicitly that one may sell chometz to a gentile before Pesach, although this meant that the gentile took the chometz home with him (see Terumas HaDeshen #120). Today when we sell our chometz, we leave it in our homes and we know that the gentile does not intend to use our chometz. Does this sale present us with any halachic issues to resolve?

REASONS TO ARRANGE MECHIRAS CHOMETZ

Before addressing these issues, we should note that there are several valid reasons to arrange a mechiras chometz even if one has no chometz of any value:

1. One is required to rid one’s house and all one’s possessions of chometz. However, some items, such as toasters, mixers, wooden kneading bowls, and flour bins are difficult, if not impossible, to clean. Shulchan Aruch and Rama (442:11) recommend giving wooden kneading bowls and flour bins and the chometz they contain as a gift to a non-Jew before Pesach, with the understanding that the gentile will return them after the holiday.

However, if one does not have such a relationship with a gentile, or it is inconvenient for the gentile to store these items in his house, one needs to modify the solution so that one does not possess chometz on Pesach. Thus, one can include this chometz and these appliances in the sale of chometz.

One should not sell items that require tevilas keilim (immersing vessels in a mikveh), such as metal or glass appliances, but rent them out instead, since otherwise one will have to immerse them again according to many poskim (Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 120:13). Alternatively, one can simply sell the chometz that is attached or inside them, but not the appliances themselves.

2. Someone who owns stocks either directly or through mutual funds and/or retirement programs has another reason to arrange selling his chometz. Although some poskim contend that one may own stocks in a chometz business over Pesach (Rav Moshe Feinstein), most poskim prohibit owning shares on Pesach of a company that owns chometz. They contend that owning part of a corporation that owns chometz is considered as if I own chometz myself (Shu”t Minchas Yitzchok 3:1). Thus, in their opinion, even if someone’s house is completely chometz-free, he should arrange a mechiras chometz to include that which he owns as part of his shares.

3. The Mishnah Berurah mentions an additional reason to sell one’s chometz -- to avoid searching for chometz (bedikas chometz) in areas that are difficult to check (433:23) or where one plans to store non-Pesach items (436:32). Many poskim contend that when using the sale to preempt bedikah, it should take effect prior to the time of bedikas chometz. This way, when the mitzvah of bedikah takes effect, these areas and their chometz are already under the control and ownership of the gentile.

4. Modern manufacturing creates an additional reason why one should arrange mechiras chometz, since it is difficult to ascertain whether medicines, vitamins, and cosmetic items such as colognes and mouthwashes contain chometz. For this reason, many people perform a standard mechiras chometz even if they destroy all their known chometz and search all the areas they own for chometz.

SOURCES FOR MECHIRAS CHOMETZ

The Mishnah (Pesachim 21a) and Gemara (Pesachim 13a) discuss selling chometz before Pesach in cases that one does not expect to receive the chometz back. In these instances, the sale is fairly easy to arrange: The gentile pays for the chometz (or receives it as a gift) and takes it home with him.

However, in instances where the Jew is expecting to receive the chometz back after Pesach, how does one guarantee that the chometz indeed becomes the property of the non-Jew? Does the Jew’s expectation that he will receive the chometz back undermine the sale? Also, does the gentile really intend to buy the chometz, or does he think that this is all make-believe and that he is not really purchasing it? This would, of course, undermine the purpose of the sale.

The Tosefta provides us with background to these questions:

A Jew is traveling by ship and has with him chometz that he needs to dispose of before Pesach. However, the Jew would like the chometz back after Pesach because there is a dearth of kosher food available.

(Apparently, there was no hechsher on that particular ship.) The Jew may sell the chometz to the gentile before Pesach, and then purchase it back afterwards. Alternatively, the Jew may give the chometz to the gentile as a present, provided no conditions are attached. The gentile may then return the present after Pesach (Tosefta Pesachim 2:6). Thus we see that one may sell or give away chometz to a gentile and expect it back without violating any halachos provided the agreement does not require the gentile to give it back.

REMOVING THE CHOMETZ TO THE GENTILE'S PROPERTY
Terumas HaDeshen (#120) also discusses whether you may give your chometz to a gentile as a present that he intends to return to you after Pesach. He permits this, although he stipulates that the gentile must remove the chometz from the Jew's house (as explained by Bach, Orach Chayim 448).

This condition presents us with a problem in arranging our mechiras chometz. The gentile is willing to cooperate and purchase our chometz, but he does not remove the chometz to his own house. Is there a way to alleviate this problem, or must we forego selling chometz?

This problem became common when Jews became extensively involved in the ownership of taverns, which was in many places one of the few forms of livelihood open to them. It became common practice to sell the whiskey to a gentile before Pesach even though it remained in the Jew's tavern (Bach, Orach Chayim Chapter 448).

This procedure seems to violate the Terumas HaDeshen's instructions.

Before we address this question, we must first analyze why the Terumas HaDeshen requires the removal of the chometz from the Jew's premises.

The poskim present different reasons for this stipulation, some suggesting that leaving the chometz on the Jew's property implies that the Jew assumes responsibility for the chometz even though he no longer owns it (Magen Avraham 448:4). The halacha prohibits a Jew from being responsible for a gentile's chometz during Pesach (Gemara Pesachim 5b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 440:1).

Others contend that the sold chometz should be removed from the Jew's property out of concern that the Jew might eat it by mistake since it was once his (Shu't Radbaz #240). The halacha is that if the Jew never owned the chometz, he may leave it on his property as long as he places a very noticeable barrier around it (Gemara Pesachim 6a).

The poskim rule that transferring ownership of the area where the chometz is stored to the gentile satisfies both of these concerns (Bach 448). Thus, rather than moving the chometz onto the gentile's property, we make the property holding the chometz into his property. Therefore, the contract selling the chometz also sells the area where the chometz is located.

If the Jew does not own the area holding the chometz but is renting it, he should rent the area to the non-Jew for Pesach rather than sell it.

(To simplify matters, many Rabbonim simply rent areas to begin with, and do not sell the areas to a gentile.) Similarly, in Eretz Yisroel, where the Torah prohibited selling land to a gentile, one should rent his property to a gentile rather than sell it.

There is another approach to explain why the gentile should remove the chometz from the Jew's property when he buys it. This opinion contends that in order to take possession of the chometz, the gentile must remove it into his property (Chok Yaakov, 448:14). This requires a bit of explanation.

WHAT MAKES A TRANSACTION VALID?

On a daily basis, we buy and sell items from merchants without paying attention when the item changes possession. – That is, at what

point does the transaction become valid. Indeed for most of our daily activities, this question is not germane. I go to the supermarket to buy groceries. Does the item become mine when I pick it up to place it into my shopping cart, when I pay for it, or when I pick up the bag to leave the store? The vast majority of times it does not make a difference.

However, sometimes it makes a difference at what point the item becomes mine. If the item accidentally breaks after I paid for it, but before I picked up the bag, is it already mine or not? If the item is indeed already mine, I have no right to ask the merchant to replace it. It makes no difference whether it broke while I was at the store or after I brought it home - in either instance it is incorrect for me to assume that the merchant is responsible to compensate me. Indeed, although the merchant may be willing to replace the item, it is unclear that I may ask him to do so. The merchant may replace the item because he does not want to lose a customer, not because he has any obligation. Thus, this may qualify as coercing someone to give a present that he does not want to, something that is halachically prohibited and morally objectionable.

When selling chometz, it is of paramount importance to determine that the transaction has actually transpired. If the transaction has occurred, then the chometz now belongs to the gentile and there is no violation of bal yira'eh and bal yimatzei on Pesach. However, if the transaction has not taken effect, then the chometz still belongs to the Jew, who will violate bal yira'eh and bal yimatzei.

HOW DOES THE CHOMETZ BECOME PROPERTY OF THE GENTILE?

An item changes ownership when there is an agreement between the parties that is then followed by a maaseh kinyan, an act that transfers ownership. There are many types of maasei kinyan, each appropriate to some transactions and not to others.

Here is an example of an attempt to make a maaseh kinyan that does not work. Reuven wants to purchase a candy, and he decides to draw up a contract for the sale. This written contract does not transfer ownership of the candy to Reuven since it is not a recognized maaseh kinyan for transacting movable items. (Real estate is an example of an item for which a written contract is a maaseh kinyan.) On the other hand, the candy becomes Reuven's property when he picks it up (assuming that the seller has agreed to the transaction and the two parties have agreed to a price) because this is a maaseh kinyan for movable items.

The poskim dispute what is the maaseh kinyan when purchasing movable items from a gentile, some contending that movable property becomes the buyer's when he pays for it (Rashi, Bechoros 3b), others contending that it does not become his until he picks it up or takes physical possession in a similar way (Rabbeinu Tam, quoted by Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 71a). If it is a large or heavy item, then it becomes his when he pulls it or causes it to move it in some other way, or when it is delivered to his property. Thus the chometz will not become property of the gentile until he takes physical possession. This presents us with a practical problem. Since the gentile is not bringing the chometz home with him, nor is he picking it up, there is no maaseh kinyan taking place to transfer to him the ownership of the chometz according to Rabbeinu Tam.

Several poskim suggest alternative methods of carrying out the transaction (see Mishnah Berurah 448:17). In some of these methods, one rents to the gentile the places where the chometz is stored. Since not all poskim accept this method of transacting chometz, we perform several such maasei kinyan in order to guarantee that the chometz indeed becomes the property of the gentile. This concern is one of the reasons why some people refrain from selling chometz

gamur and only use the mechirah as a back-up measure. (See also Tevuos Shor, Pesachim 21a for another reason.)

We see that conducting a proper mechiras chometz is a complicated procedure, and certainly beyond the halachic skills of the typical layman. Thus, it is inadvisable for a lay person to arrange his own mechiras chometz without a rav's supervision and advice.

A PRIVATELY ARRANGED SALE

In one of my previous positions, I was the only rav in the vicinity who was arranging mechiras chometz. One member of my shul, an attorney, had not approached me to arrange for the sale of his chometz, which I assumed was an oversight on his part. Wishing to avoid a crisis, I approached him diplomatically to ask whether he had forgotten to take care of mechiras chometz. He replied that he had arranged his own sale with a non-Jewish acquaintance of his, and had indeed drawn up the deed-of-sale himself.

The attorney did not consult with me before he arranged this sale. In all likelihood, the contract he drew up was valid according to civil law, and therefore would be considered a valid mechirah according to some poskim (Masas Binyamin quoted by Magen Avraham 448:4). However, according to many poskim this attempt to sell chometz did not follow the rules that govern mechiras chometz (see Magen Avraham and Machatzis HaShekel). Thus, the attorney had violated bal yira'eh and bal yimatzei according to many opinions.

DIFFERENT TIME ZONES

Shimon is looking forward to his visit with his children in Eretz Yisroel for Pesach. He must make sure to mention this to his rav who is arranging his mechiras chometz. Since the sixth hour of Erev Pesach will arrive for Shimon in Eretz Yisroel many hours before it arrives for his rav in New York, Shimon's chometz must be sold before the sixth hour of Erev Pesach in Eretz Yisroel, many hours earlier than if he were in America. The rav will make sure that the sale on Shimon's chometz takes affect earlier than everyone else's.

CAN I SELL CHOMETZ WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION?

Yosef stored a case of whiskey in my garage and then left for a lengthy vacation. He told me he would be back by Purim. A few days before Pesach, I notice that the whiskey is still in my garage, and I have not heard from Yosef, nor do I know how to reach him. What do I do with his whiskey? Can I arrange mechiras chometz on it without his explicit authorization?

Yehudah's father, who lives in South Africa, is unfortunately no longer able to care for himself and suffers from dementia. Months ago, Yehudah moved his father into his own home in New York and closed up his father's house for the time being. Now Yehudah realizes that he has no idea if his father owns any chometz in the house, or where it possibly might be. Can he authorize mechiras chometz on his father's property without authorization?

The Gemara tells a story that impacts on these shaylos. Someone placed a large sack of chometz with a man named Yochanan the Sofer for safekeeping. On the morning of Erev Pesach, Yochanan went to ask Rebbe whether he should sell the chometz before it becomes prohibited. Rebbe ruled that Yochanan should wait to take action since the owner might still claim his property.

An hour later, Yochanan returned to ask the shaylah again and received the same reply. This happened hourly until the fifth hour, the last time at which he could sell the chometz, at which time Rebbe instructed him to sell the chometz to gentiles in the marketplace (Gemara Pesachim 13a).

There is a question that this Gemara does not address. How could Yochanan sell the chometz, if the owner had not authorized him?

The answer is that although the owner had not authorized Yochanan to sell the chometz, if it will become worthless, he should sell it as a favor for the owner. This is a form of hashavas aveidah, returning a lost object to its owner, since now he will receive some compensation for his chometz and otherwise it will become worthless (Mishnah Berurah 443:11). Similarly, both Yosef and Yehuda would be able to arrange mechiras chometz even though the owner had not authorized them (see Magen Avraham 443:4).

According to Kabbalah, searching for chometz is symbolic of searching within ourselves to locate and remove our own arrogant selves. As we go through the mitzvos of cleaning the house, searching, burning, and selling the chometz, we should also try to focus on the spiritual side of this search and destroy mission.
